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Imagining Change in Anthropology

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The Editors' Note: Imagining Change in Anthropology

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So I turned myself to face me

But I've never caught a glimpse

How the others must see the faker

- David Bowie, "Changes" (1971)

For the October 2018 issue of *Open Anthropology* we explore the theme of imagining change in, through, and of anthropology. The issue is a companion to the 2018 Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association in San Jose, California. In tandem with the conference theme of "Change in the Anthropological Imagination: Resistance, Resilience, and Adaptation," we highlight how anthropologists have imagined change, including historical selections that speak to changes within the discipline. We also include several selections emphasizing the imaging of change, from ethnographic film, to multimodal approaches, to the live social media documentation of Hurricane María.

From the tenuousness of employment in academia to the #MeToo movement, all of us are prompted at the present moment to confront the ways in which we shortchange and fail each other as researchers and scholars, colleagues and citizens, mentors and teachers. We know we can do better. As the editors of this collection, our aim is to call attention to the efforts that already have been and are being made. We hope to encourage change in our own practices and ideas in order to reimagine and reconstitute an anthropology that is resistant, resilient, and adaptive (and not entrenched, precarious, and irrelevant).

We begin with a 1990 *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* article by [Emily Martin](#), who presents the [2018 AAA Distinguished Lecture](#). “Toward an Anthropology of Immunology: The Body as Nation State” examines the metaphors used in popular media and scientific literature to describe and explain the human body’s immune responses. For those engaged in teaching and learning, it is an excellent introduction to Martin’s work (along with the widely anthologized “The Egg and the Sperm: How Science Has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles”). The depictions of “killer T cells” and of macrophages that descend upon “invading cells” and “ingest” them (413) will be familiar to contemporary readers. Martin points out that “one kind of ideological work such images might do is to make violent destruction seem ordinary and part of the necessity of daily life. Perhaps when the texts slip between warfare and ingestion they in effect domesticate violence” (417). Although Martin conducted this work more than 30 years ago with a particular interest in the framing of HIV/AIDS, her analysis here of body as nation-state resonates with the themes of the 2018 conference.

Especially today, what ought to be appreciated about Martin’s work is that she brings to our attention not only the dominant and dominating ideas and practices of our times, but also “alternative visions and acts of resistance,” as [Anna Loewenhaupt Tsing](#) and [Paulla A. Ebron](#) write in their 1988 *American Ethnologist* book review of *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction*. In this book, Martin demonstrates how the ideas and images describing women’s reproductive bodies also define their gendered, raced, and classed treatment. At the same time, Tsing and Ebron comment: “The book invites us to join the pleasure of everyday insurrection. . . . These women are for the most part not political activists, but they dare to name ‘standard medical procedures’ as violations” (168).

The demands of productive labor on women’s and especially girls’ bodies and, in turn, the reproduction of disciplined and docile bodies are the focus of [Teresa Figueroa Sanchez’s](#) “Californian Strawberries: Mexican Immigrant Women Sharecroppers, Labor, and Discipline,” published in *Anthropology of Work Review* in 2013 (and also on [YouTube](#)). As Sanchez notes, sharecropping re-emerged in California in reaction to (and undermining) the successful efforts of United Farm Workers—co-founded in 1962 by [Dolores Huerta](#), who will deliver this year’s [opening keynote address](#) in San Jose—to address unfair labor practices, establish collective bargaining rights, set a minimum age of 12 for agricultural workers, and introduce overtime pay (17). In this paper, Sanchez draws on her experiences in the field, both as an anthropologist and as a teenaged Mexican immigrant sent by her father to plant and pick strawberries. The California strawberry industry largely depends on sharecropping families. While men held the contracts, they delegated responsibilities for the harvest itself to women in the household. This also meant that children became involved in the work, as women could tend to them while in the field and children developed the skills to harvest the notoriously delicate fruit. Women themselves described “having children in the sharecropping plot as a safe and rewarding task, insofar as children learned the capitalist work ethic of hard work and sacrifice and fulfilled their family’s desire to have hardworking children and teenagers” (22). This work also takes a toll on bodies as it involves the constant up and down of stoop labor, exposure to pesticide residues, and the staining left behind by the tannin in the strawberry’s juice. “Labor, as

well as the body, is socially produced on the farm,” Sanchez writes. “Learning the capitalist work discipline concept of industrial time and developing and shaping the body prepares young women to become proletarian workers whose bodies are conditioned to meet the strenuous demands of California’s thriving agrarian capitalist economy” (23).

Our next selection demonstrates what and how we learn differently when we imagine the work of anthropology differently. In “Toward a Fugitive Anthropology: Gender, Race, and Violence in the Field,” the focus is again on bodies and the field. [Maya J. Berry](#), [Claudia Chàvez Argüelles](#), [Shanya Cordis](#), [Sarah Ihmoud](#), and [Elizabeth Velásquez Estrada](#) present and reflect on their experiences of violence and its threat upon their bodies while undertaking anthropological fieldwork in communities in El Salvador, Cuba, Palestine, Mexico, and Guyana. “We argue that the specificity that stems from our navigation of the field as black, brown, indigenous and queer cisgender women provides pedagogically important insights into the practice of fieldwork and the conceptualization of a decolonized anthropology” (539). The instances that the authors discuss here are not meant to be treated as unusual, but as underscoring the raced and gendered dimensions of disciplinary practice-as-usual. The section titled “When Help Isn’t on the Way, or Black Women’s Fieldwork” describes the responses to an assault on one of the authors while conducting fieldwork. There is sympathy for the author, who is Afro-Cuban-American, and also concern for the (white) attacker’s family who runs the boarding house where foreign researchers, like the author, frequently stay. There is chiding of the author by an older Afro-Cuban woman for speaking Spanish, not English, thus failing to differentiate herself as not like other black women in Cuba and falling victim to the taken-for-granted logic that her blackness invites violation. There is also the author’s own response:

I maintained my silence out of fear that talking about my assault would potentially overshadow the research or cause harm to its perpetrator. Activist anthropologists are expected to engage in lone acts of bravery in order to shed light on the struggles of others with less relative privilege. I had also internalized the idea that black women cannot afford to bring any more attention to our already hypervisible bodies. (547)

How, then, to do the important and necessary work of a politically engaged anthropology as a woman in a body that is marked and vulnerable? Collectively, the authors imagine a change in the discipline, calling for a fugitive anthropology that is grounded in embodiment, collaboration, and care. “In these nurturing bonds and praxis we identify the core of a feminist ethos, whose continuation in the academy is politically vital and spiritually necessary” (559).

The next four selections are historical in character, providing brief glimpses into how US anthropology has approached change, as well as a primer on why we really needed and continue to need the “core of a feminist ethos.” [A.L. Kroeber’s](#) “On the Principle of Order in Civilization as Exemplified by Changes of Fashion” published in 1919 in *American Anthropologist*, provides a classic example of how the then relatively new discipline of academic anthropology would portray social change. For this issue of *Open Anthropology*, it is also interesting to note that in the same decade when Franz Boas was publishing [“Changes in the Bodily Form of Descendants](#)

[of Immigrants](#)” from Columbia University in New York, Kroeber (granted the first Ph.D. in US anthropology under the direction of Boas) was building a program at the University of California, Berkeley. Kroeber was seeking quantitative measurements to describe the “rise and fall of national arts and of national fortunes” (235). Using terms that echoed descriptions of business cycles, Kroeber described “a similar course of origin, growth, climax, decline, and either death or petrification, analogous to the life stories of organisms” (236). Tracing such movements quantitatively brought empirical difficulties, and so Kroeber eventually settled on eight measurements of “women’s full evening toilette” (239), or a silk evening gown. After many tables and charts, Kroeber concluded he had found reasonable evidence of an underlying pulsation in the width of civilized women’s skirts, which is symmetrical and extends in its up and down beat over a full century. . . . The major proportions of dress change with a slow majesty, in periods often exceeding the duration of human life, and at least sometimes with the even regularity of the swing of an enormous pendulum. (257-58)

If even the rapid whims of fashion could be part of an “enormous pendulum,” so too did Kroeber subordinate the contributions of any individual to the social whole. “The forces are social, and not the fortuitous appearance of personalities gifted with this taste or that faculty. Again the principle of civilizational determinism scores as against individualistic randomness” (261).

Through the following decades, the development of US anthropology would, in general, follow Kroeber’s lead in thinking of culture as subject to slow-moving change that exceeded the duration of human life, as well as the duration of any anthropological field study. Like Kroeber, Ruth Benedict’s *Patterns of Culture* (1934) subordinated particular elements to a cultural whole, while subordinating “individualistic randomness” to an overarching order. With the rise of anthropology as a degree-granting, academic institution, the field study as a rite of passage validated the capture of culture as an unchanging whole. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot wrote in *Global Transformations*, “to put it bluntly, at some point in time one has to close the book and the easiest way to do so is to claim to have exhausted the territory. Doctoral theses claimed—not always implicitly—to put between two covers all that was essential to know about ‘the culture’ under study” (2003, 104). But by the 1960s, both anthropology and the world demanded to know about social change. [Frederik Barth’s](#) 1966 plenary address to the American Anthropological Association, published the following year as “On the Study of Social Change” in *American Anthropologist*, announced from the very first sentence of the abstract that times had indeed changed: “Traditional anthropological description in terms of pattern and custom, convenient as it is for certain purposes, results essentially in accounts that do not adequately portray change” (661).

Barth’s plenary address aimed to reorient the study of anthropology toward change. Barth argued that simply tacking on the study of change, “treating ‘social change’ as if it were a topic of anthropological investigation like ‘religion’ or ‘domestic organization’” (661) would be inadequate. Rather, “we must recast our very description of social systems in order to accommodate these data about the events of change” (661). Barth then reviewed the usual anthropological search for a pattern, which made change essentially unobservable (662). Very

much against Kroeber's declaration that individual personalities do little to alter the overall societal trajectory, Barth explicitly studied entrepreneurs (664). Rather than describe social institutions, Barth turned attention to "institutionalization" (668).

Similarly [Anthony F.C. Wallace](#), in his 1972 article "Paradigmatic Processes in Culture Change" (also in *American Anthropologist*), sought to describe processes of culture change which had been neglected by anthropologists (467). Drawing specifically on Kroeber, and on Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), Wallace attempted to generalize Kroeber and Kuhn into a "model of a type of culture change" which he called "paradigmatic" (467). Interestingly, Wallace described the fieldwork of Boas as a kind of "paradigm-forming" event in US anthropology (469) which later led to paradigmatic core development such as doctoral dissertations. Wallace was most interested in case studies regarding textile mills and industrialization in Pennsylvania (472-74) and in Great Britain (474-76).

What goes unmentioned in Wallace's discussion of industrialization were the earlier experiments and templates for industrial activity that occurred in the sugar-producing colonies of the Caribbean—as Sidney Mintz detailed in *Sweetness and Power* (1985). Nevertheless, there is something of a giveaway at the end of Wallace's article:

It seems to be the case that the world has repeatedly been transformed by the conjunction of trivialities: specifically, by the application of new navigational gadgets to the problem of securing spices for the dining tables and beaver pelts for felt hats, by the application of mechanical rollers to the problem of making enough cotton thread to satisfy the demand for cotton cloth created by the importation of Indian cottons from recently conquered India—and so on. (477)

Importantly, all of these activities—securing spices, accumulating beaver pelts, expropriating cotton—were very much in process well before Boas and the anthropologists initiated their "paradigm-forming" field studies. Hence, even in this 1960s anthropological turn to social change, many anthropologists missed how much wrenching "social change" had already occurred by the time the first fieldworker arrived. A corrective perspective would finally be most forcefully delivered by Eric Wolf in his magisterial *Europe and the People Without History* (1982).

We conclude the historical retrospective with a somewhat curious (and less-frequently cited) piece published in *Ethos* in 1975 by [Thomas J. Schoeneman](#): "The Witch Hunt as a Culture Change Phenomenon." Schoeneman was here attempting an interdisciplinary endeavor which would compare anthropological accounts of witchcraft with historical accounts of witch hunts (530). Particularly, Schoeneman drew on Anthony F.C. Wallace's work on "revitalization theory" to argue that "the witch hunt is at once reflective of and an agent of sociocultural change" (531). Frankly, it is interesting to re-examine anthropological work on witch hunts at a time when US President Donald Trump tweeted more than 110 times about a witch hunt between May 2017–August 2018 (["Trump's Growing Obsession With the 'Witch Hunt'"](#)). Schoeneman concluded

that witch hunts were not quite like revitalization movements in that “the change involves a dysfunctional innovative attempt to preserve established cultural institutions and social relationships by seeking the locus of misfortune in some group other than the existing powers” (552). Here, we might simultaneously see how it is the Trump rhetoric which seeks to conduct “demonological investigations” into threatening others, while at the same time understanding that in fact there are many who want investigative powers precisely to preserve established cultural institutions. And we might here ponder, with Jonathan Rosa and Yarimar Bonilla, to what extent “some institutions need to be comprehensively reconstituted or abolished altogether” (from “Deprovincializing Trump, Decolonizing Diversity, and Unsettling Anthropology” [2017, 202] which also appeared in the October 2017 issue of *Open Anthropology*).

In keeping with a historical retrospective, the Executive Session on “Celebrating 50 Years of Ethnographic Film: Documentary Educational Resources and the Society for Visual Anthropology” reminds us of the enduring power and the history of ethnographic film. The next two selections include work by two of the panelists from that session. In “A Kalahari Family: Some Thoughts on Reflexivity, Voice and Social Location” (2003), John P. Homiak provides commentary on John Marshall’s [A Kalahari Family](#) (2002). Filmed between 1950 and 2000, the documentary series is recognized as a monumental work documenting the changing lives and experiences of the Ju/’hoansi. In addition, Homiak, who is the director of the National Anthropology Archives and the Human Studies Film Archives at the Smithsonian Institution, notes the reflexive turn that Marshall takes in these films. “Throughout the course of the early scenes are clear echoes of Marshall in dialogue with his own filmmaking past, describing the Ju/’hoansi as gatherer-hunters” (131). Homiak also notes the break-down of the filmmaker’s reflexivity, which is limited by lack of attention to the concerns of power. “As a person of perceived power who can advance the interests of specific individuals, Marshall blurs his act of ‘speaking with’ into an act of ‘speaking for’” (132).

In “Collaborative Filmmaking: An Open Space for Making Meaning, A Moral Ground for Ethnographic Film” (1995), [Sarah Elder](#) reflects on her own approach to ethnographic filmmaking in terms of power:

Recent discussions about documentary reflect a kind of magical thinking. It reminds me of the healer who prescribes eating an owl’s eyeballs for blindness and sheep’s testicles for virility. I’m referring to the notion that if makers are of the same gender, ethnicity, or class as their subjects, then their films or videos will without question represent their subject accurately and responsibly. (96)

Elder asserts that such thinking undercuts and trivializes the important efforts that truly collaborative projects require. “The problem of representation lies not only in the identity of the filmmaker as outsider, but in the power dynamics between any filmmaker and her subjects” (96). Elder then discusses the thoughtful (and lengthy) process in which she and colleague Leonard Kamerling engaged and involved the Alaska Native communities whose cultural lives and experiences they documented in such films as [The Drums of Winter](#). Their method emerged from

a recognition that ethnographic filmmaking—in particular, the relationship between filmmaker and subject—demanded change. “The process isn’t efficient or neat or orderly,” Elder remarks. “What we have gained from this apparent inefficiency is a depth of involvement, a level of ethical accountability, and the likelihood of real political and social relevance that would otherwise be impossible” (101).

The next selection addresses the questions that those of us who teach ask ourselves frequently. What is the point of a system of higher education invented in the nineteenth century for undergraduate and graduate students in the twenty-first century? Indeed, what are these students learning from anthropology?

Frequently, one hears utterances about critical thinking, communication skills, and problem solving, but in “Making Anthropology Relevant: Collaborative Assessment in Support of Graduate and Undergraduate Success Beyond the University,” recently published in 2018 in the *Annals of Anthropological Practice*, [Audrey Ricke](#) offers a concrete example of what anthropology professors can do to support their students’ training in these areas. Noting the parallels between grading student writing assignments and content analysis, and working with students and team-based research, Ricke describes what she calls a collaborative assessment process that puts anthropology to work in teaching. In this process, a grading rubric is developed along the lines of a codebook, which an instructor might share with graduate teaching assistants (when they are involved). The teaching assistants thus gain experience in the direct application of strategies and skills from team-based projects. Then an in-class exercise for undergraduate students is developed from the grading rubric. “In this step, the goal is to craft consensus among a wide range of levels and majors about what constitutes a particular critical thinking skill” (8).

Those of us currently in the throes of grading papers will recognize this lack of agreement is exactly the problem that brings students to our office hours. Without this agreement of understanding, students feel frustrated because they cannot see what they “did wrong,” and instructors feel frustrated with what they perceive as students’ lack of effort, preparation, or even ability to do the work. (Ricke also includes an interesting discussion of the “close, but no” category in coding that seems especially apropos in grading.) In a team-based research project, the team members develop avenues to improve communication and build a shared understanding among colleagues in order to ensure the success of their endeavor. Ricke reminds us that our work with students requires the same.

Collaboration is a key concern of the previous two readings and of the next two selections appearing in *American Anthropologist*’s Multimodal Anthropologies section, which previously had been called Visual Anthropology. The changes in name and concept, made in 2017, reflect a changing imagination of anthropological engagements across a range of media toward diverse aims and goals.

“Imagine a world in which troves of ethnographic data could be made available, searchable, and reusable with privacy protection and ethical care by anthropologists and research participants

working in a shared problem space,” [Luis Felipe Rosado Murillo](#) begins in his 2018 *American Anthropologist* article, “What Does ‘Open Data’ Mean for Ethnographic Research?” (577). He then outlines the challenges to realizing an open, shared anthropology in terms of privacy protection and respect for a given community’s protocols restricting the circulation and re-appropriation of their cultural materials. In addition, there are under-examined assumptions about ethnographers as the possessive authors of “their” data drawn from “their” fieldwork. “In this landscape of information politics, the question of ‘collaborative ethnography’ is best treated as an object of inquiry, not a point of departure,” Murillo writes. “It goes without saying that we have been increasingly ‘collaborative’ in that entangling ourselves in social relations and obligations are necessary conditions for ethnographic research” (577). Pointing to recent examples of projects that have collaborative approaches built into their digital platforms, the article demonstrates that thoughtfully conceptualized data management plans can create important and meaningful opportunities for researchers, research participants, and students to engage each other. Murillo does not imagine that open data solves or addresses all of our research problems. Nor is he calling for a “total archives” along the lines of a Human Relations Area Files 2.0. Rather, he suggests: “Because we have the renewed possibility of creating ties through digital platforms, one of the goals would be to fully integrate digital technologies with ethnographic approaches and not to colonize anthropology with tools and methods that were built with different design logics and epistemological orientations” (581).

Among anthropologists, it is well understood that climate change is an urgent matter of our times and that our discipline has a critical role to play in our understanding of and responses to it. In “A Multimodal Approach to the Anthropocene,” published in *American Anthropologist* in 2018, [Jason M. Kelly](#) and [Fiona P. McDonald](#) write: “The challenge posited to anthropology in responding to the Anthropocene is, in part, a pedagogical one, an institutional one, and a publishing one. It is also fundamentally an ethical one about access and participation” (591). Their essay discusses an assemblage of work—including web sites and more traditional “outputs” such as a monograph and articles—emerging from a collaborative and interdisciplinary workshop on the “Anthropology of the Anthropocene” held in 2017. The focus is on *An Anthropocene Primer*, an open-access digital portal that is intended as a resource not only for scholars and students, but also for members of the larger public. Notably, the organizers’ interest is creating a resource with global reach, thus a Spanish translation is currently in the works for 2019, with plans to include additional languages as both the primer expands to include more material and the funds to support translation become available. At the core of the primer is the “Syllabus,” which readers may choose to navigate by completing a course of modules (featuring texts and videos) at beginner, intermediate, or advanced levels—or they may read and view the entire primer without the course. In addition, readers can highlight and annotate the text, keeping their notes private or conversing with other readers in the marginalia. Kelly and McDonald describe the primer as a form of “serious play.” Like other forms of serious play that have received attention lately—such as classroom gamification—the primer is “an intersubjective, sociable experience. It requires collaboration both across the disciplines and across structural boundaries, whether disciplinary, institutional, or sociocultural” (590).

Continuing the theme of confronting climate change and multimodal ethnography, we conclude this issue of *Open Anthropology* with “Imaging Disaster: Puerto Rico through the Eye of Hurricane María” by [Hilda Lloréns](#) in *Transforming Anthropology* (2018). Lloréns “conducted research with Puerto Ricans about the aftermath of Hurricane María as part of a larger collaborative project documenting the moral economies of disaster recovery in Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands” (136). She discovered an important corrective to current narratives about a disaster: “The people in Puerto Rico are not ruined as the mainstream media has often depicted. Instead, people’s creativity abounds, as evidenced in several examples of efforts at rebuilding in an environmentally sustainable manner after the hurricane” (137). Lloréns then seeks to locate these narratives within a longer history of Puerto Rico as a colony as well as the unfolding relationships of a Puerto Rican diaspora. Her conclusion regarding Puerto Rico and the diaspora is one that we might also imagine for a more relevant anthropology:

Perhaps this is an opportune moment to unite the long-divided borders between the diaspora and the island not only to rebuild a more just, equitable, and environmentally minded society but also to pressure those in power to see the inequality and the foundations this lays for magnified devastation and trauma. . . . The time is ripe to transform the society into a just and equitable one for island residents without catering to the very same structural forces and economic powers that have continuously fostered the cataclysm. (150)

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Toward an Anthropology of Immunology: The Body as Nation State

Emily Martin – *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*. Vol 4, Issue 4:410-426 (1990)

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Book Review of Emily Martin's *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction*
Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing and Paulla A. Ebron – *American Ethnologist*. Vol 15, Issue 1:168-169 (1988)

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Californian Strawberries: Mexican Immigrant Women Sharecroppers, Labor, and Discipline
Teresa Figueroa Sanchez – *Anthropology of Work Review*. Vol 34, Issue 1:15-26 (2013)

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Toward a Fugitive Anthropology: Gender, Race, and Violence in the Field

Maya J. Berry, Claudia Chávez Argüelles, Shanya Cordis, Sarah Ihmoud, and Elizabeth Velásquez Estrada – *Cultural Anthropology*. Vol 32, Issue 4:537-565 (2017)

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On the Principle of Order in Civilization as Exemplified by Changes of Fashion

A.L. Kroeber – *American Anthropologist*. Vol 21, Issue 3:235-263 (1919)

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On the Study of Social Change

Frederik Barth – *American Anthropologist*. Vol 69, Issue 6:661-669 (1967)

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Paradigmatic Processes in Culture Change

Anthony F.C. Wallace – *American Anthropologist*. Vol 74, Issue 3:467-478 (1972)

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The Witch Hunt as a Culture Change Phenomenon

Thomas J. Schoeneman – *Ethos*. Vol 3, Issue 4:529-554 (1975)

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A Kalahari Family: Some Thoughts on Reflexivity, Voice and Social Location

John P. Homiak – *Visual Anthropology Review*. Vol 19, Issue 1-2:128-134 (2003)

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Collaborative Filmmaking: An Open Space for Making Meaning, a Moral Ground for Ethnographic Film

Sarah Elder – *Visual Anthropology Review*. Vol 11, Issue 2:94-101 (1995)

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Making Anthropology Relevant: Collaborative Assessment in Support of Graduate and Undergraduate Success Beyond the University

Audrey Ricke – *Annals of Anthropological Practice*. (2018)

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What Does “Open Data” Mean for Ethnographic Research?

Luis Felipe Rosado Murillo – *American Anthropologist*. Vol 120, Issue 3:577-582 (2018)

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A Multimodal Approach to the Anthropocene

Jason M. Kelly and Fiona P. McDonald – *American Anthropologist*. Vol 120, Issue 3:583-595 (2018)

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Imaging Disaster: Puerto Rico through the Eye of Hurricane María

Hilda Lloréns – *Transforming Anthropology*. Vol 26, Issue 2:136-156 (2018)

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