

Ethnographic Research Methods

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Pronouns: She/Her/Hers

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Land Acknowledgement

Recognizing Anthropology's role in the settler colonial project and the on-going occupation of Indigenous lands, it is important that we acknowledge that this course and all of our endeavors at Brown occur on the traditional lands of the Narragansett, Wampanoag, and Pokanoket peoples. May the knowledge we gain here be in service of justice.

Course Description and Objectives

In this course, *Ethnographic Research Methods*, we will learn about how anthropologists and ethnographers conceptualize, conduct, and analyze their research. This course is guided by the premise that ethnographic research is a two-fold endeavor; it is both a way of knowing and a way of representing people and their practices. We will consider what kinds of questions can anthropology ask, and how does ethnographic research serve to answer them? We will look at the types of research practices that we use to generate and collect data, and discuss their strengths and weaknesses. We will practice analyzing data sets, looking for emergent patterns that are theoretically and contextually grounded. We will look at examples of ethnographic representations, including ethnographic writing, drawing, photography, audio, and video, to understand how the relationship between analysis and representation. Finally, we will discuss the ethics of ethnographic research, particularly in relationship to Anthropology's history as a colonial discipline and the development of these methods in service of rendering Indigenous peoples knowable to the West.

Specifically, as a result of this course, students will be able to:

- Explain the aims and scope of ethnographic research to both lay and professional audiences.
- Deconstruct ethnographic writing to identify what questions the author asked, what data they used to answer their question, and how it is anthropological.
- Demonstrate understanding of the ethical considerations involved in conducting ethnographic research on and with human beings.

- Write an ethnographic research question and design a research proposal outlining what type of data they would need to answer it and what research activities they would conduct to collect that data.
- Analyze ethnographic data and interpret trends therein.
- Produce an original ethnographic work.

Diversity and Inclusion Statement

It is my intention that this class be a productive and collaborative environment for all students. Anthropology as a discipline seeks to understand and respect human diversity in all of its complexities and on its own terms. I strive to bring that approach to the classroom and to foster an environment in which we all seek to first and foremost understand the perspectives of our classmates and colleagues. Anthropology also trains us to pay attention to the ways that power differentials across many scales and contexts shape human interaction. In this vein, I ask all of us to reflect upon our own positionally in the classroom, to examine our various privileges, and to make space for one another. Anthropology has historically contributed to the systems of oppression that we find ourselves still navigating today. Therefore, it is important that we all be mindful of the ways that knowledge and opinions do not exist in a vacuum but rather have concrete effects in the world. As we work through the course materials during the semester, we will agree to learn together, to make space for one another's learning processes, and to respect the diverse racial, ethnic, national, gender, sexual, class, religious, and other identities of the people we are learning with and learning about.

Names and Pronouns

If you go by a different name or gender pronoun than the one that appears on the official course roster, please inform me. Students are expected to refer to their classmates by their stated names and pronouns.

Accessibility and Accommodations

Brown University is committed to full inclusion of all students. Please inform me early in the term if you have a disability or other conditions that might require accommodations or modification of any of these course procedures. You may speak with me after class or during office hours. For more information, please contact [Student and Employee Accessibility Services](#) at 401-863-9588 or SEAS@brown.edu.

Writing support and Plagiarism

Plagiarism and academic dishonesty will not be tolerated under any circumstances. If you are unclear on how to cite information, please contact me and I will direct you to library resources. If you are unclear or struggling with a writing assignment, please come and talk to me in office hours so we can discuss how to approach the assignment. Finally, I

encourage you to use the resources available to you at the Writing Center for your written work. [Request an appointment here.](#)

Extensions, Late Assignments, Absences, Etc.

I understand that this course is but one part of students lives and that occasionally external factors may cause a student to miss class or require more time on an assignment. I ask that in this case, the student come to office hours so that we might together come up with an alternative time line or go over missed work. While I am willing to be flexible, if a pattern develops in which it becomes clear that you will not be able to meet the demands of the course we will have to consider options including withdrawing and/or not passing. It is always better to talk to me first than to get to that point.

Basic Needs

Any student who faces challenges securing their food or housing and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Dean's office for support. Furthermore, please notify me if you are comfortable in doing so, and I will assist in facilitating this support to the best of my ability.

Required Materials

- De León, Jason. 2015. *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Hamdy, Sherine, Coleman Nye, Caroline Brewer, and Sarula Bao. 2017. *Lissa: A Story about Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution*. North York, Ontario, Canada : University of Toronto Press.

Evaluation

Participation (20%)

Attendance and active participation in discussion are essential to the success of the course and will be evaluated as part of the final grade. Students are expected to attend all class sessions and to have thoughtfully engaged with the readings. Students should come prepared with specific passages of the texts and questions that they wish to discuss. If there are parts of the readings that are confusing or intriguing, share those passages with the class. If you make a connection between something you've read for class and something happening in the news or your own life, bring those observations as well. If you are struggling to find ways to participate, please come speak to me during office hours so that we can discuss your concerns and brainstorm ways for you to join the conversation.

Article Analysis (20%) Due Week 4.

I will assign three ethnographic articles for this assignment. I encourage you to read all three. Choose one and write a 3 page paper analyzing the article to reveal the ethnographic questions the author seeks to answer and the data they used to answer them. Students will need to work backward from a finished ethnographic product to try to understand the process through which it came to be. They will need to identify the major parts of an article: 1) the argument; 2) the literature review; and 3) the ethnographic discussion. Once they have done so, they will then make a case for what question they think the author was trying to answer and what evidence they used to do so.

Ethnographic Research Assignment (60%) - Four parts, each 15%

Students will receive feedback from the professor at each stage of this project to help them as they move on to the next step

Write a 1-2 page research proposal. Due Week 6 (15%)

Design a mini ethnographic research project to be carried out on campus* asking and answering a question about the social and cultural life of Brown. The purpose of this assignment is not to probe the deeper meanings of life and human nature, but rather to 1) put into practice the particular approach to research that defines anthropology and 2) to get a sense of how the theory and method we are learning about can be applied to understanding everyday life. This skill set can be useful for many professional fields, including international affairs, business and marketing, journalism, user experience research and design, etc.

Think about what types of questions an anthropologist might ask about college life. Make sure that the scale of your question is manageable both for this assignment and for your ethnographic site. For example, you might, for some reason, be interested to know if college students' academic success would improve overtime if they listened to the Spice Girls every morning for an academic year. However, this type of cause and effect research question is not a typical anthropological question, nor will you have the time to carry out this research over a full academic year. A better anthropological question might be, Do college students listen to music when they study? If so, why? This question is answerable using anthropological methods such as ethnographic interviews and participant observation. It might also tell us something interesting about the role of music in the cultural life of Brown students.

Next, think about what kind of information you would need to answer your research questions. What would you need to observe? Where would you go to conduct your observation? What activities or interactions will you be looking for? Why? Who would

you need to talk to? What types of questions would you ask? What materials or documents you would need to look at? What would you be looking for? What ethical considerations should you account for? How will you account for them?

Please use the research proposals provided as guides for your proposal. Your proposal should include 1) a clearly stated research question or questions; 2) clearly articulated methods for data collection including research sites, research populations, and methods; 3) a discussion of what you expect to find and how you will determine if you've answer your questions.

Write at least 2 pages of field notes. Due Week 9 (15%)

Conduct an ethnographic observation and take field notes. Spend at least one hour conducting your observation. Write detailed notes on what you observe. Pay attention to what you observe vs. what you deduce about those observations. How do you know what you know?

Please use the sample field note provided as guides in your writing. Field notes should include a description of where you were, when and how long you were there, who and what you saw, and how you evaluated the interactions you observed. In other words, how you know what you saw. Your positionality is essential to your observations, you should not speak as "a voice from no where" but rather have a clear presence in your writing.

Conduct an interview and write a 2-3 page summary. Due Week 11 (15%)

Conduct an ethnographic interview and take notes. You may use your phone or other recording device to create an audio recording of the interview, if and only if your interviewee consents. Using what you have learned from your observations, think about what questions you might want to ask. Come prepared with a set of guiding questions, but practice letting your interviewee steer the conversation based on their understanding of and interest in the topic. Write detailed notes not only on their answers, but also on what you observe in their behavior during the interview. Are there questions that excited them? Questions that fell flat? What can you learn from their intonation or body language? Following your interview, write a 2-3 page summary of your interview. Make sure to include detailed information about how you arrive at your conclusions.

Produce an ethnographic work based on your analysis. Due during finals (15%)

Analyze the data collected during your observations (We will practice doing this together in class). What did you learn? Do the things you observe answer the questions you set out to answer? How so? Or, why not? What, if any, ethnical or methodological

dilemmas did you encounter? Use any of the readings from the course to inform your analysis

Produce an ethnographic work based on your analysis. You may choose the format of your ethnography based on the types of ethnographic works we have seen in class (e.g. cartoon, podcast, etc.). If you choose to write a paper, it should be 4-5 pages. If you choose to do something other than a paper, you should include a short one page explanation of your work. Either way, your analysis should have a clear central argument. This argument should be appropriate in scale and scope to what you've been able to observe and deduce. It should use the data from your observations to support the argument. It should make connections to the themes and readings from the course.

You will turn in a 1 page proposal for this project and discuss it with me in office hours by week 12. This will not be graded, but will provide valuable feedback for your final project.

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Calendar

Week 1: The Aims and Scope of Anthropological Research

- Baker, Lee D. 2010. *Anthropology and the Racial Politics of Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press
 - Introduction
 - Cult of Franz Boas
- Franz Boas. 1932. "The Aims of Anthropological Research" In *Science*. New Series, Vol. 76, No. 1983 (Dec. 30, 1932), pp. 605-613
- Franz Boas. 1896. "The Limitations of the Comparative Method of Anthropology" In *Science*. New Series, Vol. 4, No. 103 (Dec. 18, 1896), pp. 901-908
- Geertz, Clifford. 1973. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture." Pp. 3-30 in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz*. New York: Basic Books

Week 2: Anthropology, Power, and the Other

- Nordling, Linda. 2020. "Who Gets to Study Whom?" *Sapiens*. <https://www.sapiens.org/culture/anthropology-colonial-history/>
- Kamala Visweswaran. 1998. "Race and the Culture of Anthropology." *American Anthropologist*. 100(1): 70-83.

- Parikh, Anar. 2018. "Race is Still a Problem in Anthropology." *Anthrodendum*, April 9, 2018, <https://anthrodendum.org/2018/04/09/race-is-still-a-problem-in-anthropology/>.
- Ann Stoler. 2010. "Rethinking Colonial Categories" in *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*. University of California Press
- Deloria, Vine Jr. 2012 [1969]. "Custer Died for Your Sins" In *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader*, edited by Antonius C. G. M. Robben and Jeffrey A. Sluka, 2nd edition, 199-206. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 2003. "Anthropology and the Savage Slot: The Poetics and Politics of Otherness." In *Global Transformations: Anthropology and the Modern World*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. Pp. 7-28.

Week 3: Refusal, Representation, and Ethics

- Sherry Ortner. 1995. "Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal." In *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. 37 (1): 173-193.
- Audra Simpson. 2007. "On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, 'Voice,' and Colonial Citizenship." In *Junctures* 9: 67-80.
- Clifford, James. 1983. "On Ethnographic Authority," In *Representations* 2: 118-146.
- AAA Code of Ethics (2012 statement), review online, <http://ethics.americananthro.org/category/statement/>
- Price, David H. 2016. "A Short History of American Anthropological Ethics, Codes, Principles, and Responsibilities – Professional and Otherwise." In *Anthropological Ethics in Context: An Ongoing Dialogue*, edited by Dena Plemmons and Alex W. Barker, 23-38. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, Inc.
- Bourgois, Philippe. 1997 (1991). *Confronting the Ethics of Ethnography: Lessons from fieldwork in Central America*. In *Decolonizing Anthropology: Moving Further toward an anthropology of liberation*. Faye V. Harrison, ed. Arlington, VA: Association of Black Anthropologist, American Anthropological Association.

Week 4: Research Design: Asking Anthropological Questions

- Research Proposal Samples
- Bernard, H. Russell. 2011. "Preparing for Research." In *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, 5th edition, 66-95. Lanham: Altamira Press.
- Booth, Wayne C. et. al. 1995. "Asking Questions, Finding Answers." In *The Craft of Research*, 29-47. University of Chicago Press: Chicago.

Article Analysis Due

Ethnographic Article Selections:

- Allen, Catherine J. 1981. "To Be Quechua: The Symbolism of Coca Chewing in Highland Peru." *American Ethnologist* 8 (1): 157–71.
- Bonilla, Yarimar. 2011. "The Past is Made By Walking: Labor Activism and Historical Production in Postcolonial Guadeloupe." In *Cultural Anthropology* 26 (3): 313–39.
- Mahon, Maureen. 2000. "Black Like This: Race, Generation, and Rock in the Post-Civil Rights Era." In *American Ethnologist* 27 (2): 283–311.

Week 5: Conducting Research: Observing

- Forsey, Martin Gerard. 2010. "Ethnography as Participant Listening." In *Ethnography* 11 (4): 558-572.
- DeWalt, Kathleen and Billie R. DeWalt. 2011. "Doing Participant Observation: Becoming a Participant." In *Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers*, 2nd edition, 41-66. Lanham: AltaMira Press.
- Bernard, H. Russell. 2006. "Field Notes: How to take them, code them, manage them." In *Research methods in anthropology: qualitative and quantitative approaches*, 387-412. Lanham: AltaMira Press
- Jackson, Jean. 1990. "I am a Fieldnote: Fieldnotes as a Symbol of Professional Identity." In *Fieldnotes: The Making of Anthropology*. Roger Sanjek, ed. pp. 3-33. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Fieldnote Samples

Week 6: Conducting Research: Asking

- Briggs, Charles. 1986 *Learning How to Ask: A Sociolinguistic Appraisal of the Role of the Interview in Social Science Research*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
 - Introduction
- Bernard, H. Russell. 2011. "Chapter 8: Interviewing I: Unstructured and Semistructured." In *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, 5th edition, 171-202. Lanham: AltaMira Press.
- Schensul, Jean J., and Margaret Diane LeCompte. 2013. *Essential Ethnographic Methods: A Mixed Methods Approach*. 2nd ed. Lanham, Md.: AltaMira Press. (Selections from Interview Chapters)

Research Proposal Due

Week 7: Conducting Research: Doing

- Schensul, Jean J., and Margaret Diane Le Compte. 2013. "Structured approaches to ethnographic data collection : surveys" In *Essential Ethnographic Methods: A Mixed Methods Approach*. 2nd ed. Lanham, Md.: AltaMira Press.

- Sondgrass, Jeffrey G. 2014. "Ethnography of Online Cultures." In *Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology*, Second Edition. Bernard, H. Russell, and Clarence C. Gravlee, eds. 437-466, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/brown/detail.action?docID=1734036>.
- El Guindi, Fadwa. 2014. "Visual Anthropology." In *Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology*, Second Edition. Bernard, H. Russell, and Clarence C. Gravlee, eds. 414-436, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/brown/detail.action?docID=1734036>
- Farnell, Brenda and Laura R. Graham. "Discourse-Centered Methods." In *Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology*, Second Edition. Bernard, H. Russell, and Clarence C. Gravlee, eds. 371-413, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/brown/detail.action?docID=1734036>

Week 8: Digital and Virtual Ethnography

- Bonilla, Yarimar, and Jonathan Rosa. 2015. "Digital Protest, Hashtag Ethnography, and the Racial Politics of Social Media in the United States." *American Ethnologist* 42 (1): 4–17. <https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12112>.
- Boellstorff, Tom, et al., 2012. *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
 - "Why ethnographic methods and why virtual worlds?", 6-8
 - "Participant Observation in Virtual Worlds", 65-91
 - "Other Data Collection Methods for Virtual Worlds Research", 113-126
- Tallbear, Kim. 2013. "Genetic Genealogy Online" In *Native American DNA. Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Week 9: Analysis

- Wortham, Stanton and Angela Reyes. 2015, "Discourse analysis of ethnographic data." In *Discourse Analysis beyond the Speech Event*. New York: Routledge.
- Fetterman, David M. 2010. "Finding Your Way Through the Forest: Analysis." In *Ethnography: Step by Step*, Third Edition. 93-109. Los Angeles: Sage.
- DeWalt, Kathleen and Billie R. DeWalt. 2011. "Analyzing Field Notes." In *Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers*, 2nd edition, 156-183. Lanham: AltaMira Press.
- Hill, Jane H. 1995. The Voices of Don Gabriel: Responsibility and Self in a Modern Mexicano Narrative. In *The Dialogic Emergence of Culture*. Dennis Tedlock and Bruce Mannheim, eds. Pp. 97–147. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Field notes due

Week 10: Ethnographic Writing

- Behar, Ruth, and Deborah A. Gordon. 1995. *Women Writing Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press. (Selections)
- Clifford, James, George E Marcus, and Kim Fortun. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. 25th anniversary ed. / Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2010. (Selections)
- Fassin, Didier. 2013. "Why Ethnography Matters: On Anthropology and its Publics." *Cultural Anthropology* 28, no. 4: 621–46.

Week 11: Alternative Ethnographies 1: Comics

- Hamdy, Sherine. et. al., 2017. *Lissa: a story about medical promise, friendship, and revolution*.
- Dragone, Francesco. 2017. *The Making of Lissa*. (We will watch this ethnographic making-of film in class)
- Causey, Andrew. 2015. "'You've got to draw it if you want to see it': Drawing as an Ethnographic Method" <http://www.utpteachingculture.com/youve-got-to-draw-it-if-you-want-to-see-it-drawing-as-an-ethnographic-method/>
- Crowther, Gillian. 2015. "Fieldwork Cartoons Revisited." <http://www.utpteachingculture.com/fieldwork-cartoons-revisited/>
- Perley, Bernard. 2019. "Going Native...In Other Words." **Anthropology News** website, September 19, 2019. <https://www.anthropology-news.org/index.php/2019/09/19/going-nativein-other-words/>

Interview Analysis Due

Week 12: Alternative Ethnographies: Audio and Visual Anthropology

- Gladwell, Adam, ft. Leslie Walker and Chris Chan. "100 Years of Beauty and the Beast of Youtube with Chris Chan." *This Anthro Life*. <https://thisanthrolife.org/episodes/100-years-of-beauty-and-the-beast-of-youtube-with-s1!2c6a8>
 - Also watch some of Chan's videos on Youtube. <https://youtu.be/XgZtQitm-nM>
- Taylor, Carylanna. 2019. "How I Chose to Apply Anthropology through Film." Anthropology News website, November 8, 2019. DOI: 10.1111/AN.1307
- "Fiori Berhane on the Mediterranean Sea as A Nowhere Space" A Correction Podcast. <https://www.acorrectionpodcast.com/phoneyeconomy/j5rn8h24ayjhhm92ghnxthcb6tey2w>
- André-Johnson, Cory-Alice. 2020. "What Does Anthropology Sound Like: Activism." AnthroPod, *Fieldsights*, January 20. <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/what-does-anthropology-sound-like-activism>

- Readings on Ethics from the Society of Visual Anthropology <https://societyforvisualanthropology.org/about/ethics/>

Final Project Proposal Due

Week 13: Blogs, Op Eds, Poetry, Fiction

- Jacobsen, Kristina. 2020. "When Coronavirus Emptied the Streets, Music Filled Them." *Sapiens*. <https://www.sapiens.org/culture/coronavirus-sardinia-music/>
- Leinaweaever, Jessaca. 2017. "Peru Should Think Outside the 'Baby Box'." <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2017-09-12/perus-congress-considers-an-unwise-baby-box-law-for-abandoned-children>
- Cotter, William M. 2018. *56 Seconds*. <http://u.arizona.edu/~williamcotter/bootstrap/AH2018.pdf>
- Johnson, L. P. (2018). Devil on My Shoulder: An Ode to Adriamycin. *Anthropology and Humanism*, 43(1), 147-149. <https://doi.org/10.1111/anhu.12205>.
- Chareonsonthichai, Thararat. 2012. "The Fragrance of the Classical Past: The Memory of the Lao King and the Reconstruction of the Lost Rituals of Bun That Luang" In *Anthropology and Humanism*, Vol. 38, Issue 1, pp 67–81
- Garofalo, Livia. 2020. "Wounded attachments: infrastructure, intimacy, and harm in the national public hospital." *Somatosphere*. September 2020.

Weeks 14 & 15: Bringing it all together: Land of Open Graves

- De León, Jason. 2015. *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
 - Check out the Undocumented Migrant Project's Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/hostileterrain94/?hl=en>
- Norton, Holly. 2018. "What anthropologists can tell you about the US Border and immigration crisis." *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2018/jul/18/what-anthropologists-can-tell-you-about-the-us-border-immigration-crisis>
- Aviles, Mary. "Data Visualization As an act of Witnessing" *Nightingale*. <https://medium.com/nightingale/data-visualization-as-an-act-of-witnessing-33e346f5e437>

Ethnographic Work Due

***Addendum**

The above syllabus is designed for a face-to-face classroom where the possibility of observing life “on campus” does not post an over-whelming health risk to students, faculty, staff, and the larger community. Unfortunately, we are not currently living under those conditions as a result of the COVID-19 public health crisis. Therefore, I am including here a list of additional resources that can be used to adapt this syllabus to a hybrid or virtual model. In my adaptation, I would encourage students to use the tools learned in this class to document their own experiences as college students during a pandemic. Much has been written about them, but this course presents and opportunity to flip the script and let these students tell their own stories.

- Lems, Annika. 2020. “The (Im)possibility of Ethnographic Research during Corona.” Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology. <https://www.eth.mpg.de/5478478/news-2020-06-11-01>
- DeHart, Monica. 2020. “Thinking Ethnographically in Pandemic Times.” Social Science Research Council. <https://items.ssrc.org/covid-19-and-the-social-sciences/social-research-and-insecurity/thinking-ethnographically-in-pandemic-times/>
- Chao, Sophie. 2020. “When Crisis Brings Us Closer: Reflecting on Family, Fieldwork, and Faraway Homes in the COVID-19 Pandemic.” *Somatosphere*. <http://somatosphere.net/2020/when-crisis-brings-us-closer-reflecting-on-family-fieldwork-and-faraway-homes-in-the-covid-19-pandemic.html/>
- Various Authors. 2020. “The Future of Anthropological Research: Ethics, Questions, and Methods in the Age of COVID-19: Part I” <http://blog.wennergren.org/2020/06/the-future-of-anthropological-research-ethics-questions-and-methods-in-the-age-of-covid-19-part-i/>
- Various Authors. 2020. “The Future of Anthropological Research: Ethics, Questions, and Methods in the Age of COVID-19: Part II.” <http://blog.wennergren.org/2020/07/the-future-of-anthropological-research-ethics-questions-and-methods-in-the-age-of-covid-19-part-2/>