

Facing the Earth. Facing Information. Facing our lives.

J: This is a talk about a place, specifically about the Tone river. It exists out of three parts: facing the earth, facing information and facing our lives. Feel free to wonder around and explore, to leave and come back. Or you can leave and not come back. As you wish.

How can we make a scientific exploration to represent a place, specifically the Tonegawa, without colonising it?

How can we make a social exploration to represent a place, specifically the Tonegawa, without colonising it?

How can we make our exploration to represent a place, specifically the Tonegawa, without colonising it?

...

The first part of this talk will be: Facing the Earth, and it will deal with the question: How can we make a scientific exploration to represent a place, specifically the Tonegawa, without colonising it?

S: Welcome to the Center for River Representation, short CRR. Despite its name, it is not a very large space. Years of smoking filter cigarettes have turned the walls yellow. We see maps and drawings, some photos and a large, horizontal window that shows a blue-grey sky, green land with mostly ricefields and a dark stream of water, flowing through the flatland like a snake that does not know whether it should stretch or bend to push itself forward. Telephone poles and wires connect house to house to farm to house.

This is a place we have never been, we are certain. The words on the wall are foreign to us, we don't understand most of our surroundings. Instead, we project our thoughts and ideas, we try to make this place our own for the time being, so we recognize it, so we feel at home.

J: 'How you know co-constitutes what you know' (Barad in Neimanis 24). The Center for River Representation is a thinking exercise, so let go of what you think is real, for it ain't really real honey.

S: We ask this question: is representation colonisation? Colonisation here means: The act of negating what is native to a place through imposing your own ways of using, knowing, understanding, owning, rating, inhabiting, or appropriating that place for your own good.

On the floor there is a map of the Tone river. It dates Meiji period (1880-1886), beginning, so it is an old map. We can walk on it. We can balance our feet carefully on the representation of the parts where we stood on the land and in the landscape, for real. There we were real. Here and now we are a representation, just like this map is also a representation, that, in its own way, is colonising the landscape it represents. We balance on top of the river between representation and colonisation and all that falls in between and outside of those two conditions.

In this place, this Center for River Representation, but not really, we are reminded of our place in relation to the river. One person says:

J: You won't have enough time to study the river, it takes years and years of researching and studying because it is so large and abundant.

S: We nod. She's right.

The scientific representation of water is also known as river control.

J: CONTROL

Did you know they moved the river?

S: No.

J: They changed its course, just like that, cut it up and sewed it back together with another river.

S: But how did they do that exactly?

J: Dunno exactly. But clearly river control is necessary.

S: Listen honey, to control the river is to destroy the possibilities of the river, river control isn't necessary. All embankments are walls, for the humans living 'outside' of the wall, as well as for the river floating 'inside' of it.

J: And also the animals?

S: Yes and the animals are imprisoned too.

...

J: Let's learn flood control

S: Here are three photos of Dutch engineers that worked on the rivers in Japan (we assume). Here is Rouwenhorst Mulder, famous for constructing the Tone canal. Here's Lindo, famous for laying the base for the current Japan Standard – an abstract zero level for water height. And here is Van Doorn, the first Dutch engineer that came to Japan.

In Japanese there is a word that means 'learning from the Dutch' - Rangaku.

J: Let's learn power control

We had our portion of rangaku as well when we studied in The Netherlands. Going there seemed logical, for we needed a set of tools. But did the Japanese really require a western toolset? Here's a known story: from roughly the 17th to the 19th century, Japan was closed to the world. The Dutch were the only westerners that were allowed to 'enter' Japan for business. 'Enter' because for most of the time they were held on an island called Deshima just of the coast of Nagasaki. So they were not really allowed inside Japan. The Dutch kept the Japanese updated on western knowledge, technology, medicine and astronomy.

General conclusion of this 'west teaching the east episode' is that when Japan was opened up by yet another westerner, they could not colonize the country because the Japanese already knew how to 'catch up' with the west.

S: 'Catch up' is such a weird choice of words. Who says that, like, the Dutch Embassy?

In Japan, the Dutch were allegedly not in the colonizer's position, yes, but the Europeans still felt superior, and the Dutch had their own interpretation of the 'white man's burden'. Their attitude was that of colonizers, even though they had no physical access to the land and its resources. In one of his letters, Lindo refers to his stay in Japan as being in 'a children's world, seen through a magnifying glass' (van Gasteren e.a. 134, 146).

J: Let's learn land control

Our guide, Mr. Tanabe, made an island once. He called it Raccoon Island. It is right in front of the Tonegawa River Office in Sawara.

S: Are there any raccoons on it?

J: Yes.

S: But how do they survive?

J: Raccoons can swim and there are plenty of snakes, fish and other creatures to snack on.

...

S: Back to the Dutch

J: But not for too long okay.

S: Okay.

Let's learn map control

S: Name one river in Japan and you can be sure that it flows through Japan only. This gives Japan the opportunity to control its rivers in their totality from source to ocean. Floods are a mainstay, and watercontrol happens all the time (van Gasteren e.a. 101).

J: All the time. Control happens all the time.

Let's learn resources control.

Let's learn place control. There has always been a complex construction of irrigation canals from the rivers to water the fields.

Let's learn food control. Water is important to grow rice

Let's learn production control. And one needs a lot of water for rice.

Let's learn market control. There's always been people conditioning rivers for personal profit.

Let's learn wealth control. Let's learn trade control. There's always been hydraulic engineering.

S: During the Edo period, rivers were turned into canals, new canals were constructed and routes were changed. They messed with the water to improve transportation, to built dams and aqueducts. In the 18th century, the focus shifted from expansion to conservation (103). Because of this shift, the big rivers became the center of control. And it was challenging: the level of the water had to be low enough to prevent flooding, but high enough to irrigate the fields. Once started, river control was an endless endeavor. And very expensive.

J: What a period. And then now, finally, specifically about the Tone.

S: Etonneeeeeeee

J: Let's learn disaster control

S: In 1822 a flood of the lower Tone destroyed a large area all the way to the sea, making rice fields useless. That flood brought back earlier proposals to shift the Tone north of Edo (111). And then they moved it. They moved the river.

J: Yes but how did they do that exactly?

S: I dunno.

J: Let's learn fluid control

Let's learn use control

Let's learn mobility control

S: Dutch engineers worked on the development of the Tone canal (123).

J: Let's learn defense control.

S: Surely, the Dutch were famous for the development of their waters, but the Japanese landscape looks somewhat different. There are no mountains in the Netherlands, and also no wild streams. There are no rivers that are sometimes dry and that sometimes flood. After a Japanese delegation visited The Netherlands in 1873, they wrote:

"the one that wanted to tame Japanese waters with Dutch engineering had started an assignment comparable to 'climbing in a tree to catch a fish'" (124).

But then:

On June 18, 1890 the official ceremony to open the Tone Canal took place. Everyone was there, Mr. Tadataka, Mr. Tanabe, Ms. Kanoh, Neneko, Yumiko, Mr. Furuta, Ms. Kuramochi, Julieta and Sarah. The only one missing was Mr. Mulder, the Dutchman that had played a crucial role in the construction of this project. He left a day after the canal was finished cause he wanted to go home so badly.

J: This is the canal. It was a miracle that it got constructed after all. Last night, Mizu, a Moriya native, told us about the Chiba-Ibaraki conflict on the construction of this canal. As the river borders both prefectures, they have to agree on things related to it. Ibaraki really wanted the canal and Chiba kept saying no no no, for four years.

For the Dutch, the development of the Tone Canal was the crown on their hydrological engineering in Japan. It sure made a big change for the region and its inhabitants.

S: Well, it did not really live up to its expectations. Two months after the festive opening of the canal, a huge flood already struck the area. The Dutch techniques, based on flatland, were in the end not that suitable for the Japanese landscape. And the flooding never stopped. Perhaps those men of great engineering were too focused on water as an abstract idea. Water as something 'out there' that can be measured or quantified, designed and disturbed and modified, without any consequences. Once a man wrote a book about water as a scientific given, he called this water: 'modern' water. Modern water is completely disconnected from the social relations to it, the things that give water local meaning (Linton 159).

J: Modern water?

S: Modern water.

J: Let's learn possibility control
Let's learn relationship control
Let's learn meaning control
Let's learn mind control

S: Let's think, for a moment, about water. Just water. Water is around us and in us, it covers 70 percent of the Earth's surface and half of a human body. A myriad of interpretations exist for water: it's social, scientific, sacred, aggressive, violent, it's a resource, a scientific resource, it's H₂O, it is part of the hydrologic cycle.

J: Let's learn the hydrologic cycle!

"The hydrologic cycle is the most fundamental principle of hydrology. Water evaporates from the oceans and the land surface, is carried over the earth as water vapor, precipitates again as rain or snow, is intercepted by trees and vegetation, provides runoff on the land surface, infiltrates into soils, recharges groundwater, discharges into streams, and ultimately, flows out into the oceans from which it will eventually evaporate once again. This immense water engine, fueled by solar energy, driven by gravity, proceeds endlessly in the presence or absence of human activity." (Maidment 1993:1.3 in Linton 164-165).

S: 'Proceeds endlessly in the presence or absence of human activity.' So it happens even when humans are not present?

J: Yes.

S: Interesting. So according to science, the narrative of the hydrologic cycle unveils a truth that was already present in nature, but it needed a researcher with a scientific method to reveal itself? (166).

J: Uhu.

S: And this hydrologic cycle claims to represent all water?

J: Yes.

S: So no water could escape science?

J: No.

S: And everyone believes this hydrologic cycle is the truth because science says so?

J: Yes.

S: And it is claimed to be a 'natural' phenomenon'? As if nature came up with this idea first and consequently humans discovered it?

J: Yes.

S: Doesn't that imply, in the hydrologic science's claim to represent all water, that it is isolating water from the 'social processes that make it what it is in each particular instance?' When something is represented as a thing 'that was always there', it becomes universal, hence erases its specific social context completely (159-160). Right?

The question is: how can water escape this scientific cycle? Maybe when we stop seeing water as an abstraction, as a resource or commodity and see it as part of a social process? Before the Meiji period, the Tonegawa had many names. Locals called the river whatever they wanted. After the name Tonegawa was established nationwide, unified, that social activity was gone.

J: Do you think it will stop the flooding when we see water as a social subject?

S: Maybe.

J: But how can you represent the 'voice' of something non-human? Reasoning that humans have to represent the 'voice' of nature comes from post-colonial thinking, where 'we' represent something 'out there' that supposedly cannot speak for itself.

Let's learn crisis control

S: And then they moved the river. Did you know that they moved it.

J: Yes but how did they do it?

S: Dunno.

...

S: The second part of this talk is called: Facing Information, and it will deal with the question: How can we make a social exploration to represent a place, specifically the Tonegawa, without colonising it?

So we are still in the Center for River Representation, short CRR. It still smells a bit of old men and filter cigarettes. The dark Tonegawa river, flowing through the green, watery ricefields, is also still visible through the horizontal windows.

...

Yesterday, Naoto said that when there is a flood in Gunma, in the mountains, the water will arrive one day later in Toride. This body of water floods rabbits and foxes from the mountains onto the lower fields of Kanto. People go out to 'hunt without guns'. They can just pick the rabbits and foxes, like mushrooms, and cook them for dinner. He's talking about a different era of course, but today, after a flood, Naoto takes his daughter to the golf court in Toride to catch fish in the puddles. Not to eat them though. Fish for eating comes from Kasumi.

...

J: Let's talk about Kappa!!!!

Mizuho told us about a book on the Tone river called Tonegawa Zushi, which appears to be a tourist guide to all ones favorite places around the Tone river. Written in the mid 18th century by Mr. Sōtan Akamatsu. One of the main attractions is Neneko, the Kappa of the Tone river. There are four sentences that make up the base of the story of the Kappa, and then people can modify them.

There is a Kappa in the Tone river named Neneko.
Every year, Neneko moves, she changes place.
The local people know where Neneko is living.
Because where she lives, bad things happen.

Yumiko is 25 years old and lives in Tone town. We meet her at the Life Long Learning Center on a sunny day. She tells us about Neneko. 'Neneko was so evil', she says, 'always giving us a hard time.' Yumiko doesn't believe in Kappa anymore.

She says: 'The Kappa is awful, but also extremely polite. If you bow, the Kappa is forced to bow back and then the water in the bowl on its head will pour out and that is a disaster!'

Yumiko thinks that's funny.

She showed us drawings of Kappa.

This drawing shows a trick to catch Kappa. Kappa sometimes sticks his Kappa hand up the person's bum to grab the person's liver. This man is showing his bum as bait so that the Kappa comes and gets caught.

The motive of the story is to make Kappa feel inferior to the human. Kappa functions as a trope for the Tonegawa river: humans try to control the river and Kappa, who is evil nature, makes the river flood.

Mr. Tanabe is 80 something and has lived in Sawara all of his life. He claims to be the oldest in the group of guides of the 'Education for disaster prevention exhibition' in Sawara River Station. He remembers the big flood in Sawara, 70 years ago.

S: I remember people scavenging for furniture and possessions adrift in the flood. I remember corpses adrift in the flood. I remember a group of people trying to lift a shelf out of the water, with ropes, and then the shelf overturned and on the other side was a dead body; the remains of a man with his arms and legs clamped around the shelf. 'It's been 70 years', he remembers. 'Japan is beautiful', he thinks. 'That is often said by people from a foreign country. But they don't understand the dangers of living here'.

J: His daughter is married to an American. He says he doesn't want to go back to his country because life is much better here. The food is good. Mr. Tanabe understands that, but his son-in-law has no idea of the dangers of this place.

Satoko, who visited yesterday, agrees. She thinks "the river is both scary and beautiful". Her house in Katori is five meters below the water level. When it rains, her husband is checking the weather forecast on his phone all the time. She and her husband built a third floor on top of their house. That's where they sit when the Tonegawa floods.

...

'How we know co-constitutes what we know.' (Barad in Neimanis 24).

...

Dear Mr. Inoh Tadataka,

Hope you are well.

Thank you for sharing your former home by the canals in Sawara with us. Looks great/great place. Someone mentioned that place is a shared reality, we could not agree more.

We are writing to you because we find ourselves facing a problem here; the Tonegawa. We are trying to understand how this river, because a river is a shared reality, has come to be. But how do you map a shared reality?

The river is out there. The problem is in here. The problem is the size of the river and still it fits in this room. Are we dealing with a problem of scale? Yesterday we talked to Mister Tsurumi, another mapmaker like you. We also talked to Mr. Van Doorn, Mr. Lindo and Mr. Chávez, all hydraulic engineers. We talked to Mrs. Kanoh, and to Mrs. Kanoh as a child.

Ms. Kanoh told us about learning to swim in the Tonegawa. Five meters from her house there was a small canal. When she was three years old, her father threw her in the canal. She had to find a way out of the water, by herself. This was an important training for if you cannot take care of yourself in the water, you die. Once you become taller, you'll learn to swim the special Ibaraki way. It is like this:

It is called Yokonoshi. Side ways swimming.

S: Like this?

J: Kind of. You can do this side stroke for a long time without waisting too much energy.

Dear Inoh

Ms. Kanoh's story is part of the shared reality of the river. But what else can we do besides from re-telling her story? We haven't even touched the water.

We talked to so many people; geologists, historians, geographers, fiction writers, teachers, boat captains, cooks, politicians, vendors, and we still don't know. We talked to Mizuho. We talked to Bas. How can we measure the relations between the river and the people who live with it and who use it? Or is measuring already a word of exact science that inherently neglects a shared reality. You would know such a thing. Is representation always scaling down? Or can it be part of a process to augment it, to put layer upon layer to create many representative images of this river.

You mapped the entire country of Japan at a time when that was next to impossible. You know this place, its shared reality, its borders and problems. To us, the Tonegawa still does not make too much

sense, let alone we can map it. Which is why we want to ask you if representation makes sense to you? You who has surveyed, mapped, walked, interpreted and finally represented, please tell us; is it just a problem of scale we are dealing with here?

All the best,
Sarah and Julieta

...

S: There is actually another name for the Tonegawa: Bando Tarō.
Tarō: the oldest son.
Bando: we don't remember what this word means.

...

J: The last part of this talk is called: Facing our life, and it will deal with the question: How can we make our exploration to represent a place, specifically the Tonegawa, without colonising it?

Come come, dear visitor. Come, let us show you the river we know.

S: We still find ourselves in the depressing Center for River Representation, short CRR. It still smells like old men and cigarettes and old paper and the Hibiya Line on a rainy day. We see maps and drawings, some photos and a large, horizontal window that shows a blue-grey sky, green land with mostly ricefields and a dark stream of water, flowing through the flatland like a snake that does not know whether it should stretch or bend to push itself forward. Telephone poles and wires connect house to house to farm to house.
In a way, this place demands to let go of what one thinks is real, for it ain't really real honey.

The map of the Tonegawa is still here, on the floor. We can walk on it. We can balance our feet carefully between representation and colonisation and all that falls in between and outside of those two conditions. We focus on our bodies and where we stood on the land and in the landscape, for real. There we were real. Here and now we are a representation, just like this map is also a representation, that, in its own way, is colonising the landscape it represents.

In this place, this Center for River Representation, but not really, we are reminded of our place in relation to the river. One person says:

J: You won't have enough time to study the river, it takes years and years of researching and studying because it is so large and abundant.

S: We nod. She's right.

J: How does one organize an expedition to go see a river: what equipment is taken, what sources read; what are the little dangers and the large ones? No one knows this at the start, one can only speculate (Steinbeck, Ricketts 73).

S: The expedition could be a scientific exploration, to understand the quality of the water and the way things are measured and mapped and organised and discovered. How dams and bridges are built, and who did it and when.

It could also be a social exploration, seeing how the stream has influenced the lives of many people and also how many people have influenced the course of the river.

And it could also be a personal exploration, from the outsiders gaze in this case. The expedition as a physical exploration of the landscape, trying to understand how a river is shaped by cycling next to it and feel the same wind, to end up in the same ocean. The bodies and eyes of two visitors in this bando taro landscape.

J: Here are some problems:

J&S

Problem number 1: the Ibaraki Pacific coast looks exactly like the Belgian coast and it is dirtier than the Mexican coast.

Problem number 2: highlighting issues or telling stories within the frame of art makes them at the same time symbolical or even improbable because of, you know, the frame of art.

Problem number 3: it is important to recognize and acknowledge the position we are speaking from, hence this long introduction to the last story we will tell.

J: Okay. Let's tell the story!

S: The Tanago fish is a tiny tiny fish that lives in the Tonegawa. Ms. Kanoh tried to eat it once, and it didn't taste too good. Anyway, the tanago fish that now lives in the Tonegawa is not the original one, it is an imported copy!

J: The imported copy supposedly made the original version go extinct. Both the native version and the imported version lay their eggs in shells. But the imported one would confiscate all the shells leaving the natives no place for their eggs.

S: A true classic.

J: There is also a tanago fish in Lake Kasumigaura. But this is not just a tanago fish, it is THE tanago fish. The original species from the Tone river. Some twenty years ago, the original fish was entrusted to the people that live around Lake Kasumigaura. And they are going to return it!

S: But first things first: the tanago needs a place to live in the Tonegawa. After centuries of land and river development without taking into account the natural habitat of all species living along and in the river, Mr. Sato, from the Planning Division at Tonegawa River Office is creating a bay in the river for tiny fish to hide. He is making a representation of nature so real nature feels tempted to come back!

J: So, Mr. Sato wants the situation to go back to how it used to be; the tanago is gone, and he wants for it to come back.

S: The imported tanago fish needs to leave? They don't eat the tanago?

J: No.

S: They eat the imported tanago.

J: No. No fish eating another fish. The imported tanago occupies all the shells. The original tanago cannot find a place to breed.

S: So the imported one has taken over.

J: Yes.

This is the modern version of Yokotone Gate.

Yuzo San told us about this gate. He goes there with his friends to catch the tanago. They hold a contest: the one that can hold the most tanago in the palm of one hand will win, so you better catch the tiny ones so you can fit more.

S: Here is the fresh water and behind the gate is sea water. The level of the water here is higher than the sea. When the gate is open, the one with the triangles on it, you see it, when you get close to it you get sucked into the ocean.

...

J: When we arrived here, besides from seeing a couple of Google photos, we knew nothing about the river.

Did you know they moved the river?

S: They did? How?

J: No one knows. I don't know.

S: I don't know either. But I could imagine.

J: To experience the river, we rode our bikes along the embankment from Moriya to Inubosaki. On the road we stayed in places in the Japanese heartland, and it appeared extremely ugly and it never stopped and every 10 kilometres looked exactly like the previous 10 kilometres.

S: One hundred and ten days in Japan.
One hundred and forty-eight hours cycling along the Tonegawa.

Being there.

J: Talking about it.

S: Hoarding stories, experiences, thoughts.

J: Acknowledging that all of it is important or none of it is.

S: Collecting and constructing representations demands "non-hierarchical understandings of difference as a process". This means it is never-ending and will continue to grow. This at the same time demands that we take responsibility for the role we play in that process (Barad in Neimanis 3). Therefore, this Center for River Representation requires a constant updating from humans and non-humans related to the river. Also today.

J: Do you know a story, an experience, a critical review, a comment – recent or ancient, yours or someone else's - about all what we just said and all the other things that we did not say. To continue for the text to grow, to get to that point where representation is almost acceptable, we would like to learn from you. The comments can be related to the maps, to the kappa, to Inoh Tadataka, to us, to the Dutch, to all the things we did not say or said wrong.

Tell us in words, now, if you like, or if not, write it down and put it in the box. There's a translator!

-

Bibliography

Gasteren van, Louis e.a. *In een Japanse stroomversnelling - Berichten van Nederlandse watermannen - rijswerkers, ingenieurs, werkbazen -1872-1903*. Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2000.

Linton, James. *What is Water? The History and Crisis of a Modern Abstraction*. Carleton University: Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, 2006.

Neimanis, Astrida. "No Representation without Colonisation? (Or, Nature Represents Itself)." *Somatechnics*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2015, pp. 135-153.

Steinbeck, John & Ricketts, Ed. *The Log From the Sea of Cortez*. London: Pan Books, 1964.

Thanks to

Moriya City Library, Tonegawa-Karyu River Office, Mizu-no-Sato Sawara, The Inoh Tadataka Museum, Chiba Prefectural Center Museum - Otone Branch, Yanagita Kunio Memorial Park, Geographical Survey Institute, The Science Museum of Map and Survey, The Dutch Embassy, Tone Town Lifelong Learning Center, Tone Town History Folk Museum, Sekiyado-jo Museum.

Special thanks to

Yumiko Fujimoto, Mizuho Ishii, Aruma Toyama, Ryota Tomoshige, Kenichi Kondo, Curtis Tamm, Hiroe Kuramochi, Ichiro Arai, Fumi Kanoh, Chiaki Takahashi, Yoshihiro Tanabe, Toshimitsu Yoshikawa, Reiji Sato, two boat captains, Eisaku Tsurumi, Bas Valckx, Tomoko Futami, Satoshi Ikeda, Yoshimitsu Furuta, Motoko Ishibashi, Megumi Susuki, Keisuke Aoki, Yusuke Shimura, Unen Kumagai, Koji Hamada and all the supporters of ARCUS Project that always live with the river.