

Dean's Roundup

Friday August 30th, 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 (kyŏŕ'ə-tŏr'ē-əl, -tŏr'-)] *n. nounised by the Dean from curator + editorial*

Dear All,

Welcome back from summer schedules. HKU's inauguration ceremony this week welcomed about three and a half thousand new students. Many thanks to those colleagues who came to the Faculty's Tea Reception following the ceremony to introduce themselves to our new intake.

During this week I commence the first round of consultation on strategically re-positioning the Faculty. This follows four months or so of observation, research, talking and thinking about the various mandates placed upon me. These include improving the research profile of the Faculty; growing it; keeping the local professions happy; keeping staff happy; raising the international profile; improving links with Mainland China; diversifying away from Mainland China; increasing cross-disciplinary culture; preserving distinct disciplinary cultures; providing students with a first class education; and many others. Where to start; what to do?

A name change might be appropriate at some stage but we need to keep the powerful local professions and alumni on side and there is no need to make enemies when the existing name broadly works for us. Where it plainly does not work is in describing exactly what the tin contains. So I propose to adopt an all embracing new name to *describe, communicate and shape* the multi-dimensional existing and future *program* of the Faculty. Emphasis on program rather than programs. I purposefully want to avoid putting anything down in writing at this stage, to avoid incomplete ideas leaking beyond internal discussion. So I am making my way around the Departments in the next two weeks, verbally introducing for your consideration a simple strategy for re-imagining (and re-imagining) the faculty.

Then in September we have three meetings planned, where I will present these ideas a little more formally: Faculty Executive Committee; Faculty friends from the professions; and Faculty Board. At the last of these, colleagues will have a chance to ask questions and discuss the proposal. Meanwhile, if you have specific ideas to help shape our identity and purpose, please email them to Winnie in the Faculty Office. There is no perfect way to consult over strategic plans so please bear with me as we go through this process. I promise that this is a light touch exercise that will involve very little immediate change, and thereafter, mainly changes in focus and priorities. How much we want to adjust teaching programs will be led by departmental level discussion, since that's where the best teaching decisions are made. That's all I shall (hopefully tantalizingly) say for now, leaving the next level of elaboration to the current round of Departmental meetings. After these meetings, please feel free to email me (via Winnie) to say 'bad' or 'good' idea, even if you may not have specific strategic comments about the future of the Faculty. I promise to read and consider all submissions.

Stimulated by Thomas Heatherwick's Pacific Place renovation, one of David Erdman's interior designs and my own amateur efforts in designing the interior of a new home, I have been thinking about landscaped interiors, digital fabrication, parametric design, design for surprise and integrated zero furniture form and function. Landscaped interior design naturally means plants. But why should it? Why should landscaped interiors always be green? Some of the most stunning natural landscapes are appealing because of the sculptural qualities that blend shape, texture, mass, colour etc. and manage by various ancient natural processes to create human scale environments within much more vast canvasses. Has anyone come across interior landscapes created using Corian, Maganite, Marlan or other acrylic or solid polyester materials? One could imagine a karst living room with seats and sofas moulded into white Corian outcrops. Or a bedroom of soft salacious Corian curves like a sculptured sahara. Add some seamless wooden flooring for a mixed-material version or contour the whole room with hills and valleys into one continuous usable and tactile surface. Is this a researched area?

How about a cavernous bathroom with moulded-in bath and a single stalactite ceiling light and matching stalagmite sink pedestal, achieving the sensuous beauty of naturally formed, water- polished travertine cavern walls? Small homes in high density Asian cities limit the scope of the genre but on the other hand, make it more cost effective than in the expanse of a North American suburban home. Indeed, small spaces require more tightly configured designs for good functional and aesthetic effect.

The history of faux landscapes outside is more established. From the classical gardens of English country houses, to miniature Japanese karst-scapes, the art of sculptured gardens has been long perfected. Whole regional landscapes have emerged by careful manicure. The English Lake District's semi-wild beauty is as much a creation of wealthy recreational land-owners over two of three hundred years as the work of natural processes. The great English landscape painters of Lake Windermere both captured and created their subject.

The modern era version of designed 'natural' landscapes, epitomised in the socialist (and Corbusian) urban landscapes of Eastern Europe, perverted the form to destruction, but that was thankfully a short-lived diversion. I am no expert, but I imagine that a more sophisticated post-modern digital facsimile of natural landscape form is now routine. I am sure that the public realms around buildings designed in Zaha Hadid's studios extend and reflect the natural forms of her structures. But what about a new generation of digitally generated hard landscapes for Hong Kong's hundreds of new neighbourhood parks about to be built? District governments have significant new funds for this project. Working together, our digital designers and landscape architects could create a menu of landscapes. Communities could experiment with parameterisation. Create a 1000 landscape forms one afternoon in a public engagement exercise and have a panel of experts select a short list for implementation. Hong Kong could quickly become the most landscaped city in the world. An embedded Garden Festival approach writ large.

Earlier this week I had a fascinating conversation with Leslie Chen, one of our Landscape teachers, about not just digital re-creation (facsimile) of landscapes but digital landscape simulation. This extends the above ideas in an exciting way I think. We discovered during the conversation, that we both have among our teaching repertoire, lectures on the origin of morphologies. Leslie likes to ask his landscape students to consider how a river and herd of buffalos both move in a curvilinear pattern. In a lecture course on the evolution and economics of the city, I put up three slides; one of sinusoidal (s-shape) patterns; the second of dendritic (finger-shape) patterns; and the third, of swarm patterns. The first includes a snake's trail in the sand; the suture in a human skull; and a river meander; the second, a neural network model from the human brain, a river delta, an oak tree and an image of Paris from space. The third includes a flock of birds, a swarm of bees, a shoal of fish, a colony of ants and a crowd of commuters. Then I ask students to discuss how each pattern has been generated in terms of process: local process leading to global pattern. Each local process is very different but leads to an analogous (rather than homologous) emergent morphology.

Developing a theory of emergent urban form is arguably a far more sophisticated and useful approach to *urban morphology* than the Italian-British school of that name. It comes from the idea of 'emergence' in complexity theory in natural and social science and relates well to the Austrian and Chicago economics

espoused by our new Ronald Coase Centre for Property Rights Research. Tom Verebes explores similar abstract ideas in architecture in his newly published Routledge book. Leslie's point, I think, was that we should teach students how to understand natural landscape shape, from process, both to better understand and to better and more imaginatively and interactively create.

I would be very interested in some inter-departmental discussion in the faculty on these ideas. The field may already be well covered. But I suspect there's a nice research agenda here. Worth at least some student theses crossing landscape, parametric design, digital fabrication and neighbourhood planning.

Next week, continuing the cavernous bathroom design theme: thoughts on troglodyte living...

Congratulations and thanks to colleagues for their valuable contributions listed below: the faculty wouldn't be great without your work. Not included below but details hopefully coming next week: I have just received notification of four faculty successes in HKU's Experiential Learning Fund: submissions by Vincci Mak (x2), Dorothy Tang and Melissa Christ. Excellent news.

Chris

Addendum:

I apologise for not adding Eunice to the Speculative City symposium team in last week's Roundup.

Department of Architecture

I. Mr. Christian Lange

- won with his design firm Rocker-Lange Architects an “excellent work award” in the international competition for “The 5th China International Architectural Biennial 2013”.

The competition brought together architects, landscape architects, and artists to create a series of temporary physical installations on sites adjacent to the National Stadium in Beijing.

The Jury Committee comprised of Cui Kai, Architect, China / Song Jianming, artist, China / Liu Kecheng, architect, China / Zhu Pei, architect, China / Xu Bing, artist, China / Zhang Xin, developer, China / Olafur Eliasson, artist, Denmark / Sheila O’ Donnell, architect, Ireland / Mack Scogin, architect, USA / Hans Ulrich Obrist, curator, Swiss / Joshua Prince-Ramus, architect, USA

For more information please visit: http://www.ciab.com.cn/web/web_contenten.asp?id=405

2. Dr. Hoyin Lee

- conducted a workshop for 30 undergraduate students in the *Volunteer Mentors for the Cultural Heritage Ambassador Programme (CHAP)*, jointly organized by the HKU Architectural Conservation Programmes (ACP), HKU General Education Unit (GEU) and the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Group (HYFYG), a summer programme for the revitalisation of the Former Fanling Magistrate, to be operated by HYFYG, on August 23rd, 2013.
- invited as an Adjudicating Panel Member for the *HKIP Awards 2013*, organized by the Hong Kong Institute of Planners on August 24th, 2013.

Division of Landscape Architecture

I. Melissa Cate Christ

- As part of the panel *Agriculture, Food Security and the Commons in ASEAN*, at the conference *Beyond Borders: Building a Regional Commons in Southeast Asia: 3rd International Conference on International Relations and Development (ICIRD 2013)* at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand, Melissa Cate Christ presented her recent research on Singaporean local food production in relation to regional food security policy in the paper “Food Security and the Commons in ASEAN: the role of Singapore” on August 22nd, 2013.

Department of Real Estate and Construction

I. Dr. Wilson Lu

- published a research article “**Lu, W.S.** (2013). Construction Waste – Hong Kong Style. *Waste Management World*, Aug 15th, 2013, <http://www.waste-management-world.com/articles/print/volume-14/issue-4/features/construction-waste-hong-kong-style.html>”
- published a paper “Shi, L.G., Ye, K.H., **Lu, W.S.**, and Hu, X (2013). Improving the Competence of Construction Management Consultants to Underpin Sustainable Construction in China. *Habitat International*, forthcoming”.

2. Dr. Kelvin Wong

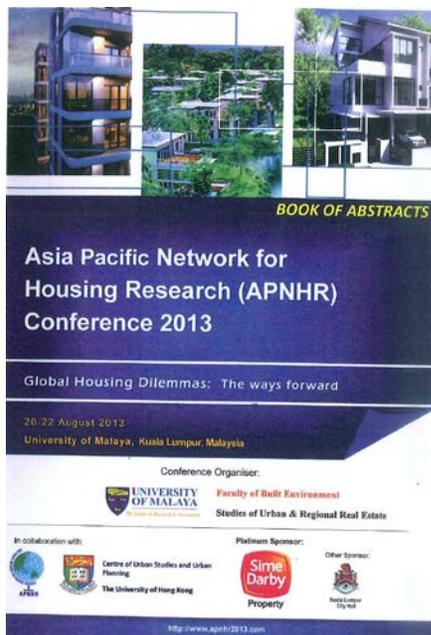
- has the following paper accepted for publication:

Wong SK, Wei Q & Chau KW. "IPO location as a quality signal: the case of Chinese developers", Journal of Real Estate Finance and Economics.

Department of Urban Planning and Design

1. Professor Rebecca Chiu

- the Asia Pacific Network for Housing Research (APNHR), founded and operated by CUSUP, just held its 2013 Conference on 'Global Housing Dilemmas: The Ways Forward' at the University of Malaya, hosted by the Faculty of Built Environment and the Department of Estate Management, from August 20th to 22nd, 2013. The conference was able to attract 100 participants from 20 countries. 21 new members were recruited.



- as Founding Chairman of APNHR, officiated at the Opening Ceremony, and was one of the adjudicators of the Best Student Papers Award, and also helped review three conference papers.

2. Dr. Roger Chan

- served as a Panel Adjudicator for the Hong Kong institute of Planners Awards 2013 on August 24th, 2013.

3. Dr. Weifeng Li

- published a new paper:

Zhu, Y., Diao, M., Ferreira, J., Li, W. and Jiang, S. (2013), Flexible Geospatial Platform for Distributed and Collaborative Urban Modelling, In S. Geertman, F. Toppen and J. Stillwell (eds.), Planning Support Systems for Sustainable Urban Development (Lecture Notes in Geoinformation and Cartography), Springer Verlag Berlin Heidelberg, pp. 375 - 394.

4. Dr. Mandy Lau

- presented a paper entitled "The locational outcomes of public housing allocation" at the *Asia Pacific Network for Housing Research (APNHR) Conference* in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia from August 20th to 22nd, 2013.

5. Professor Chris Webster

- gave a pre-dinner talk to the Hong Kong Institute of Urban Design summer gathering at iBakery Gallery Café, Hong Kong, August 28th, 2013, entitled: A contemporary Urban Design agenda for HKU.