Industrial Design, Ethnography and Anthropological Thought

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We bear in mind that the object being worked on is going to be ridden in, sat upon, looked at, talked into, activated, operated, or in some other way used by people individually or en masse.

When the point of contact between the product and the people becomes a point of friction, then the industrial designer has failed. On the other hand if people are made safer, more comfortable, more eager to purchase, more efficient – or just plain happier – by contact with the product, then the designer has succeeded.

We all know that a machine-made commodity can be awkward or handy, ugly or beautiful. Industrial design is a means of making sure the machine creates attractive commodities that work better because they are designed to work better. It is coincidental, but equally important, that they sell better. (Dreyfuss 1955)

ABSTRACT: The definition of ‘applied anthropology’ varies from period to period and from culture to culture. However, anthropology’s centrality is, in my eyes, unquestionable. With that in mind, a significant part of the discipline’s basic principles remained unchanged, despite recent socio-cultural, economic and technological changes sweeping the world in recent years. In this article I wish to present two case studies in which the inherent connection between anthropology, as a discipline, and other professions, is challenged. Through teaching anthropological theories and methodologies to industrial designers and architects I will present a somewhat different approach from those practiced by anthropologists. As a result I will redefine the role of the applied anthropologist as an essential member of the design team.

KEYWORDS: applied anthropology, ethnography, industrial design, design anthropology

Anthropologist, Designer or Architect?

During one of the many debates which took place during a research session focusing on the definition of ‘applied anthropology’ and anthropology’s role in contemporary society, I found myself offended. The heated debate was based on two opposing groups. In one corner stood the ‘classic’ anthropologists, teaching in various departments in universities throughout Israel, or those who define themselves as anthropologists as a central part of their professional identity. In the other corner stood those of ‘adjacent’ disciplines (architects, filmmakers, designers and culture administrators or policy makers). During this debate I found myself a key speaker among ‘the others’ group, while contradicting and criticizing my beloved discipline, upon which I was raised from the first days of my academic career.

This duality, in my eyes, is not solely my burden, but rather derives from an inherent disciplinary duality: firstly, anthropology, as a professional body of knowledge, deals with an almost infinite amount of socio-cultural knowledge, and as such, suggests fascinating
explanations relevant also to practical professions, such as architecture or industrial design. Secondly, due to this abundance of theories, methodologies and areas of interest, characterizing the discipline, guidelines to prevent ‘crossing borders’ and falling to unprofessionalism, should be outlined. This said duality characterized my difficulties to find wiling and cooperating mentors in my PhD thesis, combining anthropology and industrial design.

In the last few years I have been teaching several courses in departments of industrial design (at Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design and Hadassah Academic College) and architecture (BA and MA at Bezalel). Unfortunately, I have found out it is not easy being an anthropologist in a department of architecture or industrial design. The gap manifested in the academic context, subject matter, research methodologies, goals and primary teaching methods, is considerable. However, setting aside the aforementioned constraints and difficulties, these worldview differences can lead to fascinating dialogues and collaborations with designers and industrial designers alike. For example, a course taught dually by two professors, one focusing on theoretical dimensions (an anthropologist, psychologist or sociologist), and the second focusing on practical dimensions (an engineer, designer or architect), amounts to a unique and profound experience, to students and staff members alike.

For six years I have been teaching different courses in anthropology in universities and colleges alike, and yet, teaching industrial designers was by far the most challenging. For example, it took me a fair amount of time to assimilate that industrial designers think visually, in contrast to ‘classic’ anthropology students who think textually; this led me to change my teaching techniques, and my choice of subjects and examples. Furthermore, as a teacher, it took me a while to renounce the somewhat mythological structure of the course ‘introduction to anthropology’, and try to develop a worthy successor. In the last couple of years, after weighing possible alternatives, I have decided to walk a different and somewhat unorthodox path towards teaching anthropology.

This article is a result of my PhD dissertation, which was based on a study focusing on the social roles of industrial designers. My thesis is based on in-depth ethnography which took approximately eighteen months. During my ethnographic work I have been spending a day every week for the said duration, in an alternate order between three different industrial design studios. Furthermore, for the last two years I have been working in various vistas as an applied anthropologist alongside industrial designers.

In this article I will present the essence of theoretical and practical dialogue between anthropology, design and architecture, a dialogue which will also serve to define contemporary applied anthropology. I will begin by presenting two pedagogic case studies, and proceed to present applied anthropology theories and practices in the field of industrial design.

Two Case Studies: Anthropology in the Service of Designers and Architects

Nacirema

The classic pedagogic method being used in the ‘introduction to anthropology’ course, the first and foremost course in our degree, usually follows a path of chronologically presenting primary theories and thinkers, alongside canonic texts of the forbearers of the discipline. In addition, through famous studies, the professor demonstrates key methodological principles, while demonstrating the anthropologist’s role in the contemporary academic universe. Furthermore, one of the keystones of the course lies in illuminating the gap between anthropology’s comprehensions of daily reality, in contrast to other academic disciplines. One of the most famous illustrations to this claim lies in the long-lasting insistence on opening the course with Miner’s (1956) classic
article on the Nacirema Tribe. In this article, Miner illustrates the Westerner’s difficulties in viewing himself from an anthropological perspective (as an act of defamiliarization). This text remains an inherent part of the anthropological canon, and the numerous articles written in the past fifty years relating to it can attest to its importance. However, in the few times when using this text to illustrate anthropology’s unique standpoint, unfortunately, my design students failed to view its brilliance. After Miner’s first example they ‘cracked’ his ‘secret’ meaning and lost interest in all the ensuing examples. Nevertheless, beyond this anecdote, the classic structure of the ‘introduction to anthropology’ course usually remains the same, and includes a presentation of basic theories and articles written by key thinkers (Durkheim, Boas, Evans-Pritchard, Malinowski, Turner, Goffman, Geertz, Gluckman, Levi-Strauss, Benedict, Douglas and more). But, despite this structure’s proven success among students of anthropology, it was pronounced to be a failure when taught in the department of industrial design. Students found it irrelevant, obsolete, tiresome, overly detailed, anecdotal and overly focused on remote communities. After changing the course’s syllabus to no avail, I decided to change the course’s structure and goals radically. In order to create a different atmosphere I turned to a once-popular alternative called ‘design ethnography’.

The term ‘design ethnography’ was coined in the 1990s (Salvador et al. 1999), yet almost vanished from academia and returned lately to the academic discourse alongside the growing interest in user-interfaces, and the user’s wants and needs (Bichard and Gheerawo 2010; Ventura 2011). In order better to understand the user’s world, designers use qualitative methodologies taken primarily from anthropological thought (Geertz 1973), mainly interviews and participant observations. This rich and deep qualitative data enables designers to base their pragmatic and technical decisions on the user’s true needs, and not blindly to follow middlemen or corporate evaluation teams (sales or marketing, for example). In my PhD research, as well as in my pedagogic work, I started to mesh up design ethnography with classic anthropological theories and methodologies in order to bridge the gap between design students and anthropology, as a discipline.

In the new version of the ‘introduction to anthropology’ course, targeted at second-year design students at Hadassah Academic College, I decided to teach anthropology from the end to the beginning. In other words, I decided to start by introducing qualitative methodology and then proceed to teaching anthropological theories and key thinkers. During the first lesson I presented the students with their ‘end of semester project’, which was to design a mass-produced object targeted at a specified socio-cultural group. While every student selected a different group, all of the students designed the same object (i.e. a chair in the first year and a table in the second year). As a key feature, the students had to explain their choice of materials, aesthetics and functions, as deriving directly from their chosen socio-cultural group. During the next lessons I started a chronological pendulum movement from classic and modern anthropological thought to practices of design methodologies, as well as reading texts of key anthropologists (Mauss, Douglass, Elias, Geertz to name a few), relevant theories (mainly material culture and visual anthropology) and adjacent thinkers (Marx, the Frankfurt School, Bourdieu, Foucault and more). The ensuing papers were illuminating.

The variety of papers presented by the students was astounding: a table for treating anorexia; for fishermen’s personal and professional gear; for various ultra-religious Hassidic groups; for professional tattoo artists; a table and eating utensils for Thai manual labourers; a table for street musicians; for soccer fans; a backgammon table for elderly residents of Jerusalem’s Central Market; a table for ADHD children and for anthroposophy-oriented kindergartens and many more.
During the second year of running the new course, the chosen product was a chair, and here as well, the results were extremely innovative: a first-date bench for ultra-orthodox Jews; a washing chair for dog hairdressers; a commemorative chair for the Armenian holocaust; an ergonomic chair for breastfeeding; a pneumatic ladder-chair for wedding photographers; for cubicle-situated bureaucrats and more. The result, for me, was astounding, although I was facing a strong sense of betraying my discipline. This sense of betrayal stems both from the way anthropology should be taught (as I was taught), as well as the ‘sacrilegious’ use of anthropology (a liberal and humanistic discipline, in my eyes) as an applied tool for designers or architects. However, from the students’ point of view, a deep, mediate and long-lasting bond was originated with the field of anthropology. Furthermore, the discipline’s basic principles and ways of thinking became, for them, a key feature in the industrial designer’s toolkit.

The lecturer’s work is not an easy one; it is a time-consuming, difficult task which demands the lecturer’s full attention, as well as an infinite number of innovative ideas and techniques. It is not my intention to reduce the difficulty level of the course, or to reduce the quantity or quality of the subject matter, far from it. A good industrial designer has to acquire basic knowledge in theoretical concepts, methodological practices, as well as verbal abilities and literacy methods. However, anthropology’s unique features of open-mindedness and flexibility should commence in the ways we teach. We have to stray, on occasion, from the path in which we were educated, in order to accommodate our subject-matter to our students.

*AnthroTect*

The second case study I will present depicts the pedagogical guidelines of a course I named ‘Anthropolis: from an anthrotect to an anthrotact’. The name of the course alludes to the focus of urban anthropology; however, the second part of the title hints at my intention to create an interdisciplinary approach, not only between anthropology and architecture, but also to spur architects to keep their socio-cultural tact. This is not only an exercise in semantics, but rather a fundamental pedagogical choice, since applied anthropology’s essence lies not only in applying qualitative research methods, but rather in promoting deep and meaningful changes in its practitioners’ awareness. And by that I mean, primarily, open-mindedness, multi-layered thinking, pluralism and an anthropos-oriented mind. And indeed, when presenting the course (taught at an Urban Design MA programme, and meant for experienced architects) I turned to address the architect’s work as seen through the eyes of the person walking in his designed urban spaces.

The goal of the course, in my eyes, was to focus on the ways ‘ordinary people’ experience urban designed spaces. Indeed, one of the critiques regarding the presentation of architecture lies in the way new buildings are depicted in most cases in a ‘clean’ (i.e. devoid of any human presence) environment, whereas only the building is present, in all its vacant glory. Hence, in this course I intended to resume the connection between the architect and his ‘consumers’, meaning people using his designed urban space. In order to do so, I chose to divide the course into three sections: the first part focuses on qualitative research methods; however, instead of dealing mainly with the ‘how to’, I chose to focus on the ‘why to’. By that I mean presenting qualitative research in its socio-cultural-ethical complexities as present in the architect-pedestrian relationship: why does the architect have to understand the pedestrian’s needs, how his needs are manifested via qualitative interviews or participant observations etc. The second part of the course focuses on theories, where my first intersection was between interpretive and political theories. In this part I chose not to separate
between classic anthropological theories and other disciplines. For example, interpretive theories started with Weber (and his ‘verstehen’) and Geertz, of course, yet, we found ourselves dealing in length with Barthes’ semiotics (for example, cultural interpretations of colours and materials architects use, Barthes [1957] 2012) or Bachelard’s ([1958] 1994) phenomenological-psychoanalytical approach. In the same way, when teaching political theories we started with Marx (1983; [1867] 1992) and Gramsci ([1972] 1992), the Frankfurt and Birmingham Schools, and De Certeau (1984). The third part of the course focuses on specific and current urban anthropological issues, such as urban pluralism, strife and conflict in the neighbourhood, reasons for leaving one’s apartment, gentrification and so on.

As a final assignment, the students were asked to choose an urban space, while focusing on a specific socio-cultural surrounding (areas of social, religious or political conflict; urban inequality, urban semiotics etc.). This assignment’s purpose was to gather data from urban ‘consumers’ and, following their input, to choose either to keep the current architectural outline, or change it accordingly. The assignment’s output was a written document including methodological, theoretical and practical (in the form of an architectural programme and sketches) elements.

Here are some examples: one of the students chose Bourdieu’s (1984) theory of aesthetic segregation, or ‘distinction’, in his words, following Elias’ (2000) description regarding the endless race for aesthetic separation between socio-economic classes. Her research focused on houses she designed in a new semi-rural community in the North of Israel. While people of ‘old money’ chose from several options the most modest alternative, recognized only by their choice of top-of-the-line materials, in contrast the more ‘nouveau riche’ residents chose extreme amounts of money to display their new acquired social status. Another assignment focused on the ways residents of luxury towers exclude pedestrians from using their street-level spaces. Yet another assignment focused on a central area in Jerusalem and designing ways by which it will become a focal point for different communities living in the area. The success of the course lies, in my eyes, in the assimilation of anthropological theories, ideas and practices by architects who took part in it. This example, as can be seen in Shaffer’s extensive pedagogical descriptions (2003, 2005), expresses the importance of openness and extensive creativity when teaching design professionals. This interdisciplinary approach needs to be based not only on methodologies, but also on the importance of various theories to the world of designers and architects alike.

**Beyond Design Ethnography**

We can see, then, a change of perception among design professionals is a must, yet how to define this interdisciplinary practice? During the 1990s researchers from different disciplines started recognizing the importance of the consumer’s preferences and behaviour in the design of new products, technologies and user-oriented graphic design (Beyer and Holtzblatt 1998; Holtzblatt et al. 2005). A few years later, contextual and user-oriented design was being used in the marketing world, as well as industrial innovation and design. However, only several years later, qualitative, rich, ‘from the native’s point of view’ data (contrary to focus groups or statistic data) was sought after by consumer-product corporations (Lu Liu 2010).

Design ethnography was developed as a research strategy at the end of the 1990s, and targets the gap between the consumer’s world and that of the manufacturer. Salvador et al. (1999) claim that, following the debates in the studio targeted at meeting the manufacturer’s demands, the designer is less and less oriented towards meeting the consumer’s demands.
in tandem. In order to bridge this gap, while creating a close and personal connection with their potential consumers, designers adopted the guidelines of classic ethnography (mainly, a short stay in the field while conducting concise interviews and product-oriented observations). Following these guidelines, the designer is transformed into a ‘part-time anthropologist’, gathering data while staying, briefly, in the field. After exiting the field, the designer processes his gathered data and implements it to plan and design his product better. In my eyes, this approach presents a fair number of problems, inasmuch as the designer functions as an anthropologist, yet gathers specific data in order to design a better product; this dual role may fall between the drops. However, a fully ‘credited’ anthropologist – one who remains in an academic anthropology department maintains a deep and longer connection with the field. Surprisingly, not many corporations have yet realized design ethnography’s potential in creating a better product.

According to Julier (2000), assimilating ethnography in the design process will result in innovative, useful and interesting results. Blomberg et al. (1993) follow the same route and claim, that ethnography’s unique keystones – holistic thinking, open-mindedness, adopting the ‘native’s point of view’, relying on the ‘natural’ products of the field etc. – will highly benefit the designer in better understanding the consumer’s needs. The main friction point may arise, according to said researchers, from the fact that while anthropologists delve deeply into the field, designers do so only as a brief and focused effort. Therefore, the designer has to change his perspective in adopting an anthropological viewpoint deriving from the way consumers experience reality. Blomberg et al. (1993: 125–130) describe several ethnographic features relevant for designers:

- **Natural Characteristics**: in the sense of the use of designed objects, and consumers’ interaction in their ‘natural’ surrounding.
- **Holistic Approach**: consumer’s behaviour must be appraised in their socio-cultural context, especially so when dealing with inclusive design.
- **Thick Description**: following Geertz’s (1973) recommendation, a rich description will benefit the designer in planning and designing a better product.

In other words, following basic anthropological concepts and methodologies will benefit the designer greatly. Yet, what does it actually mean to adopt these principles in the field of industrial design?

**Using Anthropology in the Field of Industrial Design**

First, I wish to explore the relevance and importance of anthropology to the world of industrial design in two dimensions comprising the field of applied anthropology: academic applied research and practicing anthropology (Erving 2000). To these I wish to add a third dimension, that of pedagogical practice targeted at anthropological courses taught at schools of design (graphic, as well as industrial) and architecture. Contrary to classical definitions, viewing applied anthropology as contributing mainly to corporations or government agencies, I will present an alternative, which is working alongside practical disciplines, such as industrial design or architecture.

As every cultural anthropologist knows, applied anthropology in its early stages suffered (justly) from a negative image. Some applied anthropologists worked in the service of European nations which used their socio-cultural skills in order to exploit local communities better (Mascia-Lees et al. 1989). However, Geertz’ seminal works changed the way anthropologists think and work, and yet there are still fields who cry for a cooperation with anthro-
Similarly to the classic anthropologist's basic qualities, applied anthropologists typically need a flexible mind; a capability to adapt to various socio-cultural and professional surroundings; highly acute social skills; the ability to assimilate new bodies of knowledge rapidly; innovation skills; mediation or negotiation skills; interpretation abilities; a vast theoretical and practical knowledge, and practical knowledge in their field of research. Our starting point lies in the applied anthropologist's capabilities to gather data and translate it to a relevant action of practice. The anthropologist's applicability and influence on the field can be appraised through several arenas:

- **Pedagogical courses** (MA and BA): As we have seen in the beginning of this article, different disciplines develop world-views rather different from those of the anthropologist, since, for example, the designer's goal is to translate theoretical knowledge into applicable methods and not only in culminating information. Therefore, when planning a classic anthropological course, the examples, as well as the goals should be altered and be practice-oriented. In this way, visual anthropology, for example, turns into applied semiotics dealing with socio-cultural differences articulated through material or colour selection. In this way, anthropological thought and methodologies serve to apply changes in the ways the designer thinks of his product. In a similar fashion, architects use anthropological teachings to better plan their urban spaces according to the needs of their ‘consumers’.

- **Theoretical and methodological training in design or architecture schools**: Shaffer (2003) presented an in-depth review of a combination of practical and theoretical pedagogical tools in an Oxford architecture studio. Indeed, training programmes of designers have to include in-depth courses of methodologies and ethnographic practices (qualitative research methods, research ethics, visual anthropology, visual and material analysis etc.) as well as courses in visual culture, advanced semiotics and phenomenology and more. Furthermore, I have been mentoring fourth-year design students in their final projects. It is extremely important, in my eyes, to offer mentors who are not strictly practitioners of design or architecture. Cultural researchers (anthropologists, sociologists or psychologists) mentoring design students will bring forth a whole new approach to their projects, which will enhance each department's innovation. Finally, courses taught by two lecturers, one specializing in theoretical knowledge (anthropologist, social historian, social psychologist), and the other in practical knowledge (designer or architect) will highly benefit the students and the department's outcome, following the Bauhaus School's footsteps.

- **An anthropologist in the studio**: As we have seen in this article, anthropological knowledge is crucial for the work of the designer, as well as that of the architect. Condensed workshops can be held in design or art schools, as well as in design studios or architectural firms. An even better solution would be to employ an ‘in-house’ applied anthropologist to offer ongoing guidance and advice.

- **Design-oriented research**: beyond developing a research department which will focus on practical visual disciplines (industrial design, graphic design and architecture), there is a need for research seminars targeted at design students (BA, MA or PhD) and at professionals of these fields. MA programmes in design should also present the option of writing a theoretical thesis in the fields of industrial or
graphic design. Our point of origin lies in one of the basic traits of anthropology, that of commitment and involvement in our socio-cultural communities (Van Wil-ligen 2002).

• **Changing the minds of industry leaders:** My intention is to create and promote research processes which will tighten the bond between researchers and industry leaders. The focus should be beyond ecological research targeted at friendlier materials or industrial processes, but also to understand the local communities better and their socio-cultural normative keystones. An academic–industrial interaction will benefit not only corporations, but also students who will develop their applied skills.

• **Social impact:** As one can see in these pages, I believe the designer has to take his place as a leading social agent. With that in mind, I do not mean the classic sociological term, but rather as a social axis influencing society through technology, industry and ethical consumption. Designers, as well as architects, can use their liminal ability as a mediator between the community and industrial corporations. In this way, the designer will influence ecological, ethical and manufacture dilemmas which will impact on entire communities. Furthermore the designer can and should strengthen the bond between academy and the community, especially as a discipline dealing directly with our daily lives.

In this last section I will deal at length with one topic which is the most urgent in my eyes – the role of the applied anthropologist as an essential member of the design process team (comprising mainly of designers, engineers and marketing professionals). With Geertz’s words above echoing in my ears, I wish to conclude with anthropology’s major strength, which is its flexibility and adaptability to other disciplines, while maintaining an outer perimeter allowing it to become an academic plexus. As Margolin (2007) mentioned, even if the designer’s influence is limited, he is not free of responsibility regarding the socio-technological world in which he works. In his sphere of professional and social influence, the designer has to harness industrial, technological, municipal and political forces for the good of the community. One of the ways to do so, in my eyes, can stem from applying a bit more of what can only be described as the ‘anthropological spirit’.

In a broad perspective we should strive to redefine the contemporary concept of ‘anthropology’, which suffers from an acute case of over-use (every person today watching a reality show is an anthropologist of a sort). This vast question, bigger than the scope of this article resonates in the title of Maurice Bloch’s (2005) article ‘Where did Anthropology Go?’, resulting, in his view, in a scattering of studies focusing on an endless array of subjects. The solution, therefore, lies in the cooperation of anthropologists with professionals from other disciplines in a process strengthening both. Another problem lies in the common knowledge that anthropologists are, simply put, ethnographers. Yet, as Ingold (2008) stresses correctly in his important paper, ‘anthropology is not ethnography’. Anthropology, as Boas, Mead or Geertz outlined it, is far more than its methodology. While ethnographers describe, (applied) anthropologist act. Following his words, I will outline what it means, in my opinion, to ‘use’ anthropology as a key feature in the professional work of industrial designers.

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**One of the Team: The Applied Anthropologist and the World of Industrial Design**

One of the advantages of anthropology as a scholarly enterprise is that no one, including its practitioners, quite knows exactly what it is. (Geertz 2000)
Researchers from various disciplines have been pondering the complex relationship between design, capitalism and taste. A common string of thoughts highlights the role of research and aesthetics during the design process as key elements for improving sales (Shore et al., 2007). However, in my eyes, the combination of anthropology of design and anthropology for design is much more important. Ethnographic research or the implementations of applied anthropology in the professional work of designers corresponds with the bare essentials of anthropology as a discipline, as Fulton Suri (2010) describes at length. Usually, when working as anthropologists in other professional vistas, outsiders tend to treat anthropology first and foremost as a complex tool of qualitative research methods. This, of course, is far from the truth. The role of the applied anthropologist in a team of designers should not suffice in providing qualitative research data or phrasing a research question or scientific rationale. The applied anthropologist would not provide a ‘fig-leaf’ for the capitalist agendas of the design profession. This being said, the applied anthropologist should (after constructing and leading a deep and meaningful qualitative research) be adamant in his role as an ambassador of his profession. In that I mean several roles:

1. User-oriented design: While industrial designers focus on the ideas and demands of consumers for the last decades (Hill 2004; Shore et al. 2007), the applied anthropologist offers a different perspective. While designers contemplate consumers’ needs as a tool for enhancing sales, the anthropologist’s view is rooted in a deeper understanding. The anthropologist’s scientific work should focus on ways to improve the consumer’s daily routine and immediate material surrounding. Various designers in our days choose to focus mainly on socially oriented projects (such as paramedical, community-oriented or other projects), rather than adding consumer products to an overly crowded market. In this context we should strive towards a more complex definition of the common trope, ‘the user’ (Wakeford 2003: 237).

2. Defining and maintaining a moral compass: The applied anthropologist’s academic sphere should function as a moral compass for the team of designers. By that I mean the anthropologist should serve to remind the designers of their commitment to preserve their clients’ dignity and basic prerogatives, as is written in the American Anthropological Association’s code of ethics. This implies of course the necessary knowledge of the applied anthropologist in the professional fields of materials, production methods, distribution and so on.

3. Working as a mediator: While designers themselves serve as mediators between clients and consumers (Ventura 2011), applied anthropologists should function as mediators between designers and consumers. By that I mean both in the macro-level (social surrounding) and the micro-level (the consumer’s social needs). For example, designers excel in taking into account ergonomic variations stemming from physical dimensions of consumers. However, the applied anthropologist should add to the equation various socio-cultural dimensions, such as shame, prudence, social pressure etc. This metaphor resonates, in my eyes, with Suchman’s (2011) work on innovation and technology. As technological beings, we tend to interpret innovation and technological advances as a wholly positive process. It is the anthropologist’s prerogative to stall this tendency and ask questions no one else would. Wakeford (2003) arrives at the same conclusion, while stressing the importance of an interdisciplinary perspective involving
designers or technology-oriented professionals and social scientists.

Viewing himself not only as a representative of his discipline, but also as a key member of the design team, the applied anthropologist can and should create a deep and meaningful change in the field of product design. While the field shifts towards socio-culturally originated products (such as social design or service design) the applied anthropologist has to preserve his unique role as a scientist. Contrary to other design-oriented professionals (socially sensitive as they may be), the applied anthropologist is rooted in a deep and rich scientific milieu whose prime interest should be the social surroundings of consumers (contrary to clients’ prime concern of promoting sales). As a ‘socio-material’ agent, the applied anthropologist has to promote not only valid and professional data but rather preserve the crucial base of industrial design, which is, to use Henry Dreyfuss’ famous book title – the essence of ‘Designing for People’.

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Notes

1. The research group was titled ‘Applied Anthropology’ and took place at Van Leer Research Institute in Jerusalem.
2. After a lengthy search in various academic institutes I found two mentors and hence extend my gratitude: Prof. Tamar Elor from the department of Sociology and Anthropology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and Prof. Samuel Kaplan of the Department of Industrial Design at Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design.
3. These issues will be described in length in several forthcoming articles.
4. In those academies in which I teach, although in some departments the situation is much different, such as: Aberdeen, UCL and of course the RCA (Royal College of Art), in which I am currently enrolled as a post-doctorate.
5. These ‘in a nutshell’ remarks will be broadly discussed in several upcoming articles, yet I still think it important to raise these issues first and foremost among applied anthropologists and further along the way – to broaden the scope to include anthropologists in general.
6. Of these, two edited books should be noted: Alison Clarke’s Design Anthropology (2010) and Gunn and Donovan’s Design and Anthropology (2012). These books, contrary to others, deal directly with designers and architects in various issues.
7. Following Suchman’s (2011: 3) call for striving towards the anthropology of design.
8. An important example for combining applied anthropology with inclusive design is articulated in the article written by Bichard and Gheerawo (2010).
9. An implied comment should advise the applied anthropologist to choose carefully the projects and clients with which he engages.
10. For example, the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design, situated at the Royal College of Art (RCA), or the program of Social Design, situated at the Design Academy Eindhoven (DAE).

References


