**Teaching the film
"One Table Two Elephants"**

Jacob von Heland and Henrik Ernstson

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This document is based on a presentation held by Henrik Ernstson at New York University in 2017, invited by Anne Rademacher.

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History of this presentation:
- **The first version of this presentation was made at Deutsches Haus, New York University, on 3 April 2017, invitation by Prof Anne Rademacher.**
- **It has been continuously adapted since through other presentations in Namibia, Sweden, UK, and South Africa.**
- **We have adapted this for our Teaching 1T2E site at Situated Ecologies and will continue to do so at irregular intervals.**
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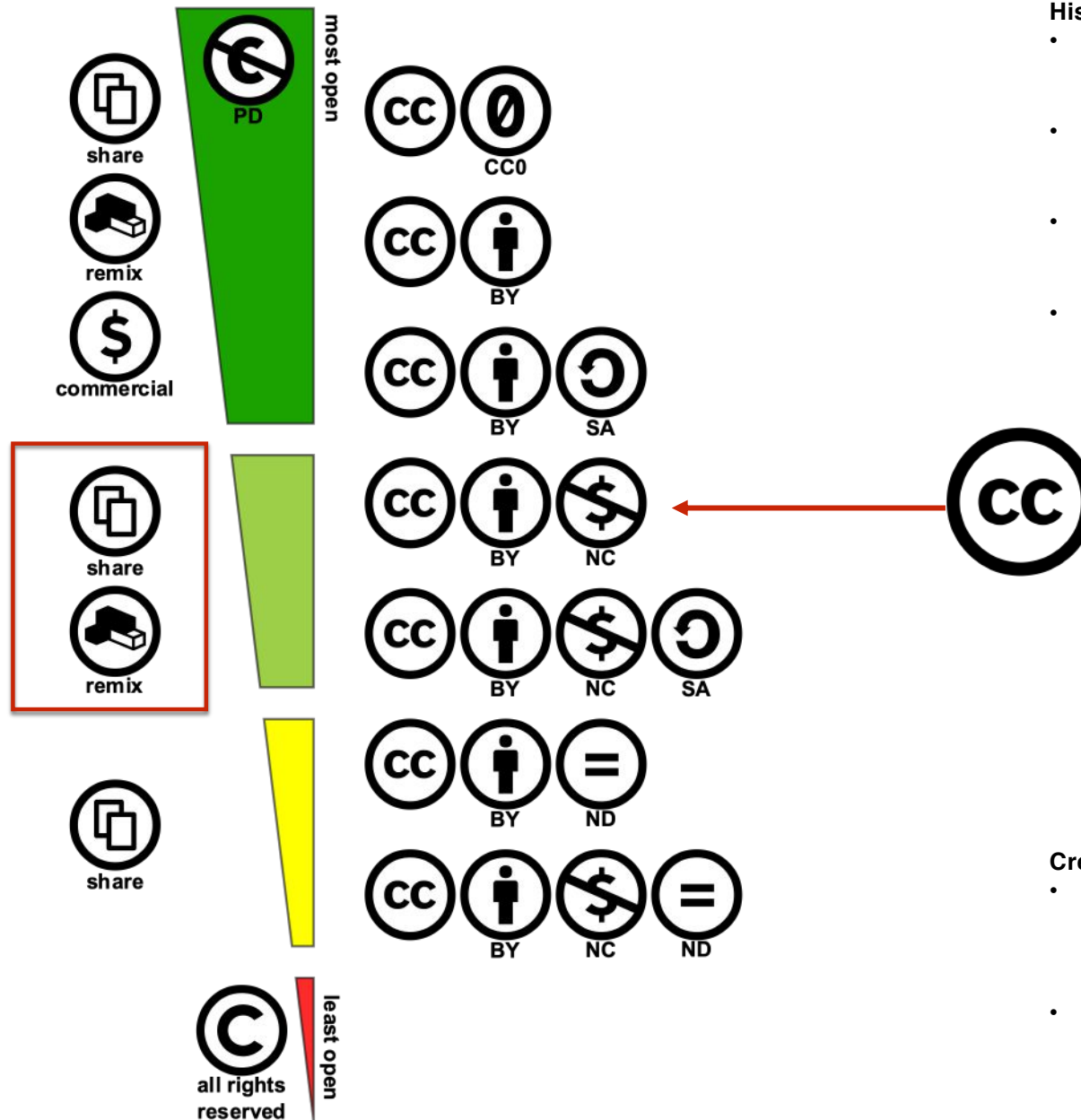
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- **The presentation is published under the Creative Commons License, CC-BY-NC, which means that it can be used, shared, and remixed but not used for commercial purposes.**
- **We want the film to be used in teaching at high schools, universities, NGOs, and many other places where one want to have critical discussions about knowledge, urban ecology, justice and politics.**

Resources

The Situated Ecologies Platform
Art, design and research collaborations to contest and democratize ecologies.

Annual PhD Seminar: Democratic Practices of Unequal Geographies

2015, 2016, 2017 & 2019
Henrik Ernstson (Convenor)
Annual PhD seminar that reads read political philosophy with and against Southern urbanism. Marxism, feminism and postcolonial theory. Intense 1-week seminar with 15-25 participants. Co-convened with Drs Andrés Henao Castro, Ashley Bohrer and Jacob von Heland.

bit.ly/DemocraticPractices

ONE TABLE TWO ELEPHANTS

EDITED BY HENRIK ERNSTSON AND SVERKER SÖRLIN
#OpenAccess
GROUNDING URBAN NATURES
HISTORIES AND FUTURES OF URBAN ECOLOGIES

QUESTIONING CITIES SERIES
URBAN POLITICAL ECOLOGY IN THE ANTHROPO-OBSCENE
POLITICAL INTERRUPTIONS AND POSSIBILITIES
EDITED BY HENRIK ERNSTSON AND ERIK SWYNGEDOUW

CROSS CUTS
STOCKHOLM ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES FESTIVAL FOR FILM & TEXT 2019

2018
Jacob von Heland & Henrik Ernstson
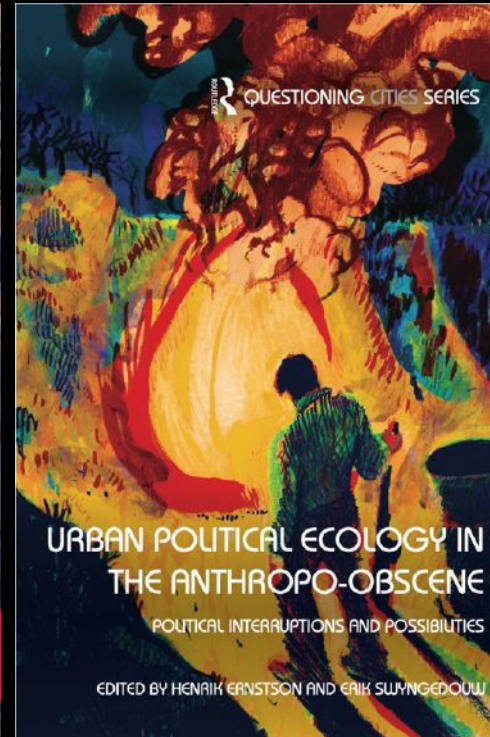Cinematic ethnography, 84 minutes, Color, HD, Dolby 5:1.

- World Premiere In Competition at CPH:DOX 2018 20th March 2018
- Official selection at InScience Science Festival Nijmegen 8 Nov 2018
- African Premier In Competition at Cape Town Internat Film Festival 2018
- Selected In Competition Tirana International Film Festival 2018
- Official selection Crosscuts Environmental Humanities Film & Text Festival, Stockholm, Nov 2018
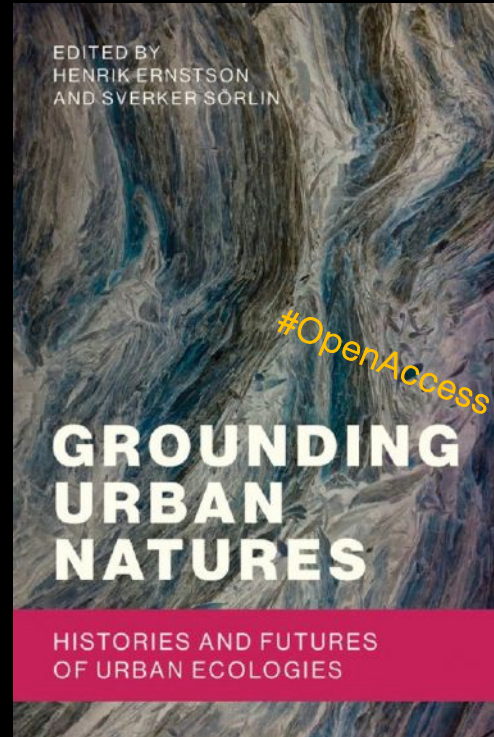
2019
Henrik Ernstson & Sverker Sörlin
MIT Press

#OpenAccess — Won the MIT Press Library Award

https://www.mitpress.mit.edu/books/grounding-urban-natures

2019
Henrik Ernstson & Erik Swyngedouw
Routledge

https://www.routledge.com/Urban-Political-Ecology-in-the-Anthropo-obscene-Interruptions-and-Possibilities/Ernstson-Swyngedouw/p/book/9781138629196

2018, 2019
Jacob von Heland (Chief Editor)
Major festival including *Annals of Crosscuts*, a peer-reviewed forum for film as research with Jacob von Heland (Chief Editor) and Henrik Ernstson (Subject Editors, one of several)

https://crosscuts.se

Art, design and research collaborations to contest and democratise ecologies.
Developing registers for *thinking*, *knowing* and *doing* situated ecologies.

Background 1:

- Why integrate film-as-research?

Towards a Visual Environmental Humanities in the Digital Era: Filming and Writing as a Bimodal Research Practice.

Research grant, (2017-2020), from the Swedish Research Council Formas

Aim 1) Case studies of **cinematic ethnography** to explore the contested character of urban natures, waste and histories in African cities

Aim 2) Organise **seminar and film-based special issue** that develops "bimodal" visual/text practices for Visual Environmental Humanities (VEH).

One Table Two Elephants is many things… and amongst these, a case study into "**cinematic ethnography**":

- Jean Rouch (1917-2004, French) believed ethnographic cinema possessed liberating powers because of its capacity to intimately project the richness of local sensibilities.

- He used the camera to develop with his participants ***situated and relational truths***.

- *This contrasted to the positivistic wish and use of film as a technology of realism.*

- The approach corresponds with the ***critical research tradition***, in which urban realities are considered *situated, relational and multi-dimensional*.

Note: Some referred to Rouch's approach as "premature postmodernist" (see P. Stoller, 1992 *The cinematic griot: the ethnography of Jean Rouch*. University of Chicago Press.)
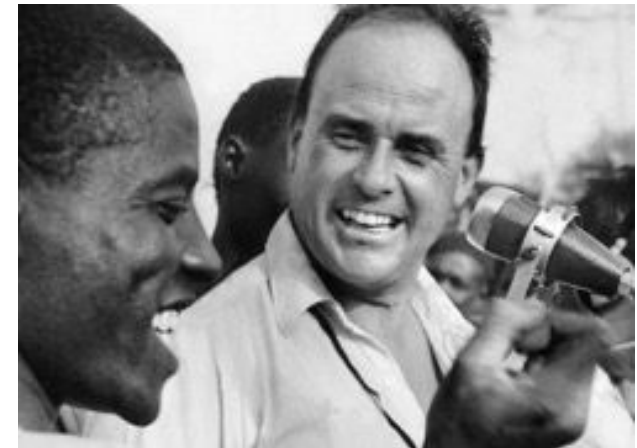
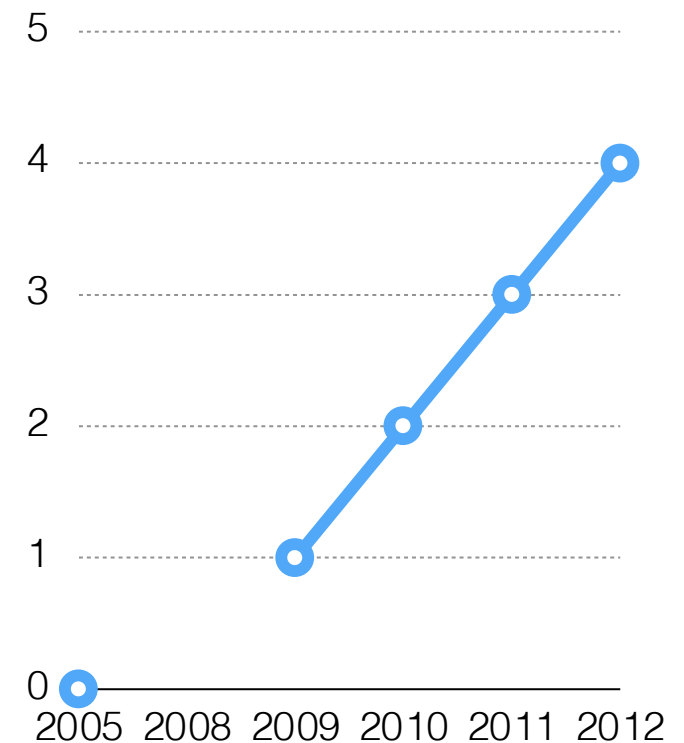*Damouré Zika and Jean Rouch, long-term collaborators in Niger.*

Aim 1. Develop knowledge and networks around *bi-modal research practice* of film-text to contribute to Visual Environmental Humanities ("Filming Cultures")

Motivation: There is a ***collective deficiency*** in the academy to engage with film: This in spite the **digital revolution** (a "third revolution" in knowledge production)— **digital film** now dominant form of societal communication, but academy reluctant to follow.

Motivation: Film (as "writing in light") may supplement and enrich text-based scholarship (14).

- Humans are visual ***and*** linguistic beings and ***text and film*** are different modalities that encode and present information with their relative strengths and weaknesses (supported by semiotics, see 15).
- E.g: bodily communication and sensory experiences have been considered especially ill-suited to describe with text, where film offers possibilities. (16).
- Thus, film has clearly something to offer to ethnography and research.
- But why has film not really been integrated in academic knowledge projects?

Billion of views at YouTube since start in 2005 to 2012

Aim 2: Develop knowledge and networks around *bi-modal research practice* of film-text to build the Visual Environmental Humanities ("Filming Cultures")

Why? Partial reasons might be:
1. Since the Enlightenment, scholars have been fundamentally text-based.
2. Film emerged as a technology of realism, but the technology was seized by artists who developed the fiction/Hollywood cinema.
3. Film's dual legacy as a scientific technology and a cinematic art has been problematic to scholars who have not known "what to do with it" (MacDougall, 1998. Transcultural Cinema, P U Press.).
4. Mostly used as a documentation tool and recording device, *stripped from its ability to speak eloquently and richly about the world*.
5. We believe (and hope) a "cinematic turn" is waiting to happen, expanding the possibilities of film, comparable to the profound "literature turn" of text-based ethnography (Clifford and Marcus 1986).

Sir Robert Boyle (1627-1691), scientific investigator, in his study.

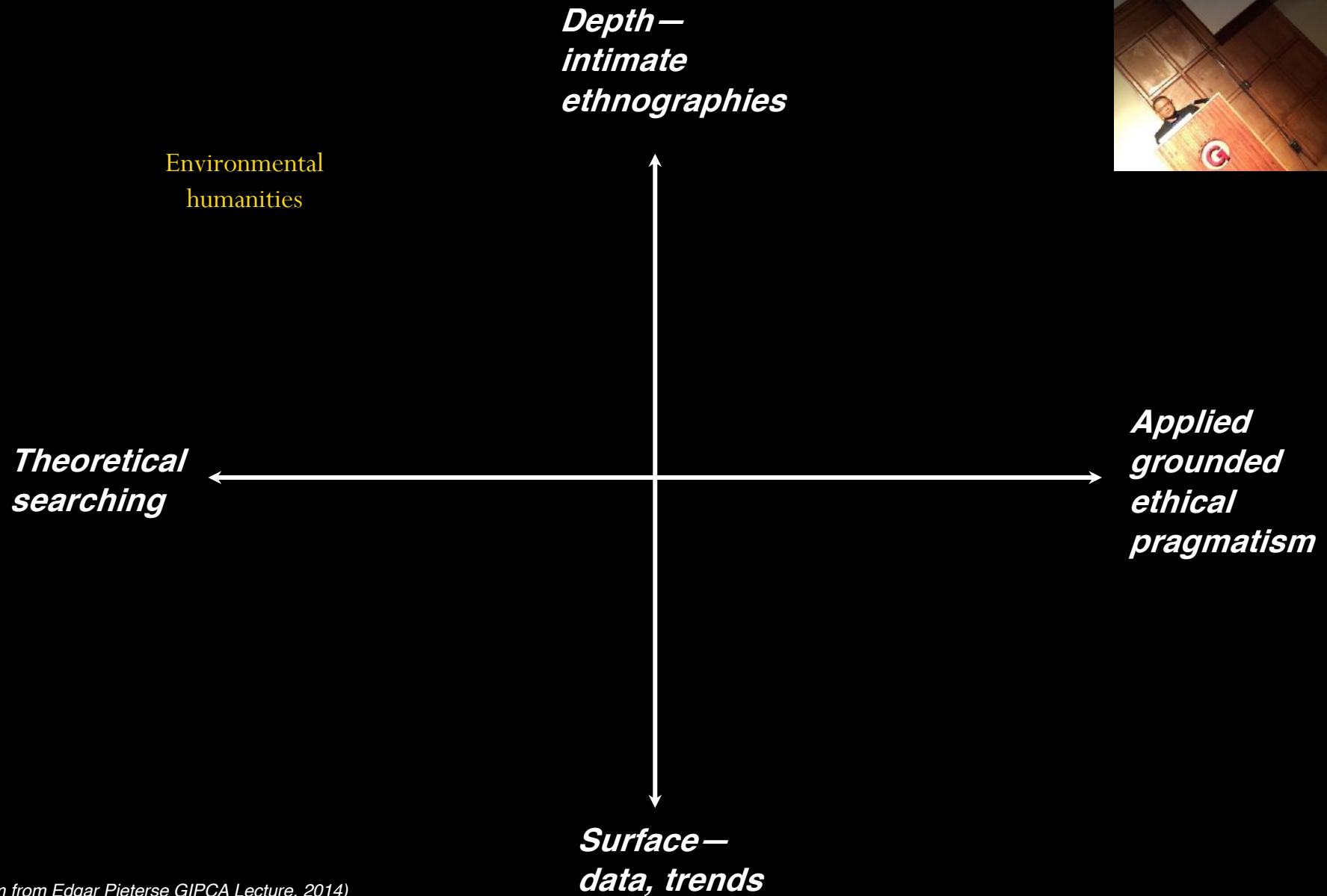Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson "writing up" in their fieldwork study in Bali.

"Sallie Gardner at a Gallop" (Muybridge 1878), the first moving image (3 secs).

Background 2:

- How to research contested urban natures in cities of the global South?

- Postcolonial urbanism

- Situated Ecologies

- Approaching the film, Cape Town

Research practices in a 'world of cities'

Depth—
intimate
ethnographies

Environmental
humanities

Theoretical
searching

Applied
grounded
ethical
pragmatism

Surface—
data, trends

(Diagram from Edgar Pieterse GIPCA Lecture, 2014)

Intimate
ethnographies
   +
Theoretical
searching

Environmental
humanities

The politics of an
"urban beyond measure".

…to explore
and make
sensible…

Ontological
politics
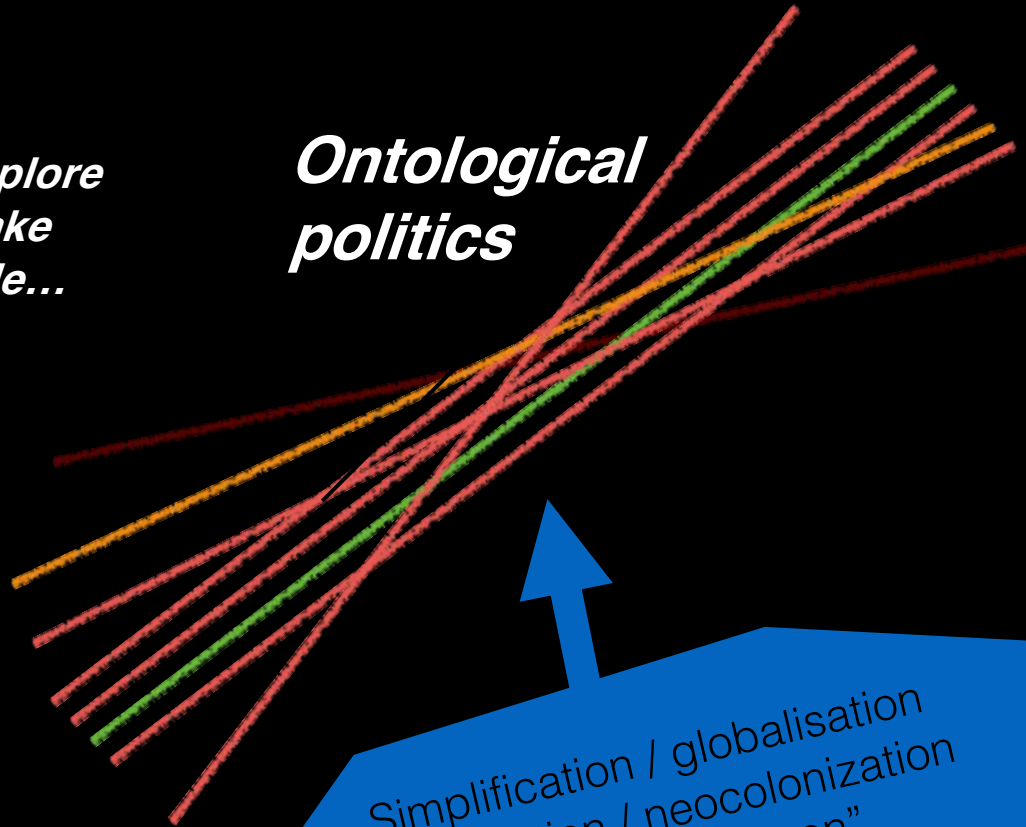
Simplification / globalisation
Colonisation / neocolonization
through "the green"

METHOD:
Experiment with new
registers of knowing and
coproduction of
knowledge— film is one!

OBJECTIVES:
1. To make multiple realities
   felt and sensed…
2. … and through these
   construct new categories
   of knowing.
3. To create an artefact
   from a longer research
   effort that can participate
   in making visible and
   sensible ontological
   politics in Cape Town—
   and any city.

Intimate ethnographies

+

Theoretical searching

Environmental humanities

RACE

NATURE

CITY

COLONIZATION

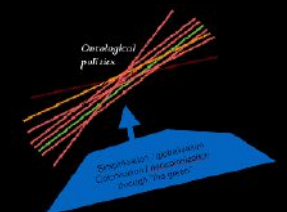*Historical process embedded within European-led capitalism since 1500s that enrolled and codified peoples and natures in particular ways from the viewpoint of the metropole for its exploitation and development.*

COLONIALITY

Defined not only as a material process of appropriation and subjugation, but also as an exclusionary hierarchy of knowing and being that still pervades contemporary life. (Mignolo; Maldonado-Torres; def. from Shultz 2017)

DECOLONIALITY
#RhodesMustFall
#FeesMustFall
Practices of decoloniality

Table Bay

Blauwberg

NORTHERN SUBURBS

Milnerton

Goodwood
1956

Bellville
1958

Sea Point
1957

Windermere
1956

City
Bowl

Salt River

Parow
1958

Schotsche
Kloof
1957

District
Six
1966

Walmer
Estate
1973

Mowbray
1961

Black
River
1968

Athlone
1957

Camps Bay
1957

Newlands Village
1961

Kirstenbosch
Botanical
Gardens

Belletjiebos
1966

Claremont
1961

Harfield
Village
1968

Rylands
1957

Nyanga

Kenilworth
1961

CAPE FLATS

SOUTHERN
SUBURBS

Wynberg
1961

Meadowridge

This map shows Group
Areas Act declared by
1977, with selected
declaration dates.

Heathfield

Grassy
Park

Princess
Vlei

Khayelitsha

Mitchell's Plain

Retreat

Lavender Hill

Strandfontein

Legend:
- Africans
- Whites
- Coloureds and Malays
- Malay Group Area
- Indians
- Industry
- 'Controlled' Area
- Other

Elsie's Peak

Muizenberg

False Bay

Kalk Bay

Cape Town context (short)

- **1957 Group Areas Act** (from 1950)
- **1970s District Six**, over 60 000 people were forced to move to Cape Flats during the 1970s
- **1994 Liberal democratic form** won by anti-apartheid struggle

- Since then great expansion of the city
  - Dense informal settlements and "township-like" area of Cape Flats
  - Upper/middle class non-dense suburbia

"Cape Floral Kingdom"
- Extremely high plant diversity from the fynbos plant biome
- High endemism (many plants only found there, and in constrained spaces)

In red is marked some of the sites where filming was done in collaboration with the participants.

1 Table 2 Elephants

To think about before watching the film:

- Ways of knowing; what practices of knowing are in action?

- Who is placed "in the know" through these?

- Presences of coloniality and decoloniality

- Situations of fluidity and hybridity; when during the screening do you as viewer "feel lost", when are things not clear to you?

Let´s start the film.

AFTER THE FILM

Ideas towards a discussion through visiting particular scenes.

The order can be re-arranged.

More scenes can be added.

Science-in-action

Matters of concern…

… and the practice of coding such matters into scientific facts.

- *What technologies are used? What artefacts?*
- *What actor-networks or assemblages have been constructed?*
- *Who and what is enrolled in these actor-networks (of translation)?*
- *The construction of scientific facts?*
- *Field science — the expanded laboratory?*

Discuss "politics of scale" as one entry point to understand political ecology.

(Latour 1988, 2005)

Labour relations & ways of knowing

- The hierarchies of Cape Town's biodiversity network
- Hierarchies of authority, salary, control over ones work environment and labour hours.
- Racial coding of this hierarchy
- What does this tell us about social organisation of a particular scale of concern for plants/biodiversity.

- Colonial legacies, modernist legacies
- The intimacy of inter-personal relations
- The management and deployment of "human resources"

- "Duress", "Imperial Debris" (Stoler 2013, 2016).

She informs us that Thunberg [one of Linneaus' "apostles"] arrived in the Cape in 1772, a full century after the Dutch East India Company had built a fort there, upon where "he learnt Dutch, or our version of Dutch, then" and "he discovered," turning to Pat, asking rhetorically, "how many Ericas?', two hundred, three hundred Ericas [a family of flowers, *Ericaceae*]." And, in summing up, "He [then] went off to Japan. Having become the Father of South African botany, he became the Father of Japanese botany [as well]."

"…you really need to have certain eyes…"

Who is in the know?

What experiences are taken seriously?

Speaking from Cape Flats into the future of the city

Learning to unlearn (Spivak)

De-linking (Mignolo)

Decolonial practices of knowing?

Leeroy Philips & Stefan Benting, Mixed Mense Bboy group

Alternative practices of knowing the city, of knowing urban nature?
Enrolment of others - who is enrolled

A practice that is not essentializing the past, but hybridising/mixing street-smart hip-hop with a practice of knowing the past through a resistance of using existing forms of knowing.

Is this a definition of decolonial practice? Embodied decolonial theory?

Bradley van Sitterts

"I am learning my Khoi-khoi language. I may not speak it perfectly, but I am learning."

Alternative ways of placing urban nature in the know…, alternative narratives…, alternative names, clothes, instruments. A different 'actor-network' that translates not only *what* is known (content), but *how* things are known (form). This places other people, bodies, and things 'in the know'.

This has the effect of challenging from where one can stand to speak into the future of the city. An alternative way of legitimizing who can speak into the future of the city.
Knowledge politics/ontological politics.

"…[the Portuguese sailor] had the pleasure of naming it [the mountain]. But it obviously had another name because people were living here."

[Princess Vlei] "I call her kaokai !ovis"

Emile Jansen, Heal the Hood

"We speak in African […] but I feel our ancestors heard [us], and challenged us to take on this battle, and stood by us to win."

"layers and layers of history…"

But, what about the human/non-human divide?

Does the film "One Table Two Elephants" reinforce this divide? Or not?

Discuss how the film places this dichotomy in an ethnographic context.

For more on post humanities discussions, see also the shorter film we've made
"Killing Aliens Everyday"
Link: https://vimeo.com/343835799
Pwd: racetrack

"The problem with Cape Town is that we became so indoctrinated and the deculturalization became [so] complete—I mean, what we call the whitewash was complete—that the memory was removed and these kids of today, and even a lot of the adults, they don't recognize their own history and their own ancestry at all"

Epistemological politics - ways of knowing
Ontological politics - what is real; what is here; what experiences are valid

NB! Scenes that only appear in the the 47-minute first cut version of the film. We plan to edit another film for these. /Jacob and Henrik

Prestwich Memorial
The performativity of histories.
The presences of multiple histories. And what do we do with them?

The reality of ghosts in postcolonial cities.

Politics of representation

What can be seen in Cape Town today? What can be seen in a Rainbow Nation? What can be part of liberal democratic form? Dissensus. Staging dissensus.

NB! Scenes that only appear in the the 47-minute first cut version of the film. We plan to edit another film for these. /Jacob and Henrik

"I´ve come to realize that other than an object—which can be studied, documented, and written up and makes an offering to science and knowledge—that there is another dimension to an object [...]. Objects have powers in themselves, a huge array of symbolic meaning and can be immensely important to people outside of scientific considerations."

NB! Scenes that only appear in the the 47-minute first cut version of the film. We plan to edit another film for these. /Jacob and Henrik

Thank you!

Visit our website
www.SituatedEcologies.net

Art, design and research collaborations to contest and democratise ecologies, developing a new language and registers for *thinking*, *knowing* and *doing* situated ecologies.

Contact us for more resources:
Henrik Ernstson (henrik.ernstson@manchester.ac.uk)
Jacob von Heland (jacobvh@kth.se)

The Situated Ecologies Platform

Art, design and research collaborations to contest and democratize ecologies.

ONE TABLE TWO ELEPHANTS

Provincialising MALFEASANCE

CROSS CUTS
STOCKHOLM ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES FESTIVAL FOR FILM & TEXT
2019

Killing Aliens Everyday