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Roundup: *Ceiling function, the mathematical operation of rounding a number up to the next higher integer.*

Roundup:  *a term in American English referring to the process of gathering animals into an area, known as a "Muster" in Australia.*

Rounding up: *when a helmsman cannot control a boat and it heads into the wind*

Roundup: *the plan for an invasion of northern France by Allied forces during World War II   (WikipediA)*

*Dean's Roundup: part blog, part bulletin; part honour roll, part curatorial [**cuˈra·to**ˈ ri·al** (kyo͞orˈə-tôrˈē-əl, -tōrˈ-) n. nounised by the Dean from curator + editorial]*

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Dear all,

A short reflection on why we do what we do. Academics (and those who support them) are part of a privileged class of people set apart by society to think, reflect, analyse, create, discover, invent, pursue spiritual dimensions of life and death, and engage noble arts and sciences.

I suspect that since the first Mesopotamian urbanites invested time in building settlements financed by surplus from settled grain farming, there have been two types of intellectual: those who elucidate and those who obfuscate. Enlighten or obscure.

Early intellectuals mostly worked under the patronage of rulers; they were the seers, wise-men, prophets, priests. All historic cultures record the difference between false and true prophets: those who say what the ruler wants to hear and those who speak with integrity no matter what. Fewer of the latter survived; so intellectual culture must be presumed to have developed principally under the influence of the former. That said, most game-changers were of the latter type – committed seekers after philosophical, empirical and metaphysical truth who were willing to go to the wall for their beliefs and theories. There was no doubt also a large middle ground of knowledge-seeking intellectuals who may not have been prepared to go to the wall for their beliefs but who would not readily capitulate.

In modern liberal societies, false prophets are not so likely to bend to appease rulers, as they might still do in North Korea, but are just as likely to have their intellectual integrity dulled by other self-serving agenda. (Bending one's analysis and advice to preserve one's life is of course an extreme example of the self-serving intellectual).

One telltale distinction to watch for in walking this tricky tight rope is *jargon* versus *technical terms*. Technical terms simplify, elucidate and enlighten; jargon complicates, obfuscates and confuses.

Weijen Wang, told me of a brochure for an architectural lecture series he recently came across, which he could not understand. I'm guessing that it wasn't full of technical terms aimed at making intellectual conversation more efficient.

To caricature, if you will forgive me, the artists and scientists in out company each have their own challenges in this respect. Architects and human geographers, for example, dwell in intellectual communities of practice that have a tendency to create worlds within

worlds. Language is invented to complicate rather than to simplify. (Not all architects and geographers of course). For some intellectuals, their entire academic endeavor is spent in a world within a world, where nothing is as it seems and every real world concept is mapped to one in that Alice in Wonderland place. And Wonderlands being what they are, the mapping is rarely easily done.

Not so long ago I sat through a research seminar given by quite a famous academic, working on the boundary of rural geography and sociology. I sat there for a whole hour pen in hand as the discussant, waiting for some single idea, statement, proposition, snippet of testable, or even debatable, theory that I could ask a question about or critically challenge in some intellectually useful way. There was not one. Not a single refutable proposition or useful philosophical statement or insight. It was like that fabled journal article that a physics professor managed to get published in a sociology journal, which turned out to be generated by random parsing of sentence parts taken from similar papers.

That's just bad (very bad) social science. I think that the equivalent danger faced by arts and artistic scholars is subtler. There is no doubt bad art and architecture scholarship (I leave design colleagues to talk about what that might be). But because art and some aspects of architecture can legitimately be about creating mystery – mystery being a quality that can make a building, a painting, a poem or a piece of prose describing an artwork socially valuable, inspiring, beautiful and so on, the guidelines for avoiding poor scholarship and empty intellectual pursuits are not so obvious. One very obvious test in architecture is to ask how related to buildings is one's intellectualizing? At the extreme, one could take the position that all architecture should be buildable and all architecture research directed towards understanding buildable forms. I'm not necessarily taking that position, but one could. Short of that, one could say that our intellectual deliberations should help produce better architecture – through educating better architecture students or constructively critiquing the buildings of architects. One way or other, we should probably be using our privileged 'set-apart' status as intellectuals to inspire and enrich others. I think it is quite easy to spot intellectual projects that are self-serving.

The scientists among us have their own pitfalls. I admit to having written some papers earlier in my career, principally as a matter of vanity, or perhaps not outright vanity but at least self-discovery, self-assertion and self-proving. I am not proud to admit it. At best, I can rationalize them as a necessary step through which I learned and matured intellectually: part of my training to become a more useful intellectual. Many social scientists use sophisticated quantitative and qualitative methods in the same way as artists weave poetic words (good) and other social scientists weave weasel words (bad). Statistics are presented as *magic dust* rather than as a rigorous way of testing a theoretical idea.

Whatever *magic dust* our kind tend to use, here's a challenge for HKU Faculty of Architecture: for the sake of an enlightened and open society, please try and avoid it. The world will be a better place if, in our own ways, we respectively use our time to answer significant questions that routine society doesn't have time to answer; to create new knowledge that is useful for at least n=2 (you and at least one other, preferably more); to probe and explain matters that are too difficult or too time consuming for most to understand; and in communicating the results of our scholarship, to simplify rather than to complicate.

To do this is to empower others with knowledge given away. Setting ourselves up as experts with an expertise built within a make-believe world does the opposite. Sadly, the Research Assessment Exercise and other peer review processes do not completely guard

against this. Knowledge exchange activities keep our feet on the ground to a degree, as do some kinds of consultancy. Submitting our work to cross-disciplinary journals helps. Generally the broader the scope, larger the readership and higher the citation impact of a journal, the less chance there is of being able to publish work that has little or no social value: one good reason for each of us to aspire to be working on at least one paper at any one time that is targeted at the top journal in our field.

Congratulations to colleagues for the achievements mentioned below.

Chris

# Department of Architecture

1. Dr. B.S. Jia

    - has a new article published "*Master Class - the long view: architectural education on Open Building (1)*", Architectural Worlds (No 155), 2014:1 Vol. 29, Shenzhen, China. p. 34-37 (ISSN1000-8373)

2. Mr. Tom Verebes

    - invited to serve on a Curriculum Review Panel, to write a report on the curriculum for a proposed new programme, "Bachelor in Computational Design", within the Faculty of the Built Environment at the University of New South Wales in Australia.

# Department of Real Estate and Construction

1. Dr. Tas Yong Koh

    - had attended the Hong Kong Construction Safety Benchmarking Group (CSBG) meeting on 9 Apr 2014. In this meeting, Dr Koh, together with practitioners from the Hong Kong construction industry had exchanged views and ideas on improving construction project safety performance of the industry. Specific issues of discussion include safety involving people working at height and plant and equipment safety. The discussion in these two areas led to the idea of the need to replace the use of current bamboo scaffold to the system modular metal scaffold. Current concern in the replacement of scaffolding system revolves around the livelihood of the existing bamboo scaffold erectors and the trade unions' resistance. Dr Koh had proposed for the Construction Industry Council (through the Council's representative in the meeting) to engage the trade unions for discussion and exploration for a phased replacement of the scaffolding system. This suggestion was  supported by the Hong Kong Airport Authority's (AA) representative as the AA had already used metal scaffolding in their construction works.

2. Dr. S W Poon

   - was invited by Antiquities and Monuments Office to examine as an expert and to submit a report on the unearthed stone structures including the 1,000-year old square well at the Old Kai Tak Airport, on 2 April 2014.

# Department of Urban Planning and Design

The Hong Kong Institute of Planners (HKIP) granted full recognition to the MSc (Urban Planning) programme offered by the Department of Urban Planning and Design for the period up to and including the 2015 intake.

1. Dr. Mandy Lau

   - had a single-authored paper entitled "Sectoral integration and meta-governance: lessons beyond the 'spatial planning' agenda in England" accepted for publication in *Town Planning Review.*

2. Ms. Christina Lo

   - participated in the MTR West Island Line (WIL) Youth Ambassador Programme Kick-off Ceremony "港鐵西港島綫青年大使計劃" 啟動儀式 held on 7 April 2014 in Rayson Huang Theatre, HKU. A number of the Ambassadors are from the BAUS and MUP programs. They will be conducting community outreach by delivering talks/briefings on the WIL opening information to schools/elderly centres/community centres/owners incorporations etc.



3. Dean Webster

   - had a paper with his former PhD student Yang Xiao, now at Tongji, rejected from the Journal of Housing Economics ☺. The good news was that the referees thought it need to be broken down into two separate papers and resubmitted. A month's more work but a better outcome.