

# Anthropology Colloquia

Spring 2014

**Joe Dumit**

## *Embodying Improvisation: Research Presence and Fieldwork with Scientists*

In collaboration with the KeckCAVES and Humanities Innovation Lab at UC Davis and Natasha Myers (York U), this paper explores ethnographically the processes of engagement with a three-dimensional immersive holodeck-like CAVE that is the ongoing project of seven years of collaboration and encounter between geologists and computer scientists, and many others including artists and performers. The construction of a digital environment to facilitate scientific research on a daily basis makes explicit the need to formulate "research presence" as a related form of what in virtual reality research is called illusive "presence". In particular, the ability to responsively scale data enables a form of "haptic creativity," where researchers are moved by moving images to invent new metaphors. Through temporal and spatial scaling, experimentalists are caught up in prolonged encounters with their data, instruments and stories. As one scientist explained, "The give and take, back and forth between you and the data suggests what to do next in the experiment." A temporal slice into what Hans-Jorg Rheinberger calls experimental systems. In turn, I discuss the the improvisational lessons learned at scales from software design to presentational modes and artistic practice to funding restructuring.

Joseph Dumit is Director of Science and Technology Studies and Professor of Anthropology at the University of California Davis. He is the author of *Drugs for Life: How Pharmaceutical Companies Define Our Health* (Duke, 2012) and *Picturing Personhood: Brain Scans and Biomedical Identity* (Princeton University Press, 2004). Dumit has also co-edited *Cyborgs & Citadels: Anthropological Interventions in Emerging Sciences and Technologies*; *Cyborg Babies: From Techno-Sex to Techno-Tots*; and *Biomedicine as Culture*. He was associate editor of *Culture, Medicine & Psychiatry* for 10 years. He is a founding

member of the Humanities Innovation Lab (<http://modlab.ucdavis.edu>), is designing a game on fracking, and is currently studying how immersive 3D visualization platforms are transforming science (<http://keckcaves.org>). He has begun work on a new project on the history of flow charts, cognitive science, and paranoid computers. <http://dumit.net>



Monday, May 12

3:30-5:00 pm

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