

REPORT FROM 'PAST PRESENT AND FUTURE OF PUBLIC SPACE'

Ten years of thinking, making and living
co+labo radović 研究室

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Abstract

The world we live not only enables, but it demands interaction with, and an awareness of cultural difference. My own involvement in research and education with and in cultures of the Other started long ago, with deliberate focusing on radical cultural difference since mid-1990s. Main aims behind those attempts remain as established in those early days (Bull et al., 2008; Radović 2003; 2004; 2005a): to acknowledge and celebrate the possibility and an inevitability of diverse, situated knowledges (Haraway, 1991), and to expose the risks associated with any foreign intervention – even when careful and best intended (Radović, 2005b). In order to develop the much needed, finely responsive and highly responsible interactions with cultures other than our own, polemological edge grounded in a strong value system, and “force theory to recognise its own limits” (Highmore, 2006) is necessary. Such interactions contain the possibility of discovering and opening a new paradigm, new ways of thinking the seeds of which (may) exist in the ways of *the Other*.

Keywords: Japan, cultural complexity, sensei, the other

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“When exploring cultures and thought of the Other only crossing thresholds and ‘entering’ might be possible.”
(François Jullien, 2015)

I a view from the privileged position

The world we live not only enables, but it demands interaction with, and an awareness of cultural difference. My own involvement in research and education with and in cultures of *the Other* started long ago, with deliberate focusing on radical cultural difference since mid 1990s. Main aims behind those attempts remain as established in those early days (Bull et al., 2008; Radović 2003; 2004; 2005a): to acknowledge and celebrate the possibility and an inevitability of diverse, situated knowledges (Haraway, 1991), and to expose the risks associated with *any* foreign intervention – even when careful and best intended (Radović, 2005b). In order to develop the much needed, finely responsive and highly responsible interactions with cultures other than our own, polemological edge grounded in a strong value system, and “force theory to recognise its own limits” (Highmore, 2006) is necessary. Such interactions contain the possibility of discovering and opening a new paradigm, new ways of thinking the seeds of which (may) exist in the ways of *the Other*.

Investigations that focus at personal experience can be rightfully challenged, but one must never shy away from such controversies. Personal insights get excluded or tamed precisely in the way in which the sensibilities of the *Other* get dismissed. In both cases, such exclusions ultimately lead to the loss of complexity. The inquiry needs to continue while responsibly keeping on mind that conflictual situations are possible. That is why, when writing about my own cross-cultural immersions, I use first person singular (Radović, 2019a). And, such is the case with this text. In order to be properly investigated, the themes addressed here critically depend on a combination of research rigour and those commonly excluded, intuitive, even deeply intimate insights.

The privileged subjectivity and questions which it opens to research (along with multiplication of subjectivities, as elaborated in Radović, 2014) are at the core of my ongoing and unusual investigations, which have emerged from one adventure, an experiment *in vivo* to which I have subjected my own academic and personal life. It turned out that in 2009, by accepting professorial position at the oldest University in Japan, Keiō Gijuku Daigaku (慶應義塾大学), I have gained unique, internal perspective from the previously inaccessible innermost of the Japanese educational system. Following my earlier visits and research engagements in this country (Architecture Research Institute, Tsukuba, 1997; Osaka City University, 2003) and my visiting professorship at the University of Tokyo (2006-8), without initially realising that fact at Keiō I became the first foreigner ever to be entrusted with establishing and directing a discrete research laboratory in the fields of architecture and urban design in Japan. That is how 研究室 co+labo radović came about.

The uniqueness of that experience demands both introspection and critical interrogation of the very fundamentals, even in disciplines as established as urbanism and architecture. Over the last eleven years, from that privileged position at the helm of *my own but simultaneously Japanese research laboratory*, I was in situation to not only observe (as the strangers do), but also to get profoundly involved in shaping and directly

contributing to arguably unique, highly developed and elaborate ways of thinking, teaching and production of space in Japan, the culture universally recognised for excellence of its design.

The number and complexity of themes to be touched here reach beyond limitations of a short essay, which demands a clear focus. This text will introduce only a set of selected aspects of *kenkyushitsu* (研究室), the phenomenon of Japanese research laboratory and, where necessary, refer to relevant parts of an inexhaustible web of references and asides.

2 my Japan, lived

As hinted above, I have moved to Keiō with an already established value- and knowledge-base, tested through my previous academic and practice experiences in Europe, Australia and Asia (Radović, 2005a; Radović, forthcoming 2019). My early appreciation of cultural difference helped develop a sensibility attuned to Jullien's own realisation that in contacts with *the Other* "only crossing thresholds and entering might be possible" (Jullien, 2015).

I have been arriving to Japan on numerous occasions and in a variety of ways. But, in 2009 I have entered to stay. My tenured position at Keiō allowed me to (at least) postpone thinking about an inevitable ending. The stability of that position has allowed me to get fully immersed in that new, and profoundly alien environment. What kept me in this country ever since is very different from what initially attracted and brought me to Japan. My previous long crossings and stays could only hint at what Keiō eventually enabled me to experience – a *life* in Tokyo, the spaces of Tokyo truly lived. Lived experiences demand time. No observation or research method can replace what unselfconscious immersion provides generously; the fascinations and frustrations of simple, boring *vécu*. In *Another Tokyo* (2008a), *Small Tokyo* (with D. Boontharm, 2011) and in other attempts (eg. Radović 2012, 2013, 2017, 2018), I sought to explain how acquisition of *vécu*, for a foreigner still dramatically uncommon everydayness of Tokyo, opens ever-new realities of its complex, layered urbanity. One needs to understand that here foreigners constitute only 1.5 of total population (in comparison with 14% in Paris, 36% in London, 37 in New York). Being almost monocultural, Tokyo offers very little to be compared. It enables *écart*, juxtapositions favoured in linguistic studies by Jullien, who also strives to place cultures not against each other, but "on either side of an *exploratory divide*, so that they can 'reflect' each other" (Jullien, 2018, my italics). Such thinking allows for extended explorations without losing the key point, which is here in the very fact that this city (culture), over time, *remains* unusual. Unusual, untameably *other* – to me.

This paper is yet another node in the web of explorations, the spider-maker of which is not (only) me, but my life in Tokyo itself.

Due to its sheer size, complexity and irreducible complexity across scales (Radović, 2019a), in Tokyo an observant foreigner easily can comprehend how, indeed, "when one speaks about the city, one speaks about something else" (Stanek, 2017) and how this particular city, as invoked by Kisho Kurokawa, is not a single entity at all, that it stubbornly remains an assemblage of "500 villages" (Kuma, 2017). The experience of such complexity, in its full and capricious foreignness, demands both factual, objective

and a deeply experiential, subjective lived insights. What is new in my own research comes from the above-described privileged vantage point; a foreigner is rarely granted the perspectives arising from everydayness of *vécu*; to a local the otherness of Tokyo remains elusive. The combination of those two, commonly and logically separate perspectives facilitates interesting intertwinings of Tokyo as simultaneously conceived, perceived and lived – by a researcher. Precisely that is what keeps me and my co+labo radović going.

Long ago I have learned to see cities as spatial projections of society (Lefebvre, 1996). In that sense, the items on Barry Shelton's list of characteristics that define urbanism of Tokyo, for an architect and urbanist usefully visualize this city and the power producing its distinctive spatial form(lessness). His observations exposed the Japanese capital as decidedly non-hierarchical, horizontal and piecemeal, consisting of decentralized patchworks, as a “shifting and cloud-like order” which is temporary, flexible, with vague boundaries between objects and surroundings (Shelton, 1999; Radović, 2008). Ashihara suggest that there is a *Hidden Order* (1989) in it, and I like follow from there, exploring the continuing efforts of Japanese elites to “Westernise”, without enacting any factual change. These contradictory efforts that make an ingrained fuzziness desirable are fundamentally culture-specific. Since their first encounters, Japanese elites flirt with the West. In the second part of the 19th century, after the defeat in World War 2, the post-bubble and in the ongoing period of an uncritical neoliberal rule, global capital was increasing its presence in this country. At the same time, the polite welcoming embrace of Japanese elites was mediated by a myriad of formal and informal rules, with a single aim to keep (the image of) the outcomes within their favoured, largely imaginary frames, the self-imagery presented, both internally and externally, as culturally desirable. We can't expand on particular places and practices which explain the impacts of that attitude on Japanese urbanism. At this point we have to return to the main theme of this essay, that of the Japanese research laboratory. It suffices to say that these same (in)flexible rules of (non)acceptance apply to any institutional model imported to Japan – from legal system to the idea of University.

3 the world of Japanese research laboratory

Research laboratories are fundamental organisational units of Japanese universities, within which the *kenkyushitsu* system operates as a specific, culturally conditioned – and conditioning – phenomenon. To me, on the basis of my immediate experiences from two oldest and arguably most reputable tertiary institutions in the country – public University of Tokyo and private Keiō University – the laboratory is an epitome of both the strengths and the weaknesses of overall educational system. The laboratories (again, conditionally - *to me*) embody the best and the worst in that deeply traditionalist power structure, which is expected to simultaneously strengthen its dubious, resilient national(istic) essence and to advance the much revered global(ist), strive towards the cutting-edge modernity and gain an all-important international recognition. They are, at the same time, highly autonomous engines for production and dissemination of knowledge, and well-oiled mechanisms for ensuring the perpetuity of an outdated, top-down essence of that structure. This contradiction shines further light at an overall paradoxical nature of broader power relations in Japan: a rigid and deeply flawed system rests on a vibrant, profoundly decentralised, variously bottom-up (em)powered

network on units. The maze created by these loosely coordinated small, individual, agile micro-units of educational system duly reflects the complexities and intricacies of the broadest social order, as captured by Shelton's simplified summary of disorderly Japanese urbanism. The roots of this hidden order, which finds its accurate projection in Japanese cities, reach deep into the established power relations of Japan at large. That is a complex, both mystified and well-researched theme. For our purpose, only the subtitle of Taggart Murphy's excellent *Japan and the Shackles of the Past* (2014) tells enough.

At their best, *kenkyushitsu* could be seen as semi-independent, boutique-like schools within the schools, the specialised units entrusted with crafting and delivery of much of post-graduate education. They are mutually more competitive than collaborative, seeking external recognition through innovation which, in return, establishes their status within and beyond the home institution and, in some instances, internationally. Being insular, they operate with, to a foreigner surprising level of autonomy, which can reach true autarchy. That is the freedom largely based on independent budgets, especially when the laboratory is successful in obtaining external research funding (both competitive and non-competitive, all with many conditions which ensure varying levels of control and obedience) and – on the status of the laboratory leader after whom the laboratories get named. The *sensei*.

In order to explain what the research laboratory is, we need to know what is *sensei*? Asking “what” is more appropriate than to seek “who” the *sensei* is because, in essence, Japanese professors are more (the parts of) an institution than particular individuals. The core of what the System demands from its professors gets best exposed through observations of standard procedures for succession of a person at the helm of the laboratory. Those top positions are rarely, if ever open to competitive applications. They get crafted to fit a favoured and carefully predetermined candidate. The underpinning, deeply engrained Confucian values celebrate blandness, impersonality and replaceability, which makes obedient service an unquestionable bottom line, a *conditio sine qua non*. The quality is a welcome, much desired bonus. The key expectation is that, by the time of promotion into the professorial position, the successor will be groomed to not only *know* the “system”, but to *be* the system. That expectation favours slow climbing up the ladders of a particular institution, with only occasional, lateral, and equally well prepared and staged imports. Those slow and structured ways of climbing up the ladders of academia ensure that those who reach the very top, regardless if they are the true believers or only the consenting cynics, are the reliable guardians of core values. After that, the power of individual professors and, in parallel to that, the recognition of their laboratories grow with time and experience, multiplied by intricacies of involvement in a variety of formal and informal associations, individual and group bondings, which all acknowledge the ultimate power of seniority, belonging to relevant networks and – (self)discipline. An important aspect in that process are endless meetings, committees and consultations, the collective exercises in perfecting already elaborate hints and gestures, the adoption and refinement of decorum which both (re)defines, and is defined by *kata*, the “proper ways” (De Mente, 2003) and – *ruru* (rules). Many of those rules remain purposefully unwritten, not intuitive, fuzzy, open-ended, often mutually exclusive and subtly referential – demanding explanations and guidance by those with long experience within the system. After all, *sensei* 先生 means –

“born before”, the experienced one. In any case, those rules define (without anyone spelling that out) who sits next to whom in the meetings, with whom one drinks at *izakaya* parties, for whom *everyone* should vote, when to press an issue or step back and save face, at whom to laugh and at whose words to always nod with appreciation. These rituals create invisible gates and walls, openings and gaps through which the risk-averse society makes any lateral access into the power structure, or any other surprise on the way up, well controlled or, simply, impossible.

Is that bad? My cultural belonging says – yes. My years of work with cultures of *the Other* helped me comprehend the profundity of Ferrarotti’s declaration that it is better “not to understand, rather than to colour and imprison the object of analysis with conceptions that are, in the final analysis, preconceptions” (Dale, 1986). Everything described above is part of what makes Japan – Japan.

In one of his masterful observations of the Japanese ways, Roland Barthes recognised in those obligatory bows “a certain exercise of the void (as we might expect within a strong code but one signifying ‘nothing’). Two bodies bow very low before one another (arms, knees, head always remaining in a decreed place), according to subtly coded degrees of depth” (Barthes, 1982). It takes time and immersion to comprehend the fundamental emptiness which “by the scrupulosity of its codes, the distinct graphism of its gestures, and even when it seems to us exaggeratedly respectful” (ibid.) tends to be seen and interpreted by less insightful strangers as deeply meaningful. The rituals, *kata* and rules only allow time for deferral, for non-judgment to let the system decide, to leave space to the code itself to confirm not necessarily the reasons behind its own existence, but to confirm itself. As Taggart pointed out, “generations of foreign writers have attempted to put their fingers on just what it is they find so alluring about Japan. The most successful at this exercise [...] have pointed to an acceptance of things as they are” (Taggart Murphy, 2014).

The fact that 先生, *sensei*, literally translated means only “born before” expresses clearly enough the system founded on seniority, hierarchy and, of course, it hints at the proportionate level of responsibility. At the University of Tokyo, Keiō and elsewhere, the colleagues who were (and still are) kindly trying to help me understand how the system works all used the same analogy, that between Japanese professors and the *samurai*. In *The Eight Virtues of the Samurai*, Nitobé (2016) listed righteousness, courage, benevolence, respect, honesty, honour, loyalty and self-control. I list those attributes here only to illustrate the magnitude of the challenge caused by my appointment at Keiō – both to this particular *sensei*, and to the system itself. Me, the *samurai*?

But, before returning to personal side of this story, we need to explain that laboratory professors hold an almost frightening level of power which he (with very few exceptions it is a man, the patriarch; in Department where I teach, current male-female ratio is 27:1) can exercise over the laboratory members. The “*samurai*” code, at least in theory, safeguards the benevolence of that, otherwise absolute authority.

The laboratory members are students which (where I teach) include the fourth year undergraduates, Masters, Doctoral and Post-Doctoral candidates. Typically, at the end of their third year of generic studies of engineering, students nominate their preferred laboratory. The professor, respectful of both the limits defined by Department and intricate, almost ritualistic bottom-up negotiations among the students (aimed at avoiding any conflicts or loss of face), chooses his new students. They enrol in laboratory

where they are going to spend the next three years, under the sole guidance by their *sensei*. The focus and the way of functioning of the laboratory depends almost exclusively on that particular professor and the ways in which he approaches teaching and research.

In 2006, when I was first invited to take part in assessment of design studios at the University of Tokyo, it was explained to me that what is being assessed is: commitment first, attitude second, and then – the quality of the work itself. In that order. At every occasion, including such assessments, not only knowledge, skills and sensibility, but the above-listed demeanour - righteousness, courage, benevolence, respect, honesty, honour, loyalty and self-control get trained, ingrained, expected and tested, too.

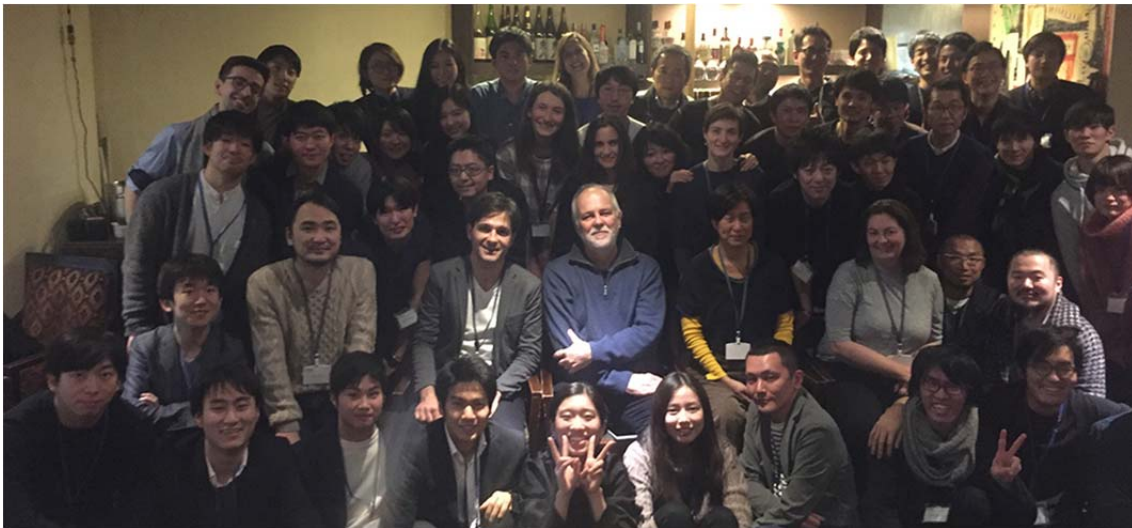


Figure 1. The tenth anniversary of co+labo radović
A group photo with current students and some of the co+labo alumni, associates and friends

Internal observations and investigation of Japanese research laboratories provide the foreign researcher with fantastic insights into the functioning of broader Japanese culture. Those microcosms of social association expose complex relationships defined by indigenous, highly resilient structures of power and responsibility, fine support systems, well-developed abilities to self-organise and self-manage – while remaining keenly aware of those structurally above and below. The key to the functioning of that system, the backbone of its resilience is *senpai-kohai* (先輩/後輩) culture, where the seniority principle filters down to the youngest members of the group. That organically intertwines with the rules of *uchi* and *soto* (as belonging and exclusion), *tsukiai* and *giri* (indebtedness; Dore, 2005), and the plethora of other cultural practices which render the foreigner (in proportion to a degree of her/his foreignness and power, which may differ in various situations) aside. Those practices combine to form incredibly complex assemblages, the roots of which get planted in the earliest childhood, continue to be gently nurtured and imposed at every step, from nurseries and kindergartens, via primary and high schools (formalised in controversial *Moral Education* classes; *dōtoku*, 道徳 – literally “the path of virtue”), again the memberships in many formal and informal

associations, such as sports, arts, hobbies. These deeply ingrained principles structure the laboratory which, in turn, becomes entangled in the broader webs of connections. All of those are carefully structured by regular, detailed and tedious – again formal and informal, but ubiquitous - guidance sessions, the reminders that there always is the right, “Japanese” way (even though a particular individual might not be aware of it – which is where the authority of *senpai* and *sensei*, those born before, asserts itself). All that makes young Japanese both feel a strong sense of belonging to their groups, and also quite desperate when alone, in particular, in environments structured by other organising principles.

A very special phenomenon within this overprotective society is a highly ritualized job-hunting practice, *shukatsu*, which consumes the best part of the opening year of Masters studies. Japanese businesses and companies are closely associated with universities of appropriate standing. The graduates of Keiō, accordingly, fill the ranks of some of the most prestigious corporations, which are part of the power system the establishment of which reaches back to the times of Meiji Reformation and beyond. That is the “system which cares”, under the condition of traditional obedience, offering life-long work safety and carefully coded set of mutual obligations for life.

And then – a foreigner comes to the helm of the 研究室 !

4 a co+labo way

In March 2009 I joined Keiō with a general outline of my co+labo project, with open mind and some non-negotiable starting positions. co+labo was to be(come) an architecture and urban design lab, dedicated to research, design-research, action (including corruption of youth). My laboratory was to be founded on ethics, as defined by my previous work (most prominently expressed as *eco-urbanity*, Radović, 2008a; and *urbophilia*, Radović, 2007) and academic standing. We were to strive towards environmentally and culturally responsible research, design and action. The name of this architecture and urban design laboratory unusual for Keiō University, co+labo radović, was to be written in lowercase, including the letter “r” in my surname and that distinctive, Serbo-Croatian “ć” (which places me squarely outside the domineering West, which is in Japan and much of the world seen as the only West). Although the professor, I was to be one of co+labo members, definitely a *primus inter pares* but absolutely not an autocrat at the top. And, as explained by Henri Lefebvre, the foundational thinker behind the ethos and praxis of co+labo, we wanted our laboratory to cherish “the dignity of bearing the + sign, that of joy, happiness, enjoyment, of sensuality - the sign of life” (Lefebvre, 2017). Vuk Radović, co-founder of co+labo, added another, all-important nuance to that “plus” in a logo which he has designed – the red color of life. Over time, we have also embraced the sign ☯, which elegantly communicates our firm rejection of banal binarism and encapsulates the wisdom of complexity. In co+labo, as in Lefebvre's metaphilosophy in general (Lefebvre, 2016), “architectural practices are to be conceptualized as transversal, that is to say cutting across onto-categories and contributing to all phases of research, programming, designing, construction, and the continuous appropriation of buildings” (ibid.).

Every autumn, when introducing my laboratory to the students who want to join us in the next school year, I table a smörgåsbord of themes from which the co+labo feast only begins. The names of thinkers whom I invoke to help us on that journey include

none less than (for 2019, Figure 2) Bogdan Bogdanović, Michelangelo Buonarroti, Guy Debord, Walter Benjamin, Martin Heidegger, Roland Barthes, Michel de Certeau, Georges Perec, Felix Guattari, Michel Serres, Jean-Luc Nancy, Jane Jacobs, Henri Lefebvre, Hélène Cixous, François Jullien, and a number of regular and one-off visiting lecturers (for details, see colaboradovic.blogspot.com). In the culture where urbanism is seen as either an offshoot of an impotent planning system, large-scale architecture or, even worse, an extension of the dominant techno-think – that is a quite provocative team.



Figure 2. An “Introduction to co+labo” slide from, which introduces difference which this laboratory can make

That visual “smörgåsbord” expands into the series of key words and concepts, which include:

- innovation ☯ tradition
- science ☯ art
- techne ☯ poiesis
- totality - complexity
- urbanism ☯ architecture
- existence - experience - body - *chiasma*
- five senses (or more)
- quality of space
- urban, public, private - across cultures
- complexity - as sensed, as felt, as discovered
- complexity - without reduction
- search for essence
- the core of complexity, oeuvre, totality
- spaces and conceived, perceived and – lived
- vécu*

In those briefing sessions and my follow-up lectures and impromptu provocations I like to quote Roland Barthes, in order to confirm how I also “I sincerely believe that at the origin of teaching such as this we must always locate a fantasy, which can vary from year to year” (Barthes, 2011) and promise that I will help co+labo students seek “a dreamer” in each of them, in every one among us.

co+labo radović is positioned against “the spectacle has spread itself to the point where it (...) permeates all reality. It was easy to predict in theory (...) that *the globalisation of the false was also the falsification of the globe*” (Debord, 1988), and we have got together in agreement that “The quality and the character of everyday life, together with spatial expressions of ordinary activities are going to be the measure of success or failure on the road to-wards sustainable development” (Radović, 2012), where we seek *radical realism*, as the *praxis of eco-urbanity*. co+labo radović could be visualised as a patchwork of overlapping essays un progress, essays as in the original sense of the word – as trials, attempts, endeavors. We *assay* and, in the sense of Latin *exagium*, we weight and judge ideas and actions against the values of environmental and cultural responsibility, *eco-urbanity*. The foundational essayistic nature of co+labo seeks a much needed combination of intellectual scrutiny and ludic freedom, all in hope to attain that childlike freedom, to get caught by fire, and reach beyond what others have already done” (Adorno, 1984; Badiou, 2018).

Telling full story of co+labo radović (even if that was possible at all) would demand much more space than an essay can provide. A fragmented, incomplete summary of what that small institution which promises deep intellectual dive within an environment dominated by solutionism (Morozov, 2013), could read as follows:

in March 2019 I was appointed 先生 at 慶應義塾大学
sensei at Keiō Gijuku Daigaku
professor at Keiō University

note: if linguistically strict, neither *sensei* means *professor*, nor *daigaku* –
university

I was never explicitly told what the expectations from me were, why I was given this
fiefdom with full trust

I had to guess why that happened, and intuited that I must have been appointed *because*
I was different

(but, have I really been expected to differ?)

consequently, my laboratory was expected to be a place of difference

(but, has my laboratory really been expected to differ?)

(was I expected to be an agent of change, or proverbial import which system
needs to fake change?)

but

those who wanted me to join Keiō in the first place knew me well enough

I felt responsible towards them and their unuttered intent

where they wanted me to be I undeniably *was* undeniably different

and there was no chance that my laboratory would not differ

I have designed co+labo radović to be(come) *a place of radical, positive otherness*

respectful, responsive, responsible – yes
but, also self-consciously foreign, both tested by and testing to the System

co+labo radović was to be(come) *my* laboratory
in order to take full responsibility, in and for that educational unit, I had to
strive towards my own best
in order to guide my students, I had to be myself – a true Barthesian technician
and dreamer
and encourage, demand, help my students to discover and be(come) their
own selves
co+labo principles are openness and transparency, equality in difference
ie. the exact opposites to how the broader System works)
in order to get close to those aims - at the core of co+labo is an absolute
mutual trust
co+labo was *their* laboratory
we are different
in co+labo we do not blend (one of my colleagues explained how his students
are – his “soldiers”)
in co+labo we respectfully share (my students and I are all co+labo *members*)
co+labo is an international environment, which consciously questions dominant
mono-culture
we operate in English language, not native to any of us - thus avoiding
domination by fluency
my Department, the Faculty, Keiō ... Japan enabled me to undertake this experiment
(or, at least, turned a blind eye to it)
(or, a blissful lack of interest, as long as all that truly matters works well)
in any case – another paradox: enormous generosity within the system which I
criticise as ossified
an unlimited opportunity to explore
an unlimited opportunity to be(come) what I dream one laboratory
should be
an unlimited opportunity to (be) myself
conducting major research and design-research projects
seeking utopia, pushing the limits towards the paradigm shift
my task, as I see it, is to help students dream (Barthes)
the task of any professor, anywhere should be to “corrupt youth” (Badiou; see the *Post
Scriptum* of this essay).

5 the co+labo radović efforts

As the whole essay was, so its conclusions need to be fragmentary, incomplete, perhaps
(even, contextually to its theme – somewhat fuzzy).

Over its eleven years at Keiō, co+labo radović delivered what is expected from all
proper, Japanese laboratories and – more. That more, which was intended and explicitly
exposed from the beginning in that magic, red *plus* sign in our logo was, I want to
believe, expected. co+labo is explicitly international. It hosts foreign students and

researchers, and its Japanese and non-Japanese students undertake various projects abroad. In both hosting and visiting we seek and we largely succeed to open up, to recognise and accept (*the Other*), to a cry to be recognised and accepted (as *the Other*, by *the Other*). That is, some would say, very ... “non-Japanese” – but, not the Japanese members of co+labo. Within the context of the Faculty of Science and Technology, which seeks to educate experts, co+labo strives to inspire the emergence of architects and urbanists as intellectuals. co+labo tries not to impose one way to future. A number of co+labo students study abroad; some have completed their double degrees at Politecnico di Milano, at KTH Stockholm; others have pursued their second degree at Harvard, Tisch School Of The Arts, Architectural Association, Yale. Some joined us in Tokyo – from Belgium, Bosnia, Brazil, China, Croatia, Ecuador, France, Italy, Peru, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Thailand. Many of Japanese co+labo graduates continue to work in major Japanese corporations, while some chose to join smaller architecture and urban design practices; several have ventured beyond their original degree, and are involved in other creative and intellectual fields, such as publishing, film ... music. In its context, co+labo is a node of profound difference, but the intention was never to challenge, but to engage with the essence of *kenyushitsu*. True excellence, somehow, becomes possible in that organisational format. That format, some of its imperfections included, undeniably contributes to the production of quality associated with Japanese (architectural and urban) design and its global recognition. My deep immersion in that system, along with an impossibility of assimilation, over the last eleven years made that quality one of the foci of my research. One of the key themes within that is the (im)possibility of translation or transplantation of that quality outside the cultural frameworks of Japan, outside that (often annoying fuzziness of the overall system). co+labo has introduced and tested some of non-Japanese educational qualities, such as critical thinking – and dialectisation of those irreconcilable opposites seems to have contributed to some of the quality we have achieved there. The co+re project is being established to further explore the possibility of internationalisation beyond globalisation, synthesis without dangers of blending in and slavery to the stereotypes such as “best practice” Instead of an impossible conclusion to what is only a fragment of the story, we will end with yet another smörgåsbord, several of co+labo projects which illustrate how some of those idea(l)s sought their expression.

I

Measuring the non-Measurable – Mn'M.

A three years long research project (funded by Japanese Government's Strategic Grant, 2011-14),

and its organisational framework.

IKI – *International Keio Institute for Architecture and Urbanism* (chaired by myself, Kazuyo Sejima and Hiroto Kobayashi; launched at *Biennale Architettura*, Venice 2011; managed by co+labo).



Figure 3. Nine volumes of Mn'M research published in the period 2011-14 (see references).

II

Sustainable Maribyrnong, the two years long planning-design strategic project (funded by Vic Urban, planning agency of the Victorian Government, Melbourne, Australia); a real-life exercise in strategic thinking across scales and radical implementation of principles of *eco-urbanity*, radical realism.



Figure 4. From final presentation of *Sustainable Maribyrnong*, the material used in teaching of *Advanced Sustainable Architecture and Urban Design* at Keiō University, Faculty of Science and Technology

III

The Barn House, the First Prize at International Architectural Competition (funded and built at the location in Hokkaido, Japan by LIXIL Corporation); another well-received exercise in radical realism, where an architectural project aims at recovery of a large-scale spatial identity, place-making as place-(re)taking.



Figure 5. The Barn House, and one of its residents. The project was for temporary dwelling of two researchers of extreme climate at Memu Meadows, Hokkaido. Apart from strict application of many measures of passive design, the volume-sharing between resident researchers with two resident horses, which improve energy balance while also contributing to the depth of experience and the broader meaning on location which used to produce some of the finest racing horses in Japan.

IV

Jiyugaoka, a series of research and design-research projects conducted along one of the Green Promenades of Tokyo. Triggered by Mn'M, the projects in this area included extensive community consultations and experiments, with activation of places of everyday life.



Figure 6. co+labo urban cupboard Pavilion – an openable and expandable cube used to communicate the results of co+labo research and collect data from the residents and passers-by in this and several other parts of Tokyo. As part of an overall co+labo ethos, the pavilion was designed and produced in co+labo.

V

Ginza, a series of research and design-research projects within one of the most prominent precincts of Tokyo, the character of which is, almost paradoxically, defined

not by stability but by rapid evolution and change; the projects included numerous fieldwork, sessions exhibitions and award-winning design projects.

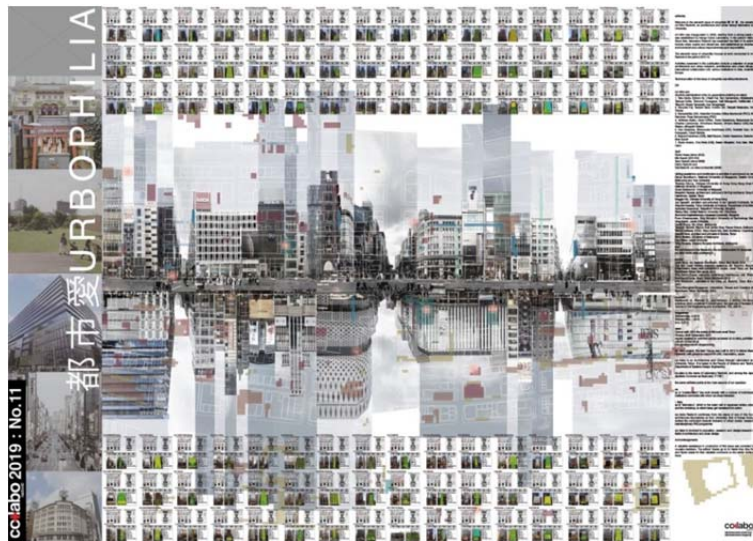


Figure 7. co+labo issues *urbophilia*, an (ir)regular newsletter which summarises some of the key projects conducted by laboratory members and associates. This issue (forthcoming 11.2019) summarises two years of our various investigations in central Ginza, which include urban agriculture, local production, presence of art galleries, evolving typology of Shinto shrines, POPS, parallel cinematic identities of Ginza, the layers of past – both in use and buried underground, and more.

VI

The Split Case (2011) and *Reopening the Split Case* (2019).

Two of many regular international workshops, co-organised by co+labo and our international partners (in Japan, Australia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Italy, the Netherlands, Serbia, Singapore, UK and Thailand) were conducted in the Croatian City of Split. In 2019, *Reopening the Split Case* will act as a prelude to an entirely new concept of workshops that will unfold in the period 2020-25. That series is coordinated by co+re (collaborative research and design-research platform imagined and managed by Davisi Boontharm and Darko Radović)



Figure 8. The flyer for *Reopening the Split Case*, a co+labo and co+re project in progress during the production of this essay. The organisers are the University of Split and co+re, and participants include Keio University, Tokyo;

Universidad de las Américas, Quito, Ecuador; Gehl, Copenhagen, Meiji University I-AUD, dbStudio, Tokyo, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok; Faculty of Architecture, Kuma Lab, University of Tokyo; Faculty of Architecture, University of Ljubljana, and - more.

VII

Comprehensive Design Workshop - CDW, two years long design research project (funded by Ishibashi Corporation 2018-19) which focused at Keiō University sport and recreation facilities and their future; and its organisational framework.

Keio Architecture: KA - chaired by Darko Radović, Jorge Almazán and Hiroto Kobayashi; managed by co+labo).



Figure 9. The award winning CDW student projects, the authors and members of an international Jury which included Kazuyo Sejima (Honorary President), Kohei Itoh (CDW Initiative), Darko Radović (Chair), Hiroto Kobayashi and Jorge Almazán (CDW core team), Gabriele Masera (Politecnico di Milano), Tadej Glazar (University of Ljubljana), Neno Kezić (University of Split), Estanislau Roca (UPC Barcelona) and Keio teaching associates (2019) Satoshi Sano, Motoo Chiba and Katsuhito Komatsu.

VIII

collaborative research and design-research platform co+re (imagined and managed by Davisi Boontharm and Darko Radović).

A research project (2020-25) aimed at summarising rich international experiences (partially described in this essay) and exploring the capacity of cross-cultural implementation, customisation, requalification, testing and international dissemination of the key findings. The activities and, then, photos and reports from co+re projects are passionately expected.

And - I remain grateful for generosity, open-mindedness and trust of all of my colleagues and students at Keiō who have accepted such radical departure from the business as usual, who have allowed an extreme experiment to get deeper and – in particular, those who by joining these efforts helped make the co+labo way.

Post Scriptum

Darko Radović

Graduation Speech, delivered 25.3.2019 at Keiō University, Faculty of Science and Technology, Department of Systems Design Engineering Graduation Ceremony, at Minato Mirai, Yokohama

It was a great honour for me to be selected to deliver this Graduation Speech today. I would like to express my most sincere congratulations for the accomplishment which we are celebrating here today!

[...] Every graduation marks an ending; with this ceremony today, you have formally completed your first university degree. Every graduation also marks a new beginning; in your case, that is the beginning of your Graduate Studies, or of your professional life. That is why this brief address will consist of two parts – the official congratulations, and one personal advice.

While, in the name of the staff and students of the Faculty of Science and Technology, Department of Systems Design Engineering I congratulate you all on successful completion of one important, formative stage in your lives, the focus of my talk will be on future, on the steps in front of you, on reaching academic and professional maturity. I want to give you one advice.

That advice is not original. It is, actually, two thousand and five hundred years old. I will communicate it to you by telling a story with four characters. Three of them are old (much older than I am), while the fourth one is very young.

The first character which I want to introduce is a famous Greek philosopher, Socrates. Socrates died many years ago. If he was still alive, he would be 2580 years old. He has died, but his thought is as alive and as relevant as ever. The other character in the story which I want to tell today is a great Japanese intellectual and activist whose work you all should know very well – Fukuzawa Yukichi. If still with us, the founder of Keiō University would be 184 years old. While he has died more than a century ago, the results of his work are evidently alive and relevant. The third character which I invoke here is Alain Badiou. He is a 82 years old, famous and still very active French philosopher. In the central part of my talk I will use Badiou's voice to convey I what want to tell to you. And the final, fourth and most important of the characters in this story is each and every of you - individually.

I have a pleasure to address 121 of you today. I congratulate to you all, but I want to speak not to the crowd of 121, but to a big group of young individuals. As always, I want to stress that you are all equal, but - different. Good education advances both equality and difference. Your own difference is what I want to emphasise today. So, let me begin ...

**

Two years ago, Alain Badiou has published his new book, entitled *The True Life*. This tiny volume explains the main point of my talk today. Badiou addresses young people, talking about their future - precisely as I am doing today. He tells a story of Socrates, a story of the great teacher who used to talk regularly to the youth of ancient Athens, giving them advice which remains as relevant today and here, as it was relevant then and there.

The thought of Socrates is 2,000 years old, but still relevant – because it is profoundly human. Socrates has lived a full and eventful life. History and legends say how he used to be a stone mason. He knew physical labour. Then, he was a soldier, a *hoplit* who knew the war. Eventually, as a philosopher, he started exploring *Alathea*, the ancient Greek Goddess of Truth. That dangerous theme, the truth, brought about his demise. In the year 399 b.c.e. Socrates was sentenced to death and executed.

What was the mortal sin of one of the greatest thinkers of all times? That is what Alain Badiou explains in *The True Life*, and from there I borrow some of the words that follow:

“Socrates, the father of all philosophers, was condemned to death on charges of ‘corrupting youth’.”

It is important to understand that there:

“Essentially, to corrupt youth means only one thing: to try to ensure that young people don’t go down the path already mapped out, that they are not just condemned to obey social customs, that they can create something new, propose a different direction as regards to true life.”

The problems which you are going to face today if you chose the Socratic path are very similar to those which the Greeks of your age had to confront 2,500 years ago. Badiou continues how:

“... the starting point is Socrates’ belief that young people have two inner enemies [...] and he summarises that: “Basically, when you’re young, you’re faced, often without being clearly aware of it, with two possible life directions, which are somewhat overlapping and contradictory. I could sum up these two temptations like this: either the passion for burning up your life or the passion for building it.”

The superficiality of computer games explain what Socrates meant by this definition of your “first enemy”. Your ... *shukatsu* (traditional Japanese “job-hunting”, seeking life-long employment)) could serve us as a good example of the “second enemy” facing the youth. Both are conditioned by an overwhelming power of the present, by the world as it is now, by ruling power relations. The System. Then, Badiou gives that concrete Socratic advice which I want to convey to you today:

“There’s is nothing more important for everyone, but particularly for young people, than being attentive to the signs that something different from what is happening might happen. [...] To put it another way, there’s what you are capable of – building your life, using what you’re capable of – but there’s also what do don’t yet know you’re capable of, which is actually the most important thing [...] what you discover when you encounter something that was unforeseeable. ...you discover a capacity in yourself that you were unaware of.”

That is precisely what happened to Yukichi Fukuzawa – the founder of Keiō University. In 1853, when American Black Ships entered the Bay of Edo, he was 18 years old. As Tokugawa Japan faced a dramatic, unforeseeable situation, Fukuzawa discovered in himself the capacity which he was not previously aware of.

Today, while congratulating you the great achievement which we are celebrating today, as your professor I feel responsible to ... corrupt your minds, precisely in the way Socrates was, and Badiou is doing. I feel obliged to continue with great Socratic tradition. Yukichi Fukuzawa was not seeking an easy career. He was not following the paths beaten by his *sempai*. He embarked on the path of voracious learning of foreign languages, on communication with other cultures, on travels and contextualisation of the best of what he has seen elsewhere into the realities of the 19th century Japan. Do not forget – when he discovered in himself the capacity which he was not previously aware of, the capacity to lead, Yukichi Fukuzawa was of your age! In the year 1858 (which you can find on the coat of arms of Keiō University) Fukuzawa has established a school for Dutch studies in Edo. He was 23 years old. Almost all of you who are graduating today are only one year younger; the majority of you are 22 years old. Fukuzawa obviously did not think that he was too young. He did not seek the safe paths charted out by the precedents. There were no precedents. And, there are no excuses for saying how one is too young to be brave, too young to be innovative, especially too young to dream. Dreams challenge the System, they produce change. Fukuzawa followed the “corruptive” logic of Socrates. In himself he discovered a capacity he was unaware of. He was brave, progressive, and he sought change. He rebelled against timid, conservative, status quo.

(But, I often get told how “Japanese people” are, somehow, precisely that; shy, timid and conservative.

As a foreigner (the foreigner who chose to live and work in Japan) I dare to say, I know that is not true! In that argument, the example of Yukichi Fukuzawa is on my side. No one can dispute that he was Japanese, a Japanese *par excellence*.)

The advice which I promised to give to you today, the best advice which one can give to the young people at the opening a new phase in their lives which was formulated more than 2,500 years ago, is:

Do not follow the paths which are already mapped out for you, do not blindly obey social customs.

Seek, propose and create new, different directions which lead to a true life.

Seek how to be good and how to do good; how to be happy.

At your next step – which is *now* – when entering your Masters studies or the workforce, please remember Socrates, remember Yukichi Fukuzawa, remember Alain Badiou and - be brave. Seek in yourself the capacity to dream, and try to make this world a better place. You are young, and the future literally belongs to you.

There is a lot to learn from us, professors (including those among us who are 2,500 thousand years old). In *The True Life* Badiou, importantly, proposes “an alliance of disoriented youth and old veterans of life”. But - think critically. Learn from us and –

judge. As the great Modernist architect Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, whom you know as Le Corbusier, once said - seek to stand on our shoulders, see further than we are capable to see .

Once again, it is my great honour to, in the name of System Design Engineering, congratulate you and all of those who love you and trust in you, the successful completion of your SD degree and I wish you all the best in the future.

頑張ってください！



Figure 9. 2019 graduates from the Keio University Center for Space and Environment Design Engineering, which include those who completed studies in co+labo radović.

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