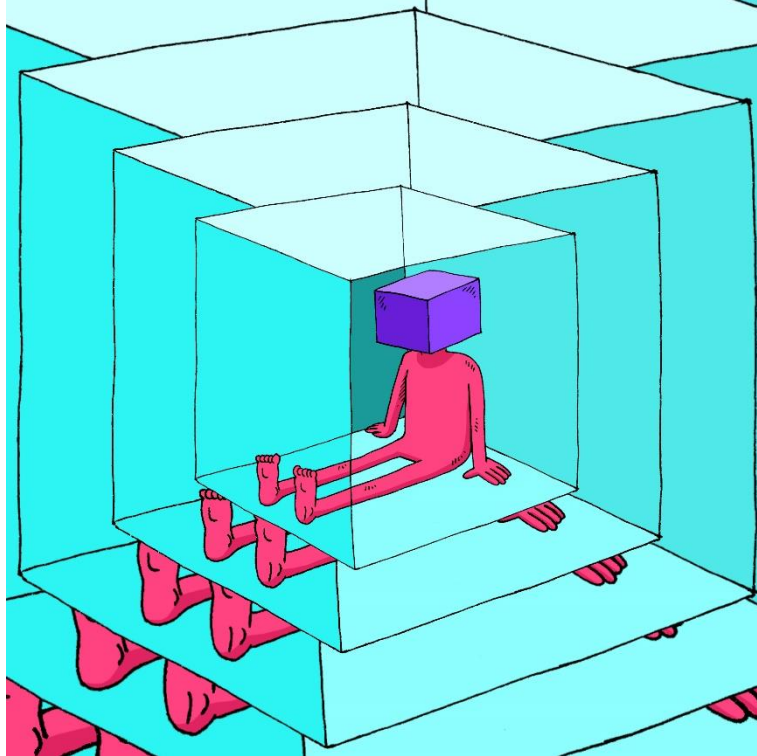


Call for Participation – U21 Researcher Resilience Online Workshop

### Feeling Digital and Reimagining Fieldwork during COVID Time



*Credit: Franco Arriagada*

*This online workshop is part of an international collaborative project funded by Universitas 21 (U21) and hosted at The University of Hong Kong (HKU)- "Reimagining fieldwork in the interconnected world: ethnography-inspired digital strategies under the COVID-19 challenges".*

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed ongoing challenges for global fieldworkers, while it also produces opportunities for everyone to reimagine fieldwork by feeling digital at a moment of forced social distancing and digitalization. What does "digital" feel like when it penetrates our daily life rhythms and confuses our senses? This experimental initiative is **NOT** another call for fieldworkers to simply "go online", produce distant fieldwork, and overcome the "obstacles." We start by questioning the promise of "digital" in human connection and understanding the implications of forced digital inclusions accelerated by COVID-19. From there, we reconstruct the imaginary of the fieldwork by opening up our body to feel digital, making our everyday engagement with digital technology a critical theatre of experimental performance. We recall the physical attentiveness of the researchers who sit too long with computers and digital devices doing mental labour. We ask critical questions about our daily engagement with the "digital" and respond to the questions through artistic and philosophical bodily reflections. We seek to advance digital ethnography not simply as "fieldwork online"

but as a broad system of intersubjective connections beyond a narrow boundary of empiricism.

We hope to answer the following questions through these experimental fieldworks: What produces our "digital" experience? How do our bodies achieve mediated attunement with other people? What constitutes our Zoom fatigue? What are the failed promises of distant communications, research, and teaching? How can devices lay tyrannies over users' bodies while also bringing opportunities for self-exploration and research potentials? How do we know what "big data" is from a phenomenological perspective? What social differences do we realize doing "digital" (field)work? After addressing these questions, we ask how to advance digital ethnography not simply as "fieldwork online" but as a broad system of intersubjective connections beyond a narrow boundary of empiricism.

The workshop participants will conduct experimental fieldworks of "body theatres" through mediations of digital devices at the experiential level. One example of these experimental fieldworks is to use the digital device, such as the web camera, to generate the sensation of a shared body that is touched, saddened, moved, etc. despite the non-presence, and thereby challenging the narrative linearity of seeing-hearing in virtual interaction. And we have four other sets of experimental fieldworks to be unlocked after you join us!

These "body theatres" will be designed and coordinated by our coach Ms. Anna Cruz Benavidez (Anthropologist and Theater Director at the [OTRO CUERPO](#), a Theater and Research company, Mexico). The participants will record the experimental fieldwork (less than one hour) and write ethnographic diaries to reflect upon these experiences. These recordings and diaries will be shared within a group and discussed by outstanding scholars in anthropology, sociology, media, and performance studies. The workshop's outputs will be co-authored articles and other creative outputs based on the recordings and ethnographic diaries, followed by the discussants' commentaries. We aim to combine these works into a creative edited volume. The initial editing costs will be covered with the U21 funding.

We will select 20 participants to form 5 collaborative groups performing different sets of experimental fieldwork. The participants are expected to spend several hours preparing, fieldworking, and reflecting in their daily life under the direction of the coach and the conveners during March 2021, write up ethnographic diaries by April, and comment upon each other's works in a 1.5-hour session led by the discussants in mid-May.

We are honoured to have Prof. Jarrett Zigon (William & Linda Porterfield Chair in Biomedical Ethics and Professor of Anthropology, Founding Director of the Center for Data Ethics and Justice, University of Virginia) delivering a keynote speech at the workshop. And we are happy to have outstanding scholars from Austria, Denmark, Hong Kong and the United States joining to form a truly international group of discussants.

**To participate in this workshop:**

You can apply for participation by submitting a **personal statement** stating why you are interested in joining (maximum 800 words) with a **short bio** (maximum 250 words) and your **publication records** (both academic and non-academic) if there is any.

Applicants with **all backgrounds** from **all countries and regions** are welcome. No prior theatre experience is required. But we will prioritize applications from graduate students and early-career scholars/practitioners with experience in ethnographic research and digital fieldwork. There is **no** charge for registration.

The deadline for application is **Feb. 28, 2021**. We will notify the accepted members by early March.

Please apply by sending the email with your attachment(s) to [feelingdigitalworkshop@gmail.com](mailto:feelingdigitalworkshop@gmail.com).

If you have any query, please feel free to contact the workshop convener Mr. Yichen Rao (PhD Candidate, Anthropology and STS, HKU) at [ycrao@connect.hku.hk](mailto:ycrao@connect.hku.hk)

**Hosts:** HKU Anthropology Research Network, Department of Sociology, and Hong Kong Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (HKIHSS)

**Project advisors:** Prof. Tom McDonald (HKU), Prof. David A. Palmer (HKU)

### **Privacy and confidentiality**

We will keep any information and material in connection with your application strictly confidential if you clearly identify the information as confidential. We may disclose confidential information only to the project designers and conveners. Please note that the ethnographic diaries and recordings produced by you during the event will be made semi-public to all participants, discussants and registered audiences of the workshop. This should be acknowledged when you apply for the workshop.