Transcript Thursday Night Live!
Research Infrastructures
March 31st 2022

This transcript contains unedited notes of the presenters, the actual presentations and conversations during the event may vary.

Introduction

Good evening! Welcome to Het Nieuwe Instituut: the National museum for Architecture, Design and Digital culture based here in Rotterdam. My name is Delany Boutkan, I work as a researcher here in the museum and together with my fellow-researcher Federica Notari we are very excited to be your hosts for this evening.

Tonight in this Night of The Fellows event, titled *Research Infrastructures,* we will celebrate the soft closing of the official part of this year's fellowships at Het Nieuwe Instituut. Through its annual Call for Fellows, Het Nieuwe Instituut's Research Department acknowledges and gives visibility to research projects offering departures from established modes of thinking and to become a catalyst for collective forms of knowledge. On this screen you can see all our amazing previous fellows over the past 7 years.

In 2013 Marina Otero Verzier and Katía Truijen started the Call for Fellows here at Het Nieuwe Instituut. The Call for Fellows are a series of yearly open calls to which individual researchers and collectives can respond to a theme set by the Research department here or bring up their own. Following, the applications go through a pre-selection by the Research department and the final 3 fellows of each year are selected by an external jury.

The fellowship trajectory gives the possibility to initiate or continue a research project alongside or with Het Nieuwe Instituut, without applying with any specific outcome in mind or the pressure to create an outcome in a limited amount of time behind closed doors. In order to 'do' research in collective and public forms, individuals and groups of researchers need infrastructures to support ways of bringing people, knowledges and perspectives together, but how can you approach this within and alongside existing institutions, or beyond them?

How do our current fellows go about building collective and public networks for research? What role can fellowships play in transforming institutions, how do fellows reflect on the biases of those institutions, and how do they work with the complexities and multi-dimensional approaches within such research practices? Tonight we will walk you through those questions, and likely will bring up more questions, together with our lovely guests who Federica will now introduce to you.
Tonight we are joined by three collectives, MELT, School of Mutants and Tropic Fever.

As MELT, Ren Loren Britton and Isabel Paehr are arts-design researchers who study and experiment with shape-shifting processes as they meet technologies, sensory media and pedagogies in a warming world. Their work on the Meltionary (derived from "dictionary"), is a growing collection of arts-design-research engagements that cooks up questions around material transformations alongside impulses from Trans*feminism and Disability Justice. MELT works and takes rest to practice for the present and future in which all disabled and trans*gender people flourish. Melt works with melting as a kaleidoscope like phenomena that touches upon multiple topics at once: climate change, the potential for political reformulations, change over time, and material transformation.

The School of Mutants is a collaborative art and research platform initiated in Dakar in 2018. It starts with an inquiry into educational infrastructures and radical pedagogies that emerged in post-independence West Africa. The project reactivates ruins of academic utopia by mobilizing spaces for the production, transmission and pluralization of knowledge in a non-hierarchical way, in connection to socio-cultural, ecological and aesthetic mutations of the real. Joining us tonight from the School of Mutants are Hamedine Kane, Stéphane Verlet-Bottéro and Lou Mo.

Tropic Fever is a collaborative project initiated by Robin Hartanto Honggare, Perdana Roswaldy and Mahardika Yudha. *Tropic Fever* uncovers the racial and spatial imprints of colonial plantations and their entanglement with our contemporary society. Engaging multimedia format, the work utilizes archival and visual materials from Indonesia and the Netherlands in parallel with a close reading of historical literary works that captured the plantation lives.

And with this we will now leave the floor to our first collective, the School of Mutants.

School of Mutants

Opening: Reading of the mutant manifesto in Wolof by Hamedine

1. The School of Mutants is established on the wrecks of developmentalism.

2. Mutants work toward the reappropriation of knowledge and the creation of all knowledge useful to overcome the historic-materialist foundations of power.

3. This task is inseparable from a continuous resistance against the templification of knowledge.

4. In these conditions, ruins are understood as the fundamental condition of future possibilities.

5. Developmentist ruins guarantee, in an almost natural order, the vigorous persistence of critique, of vigilance, of the possibility of keeping an eye on the course of action.

6. Ruins provide a protection against the process of phallic memorialization that characterize elitism and political personnel.

7. The mutant community is maintained by a beam of imperceptible relations.

8. Mutant spirit originates in a condition that relies not on physical interdependencies but on an open-ing to relationality, a behaviour, a signal.

9. To mutate is to abolish borders and occupy vestiges of the economic order built on the corpses of slave trade, appropriation and extraction.

10. Mutant ecology relates to a spirituality without object.

11. This unpreceded mutation enlarges humanity to a coevolving community of agents that recognize each other around radical imagination.

12. Mutant cultural determinants do not follow an ethnic but a syncretic order.

Introduction to The School of Mutants (Hamedine in French, consecutive translation Stéphane)

Dans Une si longue lettre, Mariama Bâ écrit ces mots à propos de la tâche d'institutrice : « Nous stimulions le déferlement de vagues enfantines qui emportaient dans leur repli un peu de notre être.»

La scène en question se déroule à Sébikotane, verte campagne associée par métonymie à la pluie heureuse et la jeunesse dansante.

Mariama Bâ ayant étudié à l'École normale de jeunes filles à Rufisque, il est probable qu'elle connût bien la région.

C'est le lieu même où nous avons commencé nos recherches sur les infrastructures d'éducation il y a trois ans.

Celles-ci commencent par le chantier écocidaire de la ville dite « intelligente » de Diamniadio, où la construction d'une nou-velle université Amadou Mahtar Mbow, promise pour former les cadres techniques et commerciaux nécessaires à la réorien-tation de l'économie sénégalaise vers l'exploitation extractive des ressources fossiles off-shore, semble suspendu, entre bâti-ments délabrés et nouvelles constructions erratiques.

Les communautés maraîchères ont été expulsées, la forêt de baobabs en partie rasée, pour laisser place à l'incertitude d'un avenir dont les fondations, sous les couches de béton, semblent avant tout électorales.

L'enquête nous emmène non loin, sur le site de l'Université du Futur Africain abandonnée et sa fameuse pyramide inversée.

Il y a quelques mois, les traces de cette utopie architecturale et académique panafricaine ont été démolies pour y installer un Institut du Pétrole et du Gaz. À Toubab Dialaw, c'est l'économie populaire locale de la pêche et l'École des Sables qui ris-quent d'être englouties par le projet de port à conteneurs géant de Ndayane.

L'École des Sables se situe dans le prolongement du projet Mudra, né en 1977 lorsque Léopold Sédar Senghor laissait les clés du Musée Dynamique de Dakar à Germaine Acogny pour y installer une école de danse (pan)africaine.

La chorégraphe y développait la synthèse inventive et très élaborée de différents horizons chorégraphiques et dramatiques africains et extra-africains, jusqu'à la fermeture brutale du centre au début des années 1980, alors que l'alternance politique déplaçait les impératifs budgétaires vers une réponse aux difficultés économiques, en pleines réformes d'ajustement structu-rel.

À Gorée, l'Université des Mutants était inaugurée en 1978.

Pendant quelques années s'y sont réunis des chercheur·es de tout le continent, mais aussi d'Amérique latine et d'Asie, expé-rimentant un partage de connaissances sans hiérarchie, sans professeur, libre de toute autorité épistémologique occidentale.

Sans doute mal historiographiées parce que mal comprises, ces deux expériences visionnaires, radicalement multidiscipli-naires, esquissaient la quête d'appareils pédagogiques d'un genre nouveau, nourrissant dialogues et hybridations entre une gnosis endogène et des savoirs issus d'autres suds et du nord.

Toujours à l'est de Dakar, les ruines du « donjon » de l'École Normale William Ponty témoignent de l'angoisse coloniale en-vers une institution que l'empire avait lui-même créé : installée à Gorée, l'école assurait la formation administrative et médi-cale de brillants jeunes Africains recrutés dans toute l'Afrique de l'Ouest, dont nombreux allaient devenir des artisans des indépendances, des chefs d'État et des militants panafricanistes radicaux. Il est dit que c'est leur esprit révolutionnaire qui causa la mise à l'écart de l'école à Sébikotane en 1938, loin du centre de pouvoir. Une méfiance récurrente des dominants à l'égard des lieux de savoir se retrouve à différentes époques et espaces : la suspension répressive de l'Université de Dakar en 1968, la fermeture de l'Université Lovanium par Mobutu en 1971, le transfert de l'Université d'Éducation de Tokyo à Tsu-kuba suite aux mouvements étudiants de 1968, le transfert de l'Université de Vincennes à Saint-Denis en 1980…

Translation:

In So Long A Letter, Mariama Bâ wrote these words about teaching: "In those children we set in motion waves that carried in their wake a small part of our beings."

The scene takes place in Sébikotane, a green land metonymically associated with good rains and a prancing youth. Mariama Bâ studied at the School for young women of Rufisque, so she probably knew the region well. It is here that we started our research on educational infrastructures three years ago. We began with the ecocidal construction site of the so-called "smart city" of Diamniadio, where the site of the new Amadou Mahtar Mbow University, destined to train commercial and technical executives needed to redirect the Sene-galese economy towards the extractive harvesting of offshore fossil resources, seems at a standstill, crowded with dilapidated buildings and erratic new constructions. The farming communities have been kicked out and the baobab forest has been partly cut down to make room for an uncertain future built on electoral needs, and whose foundation is hidden under layers of concrete. Our studies then take us to the abandoned construction site of the Université du Futur Africain (University of the African Future) and its infa-mous inverted pyramid. A few months ago, the last remains of this pan-African architectural and academic utopia were demolished to make room for an Institute of Oil and Gas. In Toubab Dialaw, the local, working class fishing economy and the École des Sables dance school might be extinguished by the giant container port project of Ndayane.

The École des Sables is the continuation of the Mudra project created in 1977, when Léopold Sédar Sen-ghor gave Germaine Acogny the keys to the Dakar's Musée Dynamique so that she could convert it into a (pan-)African dance school. The choreographer developed an inventive and highly elaborate fusion from dif-ferent choreographic and dramatic African and extra-African horizons, until the center abruptly closed in the beginning of the 80s, when the political handover of power migrated the budgetary requirements towards an answer to economic difficulties, in the midst of structural adjustment reforms. The Université des Mutants (University of Mutants) was inaugurated in 1978 in Gorée. For several years, researchers from the entire continent, as

well as Latin America and Asia, would meet there and experiment sharing knowledge without

hierarchy or teachers, free from all Western epistemological authority. These two visionary and radically mul-tidisciplinary experiences, misunderstood and probably badly chronicled, outlined the search for a new kind of educational method, giving nourishment to dialogues and hybrid forms between endogenous gnosis and knowledge derived from other Souths and the North.

Also to the East of Dakar, the ruins of the "dungeon" of the William Ponty School reflect the colonial fear of an institution that the empire had itself created: located on Gorée, the school provided administrative and medical training for brilliant young Africans recruited from across West Africa, most of whom would become artisans of independence movements, state leaders and radical pan-African militants. It is said that it was their revolutionary spirits that caused the relocation of the school to Sébikotane in 1938, far from the center of power. There is a recurring distrust on the part of rulers towards sites of knowledge at different times and in different places: the repressive suspension of the University of Dakar in 1968, the closure of Lovanium University by Mobutu in 1971, the transfer of the Educational University of Tokyo to Tsukuba because of the student movements of 1968, and the transfer of Vincennes University to Saint-Denis in 1980…

Infrastructures of utopia (Stéphane in english)

An important part of our work consists of exhuming the archives of these ephemeral initiatives to contribute to the corpus of documents on African practices and theories for knowledge and learning.

[slide: rescuing the library of the University of Mutants]

These schools and environments of transmission, both with different goals, socio-historical paths, degrees of institutionalization or diffusion in society, seem to be at the mercy of palimpsest-like politics: to erase knowledge structures and better enforce the dominant narratives as needed by the neocolonial needs of the movement of capital. The pooling of archives can therefore shed some light on the archaeology of the Knowledge-Power coupling since independence. What do these educational structures, from their creation to their eradication, say about power? What are their aesthetic and sociocultural modalities? What dynamic ten-sion do they highlight, between the autonomous fabrication of collective norms and the state institution of social control mechanisms? How far should we "de-school society"?

The last few months, with the support of the HNI fellowship we were able to do a long research stay in Da-kar, staying at RAW Material Company – a one-of-a-kind cultural alter-institution, unique in West Africa, that puts a a strong emphasis on discursive practices,

reflexivity, public programming, activism and learning that celebrated its 10 years of existence during our stay there.

We wanted to expand the framework of our research according to three specific but interdependent dimen-sions: a spatial dimension, firstly, by showing more interest in the interpretation of other educational utopias related to independence in West Africa and to the metamorphosis of the continent and its diasporas – for ex-ample: the Afrihili linguistics center created in Ghana in 1971 by Kumi Attobrah, an engineer, to devise a lin-gua franca to be at the service of a multinational pan-Africanism, with archive materials that we inserted in a restitution exhibition [cf. slide].

Together with our colleague from the collective Tabara Korka Ndiaye, we also inquired into the practice and dissemination of the militant artistic education practice Theater of the Oppressed, which circulated from Bra-zil to Burkina Faso and eventually Senegal, with a paper due to be published.

Focus on forum theatre (Stéphane – extracts and summary in English)

Forum theater is a genre of "theater of the oppressed", a practice developed from the 1970s by theater maker and activist Augusto Boal who was influenced by Paulo Freire's work on pedagogy of the oppressed, first in Brazil and then in Argentina and Peru after Boal was forced into exile during the Brazilian military dictatorship.

Theater of the oppressed is based on a system of physical exercises, improvisation techniques, aesthetic proposals and image games that are used to raise awareness on a particular social situation, with a focus on individual attitudes and bodies. The goal is to make theatrical activity an effective pedagogical tool for under-standing and finding solutions to social and personal problems.

In Burkina Faso, Prosper Kompaoré and the Atelier Théâtre Burkinabé (Burkinabè Theater Workshop) devel-oped a theater of social intervention in the 1970s and 1980s. Their practice was strongly influenced by the principles of socioeconomic justice, peasant rights, empowerment and education that infused the 1983 revo-lution and the following years. Kompaoré met Boal in Paris in the 1980s and, as he discovered that they both shared a similar militant vision of theater as a tool for social change, invited him to lead forum theater work-shops in Ouagadougou in 1989.

According to Mamadou Diol, cofounding director of the Kàddu Yaraax theater company and cultural center, the rising popular success of theater of the oppressed at the turn of the 20th century is also rooted in the dis-course and transnational encounters on alternatives to development; in particular, women's organisations that were addressing the role of women in development, and spaces for South-South exchange such as the World Social

Forum, have provided contexts where forum theater was circulated and practitioners trained each other during workshops and performance events.

In the early 2000s, Kompaoré came to Senegal to facilitate workshops on forum theater techniques, that at-tended Diol and his colleagues attended. Among them, Seydou Ndiaye recalls that their group was, at the time, already practicing a form of popular theater inscribed in a long tradition of dialogical performance prac-tices concerned with addressing social problems faced by communities and advocating local languages as opposed to the colonial tongue of the official, elitist cultural aesthetics. Active circularity and conversation are at the heart of popular theater in Senegal. In fact, according to Diol, social theater is deeply rooted in the hor-izontal processes of traditional systems of relations such as the penc – the communal assembly – or the low-ceiling mbaar hut for conflict resolutions that prevents anyone from standing up and dominating the conver-sation, thus obligating all to listen to each other.

However, before the concern with real-world issues impacting communities, Kàddu Yaraax considers popu-lar theater as first and foremost an artistic project guided by creative work, as Diol stressed several times during our interviews. The incorporation of forum theater as a language and a discourse, is a way to formal-ise the aesthetic work, in addition to anchoring the project into an international scene composed of cultural networks and civil society organisations. The practice can neither be reduced to community-level mediation infused with popular Senegalese dialogical traditions, or assimilated to an Africanized version of the forum theater 'discipline' practiced in international development networks.

In fact, Kàddu Yaraax demonstrates a wide range of theatrical interventions ranging from institutional paid work such as a recent partnership with the direction of the new TER train line in Dakar to deliver an embod-ied training of all operational staff using forum theater pedagogical techniques; to frontline performances coined 'direct actions' aimed to support social movements such as during the 2012 uprising; to adapting Mo-lière's classic 17th century satire Le Médecin malgré lui (The doctor in spite of himself) in wolof, as we wit-nessed when we did our second interview with Diol at the center.

In 2019 the School of Mutants and Ker Thiossane commissioned a forum theatre playwright, Alassane Ciss, a play during a public assembly we hosted with local communities facing eviction and landgrabbing by the Diamniadio smart city project. Alassane insisted on the view of forum theater as a tool to "enable the popula-tion to develop a certain consciousness and access information on what is happening, in order to exert their responsibilities towards what they consider their due or their right." Rather than commanding the public how to act, the aim is to empower the community in line with Freire's conceptualisation of an emancipatory peda-gogy that doesn't resort to a liberating promise coming from outsider educators: "as forum theater artists, we don't ask people to take the streets. For example, I can create a piece and invite the mayor to the show; I play

the mayor's role and in that role, I make mistakes. I use forum theater to force the mayor to react and make some amends, whether he wants it or not, by exchanging with the inhabitants who are guarantors for his power."

As we observed during the forum theater performance in Sébikotane, the representation of local actors delib-erately opens a gap in the mind of the spectator: if the behavior represented on stage is interpreted as nega-tive or harmful, how should real-world actors realign their actions, decisions, public policies, towards what is

considered good? Ciss suggests that "otherwise, it would be hypocrisy": this hypothesis forms the basis for the dialogical process that follows the performance. Since each in the public may have a different view on what is considered good for the community, the only way for realignment is to face the diversity of personal judgments and values through conversation. In a sense, this approach to forum theater also echoes Rancière's theory of the "emancipated spectator", in which resistance to oppression is articulated as a dy-namic social process in which people form their own opinions and interpretation of the world that they may connect within shared concerns.

It would be hard to find a more acute example of a 'mutant' teaching practice, with a geographic trajectory of forum theater, from Latin America to West Africa through Europe that outlines a cartography of social art practices for liberation. Emancipatory artivism travels the Southern routes, offering multiple stages to revolu-tionary becomings. As it migrates, it mutates on the way: an itinerary made of chaotic nomadism, chance en-counters, individual reinventions and collective translations.

We could name this counter-hegemonic utopia after Boaventura de Sousa Santos, an "epistemology of the South": a practice which, as it travels, produces its own knowledge of the world and of how to act in the world. This is the kind of viral journey of epistemic mutations that the School of Mutants sets out to delineate. Since we began our investigations on the topic of state-led university projects that served nation-building dis-courses and various ideological and political agendas in post-independence West Africa, we have also been interested in decentralized experiments in pedagogy and alternative education concerned with pan-African-ism and Southern solidarities. Not only is forum theater in Senegal a case of decolonization of theater as knowledge that evades the sanction and classification of epistemic hierarchies of the North; it also offers a way forward towards popular education models outside of official learning institutions.

Mutant education

Going back to the critical and poetic potential of the figure of mutants, we can see it as a post-negritude frag-ment among the ruins of Gorée: an offering for the reader, a project to pursue, a conceptual vehicle to which other narratives can be attached. What mutant pedagogies can we use to live in mutating worlds?

Education as mutation, like a contagion between beings, people, and epistemic fields. We can link the strik-ing force of this vision to Edgar Morin's transdisciplinarity: "transdisciplinarity is often characterized by cogni-tive schemes that cross disciplines, sometimes with such virulence that they startle them!". The analogy of biological mutation is particularly interesting because it rests not only on internal factors (a random spontane-ous mutation) but also on external factors, like the effect of environmental irradiation.

From this emerges a disturbance in the field of education with the deconstruction of the modern-colonial or-der of education, and reflections on the recent sharing between the African reevaluation of precolonial knowledge -like the ethno-philosophical approach and its critique - and the amplification of external contribu-tions (including provincialized Europe) as Valentin-Yves Mudimbe analyzes it. All the while remaining cau-tious of the identity-shaped shadow cast from excessively culturalist constructions.

In addition, the study of educational infrastructures problematizes complex cultural objects that go beyond their attribution to a rigid geographic perimeter: the Université du Futur, for example, was part of an Afro-Asian cooperation network. Will let Lou (pre-recorded from Taipei) develop this aspect of the research.

Conclusion (Hamedine in French, consecutive translation Stéphane)

Dans l'idée d'une École des Mutants qui réactivent et détourne l'héritage de ces ruines, il y aussi Ecole : espace où l'on prend soin d'une conversation, d'un besoin d'échange et de quête.

Étymologiquement, la skholè grecque est l'arrêt de travail, le repos consacré aux discussions et à l'étude. Une sorte d'école buissonnière – sachant que les buissons historiques n'étaient pas un lieu de prélassement mais d'enseignement clandestin des premiers protestants pour échapper à la répression de l'Église.

Le daara, de l'arabe dar, c'est la maison : un écrin sûr pour préserver la précieuse économie du savoir.

Notre enquête a commencé autour des "infrastructures d'utopie", pour reprendre le titre d'une enquête de l'anthropologue Brian Quinn sur l'UFA et Ponty. A partir de nos études de cas et des différents chapitres de l'Ecole des Mutants qui s'in-scrivent dans différents territoires, nous explorons l'idée de sous-structures d'utopie (pour reprendre l'idée des sous-com-muns de Fred Moten et Stefano Harvey): que devient l'infrastructure du savoir lorsqu'elle prend la fuite, lorsqu'elle maronne et se dé-académise ?

Translation:

In the idea of a school of Mutants that reactivates the legacy of these ruins, there is also School: a space where conversation and a need for dialogue and research are cherished. Etymologically, the Greek word skholè means the cessation of work, rest dedicated to conversations and studies. Kind of like skipping school, known as the "école buissonnière" in French, and which can literally be translated into "bush school", even though historically, bushes were not a place of rest, but rather of clandestine teachings from the first Protestants seeking to escape the Church's repression.

The daara, from the Arabic word dar, is the house: a safe cocoon meant to preserve the precious knowledge economy.

Our inquiry started around "infrastructures of utopia", a term coined by anthropologist Brian Quinn referring to UFA and Ponty school. Based on our case studies and the different chapters of the School of Mutants that take place in different contexts, we explore the idea of understructures of utopia, echoing the concept of un-dercommons of Fred Moten and Stefano Harvey. What becomes the infrastructure of knowledge when it becomes fugitive, when it marroon away and unacademizes itself ?

Lou (audio in video)

Hello everyone!

This is Lou from The School of Mutants speaking from Taipei. I'm sorry I can't be with you in person today, but I'm sure you'll hear more about The School of Mutants and be able to discuss with my colleagues Hamedine, Stéphane and Oulimata.

I want to thank the Het Nieuwe Institute for this opportunity to conduct research as an artist collective. It's also a great pleasure to get to know the other fellows and learn about their work.

I have been working as a part of The School of Mutants since 2019, and my main research interest currently is on Afro-Asian connections. For example, we had the opportunity to work together on the 2020 Taipei Biennial, where we investigated from the University of African Futures on the competition of the two Chinas in diplomacy on the African continent, involving a lot of geopolitical complications, but also cases of exchange. How do we go from the ideology of Third Worldism to 21st century capitalist competition.

This time too, I had the opportunity to conduct some research, but this time on living things. So in a minute or so, you'll hear me talk about the Asparagus Project. About the globalization and economic history of the asparagus, which is quite fascinating. And it's a small project I had the opportunity to complete and present a preliminary version at an exhibition at the Pompidou Metz within the scope of the Het Nieuwe Institute fellowship. It's a story across continents. And I hope you will enjoy it. It's one of our research tangents right now, on plants and living things, and how they tie in to this larger scheme we are interested in. For example, ylang ylang, cloves and so on and so forth. Of course, in this case, the Dutch archives are enormously interesting and helpful.

Next up also, we are coming back to our first theme of infrastructure and architecture to explore more about the University of African Futures in relation to the Museum of Black Civilizations, one financed by Taiwan and one financed by China, both huge public infrastructure projects. So more on that soon! Please do follow our Instagram account so you get to know a little bit more about what the mutants have been doing!

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A Tale of Asparagus
The asparagus, the most well-known edible plant of its genus, is understood to originate from Europe.

Its story in Taiwan starts in 1934, during the Japanese colonial period. The Palmetto variety was introduced from the United States but this experiment ultimately failed. Taiwan fulfilled many of the Japanese Empire's colonial dreams, and one of these was being the tropical laboratory. The Japanese set up experimental botanical gardens in many different places on the island and tried to introduce a great number of species. It would change the local flora forever. The effort to introduce asparagus to Taiwan would only resume in 1955, after the Nationalist takeover of the island. Many different varieties were introduced from California. Even though the asparagus is a vegetable from temperate zones, farmers found ways to attend to it and made the crop prosper on the tropical island.

Most of the Taiwanese asparagus are produced in the central and southern parts of the island. The asparagus likes well drained sandy soil best, just like peanuts. Taiwan was already a producer of peanuts, but it was not as profitable to farmers as this western vegetable.

During the 1960s, asparagus became a more popular crop. Green asparagus was gradually introduced into Taiwanese cuisine. Production quantity ebbed and flowed throughout the decade with some years of regrettable overproduction until a winning formula was found. In 1971, Taiwan was the world's top exporter of canned white asparagus, most of which sold to Europe, in particular West Germany. This coincided with the end of the Bracero Act in the United States, another great exporter of asparagus. The production chain from Taiwanese farms to cans in European supermarkets became an important national industry that earned the island nation much needed foreign currencies. Most of the farmers produced exclusively for export and the national company purchased at fixed rates to control the market. More than seventy factories would have been canning asparagus during that time. National conferences were held and research centres kept busy for the prosperity and well-being of the asparagus in Taiwan.

The canning industry started in Taiwan from the dawn of the 20th century with the hard work of Japanese entrepreneurs. Some of the most successful canned products included pineapples, mushrooms and asparagus. From the 1980s and on, as Taiwan's economy developed, manpower became more expensive and gradually the export canning industry retracted. Like textile, asparagus farming would migrate to other places with cheaper labor such as mainland China and Southeast Asia.

Talking about the asparagus to a Taiwanese would always evoke the familiar taste of Tsin Tsin asparagus juice, an old-fashioned favorite to be found in corner stores. Boasting a Marilyn-like scarcely clothed bombshell on a beach, Tsin Tsin is a beloved local brand that has lived through decades. The brand image has never changed, reminding us of Taiwan's American aid period. Currently, very few local producers of asparagus remain, and now they only produce for the local market, fresh or frozen. In fact, Taiwan has become an importer of asparagus from other countries such as Thailand. The success story of the export asparagus is mostly forgotten.

Nevertheless, that is not all to the adventure of the asparagus in Formosa. It was to have a diplomatic role.

From the late 1990s to the early 2000s, before Taiwan, that is the Republic of China, and Senegal broke off diplomatic relations for the third and last time, asparagus was an important topic of discussion in this short-lived Afro-Asian relation.

One of the Taiwanese Agricultural Technical Mission's objectives was to introduce asparagus farming methods to Senegalese farmers and help them establish a source of revenue with a high-income vegetable appreciated by European countries and white tourists in West Africa. Other endeavors included teaching technical know-how of successful rice paddies or growth of ornamental plants. Taiwan has a long tradition of sending agricultural experts to their diplomatic allies.

The asparagus did grow in Senegal, in small test farms here and there. In order to promote for an asparagus industry, a training centre was set up in Sangalkam, not far from Dakar. During President Chen Shui-bian's July 2002 African tour, the visit to Sangalkam was highly publicized. The good peasants' son Chen Shui-bian, all smiles, would cut stalks of asparagus himself in the company of his Senegalese counterpart Abdoulaye Wade.

The idea was to set up asparagus culture in the country and train Senegalese coordinators who would transmit the knowledge and help local farmers. The Senegalese Asparagus Association, SENASPERGE, was also formed. However, the initiative backfired after a first business trial. SENASPERGE's expectations of demand, mostly geared towards hotels resorts and high-end restaurants catering to European tourists, far exceeded their actual sales results. The Association exhausted its funds and was not able to pay back farmers for the asparagus they promised to sell for a good price. The discontent leads to the abandonment of asparagus fields.

Soon after, Senegal broke off with Taiwan abruptly. The island nation would remember this bitterly

Tropic Fever

Tropic Fever - Act I: Forest (video)

Land, Sumatra's East Coast with its vaporous forests.
Nowhere, a village, or even a house. Not even a coco palm. Only forest and swamp. Presently we saw the first campong.
Then again forest, swamp, lianas, monkeys, jungle, thicket, stillness, dark pieces of water. Suddenly, as if marked out with a ruler, a huge clearing. Ditches dug in a straight line, paths, two-metre high tobacco plants in endless straight rows. As far as the eye could reach, there swayed a light-green sea of leaves. Everything one saw was carefully tended, almost exaggeratedly ordered.

Now one plantation succeeded another. The campongs were no longer in the forest, but around the plantations.

Here and there I saw a grazing zebu herd, steers looking for coolness in the puddles, white and black pell-mell. Then came the forest, a sombre, tangled, black-green maze. Then again a well-kept tobacco plantation. Flower gardens, tennis courts, huge coolie barracks… and everywhere order and cleanliness. And so it continued: forest, campong, plantation.

The forest here was cleared many years ago; then tobacco was planted, and later the terrain was allowed to lie fallow, and this was the seventh year. Next year it would be planted again. For a year tobacco was cultivated on the terrain, and then for seven years it would lie fallow.

When we had traversed the lalang grass we reached the new clearing. Hundreds of axe-blows echoed through these wilds uninhabited by humans. The only sound was that of the axe-blows. The forest was being destroyed because a few months from now tobacco must grow there.

Where forests had stood, tobacco plantations developed, and narrow, swampy, but passable roads connected them with each other. The colonial administration sent out officials, judges, and constabulary: the colonization was under way.

Robin Hartanto Honggare

Tropic Fever is a collaborative film project that documents the plantation lives in the Netherlands Indies. The film narrates monologues based on a semi-autobiographical book written by László Székely, a Hungarian who worked several years as a plantation manager in Sumatra. The book was first published in the 1920s in Budapest; then, it was translated into other languages, including Dutch (*Van oerwoud tot Plantage: Verhaal van een Plantersleven*) in 1935 and English (*Tropic Fever*) in 1937. By juxtaposing the narrative with visual archives from across Dutch institutions, the project aims to depict the spatial implications and racial imprints embodied in the practice of commodity extraction, a crucial economic motive sustaining colonialism.

The work was initially conceived as an academic research in the Netherlands, but it then evolved into both in-depth investigation and artistic exploration in the form of a film. Het Nieuwe Instituut provided not only material support but also the freedom to explore various means of dissemination. As the research progressed, it became clear that the project required more perspectives from other thinkers. Perdana "Pepe" Roswaldy, writer-sociologist, and Mahardika Yudha, video artist, joined the project, bringing their multidisciplinary points of view into the three acts of the film as well as threading

connections between the narratives and the visuals. While we haven't met each other before and during this project, we managed to work together from different places, including Evanston, Rotterdam, and Jakarta. We also realized along the way that in order to capture the plantation lives in their entirety and with greater details, we need to not just rely on the "architecture" archives at HNI but also engage other collections in Nationaal Archief, Leiden Libraries, and Eye Filmmuseum.

Our working process can be generalized into three phases. In the first phase, we collect various archival materials and conduct research about the history of plantation lives in the Dutch colony. In the second phase, we examined the book more thoroughly, discussing it in multiple sessions to find the intersectional points that we found important to present to the broader audience, then selecting parts of the texts to create a sort of a textual montage. In the final phase, we returned to the visual archives and linked them with the narratives. In reality, it is a messy process. We moved back and forth through these phases, rereading the texts, rewatching the videos, and gathering input from other viewers, including from the HNI R&D team, to whom we are incredibly grateful.

Pepe Roswaldy

When Robin asked me to participate in this *Tropic Fever* project, I wondered what else we could say about plantations through the lens of a colonial white planter. As if that perspective has not been plaguing the studies of plantations for centuries. Robin perfectly encapsulates what plantations do for the state: that they are the very architecture that builds colonialism, quite literally. Plantations are not merely a farming area. They are meticulous planning maps for the workers, water volume, and crops. László Székely knows this very well: he details the construction of plantations as if he illustrated those maps in words. The worst part of building plantations is not only the destruction of ecology, but the creation of a social world that plantation maps aim to possess, intentionally or not.

The architecture of such places also builds the fictional narrative of race. Using the term from WEB Dubois, American sociologist, the color line is pretty much the essence of plantations. Just like the architecture, it occurred quite literally: ethnic and nationality-designated barracks, the whispers among workers, payday, and seats in the bars or canteens. And since gender and race are intertwined, one should not be shocked that women almost do not talk in the book at all. Their skin colors are frequently brought up not by the coolies or the women themselves, but by the white tuans, by Székely. They are the ones who assign the characters based on one's skin pigmentation. The *coolies* can only silently grunt; the women are so noisy but only in the back – hoping a white kind tuan will take her away.

Although metaphor may be useless, discussing and learning about plantations can feel like peeling layers of an onion. The deeper we get into the bulb, the more painful and aggravated we become. The narrator in *Tropic Fever* feels it too: excitement turns into despair, despair turns into arrogance, arrogance turns into numbness, and finally that numbness is broken. There is only so much that plantations can offer for lives, and hope is barely one of them, as our narrator finds out. Such affect of plantations is integrated to its racial imprint, in the persistent scapegoat of "tropenkoller" or "tropic fever." The feeling of madness in the Indies, it is the heat, but never colonialism. It is the warm beer, not the white violence. It is their caricature of black men, not the racial slurs.

By reconstructing *Tropic Fever* this way, Robin, Diki, and I hope that we would always be aware of the unruliness of colonialism and its power.

Mahardika Yudha

After the Cold War ended, films that utilized historical footages and photographs from the Dutch colonial period began to appear, the renowned examples being *Moeder Dao* (1995) by Vincent Monnikendam and *Call Me Babu* (2019) by Sandra Beerends. These films were produced by Dutch filmmakers. In Indonesia, I have only encountered one performance and video art by an Indonesian artist that utilized colonial archives. Until today, not a single film produced by an Indonesian director uses the enormous representations of the Netherlands Indies in the colonial archives, be they as documents to be analyzed, questioned, reinterpreted, rejected, or accepted in the form of a film. With this background in mind, I accepted the invitation from Robin and Pepe to collaborate.

I constructed the visuals based on the narrative that was selected by Robin and Pepe. Thus, I didn't start from László Székely's ideas, but from Robin and Pepe's interpretation of Szekely's ideas. In other words, I departed from one layer beneath the book.

From this initial process, I explored the visual documents, including photographs and footages that could be represented as part of the film, some from the recommendation by Robin and Pepe, and some from my own research. The main question in this process is whether I should translate the narrative explicitly, create juxtaposition, or choose visuals that possessed no relation at all to the narrative. In the end, I used those three methods while carefully arranging the rhythms in the film.

This film uses two main forms of documents: stills (photos, maps, newspapers) and moving images (footages). The photographs are mainly sourced from Digital Collections Leiden University Libraries, all of which are available for public use under the creative commons license. It is important for me personally to make those archives known

to the broader public to encourage more reproductions and reinterpretations. The photographs were mostly taken in between 1890s and 1930s, the range of time when Székely was in the Netherlands Indies. They were taken by de Bussy, Jean Demmeni, K. Feilberg, Neville Keasberry, C.J. Kleingrothe, M. Mazaraki, J. Willem Schut, and anonymous photographers.

The footages were mainly from Eye Filmmuseum collections, including records by Willy Mullens, J.C. Lamster, L.P. de Bussy, Karl Josef John, L.C. Reedijk, videos ordered by Koloniaal Instituut and plantation estates, as well as amateur and family films. Another important document in this project is the fictional movie titled *Rubber*, directed by Gerard Rutten. This was a movie adaptation of a novel written by Madelon Szekely-Lulofs, who was married to László Székely.

The visual documents were crucial to capture the perspectives of the "West" when seeing the lives in the Netherlands Indies. Those "West" and "white superiority" perspectives dominating the audio and visual materials became an instrumental point in assembling the montage within the film structure. They were utilized to produce dramatization within the acts. Nevertheless, as Indonesians who observed the documents and sought to reconstruct them while also simultaneously being subjected to those perspectives, we also experienced the tension between subjectivity and objectivity when creating the montage, and this perhaps can be seen in the final output.

The project itself is not only about depicting or visualizing the narrative, the tropic fever, the plantation, the migration, the relation between architecture and everyday life, the environment, the tropenkoller, or colonialism per se. The film is further about approaching and revisiting language, function, and power within the colonial archives. It seeks to discuss archives and media while representing and reinterpreting history, using film as a critical vehicle.

MELT

1. Welcome, Intro, Project Outline

[SLIDE: ACCESS SERVER]

Good evening everyone. We are MELT - Ren Loren Britton using they/them pronouns and Isabel Paehr using she/her pronouns. We first wanted to thank the New Institute for their support of our work over the past six months and especially give a warm thanks to Delany & Federica for their scheming and strategizing throughout our fellowship. Additionally we wanted to thank the other fellows for their presentations and for their engagements with us

over these past six months – it has been a pleasure to think and work alongside you all. We wanted to begin by saying that we do not assume that anyone is cis-gendered or non-disabled – this is the place our work begins from. Our fellowship project is called ACCESS SERVER and in the next 20 minutes, we would like to introduce the motivations, workings and wished for futures this project proposes.

[SLIDE: "There is a significant problem with cultural institutions across Europe when it comes to disability access."]

From our lived experience and the experiences of disabled friends and colleagues, we know that there is a significant problem with cultural institutions across Europe when it comes to disability access. Often, there are no ramps, no captions, no sign language interpretation, no braille signs, no gender neutral bathrooms, no rest areas, no breaks, no image descriptions and other things that make it possible for disabled people to visit, work and be in institutions. Institutions routinely disregard their legal and social responsibilities towards making access. Our project, ACCESS SERVER, works against these exclusions by uplifting and upholding our beloved disability communities. Together we work to disrupt systemic ableism in cultural institutions.

[SLIDE: "Disability Justice celebrates and honors disabled brilliance and vitality by upholding a vast community of people with non normative bodies and minds."]

ACCESS SERVER works with a Disability Justice framework, which is a framework coming out of the necessary work of the queer and BIPOC run performance collective SINS INVALID. Disability Justice centers people of color, queers, nonbinary and trans* people with disabilities. We practice with disability justice because this framework celebrates and honors disabled brilliance and vitality by upholding a vast community of people with non normative bodies and minds. This includes though is not limited to, folks who identify as disabled, chronically ill, Deaf, mad, neurodivergent, and more, whether their disabilities are apparent or not.

[SLIDE: What do you need to be in any space?]

In ACCESS SERVER we define access as the conditions under which people can approach or be in a space. When you can fully be in a space, it means the space is accessible to you. Access requests describe what people need to be in spaces, be they

online or physical. For example: you may need a rest area if you are chronically ill, autistic or breast feeding. Having to ask for access in and of itself is already a barrier to being in a space. How can you be sure that your request will be cared for, and that you won't be discriminated against for bringing up a topic that the institutional workers might feel unprepared to answer or defensive towards. This is why

[SLIDE: "ACCESS SERVER anonymizes emails, to care for disabled people writing access requests, and also works with institutions to grow their access knowledges so that those who want to make access are well resourced to do so."]

ACCESS SERVER anonymizes emails, to care for disabled people writing access requests, and also works with institutions to grow their access knowledges so that those who want to make access are well resourced to do so.

ACCESS SERVER pays 20 Eur per email for your / our work of writing to institutions with access requests. Access requests describe what people need to be in spaces, be they online or physical. We understand that the work of writing institutions asking for access is so tedious, that in fact, maybe you've given up on even asking for access, because you haven't been invited and cared for within these spaces for so long. There is so much work to be done, and so many processes of learning that must unfold for many people within institutions to make anti-assimilationist access work, and this is where ACCESS SERVER comes in. By finding some compensation for the labor of asking for access, 20 Euros per email at a time, we hope to chip away at barriers and make access possible. ACCESS SERVER includes email templates and suggestions of what you could ask for so that writing access emails becomes easier.

2. How Access Server Works

[Slide: How ACCESS SERVER works]

Right now, ACCESS SERVER is in the conceptual phase and we are looking for accomplices and comrades alike. Now we will describe how ACCESS SERVER works in practice. We will do this by showing you an animation that we will describe verbally as well.

ACCESS SERVER is an email server that anonymizes, collects and financially compensates access requests that disabled people send towards institutions.

[SLIDE: An animation zooms in on an icon that looks like a web fillable form. In this form you can write an email to an institution. There is an arrow doodling its way to the next step.]

(1) WEBSITE: disabled person uses the form to write an email to an institution
Access Server always starts from the access request of a disabled person. The ACCESS SERVER website will provide templates and an email form to make writing access request emails accessible in itself. As a disabled person you provide your own email address, which ACCESS SERVER anonymizes, an email address of the institution or gallery or event that you would like to visit or be a part of, and your access request. For example you can ask for captions.

[SLIDE: In this animation, a graphic representing ACCESS SERVER lights up when it receives an email. The next steps that we will read out soon are displayed. ACCESS SERVER produces an email that follows the arrow from before as it continues squiggling towards the next step.]
2 --> the email is in the responsibility of ACCESS SERVER.

(2) ACCESS SERVER: redirects the email to the institution, thus anonymizes it & automatically quotes previous access emails to the institution
Access Server then redirects the email from step one to the institution. The email address from the original sender is anonymized in this process, as every email that leaves the server looks as though it comes from the server itself. Collectivity amasses over time through chaining emails together. All emails that are sent to the same institutional email address will quote previous emails showing disabled people writing the emails that they are not the only ones asking for access, and pressuring institutions to understand the collective body of emailers that are writing them.

(3) ACCESS SERVER: pays 20€ to the disabled person
Access Server sends 20€ as a compensation for the labor of writing the access request.

[SLIDE: An animation of the ACCESS SERVER displays the email traveling from the SERVER to the Institution. The arrow in the animation dances towards the Institution.]

(4) INSTITUTION: receives the email
An institutional worker receives the access request email. In the footer of the email they can find a link to the Access Server website. The website provides information on how to make the requested access possible. For example, the institutional worker receiving the email can learn how to activate automated captions in video conferencing softwares, or how to hire people who do live-captioning.

[SLIDE: The Institution is displayed as a small building with steps in front.]

(5) INSTITUTION: makes their event/exhibition/space/website more accessible
The institution then works on making access possible. For example, the institutional worker who received the email may reach out to their team, figure out how to implement the changes necessary to make access, and then do it.

[SLIDE: A red ramp appears atop of the stairs]

(6) INSTITUTION: writes an email response
As a last step, the institutional worker formulates an email response to explain what kinds of access they were able to make possible. Perhaps they may need follow up information, or they may be able to offer a timeplan towards when the requested access will be possible.

[SLIDE: An animation of an email response is sent to the ACCESS SERVER from the institution – the arrow dances along to show the movement of the email.]

--> the email response is sent to ACCESS SERVER.

(7) ACCESS SERVER: redirects the institution's response to the disabled person who originally sent the access request.
ACCESS SERVERs task is now to reconnect the email address of the original sender to the institutional email response. Without giving away the identity or email address of the disabled person, ACCESS SERVER sends the email response to the email address of the original access requester.

[SLIDE: An animation of the ACCESS SERVER linking up to the initial email is shown, and then an arrow dances to show the movement of the response being sent to the disabled person from step one.]

--> the email response is sent to the same disabled person who had initially emailed

(8) PRIVATE EMAIL: disabled person reads the response and (9) continues dialogue through ACCESS SERVER or not
Finally, the person who asked for access receives a response to their private email mailbox. Either access is server, and they can now more easily approach the institution, or they may have follow up questions or remarks. From here, they can continue the dialogue with the institution through ACCESS SERVER or they can decide not to.

[SLIDE: Animation of all the moving parts of the ACCESS SERVER shown as a whole comes together.]

3. Grassroots Access

[SLIDE: Grassroots Access]

Our project works with a grassroots approach to accessibility because throughout disability histories, access has been made by disabled people through protests, cross disability organizing, and anti-assimilationist theorizing / designing. To name two examples: In 1973, disabled activists occupied the municipal offices of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare in San Francisco California for 28 days in what came to be known as the 504 Sit-in to demand that the 'Rehabilitation Act' be signed. When it finally was, it was the first civil rights protection for disabled people in the United States. This act prohibited discrimination on the basis of disability in programs conducted by federal agencies including any agencies receiving financial support from the state. It was a major win interms of access to employment, transportation, housing and multiple other fields of life for disabled people. This act is often spoken about in relationship to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, religion, national origin or gender which formally ended segregation in public spaces in the US. During the 504 Sit-in there are well loved stories of how The Black Panthers supported those sitting in with food, and Deaf people outside of the building would sign to Deaf people inside of the building

through the window to communicate about plans and next steps when phone lines were cut.

[SLIDE: A photo shows a poster drawn by Ken Stein during the occupation of the HEW building. Black hand drawn letters state: "Sign 504 now!" The O is drawn as a stickfigure wheelchair user who holds up a sign that reads "now".]

In 1981, disabled people in Dortmund, Germany, organized the Krüppeltribunal, which translates into cripple tribunal, that addressed human rights violations of disabled people, particularly in nursing homes and psychiatries. During 15 thematically structured trials, harms that have been caused were openly discussed and publicly addressed to build solidarity and move towards transforming structurally violent conditions. These cross disability moments of solidarity are clear examples of how disabled people have worked together to enact and push forward change and how institutional and legal infrastructures were transformed along the way. For example, both of these legal movements informed the 1982 UN "World Program of Action Concerning the Disabled" which laid out guidelines for steps towards full participation and equality for disabled people at an international scale.

[SLIDE: These histories inform our presents of protest and access making.]

These histories inform our presents of protest and access making. In 2016, the UN Disability Treaty mandated that all disabled people must be able to access cultural institutions without exception. These legal frameworks show that access is not only a need, but that it is also a right. Yet, many institutions in Europe are not actively caring towards making access. And all too often, if access is considered an issue, it is understood as a one-time effort.

We understand ACCESS SERVER to be a project of accessibility making that is an ongoing process, not a 'check box' one time lift. Not to say that there aren't concrete steps that can be taken forward and directly implemented! - However, this work moves towards accessibility as a practice that requires institutions themselves to rearrange their priorities and working processes. We wish for institutions to care for access as something just as important as caring for other infrastructural considerations like: making exhibitions, writing emails, or ensuring that there is coffee. We want access to be like the coffee: manifold, shared and discussed by the corpus, enjoyed and enjoyable, with many options of how it

can be brewed, and as something that can be accepted or refused with no hard feelings but that is still there, present and offered, always.

[SLIDE: Thank You!]

Collective Q&A and Thank you round (Unscripted)