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CHAPTER 11

Mutual Intraventions

Anthropology and/as Architecture, and the Other Way Round

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Encounters in between Anthropology and Architecture

In recent years, both independently and in a series of teaching collaborations, we have been exploring what architecture and anthropology can learn from one another. Whereas for anthropologists, architecture could inspire a more materially grounded, compositionist, and interventionist approach, anthropology's emphasis on processual and relational inquiry, together with the conceptual vocabularies and borrowings from more-than-human, multispecies and new materialist thought, might also help us to rethink architectural practice.

In this chapter we wish to discuss the 'conceptual travails' – or, as we will call them, the 'mutual intraventions' – we have been undertaking over the last eight years. We show how, through interdisciplinary conversations and mutual inspiration, sometimes travelling to work in the same places, at other times exploring from a distance, we have exchanged concepts, in the senses both of more or less above-the-ground philosophical proposals for how the world works, and of more hands-on embodied approaches to doing in practice. This shift towards getting inside our own practices has led to a specific interest in the design studio as a pedagogical setting, which these philosophical inspirations have the potential to inform, a site requiring them to be worked out in non-verbal and material ways by grounding them in specific projects or concerns. In what follows, we think with the work that 'we' (meaning us three authors, plus a few of our colleagues from Spain, the United Kingdom

and Germany) anthropologically inspired architects on the one hand, and architecturally invested anthropologists on the other, have undergone in recent years. These conversations have been rooted in diverse attempts to rethink and create distinctive devices for the re-education of architects, in official and extra-official learning programmes, at the same time as opening avenues to reimagine what anthropology could be.

Some of these attempts have crystallized into publications, such as *Posthuman Emergences* (Nieto Fernández et al. 2021), a recent publication of the School of Architecture in Alicante, which focuses in its Master's programme on more-than-human pedagogic experiments; but also in the special issue of the journal *Diseña*, on 'Re-learning Design' (Farías and Criado 2018a), which assembles a range of experiences inspired by science and technology studies (STS) to suggest how anthropology and cognate areas of reflection with a more-than-human or multispecies focus might speak to sensitized professionals engaged in open-ended inquiries together with other agents. But beyond these results, in this chapter we wish to reconstruct some of the dialogues, borrowings and exchanges that have facilitated this dialogue between anthropology *and* architecture, or this reimagining of anthropology *as* architecture, and vice versa. The chapter itself is presented as an exchange between the three of us, in which we take it in turns to report on our experiments, explorations and experiences.

Beyond Disobedience

Enrique: In 1997, the University of Alicante launched its programme of training for professional accreditation in architecture. At the time, both the team of teachers in the field of architectural design and the students who joined the programme were keen to invent new ways of working that would give shape to the intuition that teaching practices could themselves be considered architectural in their own right, and therefore irreducible to the teaching of 'Architecture' as a ready-charted disciplinary field. On this path, the almost heroic experiences of 'organized disobedience' to prevalent ways of teaching in the universities of the 1970s were a beacon to us. They included those of John Hejduk at Cooper Union, Alvin Boyarski at the Architectural Association, the so-called Texas Rangers in Austin, and Alberto Cruz and Godofredo Iommi at Ciudad Abierta in Valparaíso.

Design professors in Alicante found in these ways of working an approach to inhabiting the university that both generated new teaching practices and, at the same time, set up a stage for critical reflection on a

historically situated and materially embodied present. The so-called Alicante Model, which emerged from this, embraced the set of practices, policies and aesthetics needed to open the field to possible ways in which the discipline of architectural design could inhabit the university. It was a matter of overcoming the divisions between knowledge and skills, and between contents and objectives, in favour of the construction of a framework of relations that would introduce both a broadened perspective to the students and the heterogeneous urgencies of the present time (Nieto 2012). What design professors at that time could not know was the kinds of issues this would bring into design classrooms, or how they would lead to a reformulation of that initial position of disobedience to the discipline. *Posthuman Emergences* (Nieto et al. 2021) traces some of the deviations from the discipline that came from students' biographies in the Final Degree Thesis in Alicante between 2004 and 2015, before the Bologna process changed the relation of the discipline of architecture to the university.

Ester: It was in 2015 that I started teaching design in Alicante; our courses were then coordinated by Enrique Nieto. Enrique has had a long research career in architectural pedagogy; his thesis 'Organizing the Dispensable', recently published as a book, *¡Prescindible organizado!* (Nieto 2022), reflects on the Alicante Model, and has been a continuous source of inspiration for my work both as a teacher and in practice-based research. One of the key pillars of this model is that every teacher, even a novice as I was then, has the opportunity to invent their own studio courses in a 'system of practices' that relies on heterogeneity and unexpected events (ibid.: 301–34). From the beginning I wanted to entitle my studio courses 'Experiments with the Profession', and they have all been structured around this idea. The experiments I propose in these courses resemble experiments with the profession that I have already been carrying out as a practising architect with clients and their commissions. In several of these, the problem of tourism-related urbanization in the Costa Blanca was 'placed on the table' (Masschelein and Simons 2013: 3941), as we searched for procedural techniques for landscape design.

For example, in some courses I have taught, students were asked to become apprentices of lifestyle migrants and, changing the roles of guest and host (O'Reilly 2009), to make inquiries into how they are inhabiting an already familiar landscape, but in a different way. These mentors, who could even have been the students' foreign neighbours, helped them design field methods for learning their specific ways of perceiving and relating to their environment (Gisbert Alemany 2018). The writings of anthropologist Tim Ingold were key to developing this pedagogic work. For

example, I asked students to trace their foreign guests' taskscapes (Ingold 1993); we built tools to enhance the students' skills (Ingold 2011: 51–62), played with materials (ibid.: 19–32) and built transducers of the guests' perceived environment (Ingold 2013: 91–108) – to list only a few examples of how fertile and provocative the reading of Ingold's books was for the practice of teaching architecture.

Subsequently, I was privileged to work with Ingold and his colleagues in the research project 'Knowing from the Inside: Anthropology, Art, Architecture and Design' (2013–18), funded by the European Research Council, and to study anthropology with them as I developed my thesis with both Nieto and Ingold at the intersection of an architecture that had been opened to the experience of the environment, and an anthropology that had been opened to an imagination and design of the future. This combination opened other doors; it allowed me, for example, to visit Tomás Criado and Ignacio Farías, then based in Munich, who had managed to make a space for themselves to teach design, as anthropologists, in a school of architecture (Gisbert Alemany 2022: 45–90). This visit made for a tighter a connection between this group of STS-oriented anthropologists and the teachers in Alicante – one that had begun around 2008 in a postgraduate course taught by sociologist Fabian Muniesa and architect Izaskun Chinchilla, which had already asked the key question, 'to what extent does design activity in architecture and urban planning equate to sociological research?' (Torres Nadal et al. 2008).

Design in Crisis?

Tomás: In its initial articulation from 2014, the Munich Centre for Technology in Society (MCTS; recently rebranded as the Department of Science, Technology and Society at the Technical University of Munich, TUM) was conceived of as

an 'integrative research centre' within TUM, tasked with bringing STS insights to bear at various other TUM departments and schools, and providing a crystallisation point for social science research. This implies, among other things, that every professor at the MCTS is also affiliated with one or two other departments at TUM. This institutional structure enables us to forge strong links with science and engineering, as well as management and the political sciences at TUM.¹

When, in 2015, my chance came to join my colleague and fellow STS-inspired anthropologist Ignacio Farías at TUM, I was thrilled and did not hesitate to accept. We were tasked with a rather peculiar endeavor

our: to work, teach and conduct research at the crossroads of STS and architecture.

This was an incredible opportunity. Having trained as a ‘regular’ ethnographer, in previous years my research and political interests had led me to start collaborating with a variety of activist designers, some of whom were involved in accessibility and disability rights activism, others with the free culture movement in Spain. These engagements had revived in me a lost trajectory, a path never taken when, after high school, I decided – rather against the grain and much to the dismay of some in my family – to become a social scientist instead of training to become an architect with the prospect of joining my father in his studio (in which I also worked as an assistant every now and then). Although I never regretted my decision, grounded as it was in my own personal interests and a desire to forge my own trajectory, what I always missed in subsequent years – until I found the activist designers with whom I worked between 2012 and 2015 – was a kind of social science that took part in the material worlding of worlds, beyond merely writing about it.

However, when I fetched up in Munich, I discovered a challenge diametrically opposed to the one I had previously confronted. It lay in the tenacity of the dualism between the material and the social which I thought was long gone. The trainee architects with whom we were working were expert world-makers in the market of global studios, deploying a unique sense of the materialization of projects: this was evident from their engineer-like knowledge of the behaviour of materials, and from their organizational capabilities in construction works, not to mention their visual skills when it came to sketching, drawing, modelling or presenting. However, having worked in the vicinity of activist designers, what struck me most was that these skills and capacities were often put to use in highly technocratic projects, in which the social or the political was reduced to the ‘social context’ of the project in question, the ‘economic interest’ of its grounds or effects, and the ethical requirement to include ‘the voices of users’ or to address ‘usability’.

As we have recounted elsewhere (Fariás and Criado 2018b), working out how to teach and do research in this domain proved to be challenging, and our teaching syllabi came to embody our explorations. We started out by providing the kind of teaching courses already familiar to us from regular social science settings: seminars in which we encouraged our students to rethink their practice through an exploration of concepts – such as ‘assemblage’, ‘infrastructure’, ‘collaboration’, ‘experimentation’ and ‘technical democracy’ – drawn from STS and neighbouring disciplines like anthropology. We found that architects were not shying away from these terms and would frequently deliver well-written and thoughtful

handouts in which they were deployed. Had we not tried to play a bit more, testing in some mock-up pedagogical exercises how the terms might translate into their own practice, we would not have discovered that, despite appearances, our teaching had equipped them with nothing more than a ‘discourse’ with which to sugar-coat their prose. What could we do? How could we climb out of what we began to call ‘the predicative approach’ to teaching about the social? I thought about it often, trying to understand whether I could help to recapture, in an institutional setting, the trajectory that my ethnographic interlocutors in Barcelona and Madrid had already undergone to become savvy social thinkers through collaborative design, or experimental artists in ‘joint problem-making’ (Criado and Estalella 2018).

It was then that the work from our architectural friends in Alicante came to the rescue. We wanted to learn from their tricks of the trade, and from the kinds of things we had seen them doing and exploring. Happily, through an ERASMUS+ teaching exchange, Ester could join us for some time in Munich. Together with her, learning from a lovely course she had been teaching on ‘experiments with the profession’ (*experimentos con el oficio*), where she pushed her students to learn from lifestyle migrants on the Costa Blanca, we started imagining more edgy approaches to the design studio as a site to put architectural design in crisis. For us, oddly enough, anthropology turned into a project of designing studio briefs.

Invention: Sensitizing Architects through ‘Technical Democracy’ in the Design Studio

Tomás: We ended up calling a series of semester-long design studio projects in the MA in Architecture, ‘Design in Crisis’. In these, we attempted to design critical briefs that would force our students – as well as their teachers, namely us – to confront the limits of their methods, encouraging both them and us to relearn what design might mean in the vicinity of the work of human and other-than-human actors. Using real case scenarios and pushing students to grapple with existing agencies and conundrums, we wanted the design studios to focus on the kind of architectural practice that might emerge from, say, blind activism (Criado 2021), or the design capacities of non-human animals such as beavers (Farías, Criado and Remter 2023).

Following Ester’s poignant remarks, the processual and material speculation we proposed in these design studios was not to be an end in itself. It would be all too easy for students to treat their explorations as mere fun or thought experiments, with no effect beyond the classroom space. To

ward against this, the brief needed to evoke a different pedagogic atmosphere. This is why our main operation was to ask our students to come up with an alternative architectural toolkit, to rework their methods as part of their assignment, while also requiring them to document their process thoroughly in an open-source manner. The students ended up designing a *ManualCAD* – a multisensory kit for relations, conversations and co-design involving sighted and non-sighted actors, in turn facilitating an exploration of what a more-than-visual architecture could be;² and conceiving the workings of the *River Biodiversity Union* – an entity that, through variegated protocols and sensory suits, would oversee the effective co-design of Munich’s Isar River together with the beavers populating it, working out the kind of speculative contract that might be needed to design with or in the name of beavers, and to achieve a re-naturalization different from the human-dominated regime currently in place.³

One of the most interesting political contributions of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) has been to demonstrate the manifold forms of agency, both human and non-human, that technoscientific projects have so often disregarded. Be it as a programme for instituting ‘technical democracy’ (Callon, Lascoumes and Barthe 2011), or other attempts to sensitize experts to the relevance of existing forms of knowledge, this means engaging in compositionist explorations of the common worlds that might be inhabited as a result. Whilst this has usually been undertaken amidst heated controversy, there has been a transition from more or less dialogic forms, requiring a high degree of articulation from actors, in a particular expert tongue, and driven by technocratic procedures (Fariás and Blok 2016), to experimenting, in a spirit of careful speculation, with other forms of thinking and doing (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017). Plunging into these discussions, our pedagogical experiments led us to explore ‘expert sensitization’ as a practical programme that could unfold in and through the design studio.

The more interesting conceptual borrowing that led us to reflect on this process also came from Ester. It was through her that we discovered the notion of ‘invention’, originally coined by architect Alberto Altés and his colleagues (Altés, Jara and Correia 2016), to signal the interactions with materials and knowledges that happen in situated pedagogical architectural explorations. Perhaps giving it a peculiar Ingoldian twist, this led us to believe that from an STS or anthropological standpoint, no pedagogical practice could ever succeed, were it not to ‘intra-vene’ with its practices – were we not, that is, to create the conditions to change the design process ‘from the inside’. In recent years, we have come to describe our main approach as one of attempting to sensitize architects, ‘intravening’ with their own practices, by engaging with the

design capacities of usually neglected actors, such as blind activists or beavers, who might bring with them different ideas of what a relevant form of architecture might be (Criado 2021). Here, anthropology appears as a practice of studying *with* others, in correspondence (Ingold 2018). Or, put in our own terms, this is where anthropology creates the conditions for designers to treat other actors ‘as epistemic partners for rethinking architectural practice, thus engaging their capacities in attempts at designing with them’ (Fariás, Criado and Renter 2023: 93).

Alicante beyond Its Model: A Territory of Affections

Ester: Eight years after I started teaching, Enrique and I are now publishing a jointly authored essay on the evolution of the Alicante School of Architecture, entitled ‘Alicante Misunderstood’. One could sum it up as a review of the moment when the ‘Alicante Model’ abandoned its confrontational mode of teaching in favour of an affirmative one (Braidotti 2019). The challenge has come to be one of conceptualizing how teachers can admit into the studio classroom the affection that our students already have for a territory personally familiar to them. Inspired by the works of anthropologists like Mario Blaser and Marisol de la Cadena (2017), we have come to acknowledge the contribution of the students’ personal experience of Alicante’s landscape, in enabling us to see that the commonality is made up not only of us (teachers), them (students), the institution and the discipline, but also of the many sensitive issues that these four entities summon up when they come together. Blaser and de la Cadena propose shifting from the notion of the commons to the more nuanced idea of the *uncommons*. Unlike the commons, which involves shared asset agreements, the uncommons disrupts common ground, extending into relations with diverse beings, including non-human entities, whose interests are fundamentally incommensurable. This irreducible uncommons prompts a reconsideration of community, and calls for practices allowing for the heterogeneity of knowledge invoked by teachers and students alike. While for Blaser and de la Cadena the context for the uncommons is South America, particularly the Andes, where colonial extractivism clashes with indigenous cosmopolitics, they suggest that it can be more widely applied as an analytic device for exploring divergences between animate and inanimate life forms or irreconcilable worldviews. In our scenario, it involves recognizing the massive disparity between academic disciplinary knowledge and the experiential knowledge brought by our students within the design studio. The alignment of interests between students and teachers no longer centres around reconstructing a disci-

pline or profession. If we consider ‘nature’ as an assortment of irreconcilables, as such incompatible with the premises of the Enlightenment project, then it seems no less ‘strange’ to students to discuss urban planning as a discipline, or Le Corbusier as a mandatory starting point for material design, than it is to establish operative relations between mountains and humans.

However, our students’ experience of the city does not introduce into the studio an articulated set of different knowledges about the design and use of the territory, but rather a set of practices of knowing that call for divergent ways of relating, which reveal their incommensurability by refusing to present themselves as a coherent alternative. From the student who enacts in the studio the discipline presented to him, whether accepting it or reacting against it until finally being assimilated by the profession, we pass to an urban actor, already an amateur and a future expert affected by what concerns them, who in turn destabilizes and continually recomposes disciplinary delimitations from the incommensurability of that which affects them (Gisbert Alemany and Nieto Fernández 2026).

Writing with Enrique the essay to which I just referred has helped me to put in perspective what my role in the university, as a practice-based researcher with a foot in anthropology, has been and could be in the future: to inquire into the potential of the Alicante Model to re-territorialize the teaching of architectural design.

Architecture within Anthropology: Ethnography as an Inventive Design Practice

Tomás: In recent years, before and after Munich, I have been invested in convening collective venues of more-than-textual ethnography and collaborative pedagogy. These include *xcol. An Ethnographic Inventory*, a collaborative platform I co-curate with my colleague Adolfo Estalella, to document ethnographic inventions and the inventiveness of the ethnographic.⁴ Our main motivation for this platform derives from our engagement with a series of architectural collectives from Spain interested in documenting everyday inventiveness in digital archives of this kind, not in a pinboard modality, but looking for inspiration for further explorations in making. In our more recent work, in contrast to field research that tends to foreground the ethnographic as a means of providing detached tales of *ethnos*, we have tried to posit ethnography as an act of *invention* (Criado and Estalella 2023) – an argument we hope could enliven new forms of anthropological relevance. This inventive character also provides a tale of ethnography beyond accounts of method. Instead of ready-made ap-

proaches and techniques, we wish to foreground how any ethnographic encounter must come to terms with the need to invent the conditions of inquiry. Ethnography, thus, is a design practice through and through. It is the task of ‘*devising*’ a field, much as architects would do.

This can be seen in contemporary attempts to undertake ethnography in and through a plurality of devices, facilitating an exploration of other sensory practices and types of knowledge production beyond the predominance of observation. Indeed, many colleagues are making use of the ‘multimodal’ epithet as an exploratory ground to test different modes, including not only plural media beyond text, but also a plurality of means by which, and modalities in which, ethnographic inquiries can take place. Some of this programme took root in the workings of the ‘*Stadtlabor for Multimodal Anthropology*’, which I co-directed between 2018 and 2022 at the Humboldt-University of Berlin.⁵ In these years, we sought to position the *Stadtlabor* as a research platform from which anthropologists interested in contemporary urban issues could explore multimedia formats of knowledge production and intervention in collaboration with other urban actors. We think it is crucial to start blurring the boundaries between practices or formats of knowledge production and those of city-making. Could this be anthropology as architectural practice? To this end, we have explored conceptual, speculative and material tools, such as games, to respond to the current crises of modern urbanism.

Seen in this light, the programme I wish to develop, along with several of my close collaborators, is a kind of urban anthropology understood as an architectural project of sorts: that is, as a practice of creating the material and social conditions to learn together with others how to problematize contemporary forms of urbanism, as well as a pedagogic project to relearn the means to do this in the vicinity of variegated epistemic partners. For this to work, and acknowledging the asymmetries between parties, anthropology might need to operate in these encounters as a form of ‘expert sensitization’ to the existing plurality of ways of inhabiting and world-making. This, however, is more easily said than done.

Unfinished Coda: A Desire for More Mutual Inventions

Although our approaches share a lot of common sensitivities and mutual proclivities, their institutional emplacement still matters, imposing on us a need to remain ‘disciplined’, even if we might want to undiscipline ourselves as much as we can in order to learn from one another. For despite our hybridizing and intermingling attempts to work in the interstices of both anthropology and architecture, our disciplinary locations

continue to pre-empt our gestures. Could we break this disciplinary matrix to think about other approaches? How might we imagine conceptual and material grounds to re-educate ourselves as inhabitants of this particular in-between which we have come to cultivate? We have no answer yet. Thus, we end without a proper conclusion, but rather, a desire: for more mutual intraventions!

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Tomás Criado is an anthropologist of technoscience, especially interested in urban/environmental care. He works as Ramón y Cajal Senior Research Fellow at the CareNet group, Open University of Catalonia.

Enrique Nieto Fernández is an architect and professor at the University of Alicante. He contributed to the development of ‘the Alicante Model’ of architectural design, and leads the group Critical Pedagogies, Ecological Politics and Material Practices.

NOTES

1. <https://easst.net/easst-review/36-1/the-munich-center-for-technology-in-society-mcts-raising-the-stakes-for-sts-in-germany/> (last accessed 8 January 2026).
2. <https://designin crisis.wixsite.com/designin crisis2017> (last accessed 8 January 2026).
3. <https://thedesignin crisis.wixsite.com/designin crisis> (last accessed 8 January 2026).
4. <https://xcol.org/> (last accessed 8 January 2026).
5. <https://hu.berlin/stadtlabor/> (last accessed 8 January 2026).

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