

2025 Series
MSc Building and Urban Design in Development

URBAN DESIGN OTHERWISE

In-out[side]: Rethinking Urban
Networks for Transformative
Actions in Pelican House



Credits

UDO Pamphlet: Curated by Milagros Vidal

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The UDO is a core element of the MSc Building and Urban Design in Development (BUDD), embodying the intersectional nature of our urban design approach and a critical engagement with gender, race, and class. It embraces open creativity, subjectivity, and radical criticality, grounded in creative feminist spatial practices.

UDO is about the people we work with—students, without whom none of this would be possible. They are not just participants but partners in crime, interlocutors, and co-creators of pedagogy.

We would like to thank all the students who, not only in this year, but also in the past 5 years have contributed to the make and remake of the otherwise as an open space for learning and discussing.

The alumni, too, act as crucial connectors, as mirror-cells, through which we continue to learn and remake the world. A huge thank you to David McEwan of Unit 38 and the Pelican House Collective who has made this year's UDO possible.

And, of course, the BUDD staff, who sustain and shape this collective effort. Year 2025: In-out[side]: Rethinking urban networks for transformative actions in Pelican House (led by Mahsa Alami Fariman and Laia García Fernández)

Year 2024: Crisis, design and criticality: thinking frictions and ecologies of climate crisis (curated by Camilo Boano), Urban Design rethought: urgency, methodology and diffractions (curated by Camilo Boano), Walking Tour | Migrant Geographies: Radical Urban Imaginaries (led by Laia García Fernández)

Year 2023: Towards Anticolonial Design: urgency, methodology and diffractions (curated by Camilo Boano), Crisis, Design and Criticality: Thinking frictions and ecologies of climate emergency (curated by Camilo Boano)

Year 2022: Towards Anticolonial Design: A methodological approach to activist practice (curated by Catalina Ortiz), Re-earthing Urban Design: Radical theories and practices (curated by Laia García Fernández and Natalia Villamizar Duarte), Diasporic Designs: Voices from the South(s) (curated by Laia García Fernández and Jhono Bennett)

Year 2021: Housing Justice (curated by Giorgio Talocci), Displacement Urbanism (curated by Giovanna Astolfo and Camillo Boano), and Critical Engagement (curated by Catalina Ortiz).

Alumni featured in 2021-2025 Series: David McEwan, Amani Alshaban, Natalia Child, Nathalia Mosquera, Salma Nassar, Nada Elfeituri, Alejandro Torero Gamero, Martina Mina, Akil Scafe-Smith, Silvia Chi Cervera, Lucy Warin, Witee Wisuthumporn, Joana Dabaj, Belen Desmaison, Marina Kolovou-Kouri, Cristián Robertson, Laura Michener, Melissa García.

In-Out[side] Reflection on the Urban Design Otherwise theme

Mahsa Alami Fariman

Inside and outside. Outside and inside. Inescapably dependant. It is only through their intertwined relationship that we can understand the dynamics between them, the differing trajectories of experiences, exchanges, and influences, of multiplicities, contingencies, and intersections. From Plato's *Timaeus* (c. 360 BC) to Martinelli (2022), this dependency and relationship between inside and outside is defined not only by their separation but also by their ambiguity and in-betweenness; a loose fit between public and private, between old and new, between inside and outside. In a building, the façade is the physical expression of in-betweenness as a connective threshold that unites the human scale of everyday experience and activity, the architectural scale of the building and its enclosed spaces, and the urban scale of the street and the city. It is a thick threshold that not only defines both exterior and interior, but also opens up the possibility of existing in-between (Teyssot 2013, pp. 87–88): of going inside, stepping outside, walking through, pausing, and inhabiting the space between. In this in-betweenness lies a fertile spatial ambiguity. Merleau-Ponty (1964) developed a theory of the phenomenon of reversibility, in which a symmetrical relationship exists between inside and outside, where each term is not only implied within the other, but may also transform into the other through their mutually spatial, transformative, and theatrical function (Coe, 2024, p. 198). This phenomenon is stretched further by Falahat (2014) who looks at the doctrine of Sufism and the ambiguity and complexity of the in-betweenness within certain urban or architectural spaces of the Iranian-Islamic cities. Referring to the concepts of *Too-dar-Too* or *Hezar-Too* ("a thousand within"), she describes how entering the roofed, introverted spaces of the bazaar reveals a continuous unfolding of nested spaces, of within inside within. The sub-spaces (vaulted segments) along the main route are themselves further within, constantly emerging within, outside of, and between each other, leading to diverse individual pathways. The construction of the inside and outside represents the primordial action of enclosing and inhabiting interior space.

At one level, the separation between inside and outside aligns precisely with the Cartesian view of the world where inside and outside have been strictly demarcated, measured, divided and shaped so one can say how many people can occupy a piece of land, a building, a room, meaning. In design practices, this separation is achieved by drawing lines that bind form and function to space in a symbiotic relationship. As Gerrit Rietveld stated, "we separate, limit and bring into human scale a part of unlimited space." Technical scales and the rule of measurement in architectural plans, sections, elevations, as well as in urban master plans or zoning and spatial strategies (typically 1:100 for architectural drawings and 1:10,000 for urban planning), impose a dominant criterion. This criterion reinforces the separation of spaces into inside and outside, private and public, open and closed, positive and negative, built and unbuilt. This is indeed the disciplinary foundation of modern planning and design, and thus the basis of its hegemonic orthodoxy: the Western tradition of a "one-model-fits-all" approach (Amin and Lancione, 2009, p. 1). It functions as a strategic device that employs conventional representations of form and a formal expression of order, establishing a universal language for core design practices. These design practices systematically cleansed all contingent and transitory qualities between and across different spaces through a spatiality defined by rationalised, bureaucratised, technocratic, and capitalist logics (Till, 2009). This prevailing attitude in dominant design approaches reduces the political and social content of space (Bauman, 1993, p. 145), commodifies its aesthetic and technical dimensions—as described in David Harvey's concept of the absolute conception of space—and employs control mechanisms to appropriate the efficiencies and visibilities of space (Till, 2009, p. 123).



Photo credit: Alexander Macfarlane

At another level, decolonial, critical, feminist, and Southern approaches to architecture and urban design seek, in Simone's words, a practice that resists the intentional production of isolated and polarised space. This design practice repositions the relationship between inside and outside in alternative ways. It engages with multiple scales and opens up possibilities for rupturing dominant ideologies, including the tradition of the "one-model-fits-all" and colonial discourses on marginality—us (inside) and them (outside). At this level, design practice becomes collective, active, embedded, reflexive, relational, and transdisciplinary (Astolfo et al., 2015, p. 43). This is where we position our Urban Design Otherwise (UDO) practice for this year. UDO 25 is a process that examines resistance and transformation. It is a question that asks how to refuse. It is an action that encourages inclusive spatial agency. It is a form of curiosity that recognises positionality. As bell hooks (1989, p. 22) reminds us, "understanding marginality as position and place of resistance is crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonised people." In so doing, we focus on the extreme polarisation and discriminatory (re) production of space or spaces, particularly the binary of inside and outside. Our aim is to recognise marginalised and local contingencies, challenge the isolation and rigid demarcation of space, and engage in continuous dialogue with the conflictual nature and dynamism of inside and outside. We seek to instigate a re-interpretation of spatial production, understood "not as an objective provision but as a strategic arena for accommodating the convergence of policy, aspirations, struggles, and visions for the future" (Hunter et al., 2013, p. 50). *We call it in-out[side] because we are attentive to people, things and matters that constantly weave in and out of different spaces, territories and scales; those that stretch, blur and permeate the lines between inside and outside.*

The aim of the UDO 25 is to explore the possibilities when the inside and outside become a thing in the making: *an in-out[side]*, so that it responds to activities that 'cannot easily be channelled into clearly defined uses of space' (Simone, 2010: p. 3, Leitner, H. et al, 2020, p. 242). It renders the invisible, visible by reflecting on the diverse, ever-changing, and path-breaking practices of human and non-human agents within, through, in-between and outside of an enclosed space. It explores inside and outside not as two clearly defined entities but through their shifting and uncertain possibilities, their intersections and multiplicities, their relations and connections, and their shifts and experimental impulses that ultimately open multiple trajectories for individuals and groups, things and materials. The in-out[side] is our anew, inextricable and otherwised imagination of the inside and outside, of their multiplicity, density and intensity that are not measurable or observable with planned field approaches, but are evident through the day-to-day manoeuvring of translocal spatial arrangements among them.

Resources

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