As part of ACC and KTH, The NOTRUC Project gives the Higher Seminar/PhD Course:

Democratic Practices of Unequal Geographies:
The Aesthetical and The Political

4-8 July, 2016

Venue: Seminar Room 1, EGS Building (The Environmental and Geographical Science Building, Madiba Circle with South Lane), UCT Upper Campus, African, Centre for Cities, University of Cape Town (Map, see last page.)

Andrés Henao Castro and Henrik Ernstson
Contact: henrik.ernstson@uct.ac.za (or ernstson@kth.se), +27 82 9666554

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Welcome!

We are happy to welcome you to this year’s seminar at ACC, UCT. Below you will find the rationale of the seminar, schedule and tasks, and reading list with guidelines. This is the only document you need to print. You have been given access to the course folder from where you can download all readings. To find the venue, please refer to the map on the last page; if you arrive by car to attend the seminar, make sure to arrive early at around 8 am on the Monday to organize visitor’s parking permit; if you use the Jamie Shuttle UCT bus, please check times and drop off; if you walk, check the map. Please contact Henrik if you have any problems, and if an emergency also see contact details to Maryam at ACC.

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1. Rationale

“[T]he political does not exist outside particular circumstances that must be discerned discretely. To put it another way, there is no political theory per se.” — Jacques Rancière, Moments Politiques, 2015, p. xii

The task is urgent and profound: How to make sense of rapid urbanization across Africa and the global South, while (re)turning to explicitly think about emancipatory politics? What does the political mean in these contexts? What constitutes properly democratic practices of equality and freedom? What can we learn by rubbing political theory against urban studies of ‘the South’? This annual seminar series emerges out of an interest to put into conversation political philosophy and global south urbanism. Importantly, our objective is not that of supplementing a theoretical abstraction (e.g. ‘the political’) with some kind of concrete spatiality. Rather, and in the spirit of the quote above, we are interested in the global South as an epistemological position and a field of experiences that have specific contemporary sociomaterial realities that we hope can trouble and re-new urban and political theory.

Following last year’s seminar, in which we related our readings of Plato to Rancière with critical urban studies of the South, this year we gather a seminar that problematizes the relationship between the political and the aesthetical. This puts more focus on artists and activists that intervene materially and socially in the fabric of urban spaces, and it brings us towards the political in a quite specific way. More concretely we aim to relate questions around what Jacques Rancière calls the distribution of the sensible with interventions in urban spaces. The seminar thus focuses on readings of political theory that interrogate the relationship between the aesthetical and the political, across a variety of philosophical
approaches. Yet it explores such relationship with a particular emphasis on urban (and some non-urban) geographies of the global south. We want to discuss questions about representation, intervention, performativity, sensuousness, visibility, audibility, occupation, inscription, by placing these theories within unequal geographies that should trouble existing theoretical findings and help us to reformulate our research questions, methodologies approaches and theoretical assumptions.

2. Schedule and Tasks

The basic format for the seminar is to meet for around 3.5 hours every day, apart from Thursday, which is a longer day (see below). Each day will include a coffee/tea break after around 1.5 hours. Usually, Andrés or Henrik will talk for the first 20-30 minutes in order to provide context for the theoretical discussion: what is at stake in the texts, where does the text stand in relation to intellectual debates, and summarize main points, etc. Then we open the floor for discussion in which your readings of the literature will enter as ways to unpack and think about the seminar questions.

Task (all): The reading list is complemented with some instructions and guidelines to facilitate the reading and encourage you to take notes. Each day has a specific theme, which is followed by a formulation of the main problem and a set of guiding questions. These questions can assist you in your reading and we encourage you to try and respond to them (and other fundamental questions that emerge for you), preferably in writing so you can bring this into the seminar. In particular we are interested in how you can relate the reading to questions you have in your own project and the empirical settings you work with. This is one of the seminar’s core methods for bringing in wider experiences and empirical realities into the seminar to discuss and learn from each other. So please keep notes while reading.

Task (PhD/MSc students): NB! For PhD and MSc students that expect to get course credits for the seminar, these above-mentioned seminar and reading notes are compulsory and should be handed in by Friday afternoon (Day 5). See footnote for details.¹

Monday 9:00-13:00 (we might end a bit earlier)

We will start on Monday with an introductory lecture by Andrés and Henrik that charts the vision of the seminar/course and how it ties into the longer aim of running this annual seminar and PhD course at ACC on democratic practices of unequal geographies. The underlying rationale rests in an interest to use the seminar form (i.e. close reading of texts that are discussed in a collective) to explore how to make sense of rapid urbanization across Africa and the global South, while (re)turning to explicitly thinking about emancipatory politics. The annual seminar gathers texts and students from various critical approaches and disciplines to understand what we can learn by thinking political theory with and against urban studies and urban realities of ‘the South’. This introductory lecture will tie in debates from last year’s seminar and provide a stage for the larger debates that we will collectively grapple with during the week. As such the lecture will summarize main ideas from the Monday’s reading and then move over to discuss Monday’s reading in the seminar form. The Monday session is 30 minutes longer to also have time for a presentation-round of each participant.

Tuesday and Wednesday 9:00-12:30

We follow the general seminar methodology as outlined above.

¹The "seminar reading notes" should demonstrate an active reading of the texts and should ideally contain some examples where the student demonstrates in explicit terms how the texts relates to their respective research projects/theses. These notes are not essays, but are to be viewed as reading notes, so varied styles of taking notes will be accepted (i.e. there is no real criteria on form and style). Make the notes between 1-3 pages per day, and not more than 10 pages in total (12 pt Times New Roman, 1.5 row distance). They can be sent as a word-file, or alternatively as hand-written notes (which needs to be readable). Henrik Ernstson will provide short reflections on the notes and send back within two weeks after the seminar. The hope is that these notes will be important both for the active participation in the seminar, and as a tool to connect between the texts and your project, and as a way to help you re-think aspects of your current research project.
Thursday 9:00-21:00 (including reflection seminar, lunch and dinner)

Note that Thursday is a longer day and it includes lunch and dinner, ending at around 9 pm. We will have the morning seminar as usual, somewhat shorter though (9:00-12:00), and then eat lunch at ACC (12:00-14:00, including free time). In the afternoon we will have a Discussion/Reflection session for another 2-3 hours (14:00-17:00) and then go for dinner together (18:00-21:00). Lunch and dinner is paid for by the NOTRUC project, no costs for you.

Thursday: Discussion/Reflection Session

We will use the Reflection/Discussion session to discuss the main theme of democratic practices of unequal geographies and how we now understand this in light of the literature and our wider collective experiences and projects. This could also include bringing in and reflecting on the contemporary situation of decolonization, the student movement of South Africa, new artistic practices, new modes of (urban) capitalist projects (take Wescape for instance), and increasing (socio)ecological crisis etc. While the stage for discussion is wide, it will depart from our reading and your projects, while exploring the overarching question of democratic practices of unequal geographies. Hopefully this session will also provide ideas on what the theme for 2017 could be.

Task (voluntary): The material for the session will be organized around your written reflections. While we encourage all of you to write a short response piece (1000 words max.), this is still a voluntary task. Consequently, those that are willing, will be tasked to write a short response piece and present this orally to the seminar. The piece should grapple with questions, concerns or possibilities you have in translating the texts we have read (one or two, or all together) so that they make sense in your own personal research projects, while reflecting on the overarching question of democratic practices of unequal geographies. In other words: how the seminar literature connects (or not) with your own research projects and in the context of thinking with democratic practices of unequal geographies. This reflection could for instance be about how the notion of the ‘distribution of the sensible’ might feature in your research project, or how it makes you see new aspects you have not seen before. It could be about you narrating a short vignette from your fieldwork that resonates with a particular theoretical construct. Or that you depart from an artistic intervention we have read about. Or it could be something else that caught your attention when you were reading and discussing. Hopefully by Thursday we will feel comfortable together to make it possible to surface uncertainties, insecurities, and questions we might have around theory/practice. Taken together, this will not only be a chance for you to get explicit feedback on your projects, but also a chance for the seminar to make explicit a collective thinking around our central question around democratic practices of unequal geographies and what it might mean in our contemporary moment.

Depending on how many will write and present (we are around 18 taking the seminar), we will find a way to distribute time for presentations and discussions. There is also some time on Friday that could be used for this. More details on the seminar will be given on Monday. On Tuesday we decide who will be presenting.

Friday 9:00-13:00

Friday has its own proper theme but will also have a concluding 30-40 min reflection that strives to tie together some loose ends, gather suggestions for next year’s seminar and other feedback that can help to organize next year’s seminar in 2017.

Written feedback after the seminar

We expect everybody to send a short written feedback on the seminar/course that reflects on: (i) the planning, material, and content of the seminar/course; (ii) the discussions it provoked; (iii) how it made you re-think certain issues and your own research project; (iv) suggest themes for next years’ seminar; and (v) reflection on the role of Andrés and the role of Henrik. Please also provide (vi) any other feedback that might help us to plan next year’s seminar.
3. Readings

In total there are less than 400 pages of required reading for five days of discussion. We have also listed some recommended reading to expand on themes and provide further reading suggestions. In the course folder you will find further readings that we used in preparing the seminar and that you might find interesting.

Day 1 [Monday]: The Aesthetic Turn on the Political

• Formulation of the problem:
  o During our first day we will explore the general aspects of the relationship between the political and the aesthetic by means of Jacques Rancière’s innovative philosophical contributions to radicalize such relationship. By submitting his concepts to close scrutiny, we will explore how politics might be (better) understood by means of aesthetic categories or whether the aesthetic turn is insufficient to give an account of the political? The global South urbanism literature assists us here to trouble and possibly expand Rancière’s thinking through putting this philosophy in communication with other thinkers and realities. It also provides material to investigate what needs to happen for an aesthetic intervention to become political. Finally, we are interested in exploring what is the role of power in the relationship between the political and the aesthetic.

• Guiding questions for the reading:
  o How are we to understand different distributions of the sensible (or different regimes of the sensible)?
  o In what ways do aesthetics trouble a distribution of the sensible, in what ways does it not?
  o How do dissensual ways of being, seeing, and acting interact with each other, or supplement/juxtapose each other?
  o What is politically relevant, yet missing from an aesthetic framework?
  o What is the ‘intellectual work’ (i.e. the ability to move our thinking from one point to another) that the global South literature/context seems to be doing here?

• Key concepts: Aesthetics, Political, Distribution of the Sensible, Dissensus.

— Readings Day 1 — (94 pages)

• Required:
  Jaques Rancière. 2013. The Politics of Aesthetics. London & New York: Bloomsbury. (72 pages; NB! The actual text to read is from page 9-79, the rest is a foreword and a useful glossary of technical terms)
  Asef Bayat. 2015. “Plebeians of the Arab Spring.” Current Anthropology 56 (11): S33–S43. (10 pages) Comment: Bayat introduces and discusses (urban) political theory and sociology ‘from the South’ with Bayat (Egypt, Iran), Holston (Brazil) and Chatterjee (India). It’s good for us surface at least some aspects of these thinkers on the first day of the seminar and together with Rancière.
  Filip De Boeck. 2015. “Poverty’ and the Politics of Syncopation: Urban Examples from Congo.” Current Anthropology 56 (S11): S146–S158. (12 pages) (UPLOADED) Comment: De Boeck helps to ground thinking in the thick of things of Kinshasa. Provides texture and context to think through what ‘the distribution of the sensible’ might mean in Kinshasa. And how can the concept of ‘police order’ make sense in Kinshasa and ‘the building’, which is governed/ruled by so called informal processes.

• Recommended:

2 Only some references have comments to them. These were added while preparing the seminar and simply kept.
Day 2 [Tuesday]: Critical Theory and Ideology

Formulation of the problem:
- During our second day we delve into some foundational texts of the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School, in order to investigate primarily the relationship between aesthetics and ideology. Given our interest on critical geographies, Elias Canetti’s analysis of the architectural projects that Hitler commissioned to Speer are interesting as it establishes a clear relationship between the political and the configuration of space, and questions of functionality, and control. We rub this against a reflection on postcolonial monumentalism and artistic interventions into urban planning that undermines linear space and control.

Guiding questions for the reading:
- How are we to understand the concept of “aura” today?
- What happens to the work of art under today’s dominant modes of “technical reproduction”?
- How are we to understand the relationship between aesthetics and ideology today and through the realities, practices and theories from/of the global South?
- Is ideology the political kernel of aesthetics? What is the function of the critique of ideology in the analysis of the work of art?
- Under what kind of conceptual vocabulary can we make legible what we could loosely defined as authoritarian/totalitarian aesthetics?
- When read with and rubbed against postcolonial urbanism literature, what happens? How does the nature of our responses change to the above-stated questions, how are in that sense the postcolonial/urban South realities/experiences active in shaping how we think?

Key concepts: Ideology, Aesthetics, Aura, Monumental, Aestheticize Politics, Politicize Art, Critique.

Readings Day 2 — (97 pages)

Required:
*Recommended:*


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**Day 3 [Wednesday]: Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition and Afro-Pessimism.**

- **Formulation of the problem:**
  - During our third day we will investigate a debate between Saidiya Hartman and Fred Moten on the decision of Hartman not to reproduce the scene of torture of Aunt Hester in Frederick Douglass’ memoirs. Moten challenges Hartman’s analysis of different “scenes of subjection,” by claiming that such refusal to reproduce is not only inevitably bound to fail but could better be addressed by focusing on the “terrible beauty” of the sound that articulates resistance of the object to the violence that it suffers. Hartman, cautious about the risks involved in the iteration of that representation, takes Moten’s challenge elsewhere, towards a different critical attitude vis-à-vis the engagement of the interpreter with the archive. We would, in light of the global South urbanism literature, analyze, clarify, question, and explore the different aspects of such a debate.

- **Guiding questions for the reading:**
  - What is the relationship between production, re-production, and performativity that the Black radical tradition proposes? Is this an ontological relationship, i.e. a relationship based on (new/othered) modes of being in the world? How are we to understand this apparent linkage between ontology and performativity?
  - What kind of political relationship is established vis-à-vis the reproduction of representations of violence when violence already saturates the archive?
  - What is the role of ethics in the politics of representation?
  - How are we to understand, interrogate, and make legible what remains un-lived in the archive?
  - What is the role of the reader/interpreter/critic in face of an archive whose very protocols of recording make failure into an inescapable reality of the interpretative process?

- **Key concepts:** Performance, Archive, Black Radical Tradition, Afro-pessimism, Failure.

— *Readings Day 3 — (81 pages)*

- **Required:**

- **Recommended:**
Day 4 [Thursday]: Queering the Visual and the Critique of Empire

• Formulation of the problem:
  - This fourth session explores different analysis of historical and current imperialism through different aesthetic practices that share a common post-colonial intersectional analysis. Although such a critique of imperialism through homo-nationalism and domesticity interests us the most, we will also interrogate linkages between race, gender, class and sexuality in aesthetic practices.

• Guiding questions for the reading:
  - How to interrogate the relationship between the photograph and the caption in the politics of reception and circulation of images?
  - How do sexuality, race, class, and gender intersect/interrupt/juxtapose across specific social practices that reproduce exceptionalism or domesticate subjectivity?
  - In what ways do the concept of assemblage differs from that of intersectionality?
  - How to rethink agency in conditions of severe inequality?

• Key concepts: Imperialism, Biopolitics, Queerness, Critical Race Theory.

— Readings Day 5 — (70 pages)

• Required:

• Recommended:
  - Ann McClintock. “Race, Cross-Dressing and the Cult of Domesticity.” In Imperial Leather. (34 pages)

— Day 5 [Friday]: Animism, Materialism, and the Pre/Post Colonial —

• Formulation of the problem:
During the last day of our seminar we would investigate the relationship between animism and materialism and put it in conversation with post-colonial/de-colonial aesthetics. We will explore questions of subject-positionality, understandings of temporality, the question of history and the ways of confronting loss: What remains? How to activate the traces of that which is no longer there, in order to animate another story?

- Guiding questions for the reading:
  - What kind of relationship exists between animism and materialism?
  - What happens to time and perhaps to the politics of time after the post-colonial critique of linear Eurocentric time? What happens to death and to our ability to confront critically the massive fact of loss?
  - How are we to understand death within post/de-colonial aesthetics?
  - What is the relationship between aesthetics and loss, aesthetics and death, and aesthetics and the unthinkable?

- Key concepts: Animism, Materialism, Pre/Post/De-colonial, Time, Death.

— Readings Day 5 — (54 pages)

- Required:

- Recommended:

4. Short on the Organizers

**Dr. Andrés Fabián Henao Castro** is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Massachusetts Boston. His research interests are the relationship between ancient and contemporary political theory, particularly in reference to democratic and de-colonial theory and practices, the question of political subjectivity and the distribution of political agency. Currently he is working on a book that explores the kind of subject-positions and forms of agency that are imagined and unimagined in the theoretical reception of Sophocles’ tragedy Antigone. As a member of the international research network on Performance Philosophy he is also developing a new project on radical interpretations of Plato’s allegories. He is also working on the relationship between text and textile by putting in conversation ancient and contemporary political weavers through their reception in contemporary feminist theory. Read more on his website: [http://works.bepress.com/andres_fabian_henao_castro](http://works.bepress.com/andres_fabian_henao_castro)

**Dr. Henrik Ernstson** is part-time Senior Lecturer at the African Centre for Cities at the University of Cape Town, where he has been since 2010, and a Research Fellow at KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm since 2013. His theoretical and empirical work is focused on the politics and collective organizing around urban ecology, including interests in urban land, wetlands, biodiversity and sanitation and waste. With others, he is developing a situated approach to urban political ecology drawing on critical geography, postcolonial/global South urbanism, and environmental history. For more information, see [http://www.situatedecologies.net](http://www.situatedecologies.net)
5. Directions – and Parking Permits

The venue for the seminar is Seminar Room 1 on the second floor of the EGS Building (The Environmental and Geographical Science Building), UCT Upper Campus. The EGS building is marked out with the left-most arrow in the map (where it says “UCT Climate System Analysis Group”). The right-most arrow marks out where you can find a Visitors Parking permit for a car.

By car. Make sure to arrive early on Monday morning to get your “Visitors Parking Permits” which you can acquire at the North Entrance Road to UCT Upper Campus (right-most arrow in the map above). State your name and refer to this course and either my name and staff number, Henrik Ernstson (staff number 01453006, African Centre for Cities, UCT), or that of Maryam Waglay, ACC. The car entry to the EGS building lies at the corner of the Madiba Circle and South Lane, but you need to find parking somewhere else (white bays along Madiba Circle).

By bus. All of you can use the UCT bus system The Jamie Shuttle. It stops on top of the Madiba Circle and very close to South Lane. You find the EGS Building from there. Search Internet for the bus times.

Walking. Walk up the campus passing the Main Library and up towards the top.

Emergency contact: , Marayam Waglay, ACC, Maryam.Waglay@uct.ac.za, +27 (21) 6505903, cell phone (in emergency only), +27 (82) 6615317).