

Peter Redfield
UNC-Chapel Hill
redfield@unc.edu

Small Fixes:

Humanitarian Design in a Broken World



This talk addresses humanitarian design, a global moral imaginary flourishing at the intersection of utopian and realist responses to disaster, endemic poverty and inequality at the level of basic infrastructure. The approach has inspired an array of innovative band-aids for postcolonial suffering: ingenious designs for little devices like water filters, low-cost incubators, and alternative toilets, objects that offer little prospect of systemic response but suggest an alternative scale of social vision. Drawing inspiration from Steven Jackson's call for "broken world thinking" in technology studies, my goal is to recognize the productive centrality of breakdown and repair, while also opening questions about the scale of the future in the absence of a clear material vision for progressive utopia. Rather than assuming a unified or seamless apparatus for either health or security, we might then explore a more fragmented, heterogeneous world of dispersed threats and small fixes, moving across imaginative and material registers to reorient contests over the future.

Peter Redfield is Professor of Anthropology at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Trained as a cultural anthropologist sympathetic to history, he concentrates on circulations of science, technology and medicine in colonial and postcolonial contexts. The author of *Life in Crisis: The Ethical Journey of Doctors Without Borders* (California 2013) and *Space in the Tropics: From Convicts to Rockets in French Guiana* (University of California Press, 2000), he is also coeditor of *Forces of Compassion: Humanitarianism between Ethics and Politics* (SAR Press, 2011). He currently serves as the President of the Society for Cultural Anthropology (2017-19).