



Book review: *Bathla, Nitin (Ed.): Researching Otherwise: Pluriversal Methodologies for Landscape and Urban Studies*

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In recent years, calls to attune research in urban planning, urban design, and landscape architecture to the lived experiences of both human and non-human beings by adopting creative methodologies have gained momentum (Ait-Touati et al., 2022; Bertschi et al., 2023; Burroughs et al., 2016). These appeals encourage researchers to move beyond dominant frameworks based on abstract, Cartesian perspectives and a distant gaze, which reinforce heroic narratives and overlook local, embodied, and untold life stories. Nitin Bathla's edited volume *Researching Otherwise: Pluriversal Methodologies for Landscape and Urban Studies* emerges in this context as a timely contribution. Bringing together various articles, each offering an experimental methodology, together challenging established research epistemologies, it aims to equip researchers with tools to “enhance their sensoriums, allowing for a focus on marginal and more-than-human worlds” (p. 262). It also provides rich material for pedagogical engagement, as we have experienced ourselves in guiding architecture students to explore underseen spatialities. In the aftermath, we are prompted to ask whether working with these alternative methodologies has shifted not only how we research and design but also why and for whom.

Bathla is a postdoctoral researcher in the Department of Geography at the University of Zurich (UZH) and a lecturer in the Department of Architecture at ETH Zurich. He works across the disciplines of urban studies, ecology, geography, and sociology. In this volume, he brings together 9 contributions from 11 authors. In the introduction, Bathla offers a tour d’horizon of interdisciplinary writings and movements on ways of knowing within a historical context, thereby affirming the political dimension of epistemologies and methodologies. He consistently uses three main axes to structure the book – transdisciplinary, sensory, and restitutive methods – with each axis gathering three chapters.

The first section focuses on “Transdisciplinary Methods”. In the first chapter, the authors Luke Harris, Cara Turett, and Bonnie Kate Walker trace their collective investigation along the Dakota Access Pipeline, focusing on how field drawings can effectively narrate the interdependencies of a site. Using the section as a binding element to convey multiple scales simultaneously, they aim to make drawings operative beyond mere representation. Andreea-Florentina Midvighi's chapters follows, by documenting her collaboration with Palestinian double refugees from the Yarmouk refugee camp in Syria. She shows that, through visual ethnography, refugees not only can be recognized as knowledge producers but also can construct a counter-archive that bears witness to their perspective. Finally, the third chapter by Metaxia Markaki explores communities in peripheral landscapes of Arcadia in Greece through transdisciplinary performance, giving voice

and body to narratives that often remain unheard in territorial research.

The second section zooms on “Sensory Methods”. First, Ludwig Berge’s chapter summarizes the author’s experience in various teaching and research formats, where sound as a non-verbal form of representation offers an alternative understanding of space, mapping ‘underseen’ and multiple entanglements of the environment. Nancy Couling’s chapter then guides us through various artistic and scientific methods to grasp the space of the sea beyond its surface. Through forms of bodily immersion, a mode of counter-mapping emerges, shifting understanding toward the ocean’s urgent multispecies condition. Finally, Klearjos Eduardo Papanicolaou’s contribution makes us see, through a historical and theoretical contextualization of place in cinema and the positionality of the camera person, how audiovisual ethnography can not only grasp the complexities of our surroundings but also construct a form of knowledge that emerges through relations.

The third and last section of the book develops on “Restitutive Methods”. It begins with Ludo Groen’s advocacy for the use of public mapping and data sources for truth finding where historical records fall short. Combining visual functions of search engines, satellite imagery, website information, cadastral records, and more, this contribution outlines a systematic approach to investigating spatial evidence. In the following chapter, Denise Bertschi seeks an aesthetic to narrate the disruption caused in specific places by global economies. Her contribution unearths the spatiality of injustice through short, fixed-camera films of six buildings involved in the gold trade, attempting to shift ethnographic filmmaking away from the exploitation of people. The section ends with Johanna Just’s contribution that invites readers to challenge anthropocentric perspectives by immersing themselves in the methods of other disciplines. Hence the documented ethnographic walking practice during fieldwork in the Upper Rhine was guided by experts in multispecies studies and animal geographies and explores the possibility of attunement to more-than-human relations.

In the concise afterword, Bathla underlines that all the methods shared in the nine chapters are not fixed models but approaches that need to be positioned and grounded in material lifeworlds. He stresses that “Rather than take them as a given, readers are correspondingly encouraged to experiment with the methods presented here and to revise and adapt them to their research interests” (p. 262). Furthermore, he underscores the importance of grounding any methodology through working with communities, rather than merely researching about them.

The afterword’s invitation lies at the heart of our engagement with *Researching Otherwise* as educators. As coordinators of the design (un)studio at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne (EPFL) during the autumn 2024 semester, we organized a book launch for *Researching Otherwise*. Offered to bachelor’s and master’s architecture stu-

dents, the (un)studio questioned the pedagogy of our own practice by embodying alternative ways of learning and projecting and by exploring collective modes of knowledge production through working with the book. As an example, and drawing on students’ engagement with the book, we can claim with Markaki (p. 100, see also above) that “eventually, performance transpires as and transcends to a form of knowing and understanding the world, able to challenge the prevalent epistemic violence in academia and to counter power structures adjacent to knowledge production”. The activation of the body according to Markaki’s assertion that “performance approaches to knowing insist on immediacy and involvement” (p. 101) hence enabled a research framework that goes beyond mere observation but actively forms emotional bonds and inhibition of the participant’s reality by bodily engagement. The book’s most significant contribution from a teaching perspective lies therefore in its openness: *Researching Otherwise* does not keep methodologies hidden in a black box but invites readers to engage, experiment, and create with them.

This volume is particularly relevant for scholars engaged in multimedia-based practices such as urban planning, urban design, and landscape architecture, as it offers ways to conduct and archive research through non-textual methods. Hyperlinks to supplementary media – including videos, sound recordings, and other digital materials – are embedded throughout the contributions, expanding the scope of scholarly engagement. Through these features, the volume addresses questions of accessibility, openness, and navigation, while making space for other forms of knowledge production. Furthermore, this volume brings together 9 contributions by 11 authors, most of whom are doctoral or postdoctoral researchers affiliated with Swiss universities. Thus, the edited collection departs from the conventional focus on established academic figures, instead offering early-career scholars the opportunity to publish ongoing research. As such, it serves not only as a valuable resource for researchers, particularly those at the beginning of their careers who are in the process of developing their methodological approaches. It also speaks to an intended audience that includes “practitioners from future oriented professions, such as planning, architecture, and urban and landscape design, who not only seek to unmask and unearth systems of power and domination but also dream possible other worlds” (Bathla, 2023:262).

However, the book faces a structural tension: both its intended audience and authors have largely been trained at institutions that were built upon and continue to conceal imperialist metrics, as illustrated by the 2024 cancellation of the “Palestine and the International” lecture at ETH Zurich (Lambert, 2024). Of its 11 authors, 9 are affiliated with ETH Zurich (as of the date of publication). A broader exploration, on the one hand, cross-institutional and extending beyond academia, and on the other, grounded in a clearer articulation of positionality, might have better supported its pluriversal

purpose. For instance, reflections on contributors' relationships to their institutional and practical contexts – such as Bathla's own work in ethnographic filmmaking – could have provided deeper insight into entanglements, helping readers situate methodologies in relation to lived experience and disciplinary boundaries.

Returning to our question – why do research and for whom – we affirm that the book, as intended, enabled us to engage with human and non-human actors by carefully documenting methodological approaches that evolved into a transdisciplinary practice of working with rather than on. Thus, we are convinced that the volume opens a space for transdisciplinary, sensory, and restitutive methodologies, whether in pedagogy, research, or practice, and invites further experimentation in how to make research and projects more accountable, both within academia and beyond.

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