Anthropology and Design: Exchanges, Entanglements, and Frictions

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Abstract

Nowadays, cultural anthropologists and designers are more connected than ever. It is not unusual to find them working side by side on the same team, together with engineers, marketers and other business operators. How did we get to this point? What are the research threads that opened the way to this intersection between design and anthropology? Where are we heading now? In this introductory essay, we trace the history of the mutual attraction between anthropology and design, highlighting connections, exchanges as well as frictions and pitfalls. After taking into consideration some research routes and transdisciplinary projects, we examine the limits of the current collaborations between anthropologists and designers. Finally, as cultural anthropologists we reflect on how the intersection between anthropology and design has led to a more general rethinking of cultural anthropology, in relation to both its object (humans and culture) and its method (ethnography). This rethinking goes far beyond the specific field of design anthropology, hinting at the emergence of an anthropology of the future.

Keywords: Anthropology, Design, Ethnography, Participation, Future

Research routes in anthropology and design

Nowadays, cultural anthropologists and designers are more connected than ever. It is not unusual to find them working side by side on the same team, together with engineers, marketers and other business operators. This collaboration takes place, for instance, in global companies such as Amazon, Netflix, and Google. In addition, design anthropology as a distinct discipline and profession has gained increasing recognition, both within and outside of academia (Blomberg Darrah 2015; Cantarella, Hegel, Marcus 2019; Clarke 2011; Gunn, Donovan 2012a; Gunn, Otto, Smith 2013; C. Miller 2018; Smith, Tang Vangkilde, Kjaersgaard, Otto, Halse, Binder

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2016). How did we get to this point? What are the research threads that opened the way to this intersection between design and anthropology? Where are we heading now? The answers to these questions lie in the recent history of the two disciplines, when anthropologists turned (again) to materiality and designers started to look at the social (C. Miller 2018, p. 42).

In the second half of the last century, the anthropological interest in object culture gained renewed momentum, after the dismissal of artefacts, which followed the decline of evolutionism and the unilineal perspective (Buchli 2002, p. 9). Consumption caught the attention of anthropologists, framing their involvement in the study of subject-object relations. In this regard, deeply influential works were published. *The World of Goods* by Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood (1979) outlines a semiotic approach to understanding the role that goods have in social life. The authors argue that goods are not (only) intended to meet practical needs; they have the function of making the categories of culture tangible and persistent. Goods create meanings and constitute an information system for those who know the code: "forget their usefulness and try instead the idea that commodities are good for thinking", the authors write (Douglas, Isherwood 1979, p. 62). Pierre Bourdieu's *La distinction: Critique sociale du jugement* (1979) is also relevant, as it connects material culture – such as clothes, furniture, and artworks – to the articulation of class distinction. In this view, aesthetic taste is deeply intertwined with politics and inequalities, functioning as a social marker. Published a few years later, Daniel Miller's *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (1987) addresses the creative dimension of consumption practices. It demonstrates that artefacts, not only communicate, but are also performative. They participate in the construction, maintenance and transformation of networks of relations and identities (cf. also D. Miller 1998a, 1998b, 2009). Finally, *The Social Life of Things* (Appadurai 1986) paved the way for further research on the usage of designed objects among unintended groups of users (e.g. Burrell 2012; Ginsburg 2012; Madianou, D. Miller 2012), showing that values, functions and meanings change as things circulate through different times and spaces. In this edited book, Igor Kopytoff's concept of "cultural biography" reminds us of the fact that even the distinction between humans and non-humans depends on the context and can shift (Kopytoff 1986).

While anthropologists turned their attention to designed objects – underlining their role in forging meanings, relationships, and identities –, designers became increasingly interested in researching the contexts of the use of their creations. Designers have been more inclined to include anthropologists (and other social scientists) in their research instead of the other way around. Embryonal collaborations date back to the 1930s, when business anthropologists (Denny, Sunderland 2016) conducted research together with psychiatrists and designers on the social and material aspects of work productivity in industrial settings (Cefkin 2010, pp. 10-13; Otto, Smith

2013, p. 5). These early projects laid the groundwork for the 1970s incorporation of ethnographic methods into design practice, as a result of the shift from the object to the user. Beforehand, design was mostly concerned with the styling of products and the improvement of the appearance (C. Miller 2018, p. 39). As such, the modernist slogan "form follows function" cast the user as a passive executor of the designer's script, and as not worthy of any particular investigation. This strongly object-oriented tradition gradually declined in favor of a broader comprehension of design, beyond product design. For example, Herbert Simon's influential work *The Sciences of the Artificial* (1969) extends the definition of design to all the disciplines concerned with the improvement of the status quo (what reality might be, rather than what reality is), e.g. architecture, engineering, business, medicine, education, law, and journalism. This broad definition of design as innovation and future-making – still dominant today – is responsible for the emergence of interest in the user and the socio-cultural context in which innovations are used. "Design for the Real World: Human Ecology and Social Change" by Victor Papanek (1973) speaks clearly about this larger scope.

Two distinct research trends emerged from this "social turn" (C. Miller 2018, p. 42). In Scandinavia, the focus on the user anticipates the concept of participatory design, as a design *with*, rather than a design *for* the user. Users are no longer conceived of as passive recipients of designers' inventions; on the contrary, they are integrated into the design process, through their involvement in the identification of problems and the elaboration of solutions, as much as in prototype testing. This design practice is grounded in the 1970s and 1980s trade union projects, which denounced the negative effects of technologies on working conditions. A democratic ideal underpinned these projects. The goal was to allow the participation of employers in the shaping of their work environment (Bansler 1989; Bjerknes, Ehn, Kyng 1987). In the United States, on the other hand, the attention on the social resulted in the development of the so-called user-centered and human-centered design, in which the user was the new focus of the design practice. According to this approach, "good" design centers on users' needs and desires, while aesthetic requirements represent only secondary issues. The necessity to understand how inventions could fit into people's everyday lives, as well as how consumption practices are related to larger cultural contexts, turned designers towards ethnographic methods. They adopted ethnography as a research tool to make up for the shortcomings of market research (e.g. customer surveys) and cognitive psychology, which could only offer poor insights into people's lived experiences (Norman 1988; Norman, Draper 1986; Wasson 2000).

From a classic anthropological perspective, design ethnography is just a "pale shadow" of its anthropological version (C. Miller 2018, p. 53). Long-term fieldwork and participant observation have been replaced by techniques such as video recording, scenarios, mock-ups, props, opportunity

maps, games, etc. In addition, ethnography tends to be framed as mere data collection of the users' lives, divorced from any analytic and interpretive work. This transformation can be seen as an adaptation of the anthropological method to a different research agenda, as the purpose of design research is to offer a description of the user that can help the client's product development. It raises, however, some ethical issues as well, since it drastically re-orients the researcher's loyalty. In particular, designers rely on their customers for their research results, unlike anthropologists, whose main responsibilities are (or, at least, should be) towards their interlocutors in the field (the "natives"). Moreover, such an ethnography can exacerbate the dominant consumer culture, instead of offering a critical angle from which to look at it, mapping people's latent needs to package them into goods and services (Gunn, Donovan 2012b, p. 11; C. Miller 2018, p. 52; Morais, de Waal Malefyt 2014; Wasson 2000, p. 382).

It is within this broad scenario that the collaboration between cultural anthropologists and designers has made headway, as a result of the anthropological interest in material culture and the designers' increasing focus on the social and cultural implications of their work as change makers. In this regard, the field of Human-Computer-Interaction (HCI) and software development has played a major role. During the 1980s, at Xerox PARC in Palo Alto, California, the Work Practice and Technology Group, led by the anthropologist Lucy Suchman, pioneered future research projects. By referring to an ethnographic method, inspired by conversational analysis and ethnomethodology, the group investigated the interaction between people and computers in workspaces, helping with the design of the interactive interface of a photocopier (Suchman 1987, 2007). The success of this project convinced many HCI researchers that examining computing requires the investigation of the social contexts in which computers are embedded. The emergence of research communities of computer-supported cooperative work (CSCW) stands in this wake (Greif 1988; Shapiro 1994). In addition to the social aspect, the cultural dimension of computing was also brought to the forefront, thanks to anthropologists working in the Intel's People and Practice Group. Following the emergence of new markets such as China and India, it finally became clear that testing computers on white, male, middle-class Californians was not sufficient. Since the 1990s, cultural diversity and gender have been taken into account in computer design (Drazin 2012).

As these examples clearly show, the initial work of anthropologists with designers blends into business anthropology, going beyond a restricted comprehension of anthropology as a mere research method, which is ethnography. While designers enriched their appraisal of the users as people living in wider social and cultural contexts (Hale 2018), anthropologists turned their attention to making, complementing their focus on consumption (Ingold 2013;

Keller 2001, Murphy 2016, Pfaffenberger 2001). Today, the convergence of design and anthropology is an evolving field on its own terms with a shift from an ethnographically informed design to a design anthropology as a distinct style of knowing (Otto, Smith 2013). Anthropologists work as researchers, facilitators and co-creators of the design process, in multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary projects (cf. Murphy, Marcus 2013). The fact that the main research centers continue to be in Northern Europe (mainly Denmark) and the United States (mainly California) reveals the legacy between present-day design anthropology and past experiences of participatory design and Human-Centered Design. Current research topics, however, vary significantly and extend well beyond the boundaries of software development.

In post-modern societies, characterized by widespread processes of aestheticization (Bargna 2011; Lipovetsky, Serroy 2013), "everything is designed" (Bürdek 2015, p. 9). Systems, services, relationships, experiences, etc. can all be designed. Consequently, anthropologists who work with designers are involved in an increasing number of fields. Yet, some domains are more relevant than others. HCI is still crucial (Pink, Ardèvol, Lanzeni 2016a), as the collaboration between social scientists, computer scientists, and system designers has proved to be fruitful. Anthropologists are increasingly involved in the design of digital technologies, such as personal computers, window-type interfaces, emails, smart homes, smartphones, and digital medical devices (Hanson 2018, Strengers 2016; Pink, Mackley, Mitchell, Wilson, 2016a; Wasson, Metcalfe 2013). As Adam Drazin (2012) makes clear, this does not mean that one can discern the "anthropological bit" in a device, but it is likely that some of the experiences which take place around a certain technology were intended in the design because of an anthropologist.

Somehow connected to the field of HCI, post-humanism constitutes another contemporary research line, calling into question human-centered design and the framing of the relationship between users and objects (Forlano 2017). Wearables, biotechnologies, robots, and the internet of things challenge the separation between humans and non-humans, dominant in Western philosophy, in new and radical ways (cf. Kopytoff 1986; Latour 1993; Miller 2009; Wells 2014). Straddling anthropology and design, scholars emphasize the power of things, that are no longer conceived as instruments controlled by people, but are invested with a certain amount of autonomy. The material world is framed as "wild" (Attfield 2000), "messy" (Pink, Ardèvol, Lanzeni 2016b), "viscous" (Morton 2013), charged with "agency" (Latour 2005; Gell 1998) and "animacy" (Ingold 2013). It is entangled with humans in multiple and unexpected ways, beyond instrumentality. Moreover, non-humans are in relation to one another, not only with people (Appadurai 2013). From this "parliament of things" (Latour 1993, p. 144), where objects are no longer the "humble servants" of subjects (Latour 2005, p. 73), post-human centered design has emerged. The new methods and

practices are meant to meet the necessities of non-human entities, such as animals, trees, and rocks, giving a new traction to sustainable design, in the age of the Anthropocene (Faste 2016; Forlano 2017; Galloway 2017; Maxwell, Miller 2012).

This view of the material world as vibrant and active also has an impact on more traditional fields of design. In particular, it offers a fresh perspective on production, reconnecting design to its roots in crafts and bricolage (cf. Adamson 2010; Carosso, Ghezzi 2015; Ingold 2001; Sennet 2008). Making is no longer the imposition of a form on a passive material; it is an act of "correspondence" (Ingold 2013) between humans and non-humans, i.e. a temporal equilibrium between different forces, which crystallizes in a precarious form. In line with the craftsman's experience, correspondence implies the corporeal feeling of the matter and the attunement to it, rather than the execution of a mental image (Ewart 2013; Ingold 2001). In this regard, design is an open-ended form of future-making, which requires foresight and improvisation. It stretches into consumption, as people constantly correspond with the material world, when they bring things in relation to one another, in their everyday practices. This view informs research in different realms, such as the study of patients' experience with medical devices (Kilbourn 2012; Day, 2012) and the driving of a backhoe loader (Rolfstam, Buur 2012), pointing to the fact that design extends beyond professional design to other kinds of skilled practices. Similar broad definitions of design are increasingly popular among design scholars (e.g. Attfield 2000; Manzini 2015) and anthropologists, who see "quotidian design" as a "fundamental human capacity" (Appadurai 2013, p. 254).

The transdisciplinary domain outlined so far is not immune to criticism. Lucy Suchman (2011) herself has argued against the field of design anthropology, in favor of an anthropology *of* design, that takes design as its object of study. Anthropologists should not collaborate with designers but, rather, study them. The goal is to craft a theoretical perspective, which challenges the contemporary emphasis on technological innovation as a value *per se*. As a matter of fact, anthropologists frequently occupy unprivileged positions, when it comes to their work with other professionals. Their approach tends to be either downplayed or misunderstood (Suchman 2007, p. 4; Drazin 2012; Otto, Smith 2013, pp. 6-7). For example, within corporate settings, their critical voice risks being silenced and their contribution could be reduced to mere data collection, once again. Instead, without the constraints of corporations' interests, anthropology of design can shed new light on design as a social process (Murphy 2016). In doing so, it intersects with other sub-disciplines, such as anthropology of media (Ginsburg, Abu-lughod, Larkin 2002) and digital anthropology (Horst, Miller 2012). It covers a wide range of subjects, including architecture (e.g. Buchli 2013), advertising (e.g. Dàvila 2012; Mazzarella 2003), fashion (e.g. Hansen 2004, Sa-

dre-Orafai 2016), computers (e.g. Burrell 2012), and algorithms (e.g. Seaver 2018). The study of non-western design traditions (Ewart 2013; Tunstall 2013) is particularly promising, as it offers a critical standpoint from which to decolonize professional Euro-American design. It also reveals the fact that non-western design companies are often marginalized in the global market, under the label of "traditional craft". Following Elizabeth Tunstall (2013), decolonization should be the backdrop of any involvement of anthropology with design, aiming to unveil inequalities and valorize alternative ways of thinking and making.

Design thinking and anthropology of the future

In addition to the realization of transdisciplinary research projects, the intersection between anthropology and design has led to a more general rethinking of cultural anthropology, in relation to both its object (humans and culture) and its method (ethnography), which goes far beyond the specific field of design anthropology. This broader perspective takes shape in the work of influential anthropologists, such as Arjun Appadurai, Tim Ingold, Bruno Latour, George Marcus, and Paul Rabinow, who have made this point clear throughout their work.

Design has especially stimulated the repositioning of anthropology in relation to time, moving the focus from space to time, and from past to future. In this regard, Appadurai (2013) points to the emergence of an anthropology of the future, which overtakes the present not only considering the past (cultural legacies, archives, politics of social memory, heritage etc.) but also reflecting on future scenarios (social trends, unpredictable changes, hypothetical and imagined worlds) and the difficulty of societies and cultures to think and see their own future. As a legitimate object of anthropological investigation, the future is conceived here as a "cultural fact" and a "form of difference" (Appadurai 2013, p. 286), shaped by the work of imagination, forecasting, and an aspiration to change life conditions.

The recent orientation towards the future has come together with the reconceptualization of the present. Since culture is no longer primarily understood as something inherited from the past and subsistent in the present (Fabian 1983; Gell 1992; Munn 1992), the contemporary becomes an open time in which the world is potentially changing (Rabinow, Marcus, Faubion, Rees 2008). Being part of this ever shifting reality, anthropologists in the field cannot be thought of as mere witnesses dedicated to the representation of cultural diversity; together with their interlocutors, they are active participants in the collective construction of possible futures, taking on responsibility for their interventions in the reality they study (Salazar, Pink, Irving, Sjöberg 2017). In Ingold's terms, this move is at the core of the

practice of anthropology by means of design. In contrast to an anthropology by means of ethnography, anthropology by means of design centres on people's visions and hopes, rather than describing their lives retrospectively (Gatt, Ingold 2013, p. 149).

The focus on the future has pushed the anthropological debate beyond previous anthropological attempts to approach the future (Maruyama, Harkins 1978; Riner 1991; cf. Pink, Salazar 2008), such as Ethnographic Futures Research (Textor 1980) as a method designed to empirically investigate alternative futures relying on existing people's perceptions and images.

These changes in perspective meet and contrast ongoing social times, characterized by the acceleration instilled by communication technologies, squeezing the time of our experience in synchronicity, and into the immediate gratification of emotional and distracted consumption; the emphasis on creativity, flexibility, and "sharing" practices by the post-Fordist economy; the social precariousness hindering the elaboration of personal life plans; the perspective of an environmental catastrophe, which generates anxiety and insecurity about the future. These feelings have all been enhanced by the Covid-19 pandemic we are currently experiencing, in its conflation of apocalyptic prophecies and provisional foresights (Caduff 2015), risk assessment and demand for preparedness (Lakoff 2017). Within this framework, anthropology's interest in the future is moved by the same ethical humanism that was previously animating the focus on the past, trying to resist its contraction in the present. As before it was the past that was at risk and in need of being "saved", today the future seems to be so.

Enlisting design as a universal human trait has led anthropologists to further challenge the temporal opposition between tradition and modernity. However, it also emphasizes the risk of an ethnocentric projection that has spread design thinking, as a specific professional competence developed in western modernity, to the whole world. This is clear in designers' attempts to find design before design, design after design (Triennale International Exhibition 2016), design without a designer (Alessi 2016), design for all (Manzini 2015), and so on. This open and apparently self-weakening approach, which entails the cultural recognition of others, might nevertheless result in a more pervasive penetration and colonization of daily practices elsewhere. Anthropologists in their collaborations with designers operate on this slippery and ambiguous terrain, offering to them the opportunity to graft their work into the large field of cultures, and receiving in return the possibility to rethink culture moving through design.

In this vein, for example, Appadurai asserts that

> even the simplest societies, the ones that looked most stable, traditional, unreflective, and unquestioned, were products of continuous effort on a daily basis. Ordinary life was, in fact, the product of unrelenting efforts to make sure

> that catastrophic change, entropy, disenchantment, and weak attachments did not take the toll they so easily could. Thus, daily life in even the simplest societies must be seen as an outcome of design (Appadurai 2013, p. 254).

Likewise, "it could also be said that planning is as old as humanity (…) [and] can also be seen as a modern solution to the fear of disaster and dislocation that has haunted all human societies, to some degree" (Appadurai 2013, p. 265).

Similarly, the reference to design allows Bruno Latour to go beyond the contrast between modern and pre-modern towards a post-Promethean theory of action. Insofar as design "is never a process that begins from scratch: to design is always to redesign" (Latour 2008, p. 5). From this perspective, design

> is an antidote to [the modernist] hubris and to the search for absolute certainty, absolute beginnings, and radical departures (…) and yet still the necessity of redoing everything once again in a strange combination of conservation and innovation (Latour 2008, p. 11).

Although in a completely different theoretical frame, in addition Tim Ingold, by resorting to the notion of "correspondence" in his call for an anthropology by means of design, aims to overcome the opposition between nature and culture, body and mind, matter and design (Gatt, Ingold 2013). Seen from this holistic approach, designing "does not transform the world, it is rather part of the world's transforming itself" (Gatt, Ingold 2013, p. 146) by the way of "the activities of its inhabitants, who are tasked above all with keeping life going rather than with bringing to completion projects already specified at the outset" (Gatt, Ingold 2013, p.145). In this context, nobody holds the key to the future and "design is not so much about *innovation* as about *improvisation*" (Gatt, Ingold 2013, p. 145).

All these different approaches share a critique of instrumental rationality as an act of a sovereign subject imposing his form on the passivity of matter, a critique of design in terms of plans and projects predetermining final outcomes. The vision of a linear and cumulative temporality which is that of progress is thus revoked, and multiple futures marked by indeterminacy and uncertainty take its place. The future appears neither as a tabula rasa of endless possibilities nor as a necessary fate. Futures are already crowded with fantasies, paranoias, traumas, hopes, and fears of the past and the present (Rosenberg and Harding, 2005, p. 18). It is about working in the liminal space between the understanding of the past, existing conditions, and incoming futures.

On this basis, the notion of "uncertainty" (Salazar, Pink, Irving, Sjöberg 2017), which is related to the qualitative terrain of experience, is often critically opposed to that of "risk" (Beck 1986; Giddens 1990; Lupton 1999),

which, instead, is rooted in the quantitative dimension of probabilities and cost to benefit calculation. Set apart from danger and risk (Douglas 1992), uncertainty is reconceptualised "as generative and inevitable, rather than threatening" (Akama, Pink, Sumartojo 2018, p. 25).

Appadurai opposes an ethics of possibility that expands the social space of hope to one of probability, linked to speculative capitalism that bets on insecurity, emergency and disasters (Appadurai 2013, p. 295). This ethical opposition comes together with the recognition that

> there has been a steady *hybridization of the ideologies of calculative action,* so that the casino, the racetrack, the lottery, and gambling, in general, have infused the world of financial calculation and vice versa, thus confusing the spheres of chance and risk as technical features of human life (Appadurai 2013, p. 245).

This mutual implication of risk and uncertainty is clearly underscored by Samimian-Daarash and Rabinow (2015) in terms of relationships between regimes of truth, governmental technologies, and the forms of subjectivity produced within these problematizations. Considered from this perspective, "risk" appears as a governmental technology which converts uncertainty into possibilities, assessable risks over which management and control are possible, but resulting in a "culture of defensiveness", obsessed by risk, that increases uncertainty.

It is on this ground that anthropologists and designers meet. Designers tend to focus on "probable" and "plausible" futures. The ones that are more market-oriented favour a probable future which is "what is likely to happen unless there is some extreme upheaval, such as financial crisis, eco disaster, or war" (Dunne, Raby 2013, p. 3) or a pandemic, as we know it. The "plausible" offers a more open future.

> This is the space of scenario planning and foresight, the space of what could happen (…) is not about prediction but exploring alternative economic and political futures to ensure an organization will be prepared for and thrive in a number of different futures (Dunne, Raby 2013, p. 4).

But it is also a matter of "preferable futures" (Dunne, Raby 2013, p. 4), which demands to highlighting alternative and conflicting visions that are at stake, shaped by different needs, desires, and aims.

It is a question of power-knowledge relationships, decision-making, and a difference in scale, in which futures take shape. It is also about the possibility or not, for anthropologists, to work on different levels: on the one hand, predictive approaches modelling and analysing future scenarios, and on the other, "generative forms of *not knowing* with others, which might involve

imagining, planning, designing, enacting, intervening or anticipating the future on an everyday basis" (Salazar, Pink, Irving, Sjöberg 2017, p. 16).

Instead of probable or plausible futures, many anthropologists prefer to speak about "emerging futures" (Smith, Tang Vangkilde, Kjaersgaard, Otto, Halse, Binder 2016, pp. 21-22), outlining a vision of design as "slipping over into the future as it progresses" (Smith, Tang Vangkilde, Kjaersgaard, Otto, Halse, Binder 2016, p. 14). A design "capable of acknowledging the uncertainty of what is to come", treating uncertainty as "*technology* for research, change-making and intervention" (Akama, Pink, Sumartojo 2018, p. 55) and not as something to flee or reduce (as in calculable risks) but an environment offering some affordances to grasp, shifting the focus from prevention to precaution.

It is the premise on which, Ingold opposes foresight to prediction, the former involving imagination, not in terms of representation of absent things, but as the perception of a world in becoming a place "where everything is not preordained but incipient, forever on the verge of the actual … And it is about opening up pathways rather than setting targets; about anticipation not predetermination" (Gatt, Ingold, 2013, p. 145).

Design fiction represents another perspective which goes beyond the idea of a probable and plausible future (Making Tomorrow Collective 2020). This approach is used in speculative design to open up a discussion about future scenarios (Dunne, Raby 2013, p. 51), drawing inspiration from science fiction films and literature. It is also a field practiced by certain anthropologists, sometimes used to project on the future current conservative visions based on stability (Collins 2003, 2004), and sometimes to stimulate alternative thinking (Collins 2005), analyzing popular culture assumptions about the future shaped by science fiction (Stover 1973; Maruyama, Harkins 1975; Battaglia 2005) or to compare ways of writing in science fiction and anthropology (Samuels 1996). While in design fiction, the projection towards imagined and distant worlds and futures might seem freer, it proves to be no less linked to the present, whether this constraint is intentionally posed, or that it acts unconsciously, in delimiting and configuring the field of the imaginable. In this way, design fiction undoubtedly "speculates about a near future tomorrow, extrapolating from today (…) looking at today from the side, or sideways and forming critical, introspective perspectives that can project into new (future) forms" (Bleeker 2009 p. 8, 16).

In this context, enigmatic, alien objects are often created to function as "conversation pieces": they

> are components parts for different kinds of near future worlds. They are like artefacts brought back from those worlds in order to be examined, studied over (…), designed to provoke the imagination, open a discussion up to ex-

> plore possibilities and provoke new considerations that words by themselves are not able to express (Bleeker 2009, p. 7).

As existing, but not yet fully present objects, because they come to us from the future, they allow a suspension of disbelief about change that is achieved by the use of diegetic prototypes (Sterling 2011) or "story worlds" and storyboards.

Here, design fiction intersects with current anthropological and artistic practices, using multiple media and resulting in different products – fictional narrative, pictures, video, virtual environments, designed objects, games, graphics, comics, reenactments (Pink, Mackley 2014), theatre, performances, scenography (Cantarella, Hegel, Marcus 2019), and exhibitions (Bargna 2020) – to work between facts and fictions, on parafacts and parafictions (Lambert-Beatty 2009), para-site ethnographies (Marcus 2000), and so on.

However, despite its provocative character, design fiction seems to be consonant with the world designed by the post-Fordist economy, in its emphasis on creativity, flexibility, experience, and uncertainty, as shown by the incorporation of "the jazz organisational template" into business and organisational structures in order to become "not only flexible enough to cope with unexpected events but (...) also capable of producing unexpected events that can be further developed into and function as innovations in fields in which to remain stagnant is to perish" (Wilf 2015, p. 30). Here the engineer and the bricoleur meet (Lévi-Strauss 1962), and this is precisely design's place at the time of "artistic capitalism" (Lipovetky, Serroy 2013).

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This Special Focus brings together some recent research and work experiences, occurring inside as well as outside the Academia, which have combined anthropology and design in Italy. Taken as a whole, the articles reveal the features of a fluid and evolving field, not (yet) structured, but full of possibilities for expansion. Isabel Farina's contribution "Anthropological Design of Possible Future Spaces" along with Valentina Porcellana's, Cristian Campagnaro's, and Nicolò di Prima's "Weaving: Methods and Tools against Homelessness between Anthropology and Design" analyze two projects in Turin, opening up a broader reflection on the strengths and critical points, which underlie the interdisciplinary collaboration. Farina worked as an anthropologist on the project "Spazi neonati – Participated Design for Co-living in the Neonatology Ward" to renovate the unit for premature children at the Sant'Anna Hospital. Her essay takes into account some key points of recent developments in anthropology, such as the orientation towards the study of the future (e.g. Appadurai 2013; Salazar, Pink, Irving, Sjöberg 2017; Smith, Tang Vangkilde, Kjaersgaard, Otto, Halse, Binder 2016)

and the transformation of the research method, which tends to become "quick and dirty" (Severi 2018), "contaminating" itself with quantitative techniques, without losing its commitment to the emic point of view. For their part, the anthropologist Porcellana and the designers Campagnaro and Di Prima describe their project Costruire Bellezza, i.e. a permanent experimental laboratory part of the Social Services System for Homeless People of the Municipality of Turin. Their article clearly shows the interventionist approach (Smith, Otto 2014) and the social engagement of anthropology, when it comes together with design. These two initial contributions also offer food for thought on misunderstandings and tension, as when Farina describes the difficulty she encountered in translating her research results, intimately linked to particular life experiences and specific contexts, into general guidelines and best practices to be followed by architects. Roberta Raffaetà's "Teaching Anthropology with and to Designers: Notes from the Field," brings us into an academic context and analyzes the collaboration between anthropologists and designers, which takes place in a teaching situation. In this case as well, the encounter is both rich with opportunities and challenges, the anthropologist being initially understood by design professors and students as an expert of exotic and primordial practices, rather than as a researcher deeply concerned with the comprehension of the contemporary world. Finally, the article "Describing Artefacts. What Design and Anthropology Share, but Design Anthropology Disregards" by Alvise Mattozzi closes the Special Issue with a theoretical and wide-ranging reflection on design anthropology. By outlining the current limits, it traces some desired directions for the future, in which anthropology and design ground their communality on the thick description of artefacts. More generally, the author leads us to consider how design can fruitfully reshape anthropology, better equipping it to address the challenges of the contemporary world.

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