Pilar Mata Dupont & Erika Roux
SCENES FROM THE POLDER WESTERN

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INTRODUCTION

The sea has long been depicted and understood as a desolate, inhospitable and lawless area, a self-contained no man's land awaiting exploration, exploitation, and ultimately occupation through transformation. From colonialism and the slave trade, piracy, commerce, sea tourism, and offshore industry, the Dutch nation and its inhabitants have maintained a longstanding maritime history. This conflicted history and deep-rooted connection with the sea is fraught with manifold watery power relations, among forms of resistance, survival, and exploitation that developed over the centuries as a response to the elements and capricious environmental circumstances, and the geopolitics of war, territory, sovereignty, trade relations, and colonial violence. These power relations equally extended alongside the far-stretching Dutch coastal line and onto the expanding mainland, into what turned out to become a perpetual project concerned with 'reclaiming' land from the sea, taming nature, and oftentimes literally expanding the horizon of the Netherlands through land conversion and ideals around the makability and profitability of the landscape.

It is precisely at this increasingly thinning threshold between the sea and the Dutch polder landscape that the exhibition SCENES FROM THE POLDER WESTERN by artists Pilar Mata Dupont and Erika Roux is situated. Through a series of vignettes, informed by the cinematic tropes of the Western genre, Mata Dupont and Roux unpack a sequence of moral tales regarding an environmentally vulnerable country facing complex issues, such as climate change, sea level rise, floods and droughts, collapsing infrastructures, a nitrogen crisis, and their subsequent societal polarisation and political (mis)management. Through a tragicomic narrative, the film installation LOWLAND MELODIES, A POLDER WESTERN at RADIUS establishes arcs between different scenes and characters, human and other-than-human, each seeking to relate, in their own way, to the changes in territory, environment, and community in the Dutch culturally and politically constructed landscape.

CONTEXT

Climate change and the consequent rise of sea level have become more and more pressing, especially when living in the Netherlands, of which approximately a quarter of its landmass is situated below sea level. While the main strategy for flood protection has historically been building higher and stronger dykes—most notably with the implementation of the Delta Works after the North Sea flood of 1953—this centuries-old practice of land protection through geo-engineering is coming to its limit. Within the current climate regime, the Netherlands is not only faced with a frontal opposition from the North Sea, but is equally and increasingly subject to both the interior flooding of rivers and droughts (through the accelerated melting of glaciers, and more unpredictable weather conditions), simultaneously destabilising infrastructures and the ground water level sustaining different life forms, landscape, and biodiversity.

This idea of an unwelcoming and hostile natural land to be conquered and controlled, and the conditions that have shaped the Dutch perception of water, are reminiscent of the Western myth of the frontier and the cowboy and settler's relation to the natural landscape around them, and their relation to the taking—stealing—and making of their own nation. The dusty earth and encroaching desert of the traditional Western translates to the historical peaty swamps of the lowlands before the taming of the sea began, and places where 'new nature' grows. The expanse of the 'big sky' with its contrasted shadows translates to highly artificial land, reclaimed from the sea, grey skies above. In short, the alleged enemy, here embodied in Mata Dupont and Roux's work in the guise of anthropogenic climate change, is not facing us—like the good/evil polarity in the Western genre—but is already among us, is part of us. The modernist project of setting boundaries between nature and culture, of installing humans as custodians and overlords capable of taming and subjecting 'nature' to become a stable backdrop for human activity has failed, but is nonetheless mighty real. At present we see two main attitudes in facing the instability of our watery environment: a branch of resilience politics aimed at maintaining the known level of human comfort through techno-fixes and increased safety measures, and more sustainable solutions that would allow the sea and rivers to reclaim and rewild, taking more land away from human habitation. Nevertheless, both strategies are not without problems and complications.

This latter attitude towards the environment of letting the sea and rivers occupy inhabitable and cultivated land seems to stand in polar opposition to what may be deemed the main project of the Netherlands since the 14th century, namely that of land conversion through the establishment of 'polders'—tracts of land enclosed by dykes. The proverbial saying "God created the Earth, but the Dutch created Holland" is indeed clearly visible in the geography of the Netherlands through a cartographic, grid-like expanse of land mass, established after a process of reclaiming land, recovering flood plains and marshes that has lasted for several centuries, from the 14th to the 20th century. The Netherlands currently knows around nine thousand polder areas, for which the Flevopolder is perhaps the pinnacle of makability and ingenuity as the world's largest artificial island. Parts of this reclamation of land can be read in light of the aforementioned resilience and survival tactics, the protection and defense against the elements—through the construction of dykes, sluices, pump stations, delta works, the Closure Dyke (Afsluitdijk). Simultaneously, the process of land conversion should be read as a coalescing desire to expand a limited amount of available landmass to be recovered in the key of agricultural profitability, going hand in hand with increased industrialisation, and, ultimately, the indexation of land on the vectors of capitalism—eighty percent of current available land in the Netherlands is used for agricultural purposes, among predominant forms of monocultural crop and industrial livestock farming. Land that was initially deemed as worthless and useless, such as peat marches, were excavated for turf—a type of carbon fuel—and subsequently converted to be fit for agricultural purposes. These same peatlands, that have now run scarce, are deemed to be of great value as carbon sinks within the climate crises we are currently facing.

The exhibition SCENES FROM THE POLDER WESTERN is the outcome of a four-year long-term research project situated in the Netherlands, defined in relationship to the previously described interplay of land, sea, watery infrastructures, and the diverging aims, hopes and aspirations of the different stakeholders concerned. In 2020, Mata Dupont and Roux began interviewing climate

scientists, sea level researchers, hydraulic engineers, artists and educators working in the field of water management, as well as people whose lives are intimately related to the sea and the land, among water millers and farmers. They spent time travelling around the country to discover the different landscapes of the Netherlands: polders, rewilded lands, farmland, artificial islands, storm surge barriers, and dykes. This early extensive fieldwork and interdisciplinary research provided the artists with new and more nuanced understandings of the Dutch landscape and its historical development.

During a residency with Waterwerken on the Brienenoord Eiland in 2022, Mata Dupont and Roux wrote the first iteration of a screenplay for the film—that was published in 2023 by Building Fictions, an imprint based in Amsterdam—entitled SCENES FROM THE POLDER WESTERN, from which this exhibition at RADIUS equally lends its title. In that, Mata Dupont and Roux used a mixture of narrative techniques, references from musicals, as well as the lexicon and tropes of the Western genre, expressing the tangled challenges that humans face in this environmentally vulnerable country. In their work, they draw on the incongruous parallels between a story set in the Netherlands and the North American myth-making of the Western genre, bringing forth territorial and cultural specificities of the Netherlands through a humorous play of contrast. Following its adaptation into the film LOWLAND MELODIES, A POLDER WESTERN, the screenplay presents a series of different characters—partially informed by and modelled after the aforementioned interviews and fieldwork—facing mysterious, uncontrollable weather events due to the North Sea reclaiming land. From a disillusioned climate activist dubbed eco terrorist to a duo of dyke keepers encountering an abnormally large hole in a dyke, from a Rijkswaterstaat policy maker launching a charm offensive to regain the trust of both board and public to a misunderstood climate scientist, and a compromised, somewhat nostalgic farmers family, the films gradually unpacks and inscribes a series of characters onto an assemblage of relations within an increasingly unstable living environment. The film takes the shape of a series of vignettes depicting different political perspectives and forms of relating to territory, the environment, and community, defying traditional understanding of borders and forms of living, as a lens to look at the tumultuous relationship with water. The vignettes function as a fragmentary prism, and much alike the characters in the film, they seem to revolve around a common ground that is precisely lacking: the characters are singularities turning in on themselves, in a process of becoming increasingly destabilised, but never quite arriving on the same page. Perhaps not dissimilar from the dutch verb ‘polderen’ and its political equivalent of the ‘poldermodel’—to describe the often slow process and model for reaching consensus among different stakeholders—LOWLAND MELODIES, A POLDER WESTERN provides a representative indicator for and status quo of the widespread dissensus the Netherlands is currently facing in relation to facing climate change and implementing relevant policies to mitigate its negative consequences. From agri-business-as-usual, political indecisiveness, the post-pandemic undermining of science fact and its institutions, to the increasing dissatisfaction of different social groups in all rungs of society, Mata Dupont and Roux shed light onto the blurry and watery frontier of the lowlands.

The POLDER ALMANAC on the following pages is inserted to disclose and unpack the different subjects, terms and conditions imposed and imparted in the exhibition SCENES FROM THE POLDER WESTERN and the film LOWLAND MELODIES, A POLDER WESTERN.

POLDER ALMANAC — A GLOSSARY OF THE LAND, THE SEA, AND THE STAKEHOLDERS IN-BETWEEN

This almanac is a glossary of the polder as prosecuted in SCENES FROM THE POLDER WESTERN. The polder, in clusters and dispersed, has long required a document of secret motion and instruction—a collection of studies and references that might serve to clarify the terms obscured within every facet of its (living) program.

ACIDIFICATION

Ocean acidification is a chemical process that makes seawater more acidic. Ocean acidification occurs when the ocean absorbs excess carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. While it is normal for the ocean to absorb carbon dioxide (around 30%), humans have released exponential amounts of this greenhouse gas at an increasing rate. Since the Industrial Revolution the amount of carbon dioxide, emitted by fossil fuel burning, deforestation, land conversion, and cement production, in the atmosphere has almost doubled. It builds up in the atmosphere and the ocean is working overtime absorbing the excess. The current increase in acidity is the fastest known change in ocean chemistry in the past fifty million years, a rate of change that makes it difficult for marine ecosystems to adapt.

Source: Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition.

AFSLUITDIJK

The Afsluitdijk is a major dam and causeway in the Netherlands. It was constructed between 1927 and 1932 and runs from Den Oever in North Holland province to the village of Zurich in Friesland province, over a length of thirty two kilometres and a width of ninety metres.

AIVD

The General Intelligence and Security Service (Dutch: Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst) is the intelligence and security agency of the Netherlands, tasked with domestic, foreign, and signals intelligence and protecting national security as well as assisting the Five Eyes in investigating foreign citizens.

BOERENVERSTAND (COMMON THINKING)

This is our weightiest responsibility: to behave normally. Just as the soil counterbalances carbon dioxide produced by plants, normal behaviour makes up for the constructedness, the artificiality of our surroundings. I've come to understand that normal here implies not looking deeper than a certain level.

Source: Gwenneth Boelens & Nickel van Duijvenboden, *Il Faut* (2006).

BOEZEM

The 'boezem' is surface water that serves to collect and drain polder water. In general, the water from the boezem is discharged into a river that carries the water to the sea or to the IJsselmeer.

BOEZEMLAND

The 'boezemland', the non-drained (freely discharging) part of a water board, is also called boezem. Boezemland concerns either relatively higher areas (such as the dune areas in North and South Holland) or the strips and areas directly adjacent to boezemland waters that are located within the drainage embankments or dykes.

CANAL

Canals or artificial waterways are waterways or engineered channels built for drainage management (flood control and irrigation) or for conveyancing water transport vehicles. They carry free, calm surface flow under atmospheric pressure and can be thought of as artificial rivers.

CAPITALISM

The geography of industry itself is never quite so cleanly urban or rural anyways. Capitalism is already global, and already totalising. It no longer has an edge or border with some natural, non-capitalist sphere beyond it, and there is therefore no great chain of development in which ''backward'' countries follow those ahead of them on their way up the value chain, nor any true wilderness capable of being preserved in some sort of pure, untouched condition. Instead, capital merely has a subordinated hinterland, itself fully subsumed within global value chains.

Source: Niekolaas Johannes Lekkerkerk, *Bestiary of Corona Animals* (2020).

COAST(LINE)

The centre of gigantism is no longer situated in the vertical monuments of mother-cities, but on the sea's surface itself and on board the colossal ships which ply it. Precisely where they moor, there is a gigantic force which is recomposing coasts: the sea's horizontal imprint is gradually being deposited on the shore. The coastline is being covered with polders, platforms, outer harbors, jetties, breakwaters, and man-made islands. In a reciprocal movement, the sea is installing itself against these new pieces of land. With its ebb and flow, it is eroding both concrete dykes and cliffs and depositing sediments as well as living beings. This entanglement is increasing the contact surface between land and sea, and greatly augmenting the trouble and potential produced by their encounter. As an intermediary space and a common product between human beings and other earthly powers, the coastline is an infrastructure hallmarked by its state of ongoing crisis. From the commotion of this border, the Earth's architecture is emerging from the ceaseless embrace between land, living beings, and the sea.

Source: TVK, *The Earth is an Architecture* (2021).

DELTARES

Deltares is technological institute in the Netherlands in the field of water, subsurface and infrastructure. Deltares mainly focuses on river deltas, coastal regions, river areas, and offshore.

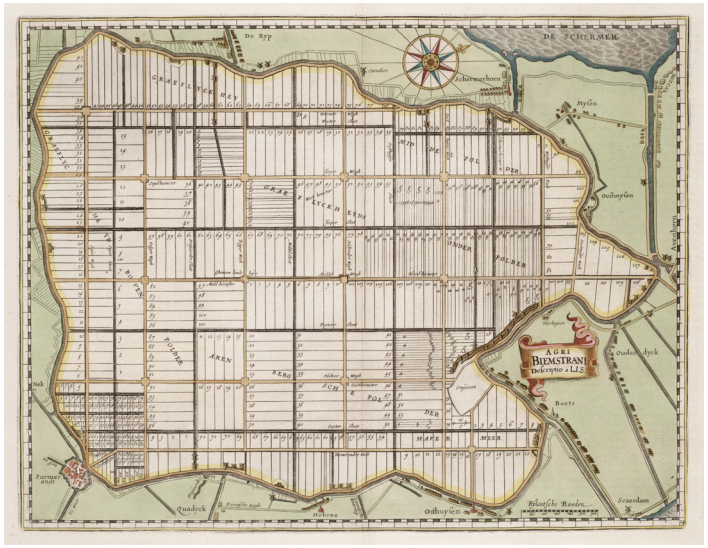
DELTA WORKS

The Delta Works is a series of construction projects in the southwest of the Netherlands to protect a large area of land around the Rhine–Meuse–Scheldt delta from the North Sea. Constructed between 1954 and 1997, the works consist of dams, sluices, locks, dykes, levees, and storm surge barriers located in the provinces of South Holland and Zeeland. The aim of the dams, sluices, and storm surge barriers was to shorten the Dutch coastline, thus reducing the number of dykes that had to be raised.

DESCARTES (RENÉ)

The coming of age of the French philosopher René Descartes coincided with the emergence of the Netherlands as the "Dutch republic" in the early 17th century: an independent nation powered by self-confident merchants. International trade and colonial conquests—e.g. through the VOC, established 1602, the first ever publicly owned corporation—generated enormous profits in need of investment opportunities. By 1612 the Beemster lake was turned into a polder (land reclaimed from water, and protected by dykes). The rectangular grid as a principle of city planning can be traced back to ancient history, from the Indus Valley to Babylon to Mexico, ancient Egypt and Greece. Via the Roman Empire it inspired Renaissance new towns. But applied to the shaping of land at this scale, organizing space according to the grid was new. The Beemster occasioned the invention of the Dutch circle: a device for the exact measurement of space based on triangulation: Adding a compass and a circle with indication of three hundred sixty degrees to a surveyor's cross facilitated the measurement of the exact angle between two straight lines to a single point. By measuring the distance between the two points of observation, the length of the unknown lines of the triangle could be calculated. This method reliably projected boundaries and allowed for the sale of land before it emerged from the water. Reclamation, together with the Dutch circle, facilitated a land-based private investment vehicle that produced a perfect grid landscape just as Descartes arrived in the Netherlands. Descartes' Discours de la Méthode comes out in 1637, at the height of the "tulip mania" gripping the Dutch merchant class: the first investment craze, it combined botanical science and horticulture with speculative capitalism. The key innovation of Descartes was not the grid itself, which had been around since antiquity, but how (through applying algebra to geometry) the grid allowed for an embrace of complexity: curved lines that could be described by mathematical formulas, and thereby were not a sign of chaos but an expression of the divine mathematical order assumed to be underlying nature. Seeing the world through a grid produced an immensely fruitful reductionism that released the power of calculation over space.

Source: Clemens Driessen, *Descartes Was Here* (2020).



DISSOLUTION

Factories are being installed in coastal free zones that are turned towards the sea, bringing them raw materials and a market for manufactured goods. Logistical warehouses and depots, free zones, and processing centers are all islands disconnected from their hinterland and directed towards their maritime accessibility. As the vector of a new linear

and territorial logic, it is the whole of the coastline which, in theory, has this interface potential, capable of engaging a recomposition or even a dislocation of the existing territorial organizations. Gradually, expanses of territory are becoming separated from the continental operation and are being devoted to maritime flows. As autonomous bodies freed from terrestrial continuity and linked by the absolute connectivity of the oceans, these parts are peeling away from the continental sphere's continuity: the Earth is becoming liquid.

Source: TVK, *The Earth is an Architecture* (2021).

DREDGING

Dredging is the excavation of material from a water environment. Possible reasons for dredging include improving existing water features; reshaping land and water features to alter drainage, navigability, and commercial use; constructing dams, dykes, and other controls for streams and shorelines; and recovering valuable mineral deposits or marine life having commercial value. Usually the main objectives of dredging is to recover material of value, or to create a greater depth of water. Dredging has significant environmental impacts: it can disturb marine sediments, leading to both short- and long-term water pollution, destroy important seabed ecosystems, and can release legacy human-sourced toxins captured in the sediment. These environmental impacts can significantly hurt marine wildlife populations, contaminate sources of drinking water, and interrupt economic activities such as fishing.

DYKE

A levee, dike (American English), dyke (Commonwealth English), embankment, floodbank, or stop bank is a structure used to keep the course of rivers from changing and to protect against flooding of the area adjoining the river or coast. It is usually earthen and often runs parallel to the course of a river in its floodplain or along low-lying coastlines.

ECO-ACTIVISM

The term ''eco-activism'' is defined as the actions of individuals or groups that protect or aid the environment. Those involved in the movement identify issues that threaten the planet's viability, from community to global concerns, and then develop strategies to promote awareness or produce solutions that directly address the problem.

ECO-ACTIVISM AND EXTREMISM

Left-wing extremism is similar to peat fires slowly smouldering underground, then flaring up suddenly with a bang. These fickle developments call for regular updates of the situation.

Source: AIVD, *Left-wing activism and extremism in the Netherlands* (2013).

GRID

In the north of the American continent, the instrument of this new settlement took the form of a vast grid protected onto the land. It was invented in the early 1780s by Thomas Jefferson, when the Union of the United States was composed of just thirteen states on the east coast. The decree of May, 1785 provided for the dividing of parcels sold to the pioneers in order to comply with a geometric grid delimiting square lots measuring one mile by one mile, equivalent to an area of 640 acres. At the same time, Jefferson launched the Lewis and Clark expedition, undertaken between 1804 and 1806. This was the first American exploration from the east coast to the west coast, ushering in the century when the frontier was conquered. The grid was a proliferating infrastructure of lines that stretched westwards as Amerindian lands were being conquered. Indifferent to the environments that were crossed and to the peoples living in them, it organized a territory regarded as wild—the "Wild West"—and permitted the exploitation of its subsoil, surface, and the living beings on it. The Jeffersonian grid foresaw its own exceptions, reserves in which the surviving native tribes were confined, just like the last large mammals that are victims of overhunting. Like an island excluded from the territories exploited by human beings, and a concession made to the uniformity of Jefferson's grid, Yellowstone was created in 1872, the first in a long series of national parks. In a landscape of sub-Alpine forest and geysers, black bears, coyotes, grizzlies, and bison all live together. Having become a tourist destination, the park was developed and improved, notably with roads, and rules and regulations that were introduced for the species living in it. The national park was at once the negative, the prolongation, and the complement of Jefferson's grid. It was an infrastructure of fragments—a pocket constructed and idealized nature—trying to make up for the farming activities in the remainder of the territory, while simultaneously justifying them.

Source: TVK, *The Earth is an Architecture* (2021).

HORSE

Horses—imported and reared by the settlers, and adopted by the Amerindians—played a considerable part in the conquest of the West and the grid's establishment. With them, it was possible to cover the long distances of those wide-open American spaces, to haul convoys and fight battles. But some of them escaped from the expeditions and regained their freedom. Like their remote ancestors, who had vanished from the American continent ten thousand years earlier, the mustangs, from the Spanish word ''mesteño,'' meaning ''wandering animal,'' joined together to form herds, with millions of them populating the Western Plains in the early 19th century. The horses that escaped from Jefferson's grid, the one they had helped to construct, were both wild and domesticated. They illustrated the changes occurring in the living world, its potential for metamorphosis, and its strategies designed to dodge problems.

Source: TVK, *The Earth is an Architecture* (2021).

HYDROFEMINISM

We are all bodies of water. To think embodiment as watery ways belies the understanding of bodies that we have inherited from the dominant Western metaphysical tradition. As watery, we experience ourselves less as isolated entities, and more as oceanic eddies: I am a singular, dynamic whorl dissolving in a complex, fluid circulation. The space between ourselves and our others is at once as distant as the primeval sea, yet also closer than our own skin—the traces of those same oceanic beginnings still cycling through us, pausing as this bodily thing we call ''mine.'' Water is between bodies, but of bodies, before us and beyond us, yet also very presently

this body, too. Deictics falter. Our comfortable categories of thought begin to erode. Water entangles our bodies in relations of gift, debt, theft, complicity, differentiation, relation.

Source: Astrida Neimanis, *Hydrofeminism: Or, On Becoming a Body of Water* (2012).

INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure is created from the meeting of the Earth's forces and the collective effort of human beings. With the help of giants, human communities create thoroughfares, canals, or fields, and sometimes also destroy them. They dig and hew, cut, carve, and level, plat and scythe, pile things up and erect them, traverse, connect, and criss-cross. […] The construction of infrastructure results as much from acts of cooperation as from acts of competition. Forms of complicity, interdependence, exchange, and negotiation combine with forms of domination, colonisation, exploitation, and violence. In any event, infrastructure lends substance to these complex coalitions between human groups and earthly powers. Much more than any functional medium for human establishments, it denotes the mediation between a political and technical project and the Earth. Infrastructure embodies the link between human beings and the Earth, between programme and site: it is a form that is simultaneously human and terrestrial. Architecture emerges from infrastructure and thus asserts its attachment to the world.

Source: TVK, *The Earth is an Architecture* (2021).

IJSSELMEER

Two thousand years ago Pomponius Mela, a Roman geographer, mentioned a complex of lakes at the current location of the IJsselmeer. He called it Lacus Flevo. Over the centuries, the lake banks crumbled away due to flooding and wave action and the lake, now called the Almere, grew considerably. During the 12th and 13th centuries, storm surges and rising sea levels flooded large areas of land between the lake and the North Sea, turning the lake into a bay of the North Sea, called the Zuiderzee. The Zuiderzee continued to be a threat to the Dutch, especially when northwesterly storms funnel North Sea waters towards the English Channel, creating very high tides along the Dutch coast. During the 17th century, Zuiderzee dykes collapsed several times and plans were drawn up to eliminate the threat by drainage the bay. Later drainage plans focused on creating fertile farmland, but they never progressed beyond the planning stage. It was only after the flood of 1916 that the legislature approved the Zuiderzee Works, a major hydraulic engineering project that involved building dykes, draining parts of the Zuiderzee and constructing the Afsluitdijk to keep tides and high water out. In 1932 the Zuiderzee was closed off by the Afsluitdijk, a thirty-two-kilometer dyke connecting Friesland and North Holland on either side of the Zuiderzee. The Zuiderzee was no longer a sea inlet and was renamed IJsselmeer (Lake IJssel). The continuing flow of fresh river water soon flushed out the saltwater.

LAND (RECLAMATION OF) I

Land reclamation, usually known as reclamation, and also known as land fill, is the process of creating new land from oceans, seas, riverbeds or lake beds.

LAND (RECLAMATION OF) II

The word reclamation itself is not a neutral term, but has evident moral connotations. The protestant reclaimer takes back what is his: the land that had been expropriated from the human sphere during the late medieval period. Nature had to be controlled and disciplined with the help of polders, canals, sluices, dykes, and, above all, with the help of a new ideology.

Source: Hub Zwart, *Aquaphobia, Tulipmania, Biophilia: A Moral Geography of the Dutch Landscape* (2003).

LANDSCAPE I

The geographical backdrop of the Dutch landscape is the elementary struggle between land, wind and water. Geographically speaking, the western and northern (or Holocene) parts of the Netherlands are slowly subsiding. The lateral moraine that once transected the area from east to west is still clearly visible in the east (near Nijmegen), where it forms a series of steep hills, but they gradually diminish in size towards the west and by the time Amsterdam is reached the sandy peaks have already disappeared fifteen metres below sea-level. Until recently, this process of subsidence was counteracted by periodical floodings, covering the area with substantial deposits. Since the Middle Ages, however, anthropogenic factors have undermined this balance of power. In the absence of intensive water management, the greater part of what is now called the Netherlands would be flooded and lost to the sea.

Source: Hub Zwart, *Aquaphobia, Tulipmania, Biophilia: A Moral Geography of the Dutch Landscape* (2003).

LANDSCAPE II

Between the late tenth and the early fourteenth century, the face of the Dutch landscape was drastically transformed. A wide expanse of wilderness, with small scattered patches of settlement and agricultural activity, was changed into a more or less continuous agrarian landscape. The greater part of the Netherlands was brought into the world of human affairs during that period. Huge quantities of previously unused lands were incorporated into the realm of culture. In the former peat-bog wilderness villages were founded and farms were built on parcels of standardised size and shape. The reclamation, by means of dykes and ditches, of formerly remote, impassable, soggy, and swampy areas, where the imprint of human presence had been absent or slight, irrevocably altered the physical appearance of the Netherlands. The landscape was thoroughly humanised. Until this time, human presence had merely produced patches of dry, arable land within a matrix of humid wilderness. But after 1000 A.D., a geometrisation of the landscape took place at an increasing pace and the natural matrix was increasingly fragmented until only a few marginal leftovers remained. Gradually, through diligent manual labour by generations of anonymous farmers, a diffuse, ambiguous, soggy and brackish landscape, in which clear boundaries between land and water (as well as between fresh and saline water) were absent, was replaced by a discrete, highly compartmentalised landscape.

Source: Hub Zwart, *Aquaphobia, Tulipmania, Biophilia: A Moral Geography of the Dutch Landscape* (2003).

NAP

Mayor Johannes Hudde of Amsterdam came up with the idea of the Normaal Amsterdams Peil (NAP) after he expanded the sea dyke after a flood in Amsterdam in 1675. Of course a dyke should be storm-resistant to protect a city against flooding, and in this case a margin of 2.67 metres was deemed enough to cope with rising water. So he measured the water level of the adjacent sea arm, Het IJ, and compared it with the water level in the canals within the city itself. He found that the water level at an average summer flood in the sea arm (when the water level reaches its maximum, not counting storms) was about the same as the level on the other side of the sea-dyke, plus the margin of 2.67 metres. In 1850, the datum was used at several places in Belgium, and in 1874 the German government adopted the datum for first-order levelling. The relatively constant water level in the canals of Amsterdam, called Amsterdams Peil ("Amsterdam level", AP), was equal to the level at summer flood at sea in the sea-inlet, which changes throughout the year. AP was carried over to other areas in the Netherlands in 1860, to replace locally used levels. In this operation, an error was introduced which was corrected (normalised) between 1885 and 1894, resulting in the Normaal Amsterdams Peil.

Source: P.I. van der Weele: *De Geschiedenis van het N.A.P.* (1971).

PARLIAMENT OF THINGS, THE

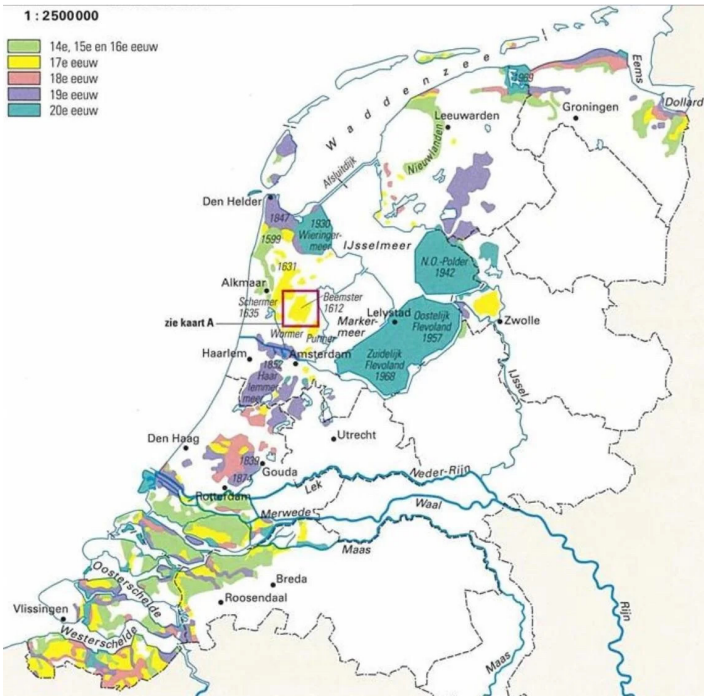
"Eliminate the social and you will finally have a faithful representation," said some. "Eliminate objects and you will finally have a faithful representation," declared others. Their whole debate arose from the division of powers enforced by the modern Constitution. Let us again take up the two representations and the double doubt about the faithfulness of the representatives, and we shall have defined the Parliament of Things. In its confines, the continuity of the collective is reconfigured. There are no more naked truths, but there are no more naked citizens, either. The mediators have the whole space to themselves. The Enlightenment has a dwelling-place at last. Natures are present, but with their representatives, scientists who speak in their name. Societies are present, but with the objects that have been serving as their ballast from time immemorial. Let one of the representatives talk, for instance, about the ozone hole, another represent the Monsanto chemical industry, a third the workers of the same chemical industry, another the voters of New Hampshire, a fifth the meteorology of the polar regions; let still another speak in the name of the State; what does it matter, so long as they are all talking about the same thing, about a quasi-object they have all created, the object-discourse-nature-society whose new properties astound us all and whose network extends from my refrigerator to the Antarctic by way of chemistry, law, the State, the economy, and satellites. The imbroglios and networks that had no place now have the whole place to themselves. They are the ones that have to be represented; it is around them that the Parliament of Things gathers henceforth. "It was the stone rejected by the builders that became the keystone" (Mark 12:10).

Source: Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993).

POLDER I

A polder is a low-lying tract of land that forms an artificial hydrological entity, enclosed by embankments known as dykes. The three types of polder are: land reclaimed from a body of water, such as a lake or the seabed (1), flood plains separated from the sea or river by a dyke (2), marshes separated from the surrounding water by a dyke and subsequently drained (3).

POLDER II



PUMPING STATION

Pumping stations, also called pumphouses, are utility buildings containing pumps and equipment for pumping fluids from one place to another. They are critical in a variety of infrastructure systems, such as water supply, drainage of low-lying land, canals, and removal of sewage to processing sites.

RIJKSWATERSTAAT

Rijkswaterstaat, founded in 1798 as the Bureau voor den Waterstaat and formerly translated to Directorate General for Public Works and Water Management, is a Directorate-General of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management of the Netherlands. Its role is the practical execution of the public works and water management, including the construction and maintenance of waterways and roads, and flood protection and prevention. The mission of the organisation is: "Rijkswaterstaat is de rijksdienst die werkt aan droge voeten, schoon en voldoende water én aan de vlotte en veilige doorstroming van het verkeer" (Rijkswaterstaat is the national agency that provides dry feet, clean and sufficient water and a quick and safe flow of traffic).

SALT TONGUE

A salt tongue is formed when a freshwater river flows into a salty sea. The seawater penetrates along the river bottom under the fresh discharge water (because the salt water is heavier). The length of the intruding tongue is determined by a balance between the friction along the interface and the horizontal pressure gradient resulting from the slope of the interface. When this equilibrium is strictly adhered to, the salt tongue is in a stable position, with the fresh water flowing seaward over the surface and spreading out to sea in a thin surface layer.

SEA

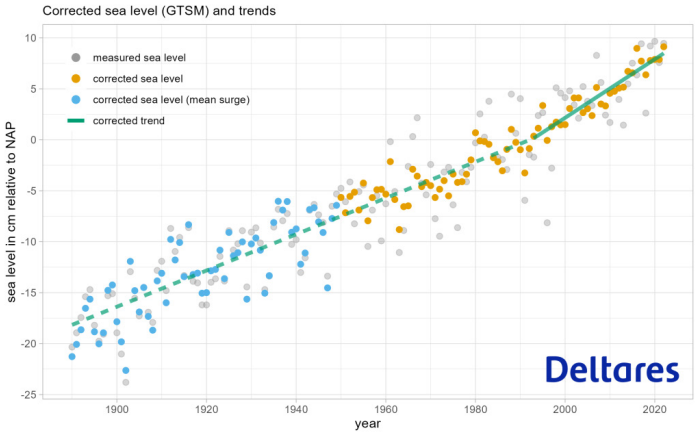
Human beings are now using the sea as the world's largest infrastructure on which, like the conveyor belt of a sushi carousel looping round and round in a restaurant, they deposit everything that they produce on the Earth. The Earth produces; the sea distributes.

Source: TVK, *The Earth is an Architecture* (2021).

SEA LEVEL RISE

Since 2014, Deltares has been updating the Sea Level Monitor for the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management. The monitor determines the status and development of the sea level to support policies for flood risk management. The results of the Sea Level Monitor are used to determine issues such as the annual requirement for sand nourishment. The monitor also plays a role in the assessment and design of the primary flood defences. The annual sea level status is based on observations from the six main tidal stations in the Netherlands (Delfzijl, Harlingen, Den Helder, IJmuiden, Hoek van Holland, and Vlissingen). The Delfzijl monitoring station is currently being carefully checked by Rijkswaterstaat. It is therefore not included in the calculation, as was also the case last year. The average sea level for the year 2022 was 9.5 cm above NAP. After correction for wind surge and tides, the water level was the highest ever (see figure).

Source: Marcel Taal, *Sea level on Dutch coast rose further in 2022* (2023).



WATERNOODSRAMP

The 1953 North Sea flood was a major flood caused by a heavy storm surge that struck the Netherlands, north-west Belgium, England and Scotland. Most sea defences facing the surge were overwhelmed, resulting in extensive flooding. The storm and flooding occurred at the end of Saturday, 31 January 1953 and in the morning of the next day. A combination of a high spring tide and a severe European windstorm caused a storm tide of the North Sea. The combination of wind, high tide, and low pressure caused the sea to flood land up to 5.6 metres above mean sea level. Realising that such infrequent events could reoccur, the Netherlands carried out large studies on strengthening of coastal defences. The Netherlands developed the Delta Works, an extensive system of dams and storm surge barriers.

WATERWOLF, THE

Until the middle of the twelfth century, settlement and agricultural use of the lowland zone were made possible by straightforward drainage, using simple techniques—digging small, shallow ditches to enhance the normal flow of water. Unfortunately, this initial round of drainage had a number of unintended consequences, the most important of which was the subsidence of the drained lands. These eventually became so susceptible to flooding as to cause what can only be described as an environmental crisis. A waterwolf stalked the land. Faced with the prospect of losing everything they had created, inhabitants of the lowland zone responded by fashioning complex systems of dykes, dams, sluices, and drainage canals, designed to perpetuate drainage while protecting against inundation. Thus, hydraulic engineering was a consequence of, not a prerequisite to, settlement. However, the deeper drainage made possible by the introduction of hydraulic engineering, while allowing the occupation and use of the lowland zone to continue, led to further subsidence. Further subsidence required more and more effective hydraulic measures for yet deeper drainage, which, in turn, led to even further subsidence. In the end, the people of the lowland zone became trapped in a cycle that has continued to the present.

Source: Willam H. TeBrake, *Taming the Waterwolf: Hydraulic Engineering and Water Management in the Netherlands During the Middle Ages* (2002).

WINDMILL

The technical device that would make a more active, offensive and large-scale form of water management possible was the windmill. The first known use of a windmill to displace water was recorded in 1408. The erection of batteries of windmills for the purpose of draining water proved very effective and allowed the Dutch to build polders of a much larger size during the seventeenth century. In order for a polder to be created, lakes, marshes or coastal areas were encircled by a dyke and batteries of windmills were constructed to pump the water out. These tools became the typical artefacts, the icons of a new Dutch landscape. Artificial canals, controlled by sluices, transported the water to the sea. Dams and sluices were built to close off sea entries and to control the movements of rivers. But the impoldered areas subsided even more and this made the Dutch even more dependent on their new technologies.

Source: Hub Zwart, *Aquaphobia, Tulipmania, Biophilia: A Moral Geography of the Dutch Landscape* (2003).

YEAR PROGRAM
THE LIMITS TO GROWTH

BETWEEN SYSTEMIC CHANGE AND CONSUMER ACTIVISM

[…] The adventure of these last three centuries can be summed up by the story of a double displacement: from economy to ecology. Two forms of familiar habitats, oikos: we know that the first is uninhabitable and the second is not yet ready for us. The whole world has been forced to move into "The Economy," which we now know is only a utopia—or rather a dystopia, something like the opium of the people. We are now being asked to move suddenly with our baggage into the new dwelling place called "Ecology," which was sold to us as being more habitable and more sustainable but which for the moment has no more form or substance than The Economy, which we are in such a hurry to leave behind. […] We are travelers in transit, as displaced masses currently wandering between the dystopia of The Economy and the promise of ecology, in need of an urbanist who can design a shelter for us, show us drawings of a temporary living space on Earth.[1]

In 1972, the now-famous report *The Limits to Growth* was published by the Club of Rome. Founded by a group of intellectuals and major industrialists, the club commissioned a team of MIT scientists, led by Donella and Dennis Meadows, to investigate the relationship between the exponential growth of our material consumption and its impact on Earth's climate and environment. The report, which was the first ever to use computer simulations, studied several scenarios set in the future, examining the future impact of resource and food consumption. The premise of the report: within a few decades, Earth's resources will deplete. At the time, the Club of Rome's report had a major impact in The Netherlands. To keep the Earth habitable, we need to control economic growth, proclaimed prominent politicians such as Joop den Uyl: "*The unbridled operation of the profit motive has led to a parasitic upward production. We thought we were getting rich, but we became poor, poor in available living environment, in welfare*".[2] Currently, fifty years later, the implementation of the report's core message has been relegated to the background. This is partly due to short-term thinking in politics concerning the government budget deficit and employment opportunities, the rise of the neoliberal doctrine proclaiming that everyone benefits from more growth through the trickle-down mechanism, and the lobbying of big companies who prioritise profit maximisation.

Departing from the *The Limits to Growth* report, the 2024 year programma of RADIUS explores the relationships between economy and ecology. Through five exhibitions, a public and education programme, we aim to counterbalance the global and totalising effects of advanced capitalism as the prevailing economic system. By harnessing the propositional and imaginative capacities of artists and other stakeholders, this annual programme aims to re-evaluate notions such as value, desire, abundance and scarcity in the face of climate change and ecological degradation. Are there forms of resistance, organisation and (proposals for) systemic change that escape these totalising effects and prioritise well-being and welfare above profit? How can we resist the totalising effect of capitalism and prioritise well-being over the profit motive?

1 Bruno Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2013), 23.

2 Jaap Tielbeke, *We Waren Gewaarschuwd* (Amsterdam: Das Mag, 2022), 27.

Pilar Mata Dupont & Erika Roux
SCENES FROM THE POLDER WESTERN
18 May — 25 August 2024

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Technical support: Menno Verhoef and Stefan Bandalac

This exhibition has been made possible with the support of:
Mondriaan Fund
Municipality of Delft
Gieskes-Strijbis Fonds
Stichting Zabawas
l'Institut français NL
Van der Mandele Stichting
Stichting Mr. August Fentener van Vlissingen Fonds

LOWLAND MELODIES, A POLDER WESTERN has been made possible with the support of:
Mondriaan Fund
Municipality of Rotterdam
CBK Rotterdam
RADIUS CCA
Amsterdam Fonds voor de Kunst
Kunsthuis SYB
Het Cultuurfonds
Ton Does and Media Horses International
WET

Acknowledgements
Pilar Mata Dupont and Erika Roux wish to thank their cast and crew as well as
Sol Archer
Anke Bangma
Reinier van Brummelen
Lester David
Ton Does
Thomas Drenth
Rudy Guedj
Antonio de la Hera
Jan Harmsma
Josje Hattink
Gisanne Hendriks
Arjan Hes
Hoeve Ackerdijk
Honey Jones-Hughes
Rineke Kraaij
Eva Kruis
Paul van Gennip and Kunstinstituut Melly
Lili Huston-Herterich
Wietse van de Lageweg
Marieke Leegte
Niekolaas Johannes Lekkerkerk
Estelle Levinson
Tim Leyendekker
Orin van Loon
Tim Mathijsen
Maurice Meewisse
Gary van Niks
Víctor Santamarina
Emil da Silva Jørgensen
Gosse Schiemer
Aimée Slangen and NIOZ
Maurice Specht
Melle Stam
Nora Steenburgen
Isabelle Sully
Vana Tsimopoulou
Bregje van Wesenbeeck
WET
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