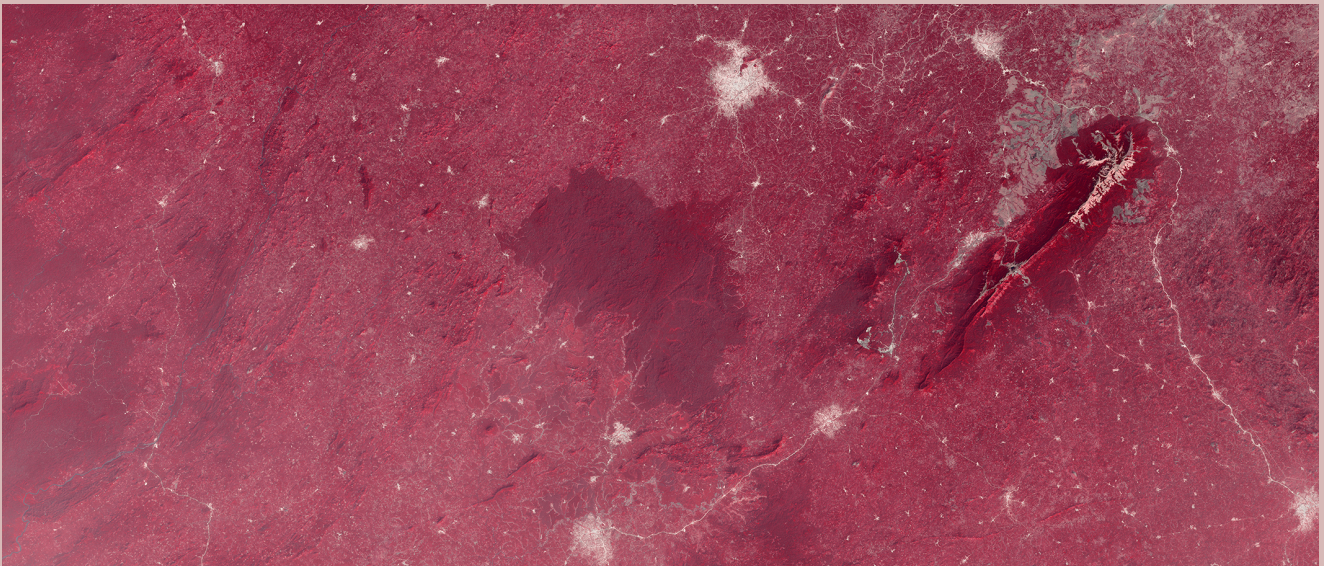




THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
Edinburgh College of Art

UOA C13

ARCHITECTURE, BUILT
ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING



RESEARCHER

Killian Doherty

OUTPUT TITLE

Uppland

OUTPUT TYPE

Digital or Visual Media

DATE

2018

FIG. 1
Film poster by Killian Doherty.



DOI:
<https://doi.org/10.7488/c95fedaa-9fb9-4256-be46-6f9b5e23a5fa>

Front cover: Landsat imagery showing deforestation due to iron-ore mining in the region bordering Liberia, Guinea and Ivory coast. Satellite imagery analysis by Killian Doherty.

01 / STATEMENT

Uppland is a 30-minute research film tracing the complex relationship between landscape, displacement and the global extractive industries within, and beyond, sub-Saharan Africa.

The film documents a new-town called Yekepa, designed and built by and for a mining company prospecting for iron-ore in the late 1950s, that exploited and transformed the indigenous landscapes of Yeke'pa.

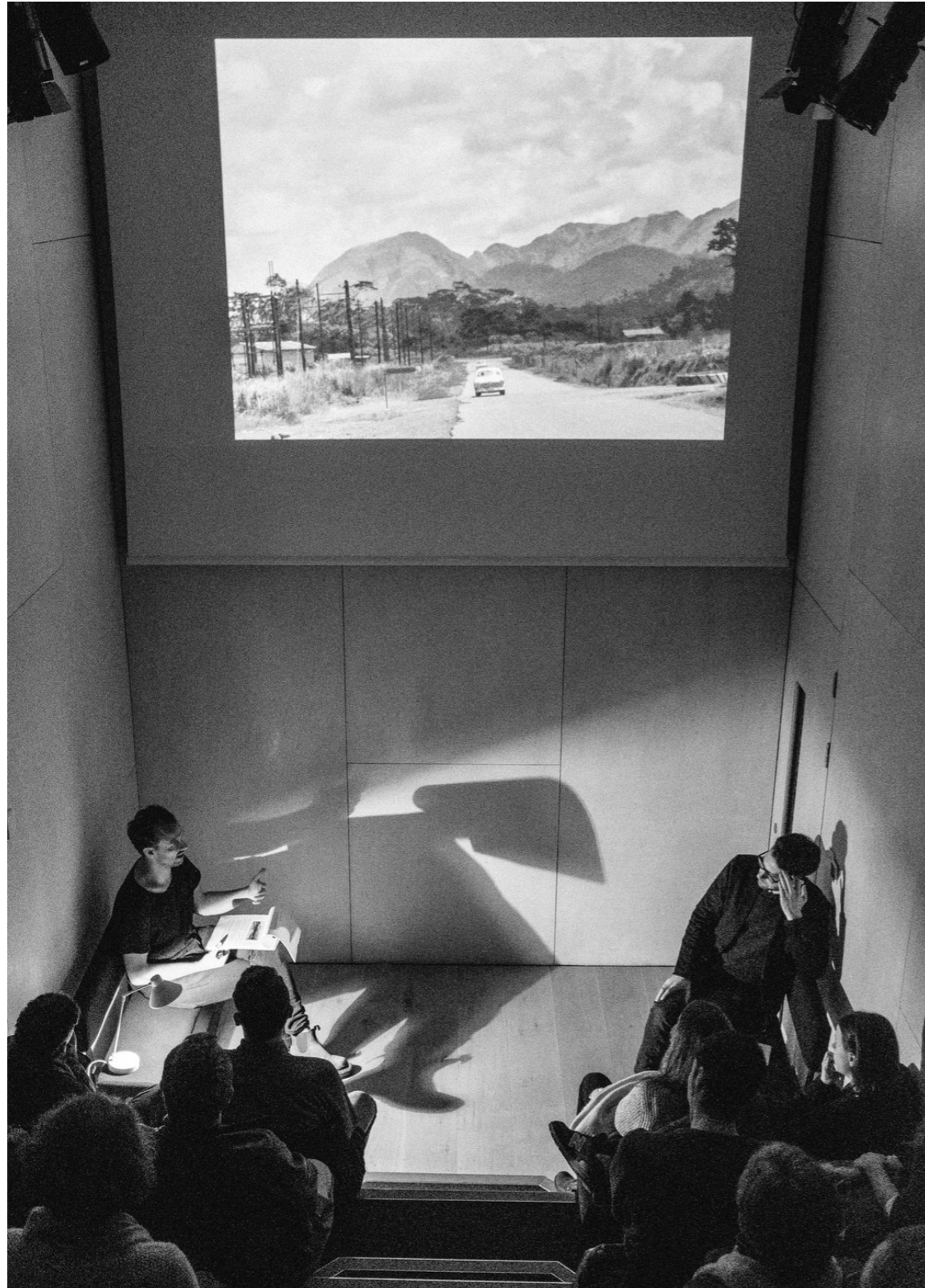
The film represents an original collaboration between an architect and a filmmaker. This research took them to the remote highlands of Liberia, once a thriving mining community, now a concrete ruin in the West African bush. Exploring the town, the researchers discovered promises of prosperity, abandonment and forgotten injustices. They revealed insights about western architecture, the remnants of colonialism, and the spiritual costs of mining.

The main outputs from this work are a number of international screenings at major film festivals, architectural biennales, as well as contributions to an international conference in Sweden. Educational rights to the film were acquired for the distributing to international research institutions and universities across Europe and North-America.

'It is a galling portrait of the harvesting of African resources and the damage done to both land and people... *Uppland* avoids most of the pitfalls of the narrated, exploitation documentary genre, its disembodied voice-over never becoming too authoritative, outraged, or self-indulgent – a rare achievement in this ever-expanding field.'

Danny Hoffman,
Africa's a Country, May 2019.

FIG. 2
Screening at Irish Architecture
Foundation, 2017. Photo courtesy
of David McClelland.



02 / RESEARCH DIMENSIONS

Uppland is a 30-minute film that traces the complex relationship between landscape, displacement and the global extractive industries, within and beyond sub-Saharan Africa.

The film documents a new-town called Yekepa, designed and built by/for a mining company prospecting for iron-ore in the late 1950s. Once a thriving mining community, Yekepa is now a concrete ruin in the West African bush. Investigating the town, the researchers discovered promises of prosperity, abandonment and forgotten injustices. Using the process of film making as a research tool, they revealed insights about western architecture, the remnants of colonialism, and the spiritual costs of mining.



FIG. 3
Filming on location in Northern
Liberia, 2016. Photo by Killian
Doherty.

03 / ORIGINALITY



FIG. 4
Screening at Venice Architectural
Biennale, 2018. Photo courtesy
of Norbert Tukaj.

African physical and human geographies when represented are commonly depicted as blighted and destitute places.

Isolated from context, such representations depict a form of mythical space, occupied and dominated by international development agencies and humanitarian actors – groups that are romanticised and self-legitimated.

Uppland expands the otherwise under-presented knowledge of Africa, first by narrating the troubled relations between built-environments and dependence on natural and human resources within the African continent. Second, *Uppland* demonstrates how western knowledge of architecture and planning is taken for granted, and often conflicts with non-western, non-economic (e.g African) ways of life.

Third, *Uppland* contributes new knowledge about documentary forms of film by challenging dominant, reductive representations of Africa. Drawing on a tradition of self-reflexive documentaries, a voice-over allows an honest framing of community involvement in the documentary project, providing a platform for the testimony of the locals without the pretence of ‘invisible’ facilitation by outsiders.

FIG. 5

Image of Yekepa. CC BY-SA 4.0.
Fred van der Kraaij.



04 / RIGOUR

Uppland grew out of Killian Doherty's practices and research into colonial architecture / town-planning across sub-Saharan Africa.

In advance of the filming, research was carried out to locate: current political economic and historical contexts of extraction in Liberia; former and previous residents of Yekepa for narrative contributions; and local NGOs such as the Sustainable Development Institute to help with facilitation on the ground. See Appendix, page 18.

While in Yekepa, a displaced Mano tribal community was encountered that revealed the parallel extractions the new-town brought about. Collaboration with this community and local partners in Liberia greatly informed the development of the project.

The strategy for making *Uppland* was two-fold: firstly, requiring participatory methods complimented by a filmic tone. Participatory research action (PRA) – reflexive, community engagement methods that draw from adult education, social science research and political activism – were adopted to work with the community facilitators, local chief and displaced communities, that communicated the extractive histories of Yekepa. Filming took place over ten days focusing on: static, unbroken takes of the architecture, town-plan and landscapes; capturing a diversity of oral testimony about the town.

A week-long shoot in Stockholm was added to interview the original Swedish residents on film, to explore the uneven power dynamics and exchanges between the developed and developing world.

The final version of the film was shaped in response to feedback from early public works-in-progress screenings in Dublin and Chicago, with a voiceover added, spoken with experiences mirroring the narrated / observed events. Followings screenings in Paris, New-York and Stockholm, members of the audience, some of whom lived in Yekepa, responded positively to the difficulties raised by this position of self-reflection.

05 / SIGNIFICANCE



FIG. 6
Film still from *Uppland*. Image
by Killian Doherty & Edward
Lawrenson.

Uppland received seed-development funding, through an international peer-review event, held by Open-City Documentaries.

In 2016 the Irish Arts Council awarded *Uppland* 'Engaging with Architecture' funding, facilitating travel to Sweden. Upon completion in late 2017, *Uppland* was submitted and selected for the International Competition for Short Films at the 40th edition of Cinéma Du Réel Festival in Paris, 2018. The World Premiere was advertised online and through the local media, taking place on Sunday 25 March at the Centre Du Pompidou, with three subsequent screenings on the 26 and 29 March in cinemas across Paris.

Parallel to the festival, a committee representing the National Centre for Cinema and the Moving Image – an agency of the French Ministry of Culture – selected *Uppland* from the competition to be made public through their library catalogue. See Appendix, page 18.

In June 2018 *Uppland* screened at the Lithuanian Pavilion, as part of the Venice Biennale Architettura, before returning to the Open City Docs Festival at the ICA in London. This screening attracted media interest from the British Film Institute's monthly film magazine, *Sight & Sound*, resulting in an article online. See Appendix, page 18.

Grasshopper Film, a USA based distribution company dedicated to the dissemination of acclaimed and award-winning independent films, purchased educational release rights to *Uppland*. Since then Johns Hopkins and Duke University libraries purchased digital copies for inclusion within cultural anthropology curricula.

At the start of 2020, the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) – an international research institution and museum premised on the belief that architecture is a public concern – added *Uppland* to its permanent collection.

In summary, *Uppland* makes a clear valued contribution to knowledge of environmental degradation using the scale of architecture and town planning.



FIG. 7
Presentation at Chicago
Architecture Foundation.
Photo courtesy of Mascontext.



FIG. 8
Venice Biennale Screening.
Photo courtesy of Norbert Tukaj.



FIG. 9
Screening at Crosscuts Festival,
Stockholm. Photo courtesy
of Henrik Ernstson.

FIG. 10
Screening at Irish Architecture
Foundation, Dublin, 2017. Photo
courtesy of David McClelland.

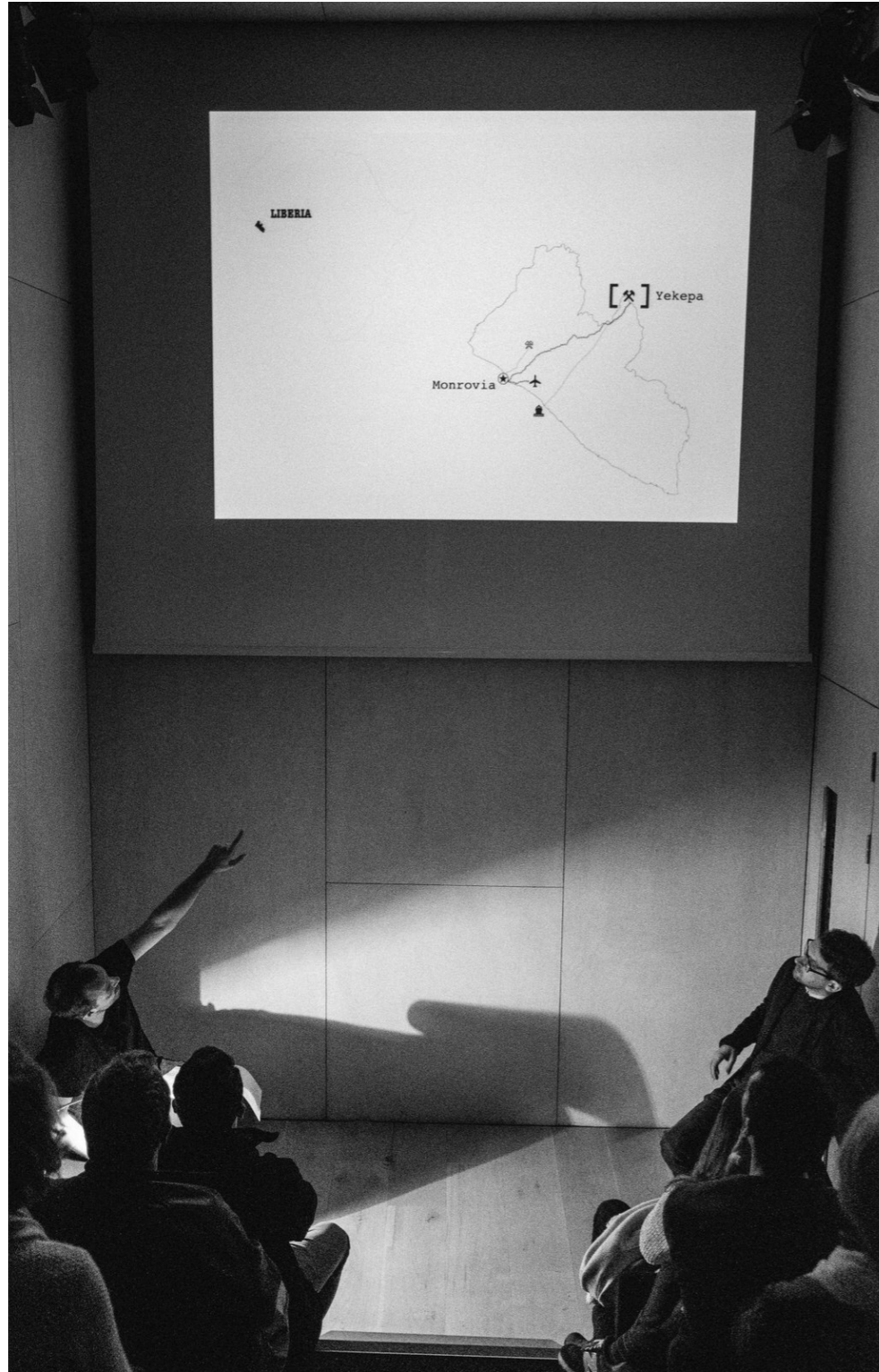
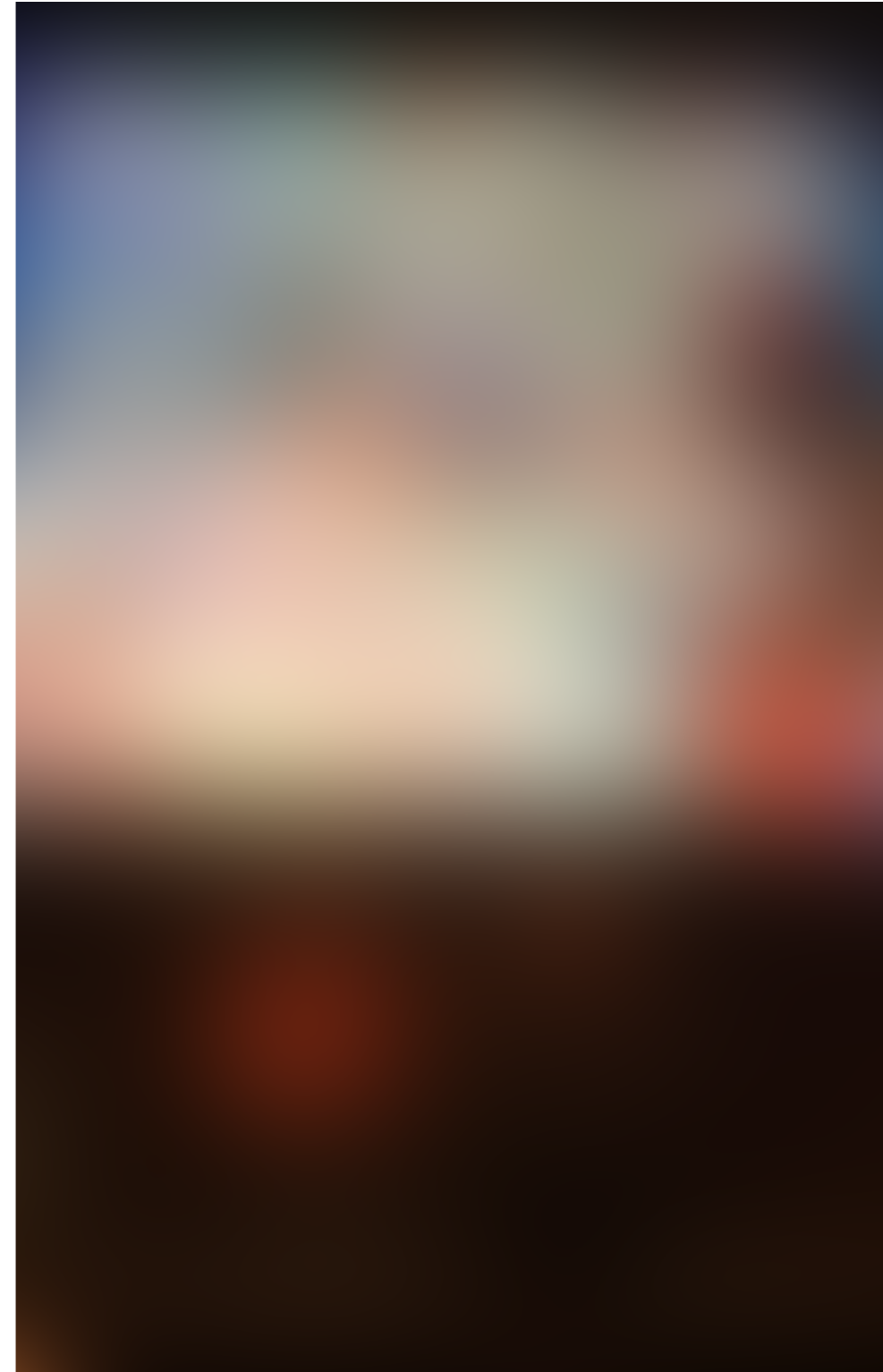


FIG. 11
Screening at Museum of Moving
Image, New York, 2019. Photo
courtesy of Nora Lee Mandel.



06 / APPENDIX

DOI

<https://doi.org/10.7488/c95fedaa-9fb9-4256-be46-6f9b5e23a5fa>

Sustainable Development Institute

<http://www.sdiliberia.org>

Media Weblinks

<http://store.grasshopperilm.com/uppland.html>

<https://imagesdelaculture.cnc.fr/-/uppland>

<https://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/comment/un-iction/steady-stare-surveillance-documentaries-spatial-turn-non-iction-cinema-uppland-home-resistance>

<https://africasacountry.com/2019/05/of-mining-and-myth>

List of Acquisitions/Purchases of Film March 2018: CNC (French National Centre for Cinema) for distribution in French Libraries.

June 2018: Non-Theatrical rights purchased by Grasshopper Films, USA.

March 2019: Johns Hopkins University, USA.

March 2019: Duke University, USA.

November 2019: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill University, USA.

January 2020: Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal.

List of Screenings

Venice Biennale Architettura, Lithuania Pavilion, 25 June 2018.

CinéSiclique, Association Pavillon Sicli, Geneva, Switzerland, September 2019.

Seoul Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism, 7 September –10 November 2019.

Annals of Crosscuts, Festival for Film & Text organized by the KTH Environmental Humanities Lab, Stockholm, 2019.

<http://www.cinemadureel.org/film/uppland-2/?lang=en>

<http://www.janeladecinema.com.br/2018/11/05/upplandia-uppland/>

<https://opencitylondon.com/events/home-of-the-resistance-uppland/>

<https://starandshadow.org.uk/programme/event/uppland-the-ruins-of-an-abandoned-african-town-reveal-their-secrets-support-film-the-london-nobody-knows-u,3655/>

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LAMCO, *Liberian American-Swedish Minerals Company*, (1956–1969), undated.

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Smith, N., (2008). *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space*. (3rd ed) London: University of Georgia Press.

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Collaboration

Uppland is the result of a collaboration between architect and researcher Killian Doherty, and London-based filmmaker, Edward Lawrenson. The film builds on two research trips that Doherty made to the ruins of Yekepa in the 2010s.

In 2015, Doherty used the site of Yekepa to explore ‘site-writing methodologies’ using text, maps and still and moving imagery, as part of his PhD at UCL. That same year Doherty was invited to a networking event in London where he met Lawrenson.

Following this, they co-wrote and submitted a proposal for a film idea, based on Yekepa. In 2016, having received awards from both Open City Border Crossing and the Irish Arts Council, they travelled to Yekepa to make the film.

Lawrenson re-shot the film from Doherty’s initial still photographs and based on Doherty’s research, with additional on-site research through contact with local displaced communities. The pair then followed up their research in Liberia with a production trip to Sweden to talk to the surviving Swedish employees.

With thanks

Photographs with permission from Thomas Johannessen, Dick Johansson and Peter Tjell.

Super 8 footage courtesy of Alf Julin, Head of LAMCO Telecommunications at Yekepa.



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