

## Anthropology Department Spring 2013 Colloquia



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### *Enregistering Design: Making Things Mean in Sweden and Beyond*

Over the past ninety or so years a powerful and pervasive discourse has emerged in Sweden amidst the parallel developments of both the Swedish model of welfare politics and a distinctive Scandinavian design aesthetic that links social democratic ideologies to the forms and functions of mundane objects, like furniture and other household goods. Alongside a now taken-for-granted cultural expectation that the Swedish political system is organized to “care” for its citizens, designed things in Sweden are similarly expected to “care” for their users in ways that align with, if only unevenly, political values of social responsibility. In this talk I will present some of my ethnographic work following the development and transformation of this cultural premise — that Swedish design is political in a particularly Swedish way — across a number of significant cultural domains. However while the talk is largely centered on the particulars of design in Sweden, I will try to offer a productive rumination on the very concept of design itself. My overall aim is to provide a working model, a prototype, for an anthropology of design that draws together various nodes and links — objects, actors, practices, discourses, meanings, and more — that all in their own ways collectively render design a critical aspect of the ongoing production and reproduction of social worlds.

KEITH MURPHY (PhD UCLA, 2008) is an Assistant Professor of Anthropology at UC Irvine. Trained as a sociocultural and linguistic anthropologist, his research interests primarily concern the relationship between language, material culture, and politics, with a particular emphasis on how these phenomena intersect with human experience. Much of his work has focused on different kinds of design, including architecture, furniture design, interaction design, and more recently, typography, as well as collaboration and creativity in face-to-face interaction.

MONDAY, APRIL 29TH  
3:30 - 5:00PM  
261, SOCIAL SCIENCES 1