Haverford College
Fall Semester 2017

ANTH 217A: METHODS IN DESIGN ANTHROPOLOGY

CLASS MEETING TIMES
TTH 2:30-4:00
Roberts 7

INSTRUCTOR
Jacob Culbertson
Email: jculbertso@haverford.edu
Office Hours: M 2:30-4:30
Office: Roberts 104

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The purpose of this course is to learn and further develop a methodology for ethnographic research on design practices. Design Anthropology is a rapidly-growing field, bridging academic and commercial interests in the diverse ways in which people make, circulate, and consume products. “Ethnography”—the methodological hallmark of cultural anthropology—is a major “buzzword” in corporate product-design and engineering firms, as their commercial interests demand a complex and rigorous understanding of “the user.” On the other hand, short-term, profit-oriented research methods may also be inimical to some of the characteristics that make ethnography unique as a methodology: a critical refusal of ethnocentric categories and preconceptions, an intimacy and ethical responsibility towards those with whom we learn and write, and a willingness for philosophical experimentation, among others.

This course takes the tense overlap between academic and “applied” practices of Design Anthropology as an opportunity to think about that burgeoning field from the outside. That is, rather than reading literature that is labeled “Design Anthropology,” this syllabus contains a broad range of texts drawn from Anthropology, Design, and the eclectic social science discipline called Science and Technology Studies (STS). In that vein, the course will also serve as
an introduction to some fundamental concerns and methods within STS and that field’s interest in design and engineering.

The majority of the graded work in this course will support a larger, semester-long research project into a design practice of your choosing. The projects will be loosely-inspired by a prominent STS method called “Mapping Controversies in Science and Technology.” “Controversy” in this context does not necessarily refer to fights and scandals, but rather to points of confusion and disagreement in the messy, inherently-social work of producing authoritative knowledge and other artefacts. The method of “Mapping Controversies” stems originally from ethnographic studies of science laboratories but has since been adapted to other creative settings and expert practices. My own expertise and research experience is in design studios and artists’ workshops and I continue to playfully adapt this method to my own purposes. You will be expected to do the same over the course of this class. The readings are generally concerned with artistic and technological objects and the practices of making, circulating, and curating them. But you will have a lot of leeway in devising a project that suits your own interests.

We will begin discussing final projects on the first day of class and soon thereafter you will need to choose a lab/studio/workshop/maker-space in which you will conduct ethnographic research. The course is roughly divided into two halves. Up until Fall Break we will approach design as a particular, historically-situated practice of knowing and creating. After the break we will approach design through the many diverse objects that designers make. Throughout the semester we will have regular “workshops” dedicated to assembling and refining your ethnographies of design, which will comprise your final project.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**
The majority of the graded work in this course comprises a semester-long research project into an object or process of design. There are two objectives for this project: 1) to “implode” your object, to show it as a dynamic network and 2) to apply the analytical concepts from the course readings and possibly coin your own ethnographic design concepts. You may choose to do participant-observation research with “makers” or you may do archival research on an object, a designer, a movement, etc. We will discuss research methods frequently in class and will be in constant conversation about your own progress. Regular assignments are intended to build up your project gradually, through various media and perspectives. It is important (and required) that your final project 1) be explicitly conceived in conversation with the course readings and 2) include the various modeling assignments that will help your project grow in a “design-thinking” way. As you will discover, this methodology demands getting beyond the surface of things, to discover unusual connections, practices, histories, desires, and so on. It also privileges a concern with the aesthetics of analytical storytelling, and presentations in multiple media (don’t worry, you’re expected to be adventurous and creative, but not necessarily artistic or skillful). This project will require your initiative, curiosity, and time. You should choose something fun.

**STRUCTURE OF THE COURSE**
Our course will follow a seminar format, and we will alternate between working through particular theoretical and/or ethnographic texts, on the one hand, and discussing your own research projects on the other. Tuesdays will be dedicated to seminar discussions of weekly
readings. Most Thursdays we will engage in a hands-on workshop on ethnographic methods. In addition, a diverse set of assignments will be due in class the following Tuesday, with the expectation that we will share and discuss them as a group.

**LEADERS OF DISCUSSIONS**
Each week a different student will lead the discussion. You should bring a short list of discussion questions (3-5), with copies for each student, and be prepared to introduce the readings and your questions for 10 minutes or so. Your questions might identity themes or passages that require more discussion or clarification, or they may connect texts to other readings. You will find more specific instructions in the document called “Guide for Leading Discussions” on Moodle. Finally, you should also bring in a “found” or made object/design/recording that relates to the readings in some way, or is part of their final project. This will be part of the discussion and the presentation.

**PARTICIPATION**
100% attendance and full participation in lectures and workshops is mandatory. If you know in advance that you have to miss a lecture or workshop, you must contact the instructor ahead of time. Missed days will require you to submit a 2-page double-spaced written response to the readings.

**GRADING**
Seminar and Workshop Participation................................................................. 30%
6 Ethnographic Fieldwork Assignments (5pts/ea)............................................. 30%
Final Presentation.................................................................................................. 10%
Final Project............................................................................................................ 30%
Because the workshops aim to generate insights collectively, building the discussion on students’ weekly assignments, it is imperative that you to complete your assignments on time. Late assignments will be penalized. For an assignment handed in one day late, you lose one grade; two days late you lose two grades, etc.

**DISABILITIES**
Students who need disability-related accommodations should speak with me as soon as possible. Students should also contact the Office of Access and Disabilities Services (ADS, hc-ads@haverford.edu) to verify their eligibility for accommodations

**E-MAILS**
I am happy to respond to emails, especially for simple matters of clarification. For more substantive matters (including grades and missed lectures), it’s better to talk in person. I am happy to set up appointment outside of my office hours if necessary. In any case, please do not expect a response within 48 hours (or more if I am travelling).
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<td>Introductions</td>
<td>Seminar: What is ethnography? What is design?</td>
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<td>Seminar: Methods</td>
<td>Workshop: Collaboratively design our final project assignment</td>
<td>Identify 3 possible object or sites for your research project. Write one paragraph on each: why is it compelling? How will you go about it?</td>
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<td>Seminar: Thing Politics</td>
<td>Workshop: Choose three objects, one from each category: natural, cultural, ambiguous. Bring them to class.</td>
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<td>Workshop: Process mapping</td>
<td>Draw a macroscopic network of your project</td>
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COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK 1

**Tuesday Sept 5**
- Review syllabus
- What is ethnographic fieldwork? What is design? Discuss final projects.

**Thursday Sept 7**

WEEK 2

**Tuesday Sept 12**

**Thursday Sept 14**
- **Workshop:** Collaboratively design our final project assignment.
- **Assignment:** Identify 3 possible object or sites for your research project. Write one paragraph on each: why is it compelling? How will you go about it?

WEEK 3

**Tuesday Sept 19**
Thursday Sept 21

- **Workshop:** Choose three objects, one from each category: natural, cultural, ambiguous. Bring them to class. Implode them.

**WEEK 4**

Tuesday Sept 26


Thursday Sept 28

- **Workshop:** Workshop research proposals
- **Assignment:** Completed research proposal

**WEEK 5**

Tuesday Oct 3

- Bruno Latour. “Give me a Laboratory and I will Raise a world” in Science Observed (1983), K. Knorr and M. Mulkay, eds., pp. 141-170

Thursday Oct 5

- **Workshop:** Network and process mapping
- **Assignment:** Draw a macroscopic network of your project

**WEEK 6**

Tuesday Oct 10


Thursday Oct 12

- **Workshop:** teach each other to tie knots
WEEK 7
Tuesday Oct 17 and Thursday Oct 19 FALL BREAK NO CLASS

WEEK 8
Tuesday Oct 24

- David Owen. “Game of Thrones: How airlines woo the one per cent” in The New Yorker, April 21, 2014

Thursday Oct 26

- **Workshop:** Finding and inverting the missing masses
- **Assignment:** Diagram the inversion

WEEK 9
Tuesday Oct 31


Thursday Nov 2

- **Workshop:** Invent a trap that models user behavior
- **Assignment:** Trap plans

WEEK 10
Tuesday Nov 7

- Alison B. Hirsch. “Scoring the Participatory City: Lawrence (& Anna) Halprin’s Take Part Process” in *Journal of Architectural Education*, 64(2): 127–140

Thursday Nov 9
• Workshop: Nick D’Avella

WEEK 11
Tuesday Nov 14
• Maria Puig de la Bellacasa. “Ethical doings in naturecultures” in Ethics, Place & Environment (13)2: 151-169
• New Alchemy Institute. Bioshelter Guidebook.

Thursday Nov 16
• “Methodologies: How to Read a Landscape” at https://discardstudies.com/2013/06/17/methodologies-how-to-read-a-landscape/
• Workshop: Reading Landscapes with Rafter Sass Ferguson
• Assignment: Make a score for your site

WEEK 12
Tuesday Nov 21
• Elizabeth Povinelli. “Downloading the Dreaming? All of it extinguished but none of it dead?” Keynote for EASA 2014 Conference (YouTube)

Thursday Nov 23 THANKSGIVING
WEEK 13

Tuesday Nov 28


Thursday Nov 30

- TBA [American Anthropological Association Conference]

WEEK 14

Tuesday Dec 5


Thursday Dec 7

- Workshop: Imagining cyborgs with Mariel Garcia Llorens

WEEK 15

Tuesday Dec 12

- Final presentations

Thursday Dec 14 LAST CLASS

- Final presentations

FINAL PROJECT due Dec 22 at 12:00 noon, by email to jculbertso@haverford.edu