Design anthropology or anthropological design? Towards ‘Social Design’

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ABSTRACT
In this article we will outline the practice of design anthropology, and define the term ‘social design’ vis-à-vis current changes in the world of industrial designers. We will highlight the various popular terms for this rapidly-growing discipline, and outline a ‘how-to’ in relation to industrial designers’ work in the studio. We will conclude by presenting two case studies in which a different approach towards anthropology should be integrated into the practical work of designers. One case study will present design anthropology from a pedagogical point of view, while the other will present a design anthropology workshop. A design methodology leaflet is attached as an appendix to better introduce design anthropology to designers.

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1. Design and anthropology: between a rock and a hard place

The evolving field of design anthropology is beginning to establish its own identity, but some anthropologists still consider design less as a coherent discipline and more as a problematic field. Design is not art, but rather an extension of material culture; and extends beyond mere consumer culture. Designers, for their part, have tended to consider anthropologists as the providers of qualitative research methods to help legitimise the growing academic standing of design, and in some cases playing roles adjacent to market researchers. However, anthropology is much more than applying qualitative research methods (Ventura, 2013), but rather a complex, flexible and applicable world-view. When trying to define design anthropology, from a theoretical perspective and methodological perspective, we have to take these wider contextual considerations into account.

As Rabinow and Marcus discussed in 2008:

In more specific terms: what is anthropology today? What could it be? What is distinctly anthropological when the discipline is no longer primarily the ethnographic study of the faraway, cultural Other? … anthropologists are increasingly studying timely phenomena with tools developed to study people out of time. (Rabinow & Marcus, 2008, pp. 8, 3)
Nearly a decade on from Rabinow and Marcus’ observation we are still questioning how can we adapt this ever-shifting discipline to our contemporary daily reality? Can anthropology be aligned with practice-oriented disciplines like design whilst not becoming a mere vessel for qualitative methods? In this article, we will outline our contribution to understandings in the discipline of design anthropology and suggest a practical mechanism for designers to bridge the gap between the design brief and the actual process of designing.

2. Is Design Ethnography Enough?

During the 1990s researchers from a range of disciplines started to recognize the importance of consumer preferences and behavior in the design of new products (Beyer & Holtzblatt, 1998; Holtzblatt, Wendell, & Wood, 2005). A few years later, contextual and user-oriented design was being used in the marketing world, as well as in industrial innovation and design. However, it was only after several years had passed that consumer goods companies began to demand qualitative data ‘from the natives’ point of view’ instead of focus groups or statistical data (Lu Liu, 2010).

Design ethnography developed as a research strategy at the end of the 1990s and targets the gap between the world of the consumer and that of the manufacturer. Salvador, Bell, and Anderson (1999) claim that following discussions about how to meet the manufacturer’s demands, the designer is less and less oriented towards meeting consumer demands. In order to bridge this gap, while creating a close and personal connection with their potential consumers, designers assimilated the basic methodology of classic ethnography (fieldwork involving detailed interviews and participant observation), but in an accelerated form. This ‘rapid ethnography’ has been defined by Norman (1999) as a shorter period of fieldwork, with targeted interviews and observations focused on a specific product, system or environment.

Following this methodology, the designer is transformed into a ‘part-time anthropologist.’ After returning from fieldwork, the designer processes their data from a design perspective (although much like those used in visual anthropology) and uses it to better plan and design their product. In our eyes, this approach reveals a number of issues that require deeper exploration, inasmuch as the designer functions as an anthropologist but only gathers the data related to and needed for the refinement their design output. In contrast, the anthropologist maintains a deeper and longer connection with the object of study, and yet this level of concentrated research does not align with the time sensitive practices needed in the design studio (Bichard & Gheerawo, 2011).

According to Julier (2000), assimilating ethnography in the design process results in innovative, useful and interesting outcomes. Blomberg, Giacomi, Mosher, and Swenton-Wall (1993) follow the same route and claim that the keystones of ethnography – holistic thinking, open-mindedness, collecting ‘emic’ accounts etc. – will be of benefit to designers by enabling greater understanding consumer needs. The main friction point arises from the fact that anthropologists study an entire society while design research is restricted to a defined area. Therefore, it can be considered that designers should shift their perspective in order to adopt an anthropological viewpoint derived from the consumer’s experience of reality.

This tension is manifested in two main areas: the first being the length of research while the second focuses on the outcome of the research. Whilst anthropologists draw upon the past (however immediate) to highlight the present, designers use the present to predict a possible future. Another difference between designers and anthropologists, as Hunt (2011) correctly stresses, lies in the raison d’être of designers (to intervene in our socio-material daily activities), while anthropologists focus on a sense of preservation by description and try their best to leave the society they are studying untouched. Applied anthropologists, on the other hand, stem from their ability to take part in their research, therefore stand between designers and descriptive anthropologists.

In a broader perspective, we should strive to redefine the contemporary concept of ‘anthropology’ which suffers from an acute case of over-use (every person watching a reality show is an anthropologist of the sort reminiscent of Frazer’s ‘The Golden Bough’ and other classic anthropological œuvres).
This vast question, which is beyond the scope of this article resonates with the title of Maurice Bloch's (2005) article 'Where did Anthropology Go?', which described anthropology as a scattering of studies focusing on an endless array of subjects. Yet it can be suggested that to engage with the challenges humans face in the twenty-first century anthropologists must, therefore, adopt a flexible approach and cooperate with professionals from other disciplines in a process which will strengthen both disciplines.

Another problem lies in the common conception that anthropologists are merely ethnographers. Yet, as Ingold (2008) counters in 'Anthropology is not Ethnography' and as we will highlight in this article, anthropology is far more than its methodology. As he rightfully stresses, while descriptive and theoretical dimensions of research differ, applied design anthropology, as we shall see, combines these elements, while focusing on designers' practice. While ethnographers describe, (applied) anthropologist act. We will now outline what it means to apply anthropology as a key component in the professional work of industrial designers.

Researchers from various disciplines have considered the complex relationship between design, capitalism and taste. A common theme highlights the role of research and aesthetics during the design process as key elements for improving sales (Shore, Watson, Hand, & Ingram, 2007). However, the combination of anthropology of design (the study of designers as a 'tribe') and anthropology for design (applied anthropology in service of designers) is much more important. As Fulton Suri (2010) describes at length, ethnographic research or the implementations of applied anthropology in the professional work of designers corresponds with the bare essentials of anthropology as a discipline. That is, while ethnography is indeed a crucial tool in the applied anthropologist's arsenal, without a broader understanding of the discipline, the researcher's efforts would be lacking the extra factor. Usually, when anthropologists are working in other professional areas, outsiders tend to treat anthropology first and foremost as a complex tool for qualitative research. This, of course, is far from the truth. The role of the anthropologist in a team of designers should not merely be providing qualitative research data or phrasing a research question or scientific rationale. The applied anthropologist should 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 study) be adamant in their role as an ambassador of their profession, ensuing, among else, deeper commitments to the various design partners.

3. Design worlds

We bear in mind that the object being worked on is going to be … in some 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 …. 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)

Design must become an innovative, highly creative, cross-disciplinary tool responsive to the true needs of men. (Papanek, 1971, p. xxii)

Design is a multi-faceted practice – one is not just a designer but a designer of specific artefacts and processes. Designers can be innovative, industrial, engineering, graphic, architectural, product, service, materials, fashion and/or interaction based. Yet in spite of the wide scope of practices within the world of design, the theory driving these processes can be narrow and somewhat lacking in engagement with the wider social discourse. Works such as Designing for People (Dreyfuss, 1955) or Design for the Real World (Papanek, 1971) reflect and consider the various disciplines of design. Papanek attempted to encourage designers to focus on the wider social implications of their creations. Whilst this drew attention to issues such as ecological considerations and social inclusion, it did not address the broader dilemma within design, both as a discipline and for designers and producers of artefacts destined for landfill. Are designers mere ‘educated carpenters’ or can their role be shifted to that of agent for social change?
We will now discuss the design principles that have emerged since Papanek’s pivotal work, including inclusive design, co-design and participatory design. We feel these demonstrate the evolution of human orientated design, and perhaps mirror the changes in design as practised in the late twentieth century. The following concepts derive from broader terms focusing on the user such as ‘user-centred design’ or the more democratic ‘human-centred design.’ In the twenty-first century, contemporary designers should not limit themselves to the singularity of their discipline’s practice but should engage in wider discourses that influence their social and cultural surroundings. Interestingly, this call to understand the worldview of the user echoes with classic interpretive anthropology theories, such as the key works of Clifford Geertz. Furthermore, the anthropological focus on daily activities, the way people interact with each other, and influence their environment through both social relations and objects echo the work of designers. Therefore, we suggest such an engagement can be defined thorough design anthropology.

4. Inclusive design

The British Standards Institute (2005) defines inclusive design as “The design of mainstream products and/or services that are accessible to, and usable by, as many people as reasonably possible … without the need for special adaptation or specialized design” (BS 7000-6:2005, 2005). Coleman et al. (2007) stress that inclusive design should be user-centred and demonstrate an awareness of the larger population, especially those who are ageing and that the awareness should also consider business perspectives. On a practical level, inclusive design should be functional, usable, desirable and viable. In an earlier work, Coleman, Lebbon, Clarkson, and Keates (2003, p. 13) define inclusive design as a process in which ‘extreme users’ as marginalised social groups are socially included. Drawing on the influence of the US equivalent, universal design, the researchers outlined several key principles including:

- equitable use
- flexibility in use
- simple and intuitive to use
- perceptible information tolerance for error
- low physical effort, and appropriate size and space

This should result in design outputs that through the engagement of ‘extreme users in the design process not only meet their needs but are also attractive and usable to mainstream society as well. More recently, Knight and Bichard (2011) have described inclusive design as a design philosophy that incorporates multiple methods to achieve inclusive outcomes that meet the needs not only of a physically diverse population but also a culturally diverse one. However, while inclusive design is certainly an important concept, recently the term has been criticized. A central criticism would be that one cannot involve every representative user in the inclusive design process and consequently, designers may be leaning to meet one user’s needs at the expense of another. This will often result in design that meets ‘special needs’ opposed to comprehensive ‘inclusive’ design (Bichard, 2015).

Researchers in various fields of design strive to create better-suited products for various end-users (Carmien, Melissa, Gerhardt, Andrew, & James, 2005; Fischer & Sullivan, 2002). Terms such as ‘inclusive design’ and ‘empathic design’ accentuate the importance of creating products that will serve the largest population possible. And yet, when designing for end-users one must not only create needs-oriented products, but also address what we term ‘social ergonomics,’ i.e. the social surroundings of the relationship between the end-user and the product. In this grey area the designer’s impact as becoming more and more meaningful, especially so when dealing with stigma through design.

5. Empathic design

Gunn and Donovan (2012, p. 1) rightfully claim that a central resemblance between anthropology and design is the ability to interpret daily activities: ‘central to engaging with others is finding ways
of imagining oneself into another person’s world.’ As a result of focusing on the user’s lived reality, a relatively new discipline of designers started to use the term ‘empathic design.’ In this approach, the designer strives to understand the constraints and difficulties faced by an individual and then create a product that will effectively counteract these (McDonagh, 2008). As ‘anthropologists,’ designers reached the conclusion that their subjective worldview and experiences were not sufficient to understand the user in a profound way. One of the differences between this and inclusive design is the call to refer to the ‘end-users’ as ‘design partners’ or simply ‘people.’ Naturally, inclusive design and empathic design share some similarities, yet the key difference between the two is the processes they incorporate in their people focused design engagement.

6. Co-design

In ethnographic research, the problems of validity and reliability were solved by the researcher sharing results and conclusions with the participants and getting their perspective on the research (Morse, Barrette, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). In a somewhat similar fashion, designers share their thoughts and insights with the end-users in what is now termed co-design. Broadening the scope of users’ involvement, this method calls for not merely taking into consideration the users’ constraints and beliefs, but their active involvement in the collaboration of the design process. For designers, a crucial element of the process is to identify and work with future users of the product (Brandt, Binder, Malmborg, & Sokoler, 2010). Co-design can result in a close relationship between the designer and the end-user, ranging from workshops organized by designers targeted at gathering users’ feedback (Sanders & Stappers, 2008; Sperschneider & Bagger, 2003; Steen, Kuitj-Evers, & Klok, 2007), to a lengthier and more in-depth cooperation (Westerlund, Lindqvist, Mackay, & Sundblad, 2003). Designers using this approach view users as collaborators holding important and relevant knowledge. Creating a meaningful connection between designers and end-user collaborators will strengthen ethical and social design, rather than design-art or design for ‘the 1%.’ Naturally, every co-design process is based on a role definition between the design professional and the actual person that will use the designed product.

7. Participatory design

Participatory design can be defined as:

A process of investigating, understanding, reflecting upon, establishing, developing and supporting mutual learning between multiple participants in collective ‘reflection-in-action.’ The participants typically undertake the two principle roles of users and designers where the designers strive to learn the realities of the users’ situation while the users strive to articulate their desired aims and learn appropriate technological means to obtain them. (Robertson & Simonsen, 2013, p. 2)

Naturally, the dialogue between designers and ‘users,’ or design partners, changes according to each design project and the appropriate processes it adopts with each of the participants holding unique knowledge that serves as a crucial element of the process. The result is an approach focused on understanding the users’ world vis-à-vis the design process through joint negotiation of the project goals. The subtle difference between co-design and participatory design is that the latter strives to not only create a better-suited product, but has an ideological commitment to involving the end-users in the design process. As a democratic perspective, this approach is deeply embedded in the Scandinavian design tradition.

Sanders (2002, p. 2), describes participatory design as a process in which ‘the roles of the designer and researcher blur and the user becomes a critical component of the process.’ Robertson and Simonsen (2013, p. 7) add that from a practical point of view ‘participatory design is driven by a consistent socio-technical approach that appreciates the context in which the technology will be used and the processes and practices within that context.’

Furthermore, participatory design could be used as a tool to reshape and refocus an organization, leading to innovative processes (Buur & Matthews, 2008). From a more theoretical point of view,
Kensing and Blomberg (1998, p. 168) describe three main areas of interest: ‘the politics of design, the nature of participation and methods, tools and techniques.’ Furthermore, these practices and associated processes are interchangeable with the practitioner, the designer and the participant /co/inclusive ‘user.’ They can flit between one process and another in different stages of the process, as each tends to be context driven, with the best approach adopted for the best contextual circumstances. Above all these approaches center on working in some form of collaboration with people at the heart of design, as the end users stand at the heart of the process.

There is a correlation between participatory design and design ethnography – both are based on daily activities and center on the lives of design partners (Blomberg & Karasti, 2013), yet, as we shall see, design anthropology offers much more to the design process than classic ethnography.

Faced with this array of concepts, we feel there is still a need for a broader perspective incorporating both practical and theoretical levels, one we wish to describe as ‘socio-design.’

8. Social design

We wish to stress that the shift from inclusive design to social design is not merely a semantic one. While inclusive design has been hotly debated in the last few years (Bichard, 2015; Coleman, Clarkson, & Cassim, 2016), we feel that a discussion of wider social attributes in its description is lacking, especially when addressing contemporary challenges. As we shall see in the following pages, there is a need for wider political as well as social issues to be addressed by designers. Reflecting the power of design/the designer in contemporary culture, we suggest a redefinition of the designer as ‘social agent.’ Here, design anthropology offers opportunities for deeper understandings of broader social issues that could influence the design process vis-à-vis the mediation between the design, the manufacturer and the design partners (a.k.a. end-users).

As discussed previously, this design shift requires a revised methodological and theoretical approach, our work focuses in human-centred design (both in the UK and Israel) we choose to broach this subject through focusing on the strain between an individual and their social surroundings. As anthropologists dealing with the field of design, we have to take into consideration various considerations such as processes of acculturation, power-relations and societal strain that encompasses the culture of the designer and user. We will address this notion through the key concept of social capital linking the individual’s needs and notions as well as society’s inherent norms and conventions.

Considering social capital, Elias described the various connections between social structures, collective memory and their reflections in individuals’ behaviors, in his acclaimed The Civilizing Process (1978). According to Elias (1991), power is a legitimate aspect of social interaction, seen not as a means for controlling others, but rather as a way to influence our self-regulation in daily interactions, and as a way to ‘prove’ our connection with both present and past via acculturated norms and conventions (Elias, 1978).

From a more pragmatic point of view, James Coleman (2000, p. 16) defines social capital by its function, stating that:

> It is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors – whether persons or corporate actors – within the structure. Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible. Like physical capital and human capital, social capital is not completely fungible, but may be specific to certain activities. A given form of social capital that is valuable in facilitating certain actions may be useless or even harmful to others.

Offering a different perspective, Bourdieu (1984) introduced his notion of cultural capital, stemming from a combination of an individual’s socially acquired taste preferences, and the societal iteration of habitus. Our habitus, i.e. norms and conventions articulated through motions and behaviors turned automatic and subconscious, is a direct result of society’s numerous fields of production. Each field, and in our case, the field of design, consists of a clear-cut frame, well-guarded by associated agents and institutions.
By combining this two-sided socio-cultural capital, we can describe our perspective. The individual in each field is constrained by various norms, some of which have become second-nature, and yet, there is a way out. Social agents, equipped with a myriad array of skills, are able to pave a route through the social and institutional constraints towards empowerment. One of these, at least in potential, is the designer. The first step towards the goal of social design, can be considered to be:

1. Inherently based on the world of the end-user. The integration of various design anthropology methodologies within the design processes will help practitioners design more suitable products, services and environments.
2. Not a 're-design,' but rather an embedded and necessary design practice. We stress the importance of the continuous contribution of design anthropologists throughout design processes, not only in early research phases.
3. Context-related and significantly embedded in user socio-cultural reality. When done correctly, a good process encompassing design anthropology perspectives can create a clear image of the user’s world.
4. Inclusive. Social design (through design anthropology) considers political perspectives in addition understanding users. The design anthropologist becomes an ethical compass for the design team, presenting them with the broader, and often hidden issues that maybe influencing the design process.
5. A lengthy but rigorous R&D process, stemming from theoretical and anthropological knowledge, in addition to ergonomic, economic and marketing considerations.

Contemporary design incorporating ethnographic methods inherently credits the users design involvement – it might not be on the scale of inclusive/co or participatory design process – but they will be some acknowledgement of cooperation. However, we think that social design has to mean not only creating more suitable objects but also basing design decisions on user-oriented data gathered directly (through rigorous qualitative research methods) from the users. Therefore, social design, in which design anthropology plays a key role, presents us with an interesting opportunity to tackle contemporary challenges. As the classic trinity of design – the client or producer, the designer and the user redefine the increasingly flexible border between them, the role of the designer will have to change. Faced with the current technological revolution (open code design or 3D printing for example), along with economic and socio-ethical challenges the designer as a socio-cultural agent will have a greater impact on society, and as a result a greater and more demanding responsibility.

| Concept       | Focuses on                     | Towards the designer or the user | Advantages                                                                 | Disadvantages                                                                 | Amount of user involvement                                      |
|---------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Inclusive     | Extreme users, often those who are socially excluded due to age or ability but increasingly socio-economic exclusions | The designer focuses on a smaller population                          | Brings extreme users to the forefront of the design process                     | The term is ambiguous, shouldn’t every contemporary design be inclusive? Does this approach stem from a marketing-centred approach to broaden the brand’s market or is it truly interesting in creating democratic design? | Depends on the project, since the context can drive the user involvement which can be intensive |
| Empathic      | A humanistic approach focused on understanding the user’s world          | As in Geertz’s classic depiction, the designer looks through the user’s eyes, yet the focal point is the designer | A deeper consideration of the user’s needs and constraints                     | While positive as an approach, the users do not take active part in the design process | Depends on the project                                           |
| Co-design     | Users actively participate in the design process                         | The designer leads the users towards integrating their needs into the design process | The design process benefits from the unique knowledge of both the designer and the users | The designer leads the design process, taking into consideration all the design aspects, of which user knowledge is one aspect | Context/project dependant                                      |
Concept focuses on towards the designer or the user

| Concept | Focuses on | Tovards the designer or the user | Advantages | Disadvantages | Amount of user involvement |
|---------|------------|----------------------------------|------------|---------------|---------------------------|
| Participatory | A partnership between the designer and the users in the design process | An ideological commitment to considering user involvement in the design process | The users are embedded in the design process | While better than the previous concepts, this approach is still focused on the somewhat limited sphere of the designed product | Considerable, but again, in relation with the context/project |
| Social Design | Offers deeper understanding of the socio-cultural worlds of the users and the designer | Design anthropology serves to mediate between the two | Strives to take into consideration multi facets of the design situation | This lengthier process, based on design anthropology highlights broader socio-cultural, economic and ethical issues influencing the broader margins of the design process | The design anthropologist serves as mediator between the design partners, designers and other parties in the wider design network |

9. Design anthropology as the key

People often use things far beyond what designers expect. This would suggest that people actively intervene in configuring products and systems in the very processes of their consumption. A process of design thus is not to impose closure but to allow for everyday life to carry on. (Gunn & Donovan, 2012, p. 1)

Gunn and Donovan stress the importance of the socio-cultural relationship between the designer and the end-users. A crucial point in the changing relationship between design and anthropology is the difference between what they term dA, Da, DA:

These understandings and practices are dependent upon methodological and disciplinary positioning: dA – the theoretical contribution is for anthropology rather than design. Design follows the lead of anthropology in terms of adopting theoretical understandings, or becoming the subject of anthropological study. Da – fieldwork is in the service of design, for example ethnographic studies are used for establishing design requirements. DA – disciplines of design and anthropology are engaged in a convergence of efforts each learning from the other. DA is a shift from informing design to re-framing the social, cultural and environmental relations in both design and anthropology. (Gunn & Donovan, 2012, p. 9)

We can relate to this cogent outline, and further it by adding the difference between classic anthropologists dealing with the anthropology of design, and design for and by anthropology which is what we do in our professional careers. One of the main differences between design and other fields of knowledge in which anthropologists take an interest (such as religion, sports, education, or politics) is that design affects the outcomes of countless daily routines around the globe. Hence, we should view and practice anthropology differently – not only to understand the discipline of design, but work with and alongside designers as applied anthropologists to create an impact on our material surroundings.

Taking on board the considerations of these recent publications in the field we feel that a third concept can be offered for discussion and deliberation. Kjaersgaard and Otto (2012), suggest that design anthropologists should not merely present designers with processed qualitative data, but rather take an active role in the design process. Design anthropologists should contribute and influence the design process as a whole, and not solely in its first stages, as a justification of corporate research or a ‘gift-wrap’ for the marketing division.

We will now present some case studies based on our work with designers in our respective art and design schools in Jerusalem and London.

For us in the practice of working with designers in live education projects, design anthropology consists of the following:

- Design research should be overseen by anthropologists who specialize in design and/or material culture as a minimum requirement – active contributions should be encouraged.
• However, the anthropologist should also be acutely aware of the time sensitive nature of design research – they have the skills and knowledge to undertake such engagements but have to be disciplined in curtailing their demands to meet the requirements of the design brief.
• The anthropologist also has to consider the culture of the client including the economic, technological and commercial dictates of modern design.
• As such anthropologists should define their role as socio-cultural mediators between the world of the client and the world of the user. When considering ethics and ethical dilemmas and conducting real and meaningful research representing the interests of the community, the result may not only consist of a design that is not only inclusive but has the potential to empower the user and his community.

In our eyes, the redefinition of the designer’s role in contemporary society has to start in the education of young designers. As such, our pedagogic outline should include design anthropology as a way to integrate socio-cultural elements throughout the design process. In the next part of the article we wish to present two case studies illustrating the pedagogical potential of social design. With design anthropology integrated into the design process, students can acquire new ways of thinking about subjects.

10. Case study 1: teaching anthropology 101

Over the past few years we have wrestled with the notion of how to teach anthropology 101 to students of art and design. This is difficult for two reasons: firstly, these are practice-oriented disciplines, hence they require an approach more suitable for their professional goals. Secondly, these students will utilise anthropology in a different way from professional anthropologists in various aspects, and so both the theoretical and methodological dimensions require revision.

When the new version of the course ‘introduction to anthropology,’ was devised for 2nd year design students at Hadassah Academic College, we decided to teach anthropology from the end to the beginning. In other words, we decided to start by introducing qualitative methodology and then proceed to teach anthropological theories and key thinkers. During the first lesson we 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 (a chair in the first year and a table in the second year). The students had to explain how their choice of materials, aesthetics and functions related to their chosen socio-cultural group. During the next lessons we 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: tables for treating anorexia; for fishermen’s personal and professional gear; for various ultra-orthodox Hassidic groups; for professional tattoo artists; for Thai manual labourers with matching eating utensils; for street musicians; for soccer fans; for elderly residents of Jerusalem’s Central Market to play backgammon; for children diagnosed as Attention Deficit/Hyperactive Disorder; for anthroposophic kindergartens were just a selection of the resulting student inputs.

During the 2nd year of this new course, the chosen product was a chair, and here as well, the results were extremely innovative including: 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; a chair for cubicle-situated bureaucrats and more. In the following years the course has focused on various design issues, such as healthcare design, the body and design, emergency scenarios and more. While the whole design research changes focus, the basis of design anthropology remains the same therefore highlighting its importance to the discipline.
The results astounded us, although we felt a strong sense of betraying our discipline, stemming both from the way anthropology ‘should’ be taught (as we were taught), and from the ‘sacriligious’ use of anthropology (a liberal and humanistic discipline, in our eyes) as an applied tool for designers or architects. However, from the students’ point of view, a deep, immediate and long-lasting bond was formed 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 tool-kit. As teachers we felt a growing need to present students that do not have basic anthropological training with a concise design anthropology tool-kit, a process we will present in the next case study.5

11. Case study 2: IDE workshop

Recently, we were asked to conduct a concise design anthropology workshop targeted at industrial designers in their first year of Masters study at the Royal College of Art in London. These Innovation Design Engineering (IDE) students are highly capable, acutely intelligent and multi-faceted designers who have a broad knowledge base, and yet lack the experience of integrating design anthropology methodologies in their design process. In comparison to the Jerusalem teaching, the RCA Masters workshop was run in a single day in which we presented our discipline’s principles and highlights. After discussions a one-day workshop6 was devised and is described as follows:

- During the workshop we presented our theoretical ideas and methodological principles in relation to actual student projects, in order to introduce our ‘alien’ way of thinking in an environment familiar to the students.
- During the first two-hour lecture we presented the key points and the advantages of the discipline. We discussed basic anthropological methodologies, and demonstrated the advantages of a holistic worldview in the innovative technological design process.
- Following our lecture, we broke up into small groups and presented the students with an opportunity to plan their individual research projects under three key topics: identifying the population, mapping the urban space and choosing relevant research methods.
- Later in the day each team conducted their own research connected to their own projects. This stage was done after a brief observation assignment conducted in various cafes around the campus.
- During the final session, each team presented their findings backed with images and examples of interviews from the field, and their individual implementations for their projects. This last phase illuminated the impact of design anthropology, since each student was trained in one of many design areas.

This very short and condensed workshop presented us with an opportunity to really think about how we present our discipline to other professionals. Furthermore, we had to consider the most crucial pieces of information which we had to keep and reshape when presenting to others. The ensuing result, among other larger conclusions, was a leaflet designed by us and other Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design designers and researchers (see Appendix 1 in Supplemental information, available at http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21650349.2016.1246205). This leaflet starts by identifying the design, context rather than the design product, a crucial distinction increasingly relevant to contemporary design. The designer then continues to define the environment, community and location of the design context and the relevant processes for this contextual definition. This small leaflet, portable and ‘at a glance’ can be used to illuminate various socio-cultural issues related to a socio-design perspective. By following these simple steps design students can plan and conduct a concise and rapid ethnographic design survey. The leaflet has been highly valued and popular with design students, we believe it can benefit design practitioners, unfamiliar with recent developments in design research, in the early stages of the design process to better define the design brief and plan the various stages that follow.

This one-day course was then extended to a five-day workshop at the Royal College of Art under the ‘Across RCA’ program. In this workshop we used design anthropology as key to work in unison
with the different disciplines which comprise the RCA including designers and artists. The relevance of anthropology to better understand the users’ world was expressed throughout the workshop.

- During the first day, students were presented with several theoretical and methodological lectures regarding the role of the design anthropologist in the design team, as well as instructions on how to use the design leaflet in the field (see Appendix 1 in Supplemental information, available at http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21650349.2016.1246205).
- On the second day they were sent to gather information comparing two café types – a global chain and a local café.
- On their third day, the students discussed another exercise focusing on their experiences on their way home and back to the RCA via public transport. The students were presented with several theories (Bourdieau’s distinction, Geertz and more), which they had to implement in another fieldwork project focusing on either a museum, a public space or a department store.
- In their last two days, students worked on their presentations resulting in a final project in which they presented each of their disciplines while using design anthropology as methodological and theoretical outline.

The resulting presentations were surprising, since even students from the arts department told us design anthropology helped them to better understand their immediate socio-cultural surroundings. A student from the textile department told us she used design anthropology to increase her understanding of her project focusing on traditional Scottish fabrics. Yet another student, from the architecture department, used design anthropology to design a public participation process to better suit her design of a public area in one of London’s neighbourhoods.

12. Conclusions

Introducing ‘design thinking’ IDEO guru Tim Brown writes in his famous book Change by Design (2009, p. 4) that it:

[...] begins with skills designers have learned over many decades in their quest to match human needs with available technical resources within the practical constraints of business. By integrating what is desirable from a human point of view with what is technologically feasible and economically viable, designers have been able to create the products we enjoy today. Design thinking takes the next step, which is to put these tools into the hands of people who may have never thought of themselves as designers and apply them to a vastly greater range of problems [...] design thinking relies on our ability to be intuitive, to recognize patterns, to construct ideas that have emotional meaning as well as functionality, to express ourselves in media other than words or symbols.

The hip and catchy term ‘design thinking’ has spread among designers and yet, while enticing, relates mainly to business-oriented think-tanks interested more in mass-produced commodities than essential objects which will not appear in fashionable design catalogues. Unsurprisingly, in business-orientated organizations corporate design teams have not adopted design ethnography as a holistic socially integrated practice.

Going back to social design we can truly appreciate the potential of design anthropology to enhance designers’ ability to identify and understand the users’ world.

The importance of design anthropology, in our eyes, lies not only as a holistic approach highlighting design outcomes, but also its role in the work of material and cultural anthropologists. Unlike anthropologists rooted in the discipline, we feel that it is important to think and write about these areas whilst embedded within the art and design school. Furthermore, we need not only designers to be committed to research and theoretical thinking, but anthropologists to acknowledge the field of design as crucial to our understanding of contemporary material and visual worlds. As we have seen in this article, using design anthropology throughout the design process helps designers from all disciplines to better understand their design situation.

With new technologies challenging the relationship between designer and manufacturer (Ventura & Shvo, 2016), and the era of ‘disruption’ reconfiguring many of designs relationships the designer’s
role in society is shifting from producer to facilitator and in itself may have to be reconfigured, perhaps redesigned? incorporating multi- and inter-disciplinary knowledge and practice. As such, designers should see themselves not as tools of production but as cognitive leaders of the material world. However, this change entails a paradigmatic shift processed through a cognitive shift in both the design and art schools and within the professional design team. Designers should embrace the opportunity to work with other professionals, but not as ‘outside help’, instead as valued partners.

Notes

1. Of these, two edited books should be noted: Design Anthropology (Alison Clarke (ed.) 2010) and Design and Anthropology (Gunn and Donovan (eds.) 2012). These books, unlike others, deal directly with designers and architects in various issues.
2. Following Suchman’s (2011, p. 3) call for striving towards the anthropology of design.
3. An important example of combining applied anthropology with inclusive design is included in the article written by Bichard and Gheerawo (2011).
4. We would like to stress that our concept of social design differs form that proposed by Sommer (1983) who urged architects to design with ‘people in mind’ through the field of environmental psychology. In contrast the social design we suggest here involves people directly in the process but considers wider social dimensions.
5. For a broader depiction of this new model of ‘anthropology 101’ see Ventura’s article (2013).
6. In a future paper we will present our various options for design anthropology workshops, i.e. two-day, three-day and five-day workshops catering specifically for designers.

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