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**Editor's introduction**

Filming, writing and transmodal futures of knowledge production

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Keywords: Peer-review of film, film-based research, transmodal environmental humanities

Introduction

Why is it that research equals text, equals text, equals text? How come the text is so central as the medium to carry research forward? Sooner rather than later, the omnipotence of the text in research will hit the academic seeking to use both filmmaking and writing like a hammer in the head. As the tenured professor Dominic Boyer reminded his readers, if you want to make a career as a scholar today, the single most important thing you can do is to write (Boyer 2016). To date, the research community that also uses film for research, does not have anything remotely similar to the peer-review journals, institutions and infrastructures that text-based research has. These have, to be honest, taken centuries to be shaped through the reciprocal processes of writing, reading and sharing. Today thousands of peer-review journals stand ready to transform your manuscript into an article publication to be placed in databases where it can later be found, cited and valued.

Still, and following the rapid development of relatively cheap filming equipment and digital film editing possibilities during the last decade or two, there are more and more researchers to whom filmmaking is a vocation and who are making research films that hold clear promise of being valuable knowledge artifacts. Lacking a robust peer-reviewing community around film-as-research, these films are scattered across the world, and only come into contact with one another with difficulty—and thus, lacking the sociability of texts, struggle to shape the wider discourse and theory, or develop its own shared discourse and language of critique. This is unfortunate because there are already few of us who have the chance or desire to inquire into the nature of these films: What are their qualities? What do they convey about the world? Where do we find them and pass them on to others? Many films made within a research context instead are viewed as add-ons to already existing (text-based and thus) properly peer-reviewed research. Or the films are placed with the university's communication department, distributed as "research communication" with a possible "social impact," clearly defining them as not being part of research proper.

It was questions and sentiments such as these that sparked us to develop a platform to "peer up" around filmmaking and support researchers that were working across film and text, regardless if they were based in the sciences, humanities or arts. Also encouraged by the many other initiatives we had met along the road (such as the *Tales from Planet Earth* festival founded by Gregg Mitman at UW-Madison more than a decade ago, Harvard's *Critical Media Practice* program, or the Science Section of *CPHDOX*), we wanted to create a serious forum for the peer-reviewing of film. This first issue of *Annals of Crosscuts* – a peer-reviewed publication for film-based research

to advance transmodal work in the environmental humanities, is the result. As editor-in-chief, I would like to introduce the audience to the films that it contains, but first I will briefly describe how the issue emerged through a peer-review process and mention some lessons learnt.

The work with peer-review

This first issue of *Annals of Crosscuts* includes eleven richly textured films that speak from the growing environmental humanities with strong intent and originality. As testimony to the integrative ambitions of the environmental humanities the contributors come from a range of disciplines, schools and practices including artistic research, urban and architectural studies, social movements of the urban south, political ecologies of water, studies of mining legacies, decolonial performance aesthetics, science studies and ethnographies of conservation, toxicity and more-than-human relations.

Made in ten countries, at four continents, the films are the final outcomes of a collaborative peer-review process that started in the first half of 2019 with an abstract call for films addressing the theme “RUPTURED TIMES”:

“RUPTURED TIMES are interstitial spaces where the past is not anymore but the future is still to come. Indeed, these are ruptured times. While globalization promises to unify the world, thousands of fractures open up space and time. New political ambitions fragment the globe and bring us back to times when nationalism reigned. Climate change ruptures the familiar flow of time with chronologies of the past and projections of the future. Civic groups also rupture time and interrupt the usual sequence of events. This issue of *Annals of Crosscuts* and the *Crosscuts* festival [the co-arranged film festival] 2019 is dedicated to exploring these ruptured times broadly and carefully through film, text and discussion” (From the *Annals of Crosscuts* Call Text, June-2019).

The theme was chosen to recognize the present as a moment of seismic activity, when past failures, damage, and mourning were facts to be reckoned (Stoler, Tsing et al. 2017, Stoler 2016, Tuhiwai Smith 2012, Folke et al. 2020), but it was still uncertain how and where eruptions might take place. A time for philosophical reflection, and of coming together, to sharpen the tools and tactics deemed necessary in preparing for future work ahead.

The peer-review followed three stages starting with going through the 30+ abstract submissions in late May 2019. Then followed 7 intense months of selecting the most relevant, original and well-executed submissions, and creating editorial teams to match them, contact reviewers, develop and refine standards, receive the actual film submissions in their “manuscript cut” (meaning edited final cut versions, but not graded, or sound mixed to allow for revision edits), circulate these on review, return the feedback and revisions to the filmmakers, receive revised film versions to, if necessary, be sent out on the second review, and then repeat the process, until all films were accepted, in time before the festival premiere of the *Annals of Crosscuts* section between the 23-24 November 2019.

Already from the beginning we wanted the peer-review process to recognize and support the diverse ways in which film are made, rather than foster contributions of a certain kind. We wanted to ensure we could provide contributors with critique and feedback that was informed and relevant to them, both in terms of theory, subject and practice. To this end we assigned two, sometimes three, senior editors for each submission, so that each editorial team would have the required in-depth understanding of the specific subject, the methods and the media, as well as access to the right network constellation of reviewers to involve. In hindsight, I believe that the open and distributed responsibility placed on the responsible and well-functioning editorial teams was the single most important reason why the review processes worked out so well in the end. While each editorial team was given much freedom to decide how to approach individual submissions, it was also necessary to develop shared guidelines and criteria for reviewers to assess and judge the submissions (In the Appendix key steering documents for the peer-review process can found).

The issue had its premier during the physical section of the *Crosscuts Environmental Humanities Festival for Film & Text* in November 2019. The digital version published in March 2021 can be watched on the Crosscuts webpage, but it will also be accessible via Zenodo Open Science at CERN laboratory. Teaming up with the latter provided each film with a digital object identifier, permanent metadata and file storage and connecting points to academic databases and search infrastructures. We developed this dual space platform to meet what we considered to be two key requirements of a digital and peer-reviewed film publication. The first was to offer the films for easy viewing through a user friendly streaming interface. The second was to create conditions that would enable these films a life as digital knowledge artefacts, just as versatile and useful as their text-based alternatives and capable of being integrated within academic infrastructures for circulating, sharing and citing in perpetuity.

The films of the “RUPTURED TIMES” issue

The films in the issue engage with a range of themes and scholarships of the environmental humanities. **The Burning**, by visual artist Isabella Martin, provides an artistic and visual STS study on the relationship between the scientific experiment and the real world. The film is set amidst water basins for the controlled breaking of waves in the Hydraulic Laboratory in Aarhus and opens to philosophical and embodied questions about what it is we think we can learn about the world “out there,” by running controlled experiments “in here”? A second film, **Atmospheres**, by anthropologist Sophia Jaworski, adds to research into toxicity and waste which have become an expanding field in the text-based environmental history and sociology. The film traces the presence of toxic and volatile compounds in the atmosphere as part of this audiovisual meditation about everyday life in a Canadian city, and the politics of toxicity and waste in the global petroculture.

Two films in the issue are political studies of the city as seen from below. With the film **Maraká'nà** the Grupo Popular Pesquisa em Ação accounts for the struggle for education, for housing, for indigenous rights, all manifested in the resistance against the 2014 World Cup mega-event in Rio De Janeiro and its disruptive developments and capital accumulations. The film,

collectively put together with various groups, develops a subaltern sensibility, where its different materials and multiple storylines captures the intensity of life in struggle and exposure to violence, but also its deep moments of pride and togetherness. Inspired by decolonial aesthetics, the dance film, **Prophesy of Present Value** grows from a staged interplay between bodily movements and a musical composition that engage themes and histories of exile and homelessness within the industrial peri-urban waterscapes of Greater Miami. The film's title comments on the pressing changes that the city is presently undergoing, justified by financial and scientific scenarios of future economic growth and climate change adaptation. In this context, the film brings into view the negative consequences such policies may once again have for the city's historically marginalized communities. The production was made by composer Emahoy Tsegue-Mariam, director and choreographer Maya Nadine Billig, and the global finance scholar Evan Marcus.

Liquid Crystal Effects by the artist Timo Menke is a philosophical meditation on the history of mining, excavation and mineral enrichment which has formed, and still forms the basis for the global "Technosphere" of internet, mobile devices and pulsating LED screens. In this film these minerals and their sites of origin become main characters in a material account of the artist's own attempt at creating an underwater exhibition in the water-filled and abandoned iron ore mine of Långban in Sweden. A second film on mining heritage is **Upland: Enframing an architecture of "Development"** which revisits Yekepa in Liberia, once a booming mining town founded on the land of the Mano tribe by the Swedish-American mining company LAMCO. The filmmakers Edward Lawrenson and Killian Doherty combine archival material and documentary efforts to interpret the abandoned industrial site that they encounter, as well as through interviews about oral history with villagers, and conversations with retired LAMCO mining employees in Swedish homes furnished with African memorabilia. The result is a visceral account of how violence on the land—the sacred mountain that became a hole through the logic of mining profits—refract lost promises and active colonial remains.

Two films in the issue are essays that deal with questions of ideology production, materiality and remains in capital cities of former imperial Europe. **Sculptures of London** by William Brown, and narrated by Lissa Schwerm, is consistently shot from the standpoint of the flaneur. The film pays attention to, and interrogates, the everyday statues of London for their meanings as city archives. The statues, in turn, tell of social order, patriarchy and empire. **Too late for history to end** reflects on the architecture of political imaginaries and is made by the photographer Kalle Sanner and the sociologist Karl Palmås. The film moves between London and Berlin as it discusses modernity and its futures alongside Albert Speer's Tempelhof world airport, the remains of fascism, the glass dome of globalization, and the present ruins of ecological crises.

Rhino People is a trilogy of short multi-species ethnographies about rhino-human relations, conservation and poaching set in South Africa. The films, made by the Exeter Anthrozoology as Symbiotic Ethics, were funded by the National Geographic and renew the activist advocacy tradition of halting rhino poaching and rhino horn consumption by instilling interspecies empathy, care and mourning through filmmaking. **Water at the margins** is a political ecology

account that follows the everyday chase of water in unserved and underserved communities in Maputo, Mozambique. Engaging closely with local residents, this film by the urban scholar Maria Rusca, asks if there is a more equitable way of sharing this precious resource.

Finally, **In the natural apiary** forms an invitation to experience the intimate (and intense) interplay between wild bees and natural beekeepers with all your senses and from a first-person position. The film is a collaboration between more-than-human ethnographer Michał Krawczyk and the Italian beekeeper Danilo Colomela and is shot in a sensory slow cinema style that pulls you in to experience a world not defined by either of the species.

Why this focus on peer-review for film?

Anthropology has, more than any other discipline, debated the role and place of film in its fold. One of its famous proponents David MacDougall, equally dexterous in writing as in filmmaking, has returned to the question throughout his career. Reviewing the growing interest with filmmaking and its professionalization within anthropology in the 70s, he believed one explanation was that anthropologists had become conscious about the “limitations which words [alone] impose upon their discipline” (1978, 424). However twenty years later, with some frustration, he noted that clearly it was not that anthropology as a field was uninterested with film or the visual, but: “its problem has always been *what to do* with it” [my emphasis] (MacDougall 1997, 276). Before films can be more readily integrated within conventional modes of academic publication, including peer-review, I believe scholars, scientists and their funders will continue to ask questions about what to do with film, and if it really matters.

Researchers today are also aware of the limits that words alone may pose on academic work, as well as restrict possibilities for public engagement. Much of the early efforts and investments in concretizing and establishing an “environmental humanities”, and perhaps a contributing reason for its growth and success, have concerned devising strategies, and nurturing skills and collaborations that expand the possibilities for work with emotions, registers and sensibilities of different qualities than what can be measured, quantified or described (Taylor 2013, Heise, Christensen and Niemann 2017, Åsberg 2017). Cross-disciplinary and beyond-academia collaborations are increasingly considered necessary to tackle the diversified mission and mandate, which for instance may involve the domains of art (Galafassi et al. 2018, and as this issue testifies to), or advocacy and activism (Johnston 2017), or hybrids in between (Verran and Kramvig 2015, von Heland and Ernstson 2018). Such academic engagements readily rely on, or integrate text-expression, but they are not confined to it as the only possible media of choice. If anything, the covid pandemic has testified to the wide adoption of telecommunication mediated through cameras, keyboards, digital interfaces and microphones in a ways that can be characterized as deeply transmodal, and as advancing what might be called a “transmodal academic culture” that has now moved far beyond text.

Indeed, much has happened around material and media uses since the 1970s and MacDougall’s question What to do with the visual? Visual ethnography has decisively grown its costume into

other fields of scholarship (Rose 2016) and melded with artistic research (Castaing Taylor and Paravel 2017). There are filmmaker-in-residence programs at universities, and funding to support science and fiction encounters (Weber 2019). Marginal genres, such as poetic film (Trinh 2004), essay film (Lopate 1992), and archive film have all gained popularity and thrive (Deutsch 1998, 2002; Russell 2018), the documentary category ‘science film’ has also been given sections (CPHDOX), targeted funding (Carlsberg Foundation) and even its own festivals (InScience, Imagine Film Festival). In fact, there are several festivals large and small to match films of almost any genre (just visit filmfreeway), not to mention the existence of online streaming databases (Snickars and Vonderau 2009), new film technologies, online resources and software for learning and editing films.

But when it comes to the crucial aspect of publishing academic work, little has changed. In an often quoted passage John Ziman refers to peer-review as “the lynchpin about which the whole business of Science is pivoted” (Ziman 1966, 148). This institution functions as an “obligatory passage point” (Callon 1984) for publication; the process by which research outputs are translated into sanctioned academic knowledge. While the peer-review and the associated architecture of academic publishing, repository, circulation and citation indexing have undergone decades of digitization, its practices remain firmly coded for text (cf. Mackenzie Owen 2006); to be precise, texts in the English language (Salö 2017). The reason behind are historically engrained in the way peer-review and writing culture have remained co-constitutive of academic practices of citation, referencing and literacy since the republic of letters (cf. Sörlin 1994, Briggs and Burke 2009). This is why, at the end of the day, and despite its many transmodal elements, research ends up in a shape that equals text, equals text, equals text. To this day academic infrastructures force researchers to finish by “writing up”.

Transmodal futures of knowledge production

This issue of *Annals of Crosscuts* does not feature what has been written up, but rather what has been snapped together on the digital editing table. It may serve as an example of how the valuable aspects of peer-review as critique and entry-point for circulation, can be woven into the process of making films, and how such reviewed films can begin asking for access to academic databases and indexing for wider relevance, visibility and reach.

If I were to say something final about the path ahead it would be this. While there is a wider readiness to embrace film and filmmaking in interdisciplinary research today, there remains a Cartesian tendency to treat film and text, or writing and filming cultures, as residing inside ready-made boxes that are difficult to change and that keep them apart. It is time to ask what properties the boxes consist of, and how the content might benefit from being mixed. Multimodal semiotics (Kress 2010), Visual STS (Galison 2015) and German media theory (Peters 2015, Wickberg 2018) provide different cuts to open the boxes with. They pay attention to the interrelatedness of media, culture and technology not just within, but also across, any activity of meaning-making – regardless if the “cultural technique” at hand is writing, painting, or filmmaking (Siegert and

Winthrop-Young 2014). That, combined with an experimental “show don’t tell” credo – seem like good ways ahead.

This publication has tried to show that it is indeed possible and exciting to intermingle, transpose and combine filmmaking and writing practices to further our understanding of what it means to live in the world of the 21st century and how to change it for the better. I feel grateful to the editors, reviewers and contributors who embarked on this task and who stayed with the trouble in solidarity with the task. I believe that in its best instances, this peer-review process actually became that shoulder that any researcher needs at times, to lean on, but also to see farther.

It has been an honor to collaborate with the filmmakers, editors and reviewers who made this issue of *Annals of Crosscuts* possible. There are many others to recognise in making the issue. My gratitude goes to Laura Pietilä who designed the digital publication of Annals of Crosscuts. The Associate Editors have also provided the necessary support throughout the process: Henrik Ernstson (who has also provided valuable feedback on an earlier version of this text), Miyase Christensen, Marco Armiero, Kalle Boman, as well as of the Festival Director Sofia Jonsson and Professor Sverker Sörlin. The KTH Environmental Humanities Laboratory and the Division of History of Science, Technology and Environment hosted the initiative, funding was received from The Swedish Research Council FORMAS and KTH Sustainability.

The digital publication is found here <https://crosscuts.se/annals-of-crosscuts/films-of-environmental-humanities>, and here, <https://zenodo.org/communities/annals-of-crosscuts/>.

Jacob von Heland

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Crosscuts Environmental Humanities Festival for Film & Text

KTH Environmental Humanities Laboratory

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Appendix - key documents outlining the peer-review process

Annals Abstracts Assessment

By: Jacob von Heland and Miyase Christensen
Vers.1.2

Abstract evaluation for Annals on a 1-7 scale, where 1 is insufficient and 7 is excellent.

1. Relevance to Annals and Environmental Humanities?
2. Originality of the abstract
3. Quality of the abstract – theory, question, clarity
4. Feasibility of the project, is timeline present and credible, does the project seem feasible within our timeframe?
5. Artistic qualities – artistic research, artistic integrity and aesthetics?
6. Ethical concerns and considerations
7. Other considerations – geography, diversity, network effects etc
8. Will filmmaking and cinema be used to do research and understand things in new ways? rather than an idea to use film as popular “communication”/”illustration” of existing research?
9. What style/genre is the film – essay, ethnography, art, documentary, journalism, activism?
10. Do we have subject editors to match with this abstract?
11. Where is film now (pre-production to post-production)?

Annals of Crosscuts 2019
By Jacob von Heland
Vers.1.1

For the Filmmaker

Guidelines for Submission of “Film Manuscripts”

Filmmakers who have been invited to submit a “Manuscript Cut” 2019 are encouraged to do so as soon as possible in order to allocate maximum time for the subject editors and the reviewers, as well as themselves to meet revisions and complete their films. Main deadline for Film Manuscripts is the 15th of August. Subject Editors will send out film manuscripts to two anonymous reviewers. They can also turn down manuscripts, or ask for specifications, revisions etc.

The Manuscript Cut

The “Manuscript Cut” is similar to the article manuscript: an edited film that the filmmaker and her internal peers/mentors consider ready for submission. In film language this film version is somewhere between a working rough cut and a final cut. However, given that manuscripts almost always get revisions, we encourage you to not wait too long before submitting the Manuscript Cut. This will make time for the reviewers, as well as your revisions. Manuscript Cuts should be the same length as the final film (max. 50 min). If the film relies on certain graphics, titles and subtitles etc, make sure to address these in the Manuscript Cut version (it can be a plate or a rough sketch). But the Manuscript Cut does not need to be sound mixed or graded. Manuscript Cuts should also be anonymized and without credits. They should be downloadable and shared with the Editor in Chief and the Subject Editors with an online link. In general we anticipate films to stand as independent pieces of work. But it is possible that you want to accompany a film submission with a written text and consider film and text as an integrated piece of work. In this case you should make this clear and provide all material when submitting the Manuscript Cut.

Finally, submitted films also should be accompanied by the separate Annals Submission Form. It is sent directly to the Editor-in-Chief and describes how the film has been produced, in relation to research practice, ethics of conduct and use of film. If you intentionally deviate with your project from conventional codes of conduct, ethics or law, this should to be stated and motivated here for the consideration of the Annals editorial team.

Important Dates:

Deadline for Manuscript Cut submission: 26 June – 15 Aug

Review of Manuscript Cut: 26 June – 5 Sep

Final Deadline for Resubmission of Revised Manuscript Cut: 15 Oct

Premiere dates: 21-24 Nov

Annals of Crosscuts 2019
By Jacob von Heland
Vers.1.1

For the Reviewer

“Manuscript Cut” Reviewer Form

Film title:

Reviewer Name:

Evaluation of Manuscript Cut on a 1-7 scale, where 1 is insufficient and 7 is excellent.

1. How is it relevant to the Environmental Humanities (broadly defined)?
2. How is the film original?
3. How does the film deal with its subject matters – theory, question, field, themes, epistemology?
4. What are the artistic/craft qualities of the film – aesthetics, narrative/story/cohesion, mood, poetics, film theory, skills, framing and precision?
5. Ethical concerns - critical media practice, reflexivity, power, authority, choices of inclusion and exclusion?
6. Does the film consciously relate to style/genre/theory/tradition – e.g. essay, ethnography, art, documentary, journalism, activism?
7. Filmmaking as a research practice – Is it clear that filmmaking is a researching activity in this project and film? Is cinema, film, film work integrated in research to study, reflect, interpret, reveal, understand something in a new way (rather than, say, an approach to use film as a mass media to communicate existing research)?
8. Other concerns and considerations?
9. Do you think this film should be published within Annals 2019 (with revisions, major revisions)?

A question about the review to the Reviewer:

10. Would you please reflect a little on the process – how is it to peer-review a film/this film? How is it similar and different to reviewing an article? Or acting jury at a film festival? Does peer-review of film seem relevant to you? How might it be handled differently?

Annals of Crosscuts 2019
By Jacob von Heland
Vers.1.2

For the Subject Editor

Overview of the Annals Review Process

1. Submissions - 33 written film abstracts were submitted.
2. First Selection by Chief Editor and core team of 21 films. This first selection (from 33 to 21) was based on following criteria and matching suitability, amongst them the effort of using film-as-research.
- 3 The 21 films are subdivided and each sent out to a minimum of two Subject Editors.
4. The Subject Editors of each submission are asked to “team up” and collectively serve as editors for each contribution they have received and to agree two suitable reviewers to each film.
5. Subject Editors can also propose to the Editor-in-Chief to reject a film which does not match the abstract, or otherwise deviates from the Annals criteria (including the research-film emphasis) without sending it out for review.
6. Each film will be treated by a small *Editorial Group* of 1-2 Subject Editors + Editor-in-Chief. This is ambitious, but judged reasonable given the first-time nature and complexity of the task. The Editor-in-Chief will not make calls on individual contributions, but he will facilitate, lead and document the process.
7. If The Reviewer accepts, that person will do the review when the Manuscript Cut (anonymized) version of the film is sent to The Reviewer. Deadline for Manuscript Cut submission is **15 Sep** (dates can be customized by each Editorial Group with filmmaker). The Reviewer watches the Manuscript Cut and writes comments and feedback (as they would if this was a journal manuscript) applying their expertise AND following the criteria sent out by the Chief Editor/Crosscuts core team. The deadline to send back the review to the Subject Editor is **XX** (customized dates designed by each Editorial Group).
8. The Reviewer makes a judgement if this film can be accepted as is, needs revision (minor or major). The Editorial Group puts together the revisions and pass it on to the Filmmaker with a Deadline **XX**.
9. The Filmmaker is sent the blind review and responds to this by re-editing the film.
10. A second and final version is sent back to the Subject Editors of the Editorial Group. The Subject Editors can either choose to accept the film based on the new version, or if they feel it is required, send it out again to the reviewers. At the end of this process there should be a clear recommendation if the film is accepted or not.
11. A final selection of films to be screened at Crosscuts and "published" as part of the special issue is selected by Chief Editor and Subject Editors based on reviews and recommendations.

Submission form for films following the first abstract selection:

**Annals of Crosscuts 2019
By Jacob von Heland
Vers.1.1**

For the Filmmaker

Annals Film Submission Form

Name(s) of Filmmaker(s):

Title of Film:

Home Institution(s):

Brief declaration of research in relation to the film, guidelines, ethical fair practice and rights (max 1 page):

Written and signed by:

Date: