

Todd Nicewonger

Title: Re-imagining Anthropology and Education through Design

Abstract: This paper explores the intersection of anthropology and education in the context of design education. In recent years, there has been a growing interest among social theorists in design as both a cultural process and product for remaking social life. In fact, Bruno Latour (2008) has referred to the designer as the new revolutionary, a figure who through contemporary paradigms, like sustainability, value-oriented and ethical design, has the ability to not only remake the material but also the natural world. As a result, there has been a revived debate among design educators on how best to prepare designers for the 21st century, just as there has been a growing interest among social scientists in the knowledge making practices of artisans. Such thinking about design expertise, however, is not new. Artisan communities have long theorized these processes in culturally and institutionally meaningful ways. In this paper I reflect on one such site by drawing on 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork at Antwerp's Royal Academy of Fine Arts. Specifically, I focus on how novice avant-garde fashion designers are taught to "build up" their design ideas in "interesting" ways that reflect not just their ascribed identities but also their "souls." In reflecting on these processes, I attend to the varying modes of embodiment underlining these practices in order to make a wider argument about ethnographically studying the social aspects of making in design. Such a perspective not only highlights design pedagogy but also offers a platform for launching several thought experiments, including considering how the conceptual and modeling practices of designers and the research methodologies and theories of

cultural anthropologists might be integrated in "educational contexts" to address pressing social issues.