ACCESS SERVER: Dreaming, practicing and making access
by MELT (Ren Loren Britton & Iz Paehr)

Abstract
ACCESS SERVER is an e-mail server that anonymizes, collects and financially compensates access requests that disabled people send to cultural institutions. This design research project pushes institutions towards caring for disability access, and upholds disabled knowledges that are currently underdiscussed, underpaid and not cared for by cultural institutions in Europe. In line with the UN Disability Treaty from 2016, ACCESS SERVER supports cultural institutions in transforming their practices so that accessibility is cared for. In this paper, we conceptualize ACCESS SERVER in relation to access, ableism and direct and indirect discrimination. We tend to conflicts, questions, and frictional anti-assimilationist crip technoscience (Hamraie and Fritsch, 2019) perspectives, and locate friction and its relation to heat as a link through technical practices that take shape against ableist cultural institutional infrastructures. In analyzing frictional experiences that emerged when institutional workers encountered the concepts around ACCESS SERVER and our demands for access, we identify three key barriers to partnership building between disabled people and institutions on the basis of our experiences with a European cultural institution: lack of accountability, lack of engagement and barrier guilt. Finally, we discuss technical-financial questions to realize ACCESS SERVER.

Contents

Prelude

> When I think of visiting the accessible institution, I feel excited
> and calm because I know how to get there, what to expect and
> most of all: that I am welcome — and that in fact, everyone is
> welcome (as our being welcome is interwoven). The accessible
> institution communicates that there are ramps, braille signage,
> and multi-modal access in audio, visuals, texts, sign language,
> as well as accessible and gender neutral bathrooms.
>
> The accessible institution asks for your access needs, because
> they are ready to care for the replies. Beyond a list of practical
> things that are centered, the ethos of the accessible institution is
> one of care and centering accessibility as a mood. When
> accessibility is the mood there is space for joy, collectivity and
> for new concerns to emerge — and when they do emerge, there
> is time available to take them into account and funding allotted
> to care for meeting expressed needs. The accessible institution
> knows that there is no feminism without considering disability.
> There is no de-colonial work if it is not work dismantling
> ableism too and vice versa. There is no disability justice work
> without anti-racism.

What we just shared were a few dreams from our practice of dreaming up accessible cultural institutions.
This practice emerged from asking ourselves: what dreams for accessible cultural institutions do we need to
make more radical and more direct demands of cultural institutions today?

ACCESS SERVER is a design research project that is still in development and is currently searching for
accomplices and comrades alike to make this server actionable. ACCESS SERVER is an e-mail server that
anonymizes, collects and financially compensates access requests that disabled people send to cultural
institutions. We do this work of structurally shifting institutions towards access as an arts-design duo called
MELT, and between us identify as trans*gender, autistic and disabled. This work emerged from our
practice through considering the ways in which we know from our lived experiences what we need to be in
spaces and by noticing how disabled knowledge is underdiscussed, underpaid and not cared for by cultural
institutions and cultural institutional workers in Europe. Although the UN Disability Treaty from 2016
mandates that disabled people must have equal access to cultural institutions, there are no infrastructures
that guarantee this access. Cultural institutions in Europe often claim to wish to make their practices
accessible however fail to make concrete steps — and ramps — towards producing access. In this set of
circumstances ACCESS SERVER centers disabled people's agency and labor of asking for access now in
cultural institutions in Europe. And further, ACCESS SERVER supports cultural institutions and
institutional workers in transforming their practices so that accessibility is as cared for and as commonplace
as e-mailing.

In this paper we discuss our research for this project through the context of a fellowship we held at a
cultural institution in the Netherlands that supported our work until recently. We begin the paper by
introducing ACCESS SERVER, and continue by contextualizing ACCESS SERVER's relation to access,
ableism and definitions of direct and indirect discrimination. We then tend to the conflicts, questions, and
frictional anti-assimilationist crip technoscience (Hamraie and Fritsch, 2019) perspective that ACCESS
SERVER is conceptualized through. We locate friction and its unfolding relation to heat (as embodied and
as metaphors for the social) as a link through technical practices that rub up against and take shape against
ableist cultural institutional infrastructures. In analyzing frictional experiences that emerged when
institutional workers encountered the concepts around ACCESS SERVER and our demands for access, we
identify three key barriers to partnership building on the basis of our experiences with a European cultural

institution: lack of accountability, lack of engagement and barrier guilt. Lack of accountability and lack of engagement we analyze as expressions of the ableism that remains unquestioned and normalized within institutional practices. We define barrier guilt as a feeling of guilt that anyone might hold, particularly nondisabled people in a place of power, when they *know* something *could* and *should* be done to reduce indirect or direct ableist discrimination, but rather than act on it they allow it to remain unaddressed. We conclude by discussing the technical questions that we are pursuing towards making ACCESS SERVER a service available for all disabled people to use and pushing cultural institutions towards ever more accessible presents.

Introduction to ACCESS SERVER

ACCESS SERVER is an e-mail server that anonymizes, collects and financially compensates access requests that disabled people send towards cultural institutions. 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 institutional workers might feel unprepared to answer or defensive towards? To care for these requests ACCESS SERVER anonymizes e-mails, from disabled people writing access requests, and works with cultural institutions to grow their access knowledges so that those who want to make access are well resourced to do so. ACCESS SERVER centers the agency of any disabled person who wishes to write an anonymous e-mail about what they require, and it pays the person writing this e-mail 20€. For example, as people requiring closed captions on video calls or on live streams, we would ask cultural institutions to enable automated captions or organize a captions worker in order for us to attend an event they are hosting. All the while working towards contexts in which this information would be available already so that nobody would need to ask.

From our lived experience and the experiences of disabled friends and colleagues, we know that there is a significant problem with cultural institutions [1] across Europe when it comes to disability access: often, there are no ramps, no captions, no sign language interpretation, no gender neutral bathrooms, no braille signs, no rest areas, no breaks, no support for care assistants, no image descriptions and other things that make it possible for disabled people to visit, work and be in cultural institutions. Cultural 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.

Countering ableism

We cannot address access without addressing ableism: a dehumanizing system that favors nondisabledness as the default and superior way of being in the world. In the following section, we outline what ableism is, how ableism functions, and how cultural institutions perpetuate ableism.

Ableism functions as a dehumanizing system that favors nondisabled people at the expense of disabled people. At its core, ableism affects the way being human is defined and understood and comes to be defined by Fiona Kumari Campbell as: "a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as perfect and species-typical, and therefore essential and fully human." [2] Ableism paints being disabled as being less, or less fully, human. Like other structural oppressions, such as racism, classism and (hetero-, cis-)sexism, ableism acts on many different

levels and produces barriers that often are especially brutal for multiply marginalized people, particularly disabled Black, Indigenous and People of Color (Brown, *et al.*, 2017; Thompson, 2021). This can and does consist of: barriers and lack of access to education (Campbell, 2009), barriers and lack of access to employment (jobinklusive.org, 2021), housing, culture and social lives (Adams, 2022); hate crimes and abuse (#AbleismusTtet, 2022); risk and reality of forced sterilization (National Women's Law Center with the help of Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network, 2022) and lack of access to reproductive justice, fear of and prejudice against disabled people (Johnson, 2013) and filicide, the murder of disabled family members and children (Autistic Self Advocacy Network [ASAN], 2022). These barriers and prejudices translate in concrete ways through, for example, as lack of access to conditions like signage/captions/ramps; lack of attention to or consideration of disabled people's concerns; control through the medical industrial complex; displacement and active disappearing of multiply marginalized disabled people globally (Afeworki Abay and Wechuli, 2022), the criminalization and devaluation of disabled people's modes of expression; the infantilization of disabled people, isolation resulting from institutionalization, incarceration and institutional and societal neglect. In a culture of ableism, few openly disabled people can work in cultural institutions and few disabled people can visit these institutions.

As Tanja Kollodzieyski emphasizes, ableism is determined through the kinds of judgements and imaginaries nondisabled people project onto disabled people [3]. As she explains, these imaginaries are often passively formed through negative media representations or ignorance, meaning that they are rarely reflected upon. Ableism also means that nondisabled people understand these imaginaries as factual knowledge [4] and consider them more accurate than what disabled people share of our experiences. All, while they imagine the ideal disabled person as "*sauber, satt und still*", which translates into "being clean, having been fed and therefore being without further needs, and being silent" [5]. This imaginary disabled person has little agency and is not assumed to be a person who would visit any cultural institutions — and even if this person did visit, the knowledge provided by the institution would not be considered to be relevant for their lived experiences or professional practice. These unreflected internalized imaginaries impact who is then considered to be part of a public for any cultural institution.

The interactions between disabled people and institutions that ACCESS SERVER facilitates happen in ableist conditions. Ableism has shaped and continues to shape how cultural institutions are structured today and influences who is (not) imagined as an audience for their programming. Disabled people encounter ableism in its intersections with other oppressive systems on a daily basis, which impacts what we think we can ask for, the ways in which we dare to ask, and what we expect as (non) responses.

How does ACCESS SERVER work?

Shifting these imaginaries and actual agential practices of who is considered to be a public for cultural institutions, ACCESS SERVER facilitates a process in which disabled people and cultural workers can interact in less harmful ways. To explain the workings of this process, we recently made a video about ACCESS SERVER, links for which can be found here: http://meltionary.com/accessserver.html. We recommend watching and/or listening to the video which exists as: a file with captions, a file with burned in captions, a file with captions and American Sign Language (ASL), and a file with burned in captions and American Sign Language (ASL). Below we share a graphic representation of ACCESS SERVER's workings, and we continue to detail how the project works step by step.
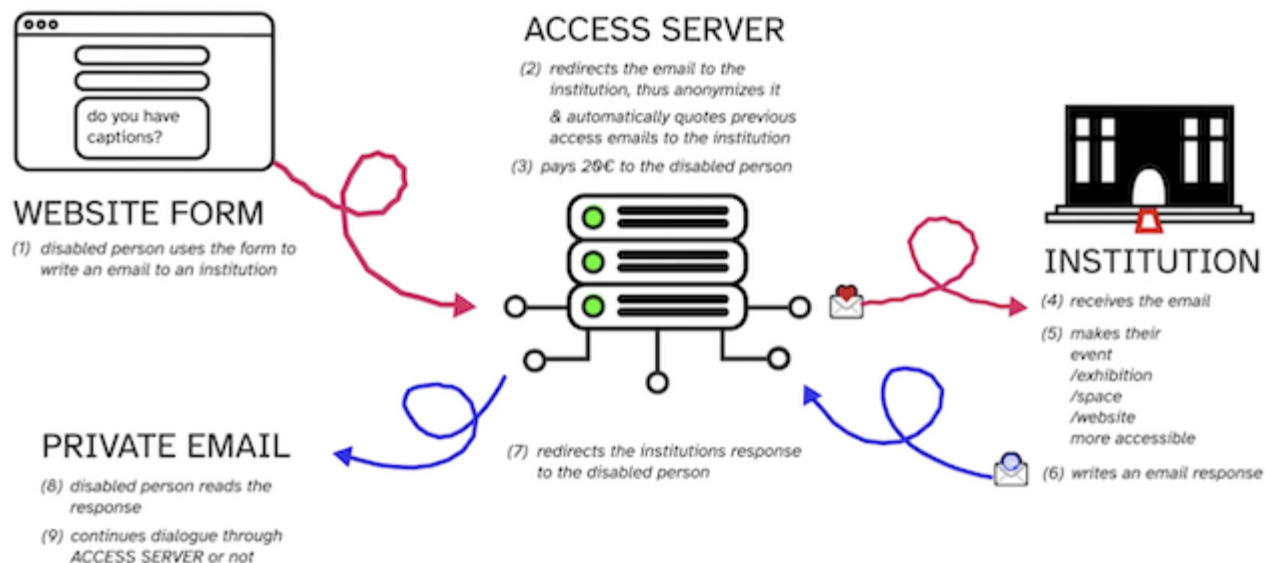
Figure 1: There are three structures consisting of an illustration and some text each with doodly arrows connecting them that represent the flow of the ACCESS SERVER. The three structures are labeled "Web site Form", "Access Server" and "Institution", and a fourth headline is titled "Private E-mail". The illustration of the Web site form shows the rounded outlines of this form opened in an Internet browser with the browser menu being represented by three little dots and one field of the form contains the words "do you have captions". The illustration displaying Access Server consists of three rounded forms representing a server rack with three green LED illuminated lights. This illustration has circuit-like arms pointing outwards. Extending from one arm an e-mail with a heart on it moves outwards towards the next illustration that displays an institution. The institution is drawn as a rectangular building with large windows and two stairs in front, and a ramp-like rectangle is drawn over them. Another e-mail is placed so that it looks as though it is leaving the institution and moving towards the Access Server illustration by following a blue arrow. The last blue arrow connects Access Server to the headline "Private E-mail". In the text that follows this image description we discuss the steps connecting these structures and the processes they each enact.

Note: Larger version of Figure 1 available here.

1. WEB SITE: Access Server always starts from the access request of a disabled person, for example a request for captions. The ACCESS SERVER Web site provides templates and an e-mail form to make writing access request e-mails more accessible in itself. As a disabled person you provide your own e-mail address, an e-mail address of the cultural institution or gallery or event that you would like to visit or be a part of, and your access request.

2. ACCESS SERVER: ACCESS SERVER receives the access request and sends it to the cultural institution. The e-mail address from the original sender is anonymized in this process, as every e-mail that leaves the server comes from the server itself. Collectivity amasses over time through linking e-mails together. All e-mails that are sent to the same cultural institutional e-mail address quote previous e-mails showing disabled people writing the e-mails that they are not the only ones asking for access, and pressuring institutions to understand the collective body of e-mail senders that are writing them.

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

4. INSTITUTION: A cultural institutional worker receives the access request e-mail. In the footer of the e-mail they can find a link to the ACCESS SERVER Web site. The ACCESS SERVER Web site provides information on how to make the requested access possible. For example, a cultural institutional worker receiving an e-mail can learn by moving through collected multimodal resources (videos, articles, resource lists) on many topics around access. They then know how to activate automated captions in video conferencing software, or how to hire people to do live captioning, or know where to look to find more resources or ask for support when they don't yet understand what to do.

5. INSTITUTION: The cultural institution then works on making access possible. For example, a cultural institutional worker who received the e-mail may reach out to their team, figure out how to implement the changes necessary to make access, and then do it.

6. INSTITUTION: As a last step, a cultural institutional worker formulates an e-mail response to explain what kinds of access they were able to make possible. They can use e-mail templates offered by the ACCESS SERVER Web site to help write back to the disabled people writing them. In their response they may need follow up information, or they may be able to offer a time plan towards when the requested access will be provided, or they may confirm that the access requested has been made possible. The cultural institutional worker can encourage the institution to pay 20€ back into the fund to acknowledge the labor provided by the person who requested access.

7. ACCESS SERVER: ACCESS SERVER receives the e-mail response sent by the cultural institutional worker and redirects the cultural institution's response to the disabled person who originally sent the access request without giving away the identity or e-mail address of the disabled person. This could be done through a randomly generated unique code, for example.

8. PRIVATE E-MAIL: Finally, the disabled person who asked for access receives a response to their private e-mail mailbox. Either access is served, and they can now more easily approach the cultural institution, or they may have follow up questions or remarks.

9. Depending on the decision of the disabled person, the dialogue between them and the cultural institution is continued through ACCESS SERVER or not.

ACCESS SERVER supports disabled people asking for access by paying us for our time and supports cultural workers to begin processes of institutional transformation by learning about what is needed to make access possible and regular in their institution. ACCESS SERVER supports both the access seeker and the access maker through templates to make this e-mail writing easier and by offering information about what kinds of access could be asked for and how to make this access possible.

ACCESS SERVER builds on existing work by disabled activists and scholars. ramp-up.me (Sozialhelden) is a Berlin-based project that addresses event organizers to make conferences accessible to more people. Another example includes the work of the BIPOC Bay Area based disability justice collective SINS INVALID (2019) and their work "Skin, tooth, and bone: The basis of movement is our people". In it, they lay out disability justice as a series of commitments centering disabled experience and make concrete suggestions for access practices in the chapter 'Access suggestions for public events'. Both of these projects work with practices of planning, caring and finding out what would be needed to implement access practices as an ongoing and central aspect of all cultural programming.

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Access to what, access for whom

ACCESS SERVER tries to make more access for disabled people, but it does not understand access as a

self-evident good [6]. Instead, we ask in the following section: Access to what? — meaning that we do not desire access into institutions that do not address and transform their ableism; and Access for whom? — which brings up questions around disability identification as a powerful tool as well as a potential barrier to using ACCESS SERVER.

In our project, access is described as what people need to fully be in a given space. This means: To be in a space without fear and to be allowed to be, act and express yourself. Access for all community members takes time as well as commitment. Access is always a work in progress, and access can be love (Wong, *et al.*, 2019). We practice with access as a value that cares for and understands disability as a desirable part of the world and that requires solidarity. Access is a framework that understands that interdependence is a political technology (*cf.*, crip technoscience manifesto). Access can feel intimate: like the "eerie comfort that your disabled self feels with someone on a purely access level" (Mingus, 2011) and it can be entirely practical, like the need for captions to understand and participate in a conversation.

Crip technoscience describes "practices of critique, alteration, and reinvention of our material-discursive world" [7] as well as a "field of knowing" [8]. With the term crip, Hamraie and Fritsch point to "the non-compliant, anti-assimilationist position that disability is a desirable part of the world" [9]. We follow this invocation of crip technoscience with a practice of queercrip alliances, coalitions (MELT, 2021) and worldbuilding (*cf.*, Kafer, 2013) to make access practices as important, as cared for, and as mundane as e-mail writing in cultural institutions. It is still the case that in cultural institutions, some of us cannot enter because of access barriers such as missing ramps; and some can enter the buildings but cannot remain within for long because of fluorescent lighting or chemical scents; and some are not physically hurt by access barriers but remain excluded from relevant information by the absence of translation into sign languages or audio descriptions. Some disabled people work in cultural institutions but hide their disabilities or experience physical and/or psychological harm through having to stay within inaccessible spaces and working conditions for long times, an experience that is not yet well documented but likely comparable to the experiences of disabled people facing ableism in academia (Brown and Leigh, 2020; Jung, 2002). It is our position that any cultural institution is not accessible as long as it is not safe to be openly disabled, and as long as there are risks attached to asking for access.

Focusing on disability access, our project addresses disabled people as a group that is routinely excluded from cultural institutions. We are using the term disabled people as a signifier for a cultural minority group that has their own shared experiences, languages, rituals, and knowledges, and who live with and often challenge systemic ableism (McRuer, 2006) through anti-assimilationist access making (Hamraie and Fritsch, 2019). This is not to say that one has to identify with disability or as a disabled person in order to experience systemic ableist exclusions: on the contrary, ableism and stigma are the reasons why people cannot (openly) claim disability identity in the first place, and this particularly effects multiply marginalized people who also experience other forms of exclusions. Research indicates that not using the word disabled causes harm (Andrews, *et al.*, 2019), and our own experiences of working with cultural institutions show that many nondisabled people working in cultural institutions are uncomfortable or do not know how to talk about or even say the word disability. This is why we are direct in our naming practices, and address the ableisms that prevent disability identification instead of avoiding definitions and namings of disability. We hope that, by inviting people to name their access needs and to request access without being asked to disclose any disability information, the project remains open to anyone who experiences access based exclusions even if they do not self-identify as disabled.

Direct vs. indirect discrimination

By not making access, cultural institutions partake in direct and indirect discrimination. Ableism shows often in an absence of considering disabled people's needs or existence, but cultural workers are mostly unaware that this posits a form of indirect discrimination. After discussing both direct and indirect

discrimination, we will give two examples of indirect discrimination with how physical spaces were not made accessible by a Dutch cultural institution.

Direct discrimination is often enacted in ways that actively exclude disabled people or position them as less: for example, cultural institutional workers may not consider someone for a job because of their disabilities, or they may communicate that certain groups would not be interested in their programming anyways because of how their disabilities are assumed to influence their ability to understand curatorial concepts. Direct discrimination is often easier to spot than indirect discrimination, and can be in direct violation of legal frameworks that promise equitable employment or access. Indirect discrimination applies when institutions do not take disability into account and apply the same policies towards nondisabled and disabled people. For example, when stairs are the only way to access an exhibition, this puts physically disabled people at a disadvantage or completely excludes them from attendance. This form of indirect discrimination is built on the assumption that "everyone sees, speaks, hears, feels, and moves in the same (nondisabled) ways" (Schalk, 2013). The resulting exclusions signal to disabled people that they are not understood as people for whom the work and programming of cultural institutions is relevant, and ultimately positions them as other. Further, institutions routinely require disabled people to prove their disability status in order to receive accommodations that may make their participation more possible or temporarily bypass an excluding condition (such as installing a temporary ramp). The kind of "proof" that is required is often paperwork or a specific form of ID provided by the state — which is not available to all disabled people because of lack of access to diagnosis, especially for people who for various reasons cannot risk being known to the state as disabled. This paradigm of "proving" disability also relies on disclosure as the only way to receive accessible conditions, another paradigm enacted by nondisabled people that perpetuates gatekeeping and prevents identification with disability by disabled people.

From our work with Dutch institutions, we have two examples of indirect discrimination at hand: one exhibition was installed in a cultural institutions basement with only a narrow staircase to enter it, making access impossible for wheelchair users with no planning for any possibilities of remote access such as a video of the exhibition. Further, in summer 2022, one institute opened a rooftop installation that could be entered by climbing 143 steps. Notably, the Web site does offer access information by stating that an elevator can be used by people with "(functional) disabilities" (Het Nieuwe Instituut, 2022). While this will allow some disabled people to still enter the installation, it still positions the primary and default way of experiencing it through climbing stairs. This installation fits into what Flavia Dzodan has shared with us as "art that demands too much" as it leaves the task of proving how one's disability might affect one's ability to climb the stairs up to disabled people at the mercy of the presumably nondisabled people running the elevator. This framing positions those with the need of or desire of taking the elevator: those who are tired, who want to for their own reasons, fat people, crutch users and anyone healing or with an injury as uninvited. A monument to inaccessibility.

Barrier guilt

Reflecting upon this monument to inaccessibility and other realities that cast space-time as not anticipating and caring for disabled people, the question arises: how does the work of making access shift when it requires holding space for peoples enormous unresolved barrier guilt? We define barrier guilt as a feeling of guilt that anyone might hold, particularly nondisabled people in a place of power, when they *know* something *could* and *should* be done to reduce indirect or direct discrimination, but rather than act on it they allow it to remain unaddressed. This kind of guilt becomes dangerous when it informs reactions to access requests in the form of anger, fear, resentment and dismissal. As such, it can present as what Ellen Samuels (2021) calls "access hostility", but it can also be much more subtle in the silent dismissal of unanswered e-mails, unaddressed questions, or whataboutisms (Bowell, 2020) that derail conversations on access.

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Attempts at partnership building: Points of friction

In this part of the paper, we will outline attempts ar partnership building with a Dutch cultural institution to identify points of friction and learnings for the design and implementation of ACCESS SERVER.

One of the primary ways that we have been working on ACCESS SERVER has been in concert with and as the fellows of a large cultural institution in the Netherlands. Prior to this fellowship, we had identified partnership building with institutions as a method of researching what ACCESS SERVER has to provide to institutions so that cultural workers can build the knowledges and tools needed to fundamentally change their (often barely existing) access practices. We considered this important because of our situatedness as a disabled arts-design duo practicing largely outside of cultural institutions or only in brief encounters when being invited to give a workshop by an institution or partake in an exhibition. As outsiders to intra-institutional practices, we needed to understand the barriers to access making within cultural institutions that take place whenever disabled people ask for access but do not receive it. However, our formal access to the institution established through the fellowship (receiving a fee for our work, being invited to work within the institution's building and to meet employees and directors) was in a frictional relation to our own disability access (sensorial stressors, neurotypical social expectations, ableist discrimination). Throughout our fellowship, we navigated support, expectations and advice from our fellowship advisors, two people (one freelancer and employee) who we met regularly with and who upheld our work. This put our attempts at making access in relation to their perception of how to make change possible within our temporarily shared context. Although access had already become perceivable within this Dutch cultural institution (Titchkosky, 2011) as a concern, the steps between recognizing that access needs to be created and how to implement that as fluid praxis within the institution remained frozen. Despite the effords of our fellowship advisers and our own efforts, throughout and after the fellowship, we remained outsiders to the intra-institutional processes that foreclosed our own and other disabled people's access. As we will show, this happened due to the institutions' inaccessible and intransparent decision-making practices, the institution's overall lack of engagement, and the barrier guilt that followed many of our attempts to facilitate change — all of which finally foreclosed possibilities of support for our project. Our frictional research did however help us to identify core areas of transformations needed from our ongoing access work that provide insights to inform the design and functionality of ACCESS SERVER.

In the following section, we pick up frictional access as a term used by Aimi Hamraie and Kelly Fritsch (2019). Access, as they explain, is not a self-evident good [10], and not a synonym for "inclusion and assimilation into normative able-bodied relations and built environments" [11]. Hamraie and Fritsch affirm that access-making happens through disabled people's "acts of non-compliance and protest" [12] which are often in friction with the status quo, as well as common assimilationist and nondisabled understandings of the work that disability access should do. They quote Fritsch's (2016) earlier work on access to explain that access means both "an opportunity enabling contact," as well as "a kind of attack" [13]. In our own arts-design practice we often work with material processes literally, and friction signals heat to us — leaving us with the question: how can we cope with the heat that making anti-assimilationist access in spaces where it is unwanted brings about, and how might we redistribute this heat? In this case heat is both the embodied experiences that we as researchers in this institution endured (heat as a way of talking about the stress that literally warmed up our heart rates). And heat is a way of metaphorically disrupting the frozen seamless inaccessible processes that received no critique at this institution. When barrier guilt comes up we assume too that cultural workers get stressed, heat up and feel the guilt of not having made access sooner. How, then, can ACCESS SERVER intervene into and work with institutions and institutional workers that understand any demands towards access, even when they are not particularly frictional but just a friendly question about a ramp, as an attack? And how can ACCESS SERVER encourage, hold and celebrate disabled brilliance through expressed non-compliance in the form of access request e-mails?

The partnership building attempts during our fellowship allowed for some understanding of the inner workings of the structural and interpersonal ableism that manifests in cultural institutions. We assume that

these structures persist across cultural institutions, making our work with this institution a good example of how these structures unfold in other institutions as well, however a study would be needed that supported an institution in their transformation towards a disability justice centered practice that would effect other European cultural institutions and produce contrasts between various institutional workings. In the following, we outline some patterns, symbols and concerns we rubbed up against.

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Meetings as (the only) structure and institutional framings of disability

Our fellowship advisors offered us the opportunity to enter into a process of meetings with various people working in leadership positions at this institution, as this would allow us to convince them individually to support our project during and after the fellowship. At this institute, small meetings are an established way for the leaders of the institute to form opinions, and we learned that while they would also discuss our project among themselves, these personal meetings were fundamental for the project's success. We met with, sometimes multiple times, six of the institutions directors of departments such as finance, education, outreach, artistic direction and communications.

Everyone we met assumed that everyone in the meeting was neurotypical and nondisabled, and coming out as autistic did not change what people assumed to be normal in the meetings. A barrier to partnership building from our side was that in these meetings, we were supposed to 'get' the culture of meetings that is probably commonplace in the Netherlands, which was difficult as neurodivergent, non-Dutch and non-institutional workers unfamiliar with the institution's processes. Making a certain kind of socializing (such as having many meetings) a prerequisite for professional support can push autistic people into masking our disabilities to fit in with given neurotypical social norms instead of allowing us to focus on ways of expression that come more natural to us. The vagueness and non-clarity on the decision making process regarding whether to continue to support our project, and when we would know, remained an issue of great confusion for us. When we posed direct questions to whichever director we were meeting with, we seemed to be asking too directly. We often left the meetings with some guarantee of support but no concrete steps towards what that would entail. Often, ideas of how to approach access at the institution were voiced by the directors, but they always entailed further steps such as setting up "a task-force", or having meetings on access between institutional workers, all of which did not happen. Following up was always our responsibility.

In our attempts at partnership building, we learned quickly that when we talked about disability or access, most directors did not understand what these concepts meant or were relying on stereotypical and even discriminatory views on and attitudes towards disability. The legal guidelines around disability access that the institute worked under such as the 2016 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html) were not familiar to these directors. Because of this, we invested care and time into explaining access basics which did teach us valuable lessons on what kinds of knowledges on disability we can (not) assume to be already present in cultural institutions. It also meant that to even be able to discuss ACCESS SERVER and what a partnership with an institution might entail, a lot of learning had to happen.

Some of the meetings themselves were held in inaccessible spaces due to noise, time constraints and limited support to actually share our work in an accessible way. Often, ableist notions came up, and indirect and direct forms of discrimination as discussed earlier were voiced. Disabled people were discussed as existing only as external to the institution, mostly in care facilities [14], and never in the room. Ableist organizations built on a medical and pity-based understanding of disability were brought up as the only reference point to disability, and inconveniences in non-disabled people's everyday life were equated with experiences of disability. In these meetings, our fellowship organizers were always present and through their presence signaling their support for the project, yet it was clearly our role to convince people not only about ACCESS SERVER but about the relevance of access itself. As access and our project are interrelated, we at

times had to convince people why disabled people have a right to access.

In the end these meetings did allow us to shape our communication into terms that are more recognizable to cultural institutional workers. However the sheer number of meetings, consistent positioning of disabled people as external to the institution, and the emotional and defensive reactions that institutional workers directed towards us when we shared our project left us exhausted.

While disability itself was rarely voiced as a term signaling a cultural identity group, accessibility was consistently expressed as a value, however the value-action-gap to doing something about it in even a cursory way remained. Value-action gaps describe the space that occurs when the values and attitudes of any cultural institution do not correlate to their actions. From these conversations we continued to understand the exclusions that were naturalized by these cultural workers. Accessibility was not centered in the institution in any structural way and any steps towards access, such as our fellowship advisor's personal investments in access, were individual and not supported by the institutional framework as a whole.

Key take-aways from these experiences for the design of ACCESS SERVER are that we cannot count on any political understandings of disability to already be present in leadership positions at European cultural institutions. The biggest barrier to partnership building with ACCESS SERVER is the fact that a political understanding of disability and access are needed to understand the project and its relevance in itself. Another take-away from our interactions is that ACCESS SERVER needs to take into account that the specific cultural contexts, legal frameworks, funding structures and hierarchies among European cultural institutions differ greatly, as was evident in our troubles of understanding how Dutch institutions operate. In our process, the inaccessible and intransparent decision making practices of the institution remained unbreachable.

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The accessibility report

In our first meeting with one of the directors, he mentioned that an accessibility report had been produced by a consultant evaluating spaces for their physical accessibility. We learned about this report three months into our six-month fellowship, and soon found out that many other workers at this cultural institution were fully unaware of its existence. We were a bit shocked and happy to learn that anyone had been working on access because up until this moment, it was as though it had rarely been considered, discussed or planned towards.

After learning about this report, we asked to receive it. However, the experience of finally getting this accessibility report unraveled like a maze. The fact we had asked for it at all felt like a frictional ask in and of itself. Every time we brought up the report in the many meetings we had, things became fuzzy: connections were missed, responsibilities were dropped, sentences were without periods, memories were lost and directions were reversed. The director who mentioned it first had probably paid for it — and so perhaps it was his job to focus on it — but he couldn't remember, was someone else at this institution also working on disability and couldn't there be a group responsible for access (yes, it would be great, we said)? Did anyone know whose job it was to follow up on the report? In other moments, access was supposed to be or assumed to be someone's job, for example when in a conversation one cultural worker asked another if access wasn't actually yet another person's responsibility. Three e-mails that we sent to receive the report remain unanswered. When we returned to visit the institution two months later, the report was brought up again in conversation, and yet no one we talked to had access to it. On 21 February 2022, four months and 21 days into our six-month fellowship, the report appeared in our mailbox with the subject line: 'herkeuring accessibility report', ("re-examination accessibility report"). It took nearly two months to forward us an e-mail evaluating the physical accessibility of this cultural institution. This document signaling one potential artifact of anti-assimilationist workings potentially already ongoing at this institution initially made us feel hopeful, however the maze of communication required to try and receive this report mirrored the spirit of

the inaccessible practices that we frictionally countered throughout our entire time at this institute.

If the accessibility report initially was a foggy, frustrating and unclear maze, when it dropped into reality through a data chunk (1,6MB) into our e-mail boxes, it became undoubtedly concrete. Clicking into the report we read that in December 2021 an accessibility review had been done. Every entrance is noted, and unenforced requirements of disability accessibility in the Netherlands are mentioned on page three. An even more bleak reality becomes evident as the report shares that every entrance into the building is not accessible in some basic ways: the ramps, if existing, are too steep, there are no handrails, the doors are too heavy, the sliding glass doors are not marked visibly enough for low vision or blind people, there are collision risks, sliding risks, stability risks. Impossibilities of access are distributed throughout the physical architectures in this cultural institution that houses important cultural heritage; no entrance or navigation mode on the ground floor is fully physically accessible according to the report.

Our attempts to receive the report reflect two modes in which disability access is made difficult because of intra-institutional processes: lack of accountability and lack of prioritization of access in relation to time. A lack of accountability occurs when responsibility for accessibility is not assigned to a person or group in cultural institutions, and/or when these responsibilities are not communicated across the institution and towards disabled guests and visitors. For ACCESS SERVER this means that the difficulty of finding the right person to write to when asking about access should not be underestimated — while taking into account that this person might not yet exist. A lack of prioritization of access in relation to time shows when cultural workers do not prioritize working on access. On an institutional timeline it may make sense to attend to access related documents at later points in time, *i.e.*, when applying for new funds, but in the timeline of a fellowship or when waiting for a reply to an access request this produces immediate barriers. Given that many programmes of cultural institutions exist only for days or weeks, cultural institutions need to find ways of responding in the timelines that they would afford to any requests that they receive from nondisabled people.

The heavy front door

When visiting the institution, we brought up a known accessibility problem in the institution, also mentioned in the report: the second door. While the front door is automated and slides open when a person moves in, the second door is: heavy, metal, and remains shut. This door became a symbol for how this cultural institution treated access. In our meetings with the directors of finance, communications, education, artistic research, our fellowship advisors and a fellow researcher — we talked about the door. We discussed how it is heavy, and how we too, people who are not yet physically disabled and usually open doors easily, struggle to open this one. As MELT we too discussed this door at length. We thought about taking one of our wedge artworks from our work "Rituals against barriers" (MELT, 2020–21) that reads "Access is Friction", or "No Assimilation" and to slide it under the door as a push towards accessibility. Wasn't it as simple as putting a wedge? We suggested doing this in one meeting and then we learned, no, we cannot, the *fire report — haven't you read the fire report?* The fire report says that a wedge is dangerous because if there is a fire the door needs to be able to easily close. *That's why* no one has done anything. *That's why* the door is still closed. It is because of a possible fire.

Figure 2: Six wooden and resin wedges are arranged in a group, some are positioned upright, others keeled over on the ground. Text on some of them is readable and says: WELCOME, ACCESS IS FRICTION, NO ASSIMILATION. The text is dark and slightly irregular, singed into the wood with a woodburner. Black paper letters that have dried within a resin wedge are not readable.

Note: Larger version of Figure 2 available here.

When we left this cultural institution in February the door was still closed, and we left too tired to do anything about it. In late March, when we returned to give a final presentation on ACCESS SERVER, Ren was joining from the institution in person and Iz was joining online. One of the first people who noticed Ren at the institute was a director who anxiously, briskly and nervously before saying even hello brought up that THEY WERE WORKING ON THE DOOR. He saw the accessibility report, and he wanted *Ren to know* that the door was being addressed. There is a group working on it, they are researching and doing price estimates. Again after the talk that same evening, this director went to say goodbye to Ren after the presentation, repeating that "Oh, you know why we couldn't open the door before? It was a fire code thing, *not us*, it's the fire code, *that* is why we haven't fixed the door yet." Then he literally walked out the door.

The second heavy metal door in this institution became a symbol for the many barriers and the barrier guilt that must be undone while creating the conditions where a frictional project like ACCESS SERVER can flourish. The amount of barrier guilt that was expressed without any responsibility being taken or assigned for making this door accessible, we take to represent a fraction of the infrastructural access making work that needs to be attended to so that anti-assimilationist access is possible at this institution and others. For the design of ACCESS SERVER this teaches us that there is a likelihood of institutional workers responding to access request e-mails while processing their own barrier guilt.

The readiness with which institutional workers brought up the fire code regulations showed that commitments to issues of safety are possible within cultural institutions. At this cultural institution, fire code regulations are well communicated across hierarchies, measures for safety are implemented consequentially and prioritized over other issues, and checks around the up keeping of these measures are performed. What if access was cared for similarly and the existing guidelines around disability access were similarly present in the ways institutional workers operated? When fire code compliance was brought up as complicating access making at the institution, one question was remarkably forgotten: what if a disabled person who needs to escape from a fire cannot open the door that is supposed to keep nondisabled others safe from this same fire?

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Shut doors, open conversations, our disabled exhaustion and cultural institutional access

Throughout our experience of implementing, discussing, being in and working alongside this particular Dutch cultural institution we have learned a lot about cultural institutional structures that maintain allistic (non autistic) and nondisabled patterns of meetings, production and timelines. What initially began as a more traditional relationship of a fellow to an institution transformed into a much messier process where access into the cultural institution was granted to us through fragments: meetings, moments of identification when disabled people working within the institution would secretly come out to us and tell us about their experiences, moments of harsh ableism expressed from some higher up employees, moments of transformation when one worker said "we should pay disabled people to do this work, and we should hire them too, they'll understand things we might not understand", moments of being reached out to by institutional workers who just learned of our work months after our fellowship ended, and more. To summarize our experience at this institution isn't possible because the experience itself was multiple: enraging and joyful, silencing and communication mode finding.

Leaving this cultural institution, questions remain about the feasibility of partnership building that may lead to more access for our bodyminds (Price, 2015) into spaces like this institution. We had many experiences that felt like it was possible to discuss, access, present and research, and we had at least the same number of other experiences where access was not granted and being in spaces was possible for just a bit, or partially, and lead to exhaustion after masking for too long. ACCESS SERVER as we have dreamed it to be would be a project that would serve us and help us to prevent these realities of exhaustion that we left this institution experiencing.

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Outlook towards making ACCESS SERVER a reality

During our fellowship and in this paper, we discuss the concepts behind ACCESS SERVER and the resistances that we met when introducing these concepts to a European cultural institution. In this section, we give insight into the process of making ACCESS SERVER an actionable server and discuss some of the practical-technical questions that arise.

ACCESS SERVER is many things, amidst them, it is a technical project including technical practices. In this project we are engaging technical questions as they cross open source technologies, financial infrastructures and im/possibilities of making anonymous.

To let fellow disabled people know about our project, we have made a trailer to explain the inner workings of the project. This trailer for ACCESS SERVER can be visited in two places, our Web site http://meltionary.com/accessserver.html and on PeerTube

https://tube.systerserver.net/c/access_server/videos. PeerTube is a peer-to-peer video sharing platform that we were invited to engage with by Systerserver, Anarchaserver and Lever Burns — three feminist technology collectives working to set up non-big-tech online platforms for trans*feminist projects. In collaboration with these trans*feminist server projects, we began to unfold the possibilities of working with accessibility while centring what we as disabled people need from technical tools.
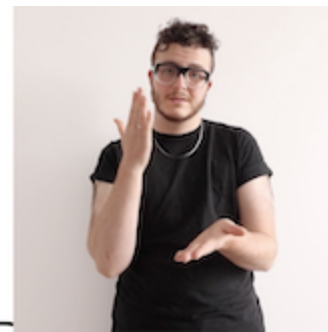
Figure 3: A screenshot from the trailer for Access Server is shown. Closed cations are enabled. The slide reads "Access Server: an e-mail server that anonymizes collects and financially compensates access requests that disabled people send towards institutions." The captions read "ACCESS SERVER works to disrupt systemic ableism". In the right top corner of the image, a small video of Ren, a white trans*masculine person is shown and they are signing in ASL.

Note: Larger version of Figure 3 available here.

Questioning what technical-financial structures are needed for this project, we are still working on how to hold and distribute money. As freelancers working under the financial laws of Germany, we are limited by not being registered as a non-for-profit, which means that we can only pay out 20€ per e-mail if we collaborate with a non-for-profit organization such as a cultural institution, or a group of institutions acting as financial collaborators and holding/paying out fees. As described earlier, a long-term collaboration has so far proven to be very difficult, so we are currently searching for ways outside of institutional partnerships.

A third technical facet of our project relates to possibilities of anonymity with e-mails and of refusing to disclose disability as the only way to be granted access in any space. We follow Sara Ahmed and her work around complaint to understand the politics, risks and possibilities of complaining as a tool against injustice. Complaining can be a way of interrupting ableism as usual, and can expose the ableism of

institutions towards understanding and changing what Ahmed calls institutional mechanics within ableist structures: to understand "what is perpetually justified and reproduced by those who are enabled by that structure" [15]. By triangulating complaint, request and anonymity as interrelated practices of ACCESS SERVER, we consider complaining as a tool that transforms each institution that has been engaged by ACCESS SERVER. ACCESS SERVER anonymizes e-mails coming from the server so that disabled people e-mailing do not get penalized for asking for access.

We practice anonymity in this project to protect disabled people against access hostility (Samuels, 2021). ACCESS SERVER aims to reduce barriers to asking for access in the first place: like wondering if you're the only one asking for access, or complying with forms of masking that the nondisabled world asks of you constantly and by pushing back against the separation and isolation that disabled people face (Price, 2009) by anonymously linking up our access requests. In the instance of a disabled person meeting the institution, anonymity can not always be completely secured, however ACCESS SERVER pushes out the timeline to create space to determine if showing up disabled at the institution will pose a risk. The anonymity that ACCESS SERVER can provide may differ depending on what kinds of access is needed and how big the context is (visiting a small gallery in a small town might make for more difficult anonymization than asking a big museum in the capital about their access practices). In this case we anonymize e-mails to protect disabled people e-mailing so that we can choose to respond to whatever negative or not response that might come back before venturing to put our bodies into otherwise hostile situations.

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Conclusion: Access dreaming, ACCESS SERVER and accessible presents

To conclude this paper, we thank you for reading, dreaming and thinking along with us and offer a summary of the discussed themes.

ACCESS SERVER is an e-mail server that acts as an intermediary between disabled people asking for access and institutional workers. ACCESS SERVER understands and employs disability "as a collective political experience of world-building and dismantling" [16], and pushes for institutions to become more accessible so that other, more accessible worlds can be dreamed of and built. ACCESS SERVER produces an archive of access requests that builds on and extends on the anti-assimilationist work that crip technoscience brings forth, with the plan of instantiating more radical accessible presents and futures. In this paper we have detailed conceptualizations of access, dreaming practices, disability, ableism, as well as direct and indirect discrimination that the project works with, also to provide terms to untangle and conceptualize complex experiences related to inaccessibility that disabled people face when working with or trying to enter European cultural institutions. By offering insights into our experiences working with a large cultural institution in the Netherlands, we discuss obstacles and possibilities of access making in practice. We identify inaccessible and intransparent decision making practices, overall lack of engagement, and barrier guilt as core barriers to partnership building with institutions and analyze take-aways that inform the design of ACCESS SERVER to (en)counter these issues. Here, we point out the need to study ableism in cultural institutions further. We consider what would be needed to build bridges to cultural workers so that they can appraoch accessibility with more possibility rather than with foreclosure before they have even began. In the context of the institution that we worked with, ACCESS SERVER and the ideas behind it sparked conversations, encouraged people to share their experiences of encountering ableism within institutions, and brought up what we have called barrier guilt: the defensive stance that some (presumably) nondisabled institutional workers take towards access requests when they know something could be done towards making access and yet don't act upon that knowledge, which is often accompanied by expressed ableist sentiments. Notably, ACCESS SERVER is still in the conceptualizing and prototyping phase, which means that all of the experiences, reactions and responses to this project were built on *the idea that disabled people could ask for accountability and access* and particularly on *the idea that disabled people would be paid 20€* and not that any of this has happened (yet).

When this project will be in full disability justice motion towards access which is love, (*cf.*, Wong, *et al.*, 2019) there are many desired effects that we can for-feel, -sound, -envision, -see, -vibrate towards unfolding. We vibrate towards futures where ACCESS SERVER pays people for our ongoing labor that is presently not yet recognized as labor. We foresee futures where cultural institutions plan for access needs in every funding application, every budget, every exhibition plan and every event. We envision futures where accessibility is centered and that barriers towards being together are in a creative and caring way considered ahead of time and resolved or reduced. We sound into futures where multiple points of accessing information in cultural institutions is practiced. And we feel into futures where disability justice is centered as cultural practice.

As a next step, we continue our search for funding to realize ACCESS SERVER as a running server. We are looking forward to re-directing your access requests. ▣

About the authors

MELT (Ren Loren Britton and Iz Paehr) study and experiment with shape-shifting processes as they meet technologies, sensory media and pedagogies in a warming world. 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. Melting as a kaleidoscope like phenomena touches upon multiple topics at once: climate change, the potential for political reformulations, change over time and material transformation. MELT shares work in the forms of videos, installations, websites, lectures, workshops.
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Notes

1. Cultural institutions work for the conservation, promotion and interpretation of cultural, artistic and scientific knowledges. In Europe, many of these institutions — for example museums, libraries, community centers, heritage sites and more — are funded by nation states. As such, they are set up "for the public" which makes it crucial to ask which groups of people are included in this imaginary of the public and which are not.

2. Campbell, 2009, p. 5.

3. Kollodzieyski, 2020, p. 4.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Kollodzieyski, 2020, p. 5.

6. Hamraie and Fritsch, 2019, p. 10.

7. Hamraie and Fritsch, 2019, p. 2.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Hamraie and Fritsch, 2019, p. 2.

10. Hamraie and Fritsch, 2019, p. 10.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Hamraie and Fritsch, 2019, p. 10.

13. Hamraie and Fritsch, 2019, p. 23.

14. Many disabled people do live in care facilities. A recent project that documents the abuse that many disabled people endure in these places and that calls for their long term abolishment is #AbleismusTötet — #AbleismKills: https://ableismus.de/toetet/de. The non-disabled imaginary of the disabled person as living in a care facility does not acknowledge the histories and presents of resistance against the often ableist conditions under which these facilities are run.

15. Ahmed, 2021, p. 310.

16. Hamraie and Fritsch, 2019, p. 12.

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