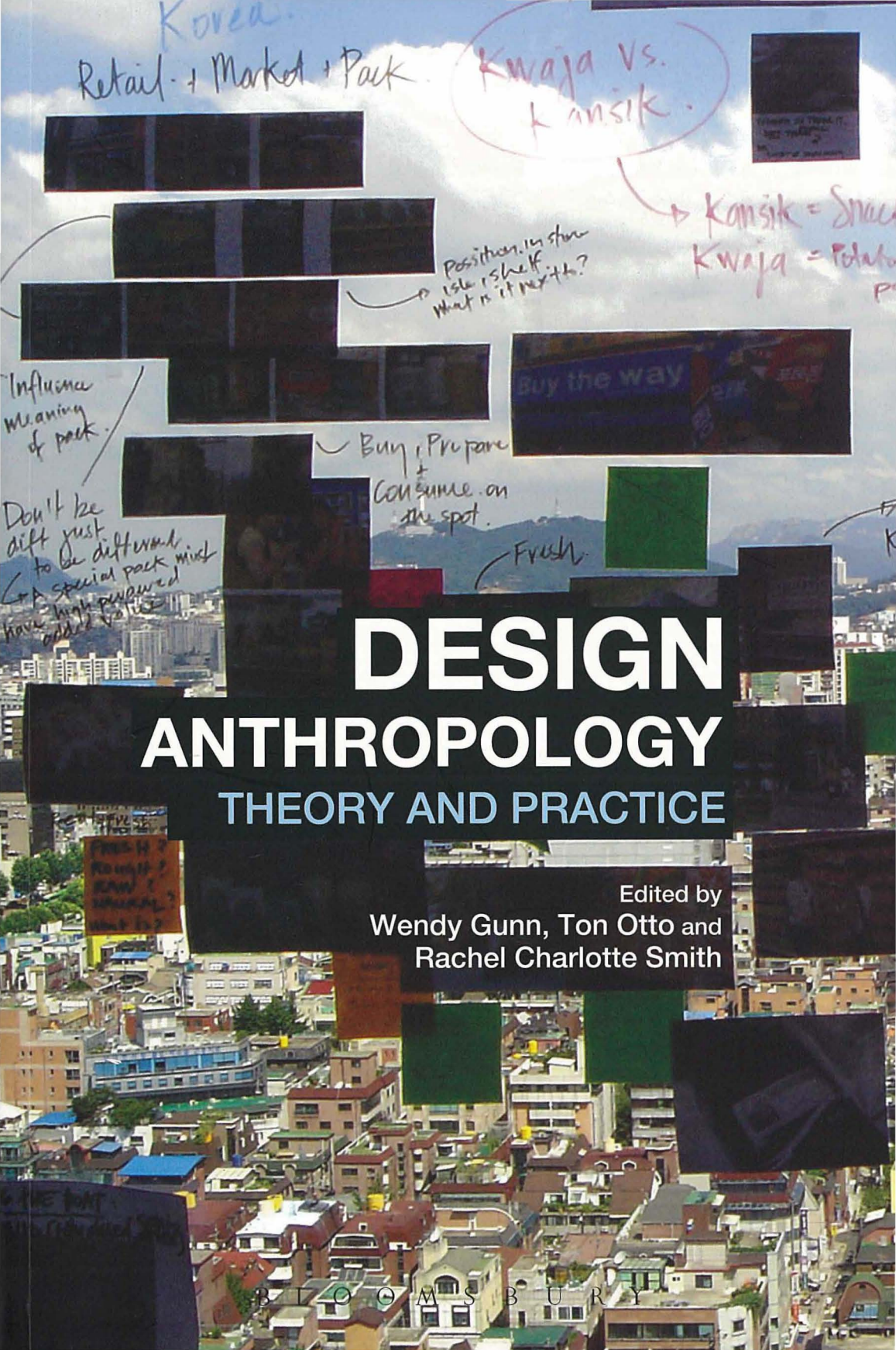

DESIGN ANTHROPOLOGY

THEORY AND PRACTICE

Edited by
Wendy Gunn, Ton Otto and
Rachel Charlotte Smith

BLOOMSBURY

Design Anthropology

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Theory and Practice

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BLOOMSBURY
LONDON • NEW DELHI • NEW YORK • SYDNEY

Bloomsbury Academic
An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

50 Bedford Square
London
WC1B 3DP
UK

1385 Broadway
New York
NY 10018
USA

www.bloomsbury.com

First published 2013

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: HB: 978-0-8578-5368-4
PB: 978-0-8578-5369-1
ePDF: 978-1-4725-1823-1
ePub: 978-0-8578-5371-4

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Typeset by Apex CoVantage, LLC, Madison, WI, USA
Printed and bound in India

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Contributors

Brendon Clark is a senior researcher and project manager at the Interactive Institute, Sweden. Since working in community development in Bolivia in the late 1990s, he has focused his PhD and postdoctoral work on knowledge reproduction practices in technology and service design processes in both the public and private sectors. He co-led the Design Anthropological Innovation Model (DAIM) project in Denmark and has been developing a contextualized language learning agenda called Language as Participation. He teaches MA-level and PhD-level design ethnography and collaborative design courses in Denmark and Sweden.

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Adam Drazin is an anthropologist based at University College London, where he coordinates a masters course on the theme of culture, materials, and design. He has conducted anthropological work for design at HP Labs and Intel Digital Health Group around various themes including aging and remembering. His main current research interests are the conduct of design anthropology, the transnational home, and the material culture of meriting.

Ian Ewart worked as an industrial engineer for many years before studying anthropology. He received his DPhil from the University of Oxford in 2012 following fieldwork in the United Kingdom and Borneo. As a research fellow at the University of Reading, his research interests lie at the cultural and material intersections of technical design, production, and use.

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Wendy Gunn is an associate professor of design anthropology at Mads Clausen Institute, University of Southern Denmark. Her main research interests are in skilled practice, environmental perception, systems development, and transformation of knowledge. Gunn has extensive experience of collaborative processes and practices of designing as an integral part of research and teaching. Recent publications include *Design and Anthropology* (Ashgate, 2012, with Jared Donovan).

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Joachim Halse is an assistant professor at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, School of Design. With a combined background in anthropology and interaction design, Joachim's research explores participatory processes of knowing and making in close collaboration with external industry partners and the public sector. In 2008 Joachim earned the PhD degree from the IT University of Copenhagen with the thesis "Design Anthropology: Borderland Experiments with Participation, Performance and Situated Intervention."

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Kyle Kilbourn is a senior human factors scientist at Medtronic, Inc. He has worked on research projects in welfare technology innovation, including the Automated Sterilization of Hospital Equipment (DEFU-STEPP) project in Denmark, which partnered the public and private sectors. His research interests include understanding experiences for design, the intersection between design and anthropology, and interaction design for health care.

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George E. Marcus is the Chancellor's Professor of Anthropology at the University of California, Irvine. On moving to UCI in 2005 after many years at Rice University, he established a center for ethnography dedicated to examining the conditions and prospects of ethnographic research in diverse contemporary settings. The center has been especially interested in the atmospheres and conditions of collaboration, which particularly influence the setting up and course of fieldwork research. Interfaces of ethnography with design practices and thinking have been of special interest to the center, as has the pedagogy of training apprentice ethnographers in their first projects. Recently, Marcus has coedited *Fieldwork Is Not What It Used to Be* (2009) with James Faubion, and contributed to a published series of conversations with Paul Rabinow entitled *Designs for an Anthropology of the Contemporary* (2008).

Crysta Metcalf is the manager of interactive media user research within Motorola Mobility's Applied Research Center and leads a cross-disciplinary team of applied research scientists. Crysta is an applied cultural anthropologist who received her BA from the University of South Florida, and her MA and PhD from Wayne State University. Her specialty areas include design anthropology, economic anthropology, and business and organizational anthropology. She has worked in applied research for Motorola since 2000, on a variety of projects utilizing team-based, transdisciplinary methods for experience innovation and interaction design. Her work has focused on emerging media and communication technologies and on consumers in both the home and mobile spaces. Crysta regularly publishes and speaks about the use of rigorous ethnographic-style research techniques as part of the invention process.

Keith M. Murphy is an assistant professor of anthropology at the University of California, Irvine. His research explores the relationship between language, design, and politics in Sweden and the United States.

Ton Otto is a professor and research leader at James Cook University, Australia, and a professor of anthropology and ethnography at Aarhus University, Denmark. Since 1986, he has conducted ethnographic field research in Papua New Guinea and published widely on issues of social and cultural change. His interests comprise the epistemology and methodology of ethnographic research, including visual anthropology and its relationship to innovation, intervention, and design. His recent publications include the coedited volume *Experiments in Holism: Theory and Practice in Contemporary Anthropology* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, with Nils Bubandt) and two codirected films: *Ngat is Dead—Studying Mortuary Traditions: Manus, Papua New Guinea* (DER,

2009, with Christian Suhr Nielsen and Steffen Dalsgaard) and *Unity through Culture* (DER, 2012, with Christian Suhr Nielsen).

Rachel Charlotte Smith is an anthropologist and a PhD research fellow in anthropology and interaction design at Aarhus University, Institute for Culture and Society and Research Centre for Participatory IT, in co-tutelle with James Cook University. Her research focuses on relations between culture, design, and technology, specifically on digital cultures, representation, and design of participatory technologies. She led *Digital Natives*, an interactive research and exhibition project creating new forms of digital cultural heritage.

Elizabeth (Dori) Tunstall is an associate professor of design anthropology at Swinburne University of Technology. Her research focuses on cultures-based innovation. Dori has worked as a user experience strategist in academia and industry for more than ten years. She holds a PhD in anthropology from Stanford University.

Christina Wasson was trained as a linguistic anthropologist. After finishing her PhD, she worked for E-Lab, a design firm that used anthropological research to develop new product ideas. She currently teaches the only course in design anthropology offered through an anthropology department in the United States. Clients for class projects have included Motorola, Microsoft, and the Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport. Wasson was also a founding member of the Ethnographic Praxis in Industry Conference steering committee.

Preface

This volume is an outcome of a panel held at the 11th Biennial European Association of Social Anthropologists Conference at the National University of Ireland Maynooth, in August 2010. The aim of the panel, *Design Anthropology: Intertwining Different Timelines, Scales and Movements*, was to expand the notion of ethnographic practice and contribute toward a research agenda for design anthropology. About half of the chapters were presented in a first version at this panel, whereas the others have been subsequently elicited by the editors.

Design anthropology is an emergent field and is practiced in different ways depending on one's methodological positioning. Design practices attempt to make connections (albeit partial) between past, present, and future. Ideally, in the present you have a vision of the past in order to create a future out of the everyday. Practitioners of design anthropology follow dynamic situations and social relations and are concerned with how people perceive, create, and transform their environments through their everyday activities. This view challenges the idea that design and innovation only refer to the generation of *new* things as being central to processes of social and cultural change. Design anthropology practices occur across different scales and timelines and involve many disciplines, each bringing their own distinct ways of knowing and doing.

Inspired by processual, critical and action orientated approaches in anthropology, the editors of this volume attend to the potential of design anthropology practices as providing places for reflection on combinations of methodology and theory. As such the volume focuses on concepts, tools, and methodology in an attempt to reconsider the relation between theory and practice in design anthropology. Starting with the ambition of carving out a theoretical field, although very preliminary, we sketch the theoretical and methodological issues involved. Considering the theory-practice relation in design anthropology raises the question, Can you develop theory as part of practice? Underpinning many of the contributions in this volume is a demonstration of the situated nature of theory generated during collaborative engagement and the specificity of theory as emergent from field investigations. Moreover, the contributors to this volume have shown how theory generated in this way can be involved within design processes. As editors we argue that theory in design anthropology is continually being built. Perhaps this is one

of the reasons why the volume demanded ongoing collaboration between the editors and contributors far beyond the normal remit of editorial input.

In the moment-to-moment interactions between anthropologists and the people they work with, anthropologists make implicit understandings explicit. What the ethnographic method brings is contrast and relation, and it opens up the taken for granted by bringing into the foreground what was in the background. Anthropological theory uses explicit contrast as a way of constructing meaningful difference. Design anthropology is a move to shift the focus from anthropological description to action. In methodological terms, how does this influence the theory-practice relation in this emergent field? What role does anthropological theory play in design anthropology? How is the validity of knowledge in design anthropology established? To address these questions the volume brings together a group of anthropologists who are actively contributing to this field.

The editors and contributors of this volume have collaborated over a two-year period to provide an overview of various positions taken by anthropologists in this emerging field. We want to emphasize that the approaches presented here are constitutive of design anthropology as conceived by anthropologists at a particular moment in time. As such the various positionings are not meant to be definitive examples of *how to do* design anthropology but rather to open lines of inquiry for practitioners of design anthropology to build on. Central to all of these positionings is a concern for the design anthropologist to be involved in some way with instigating change. Ethnography here is not just *a method*; rather engaging *with* people as a form of correspondence (see Gatt and Ingold, this volume) becomes central to transformation. As a result, *methods* of ethnography can be developed that are grounded in processual, holistic approaches that realize the agency of the participants.

The four themes used for structuring the volume were developed at The Cairns Institute, James Cook University, where Otto was working during the preparation of the volume. We are grateful to the Aarhus University Research Foundation and to SPIRE Centre, Mads Clausen Institute, University of Southern Denmark for their financial support of research visits to The Cairns Institute by Gunn (2010) and Smith (2012) to work with Otto on the volume and in preparing the manuscript. Finally we would like to acknowledge the stimulating collaboration with all contributors. The three editors have contributed equally to the task of bringing out this volume, a task that proved considerably greater than anticipated but also very rewarding intellectually.

Wendy Gunn, Ton Otto and Rachel Charlotte Smith, March 2013