

Dean's Roundup

Friday, 16 May, 2014

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^{ee}-tôr'^{ee}-al, -tôr'-) n. nounised by the Dean from curator + editorial]

Dear all,

First I must say a big thank you to Roger, Cordelia, Poonam and team for organizing a riveting research retreat last week. For those who were not able to make it, Dr. Susanne Morris from UQ and Professor Frederick Leung from HKU Faculty of Education gave a very informative and challenging introduction to the big issues in research integrity and ethics and this provided a creative platform from which to unpack some of the tricky issues concerning research, faced by the Faculty of Architecture.

It wasn't the start of the discussion but it was hopefully an important milestone and platform for future conversations, with high quality points being made on a wide range of questions. I'll pick up some of these in Dean's Roundups in the coming weeks and months. It would be good to come to the end of 2014 feeling that we have had a pretty exhaustive (but not exhausting) airing of all the main issues. Perhaps at that point we might even have a broad consensus in the Faculty about the various flavors of research culture appropriate to different parts of the FoA family. It has also been suggested that we might want to host an international conference on Research in Architecture; as a way of disseminating all the hard thinking that we will have done during the year and, being ambitious, setting a HKU benchmark on the issues, which others can use.

A few immediate loose ends of thoughts that I wanted to respond to last Thursday but didn't have time for.

First, points raised about case studies as a method. It is right to ask that the *case study* be honored on equal footing to the RCT (randomized control trial), which I described as the Rolls Royce of research designs. But only in so far as it is fit for a specific purpose. Case studies are good at unpacking complexities, as Cecelia reminded us. They can also be powerful ways of refuting hypothesis and thus testing theory, as I have said in an earlier Deans Roundup in 2013. Indeed, they are better than the RCT at exploring the intricacies of a complex case and sometimes, also better at uncovering interesting new hypotheses. In medicine, case studies of individuals with multiple pathologies and drug interaction problems are an important research activity producing vital heuristic information for practitioners and a source of tentative theory for systematic researchers. On the other hand, it can categorically be said, from *a priori* logic as well as long experience, that case studies are among the weakest kind of research designs for providing systematic evidence in support of a general theory. Supporting a theory that church buildings stand up in earth-quake zones because they have supernatural protection on the basis of one case study where a church did, in fact, survive a point 8 quake is, well, on shaky

ground. More useful in testing that theory is a single case study of a church building that fell down in an earthquake. Researchers should never be precious or defensive about their favorite methods. Unless those methods are being attacked unreasonably. I know from long experience that there is a strange movement towards 'democratization of research' or 'methodological plurality'. So-called 'mixed methods' is one thing – insisting on case studies in support of multi-variate quantitative analysis, for example, to check, explore and elaborate on the simple relationships established in a regression model for instance. But it is poor research practice to use case studies to test a general proposition, on the grounds that the data is not available or, worse, that you are not a quantitative person. Similarly, not undertaking corroborating in- depth *qualitative* research, via interviews for example, because you are a 'quantitative analyst' is equally unacceptable. A good researcher employs research tools to suit the investigation. If you need to increase your repertoire because you are moving into new areas of research, you train yourself up. Just like an experienced biochemistry professor would go on a course to learn how to use a new generation of molecular-level imaging instrument.

Second, I apologize that I did not label the research types in my presentation the other way around: A for Applied and B for Background. This would have lowered the risk of people misunderstanding my message in places. In the end, Applied research (directed at solving specific complex problems) is the most important. Background (scientific) research establishes general principles to make Applied research more effective. This being said, and noting that architecture is intrinsically an applied research and synthesizing activity, most discussants at the retreat seemed to share the view that academic architects should be distinguished from their colleagues in the city by (a) using more Background scientific research in their designs and (b) contributing to the growing stock of architectural Background research through their designs.

Third, and most urgent in my view, is the issue of the flow of knowledge in architecture. I was encouraged to hear several colleagues say that all design work undertaken in a university school of architecture should have general principles arising from it that are worth passing on to other designers – practitioners, students, other academics. If this is the case, then there is no intrinsic problem facing the discipline as it reorganizes itself to be better able to evaluate academic research and design quality (which is not just a cynical requirement of university evaluation exercises – more thoughtfully designed and evaluated quality measures will lead to greater fairness in hirings, tenure, promotions, selection in competitions, prizes etc). It means that the problem to be addressed is to find benchmarks that are analogous to those used in other disciplines; which requires deeper thought about why the various esteem measures currently in use in architecture have emerged, what they measure, how well they measure and what alternatives might be more accurate and reliable.

For example, in one conversation I have been part of since the retreat, the suggestion was made that being selected by international peer review to curate an international competition is rather like being selected by international peer review to direct a research centre. You get money and authority to bring designers (exhibition) or scientists (centre) to work on a particular theme with a specific collaborative goal. This suggests that curating is an input measure not an output measure. Winning a centre bid will accrue credit in a scientist's promotion application, but as an input measure. This alone is not sufficient. The reviewer would also expect to see the outputs from the investment: measured in papers published, patents filed etc. What are the equivalent outputs for the design curator? The exhibition itself, certainly. But what if only 10 people visited it? And probably more importantly, peer review via write-ups in the popular, professional and academic press. If curating achieves its objective of making a statement that stands a chance of changing the way people think or the way designers design, then the peer review is vital in testing that claim. Reducing the importance of self-claims in quality evaluation is another thing that needs working on.

If academic architects and critics the world over, dive in to praise or rubbish an exhibition, this sounds to me like the equivalent to citations of an academic article. The same might be said of the articles that review a specific design. If your built design or your curated exhibition is ignored by academic colleagues, it's like a zero citation count for a journal paper. You might think it's outstanding but clearly others do not.

This is one of the ways in which we need to keep the discussion going. Please give thought to these equivalencies and feed them into our ongoing debates. I had wondered if a HKU FoA web discussion on the issue might be a good idea – where we and the world can post up short think-pieces. Perhaps this could provide a network of discussants and a rich database of ideas to feed into an international conference on the subject in 2015. Your comments please.

Changing subject to the other big event of last week: thank you again to Cordelia, Poonam and team for organizing a successful Faculty visit by Professor Peter Mathieson, HKU's new President and VC. He was visibly impressed and went away with the view that we need more space to do more of the excellent things that we do – including teaching outstandingly excellent students. I was personally impressed and pleased that he asked whether an increased emphasis on research would jeopardize the design practice and teaching that clearly are important in drawing in such high numbers of student applicants. I think he was partly speaking as a practicing (renal) surgeon. That was a nice insight. He knows from experience that excellence in medical schools has to be secured in both practice AND scientific research. So he would completely understand the struggles we are having in balancing, and talking about, Type A (Applied) and Type B (Background) research.

Congratulations to colleagues for the achievements summarized below. I was at the tail-end of David Erdman's final review for his Taipei studio last Saturday and was very impressed with the quality of the work and the cleverly organized structure of the studio where students moved between groups at different stages of the work, having to cope with different kinds of sub-divided tasks, from spatial divisions of the site to horizontal divisions of layers and functions.

Chris

Department of Architecture

1. Mr. David Erdman

- brought students from his M.Arch 01 R+D studio “The Massing Complex V2.0” to Taipei for a week of workshops, seminars and meetings with municipal authorities including the Mayor. Along with 41 students from the University of Syracuse and National Chiao Tung University, a tour of the Taiwan Train Depot (their site) was conducted and teams worked collaboratively brainstorming and sharing ideas about the city and site. This is the second studio that is working directly with city authorities and various stakeholders in Taipei developing design ideas for this highly contested site.

Various local articles chronicled the events and collaboration:

<http://tw.news.yahoo.com/%E5%90%8D%E6%A0%A1%E8%B7%A8%E5%9C%8B%E4%BA%A4%E6%B5%81-%E6%8E%A2%E8%A8%8E%E5%9F%8E%E5%B8%82%E6%96%87%E5%8C%96-093920344.html>

<http://www.appledaily.com.tw/realtimenews/article/new/20140313/359454/>

<http://www.nownews.com/n/2014/03/13/1147202>

<http://news.msn.com.tw/news3606970.aspx>

<http://www.epochtimes.com/gb/14/3/13/n4104993.htm%E5%AE%A3%E6%89%AC%E5%8F%B0%E6%B9%BE%E5%AD%A6--%E4%BA%A4%E5%A4%A7%E6%9C%88%E7%BA%BD%E7%BA%A6%E5%8A%9E%E5%B1%95.html>

<http://udn.com/NEWS/BREAKINGNEWS/BREAKINGNEWS9/8545707.shtml>

<http://www.cna.com.tw/news/aedu/201403130117-1.aspx>

<http://life.chinatimes.com/LifeContent/1413/20140313004052.html>





- participated in two symposia at the University of Syracuse's Fisher Center in New York City. The symposia were organized around the joint studios he has taught in 2013 and 2014 focusing on subject of the 21st century "complex." Events included the launching of the book "POP" (which contains work from last year's studios and an essay by Erdman) and an exhibition of the work from his current studio. Erdman was a respondent for the first Symposium focusing on Competitions in Taiwan where Neil Denari, Jesse Reiser, Nanako Umemoto and David Tseng presented. Erdman also presented the student's design research over the past two years in the second symposium.



Department of Real Estate and Construction

1. Dr. Koh Tas Yong

- had been invited and delivered a keynote speech at the Hongkong Electric Construction Safety, Health and Environmental Forum 2014 on 8 May 2014. The title of Dr Koh's presentation is "Construction Workers Safety Behaviours: Observations and Explanations". In this annual event, Dr Koh had shared the research findings from research projects conducted out from the Department of Real Estate and Construction and observations gathered from industry engagements on construction safety. Both recommendations and challenges had been put forth to the Forum participants in the efforts to improve construction safety performance for the industry.



2. Dr. S W Poon

- delivered a talk on “Confined spaces regulation and bottom up basement construction” in the workshop on Occupational Safety and Health Laws in Construction, jointly organized by Safety Specialist Committee of Hong Kong Institution of Engineers, and Department of Real Estate & Construction, on 10 May 2014.

3. Professor Steve Rowlinson

- attended the 22nd Annual PACE Research Seminar at Penn State University and delivered a Key note Lecture – Home thoughts from abroad: OHS in new contexts and cultures.
(PACE is the Partnership for Achieving Construction Excellence)
- was invited as a Jury member for the Interdisciplinary Collaborative Design Studio Final Design Reviews at the Stuckeman School College of Arts and Architecture at Penn State University

Department of Urban Planning and Design

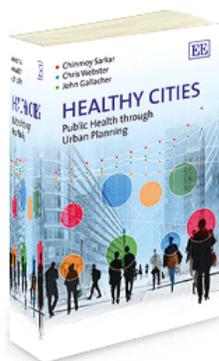
1. Professor Anthony Yeh

- attended the Jury of the International Consultation on the Conceptual Urban Design of a Dynamic Coastal Zone for Western Baoan, Shenzhen, as one of the invited jurors on 12 May 2014.

2. Dean Webster

- published a book with details as below:

Chinmoy Sarkar, Chris Webster and John Gallacher (2014), “HEALTHY CITIES Public Health through Urban Planning”, Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, ISBN: 9781781955710 eISBN:9781781955727 DOI: 10.4337/9781781955727 Pages: 424



Publisher's page: <http://www.elgaronline.com/view/9781781955710.xml>

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