

Exploring Ethnofutures

With Lyn Jeffery, Institute for the Future
Jan English-Lueck, San Jose State University
Fernando Galdino
Miriam Avery, Mozilla

Objectives

1. *First, we want to introduce EPIC practitioners to an ethnofutures approach, laying the foundation for how anticipatory anthropology and futures thinking can be used in ethnographic practice.*
2. *Second, we will provide a brief overview of professional foresight practice, the challenges of projecting into the future, and the role of ethnographic data as necessary input.*
3. *Finally, we will present several concrete examples of how an ethnofutures approach can be useful in corporate contexts, demonstrating how futures thinking can benefit a wide variety of ethnographic practitioners, particularly those who must think strategically about the directions of their companies.*

Poll

I have done a project related to the future of some topic...

I have used ethnography to help me think through that future...

How would we answer these questions?



Jan English-Lueck



Lyn Jeffery

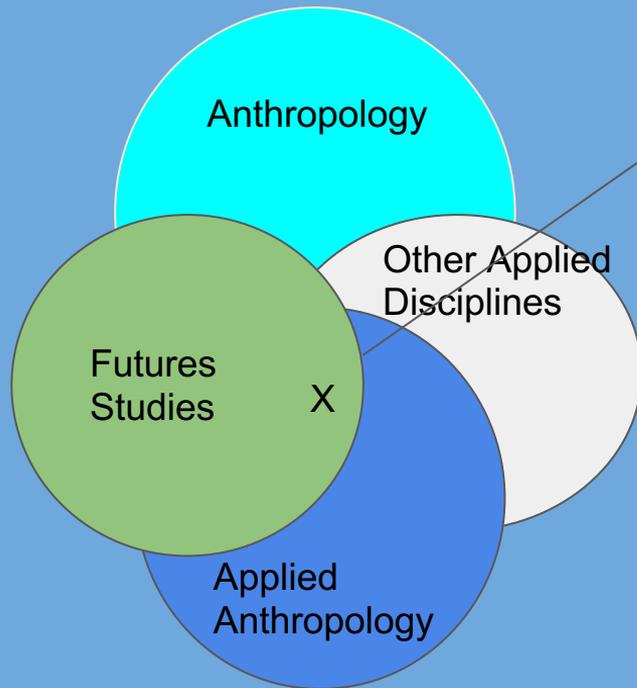


Fernando Galdino



Miriam Avery

What is an Ethnofutures Approach?



The ethnofutures sweet spot!

From forthcoming article on “Anticipatory Anthropology” by English-Lueck and Avery, Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Anthropology <http://oxfordre.com/anthropology>

Overview of the Ancestors



Anthropologists began by studying cultures that were disappearing. Then they studied cultures that were laboratories for various social scientific questions. *Now they have an opportunity to study cultures that no one has ever seen before, cultures that are shaping the future.*

Quotation from Margaret Mead: Taking Note. Photo of Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead, from <https://scholarblogs.emory.edu/visualanthropology/2016/09/08/margaret-mead-gregory-bateson/>

Robert Baylor Textor



Ethnographic Futures Research (EFR)

- Stanford anthropologist
- formalized, semi-structured interview technique
- eliciting plausible optimistic, pessimistic and probable scenarios
- set up American Anthropological Association Robert Textor and Family Prize for Excellence in Anticipatory Anthropology 1999

Photo of Robert Textor courtesy of the American Anthropological Association

Ursula Kroeber LeGuin



"Science fiction
is not
prescriptive;
it is descriptive."

Image of Ursula K. LeGuin from https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/obituaries/ursula-k-le-guin-grand-dame-of-science-fiction-dies-at-88/2018/01/23/8842ceb8-0087-11e8-8acf-ad2991367d9d_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.cf0c03141c61

The Anthropology of Science, Technology and Society

“Consideration of the nature and desirability of present and future applications of AI again provides considerable fuel for debate.” Diana Forsythe

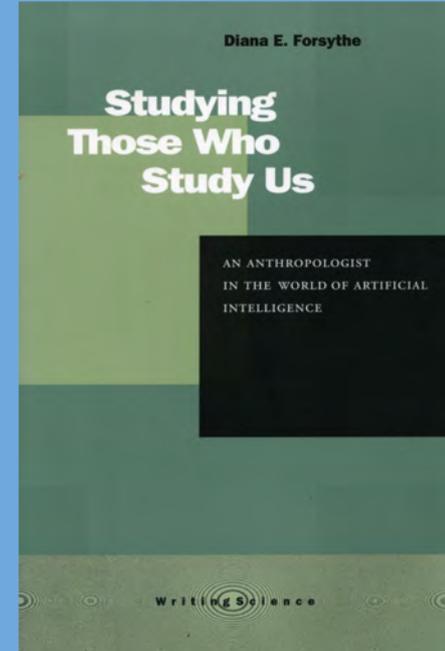
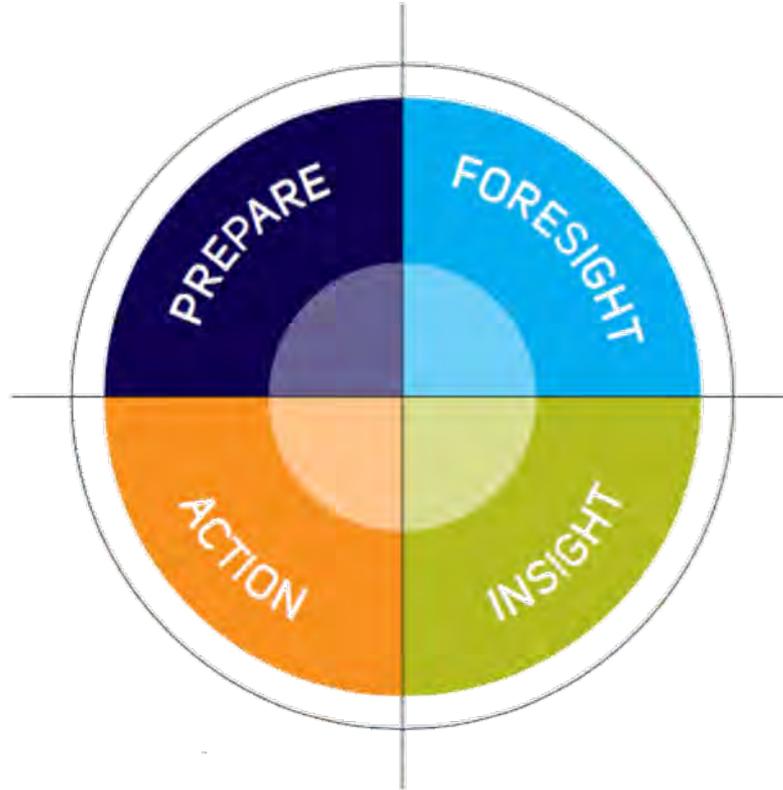


Image of Diana Forsythe's Studying Those who Study Us.

futures thinking and the professional foresight practice



professional foresight practice is a cycle



core elements of a foresight practice

- **Sense change** in multiple domains
- **Communicate vision** to drive toward insight
- **Facilitate insight** and build capacity for stakeholders



stakeholders use foresight to...

- **Develop** new offerings
- **Stimulate** new ideas
- **Evaluate** plans and test assumptions
- **Identify** strategic opportunities
- **Build** internal readiness
- **Tie** desirable futures to organizational values



why futures thinking is hard

- Bias toward precision metrics

Chance of winning

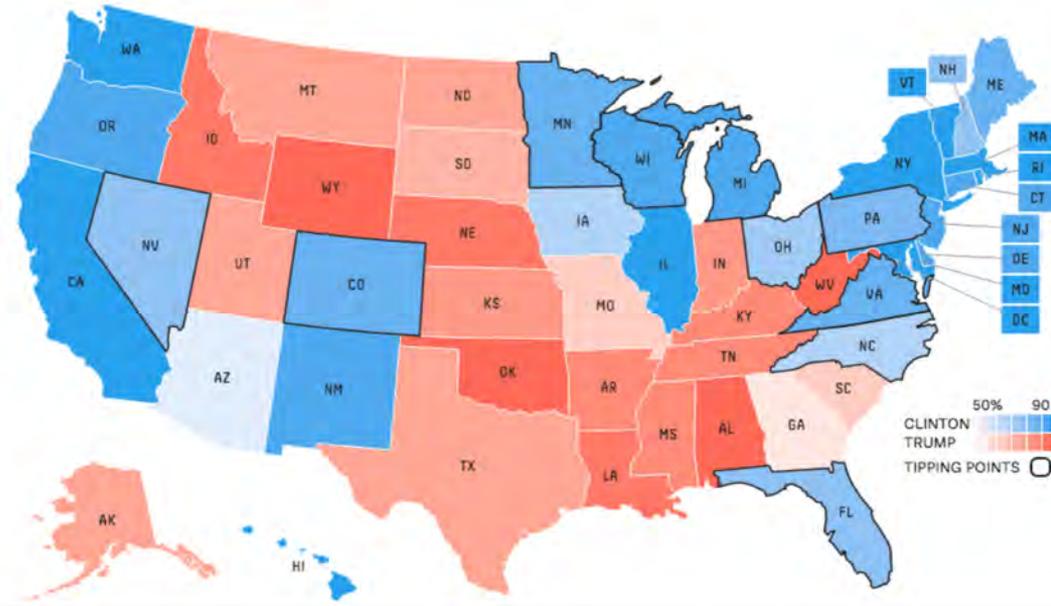


Hillary Clinton

84.6%

Donald Trump

15.4%



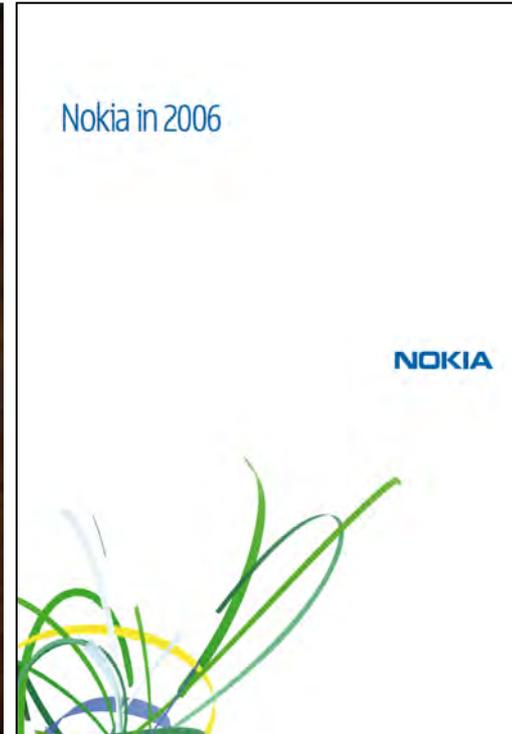
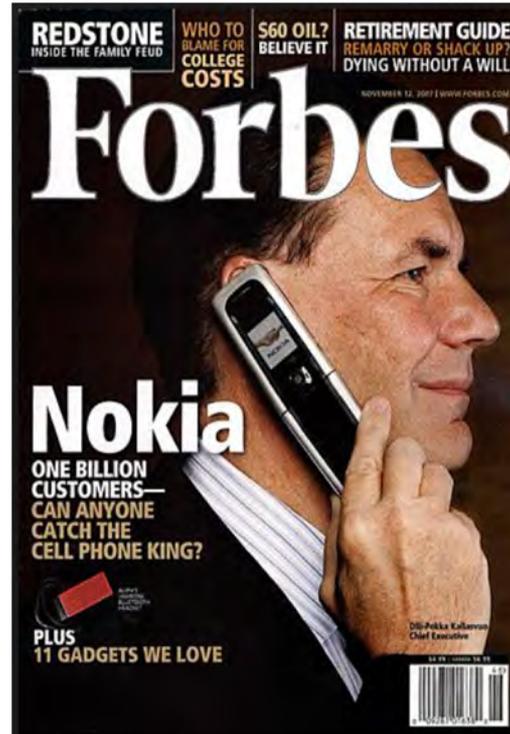
why futures thinking is hard

- Anxiety about change



why futures thinking is hard

- Official futures



why futures thinking is hard

- Your future self is a stranger



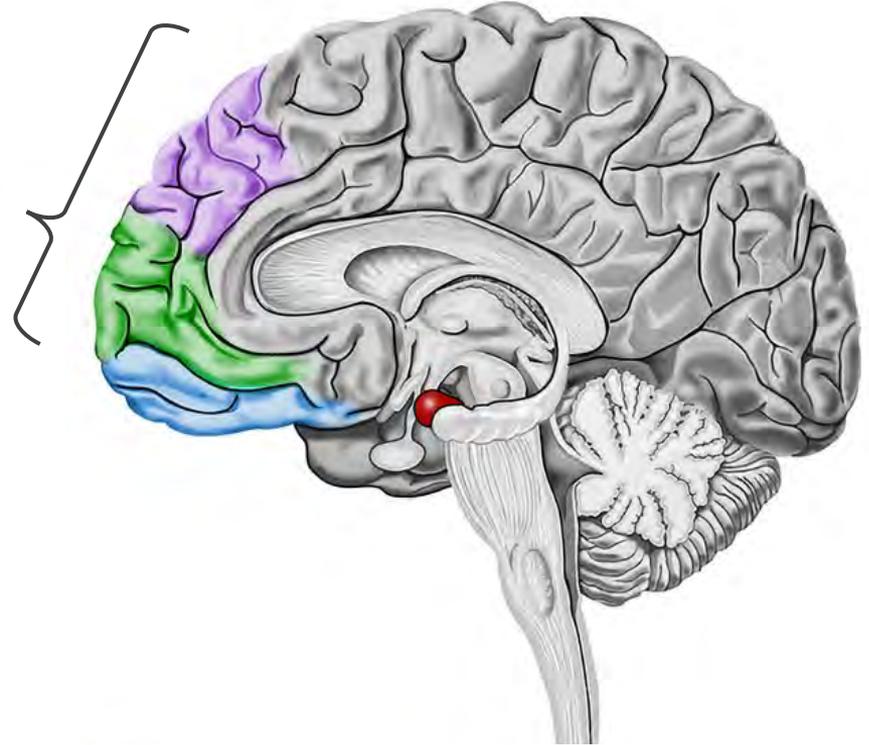
the medial prefrontal cortex

 Ventral MPFC
 Dorsal MPFC

think about yourself – MPFC activates

think about someone else – MPFC powers down

think about yourself in the future – MPFC powers down



what makes it easier to think about the future?

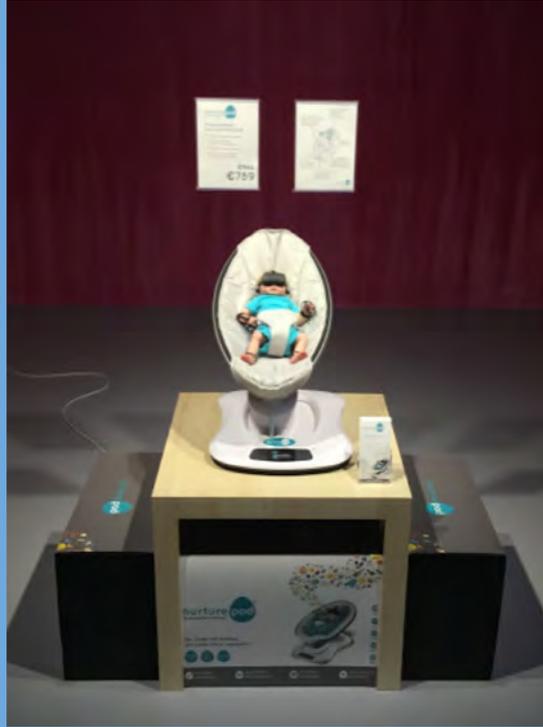


ethnographic data: necessary input



Foresight, Insight and Design



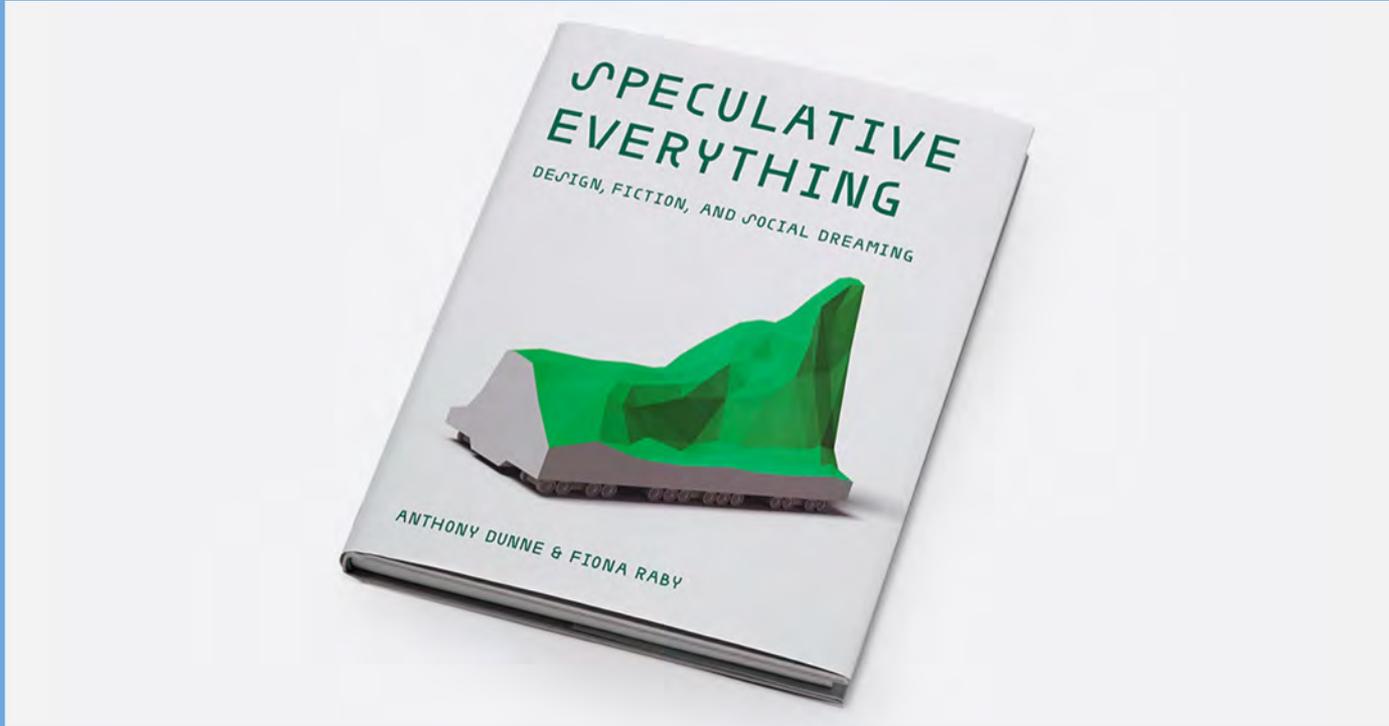


Speculative Design and Design Fiction



“NurturePod” installation by Stuart Candy
<https://futuryst.blogspot.com/2017/07/nurturepod.html>

Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming



Book by Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby

Case Studies



FROM EF
TRANSP

In a world flooded that often conflicts trust. As individual century, eaters

Now trust in institution industries is at a historical low. Edelman Trust Barometer person like yourself" is academic expert—or government official.

The Internet is enabling peer-to-peer food consumption, culinary heritage people in China are using WeChat both to exchange and to buy food products. Urbanites are opening restaurants and are otherwise adversarial; digital platforms v

FORECAST

COMPUTATIONAL FOOD PROPAGANDA

Toward food

TODAY

From centuries of dietary traditions, eaters use food to express identity. Hyperconnectivity and digital tools, personalized media, and stratification reveal itself as of digital tools, pe the shared human food with stories together—or for views. Others of breaking bread antidote to isolation.

“ Our diet is what we consume about what we eat, what we eat, what we eat, what we eat. The interconnected, to work together good of everybody.”

—DIABETES

18 Eating for Change

22 Eating for Change

JIN LIU
Building trusted food networks

Age in 2027: 24

Location: Shanghai, China



24 Eating for Change

REBUILDING TRUST

FUTURE PERSONA | REBUILDING TRUST

Jin Liu spends his days working on-demand across many platforms. He might be a food delivery app driver, an on-demand urban farmer, a dinner host on the mealsharing app YiqiChitan, and a freelance marketing consultant all in the same day. Let's catch up with him as he gets ready to host his YiqiChitan guests.

Jin steps out of the stream of evening rush hour foot traffic and into a corner wet market to pick up some fresh scallions. He's making stir-fried nian gao (sticky rice cakes) and crab for the eight YiqiChitan guests who will be showing up at his apartment in a few hours. He has room for two more people, and he wants to fill those slots, so he starts livestreaming as he shops. Almost immediately, a few dozen people tune in, and viewers from Hong Kong to Hanoi start commenting about how they wish they could make it to dinner tonight.

Jin is excited to demo a new food safety scanning device that can test the pesticide and synthetic fertilizer levels on produce. Vendors now know that because of people like Jin, if their food is labeled organic, it better actually be true. Jin has built a loyal following across several food media platforms because he's known for his candor and willingness to talk about controversial topics. A few years ago, an agricultural interest group tried to get his posts taken down by WeChat's Rumor Filter, but he was able to back up all his claims with solid data and debunk the fake news about his "fake news."

The first bunch of scallions he grabs gets a green light for parts per million of nitrate, indicating the scallions weren't grown with synthetic fertilizers. As Jin pays the vendor, he gets a notification that the last two spots have been booked and that one of them has a severe wheat allergy.

No problem! Tonight's rice cakes are homemade by a woman in Jiangsu Province. She started selling these on WeChat a few months ago, and even though they are more expensive than what Jin could find from a street vendor, he thinks it's worth it because she provides blockchain certification for the provenance of her rice flour. This kind of transparency is a big perk for YiqiChitan guests with allergies and has earned Jin a five-star ranking from three different crowdsourced allergen watchdog networks. He closes out the livestream for a few minutes as he hops on the train, but promises he'll be back in thirty minutes to teach them how to cook the nian gao.

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DAILY HABITS: livestreaming, shopping, cooking, sourcing safe ingredients, Wechatting with friends and family

ASPIRATIONS: grow livestreaming cooking show audience, host fun and safe meals, become a trusted WeChat food vendor

FEARS: his channel will be targeted and censored by industry interest groups,

JIN'S CHALLENGE:

- Cook a meal for 10 strangers coming to his apartment in 3 hours – one of whom has a severe wheat allergy.
- Grow his livestreaming audience.

IT GETS BETTER WHEN:

- He gets a new food safety scanning device that can test pesticide and synthetic fertilizer levels on produce
- He finds a food vendor on WeChat who uses blockchain-certified-provenance wheat and oil.
- AI fact-verification services help him maintain his reputation in the face of censorship.

futures personas...

- connect us to “first-person futures” via a protagonist and generate empathy for that protagonist
- develop new aspects of the foresight by imagining concrete user experiences, including unintended consequences
- envision specific emerging needs and desires that require new features, products, and services

JIN LIU

Building trusted food networks

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ETHNOGRAPHY: on-the-ground participant observation and interviews with Chinese food entrepreneurs, stay-at-home moms, livestreaming celebrities, urban farmers, etc.

“These moms are not treating this as a business, so they actually use better ingredients than branded products... I trust them more than the big brands.”
 - Mom from Shanghai suburbs



SIGNALS: mukbang, wechat p2p food sales, food safety testing chopsticks, WeChat’s rumor filter,



辟谣
 百度推送文章标题为
 “油品有毒”+“快用不锈钢筷”+“水果产地揭秘”
 让恶毒的谣言得以发生
 辟谣生活 辟谣指南



Blocked on WeChat



This WeChat account has been permanently barred from logging in because it was suspected of spreading malignant rumors and content that violated laws and regulations. Since your account has money in it, you can tap “Yes” to withdraw or transfer the money.



Farms to Firms to Families



Left, Image from Pie Ranch, Right, SJSU team English-Lueck, Deborah Walde-Baughn, Jason McClung and Robert Johnston. Photos courtesy of English-Lueck and Hamamoto.

Questions and Answers

Please use the chat function to ask questions.



Recommended Readings

Dunne, Anthony, and Raby, Fiona. 2014. *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

English-Lueck, J.A., Miriam Lueck Avery. “Corporate Care Reimagined: Farms to Firms to Families.” *EPIC Proceedings*. 2014, no. 1 (October 2014): 36-49. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1559-8918.01004>

Textor, Robert. “Commentary: A Brief Explanation of Ethnographic Futures Research.” *Anthropology Newsletter* 30, no. 8 (November 1989):1,24. <https://doi.org/10.1111/an.1989.30.8.1.1>

Watts-Engert, Jennifer, Margaret Szymanski, Patricia Wall, Mary Ann Sprague, Brinda Dalal. “Back to the Future of Work: Informing Corporate Renewal.” *EPIC Proceedings*, 2012, no. 1 (October 2012):150-162.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-8918.2012.00017.x>