RE-MIX
Re-mix research project and knowledge exchange

Re-mix is an on-going collaborative research project between the Innovation Design Engineering (IDE) Programme at RCA in London and the Kyushu University Faculty of Design in Fukuoka. The focus of this research is disruptive Innovation, created through processes of hybridisation. For the purpose of this research study, the term ‘hybridisation’ refers to the blending of design practices that strongly reflect key societal and behavioural aspects of the two respective original cultures.
A series of experimental short projects explore the mutual impact of combining two design practices embodying the regional cultures of the two institutions.
London can crudely be seen as a focus of diversity and constant evolution; Japan’s culture as more homogeneous, structured and strongly shaped by heritage.
The research addresses the role of hybridised design practices in tackling documented weaknesses in the innovation industry in Japan (the need to reinvigorate the economy by creating new strategies and services) and in the UK (translating science and technology to economic advantage)

This collaborative research comprises three short projects:

Re-mix 1 at RCA, October 2015, London
Re-mix 2 at Kyushu University, February 2016, Fukuoka
Re-mix 3 at Tokyo University, July 2017, Tokyo
Re-mix 1 – London

Re-mix 1 was a 5day project held at RCA as part of AcrossRCA 2015. It investigated the mutual impact generated by the intersection between the contrasting design practices involved, which embrace the full spectrum of innovation: from incremental innovation (Kyushu University Faculty of Design) through inclusive approaches with close coordination with participatory communities, fully tested, risk mitigated and careful strategies aiming at solid and defined improvements, to radical innovation (RCA IDE) fostered by diversity, ambiguity, improvisation, conflict, high-risk strategies and acceptance of failure.

The leading team included senior staff from RCA and the Kyushu University. Five academics from Kyushu, whose expertise range from anthropology, built environment to gamification, content design and sound culture, joined the project as participants working in teams with students from across the college.

Re-mix format was defined by a set of criteria tested and refined in previous projects I have been running in the last five years:

- Brief deliberately open to broad interpretation
- Length of the project, five days
- Horizontal group structure
- Students from the same programme spread across different groups
- Mainly students at the beginning of their studies

As observed during the course of previous research projects, these criteria foster the exploration of alternative routes leading to a highly creative idea generation process and ultimately to the generation of Innovation by triggering the following dynamics:

- Tacit willingness that all participants’ backgrounds should input into the project, encourages the initiation of creativity using disciplinary ingredients
- Initial tension and conflict caused by diverse creative thinking and clashing time schedules
- Intense sketching and model making activity replaces excess verbal communication
- Differing understanding of the brief translated into intellectual and inspirational breadth, and multi-perspective concepts

The above listed criteria were merged with Kyushu’s area of expertise: inclusive design. The project brief focussed on the exploration of the mix, clash and acceptance of diversity as a translation of inclusivity in an urban and multicultural environment.
Themes

Three themes were chosen to consider a diverse set of relationships involving two actors that might exist in the urban environment. The relationships aimed to reflect different urban dynamics and the variety of levels of control each actor might have in a relationship.

1. Predator & Prey
   Their relationship involves two actors: human and nature. With survival as the main objective, the dynamics of this relationship in an urban context can shift where the predator becomes prey and vice versa.
   In this relationship the roles may be in constant shift in an urban environment. However at a given moment there is a clear distinction between who is the predator and who is the prey. Besides in contrast to the other themes this relationship is driven by an instinct to survive.

2. Two neighbours
   Their relationship involves physical closeness implying sharing of spaces, facilities, and services, and clashing of habits.
   The two neighbours relationship represents a more parallel structure of relationship, and one that is defined by a physical boundary or an overlap of the boundaries.

   One group was allocated to investigate this theme for the project, however two students in the particular group found out they could no longer take part in the project on the first day. The remaining two students were relocated to the other groups and this theme in the end was no longer investigated for the Re-mix Project.

3. Interviewer and interviewee
   Their relationship is defined by a controlled and mutual questioning and answering face to face or through a medium. The nature of their relationship can be professional or personal (job interviews, dating online etc.) based on feelings such as coercion, trust, competition and attraction.

   A basic ‘sticker survey’ was used to enable the groups’ members to monitor both design process and group dynamics.


**Outcome 1**

**Predators and Prey I**

Group: Fritz Faust (Sculpture – RCA)  
Sarah Chan Ho Yan (GSMJ - RCA)  
Kim Yip Tong (IED – RCA)  
Chih-yang (Visual Communication – RCA)  
Chihiro Hiramatsu (Physiological Anthropology, Kyushu University)

**Concept**

The group explored the nature of the circular relationship between humans and bacteria as predator and prey. The circular nature of this relationship is depicted as follows: bacteria and viruses attack humans, humans develop vaccines and medicine to defeat them, consequently viruses evolve triggering a perpetual shift of the roles.

The concept was translated into an installation depicting an enlarged intestine where visitors could crawl in as if into one’s own body to hunt viruses.

![Figure 1. Picture of viruses into the enlarged intestine](image)

**Observations**

- The group had minimum amount of friction.
- Good group dynamics did not foster a fertile debate. The group members too quickly came to agreement on a concept on the first day. The concept did not evolve much further in the following days.
- The sticker survey (see following page) shows that the group consensus of the level of agreement is high throughout the project, apart from the Kyushu participant who seemed to experience a lower level of agreement.
- The group failed to translate their interpretation and metaphorical representation of the assigned theme into a defined and functional output in a specific context.
1. Predator and Prey I - Sticker Survey

- Kim
- Fritz
- Sara
- Chih-Yang
- Chihiro

**How is the project going?**

- **Conflict**
- **Agreement**
- **Converging**
- **Diverging**

**How are you feeling?**

- **Frustration**
- **Satisfaction**
**Outcome 2**

**Predators and Prey II**
Group: Jun Kamei (IDE – RCA)  
Wuon-Gean Ho (Printmaking – RCA)  
Ruiheng Sun (IED – RCA)  
Mia Nakamura (Sound Culture/Art Management, Kyushu University)

**Concept**
The group decided to create a collection of work to encapsulate each group member’s interpretation of the assigned theme.

Wuon-Gean Ho made a film that illustrates how the environment can become a predator in an urban context by exploring and filming a local market in London. In her film she shows how much the sounds of such an environment is as much a mechanism of enticing people in as the building or the physical space itself.

Jun Kamei made a shadow puppet theater that narrates the story of ‘one who flees and the one who eats’. The viewers were meant to shine the light left to right then right to left to experience the story from the perspective of the predator – the one who eats, as well as the prey – the one who flees.

Ruiheng Sun presented a fictional archeological report of a different kind of human species from the ancient times – Homorefuconan. The latest induce to reflection upon the relationship between humans and nature, often perceived as separate entities.

Mia Nakamura recited a poem with a slide show that echoes much of what Ruiheng points out that humans are not in a separate bubble at the top of the food pyramid but very much a part of it and a part of nature.

*Figure 2. Picture of Wuon-Geen Ho’s film*
Figure 3. Picture of Jun Kamei’s shadow puppet theatre

Figure 4. Picture of Ruiheng Sun’s fictional archeological report

Figure 5. Picture of Mia Nakamura’s presentation
Observations

- The group experienced conflicting dynamics, which inevitably led them to create a collection of work encapsulating each group member’s interpretations of ‘Predator and Prey’. Each piece strongly reflects the disciplinary background and practice of the respective group member.
- Despite the fact the group could not come to agreement quite often during the design process, the collection of work outputted was coherent and quite impressive given the time constraint.
- The Kyushu participant worked very hard in the attempt to adapt to the format of the project. At some point she looked frustrated as felt unable to fit such a loose structure and conflicting dynamics. However her output was wonderfully intuned with the other participants’ outputs.
- The group failed to translate their interpretations and metaphorical representations of the assigned theme into a defined and functional output in a specific context.
2. Predator and Prey II – Sticker Survey

- Sun
- Mia
- Jun
- Wuo-Gea

Diagram of responses to questions on project progress and personal feelings.
Outcome 3

Interviewer and Interviewee I
Group: Bentley Farrington (IDE – RCA)
Kenichi Tanoue (Built environment design, Kyushu University)
Hiroyuki Matsuguma (Content Design, Games, Kyushu University)

Concept
This group created a thinking machine that facilitates interviews by introducing gamification in this specific context. The machine attempts to enable the ‘interview’ encounter constantly characterised by tension between the interviewer, trying to show the best side, and the interviewee trying to draw out the hidden side.

The bowtie shape of the machine/board is strongly inspired by the core nature of this relationship.

Figure 6. Picture of the Interview Machine

Figure 7. Picture of participants texting the Interview Machine
Observations

- Shaky group dynamics at the start, as two members of the group quit the project at the end of day one, and the two participants from Kyushu joined the team at different time (see sticker survey on the following page).
- Smallest group and only group where Kyushu participants outnumbered the RCA participants.
- The only RCA participant who was part of the group for the whole length of the project, showed incredible ability to adapt to continuously changing group dynamics. However he seemed to have a deeper exchange and meaningful collaboration with the Kyushu participant, who was involved in the delivery phase.
- The area of expertise (gamification) of the Kyushu participant involved in the last phase of the project, strongly informed the game-based interaction of the final output.
3. Interviewer and Interviewee I - Sticker Survey

- Jye (quit the project at the end of day 1)
- Jie (quit the project at the end of day 1)
- Kenichi (left at the end of day 4)
- Bentley
- Hiroyuki (joined the group on day 2)
Outcome 4

Interviewer and Interviewee II
Group: Isak Falgren (History of Design – RCA)
       Joanne Chen (Architecture - RCA)
       Jieyu Jang (GID – RCA)
       Liu Yiqiao (Visual Communication – RCA)
       Takeshi Ushiama (Interaction Design – Kyushu University)

Concept
The group explored broadly the assigned theme that was initially translated into many different scenarios. The multi-layered interpretation of the theme led to the idea of fortune telling. This is envisioned as an interesting context where the interaction between the device (fortune teller) and the user involves mutual questioning aiming at finding clues that give users confidence in what lies in their future.
This led the group to think about how today we think of the Internet as almost an all-knowing god. The group materialised their concept into a crystal ball that users gaze into and post questions to give answers to their future, which ironically are found on the internet.

Observations

• Coesive group, although group members had very different approach to creativity and idea generation process.
• Initially the diversity of disciplinary backgrounds seemed to be an impediment for the group to converge toward a well-defined direction. Three long days of controversial debates and clashing opinions led finally to one original output.
• The participant from Kyushu seemed to struggle a lot with the open brief and random group dynamics. However he was proactive and fully involved in the delivery of the final output that involved interaction and coding, which are his areas of expertise.
3. Interviewer and Interviewee II - Sticker Survey

- **Taketoshi**
- **Joanne**
- **Kenichi**
- **Isak**
- **Jieyu**

**How is the project going?**

**Agreement** vs. **Conflict**

**Diverging** vs. **Converging**

**Frustration** vs. **Satisfaction**
Conclusions

The project brief was about the exploration of the mix, clash and acceptance of diversity as a translation of inclusivity in the given scenarios. The outputs delivered at the end of the 5day project revealed intriguing and diverse interpretations of the themes assigned. Some of them achieved a very good level of refinement, considering the short length of the project.

Reflections upon Re-mix dynamics and mutual feedback provided by the RCA and Kyushu teams, highlighted that the majority of the participants from Kyushu found difficult to work on a broad brief and adapt to spontaneous group dynamics. However it was interesting to observe that the most successful outputs were delivered by two teams:

- The smallest team that had more participants from Kyushu than from RCA.
- The team who’s output involved interaction and coding, areas of expertise of the only member of the team from Kyushu.
- The expertise of the Kyushu participants and their very structured approach to creativity had a remarkable impact on the delivery phase of the project and on the refinement of the actual output.
- The bigger is the gap between the methods, the stronger is the conflict generated by the clash between almost opposite approaches, the higher is the level of creativity.
- The level of refinement of the final output seems to be dictated by:
  - The ability to come to agreement without compromising the striking diversity involved.
  - A more structured method.
Re-mix 2 – Fukuoka

As the second instalment of Re-mix, the Kyushu faculty conducted a 4 day project at the Ohashi Campus, inviting two faculty members of the RCA’s Innovation Design Engineering Programme, Savina Torrisi and Iulia Ionescu. The project that built upon the previous in London, explored more in depth one of the three themes investigated in Re-mix 1.

Theme

Re-mix 2 sets the Interviewer/Interviewee as the theme looking at the design of dialogue in a diverse society.
From professional to private life, our life consists of many dialogues, such as medical consultations, meetings, arranged marriages, and discussions with family. However these situations can lead to miscommunications at times. With diversity in society, cultural backgrounds and individuality in communication can build barriers in communication. The project aimed at finding issues that arise from such dialogues to develop innovative communication tools and methods, which are useful to many.

Furthermore it will be enable the participants to approach innovation methods incorporating concepts such as inclusive design (design that solves social problems through including diverse people in the process), and design thinking (developing concepts from human needs).
Observations

The intersection of the two practices (IDE- RCA and Kyushu) induced what the Kyushu team defined as substantial changes in their approach:

- 4 day project instead of the standard 2 day workshop
- Open brief, although much more defined and clearly framed than the brief of the Re-mix1
- Refined final outputs. No cardboard mock ups.

Unlike the Kyushu faculty, the RCA team acted as tutors. This allowed the RCA team to observe and analyse the Kyushu practice, which they found to be strongly defined by the following elements:

- Rigorous inclusive design approach implying that the Design Partner (end–user) is fully involved in all phases of the design process and has a dominant role within the team.
- Hierarchical team structure including: a Design Partner + a Leader (member of the faculty) + students.
- Structured project schedule including every day: 1 ice breaker activity + 1 lecture + tutorials the rest of the day.
- Very extensive verbal communication between the Design Partner and the Leader, and predominantly from both of them to the students.
- Students mainly acting as implementers of the Leader’s proposal.
- Leaders taking tutors’ advice as directions to be followed. This is due to the extreme respect to be paid to the guests/members from an international institution.
- Groups narrowing down to one direction too soon.
**Outcomes**

Four groups delivered original and very diverse outputs.

Interesting group dynamics revealed potentially meaningful correlations between the hierarchical nature of the groups structure and the level of innovation of the delivered outputs:

- The two groups with the most experienced leaders delivered intriguing, but unrefined and not extremely original design outputs.

- The team with intermittent leadership, due to her busy faculty schedule, built a good communication with the Design Partner, who was partially involved in the making. The team delivered an original proposal that showed strong potential. However the design of the final output was far from being fully resolved.

- An outstanding, very original, extremely well-thought through design proposal was delivered by a team that adopted a very democratic, horizontal team structure. The team had a member of the faculty assigned as a leader, but he didn’t act as such, but as a very enthusiastic and productive participant.
Figure 9-10. Groups exploring ideas with their Design Partners

Figure 11-12. Material explorations as part of the implementation phase

Figure 12-13. Design refinement of the final outputs
Conclusions

The two projects undertaken in London and Fukuoka enabled a mutual mapping of practices, investigating the possibility that the greater the difference between the design approaches, the bigger the chance to create remarkable innovation. The contrast represented by the Kyushu and RCA-IDE approaches, highlighted in the comparison diagram below, echoes oppositions in relation to innovation documented in the literature focusing on contrasts in culture and process:

Structured vs. Loose,
Layered Expertise vs. Improvisation
Vertical & Hierarchical vs. Horizontal & Democratic
Fixed Perfection vs. Evolution
Agreement vs. Conflict, Predictability vs. Uncertainty
Certain Success vs. Noble Failure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INSTITUTION</th>
<th>BRIEF</th>
<th>SCHEDULE</th>
<th>TEAM KEY ASPECT</th>
<th>TEAM STRUCTURE</th>
<th>KEY VALUE DRIVER</th>
<th>MATERIALS</th>
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<tr>
<td>IDE - RCA</td>
<td>AMBIGUOUS, OPEN TO DIVERSE INTERPRETATIONS</td>
<td>LIGHTLY STRUCTURED - ENABLING SELF-DIRECTION</td>
<td>DIVERSITY: CULTURE, LANGUAGE, SKILLS</td>
<td>HORIZONTAL, DEMOCRATIC</td>
<td>INTERNAL DESIGN DRIVEN</td>
<td>PROACTIVELY ACQUIRED BY TEAMS. SOPHISTICATION EXPECTED.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KYUSHU</td>
<td>CLEARLY FRAMED</td>
<td>OVERSTRUCTURED</td>
<td>HOMOGENEITY, DESIGN PARTNER INPUTS DIVERSITY</td>
<td>VERTICAL, HIERARCHICAL, STRONG LEADERSHIP RETAINED BY AN ACADEMIC. KEY DECISION TAKEN BY THE LEADER AND DESIGN PARTNER</td>
<td>EXTERNAL USER DRIVEN</td>
<td>SUGGESTED PROTOTYPING TOOLS. ENCOURAGEMENT GIVEN</td>
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*Figure 14. Comparison diagram of RCA-IDE and Kyushu design practices*