

DIY anthropology

Disciplinary knowledge in crisis

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ABSTRACT: This is an account of the transformations in our anthropological activity during a period of crisis that set our disciplinary practice in an epistemic crisis. Working in the cracks left behind by the politics of austerity that started after the global financial crack of 2007-2008 in Madrid and Barcelona, we argue that our anthropological practice was rebuilt in ways that blurred our disciplinary boundaries. What there emerged was a form of anthropological knowledge whose contours may be understood not as a disciplinary field but as practice of experimental collaboration. This is an anthropological modality that re-learns its ways treating counterparts as epistemic partners and setting up with them distinct ambiances of care: caring for one another in situations of great difficulty and caring for our different forms of inquiry, addressing the very situations we were under. This would be an anthropological practice that assembles from scratch a conceptual body, also learning its ways from others, taking care for the mundane issues that are very often forgotten and rendered invisible by disciplinary fields: A DIY anthropology, as we would like to call it. Or even better, an anthropology done together with others.

KEYWORDS: EXPERIMENTAL COLLABORATIONS, DO IT YOURSELF (DIY), EPISTEMIC PARTNERS, CARE, INTRAVENTION.

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Introduction

The beginning of the 2010s was a period of political unrest in Spain. Like many other countries, it suffered the harsh effects of the 2007-2008 global financial crisis¹. However, despite the crisis (or maybe because of it) cities experienced a moment of political creativity and urban inventiveness: People occupied empty buildings and unused plots of vacant land to create all kind of projects, refurbishing the city with an impulse to reanimate collective forms of life. All kind of knowledges blossomed in these initiatives. Our several-years-long ethnographic investigations were carried out in this period in Spain's main two cities (Madrid and Barcelona). One of us (Adolfo) came across architectural guerrillas that challenged the conventional practice and work ethics of their own discipline, working in the open air with neighbours in the common task of planning the city and refurbishing public spaces. The other (Tomás) collaborated with a network of both professional and amateur designers who, after meeting the activists of the independent-living movement, united in different endeavours to defy the knowledge, political and market lockup of personal and urban supports, tinkering with the aspiration not only to forge alternatives to a receding welfare state but also to carve spaces of mutual access. In such settings, traditional forms of knowledge were thrown into crisis when institutional canons of epistemic authority were challenged, be it by neighbours intervening in the city or bodily diverse people taking care of their own bodies and relations.

Thrown into an urban landscape left behind by a policy of financial austerity, we worked intimately with architects, activist designers, and bodily diverse people. Singularly and unexpectedly for us, we found in them the companions we lacked in our local institutional academic contexts. They turned into epistemic partners: companions in the shared endeavour of producing anthropological problematisations. Under these circumstances, the knowledge we produced at the time emerged out of a moment of crisis: knowledge in crisis.

For some time now, in different reflections coming out of our ethnographic encounters, we have highlighted the particular transformations these “experimental collaborations” – as we have described them (Estalella, Sánchez Criado 2018) – have operated in our fieldwork practices. In doing so, we have engaged in a dialogue with a number of authors, who in recent

1. We would like to thank Francisco Martínez and the two anonymous reviewers for their careful and insightful comments, which helped us improve our argument.

times have argued that “fieldwork is not what it used to be” (Faubion *et al.* 2009; Rabinow *et al.* 2008), and more particularly that the study of the contemporary seems to demand from anthropologists to “re-function” their ethnographic practices (Holmes, Marcus 2005). While much attention has been paid in these debates to the transformation of the norm and form of ethnography in the empirical encounter, in this contribution we shift the focus of discussion to a different issue. We discuss here how these experimental collaborations with our counterparts in the field have shaped and affected our disciplinary practices and institutional settings of anthropology throwing our discipline into crisis. We draw on our experience to offer a description paying attention to a key institutional context in which disciplines are made: delving into the unusual presence of our counterparts in the field in our scholarly spaces, our account displaces the locus of empirical attention from the ethnographic encounter towards the anthropological meeting.

The expression “discipline in crisis” hints at two issues: First, we explore what happened to anthropology during the financial crisis of 2007. The crisis is not, in this case, a long-standing and inherent condition of anthropology – as argued elsewhere (Comaroff 2010) –, but a sociohistorical moment having distinctive effects over the shape and institutional expression of anthropology. Second, we describe how this threw into crisis the very concept of discipline, opening up a different imagination for the description of our anthropological activities in the present. In this description, a little reorientation of the discussion proposed in this special issue is attempted: We do not intend to argue on the European condition of our anthropological practice, neither we are interested in tracing geo-political frontiers of disciplinary imaginations. Instead, drawing on our ethnographic experience – and the collaborations we established with our epistemic partners in the field – we feel urged to problematize the disciplinary boundaries anthropology conventionally tends to assume. As James Clifford puts it: “a discipline most actively defines itself at its edges, in relation to what it says it is not. It does this by selectively appropriating and excluding elements” (2005: 25). What if the exclusionary boundary work of the EU was not so different from the epistemic exclusions exerted by anthropology? In this case, European anthropology should be considered paying attention to both the geopolitical borders the European Union traces, as well as the disciplinary boundaries anthropology enacts. Or, to be more precise, in our description we shift from a discussion around the geo-political identity of anthropology to its status as a scholarly discipline.

In what follows, we offer an account of the interstitial spaces that we both inhabited “in the vacuum of tradition” in the recent Spanish crisis (section 2), and how that enabled us to articulate singular relations with variegated epistemic partners (section 3) with whom we set up distinct ambiances of care (section 4). In our ethnographic description we pay attention to the blurring of institutional and scholarly infrastructures and modes of togetherness. In describing the particular transformations – or “intraventions” (section 5) – that these joint spaces enacted, we would like to intimate a different figuration anthropology took in our practice: Not a disciplinary field but a field of experimental collaborations. As we show, treating our ethnographic counterparts as epistemic partners has the potential to retrofit our institutionalized settings and disciplinary practices (section 6). The anthropology we describe, hence, is one assembled from scratch, caring for the mundane issues that very often are forgotten and rendered invisible: an anthropology done with others, a DIY anthropology?

Disciplines in disarray

Disciplines are in disarray. The discussion proposed in this special issue may be situated in conversation with a growing literature concerned with the fate of disciplines since the turn of the century (Abbot 2001; Chandler 2009; Menand 1996). Contemporary disciplines resulted from the practical organization of knowledge bodies into institutional settings that crystallized at the end of the 19th century. In diverse fields, however, a growing mismatch is being experienced between disciplinary arrangements and academic activities and communities (Chandler 2009). Clifford Geertz (1980) advanced a similar symptom already decades ago, when intimating how disciplinary genres (both writing styles and modes of thinking) had blurred and lost distinctiveness. Four decades later, this diagnosis still appears to hold, as James Clifford conveyed: “A sense of disciplinary disarray has been in the air. Things fall apart. The center cannot hold” (2005: 31).

Three vectors have spurred recent debates on the transformation and ill-fated future of disciplines. The first refers to interdisciplinarity: A figure that has come to be seen as a solution to all kind of contemporary problems (Barry *et al.* 2008), especially by funding bodies, investing this type of research with many virtues (Strathern 2011). According to Barry *et al.* (2008), interdisciplinary practices are certainly diverse and range from subordination to integration or agonistic-antagonistic relations. A second vector signals the neoliberal transformation of university as a source of disciplinary changes (Sahlins 2009). Changes in university governance and

the economic conditions of academic activity erode academic freedom and reshape disciplines that progressively lose their authority (Menand 1996). Finally, a third vector hinges on recent attempts to reorganize disciplinary fields and traditions (for instance, on the redefinition of the fourfold bundle in the USA, see Segal, Yanagizako 2005) or, as this special issue and other recent endeavours evince, arguing a distinctive geopolitical disciplinary identity (Green, Laviolette 2015; Martínez 2016).

Our intervention in this discussion takes a different route, drawing on a number of inspiring reflections from the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS). Instead of discussing the ill-fated future of disciplines, these works have discussed the shortcomings of the concept as a descriptor of scientific practices. For instance, Karin Knorr-Cetina's (1999) ethnographic investigation of particle physics and molecular biology is exemplary in its critique to the notion of disciplines: Attending to the complex materiality of scientific practice in the laboratory, she argued four decades ago that the notion of discipline was "not designed to make visible the complex texture of knowledge as practiced in the deep social spaces of modern institutions" (*ibidem*: 3). Instead, her description of laboratory practices revolves around the notion of "epistemic culture". Mario Biagioli (2009) has recently proposed a similar argument, when referring to the progressive interweaving of fields of knowledge. In his account, scientific activity is increasingly organized today by novel temporal configurations shaped by diverse collaborations, and oriented towards specific problems. Under these circumstances, the notion of discipline "is less apt to capture the more fragmentary and nimbler knowledge-making scenarios we observe today" (2009: 819). In contrast, he suggests an alternative framework: "the keyword is collaboration (not discipline or field), with each collaboration potentially instantiating a different and temporary cross-disciplinary setup" (*ibidem*: 820).

Resonating with these debates, our take of an anthropological discipline in crisis aims to flesh out many conversations and reflections shared as a result of our respective ethnographic fieldworks (happening between 2011 and 2016), and their effects on the institutional spaces and disciplinary venues of our activity. Our reflections cannot be disentangled from the economic crisis and austerity-prone milieu in which they took place. In this sense, they add up to anthropological contributions that have taken out the global financial crisis of 2007-2008 as their object of investigation. These ethnographies have paid attention to the politics of austerity (Knight, Stewart 2016), the effects of financialization over sovereign debt (Bear 2015), the temporal dimension of the crisis (Knight 2015), the many urban

transformations imposed by austerity urbanism (Tomkiss 2013) or the processes of recuperation (Martínez, 2020). The crisis has indeed intensified the wide processes of academic transformation, affecting disciplines – as the introduction and other contributions to this especial issue clearly evince. Nevertheless, it has rarely been addressed as putting in crisis the very discipline of anthropology, the topic we address in this piece.

In the vacuum of tradition: Interstitial practices

The global financial crisis of 2007-2008 that originated after the housing bubble in the USA had devastating effects over Madrid, Barcelona, and most Spanish cities. The Government applied a policy of harsh austerity since 2010 that impoverished many segments of the population². Under these circumstances, many empty plots and buildings emerged out in the cities, drawing neighbours into all sort of projects, speculating with different forms of urban life: Illegally, and sometimes extra-legally occupied. A city like Madrid witnessed the appearance of, say: a squatted social centre where a luxury apartment building was under construction; an abandoned hotel (next to the regional government location) was taken by people coming from the 15M movement (Spanish version and precursor of the Occupy movement); and vacant plots of land were “liberated” (in the vernacular idiom) after illegal or alegal occupations all over the city. People with no previous experience of squatting, or without any activist background, became engaged in many of these initiatives. Composed of makeshift constructions and auto-constructed infrastructures of different types, informal norms and regulations were established by loose forms of organisation. The emergence of these projects coincided with the proliferation of ephemeral artistic/architectural interventions in other geographies of the North during the economic crisis (Zeiger 2011).

Madrid and Barcelona became places where an interstitial urbanism developed (Mubi Brighenti 2013) in the cracks left behind by the austerity policies, as described by Fran Tonkiss: “a mode of urban practice that works

2. Austerity policies were intended to reduce the volume of the public sector 5.5% of the GDP between 2011 and 2016. Social spending was largely affected: for instance, investment on housing and community services was reduced by 42.4% and leisure and culture by 36% in the period 2011-2016 (Romero, Brandis, Melo 2015), public health and social care and education operated under large cuts too. Although we are uncertain so as to its meanings – given that different techniques of calculation and new flexible types of contracts have been invented in the last years – in the most dramatic moments of the crisis (around 2012-2014) the official unemployment rate reached 25%, and at the moment of writing this (June 2019) it is still of around 14% (INE), hitting specially those under 40.

in the cracks between formal planning, speculative investment and local possibilities” (2013: 313). One of the most paradigmatic projects of the like that developed at the time in Madrid was *El Campo de Cebada* (The Barley Field), a large plot in the city centre (2,300 square metres), self-managed by neighbours between 2011 and 2017. The story of the project is telling: The vacant plot was used by an ephemeral artistic intervention as part of a municipal festival (*La Noche en Blanco*, White Night), after a few weeks the installation closed but some neighbours that still had access to the space prepared a project and managed to obtain permission from the city council to run the space. Operating without funding, the initiative was open to anyone interested. Those willing to participate in decision-making and intervene in the spatial arrangement, or contribute to the everyday activities, were welcome to just drop by at the Monday weekly assembly that was hosted on site. No formal requirement was needed to get involved, the same organisational principle that had been followed in similar projects: like the many urban community gardens that also proliferated during these years. Many spaces like this flourished in Madrid and Barcelona, as well as in other Spanish cities³.

A completely empty plot at the beginning, neighbours made great efforts to condition the space of The Barley Field, inventing all kind of devices to run it and refurnish it with DIY infrastructures (Martín Sainz de los Terreros 2018): large structures to provide shelter from the sun during the summer, benches of imaginative shapes, tables, plots for the community garden that was built inside the space, sport equipment, etc. In a nutshell, a great array of modest and precarious infrastructures was produced on site recycling materials. A series of workshops organised under the original name of “Handmade urbanismo” taught neighbours how to re-equip the city with different infrastructures and the public space with new capacities. These were organised by Zuloark, an architectural guerrilla that was deeply involved in The Barley Field and similar projects at the time. People with different backgrounds and knowledges met and worked together in projects like The Barley Field. In their encounters, they not only occupied the vacant spaces of the city but also the disciplinary interstices that the crisis had made emerge: anthropologists working with architects, designers collaborating with activists, they occupied knowledge interstices and those vague epistemic terrains so often left behind by disciplinary boundaries.

3. We could also mention Can Batlló, a gigantic former factory reclaimed by the neighbours and turned into a self-managed social centre in the Sants district of Barcelona as another interesting case.

In one of the many open workshops organised by Zuloark in The Barley Field, they built on site a series of pieces of furniture using recycled pallets: A seedbed piece, a compost box, a planter, a table, and bench. Modest pieces of furniture that were later finely documented in easy-to-read manuals of instructions that were later made available online. As diagrammatic expressions, these sketches bear witness to the efforts invested in these spaces to activate new apprenticeships, since manuals were produced to inspire and offer resources for others to replicate similar interventions in other geographies. As accounts of a handcrafted city, manuals of instruction come to epitomise an urban genre that expands the urban fabric of the DIY city into a textual form, resourcing new city textures (Corsín, Estalella, 2016).

This was not only happening in Madrid, as recounted in Adolfo's work, but in many other locales. In Barcelona, Tomás saw a very similar and coeval landscape working together with the collective *En torno a la silla* (ETS): an initiative that united in many exploratory spatial projects and open design interventions people who could have never met were it not for the emergence of these peripheral urban interstices. That is, wheelchair using activists of the independent-living movement in their fight against spatial and technological exclusion with designers, craftspeople and others concerned with making space in our contemporary cities to bodily diversity. In there, Tomás collaborated documenting and helping others document in a great detail not only tutorials of their artefacts and gadgets but also their experiential accounts of what this newly afforded mode of living and doing together entailed for all of them (Sánchez Criado 2019).

Epistemic partners

In these spaces, we came across a variegated number of professionals that mixed with neighbours in many contexts: Architects, urban planners, activists, artists, hackers, cultural managers, designers, and even some other social scientists. Travelling with them throughout the city we traced a precise urban geography composed of cultural centres, refurbished urban voids, occupied buildings, and bars, constantly participating in public meetings or more intimate – although always open to participation – gatherings of diverse kinds and formats: assemblies in the open air, seminar-like encounters, public events and production workshops, or gatherings where common concerns were shared.

These urban interventions were not antagonist projects whose ultimate goal was to clash against traditional institutions – albeit this was the invocation of some squatting collectives, for instance. In most of the cases,

people just did what they could with the resources at hand. The emptiness of urban voids turned into an opportunity to try things out and work together. People engaged in these projects had to learn anew many things: how to organise and manage an open assembly, speak in public, build infrastructures (benches, tables, etc.), or take care of a space open to anybody with diffuse norms of behaviour... A wild research practice pervaded the goings and doings of these spaces: Engaged participants experimenting with new forms of living together that mobilised all kind of knowledges. Their material interventions in public space were very often paralleled by many exercises of theoretical speculation – sometimes, in fact, they plunged in attempts at critical design.

Our respective ethnographic fieldworks were carried out in these urban contexts, in close collaboration with our counterparts in the field. Adolfo, for instance, devised with Basurama and Zuloark a project called *Ciudad Escuela* (The City as a School)⁴. The project materialized in a series of workshops (running until 2018) that operated in the diverse self-managed and urban voids of Madrid, including a digital archive and a set of learning itineraries: a travel methodology throughout the city and a pedagogical program that equipped these circulations. Conceived as a learning infrastructure, *Ciudad Escuela* was aimed at supporting the knowledges and learnings that were produced at that time in the city.

The project grew out of countless meetings with Basurama and Zuloark for over 18 months. Meetings in their studios revolved around the state of affairs of the city: in a moment of unrest ignited by the *Indignados* movement, there was not any other explicit objective for these encounters. It all started after an invitation to both collectives to become formal members of a project funded by the Spanish Research and Development Program. The invitation provided the material conditions to think together and engage collectively in a process of problematizing of the urban landscape.

When the project finally saw the light of day, Adolfo had completed more than two years of dedicated fieldwork. Also, a conceptual vocabulary for his ethnographic findings had been elaborated: For instance, the notions of “beta urbanism”, “urban archives”, “open source urban infrastructures” were part of a tentative theoretical vocabulary produced out of his ethnographic investigation. These were too the topics that organized the pedagogical program of *Ciudad Escuela*, its seminars and workshops. The project thus came out of the intersection of the ethnographic sensibility of anthropology

4. This was part of the sustained and long collaboration with another anthropologist, Alberto Corsín Jiménez.

and the material practices of architecture, bringing together the descriptive aspiration and infrastructural imagination of one and the other (Estalella, Sánchez Criado 2016).

In both our works in Madrid and Barcelona, we shared a common epistemic concern with the city: a preoccupation to understand what was going on in these urban landscapes during such a period of crisis. Our ethnographic researches were thus adjacent to, when not partaking the investigations of our counterparts in the field. This is probably one of the reasons that would explain our deep involvement in their design projects and urban interventions, sometimes documenting different endeavours with them (as it was the case of Tomás) and, in other occasions, co-designing pedagogical programs and learning infrastructures (as it was the case of Adolfo). The deep engagement we established in our respective fieldworks with our counterparts in the field has been a key topic for our reflection in recent years.

We certainly did not expect to become so involved, a distinction we make when comparing this ethnographic modality with our previous doctoral research projects based on more or less conventional participant observation. We have conceptualized these ethnographic encounters as ethnographic modes of experimental collaborations (Estalella, Sánchez Criado 2018): A fieldwork practice that occurred through processes of material and social interventions turning the field into a site where we constructed with our counterparts our anthropological problematizations. Such epistemic collaborations extended in convoluted ways onto our academic activities and institutional settings, as we describe in the next section.

Ambiences of care

Experimental collaborations are very often the result of anthropologists working with either professionals from other fields or non-professionals, operating very often at the boundary of disciplinary spaces. Searching to explore this “edgy” type of investigations, in 2015 we put together a workshop dedicated to an in-depth reflection around forms of ethnographic experimentation in the field. It was jointly organised in Intermediae (Matadero Madrid), an art production centre devoted to experimentation with visual aesthetics and participatory art. We assembled half a dozen young scholars from different fields – singularly, none of them anthropologists – working beyond the boundaries of their own disciplines and methods: such as an architect doing an ethnography of The Barley Field (the aforementioned urban void) or an art historian doing research of visual representations in

Equatorial Guinea. All of them were bringing ethnographic methods and diverse theoretical traditions to their own disciplines, while acknowledging their methodological anxieties and disciplinary troubles in doing so.

Under the title “*Research at the edge: A curatorship of experimental collaborations*”, the workshop signalled the fertile exchanges between the arts and the social sciences. Its curatorial gesture had a two-fold meaning, referring both to the “curing” and “curating” practices needed by many investigations. We were hinting at those forms of research in precarious conditions – e.g. crossing conventional disciplinary boundaries and in the verge of crisis – that were “in need of care”. As part of the workshop, we invited the cultural collective ColaBoraBora, also a relevant actor in our field of inquiry, to curate one activity. Based in the Basque Country, ColaBoraBora is a professional association that has devoted considerable energies to undertaking research on cultural production and open/free processes of creation.

Following the workshop’s main argument, ColaBoraBora proposed a format that took the invocation around “care” seriously. The *Klinika*, as they called it, was a clinic for researchers in need:

An accompaniment service for the diagnosis and shared care, aimed at developing healthy collaborative research projects. It is especially appropriate for experimental projects leaving the orthodoxy and transgressing the canons that provoke tensions, anxieties, dizziness, and great doses of vulnerability and uncertainty in researchers⁵.

They proposed a methodological device to organise the activity: a file card mimicking a medical report, inviting participants to elicit their symptoms, provide a diagnosis, and propose an appropriate treatment for those troubled researchers and their processes. The apparently mundane file was, however, key in the activity, prompting scholars to do what they are so used to making: to write.

Care was an extended discourse at that time in the urban contexts of our ethnographies, taking expression in diverse conceptual figures. The assemblies of the Indignados movement in which Adolfo participated as part of his investigation turned the trope of “active listening” (*escucha activa*) into a careful practice. Out in the open air, care involved all kind of infrastructural arrangements (Estalella, Corsín, 2016) and social techniques, you should listen with care, which meant both “without interrupting” and “with an open mind”: trying to understand the others and making space for

5. Translated from <http://xcol.org/blog/2015/07/kit-de-investigaciones-al-limite>, accessed on 14/07/2019.

those who spoke less. But the extended invocation of care resonates with Maria Puig de la Bellacasa's discussion around an ethics of care speculating with alternative forms of living together, paying attention to the obligation not to just be concerned but "to take care of the fragile gathering things constitute" (2017: 45). These forms of care "assembling neglected things" certainly require a constant speculative concern with regards to spaces, materials, and techniques aimed at conditioning spaces in order to be together, think together, and do things with others.

In our projects we in fact attended many meetings and gatherings, assemblies and seminars, production workshops and cultural events, where very often there was a method, an explicit form of organising space, distributing people, and maintaining the rhythms. Indeed, "care" was usually invoked as a method allowing to experiment with what was possible to do with others. This was indeed the motive behind ColaBoraBora's very name: they were exploring forms of cultural collaboration. We discovered in these meetings the epistemic qualities of care: understood here as a precise way of designing ambiances for "joint problem-making" (Sánchez Criado, Rodríguez-Giralt 2017). Care was, on the one hand, a way of creating conditions for actors with variegated knowledges – e.g. guerrilla architects, neighbours, activist designers, or bodily diverse activists – to engage in inquiries about the situations they were living in; on the other hand, care entailed a series of practices whereby the very urban spaces that were occupied turned into collective and speculative modes of response to the crisis.

Only a year later we brought the methods learnt from ColaBoraBora to the very core of our own discipline in Milano's 2016 EASA conference. There, we organised another version of the Klinika, this time called CLEENIK: A clinic offered for anthropologists doing ethnographic experimentation in their fieldwork. The CLEENIK reproduced the therapeutic practice of care so common in self-help groups. It was an attempt at bringing the sensibility we had learned in our fieldwork into our own discipline. The invocation of the therapeutic rhetoric of a clinic was a playful parodic gesture (mimicking ColaBoraBora's, which in our case entailed a form of self-deprecating humour over colonial forms of understanding the ethnographic Other), which implicitly highlighted the relevance of caring for the spaces of our encounters, as well as research projects at the edge.

Having learnt the importance of setting up ambiances of care from our counterparts in the field, we brought this practice and its correlated theoretical conceptualization into the institutionalized venues of anthropology. Paying attention to the epistemic relevance of care in the adaptation and

expansion of this method was a form of taking seriously the knowledge practices of our epistemic partners. And, as we will show in closing, this is not the only instance that evinced their impact on our professional practice and our understanding of anthropology beyond being discipline. The practice of care and the experimental impulse that we found in our fieldwork would during this time percolated our institutional venues and disciplinary spaces. This was especially the case in an endeavour we participated at that time, the constitution of a Science and Technology Studies Network, originally called *Red de Estudios de Ciencia y Tecnología* (RedesCTS).

Intraventions

We were part of the group of promoters of such STS network. From 2011 on, we started organising annual meetings (or rather *encuentros*, encounters) bringing together people with shared interests in this field⁶. The network grew up as an informal and loose academic enterprise: a peer-based structure without a managing committee, non-formal membership and operating without budget, since meetings had no fees. The RedesCTS aimed for being as open as possible. Perhaps the flexibility in its name was telling: Some people used the name *Red de Estudios Sociales de Ciencia y Tecnología*, others suppressed the “social” in the name and some others added the geopolitical location: *del Estado Español* (of the Spanish state).

From the very beginnings, the network tried to welcome different epistemic and political sensibilities (something especially relevant in a country traversed by territorial tensions). We would describe the network as “an experiment of prototyping a modality of academic formal association” testing even “whether the network could be composed not only of academics, but be open to other social actors” (Estalella *et al.* 2013). It was as if the period of cultural creativity and urban unrest had infiltrated this academic context where some brought the provocative and critical spirit of their empirical sites of investigation into the design of an institutional venues, as was our case.

The experimental impulse present in our ethnographic investigations percolated RedesCTS, taking expression both in the organisational practices of the network and the design of its encounters. Great efforts were always dedicated to the choosing of spaces: non-academic locations (and non-commercial ones) were commonly picked, when available, in a gesture attempting to go beyond more scholarly or purely commercial spaces (like hotels or conference centres). The first and fifth meeting were organised in

6. There had been a couple of attempts in Spain to create this kind of institutional space, but they hadn't found the particular momentum (for a partial account, see Castillo 2011).

Medialab-Prado, a public cultural institution that works at the intersection of art, science and technology. It was the site where one of us (Adolfo) had been conducting an ethnography the year prior to the first meeting.

In these encounters, participants tested all kinds of formats, hosting theatrical representations, performances, and workshops of diverse kinds (Sánchez Criado, Calvillo 2014): for instance, one format re-enacted a Greek drama in a pub to stage a discussion around technical democracy; another one mobilised a hands-on discussion regarding open access and multimodal publishing formats and academic writing registers and genres through an inventive use of writing samples from participants. In such a space, we collectively invited participants to play and experiment with the methods to get together, a trail we have continued exploring in recent years in another institutional venue: the *Collaboratory for Ethnographic Experimentation* (#Colleex, an EASA network) that we founded in 2015⁷. As a result, in the two international workshops we have been co-organising to date, we have been testing what we call “open formats”: experiments in getting together to share knowledge and learn from one another⁸.

Seeing many people straining to care for the conditions to get together during this time of precarity – the case of the Indignados assemblies, the *En torno a la silla* collective where Tomás was researching, or many other spaces like The Barley Field – we sought to bring this caring ethos into these networks. For instance, this meant re-shaping in singular ways the traditional peer review process into what we called “care review”: a careful evaluation practice in search to collaboratively re-work (instead of reject) those precarious proposals coming from early stage researchers, or even proposals at the margins, showing shaky learnings or coming from non-academics. As one of us (Adolfo) wrote at the time:

What would happen if we thought that an academic meeting is a place that should provide space and care for those less adequate communications? We might think that academic meetings should not be just a place of excellence but a kind of hospital that deals with the investigations most needed of care⁹.

7. #Colleex is described as “a collaboratory, an infrastructure for promoting forms of collaboration. It is open to anthropologists, specialists from other domains like artists, cultural producers, designers and practitioners of any discipline interested in the creative experimentation with ethnographic practice”, see <https://colleex.wordpress.com/about/>, accessed on 14/07/2019.

8. As we have described elsewhere: “We meet to learn, but perhaps, and this is our point, we should learn to meet [...] we usually resort to the most conventional of formats: panels of paper presentations and round tables. We want to explore new ways to get together”, see <https://colleex.wordpress.com/colleex-open-formats/>, accessed on 14/07/2019.

9. See <https://redescts.wordpress.com/2015/02/09/care-review-cuidados-para-los-encuentros-academicos/>, accessed on 14/07/2019.

This constant concern with the ways in which venues were chosen and meetings designed reveals the importance of conceiving our undertakings as ambiances of care: experimental spaces in which to inquire how to meet and get together, welcoming many unusual suspects in academic venues. This took an explicit expression in the title of our fifth encounter, held again in Medialab-Prado in 2016: “overflowing academic boundaries”, a theme expressing one of the goals of the network. As expressed at the time: “we intend to tackle the apparently overwhelming challenges we face by exploring the ways in which we might articulate a joint response in alliance with those located beyond the limits of academia”¹⁰.

In such meetings we many times tested these attempts: Tomás and others invited the Independent-Living Forum (*Foro de Vida Independiente y Divertad*), an activist organisation key in his fieldwork, to take part in the closing plenary in the third meeting held in Barcelona in 2013 – foregrounding “para-academic” and “co-research” practices – where they made a presentation on “networks of emancipatory knowledge”; Adolfo, with his colleague Alberto Corsín Jiménez, co-presented his research a year later in Salamanca with one of his companions in the field, Auroda Adalid, architect part of the collective Zuloark¹¹.

But it was in the fourth meeting in Salamanca where this gesture towards those located outside the boundaries of academia became especially fertile. ColaBoraBora took part in the organisation of several special formats, at our suggestion, and their intervention was very provocative. Txelu Balboa and Ricardo Antón, from ColaBoraBora, appeared in front of a large audience in a solemn medieval hall to show an edited video using fragments from a YouTube video of a guinea pig being surgically intervened. Their audiovisual work had an automated voice-over reading a discourse from the point of view of guinea pigs (*cobayas*), reclaiming their right to being treated not just as research subjects but as co-researchers:

Without PhDs, without publications, without patents, without score in the researcher’s affiliation card; activists, amateurs, para-scientists, restless agents of (dis)organised civil society collaborating, articulating multi/trans/inter/in-disciplinary networks, generating collective intelligence...

In our extra-academic, un-homologated world there is no diaspora, no brain-drain nor return programmes because we aren’t even recognised as righteous citizen researchers. We are all (self)care – that’s all that’s left, the fundamental – not even in the back-stage but in the cages of the experiment room (a cage that looks every day more like the street, the street as laboratory).

10. Call for papers of the 2015 RedesCTS meeting: <https://redescts.wordpress.com/2015/01/18/v-meeting-of-the-spanish-network-of-science-and-technology-studies-cfp/>, accessed on 14/07/2019.

11. For an exhaustive documentation of the RedesCTS’s meetings and their organization, please check: <https://redescts.wordpress.com/archive/>, accessed on 14/07/2019.

[...] What do we want? To go way beyond participant observation, radicalising the idea of an activist ethnography. Because it's not just that researchers take part of the situations you do research about, but also that the subjects configuring those situations would be taken as researchers, besides being research subjects¹².

This was the opening speech to a rather fun dynamic they proposed to the activist researchers and researcher activists in the room: using as a metaphor the film “See no evil, here no evil” – the 1980s comedy featuring the adventures of a couple of guys, one blind the other deaf, force to collaborate to solve a crime – as in the *Klinika*, they had produced a small booklet and a series of lap pins – one with the face of Richard Pryor, the other with the face of Gene Wilder, the main actors in the film – to instigate people to re-enact the couple throughout the whole conference with different academic and non-academic researchers, sitting together and filling in the booklet, which contained questions regarding the research practices and conditions of the two people in conversation.

ColaBoraBora's “See no evil, hear no evil” or their “Klinika”, the care review, et cetera, were all interventions addressed at the very core our own discipline. Or, as we would like to call them using the term of the architect Alberto Altés and collaborators, they were “intraventions”: In a discussion about “certain disconnection between what is happening inside academia and the challenges found on the outside [...] with the ambition of opening up possibilities for reflection on contemporary forms of practice” (2016: 23), they employ this concept to name the self-learning emerging when taking part “from within” collective practices that might challenge sound and established disciplinary knowledges.

Our notion of intravention contrasts with the more common and established concept of intervention. In Design Anthropology, Rachel Charlotte Smith and Ton Otto (2016) turn intervention into a central concept, signalling a series of inquiry practices oriented to the transformation of the sites of investigation and social reality, moving “academic reflection and speculation towards a concrete process of emergence”. But intervention also refers to specific art-like pieces (Marcus 2010), while engaged interventions have been a traditional trope for anthropology's critical practices, seeking to improve the lives of peoples with whom they work (Biehl, McKay 2012). In most of these cases the locus of these intervening activities is the empirical field. And some of the most inspiring ethnographic experimentation projects for us could also be described in those terms.

12. Translated from www.colaborabora.org/2014/05/21/nosotras-las-cobayas/, accessed on 14/07/2019.

Yet, in contrast to these interventionist practices, what we are describing here is different: if anything, because they occurred in institutional spaces and scholarly venues, like academic encounters. In addressing this we are thus signalling a move from a concern with the ethnographic encounter – as common trope in the discussions pointing that “fieldwork is not what it used to be” (Faubion *et al.* 2009) – to a preoccupation with scholarly meetings, shifting in this itinerary the discussion from the norm and form of fieldwork to the boundary and expression of the anthropological discipline. Invention thus refers to modes of intra-disciplinary interventions occurring in collaboration and complicity with our epistemic partners. Setting up ambiances of care through which we intervene our discipline in a process of reversion and recursion: bringing the epistemic counterparts from empirical sites into the interior of academic venues and institutional spaces. In doing so, we not only intervened in the field, but also reversed this traditional gesture “intravening” our own scholarly spaces, drawing on the practices we had learnt from them. We do not refer therefore to a conceptual recursion that expands the conceptual infrastructure of anthropology (Holbraad, 2013; Strathern, 2018) but to a recursivity that brought into our anthropological practice the ambiances of care we had learned in our fields; hence intervening the more mundane and usually disregarded academic process of getting together. In bringing our epistemic counterparts into the interior of our institutional venues, we assembled and made room in our scholarly contexts to those located beyond their boundaries, tensing in this gesture the academic condition of anthropology and blurring its disciplinary boundaries.

Doing anthropology with others

Anthropology seems to be in a constant state of turmoil and disarray: a discipline, some have said (Comaroff 2010), whose permanent crisis – conceptual, methodological, political – resources its critical nature and nurtures its activity. In this paper we have described the disciplinary crises of our anthropological practice during a period of economic austerity and social suffering when carrying out our ethnographic investigations. Our account of a discipline in crisis offers a description of an anthropological experiment (as we would like to call it) in a Southern European country (Spain) in the particular sociohistorical moment of the post-2007-2008 financial crisis.

Despite the difficulties during this time, people were hopefully engaged in experiments exploring what was possible to do with others in the city. In the midst of a process of generalised precarity, we enjoyed the precarious

privilege of sharing with them their hope to construct other forms of living together. This has certainly impinged on our anthropological practice: in a recursive gesture, what we have attempted to practice (since then) and portray (now) is an anthropology as hopeful as those projects of reinvention of the city we learnt from. This is not to be seen as an amendment to the wide description of neoliberal academic precarisation – that we have suffered too –; it is just an attempt to show that amidst critical situations one can also be able to inhabit interstices, where life and anthropology could take a more hopeful expression.

We are not offering here, thus, a grand disciplinary narrative on Spanish anthropology but an account based on our embodied experiences and personal stories: a situated experiment that tensed disciplinary boundaries and explored novel institutional expressions for anthropology. To elaborate our account, we have referred to a quintessential instance in which disciplines are made (and sometimes remade): the scholarly meeting. A moment in which boundaries are traced (on themes, methodologies, approaches, etc.) and exclusions are made (of people, other disciplines, etc.). Meetings are the moments when (and where) we get together, but this “we” got blurred in the scholarly conferences we have described.

In the interstitial scholarly spaces we inhabited and managed to create, we mixed with our epistemic partners in a process that extended into institutional spaces the experimental collaborations we had established in the field. Our anthropological practice, hence, was brought into existence in those occasions in particular venues and infrastructural arrangements, mobilising methods to meet and practices to care for that we learnt from our counterparts in the field. The anthropology that was there brought into existence operated in particular “third spaces” (Fischer 2003), generative of and welcoming to interstitial practices of knowledge, fully academic but hospitable to non-academic practices too; fully anthropological but caring for other epistemic sensibilities. Spaces in-between, characterised hence by intimacy and trust: to fail and to err, together, learning from what these very spaces allow to inquire together.

The discipline in crisis we have described is therefore an anthropology figuring out its contemporary shape with its companions in the field, deploying, as Tim Ingold also conveys, an ethics of care: “We don’t care for others by treating them as objects of investigation [...] We care by bringing them into presence, so that they can converse with us, and we can learn from them. That’s the way to build a world with room for everyone. We can only build it together” (2018: 131). The resulting anthropology is one that dismantles its conventional epistemic hierarchies and disciplinary

boundaries, learning from its companions how to inquire. A discipline no more, but an experimental collaboration, we would like to suggest: an anthropology that brings to the fore the need to care for ambiances to do things with others – irrespective of their certified training, academic degrees and institutional affiliations or lack of thereof, their previous knowledges and abilities – engaged in the joint endeavour of constructing anthropological problematizations.

Lacking any disciplinary reference and in the void of tradition, we have described and anthropology built from scratch, made taking this and that from here and there. An anthropology constructed in the most DIY tradition. Not a discipline anymore but an experiment on doing anthropology: a DIY anthropology, or perhaps it would be better to say an anthropology done with others. A DIWO (do it with others) anthropology that recognises the need to redefine disciplinary boundaries and care for those traditionally excluded from our institutional disciplinary spaces, reimagining its endeavours with others.

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