

Dean's Roundup

Friday, November 15th, 2013

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 [**cu'ra-to' ri-al** (ky^{oo}r^ə-tô^r'ē-əl, -tô^r'-)] n. nounised by the Dean from curator + editorial]

Dear all,

First of all, let me congratulate our colleague Ms. Loo Yuet Ling for reaching her 25 years service milestone and thank her on behalf of us all for dedicating such a significant amount of her working career so far to the Faculty. Every contribution is vitally important and in the big scheme of things no one part is less or more important than another. Together we make the faculty and the university great and create great futures for our students. Thank you Loo Yuet Ling.

The devastation in the Philippines left by Typhoon Haiyan causes us to reflect on core issues in the design, construction and governance of human settlements.

The fundamental role of government is arguably to provide security. As a society matures and becomes more wealthy and stable, the need for primitive security from external and internal violence becomes relatively less important than the need for other kinds of 'basic needs' security such as economic and social security. Over time, a society starts to demand that its finer cultural preferences are also secured by the state, for example heritage buildings protected.

In the first decade of the 20th century, the first university architecture school and the first university urban planning school was opened in the UK and the world's first universal old-age pension was instituted by a British prime minister. Interestingly, the State started grappling with security in the built environment (largely driven by the need to provide health security) at about the same time as it was working out how to provide social security in the urban age. Mainland China a hundred years or so later is doing the same sums. How do you create a living environment that minimizes risks to health security and security of property and person from violent infringement and how do you provide social security more generally to make the costs of urban living bearable? The Hukou system that rations social and housing security by place of registration in the Mainland is gradually being broken up because it doesn't provide a sufficient basis for securing the social reproduction of the country's labour force. (Migrant workers get ill and die because they are not eligible for subsidized health care in the cities in which they live and work).

It is at times of crisis that societies take stock and evaluate the importance of the various securities that the efforts of tax revenue-funded governments are directed towards.

What use a beautifully designed villa, public park or town hall if it gets washed away in a landslide?

One of the first victims of collateral damage in President Bush senior's first Gulf War was a magnificent modern orthodox cathedral in Baghdad that an architect friend of mine had worked on as a young designer. There is something depressing about the idea of designing cities in peacetime to withstand wartime risks. On the other hand, fortified designs from history's more insecure periods have given us

some of our most cherished and long-lived city landmarks. HK's spray-concreted slopes were once viewed as an aberration. They have secured the city from natural hazard risk however and with their green-covered wire netting are now emblems of smart green engineering. Resilience is a fashionable topic in urban scholarship, design, engineering and policy-making. One of the big questions in the resilience agenda is the *level* of security required.

Too much security generally means loss of freedom, standardization, high taxation, loss of beauty for functionality and so on. Too little means high losses when a crisis strikes.

It would be interesting to explore in our studio teaching and our research the idea of security sensitivity-analysis ('securitivity analysis'? or just '**securitivity**'?). What would it take to secure the average city in the Philippines from another Haiyan? To secure all buildings in Istanbul to survive a repeat Izmit earthquake of 1999 that killed over 17,000 people? To secure the entire coast of Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand and Burma from another 2005 Tsunami? To secure sinking Bangkok as a capital city for another 100 years? The provision of 'total residential security' in insecure South African cities by companies like ADM has led to fortress villas and fortress gated communities, which commentators say crank up the security risk. Indeed, after security companies advertised a 7 minute armed response time service to householders, the murder rate associated with break-ins sky-rocketed. Killing the householder was the only way to guarantee getting away before the armed guards arrived.

Urban resilience is often presented as a technical or economic issue. There are some very fundamental trade-offs to be tested, designed, modeled, imagined, thought-through, debated, however. I was in New Orleans six months before Hurricane Katrina. A colleague at the University told me that everyone knew a disaster was waiting to happen. When the hurricane passed directly over the city it simply lifted up the water from the river/lake-side of the levee and dumped it on the lower-level city-side. In the process, a levee broke. The city got inundated. Government had been investing in less needed kinds of security for decades.

What securities should be top of the list for government organised investment in a city, neighbourhood, project, building? The UK security services should probably invest much more in London's so called 'square mile' – the 'City of London', a city within a city, which creates 4% of the UK's GDP and conducts about 30% of the world's currency transactions. Probably it should be physically secured much more effectively too. Like the American embassy in London and many other cities that since 2000 has been barricaded with permanent concrete road-blocks. A new fortified wall for the ancient Roman and medieval city of London? A gift to tourists in the late 22nd century?

What balance between hard infrastructural security like flood-controls and soft security like social welfare? What are regarded as individual rights may also, and probably more properly, be viewed as collective measures to increase various kinds of security in society. So *securitivity* as a way of experimenting with architectural and urban designs and urban governance measures under different levels of, and kinds of, infringements of individual freedom in pursuit of collective survival?

Exploring the fundamental relationship between beauty and security might be a worthwhile part of such a journey. Does beauty require an element of intrinsic vulnerability? Psychologists tell us that women are attracted to vulnerability in a male and many fictional female characters are portrayed as delicate and in need of protection. Delicacy in form is often associated with natural and man-made works of art such as the leaves of a Japanese Maple, the detail of a pre-Raphaelite still-life and the artificial stamen of Thomas Heatherwick's seed cathedral. Might this tell us something about how to build resilient but beautiful buildings and urban forms? The theory of minimalism and structural sufficiency in design and engineering is probably very well developed but how does it map out more generally; how does it scale up?

Another dimension of the relationship is not intrinsic connection but the extrinsic: can beauty flourish without security? (In)security not as a component of beauty but as a necessary condition for it. Art and philosophy flourish in times of peace and prosperity. The flower gardens and markets of Beirut

disappeared during the civil war and returned after. Graceful *Shards* rise to the heavens during periods of the economic cycle when there is a surfeit of footloose capital, particularly cheap credit, giving the illusion of financial security.

That leads to another thought: what are the limits to the relationship between beauty and security? In the case of the tallest-building syndrome, maximal beauty coincides with maximal perceived security: it hovers on the edge of chaos and is a manifestation of unrestrained social optimism. Society produces its most extreme objects of beauty on the eve of destruction.

The antithesis of the idea that beauty needs security in order to flourish is that security destroys beauty. There is, perhaps, an intriguing paradox to explore here. Dampeners had to be retrofitted to London's Millennium footbridge to prevent synchronous lateral excitation (wobbling). The purity of design of the iconic English Lotus sports car had to be compromised to make it officially road worthy for American import. Stunning architectural designs are routinely compromised to make them safe to build. Many have written of how the Taliban's securitization of women in Afghanistan destroyed the nation's beautiful Islamic female spirit.

Perhaps there is an optimal amount of security that makes beauty flourish without smothering it or turning it into indulgence and thence to self-destruction. On the other hand, perhaps beauty is best created in the face of opposition and is richest when it embraces vulnerability. In nature, by design or evolutionary competition or both, this is the most inspiring form. Just delicate enough a stem without succumbing to the winds. Just enough salmon survive the leap to keep the species going.

But one of the most beautiful delicacies of nature, the butterfly, may display its wonder for just a day. No security built-in there. Like the ancient practice in diverse cultures of sacrificing first-fruits or burying the greatest works of art. Beauty created and cherished for the sake of worship (of a god, gods, nature, ancestors) rather than for consumption. Dispensable beauty. Beauty enhanced by vulnerability not because of the pathos added but because of the boldness of making something intrinsically good, admirable and honorable whatever may happen to it. An architectural installation that succumbs, by design, to the elements. A neighbourhood left to the devices of its inhabitants to make of it what they will. A city built as an object of hope, optimism, beauty, prosperity and fairness, with the knowledge that it will congest and may even self-destroy in whole or in parts. The city, a building, offered as a creative act of faith. Very different from city built to withstand the strongest storm.

Well done everyone mentioned below. Thanks for your continued contributions to the Faculty.

Chris

Faculty of Architecture

I. Ms. Loo Yuet Ling (Office Assistant)

- has been serving the University for over 25 years and she is recommended for the University's Long Service Award of 2013-14. The award presentation ceremony will be held shortly after the Chinese New Year.

Department of Architecture

I. Mr. David Erdman

- recently won a Perspective Award for the project waterscape which he designed with his firm davidclovers. It was among eight winning projects selected by an International Jury for best Architectural Institutional/Public Space.
- his project for the de Ricou tower in Repulse Bay, designed with his firm davidclovers, was featured in the Sunday, November 3, 2013 edition of Sing Tao Daily.
- participated in the Media Facades Summit co-hosted by HKU. The first Media Facades Summit in Asia, Erdman delivered a Keynote Introduction and Chaired the Roundtable Discussion with Eric Schuldenfrei.

2. Ms. Tris Kee

- HKUrbanLab will co-organize the HK-Barcelona Urban Exchange Conference in HKU Centenary Campus on Feb 22nd, 2014.

The Conference will be organized by the Development Bureau HKSAR and the Barcelona Regional Urban Development Agency, supported by HKIP, HKIUD, HKGBC and HKUrbanLab. Invited guests will include Mrs. Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet Ngor, GBS JP, the Chief Secretary for Administration of the Government of the HKSAR, the Mayor of Barcelona Xavia Trias, scholars and professionals of both cities.

The event will be a one-day forum to discuss urban issues such as connectivity, green sustainability and harbourfront developments of both cities.

3. Mr. Olivier Ottevaere

- 'Black Maria' wins the Biennial Swiss Federal Design Prize (<http://www.designpreis.ch/?pageID=448>) under interior design category.
- Oliver was the designer and project leader for the MJHL Montreux Jazz Heritage Lab at the EPFL in Lausanne under the ALICE Lab and in collaboration with the EPFL/ECAL lab, a team comprising of architects, acoustic engineers, computer scientists, interactive designers, visual artists and fabricators.
- The famous Montreux Jazz Festival has been capturing the concerts that take place under its auspices in both audio and video recordings for many decades, so preserving them for future generations. The Montreux Jazz Heritage Lab (MJHL) is a specially constructed modular room. It has been created to give visitors wishing to consult the concert archives, which now exist in digital form, the opportunity of experiencing these recordings with total visual and acoustic authenticity.

The curved projection screen has been inspired by the trompe l'œil effect which the Baroque era used with such virtuosity. It gives the viewer the illusion of being physically present and in the thick of things. Acoustic considerations were an important factor in planning the geometry of the MJHL and in the choice of materials. With a view to allowing a wider audience as well to enjoy the concert experience, the side partition of the room is designed as a door and can be opened out completely.

- Comment by the Nominators:

The wooden structure has been skilfully designed as a basis for transporting digital recordings into the analogue world. Thanks to the collaboration of various different disciplines, the multimedia archive has been made available to the public in the most convincing and impressive way. The modular structure, consisting of 1300 wooden components, makes the Heritage Lab a mobile asset.



4. Dr. Cole Roskam

- published an article, 'Structures of Everyday Life: The Architecture of Wang Shu', in *Artforum* 52, no. 3 (November 2013), 252-261.
- organized and moderated a forum, 'Revisiting the Kowloon Walled City' at the Asia Society, in connection with the 20th anniversary of the Kowloon Walled City's demolition on past Thursday, November 7. A video of the event should be available on the Asia Society website shortly. (<http://asiasociety.org/hong-kong/events/revisiting-kowloon-walled-city>)

5. Ms. Eunice Seng

- Eunice Seng and her architecture practice SKEW Collaborative was awarded a Certificate of Excellence for Green / Sustainable Build in the Architecture (Professional) category for the Chinese Academy of Sciences IOT Center at the 2013 Perspective Awards Ceremony on November 7th, 2013.

The project has also been featured in a peer reviewed architecture magazine - Aric Chen, "Renovation, Innovation," *Space Magazine*, Issue 552, Nov. 2013, pp. 84 – 91. ISSN: 1228- 2472

6. Mr. Tom Verebes

- his practice, OCEAN CN, has been invited by competition jurors/organisers, Tadao Ando and Kengo Kuma, to participate in a two-stage "Invited Design Competition" for an urban landscape and architectural development zone adjacent to Osaka JR Station, in Japan
- delivered an evening lecture, titled 'Masterplanning the Adaptive City', at The University of Saint Joseph (USJ) in Macau, on October 31st, 2013
- delivered a lecture, titled 'The Genealogy of the Contemporary', at the Digital Futures Initiative, at Ontario College of Art and Design in Toronto, on November 12th, 2013.

- delivered an evening lecture, titled 'Urbanism in the Age of Indeterminacy', at The University of Toronto; along with a book launch event for 'Masterplanning the Adaptive City' on November 13th, 2013
- delivered an evening lecture, titled, 'The Adaptive City', at Pratt Institute in New York on November 14th, 2013.

Department of Real Estate and Construction

I. Dr. Daniel Ho

- appointed as a member of the Appeal Panel of Hong Kong Green Building Council Certification Schemes for a term of 3 years with effect from October 24th, 2013.

2. Dr. Wilson Lu

- presented a conference paper “**Lu, W.S.**, Huang, G.Q., Shen, Q.P., Ng, T. and **Gao, Y.** (2013). *BIMatizing* prefabrication housing construction in Hong Kong: Contexts, frameworks, and challenges ahead, in Yabuki and Makaanae (ed.) *Proceedings of the First International Conference on Civil and Building Engineering Informatics (ICCBEI)*, November 7th to 8th, 2013, Tokyo, Japan.

Department of Urban Planning and Design

I. Dr. Roger Chan

- served as the Invited Panelist on “Intangible Urban Value: How Soft Power Will Determine the Competitiveness of Tomorrow’s Global Mega Cities” of the *2013 Urban Land Institute Fall Meeting* held in Chicago, USA on November 6th, 2013. Fellow panelists include Hiroo Ichikawa, Dean, Professional Graduate School of Governance Studies, Meiji University and Joe Montgomery, Chief Executive Office, ULI Europe.