Dean's Roundup

Friday, 3 January, 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** (ky͝o͝or'ə-tôr'ē-əl, -tər'-) n. nounised by the Dean from curator + editorial]*

Dear all,

Happy Gregorian New Year to you all.

I was getting into a car during the Christmas break and found myself recalling the days when each car door had its own lock.

That led me to reflect on the evolution of control mechanisms and associated practices. Car design changed with the arrival of remote control locking technology, after which it became apparent that driver convenience trumped any advantages of being able to individually lock or unlock a car door from the outside. Individual passengers have an evident need to lock and unlock their own door from inside, so this function remained; but no need to do so from the outside, so external locks disappeared apart from drivers door and perhaps front passenger's and boot/trunk.

Design in manufacture, as in nature, tends to follow an effort minimizing logic and tends to be evolutionary.

The evolution of the car locking system is a pretty pure Pareto improvement (economist-speak for no-loss + win for some at least). There may be rare occasions when an external lock could have benefitted a passenger – Bourne's girlfriend after her jeep went off the bridge into the Goan river for example. But in the bigger scheme of things, millions of minutes have been saved by the invention of central locking and millions of kilos of ironware saved by the disappearance of superfluous shiny locks.

What about other inventions that centralize control by design? For almost 15 years I have studied gated communities as a new genre of urbanism. The economic logic for enclosure and controlling access by physical design and by institutional arrangement is compelling and apparently irresistible. The efficiency and equity issues are rather more complex than with motorcar security systems and the possibility of Pareto gain is harder to assess.

How about in architectural design? The designers of the elevators in London Heathrow's Terminal 5 decided that passengers' should cede control to the machine. There is anecdotal evidence that the automatic (pre-programmed) movement control of the lift is socially more efficient than passenger control in that in aggregate, more people get moved to where they want to in less time than in a system where the passenger calls the lift. A bit like average travel times going down when the speed limit is reduced from 120 to 80 km/hour as a result of more steady flows. But for the individual user of Terminal 5 lifts, the absence of buttons is confusing – sometimes to the point of giving up and

searching for an escalator (there are YouTube videos to prove it). The same can be said of Schindler's Lifts' Destination Control System, where the user enters a floor number or room number on a pad and is guided to the lift shaft that will take him or her there in the quickest time. This optimizes movement in the aggregate but is annoying for anyone but regular users – so more appropriate for office buildings than for the hotels where the system is often installed.

The design of business class seats on Virgin Atlantic flights optimizes uniqueness and design over functionality – a very Virgin thing. The contraption tips up to convert from day seat to sleeper, so the passenger sleeps on the underside of the chair (after the chair has contorted itself forward – first squashing and then tipping out, the unsuspecting first-time user or tired or over-fueled repeat user). One imagines the airline will eventually revert to standard technology, but not until the initial investment has been recouped and thousands of customers have suffered a squashing and a tipping

In any design, or in the evolution of any design or making or organizing process, there are generally two types of effort that are being minimized: producer's and user's. Or more generally, giver and receiver; or the two sides of a transaction. Over time, the efficiency (and probably beauty) of a design will tend to improve as the distribution of effort between the two is negotiated incrementally towards some equilibrium.

The designer mediates this exchange. A harmful and sometimes fatal conceit in designing something that mediates between two parties is to suppose too much knowledge as the designer. Or worse, to impose a net cost on the exchange by taking something from the project's value that remains with the designer and becomes value not passed on in benefit to either party. Economists call it rent-seeking. Designers might call it over-design or insensitive or elitist design. Elite design need not be rent-seeking, however. At its best, it raises the value of the transaction to all parties: provider/maker, buyer/consumer and designer/mediator.

Back to New Year, doors and control. Ancient Rome named January, the first month of the Gregorian calendar, after *Janus*, the Roman god of *comings, goings, gates, doors, passages, transitions and transactions*. The Romans New Year celebration of January 1st was dedicated to this super-deity whose function was designed in the ancient pantheon to control the passage of time and the end of old things and start of new things. It is of interest that in an age when deities were sought, borrowed or invented to create a kind of parallel order to the order of human society and the natural world, the god of transactions and transitions naturally made its way to the top. Janus was worshipped and celebrated alongside most if not all other deities. It is also of interest that he faced two ways – looking back and looking forward. Lesser deities who only looked one way were superseded by the two-facing door-keeper and overseer of transactions. There was presumably less conflict this way. Better to lodge control for the transaction of old and new within one deity.

Good design is Janus-like. Looking both ways. Concerned with both (all) parties to an exchange. Meeting the client's brief and the end-users' needs. Inventing Pareto solutions to the configuration and use of a room, building, site, neighbourhood. Producing return on capital in exchange for value for money. And if an architect can produce public art at the same time, then even better: her cleverness has benefitted the whole of the city - a third-party beneficiary of a bilateral exchange. Now that's something two-faced Janus wasn't designed to do.

Well done to colleagues listed below. A great start to the new year with a good mix of quality publications, local and national public engagements and international public recognition.

Chris

Department of Real Estate and Construction

1. Dr. Wilson Lu

   - the interview on construction waste management in China was published in *The New York Times*: "China's Mountains of Construction Rubble" by Austin Ramzy (http://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/10/20/chinas-mountains-of-construction-rubble/?_r=0).

   - published a paper "Jewell, C.A., Flanagan, R., and **Lu, W.S.** (2014). The dilemma of scope and scale for construction professional service firms. *Construction Management and Economics*, forthcoming.

   - chaired the 2nd keynote speech session of the First Construction Management Forum for Young Scholars from Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, held on 20 Dec 2013, Chongqing University, Chongqing.

   - gave a talk "My research footprints at HKU" at the First Construction Management Forum for Young Scholars from Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, held on 20 Dec 2013, Chongqing University, Chongqing.

   - led a group of 10 PhD/MPhil and MSc students to Chongqing from 21 - 23 Dec 2013. The trip was sponsored by the HKU-China 1000 Exchange Programme. They conducted a series of knowledge exchange (KE) activities in Chongqing, including the following talks in the Faculty of Construction Management and Real Estate at Chongqing University:

   - Dr Wilson Lu, "Bridging the gap between BIM and Buildings", 21 Dec 2013.

   - Mr. Liang Cong (a PhD student in the REC department), "The optimal strategy of using BIM in construction management", 21 Dec 2013.

   - Mr. Awale Raman (a PhD student in the REC department), "Creating Shared Value and the Firm Competitiveness", 21 Dec 2013.

   - Ms. Vivien Chow (a PhD student in the REC department), "The role boundary objects play in communications across unequal power relationships: A study of public engagement processes for urban development projects in Hong Kong", 21 Dec 2013.

   - visited a famous green project: CISDI building, Chongqing Urban Planning Exhibition Hall, Chongqing Grand Theatre, Chaotianmen Wharf, Jiefangbei, and urban redevelopment projects including Ciqikou and Hongyadong.

2. Dr. Yi Peng (Post-Doctor Fellow)

   - published a paper "Peng, Y., Shen, L., Zhang, X., & Ochoa, J. J. (2014). The feasibility of concentrated rural settlement in a context of post-disaster reconstruction: a study of China. *Disasters*, *38*(1), 108-124".

Department of Urban Planning and Design

1. Dr. Mandy Lau

   - was invited to give a seminar entitled "*Opposition to Public Housing in Hong Kong: Does It Matter?*", organized by the Affordable Housing Research Network (AHRN) on 17 December 2013 (Tuesday).

2. Dr. Roger Chan

   - was appointed as member of International Board of Directors for Asian Urban Research Association (AURA). The Association was established in 1985 with a view to promote dialogues between highly qualified, active scholars and expert practitioners on Asia urbanization and urban studies.

3. Professor Anthony Yeh

   - was invited to be the Chief Guest of Honour of the XV National Organization of Students of Planning Convention that was held on 28 - 31 December 2013 at the University of Mysore, India. In the Opening Ceremony of the Convention, he was presented a Scroll of Commendation for his achievements by the Governor of the State of Karnataka, His Excellency Dr. Hans Raj Bhardwaj, accompanied by Prof. K.S. Rangappa, Vice-Chancellor and Prof. Kishne Gowda (M.Sc. (Urban Planning) graduate in 1996), Director of the Institute of Development Studies of the University of Mysore (left on the photo).