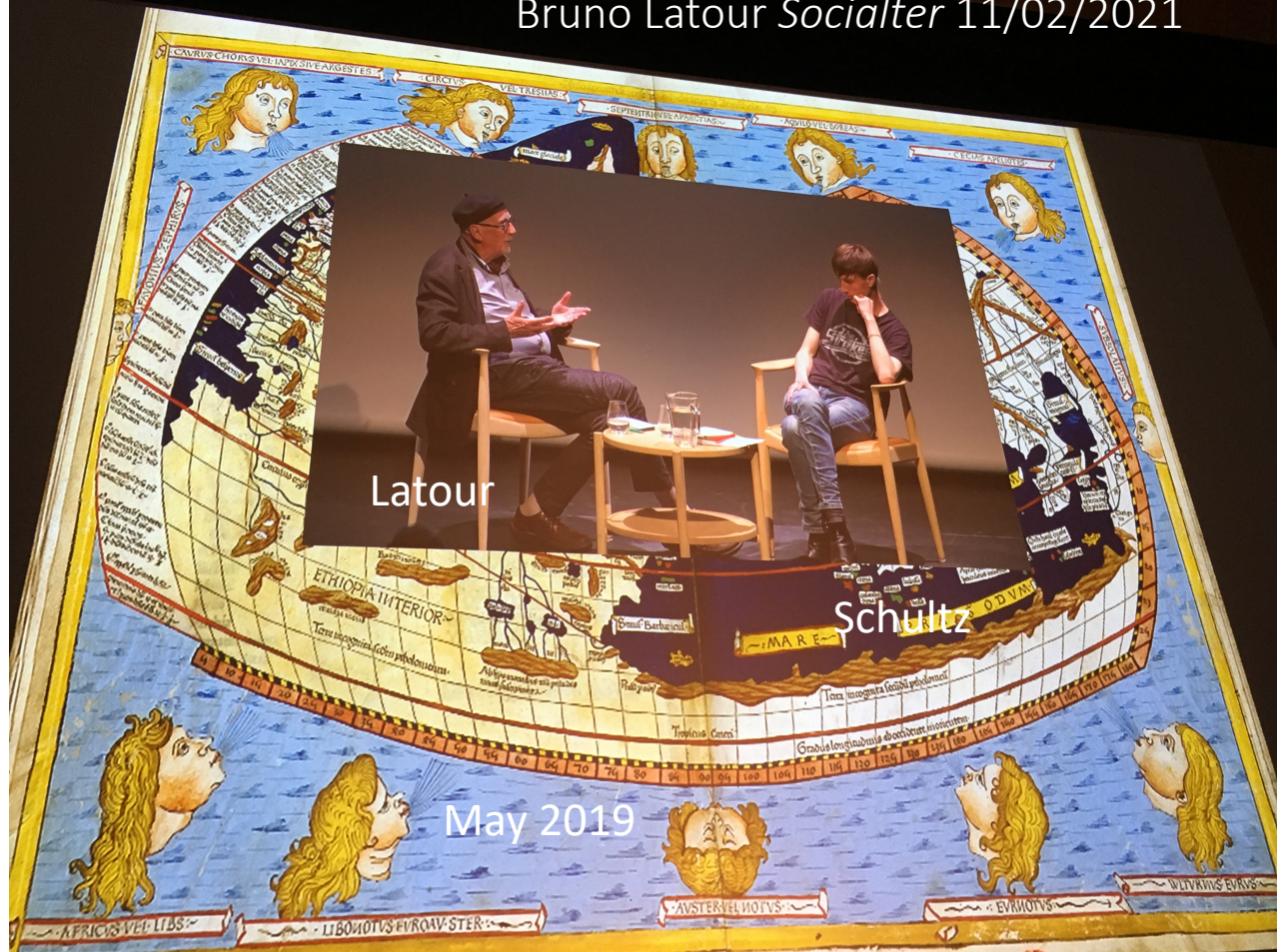


La révolution a déjà eu lieu, elle s'appelle
l'Anthropocène

Bruno Latour *Socialter* 11/02/2021



Modernize or Ecologize? Following the footsteps of Bruno Latour into the City of the Anthropocene

Key-note speech

Sustainable Built Environment & Urban Transition
Linnaeus University, Växjö

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Abstract

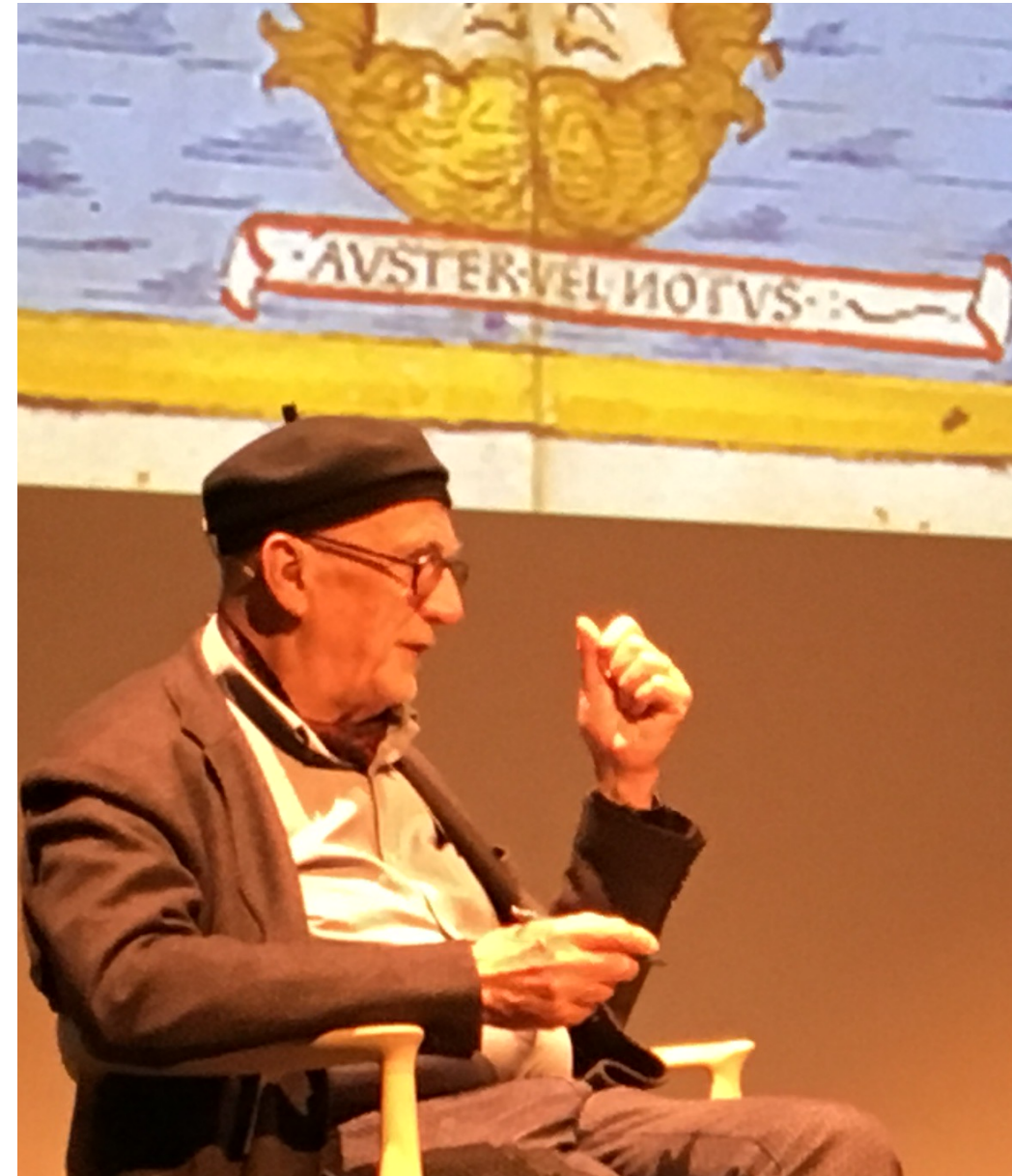
Cities were main drivers in the geological shift from the Holocene to the Anthropocene through the 'Great Acceleration' beginning in the 1950s. Cities also should be main drivers for the remedy of anthropogenic disasters such as climate change, biodiversity decline etc. The Keynote speech will explicate *the reasoning behind* Bruno Latour's option for an *ecological* and not a *modernizing* approach to such questions.

Bruno Latour: philosopher, theologian, anthropologist, sociologist, Catholic

Born 22/6/1947 as 8th child into famous Burgundy wine-growing and –selling family: the Louis Latour-estate

- Studies in philosophy and biblical exegesis
- Anthropological research at the Ivory Coast under the influence of Marc Augé
- Anthropological research in scientific laboratory in California (Laboratory Life, 1979)
- Among the pioneers of the interdisciplinary field: studies of science and technology (STS)
- Actor-network-theory (with Michel Callon & John Law). Non-human actors!
- Philosopher of the moderns: *We have never been modern* (1991)
- Anthropologist of the moderns : *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* (2012)
- Modernize (no) or ecologize (yes)? *New Climate Regime and geo-social classes: Facing Gaia* (2017), *Down to Earth* (2018), *On the emergence of a new ecological class 2022* (with Nikolaj Schultz)
- One of the most quoted thinkers in the humanities and social sciences, all over the world. 2013: The Holberg Prize, called the Nobel prize of the humanities: original, creative and humorous!
Homepage: bruno-latour.fr

Left us 9/10/ 2022



Overview

- 1) Latourian Ontology (*Ant*-ology. Actor-network, being-as-being | being-as-other, substance | subsistence)
- 2) The Ant-ological City (assemblage urbanism).
- 3) The concept of city-ness – the graduated city
- 4) The Anthropocene and the City
- 5) Urbanocene?
- 6) Modernization or ecologization
- 7) Anthropogenic conflict in the city

Ant-ology I: relational agency and existence

- 1) ***Agency***: anything that makes a difference for anything else, is attributed agency. Humans as well as non-humans.
- 2) ***Associationism or relationism***: nothing can persevere in existence without somehow being connected to something else. Without associating, any entity will go out of existence.
On the emergence of a new ecological class
- 3) ***Associating is risky, discontinuous, never given beforehand.*** "What persists persists because it doesn't persist". "Ce qui dure, dure par-ce-qu'il ne dure pas". France Culture, 21/03/2022

Ant-ology II: Substance and subsistence (being–as–being | being–as–other)

Subsistence: being–as–other ontology

Continuous existence is risky and *discontinuous* and related to, associated with other beings. It may fail, it may stabilize, but only as exposed to change.

Substance: being–as–being ontology

“As soon as we fail to note the hiatus (discontinuities) of persistence in being we are ... introducing a **substance** *underneath* subsistence ... a support ... that would be more durable than the beings are and that would ensure their continuity without having to take the trouble, themselves, to leap over the discontinuities required for existence” (AIME, 111, EME, 119)

For BL the task of *philosophy* is to *protect subsistence against substance*

The Ant-ological City (assemblage urbanism)

The *sub-sisting* city is a “*multiple object*”, assembled in multiple ways as “a transport system, as a play-ground for skateboarders and free-runners (‘parkour’), as a landscape of power, as a public stage for political action and demonstration, as a no-go area, as a festival, as a surveillance area, as a socialization space, as a private memory, as a creative milieu, as a huge surface for graffiti and street-artists, as a consumer market, as a jurisdiction”

In this ANTOlogy, the city *cannot be taken for already granted as “bounded object*, specific context or delimited site” (Fariás 2010)

Ignacio Fariás: “Introduction. Decentering the object of urban studies” In Fariás, I. and Bender, T., eds., 2010. *Urban Assemblages: How Actor-Network Theory Changes Urban Studies*. London: Routledge.



Paris ville invisible. Latour & Hermant 1998

- 1) Paris is not a pyramid with the top dominating the bottom, not a sphere within which Parisians and tourists are contained, not a frame for human interactions, for these interactions are themselves part of the ‘frame’. The tourist does not visit a pre-existing frame because (s)he is part of a “tourist infrastructure” also makes Paris.
- 2) The city consists of “a crisscrossing of actor-networks, the branches of which serve as supports, obstacles, opportunities or décor for one another, unless [...] they never meet, even though each of them is supposed to cover the entire city”.
- 3) A city, then (NA) consists of a multiplicity of sites associated to other sites by superimposed actor networks going in many directions. Some support, some contradict each other, some never meet. Bodies are linked in many other directions than households, households in many other directions than neighbourhoods, neighbourhoods in many other directions than the city, and so forth.

Concepts of city-ness/urbanity – too narrow and too expansive

- 1) Assemblage urbanism tells a lot about what happens in the city, but *avoids the question of what makes a city a city*
- 2) Since about 1990 conceptualizations have been polarized between too narrow and too expansive **conceptions**.
- 3) **Too narrow:** 1) cities as urbs (physical) & civitas (community) overlapping (Françoise Choay), 2) clearly defined urban orders and 3) centre-periphery structures, all *obviously inadequate in the light of the sprawling city*. **Consequence: Farewell to the city!**
- 4) **Too expansive:** urbanity is “everywhere and in everything” (Amin & Thrift 2002), urbanism has become “planetary”, a “worldwide urban fabric” including transoceanic shipping lanes, the world’s oceans and the atmosphere (Brenner & Schmid 2011), Consequence: The urban is everything = “it fails to refer to anything” (Sayer 1981); **Consequence: Farewell to urbanity!**

Question: Is there an **in-between concept, a minimal definition, a common denominator** that is neither too expansive, nor too narrow?

Answer. Yes! My proposal: **The graduated city**

The graduated city argument

- 1) A reasonable concept of city/urban should *include traditional conceptual* ingredients such as Louis Wirth's classical minimal definition of the city as “*a relatively large, dense, and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals*” (Wirth 1938: 8). Jacques Lévy continuing Wirth: “[D]ensity and diversity represent a good measure of urbanness, which can be defined as what makes a city a city” (Lévy 2001). Even the planetary urbanisation thesis needs it: it does not forget “the analytical centrality of agglomeration” (Brenner 2014). The ‘operational landscapes’ of planetary urbanism are *urban* only because connected to agglomerations.
- 2) City/urban are *questions of degree, of more or less*, of “relativities” as Louis Wirth – unwittingly – says.
- 3) *Size, density and heterogeneity do not have to co-variate*. Urbanities may be large, while densities are low, without heterogeneity turning into homogeneity. *Cityness may occur as differential compositions of differential degrees of the components of its concept*.
- 4) Urban “*geotypes*” are varied assemblies of density and heterogeneity. *Centralities* show high degrees of both; *sub- and peri-urban areas* have low degrees of density; *para-urban areas* have low degrees of heterogeneity, and *infra-urban areas* low degrees of both being *the limit case to non-urbanity* (Lussault 2000).
- 5) *Infrastructural mobility networks* keep this plurality of differentially composed ‘urban types’ (my concept) together.
- 6) The concept should *refer to both human and non-human actors*. Cities contain “human and non-humans, some of which (like pigeons) are living, and others of which (like street lights) are not” (Beauregard 2018: 6).
- 7) *The graduated city has an outside, does not comprise everything everywhere*.

The urban types of the graduated city (Levy & Lussault)

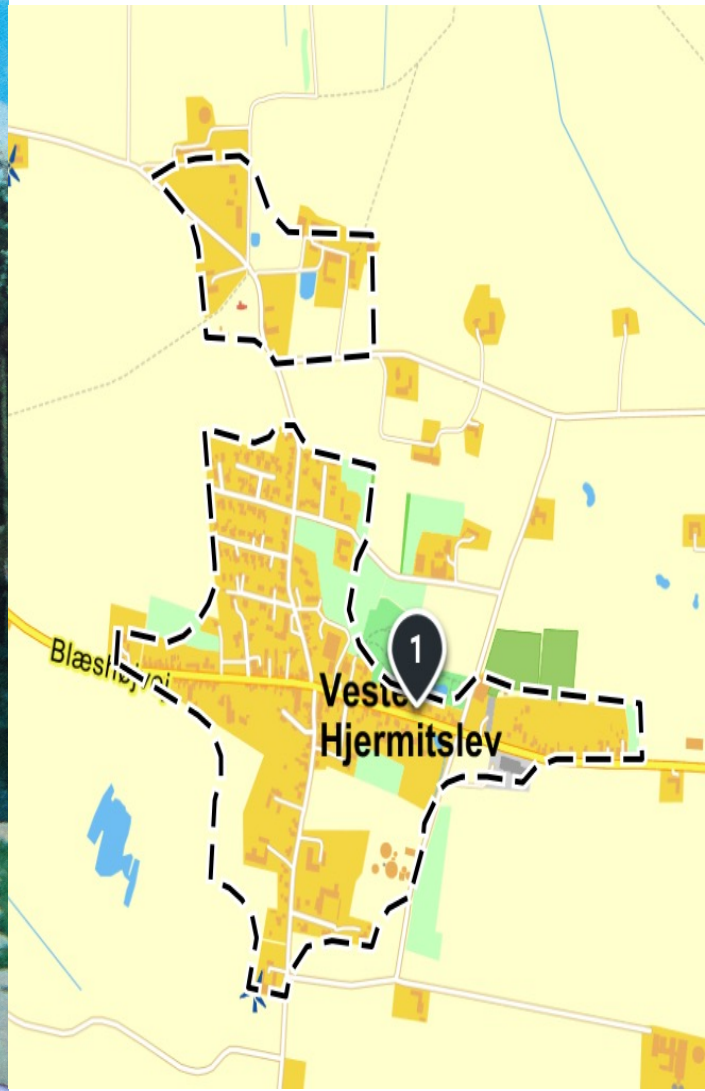
Density Heterogeneity	High			Low	Approaching Zero
High	Centrality				
		Sub-urbanity			
			Peri-urbanity		
Low			Para-urbanity	Infra-urbanity	
Approaching Zero					Country-side, Mountains, the sky, the sea

The concept: a descriptive and horizontal minimal common denominator

- 1) The concept of the graduated city serves as a *minimal common denominator* of the multiple urbanities of the contemporary city
- 2) It is *descriptive and horizontal*, it does *not causally explain urban processes*, it does *not* locate urbanity in a *vertical hierarchy* of nested levels from the global to the household, it *does not explain* from more or less hidden powers.
- 3) It conceptualises a *common plane of immanence* (Deleuze) at which a multiverse of urbanities can be conceptualized, theorised, hierarchised, explained without losing common urbanity
- 4) It accommodates Paris as a dense and heterogeneous “crisscrossing of actor networks” as well as my childhood-village in Northern Jutland, DK which we called ‘the city’.



Vester Hjermitslev in the early 1960s



The Anthropocene: a new geological epoch

Anthropocene



We live in a new geological epoch due to the impact of humanity on the Earth. Humanity has become a *'geological superpower'*, *'a force of nature'* changing the Earth itself radically through species extinctions, the depletion of fossil fuel resources, the impact of greenhouse gasses, climate changes, deteriorating biodiversity.

The Anthropocene Working Group among geologists in 2016 announced that there is enough evidence for defining the epoch to start around 1950 and in 2021 they announced that this is holds.

Cruzen & Stoermer (2000): The Anthropocene. *IGBP newsletter* 41, 17-18.

Barry & Maslin (2016): The politics of the anthropocene: a dialogue. *Geography and Environment*, 3(2).

Head, Martin J. et. al. (2021): "The Great Acceleration is real and provides a quantitative basis for the proposed Anthropocene Series/Epoch" *Episodes. Journal of International Geoscience*. 10.18814/epiugs/2021/021031

The Anthropocene: a *contested* concept

But there is a lot of disagreement. When did it start? Are all humans natural forces to the same extent?

Start?

- 1) Neolithic Revolution 10.000 years ago (massive megafaunal extinctions on several continents, settled agriculture, etc)
- 2) The Columbian exchange. The post-Columbus exchanges between Europe and the Americas of crops, animals and diseases.
- 3) The Industrial revolution and the steam engine
- 4) The Great Acceleration after 1950

Who?

- 1) Humanity. The whole of humanity? Different socialities, structures, cultures?
- 2) Colonialism and slavery (Plantationocene)
- 3) Capitalism (Capitalocene)
- 4) Bruno Latour gives up: New Climate Regime.

The Anthropocene: a *contesting* concept

Even if contestable, the concept announces *a paradigm shift* that questions a lot of conceptual dualities of modernity:

Modernity-tradition, global-local, human-non-human, nature-culture/society, rational-romantic, human-animal, concepts of periodization, concepts of disciplines, conceptions of politics....

(The revolution has already happened (Latour): It requires rethinking of categories and revaluation of values)

Jeremy Baskin (2015): Paradigm Dressed as Epoch: The Ideology of the Anthropocene. *Environmental Values* 24(1):9-29.

The Anthropocene, the Great Acceleration and the City

The Great Acceleration: The inception of the Anthropocene can be identified as the Great Acceleration (Head et. al. 2021), the extraordinary growth after WWII in human population and global economy, the increased use of energy (fossil fuels) and expanded industrialization, leading to accelerating environmental change and rising levels of CO₂ in the atmosphere (Zalasiewicz 2017).

Cities: Urbanisation increased rapidly. From 1950 to 2015 the number of megapoles (+10 million inhabitants) rose from one (New York) to 36 (Zalasiewicz et. al. 2017). ***Cities were a prime mover in the anthropogenic acceleration***, not least due to increases in the carbon footprints of *urban regions in the Northern Hemisphere* (Davis 2010: 41).

The “history of the Anthropocene is predominantly the history of urbanization” (Amin & Thrift 2017: 1).

Cities cover only 2 per cent of the Earth’s land surface, but they consume over 75% of the material resources (Pincetl 2017).

Urbanocene?

Cities were prime movers in the Great Acceleration ->

The Great Acceleration generated the Anthropocene ->

“Anthropocene is perhaps an Urbanocene”*

Cities are drivers for agro-industry, all kinds of extraction. Urbanisation constitutes a **generalised extractive system**. Everything can be exploited (...) agriculture transforms the ecosystems into mines under open sky to satisfy the needs of urbanised food markets (93).

*Michel Lussault (2021): “L’antropocène comme Urbanocène” *Néolithique- Anthropocène*, Lyon: éditions 2005, 91

Comment:

Again *too large*: Depends on a concept of the urban which is not of planetary reach. You may call the Earth urbanised due to systematic causalities related to urban agglomerations, but you will still need a concept of the *urbanity of the urban* that does not comprise the Earth as a whole.

Between modernity and ecology, we
have to choose

Bruno Latour (2010): Coming out as philosopher. *Social Studies of Science* 40(4), 605

The Front of Modernization

- 1) *The front of modernization*: An orientation (vector) of action according to an *arrow of time* that leaves the stagnant and archaic past for the emancipated future after a radical break with the non-modern(s).
- 2) Based on the ‘Modern Constitution’: a *substantial* distinction between **Nature and Culture** (non-humans and humans) and **facts and value**.
- 3) At the front of modernization “irrational *values*” have been increasingly repressed and the “rational” indisputable *facts* of nature has emerged as a *reservoir of means* for human purposes.
- 4) *Nature* occurs as *resource* for the production of wealth and comfort, but increasingly generates disastrous effects on climate, atmosphere, biodiversity etc.
- 5) The front of modernization *and* its disastrous effects generates the Anthropocene.
- 6) Modernization is like forgetting about the limitations of the Earth, leaving it.

Ecologization

- 1) To ecologise means treating non-human entities not only as means for humans but *also* as actors with their own purposes. *Moral Kantianism generalised* to non-human actors
- 2) Habitation and inhabiting the Earth is not a concept only for humans. Ecologically, habitation means *co-habitation* of humans and non-humans on the planet Earth
- 3) The concept of Nature is replaced with the concept of **GAILA** *according to which everything living are agencies that contribute to the development* of the chemical and geological conditions of the Earth. Without living organisms the Earth would not work as a habitat for its varied lifeforms. *The Earth is an actor that reacts to human activity.*
- 4) Focus is on the co-habitation of the **CRITICAL ZONE**: the thin layer between the outer space and the geological depths of the Earth, where life has modified the atmosphere and geology of the Earth.

Production versus engendering

Production: everything necessary for production is reduced to just being resource (18).

Engendering: The planet, as engendered by living beings, over thousands of years, assure much more than resources for human action. Important is sustaining the conditions of the *habitability of the Earth for all kinds of life*, that have made life possible. Engendering implies “*carefully** to ensure the *continued subsistential existence* of those beings from which the habitability of the earth depends. This is not about growth or degrowth but *well-being for living beings* (18).

****Care*** as a more-than-human concept

Emancipation cannot be liberation from dependencies, emancipation is finding freedom *in* these dependencies, in the “ties that liberate”

(Latour & Schultz: On the emergence of a new ecological class, 2022).

Three overall, conflictual ecopolitical strategies in the Anthropocene

Strategy one: strengthening 'the superpowers' of humans to shape a 'good anthropocene' through climate and geo-engineering of the atmosphere. *Ecological modernization*.

Strategy two: curtailing the destructive powers of human agency, struggling with capitalism, consumerism and with modifying modernity.

These two strategies are ecological, substantial and focussed on production/consumption

Strategy three: rethinking the Earth as cohabitation of humans and non-humans, redefining rivers, plants and animals as *kin*, rather than resources. The indigenous people of Awajun-Wampí in the Amazonas: "The river is our brother, we do not kill our brother by polluting and throwing waste on it" (Bruun Jensen).

This strategy is ecological, subsistential and focussed on engendering, care and cohabitation

Anthropogenic conflictual strategies in the city

- 1) Strengthening the ‘superpowers’ of humans: high-tech smart-city infrastructure, electric car chargers, green building design, densifying urban areas. The “ecological genius of cities” is “human settlement density” (Mike Davis 2010: 43).
- 2) Curtailing the destructive powers of human agency: Stopping sprawl, restricting private traffic, curtailing non-sustainable urban consumerism...
- 3) Cohabitation: “make kin, not cities” (Houston et. al. 2018): Rethinking the city as cohabitation of humans and non-humans.

Crossing conflictual dimensions

In 2016, of the thirty-one megacities (+10 mio inhabitants) in the world, twenty-four were located in the “global South.” The next ten megacities to emerge by 2030 will all be in the “global South.” (Mendieta: Edge city (2019))

Cities of the Global South face, in many different ways, huge population growth, unplanned city growth, informal settlements, increase in slum-dwellers, air and water pollution, rising urban poverty, serious climate risks

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE:

- **Unequal distribution and exclusion:** e.g. green gentrification, generating compact, climate-friendly neighbourhoods for the well-off.
- **North-South conflict** over compensations for unequal global distribution of anthropogenic risks.

Ecological class struggle (Latour & Schultz 2022) and the city

The ecological question is of the same magnitude as the social issues of the socio-political movements of liberalism and socialism.

The primary contradiction: production versus engendering. The formation of a new ecological class turns around the question of *limiting production versus expanding production.*

Conflict between "modern humans who believe they are alone in the Holocene, [...], and *the terrestrials* who know they are in the Anthropocene and who seek to *cohabit* with other terrestrials." (Down to Earth).

Presupposes a long process of class formation and *ideological-cultural hegemonic struggle*, strategies of the takeover of institutions and state functions


Understanding *CITIES* as *graduated differently according to modes of more-than-human co-habitation and engendering* must be a central part of such hegemonic processes.

A small example from Copenhagen.

Amager Common conflict: ‘make kins, not welfare cities!’

2017-2012 a long fierce struggle over the ‘para-urban’ non-built-up area of the “Amager Common”.

- 1) *Welfare city* development project supported by the Social Democrats and the centre-right parties in the city council satisfying needs for *social housing, closeness to metro and economic urban development*.
- 2) *Cohabitation*: civil society movements *prioritized biodiversity, protecting several sorts of orchids, the northern crested newt (salamandra), the moor frog and a unique piece of nature in the city*.
- 3) *The civil society movements won the battle*, this urban development project was stopped (but similar urban developments took place elsewhere) (Pagh 2022)



Thank you for your attention!

Rio de Janeiro May 2023