

Outside within the Colonial Theater: an Audio Guide

KUNCI Cultural Studies Center

This three-part audio guide is a site-specific intervention realized by the research collective KUNCI Cultural Studies Center (Yogyakarta, Indonesia) in the Netherlands East Indies permanent exhibition at the Tropenmuseum. The guide has been produced in the framework of KUNCI's 6-week research residency at the Tropenmuseum, a project facilitated by the independent platform Heterotropics and the Research Center for Material Culture. The audio guide can be found online on radio.kunci.or.id and can thus be accessed by everyone, both inside and outside the museum.

The storyline within this guide functions as an alternative reading of the objects being displayed in the permanent exhibition. Inaugurated in 2003, the exhibition is fashioned as a colonial theater which was made to illustrate the century-long colonization of nowadays Indonesia by the Netherlands. Through hyper-realistic life-size mannequins and artifacts of different kinds, the colonial theater aims to provide the audience with narrative sceneries of the daily life in the so-called East Indies, exploring different macro-areas such as 'Education', 'Art', 'At Home', 'Commerce', 'Discovery', and 'Presentation'. The audio guide content is exclusively developed as a critical attempt to address the ineffable gaps lurking in between the spectacular materiality of colonial gaze. Its aim is to unsettle the museum's visual syntax and rhetoric through the use of sound and its impalpable, ubiquitous, evocative power.

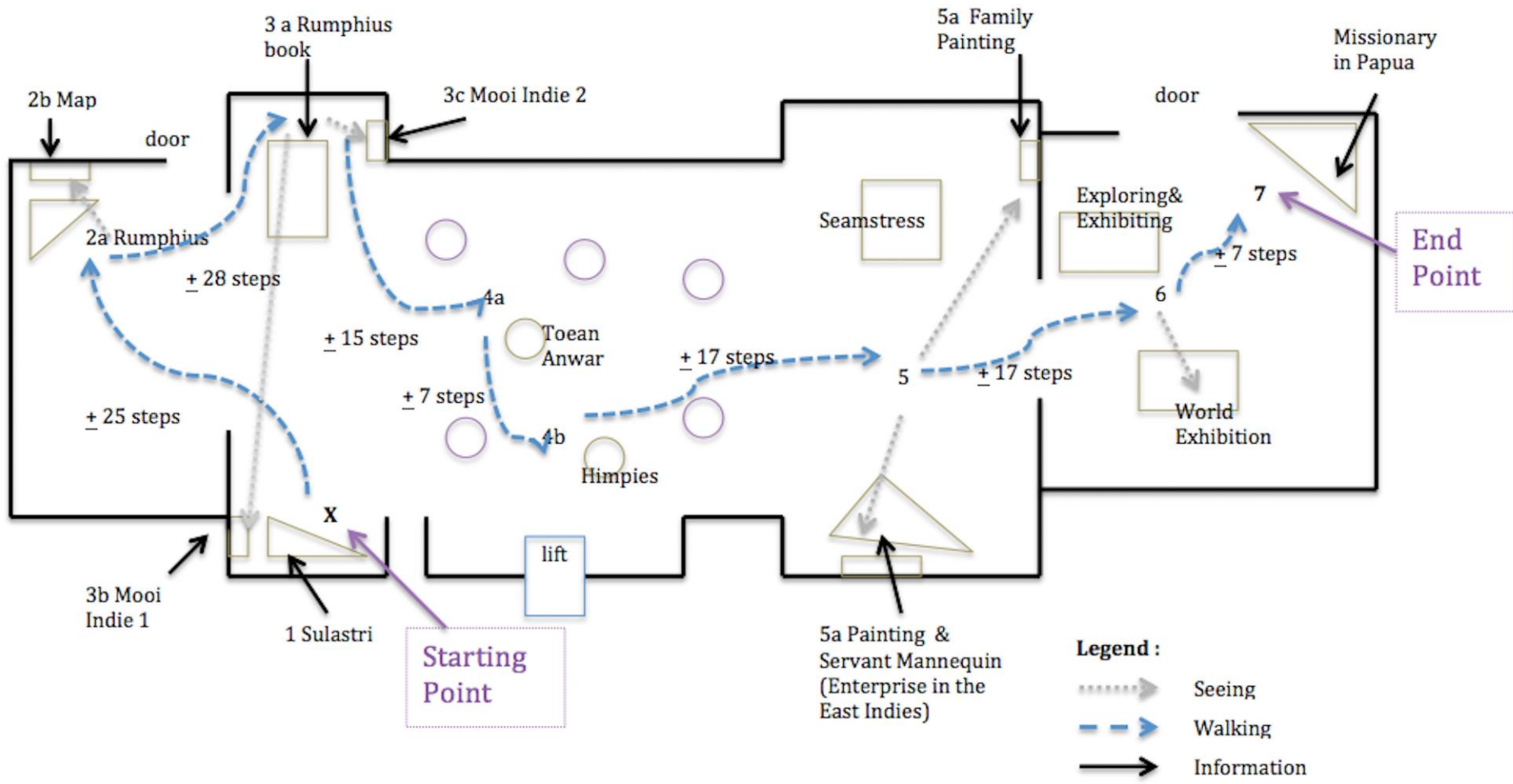
The story that you will be listening to in the guide is voiced by Sulastri, the main fictional character of *Buiten het Gareel*, a novel written by the Javanese feminist teacher and anti-colonial activist Suwarsih Djojopuspito and published in Dutch in 1940. The novel—which was published in Indonesian only in 1975 under the title *Manusia Bebas*, or the 'Free Man'—chronicles the life of a female teacher and her husband, who organized a 'wild' (illegal) school in late colonial West Java. Her narrative moves from personal conflicts to the more political ones—financial difficulties in running the school, challenges in dealing with the school's internal dynamics and oppressive colonial system. The figure of Sulastri is represented in the museum by a mannequin portraying an Indonesian teacher in the section about "Education in the East Indies". This mannequin was originally made for the Netherlands East Indies pavilion in the Paris World Exhibition of 1931 and entered the museum's collection in 1934. Throughout the years this human prop served different roles and assumed different identities, bearing testimony to the various representational practices of Dutch colonial history in the museum.

In this audio guide, the contradiction in Sulastri's fictitious existence is emphasized by using her body and voice to travel through the time tunnel of history—as the evidence, the eyewitness, the observer, the observed, the victim as well as the survivor of the colonial and postcolonial politics of representation. In our guide Sulastri's voice weaves a multifold narrative that brings the visitor in and out of the museum, amplifying what is hidden beneath what is obvious. Her voice is presented as an antithesis of the museum's gaze and as a medium for reclaiming colonial history. The routes in the guide are the sensuous paths that we choose to zoom in our knowledge and our lack of that history as well as to reposition ourselves towards colonial knowledge formations.

To hear the online podcast, go to: <http://radio.kunci.or.id/outside-within-the-colonial-theatre-an-audio-guide/>

To download the audio guide, go to: <https://archive.org/details/OutsideWithinTheColonialTheatre>

Map of KUNCI audio guide @Heterotropics



Audio Guide Content:

Part 1:

- Point 1: The world in the eyes of Sulastri
- Point 2: The 'Blind' Science

Part 2:

- Point 3: Tropical Dreams
- Point 4: Transparent Bodies
 - 1. The Dutch Collaborator
 - 2. Co-sufferings in the colony

Part 3:

- Point 5: Oiling the Wheels of Colonial Industry
- Point 6: Tragedy of Plenty
- Point 7: Unknown Encounters

Texts cited (in order of appearance):

1. Djojopuspito S 1970, *Manusia Bebas*, Jakarta: Djambatan, p. 14.
2. Mrázek R 2010, *A Certain Age*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2010, p. 131.
3. Protschky S 2011, *Images Of The Tropics*, Leiden: KITLV Press, 2011, pp. 82-83.
4. Djojopuspito S 1970, *Manusia Bebas*, Jakarta: Djambatan, 2000, p. 14.
5. Stoler A & Strassler, 2000, "Castings For The Colonial: Memory Work In 'New Order' Java". *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42(1), pp. 4-48.
6. Djojopuspito S 1970, *Manusia Bebas*, Jakarta: Djambatan, p. 291.

Music/ Audio Excerpts (in order of appearance):

1. Tropenmuseum. *AUD000313*. 2003. Waveform Audio File.
2. "Chrisye-Zamrud Khatulistiwa.avi." *Youtube*, viewed 4 June 2017:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zdJ1s-DPIHJ>.

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- Djojopuspito S 1970, *Manusia Bebas*, Jakarta: Djambatan.
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<http://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/the-doomed-blind-botanist-who-brought-poetry-to-plant-description>

Colophon:

Sulastrî's voice: Nuraini Juliastuti
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English translation: Ferdiansyah Thajib, Fiky Daulay
Recording technician: Fiky Daulay, Syafiatudina
Audio editor: Syafiatudina, Fiky Daulay
Introduction: Brigitta Isabella, Ferdiansyah Thajib, Nuraini Juliastuti and Sara Giannini

KUNCI Cultural Studies Center inhabits a precarious position of belonging to neither this nor that within existing disciplinary boundaries while aiming at expanding them. The collective's membership is open and voluntary, and is so far based on an affinity to creative experimentation and speculative inquiry with focus on intersections between theory and practice. Since its founding in 1999 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, KUNCI has been deeply preoccupied with critical knowledge production and sharing through means of media publication, cross-disciplinary encounter, action-research, artistic intervention and vernacular education within and across community spaces.

Heterotropics is an independent research and curatorial platform initiated by Amsterdam-based curator Sara Giannini and organized in collaboration with TAAK. Unfolding through different chapters and collaborations, it investigates the immaterial and material remnants of colonial desire in the city of Amsterdam. Heterotropics is a fictitious concept arising from the linguistic intimacy between "trope" and "tropic." In its different manifestations it relates language, space and collective imagery. KUNCI's research residency at the Tropenmuseum forms the project's second chapter.

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