From Anthropologies of Technique to Design Anthropology

WiSe 2018-19 – BA in Europäische Ethnologie I 4 ECTS
Wednesdays, 12-14 - Room 211, IfEE

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Summary of the course

Design features amongst the most important set of practices shaping our contemporary worlds: our work, private, and public settings are, in fact, designed through and through. Because of this, design has recently acquired great importance in anthropology. In fact, a newly developed field called Design Anthropology has become an interesting crossroads of different people trying to address design as (1) a topic of scholarly interest, (2) a source of methodological inspiration, and (3) an object of intervention. Since the 1980s, several scholars have in fact analysed different aspects of design ethnographically: for instance, its creative spaces and operations, the imagined and inscribed users of different design objects, together with their more or less creative or disputed uses and appropriations. Also, many ethnographers have tried to analyse artefacts and their mediating role in work, cognitive and everyday life practices; or have sought to understand the particular modes of exchange. Besides, the methods of design—from user studies to forms of collaborative and participatory design—are scrutinised and sometimes imported into the discipline, searching to have an impact on the particular modes in which ethnography and anthropological research at large are carried out (as a means for social intervention, be it for the creation of public debate or collaborative forms of research). This course approaches these series of works around design seeking to ground them in the wider intellectual concerns of different anthropological traditions studying technique, artefacts and technology. In order to understand the core debates these series of interconnected works bring to the fore, on a weekly basis, students will have to read and comment readings and re-enact some of these debates. In doing this, students will develop an insightful analytical gaze to understand manifold dimensions of our lives together with designed artefacts.

Methodology and requirements to pass the course

a) Weekly work: The course is structured in two main parts, with different requirements.

1. Anthropologies of Technique (sessions from 24.10 to 23.1) will be focused on reading, selecting quotations and commenting in class
reference texts in the discipline. In each session, the lecturer will provide a 20’ introductory lecture to frame the debates.

2. Design Anthropology (sessions from 31.1 to 13.2) will be based on group work, with each group having to select one of the readings (without overlaps) and prepare a presentation of around 10’, as well as read another one and send a quotation and comments for another group to engage with them in 5’. After all presentations, we will have a general discussion on the different modes of performing design anthropology afforded by the readings. Each student would then have to submit a sketch or drawing as a summary of the debate. For each session, the lecturer will provide assistance in the preparation of the presentation, the framing of the debates and how to visually summarize the debates.

All materials should be uploaded to the Moodle a day in advance of the class.

b) Book summary: Besides these weekly work requirements, all students should be preparing a summary of a reading of the Semesterapparat: students should pick and read one of the suggested monographs of the Semesterapparat in order to write a summary of its main argument and ideas in no more than 3 pages.

The summary should be submitted by February 15th 2019.

Organization of the course

17.10 | Presentation of the course, its structure and methodology

ANTHROPOLOGIES OF TECHNIQUE

Methodology: Each class of the Anthropologies of Technique sections will have a 20-30 minute introduction framing the main topics, followed by a discussion in class structured around a detailed reading of the obligatory texts.

Required weekly work: Students should (i) read the texts for each class, (ii) select one quotation, and (iii) share it through Moodle a day in advance, together a comment of one paragraph on doubts or ideas to be shared with the class.

24.10 | Introductory session: From Anthropologies of Technique to Design Anthropology

Semesterapparat

a. A ‘non-modern’ reading of a very ‘modern’ topic
   i. Techniques beyond instrumentalism
   ii. Materials beyond materialism
   iii. Design as a trope of ‘the contemporary’
b. Towards an anthropology experimentally and collaboratively engaged with/in worldings

_Obligatory reading:_

_Non-obligatory further reading:_

I. Efficacy expanded

_Semesterapparat_


31.10 | Traditional efficient acts


7.11 | Operational sequences


Non-obligatory further reading:
14.11 Arbitrariness


21.11 Enchantments


28.11 A critique of the standard view of technology


II. Beyond hylemorphism: From intentional agents and instrumental artifacts to the complex making of socio-material ecologies

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5.12 Cyborgs


12.12 Mediation


19.12 Scripts


9.1 | Ordering


16.1 | Ecology of materials


23.1 | Infrastructures


**DESIGN ANTHROPOLOGY (IN THE VICINITY OF STS)**

**Methodology:** The texts for this section should be prepared by and presented in groups, searching to summarize their main ideas for the rest of the class.

The main purpose of these sessions—where time will be very strictly managed—is that we could have an interesting debate on what design anthropology could be, attending to the different accounts proposed by the texts: an anthropology of, for, or through design?

**Required weekly work:**

(a) Students should distribute each session’s readings in groups (the main idea would be that all texts are read);
(b) With the help of the lecturer, each group should then read and prepare a 10’ presentation of one of the texts;
(c) Each group should also read another text and then send a quotation and a comment/question for another group to engage with it in the next 5’;
(d) After all presentations end, a 30’ discussion on ‘what design anthropology is according to these texts’ will ensue;
(e) Whilst in class, students must attempt to **visually summarize the situation, and the main debates** (following the experiments discussed by Mauksh, 2018a, 2018b, see below);

(f) After each session, all students will be asked to **individually submit a visual summary of the discussion** through the Moodle.

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Semesterapparat


Non-obligatory further reading


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**Debates on an Anthropology of, for, or through Design?**

31.1 | Anthropology of Design?


6.2 | Anthropology for Design?


13.2 | Anthropology through Design?


