Stills of our liquid times
An essay towards collecting today’s intangible cultural heritage

Hester Dibbits and Marlous Willemsen

In this essay we want to introduce a new programme that we have just embarked on. It seeks to develop intangible cultural heritage methodology and is introduced in this publication as it aims to also offer handles for museal collecting strategies. The programme investigates the development of the heritage field – in particular that of intangible cultural heritage, and including cultural-historical museums – as a shared public space in which contemporary formations are present and represented towards collecting present-day social repertoires. A laboratory in which we may have to let go of items that are disappearing or losing their use or relevance, and in which collecting is a multifaceted act of negotiating meanings and prompting mutual understanding.

Mixophilia

“We” are changing. Since the 1990s, ever more people have moved to and within Europe, and they are more and more different from each other. They come from many different places, and have as many reasons for their migration as they have expectations of the places they go to, and (virtual) ways to keep in touch with the rest of the world. Our daily lives imply living with difference and searching for sameness. At work and at school, in the underground and in the park, individuals constantly negotiate their

1 | Vertovec 2007.
common modes of interaction\textsuperscript{2} – if they have not entrenched. They have to find new common points of reference, since institutions that seemed secure forever are losing their capacities to serve us as such. Times are changing so quickly that new social forms cannot even solidify anymore.

Our times have become “liquid”, as Zygmunt Bauman puts it.\textsuperscript{3} In liquid times, he recognizes the coinciding tendencies of mixophobia and mixophilia:

“’Mixophobia’ manifests itself in the drive towards islands of similarity and sameness amidst the sea of variety and difference. […] The attraction of a ‘community of sameness’ is that of an insurance policy against the risks with which the daily life in a poly-vocal world is fraught.”\textsuperscript{4}

But the more people socialize with others “like them”, in venues ranging from gated communities to ethnic sports clubs, “the more they are likely to unlearn the art of negotiating shared meanings and an agreeable modus convivendi.”\textsuperscript{5}

In this context we are in dire need of shared space. Especially in cities, where opportunities self-perpetually attract ever new strangers and thus repel others or make them withdraw, we should create open, inviting and hospitable public spaces as laboratories of mixophilia to prompt mutual understanding. How could the heritage field (heritage institutions, museums, but also individuals with their traditions and ritual repertoires) shape such mix-longing public spaces? The Amsterdam Southeast-based organization Imagine IC (see text box) and the Research Group of the Reinwardt Academy for Cultural Heritage intend to explore this question in a series of events entitled \textit{Immaterieel erfgoed met prik}.\textsuperscript{6} The title translates as \textit{Intangible Cultural Heritage with Pop} and connotes an inciting look on intangible cultural heritage. In this article the project will be called \textit{Pop}. \textit{Pop} was initiated by Imagine IC as a follow-up to an earlier series that investigated new theory and methodology for participatory heritage

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{2} Wessendorf 2010.
\bibitem{3} Bauman 2007.
\bibitem{4} Bauman 2007, pp. 87-88.
\bibitem{5} Ibidem.
\bibitem{6} Within the Research Group, \textit{Immaterieel erfgoed met prik} is part of the research programme of Hester Dibbits.
\end{thebibliography}
Imagine IC

Imagine IC “pioneers the heritage of contemporary living together”. It is based in Amsterdam Southeast, a 1960s metropolitan extension. Upon the Surinamese independence in 1975, considerable numbers of people of Surinamese background came to inhabit the area. Until today, it has daily received new people from all over the world. In the house that Imagine IC shares with the local branch of the Amsterdam public library, young people from the neighbourhood and the city challenge concepts of who “we” are.

The Imagine IC network explores the modes and codes of the urban young. Imagine IC is co-financed by the city of Amsterdam, which requires the institution to contribute to the intangible heritage debate in the Netherlands (which is urgent, given the ratification of the UNESCO convention) from the perspective of youngsters in the big city. Their social fabric consists of situational communities that are (both in the real world and online) composed of people from everywhere. The young, especially in urban environments, are expert inventors of the social grammars that such communities require. Imagine IC seeks to raise awareness of the significance of today’s lifestyles as a sneak preview of tomorrow’s society, and to innovate the concept and corpus of “our” heritage.

The network creates digital productions of image and sound. The online collection is embedded in the collections of the Amsterdam City Archives and the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision. The exhibitions, as well as the education and knowledge programmes, reflect on communities and heritage in a changing world. The 2013-2014 winter exhibition is called Panna’s and Akka’s. It presents the skills of street soccer players; the scenes and sounds of the squares they share with each other and everybody else in the city.

See more: http://www.imagineic.nl

practice. It started with Echt Nederlands (Really Dutch) in 2010, in which

7 | Immaterieel erfgoed met prik is co-funded by the Mondriaan Fund. The earlier series was supported by the DOEN Foundation and the Mondriaan Fund.
Dutchness was discussed as an ongoing act of negotiation. Subsequently, the theory of “super-diversity” was explored in relation to its meaning for the arrangement of the “negotiating table”. The Netherlands receives an ever-increasing number of new arrivals. They differ from each other to an ever-increasing extent. Will they all join in the talks? And if they must, how will this take shape?

**Pop**

In the programme *Pop* Imagine IC and the Reinwardt Academy Research Group wish to investigate the shaping of mix-longing public spaces by means of a programme that itself aims to be such a space. The programme will consist of a series of five public meetings in which items from the wide repertoire of present-day society are to be annotated by a super-diverse company of actors, of practitioners and carriers, in the cities and in the country, of various ages, heritage thinkers and heritage workers, policy advisers, and students from heritage disciplines and related fields, like the social sciences and the humanities. The items to be put before them, will be concrete, rather than tactile. They will, for instance, be traditions of commemoration, sounds of the city and party practices. The selection is inspired by current programmes of museums and the cultural heritage field of which Imagine IC and the Reinwardt Academy are themselves part of. The organizers of *Pop* bring them together and the programme can thus be considered as a collecting activity.

But it is not this collection that is the aim of *Pop*. The items, or rather cases, picked by *Pop*’s organizers are merely a starting point towards a next

---

8 | Key speaker was Prof. Dr. Frank Lechner of Emory University, who drew from his then recent book *The Netherlands. Globalization and National Identity*.
9 | VERTOVEC 2007.
10 | The cost of participation in the events will be 10 euros (5 euros for students and freelancers). *Pop* meetings and reports will be brought to the attention of these persons by newsletters. *Pop* counts on networks, such as those around the cases, or: items, that are programmed; and those attracted by the (international) speakers who add to the search for meanings. *Pop* also organizes additional (dinner) events with these speakers. The company, as well as the media to which attention the programme is brought, will also be actors in the process.
collection: of current and new meanings, associations and emotions that are attached to, embedded in and sparked off by the chosen items, and by their annotation. *Pop* thus departs from a broad notion of collecting. It is not considered as one single activity, with a beginning and an end, resulting in a set collection of items. It is thought to be a process of identifying and addressing items, or cultural repertoires. What is more, *Pop* considers collecting as part of a more extensive process consisting of a range of activities, like programming, presenting, annotating, questioning, managing, documenting, constructing and transforming, but also forgetting, abandoning, leaving unnamed and erasing.

In the context of the present publication, we may then wonder which methodologies are to be applied in this activity, what the outcome would be and to what extent this collection – understood as (part of) a process in which a multitude of actors is involved\(^\text{11}\) – could serve as a source of inspiration for cultural-historical museums. The actual trajectory that has been mapped out by Imagine IC and the Reinwardt Academy Research Group, must be understood in the context of the emergence or definition process of intangible heritage practice in the Netherlands. In 2012 the Dutch Minister of Culture ratified the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. In the same year, the city of Amsterdam, a main funder of Imagine IC, requested this small archive/museum of present-day urban youth cultures to make a metropolitan contribution to the Dutch national debate on what intangible cultural heritage is and how it is being dealt with.

**Intangible cultural heritage practice**

In the Netherlands, the definition and methodology of intangible cultural heritage as yet rests strongly on the UNESCO convention. In this, the “community” plays a strong part as a signifier of practices. *Pop* asks: what is a community these days and what can be expected of it in terms of intangible heritage methodology? The Dutch national inventory of intangible cultural heritage counts on active communities to enter the practices they consider important. The inventory has recently been supplemented

\(^{11}\) For a similar, process- and network-oriented view on collecting, see *Van Mensch/Meijer-van Mensch* 2011 and *Meijer-van Mensch/Tietmeyer* 2013.
with the crafts of *Staphorster stipwerk*\(^{12}\) and Frisian woodcarving.\(^{13}\) The entries were published by VIE\(^{14}\) and annotated by the remarks that they are part of a long tradition of high-quality Dutch craftwork, and that they are on the verge of extinction. Skills like DJing or street soccer freestyling, both also of great international renown, do not at present run the risk of vanishing and have not been brought to the inventory. Surely they do “have” communities? Do these not really care about their practice? Or do they not care about the list?

*Pop* presumes that our communal daily life determines the definition of intangible cultural heritage, rather than the reverse. If the practice of intangible cultural heritage does not fit us all, it must be made to fit. We propose *Pop* as a series of five experimental collecting trips in our liquid times. Where will we go? To Amsterdam squares where one person might hear the church bells, while another notices the impact of the ball kicked against the gates of the street soccer cage. To the dinner table, where one person is eating so-called forgotten vegetables, which she grew on the roof of her flat, while someone else is having Surinamese *heri heri* to commemorate the Dutch slavery past. Such destinations will be virtual as we envisage the series to be meetings at the premises of Imagine IC. At every meeting, two collective performances will be presented and annotated; practices that can raise and make us understand fundamental issues about present-day communities.

*Pop* collects, but does not have a new collection of items as its main objective. It rather aims to provide handles for making significant heritage choices. Such choices face not only policy makers and heritage professionals, but also the performers of the daily life that is their focus. As joint collectors, we can try and reflect “society”. Or hold a mirror up to it. We can try to capture the spirit of the times for future generations. Or wish to inspire or turn around their future. We could collect practices because

---

12 | *Staphorst* is a small town towards the northeast of the Netherlands; its *stipwerk* is a craft by which cloth is decorated with painted-on dots. Friesland is a northern region (province).


14 | VIE is the Dutch Centre for Folklore and Intangible Cultural Heritage. This institution was appointed by the Dutch government to coordinate and boost the activities to be developed for the implementation of the convention.
they are widely shared, or to make them shareable. *Pop* intends to be an exercise of collecting by programming, or, more precisely, collecting by annotating. Each time, the programme will stop the time around living repertoires (i.e. create stills) by providing them with meanings at that particular moment, together with the group of shareholders present.

**A MUSEAL CHALLENGE**

The practice of institutional heritage came up at a time when the world looked very different from now. *Pop* departs from the conviction that both heritage institutions and our strategies require constant challenge in order to retain significance in society. As is shown by several publications from recent years, and also by the contributions in this volume, many cultural-historical, ethnographic and ethnological museums are aware of the need to reinvent themselves.¹⁵ People, goods and information are moving around the world with unprecedented speed, which leads to a changing society, to feelings of uncertainty and a desire to hold on to something. The enduring task of museums lies in their addressing of the people who are “here”, their feelings and their longings.

Museums reinvent themselves by creating space in the permanent exhibition area for the history of the museum, or to amplify on the origins of particular collections to ever-changing audiences. One example would be the Netherlands Open Air Museum (Arnhem), which explains in the new permanent exhibition space of regional dress how “their” collection of traditional Surinamese dress was once considered a mismatch in the collection, donated to another museum on permanent loan, and recovered only recently. Other institutions pay visits to big city areas to collect heritage of newcomers. They dynamize their collections by regarding (or having regarded) with new eyes collection pieces which already are in their possession. And they call into question traditional oppositions such as popular/elite, high/low culture, Western/non-Western, self/other, local/global, for instance by resorting to notions like super-diversity or transnational relations, or by departing from lifestyle groups (“the post-modern”, the “post-materialists”) instead of groups formed on the basis of socio-eco-

¹⁵ For the Netherlands, see for instance ODING 2011.
nomic background, age or ethnicity when drawing up their policies on collection building and marketing.

Some historical, ethnographic and folk museums opt for strictly thematic presentations, aimed at a more diverse audience. Not only the Netherlands Open Air Museum, but also the Bokrijk Museum – the largest open-air museum of Belgium – and the Westphalian Open-Air Museum Detmold provide examples of such an approach. They focus on universal practices or on traditional anthropological themes such as celebration and commemoration, death and burial, connected with practices or rituals. Quite a few urban and regional museums choose to focus on the identity of the city or region where their premises are located, responding to processes of localization and regionalization, which, in their turn, can be regarded as responses to processes of globalization. Following this approach, the new Frisian museum presents “the” story of Friesland and the Amsterdam Museum discloses the “DNA” of the capital. This approach implies that choices to acquire objects are always guided by the question whether the object fits the profile of what has been designated or acknowledged as “typical”.

A trend seen in practically all museums is the attempt to stimulate all the senses and emotions of the visitors. This is reflected in a shift from object-related presentations to experience, and accompanied by a new interest in intangible cultural heritage. Festivals, rituals, crafts, stories and songs: they all count. Folk museums, but also associations sometimes have long traditions of collecting and performing folk culture through fieldwork, living history, re-enactments and first-person interpretations. This is an approved method to deal with nostalgia for an imagined past (the invention of tradition). At the same time, this approach might cause feelings of discomfort, for to what extent do such presentations contribute to critical reflections on oversimplified world views, with all too clear-cut images of group cultures? Should museums try to satisfy the quest for nostalgia with experiences that appeal to all five senses, or should they take a more critical stance?

16 | See Kania-Schütz 2009.
NEW COMMUNITIES

An example in this context would be the small-scale exhibition *Van Huis Uit* (lit. “from the home”; fig. “by origin”), which was shown in 2007 at Imagine IC as a continuation of a research project into twentieth-century migrant interiors. One of the displays on show at this exhibition was an installation made by the British sociologist and theatre maker Michael McMillan in collaboration with designer Remco Swart, presenting a living room of a fictitious migrant family of mixed origin, full of colourful souvenirs and homely sounds. At the opening, the room was blessed by means of an initiation rite performed by a Winti priestess, which made for some liveliness, but which was not annotated in detail at the time. To what extent does such a ritual contribute to the formation of shared space, instead of just being an addition to the fun at that particular moment?

The aforementioned question has been gaining urgency in the Netherlands since the signing of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which forced museums to reflect on the role they should play at its implementation. The UNESCO convention was drawn up out of concern for the fact that all over the world, traditions, rituals and craft skills might disappear as a result of globalization processes. Countries that fall under the convention are not only obliged to build an inventory of the “various elements of the intangible cultural heritage present in [their territories], with the participation of communities,

---

19 | The research project started in 2003 as a collaborative project of the Meertens Institute (Royal Academy of Arts and Sciences) and the Institute for the Social Sciences (University of Amsterdam). It was co-funded by the Dutch Organisation for Scientific Research. The aim of the project was to gain a better insight into the relationship between material culture and the construction of social-cultural identities, especially migrant and ethnic identities. The empirical research question was how migrants and their descendants, while furnishing their dwellings, deal with their migration background and the cultural repertoires from their countries of origin.

20 | Winti is an Afro-Surinamese religion.

21 | McMillan 2009. See also Dibbits 2008, which discusses the choices that were made during the making of the exhibition *Van Huis Uit* regarding the representation of different migrant groups. Cf. Walle 2013.
groups and relevant non-governmental organizations”. The State parties must also “take the necessary measures to ensure the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage present in [their territories].” But what exactly does “safeguarding” mean? Which task lies ahead for cultural-historical museums? And what does this imply for the practice of collecting?

Both before and after the signing of the convention, there has been fervent debate in the Netherlands, like in other countries. Why would one arrange for traditions and rituals to be safeguarded, by the authorities or otherwise? Is it at all possible to collect practices, repertoires of action? And if one would and could, which ones should be selected? This last question is not insignificant, considering that recommendations for the inventory are to be made bottom-up, by a (representative of a) community. Is the idea of a society made up of several communities with spokespersons who lobby for “the collective” and their supposed “cultural property” not out of date? These are the types of questions that have been put to the fore and explored at an academic level by various European ethnologists and social anthropologists.

Outspoken Unspoken

Pop wants to face these challenges together with the museums. It will take as its focal points a series of topicalities from the museum world in

---

22 | UNESCO Convention 2003, Article 11.
23 | Ibidem.
24 | See e.g. Hafstein 2007, who argues that intangible heritage “objectifies the practices and expressions of human communities”, and in this way “makes community itself subject to conservation in the face of its purportedly steady decline in the modern world” (p. 93). Cf. Maguet 2011. An introduction to the debate about the Convention in the Netherlands can be found in Dibbits/Elpers/Margry/Van der Zeijden 2011. For a critical analysis of the idea of communities as given homogeneous entities, existing of people with shared backgrounds, ideas and needs, see Stengs 2012. The Cultural Property Research Group of the university Göttingen (URL: http://cultural-property.uni-goettingen.de/, date: 10.10.2013) investigates the construction of cultural property and “shared heritage” within the context of cultural, economic, juridical and societal discourses. See e.g. Bendix/Eggert/Peselmann 2013.
Amsterdam and in the Netherlands. For the trial episode of 20th June 2013 the widely programmed commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery by the Netherlands was chosen. Cultural activist Mercedes Zandwijken presented her “new tradition” of the Keti Koti Tables (grafted on the Jewish Seider table). Invitees “from black and white communities” are to share a fixed menu of dishes and customs of the descendants of enslaved people, while having a moderated conversation about their shared slavery past.\textsuperscript{25} In addition, Pop programmed jazz singer Denise Jannah, who had given a performance at the unveiling of the Dutch slavery monument in the Amsterdam Oosterpark in 2002. Before an audience of 85 people interested in the slavery past, either for personal or professional reasons, she answered, by singing, Pop’s question which songs reminded her of that past.

What did we collect on 20th June 2013? We enjoyed and discussed the currently successful Keti Koti Table as a tradition that intends to share old stories with new people, and wants to create new ones in the process. We listened to well-known and lesser-known songs about life at the plantations. A key observation inspired by these items, or cases, was: which stories did we not hear?\textsuperscript{26} We collected the insight that messages hidden in songs or knowledge embedded in stories of the descendants of enslaved people are not always heartily shared with “just anyone”. They feel pursued by a sustained urgency to keep things among themselves and by the conviction that traditions will change fundamentally once they become public knowledge or get canonized. Given this reluctance to share, cultural practices and their communities remain exclusive. This information also handed us the question whether this could be the very reason why new traditions, which might be suitable for sharing with “others”, like the Keti Koti Table, are being invented.

\textsuperscript{25} See also URL: http://www.ketikotitafel.nl (date: 11.10.2013). Keti koti means: breaking the chains.

\textsuperscript{26} We would like to thank Markus Balkenhol (Meertens Institute), who will soon defend his PhD thesis at the University of Amsterdam, carrying the provisional title Memory Work: Trauma, Truth and Slavery in the Netherlands. In every episode, Pop will invite a panel of two commentators of the practices presented. They will try to activate the participating audience into further annotation. Markus Balkenhol was a commentator on 20 June, next to Hester Dibbits, who is the permanent commentator in each event of the Pop series.
What could these insights mean for a collecting methodology for the commemoration of the slavery past? Would it have to content itself with an invented pars pro toto? Would this entail the public space we are looking for? For every episode, Pop will invite a keynote speaker, or keynote “questioner”, from (far) outside the field of Dutch heritage. On 20th June 2013, literary scientist Saidiya Hartman27 presented her search for the untold, sometimes even unspeakable stories of enslaved people themselves; stories that are absent from the archives of traders and slave owners. Hartman explores the role of imagination in order to complete the story that has been written so far.28 In doing so, she attaches importance to our awareness of our motives and objectives. Commemoration does not suffice as long as there is still a world to gain for the descendants of slaves.

**Emotion networks**

The stories the heirs of enslaved people could tell us, and would be willing to share with us, must not be collected for the sake of a poly-vocal story per se, as art for art’s sake. They should serve as a starting point to explain, and especially improve their place in society. This was also Mercedes Zandwijken’s concern. Hartman and Zandwijken share the same indignation toward the slavery past and its contemporary consequences, as well as the same ambition to make it socially fertile. They are both part of an emotion community around (the commemoration of) the slavery past. This is a community with wide-ranging emotions. It also includes, e.g., those of a participant in a Keti Koti Table29, who felt irritated by the emotions of pain and guilt that dominated the event, and drew the attention of the audience to the difficulties the owners must have suffered controlling the slaves in the tropical heat or at mid-sea. These are the sort of diverse emotion communities Pop will keep researching in the next episodes. Attention will be given to explicit and strong emotions that are part of the practices that Pop...

---

27 | Saidiya Hartman is a full professor at Columbia University, New York. Her publications include Scenes of Subjection (1997) and Lose Your Mother (2007).
29 | Organized by Keti Koti Table at 5 June 2013 in the Amsterdam City Archives. A similar contribution was made at 20 June at Imagine IC, by one of the participants in the Pop event.
puts before its groups of stakeholders. But also the more moderate meanings as well as implicit feelings count, as much as those that are evoked and stirred up by the passions of others.

On 28 September 2013, *De Volkskrant*, one of the leading national newspapers in the Netherlands, published a full-page article on the noise from street soccer squares in the city of Nijmegen (mid-east Netherlands). The council had barred one square with concrete blocks to keep out street soccer players, or rather the noise they made and that of their ball. The outraged residents form part of an emotion network around a current metropolitan sound, namely that of the skill of street soccer. Many others love that same sound. *Pop* examined sounds and sound networks in November 2013, in collaboration with the Amsterdam Museum, which recently opened an installation with the sound of Dam Square in 1875, 1935 and today. At the gathering, there was a presentation of two city sounds: the ringing of the church bells (carillon) – partly because the Dutch Carillon Society is preparing a “nomination” for the national inventory of intangible cultural heritage – and the sound of street soccer, which has been registered, studied, and exhibited in Imagine IC’s project *Panna’s and Akka’s*.31

Rocky (Roxanne) Hehakaija and Edje (Edward) van Gils are street soccer players. They are inventors of impressive tricks – and of the latest trends and codes of the city squares. In these squares, it does not matter who you are, but what you can do. Playing soccer like billiards, for example, in the street soccer cages of the city. The sound of it is in the street artists’ bodies, as it were. Just like bell-ringing, street soccer is a skill with a sonic effect that might either annoy one or make one feel at home. Within the framework of their joint implementation of the UNESCO convention, VIE and the Dutch Cultural Participation Fund (FCP)32 highlighted the motif of the “craft” (from the UNESCO convention) in 2013-2014. In a

---

30 | **HAlFMAN 2013.**

31 | URL: http://www.imagineic.nl/cases/pannas-en-akkas (date: 11.10.2013). The street soccer soundscapes will be part of Imagine IC’s formal collection. URL: http://www.imagineic.nl/collectie (date: 11.10.2013).

defining sense, they attached a material result to this craft. *Pop* questions this definition by using street soccer and bell-ringing to put on the agenda skills with a non-material effect. Within the scope of *Pop*, intangible cultural heritage is to be conceived as a repertoire entrenching itself in the body (= embodied knowledge), to be then passed on in practice, or, as ethnologist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett puts it so aptly, by just doing it. 33

Figure 1: Edward van Gils showing off his iconic skill (Photo: Guus Dubbelman © Photographer and Imagine IC. From: Imagine IC collection and part of Panna’s and Akka’s exhibition).
Figure 2: Edward van Gils and Rocky Hehakaija (right) at the opening of Panna’s and Akka’s, 19 September 2013 (Photo: Jeremy Paesch © Imagine IC).

Figure 3: The audience at the opening – and of the Intangible Cultural Heritage series. In the Intangible Heritage series, the role of the audiences as participants in the process of “collecting”, of annotating intangible cultural heritage, of creating new meanings, is important (Photo: Jeremy Paesch © Imagine IC).
In *Pop*, intangible cultural heritage is something you do, so that it can become part of a network. In other words, something that is not just done by you, but by other people, too. But is intangible cultural heritage also something that is done *to* you, and to other people like you? In spring 2014, there will be a small exhibition about religion in the city on the library floor of the Imagine IC house. It will be prepared during the annual project week of high school students from Amsterdam Southeast. In this expo, students will talk about how they were affected by certain pieces from the Biblical Museum of Amsterdam. What did these items “do” to them? The Biblical Museum and the Amsterdam Museum took the joint initiative to choose *believing in the city* as the theme for Amsterdam heritage institutions in the spring of 2014. Imagine IC will elaborate this theme in the Southeast area. Here, belief is a very topical subject, which does not stay “behind the front door”, as they say. Like in some other parts of the city, belief is gaining in presence in the public domain. But how exactly is it experienced and shared? Believing is seen as “typically intangible”, but is it as intangible as believed to be?
In June 2014, *Pop* will examine the relationship between intangible cultural heritage and materiality. The definition of intangible cultural heritage includes matter (see the UNESCO treaty), but how does the one relate to the other? Is matter the result of intangible cultural heritage (like with crafts)? Attribute? Carrier? Religious objects in museums tell recognizable stories. Face veils and minarets evoke many responses. In *Pop*, this will be discussed with Birgit Meyer. Her research project *Icons of Religion* studies religious images in the big, super-diverse city and the stories they tell: the stories of believers themselves and those of the perceptions of others. Together with museums, *Pop* wonders what would happen if religious objects and images were no longer shown (just) for their art-historical or cultural-historical significance, but would instead be stripped of this shock absorber to give free rein to current religious feelings. Might old Dutch Bibles, for instance, appeal to new believers? Or what repertoires of emotions and practices do contemporary belief networks contribute to the religious heritage of the city?

**Live and let die**

How could networks such as these be involved in collecting activities? Or how could the famous party scenes of Amsterdam, e.g., be tempted into having their practice established as heritage or as part of a museum collection? In the dance scenes of the city, the community only exists on the floor, but these fluid “formations” too embody rituals, skills and much more that can be understood as intangible cultural heritage. How could we possibly honour this when situational communities are not easily enticed into making bottom-up proposals to a national inventory? Which is not surprising, by the way, since people are bound to have totally different things on their mind at parties like *Sensation* or *Latin Village*. Could all of us together come to some sort of acknowledgement of the urgency to collect? And what could be the nature of such an urgency and the collection process as long as dance culture is still alive and kicking? Does the

34 | HOUTMAN/MEYER 2013.
35 | MEYER 2009.
36 | Megafestations of contemporary party cultures in Amsterdam. See also URL: http://www.sensation.com (date: 11.10.2013).
dance network not generate a collection of its own in its current repertoire? And if so, could we record this by means of (continuous) annotation?

In addition to the question how to involve contemporary networks and how we should do more with those than acknowledge their repertoires, Pop would like to raise the issue in how far collecting activities should be focused on “safeguarding” anything at all, even in a dynamic sense. In a Third Text article from 2000, the Indian thinker and cultural activist Rus-tom Bharucha opposes the tendency to store everything in museums. He challenges the heritage world to consider a radical “politics of erasure”.37 In her book Intangible Heritage and the Museum (2012), Marilena Alivizatou calls this a highly valuable initiative. According to Alivizatou, the creative potential of destruction and renewal can be considered in relation not only to physical objects and sites, but also to intangible culture. Is it true, Alivizatou wonders, that modern processes of economic and technological development should only be looked at as a threat to heritage as process? As the notion of pure and authentic traditions should be questioned, and synthesis and renewal are to be considered as a key part of cultural vitality, globalization can be considered as an opportunity for cross-cultural innovation and fertilization. She concludes: “[Yet] the creative potential of destruction and transformation emerges as a possible alternative framework for negotiating ideas of identity and contemporary engagements with the past.”38 In the international museal practice she researched, however, this approach appears to have been adopted or otherwise addressed to a very limited extent only.

While Bharucha raises the question if the museum should be erased, Pop intends to investigate, in June 2015, what the result would be if we were to elaborate the idea of erasure and transformation with respect to the collecting of intangible cultural heritage.39 One of the results might be an initial idea for a collaborative museological project which focuses on an investigation of cultural practices that have died out or have been erased (do we regret?), or that some of us would rather not safeguard for various

---

37 | Bharucha 2000.
38 | Alivizatou 2012, p. 47.
39 | See also Knell 2007, p. 22: “Loss is pervasive, an inevitable product of change, and change is implicit in consumption.”
reasons, its racist or discriminatory character being maybe one of them. The heritage sector seems to have become convinced of the fact that intangible cultural heritage is dynamic. But in how far should or can we try to actively influence this process?

As to this aspect, Pop will trace parallels with de-accessioning practices and policies of museums, but also with the “natural course of decay and evanescence” of living entities. It will lead us into the ongoing debate about the dominant role of professionals, institutions, policy makers and other actors in the field of heritage. If we have the opportunity to act as agents of change, what should we do and what should we not do?

In 2015, Artis Royal Zoo (Amsterdam) will open the doors of the refurnished “Groote Museum” (large museum) of biodiversity. This will also be the year in which the so-called millennium targets must have been met. One of the objectives was a more sustainable environment. This makes for a nice reason to use 2015 as the year in which to direct Pop at a domain of intangible heritage that has hitherto received very little attention, namely the domain of the “knowledge and practices that are connected with nature and the universe” (UNESCO), as well as with the networks they represent.

At a global level, numerous initiatives are taken to preserve animals from extinction. What is more, lost vegetables are grown into being. They were thought to be forgotten, but apparently this was not the case. While nature receives new space in urban wastelands, and beehives are installed on roofs, the city’s residents can see Winti specialists or animal shamans to discuss their problems. For a moment, it appeared as if we had bid farewell to nature, but even in the city – or precisely there? – nature is thought by many to be trendy again. Which repertoires do they add to the collections of our time? Which emotions do they attach to objects that might already have been housed in the collections of museums? Or are their points of reference elsewhere? Are repertoires possibly their own archives? Just like the culture of forgotten vegetables, whose reflection is

---

40 | Cf. the discussion about Black Pete in the Netherlands. Another topic that might be discussed more in depth is the issue of safeguarding traditions and cultural practices which are discriminatory in term of gender (UNESCO seems to have put this issue on the agenda. URL: http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00585 (date: 25.10.2013).

41 | Lowenthal 1985, p. 405, as quoted by Alivizatou 2012, pp. 189-190.
recalled by emotion networks; like the traditions of commemoration of a slavery past in which old and new shareholders retell stories that seemed forgotten, and satisfy new needs. Does “intangible heritage” organize its own storage? And does it sideline museums in the process, or, conversely, does it rely on them?

**A COLLECTION PROCESS AS A SHARED PUBLIC SPACE**

*Pop* is a process that has only just started. It so far mainly consists of questions. The focal point of the project will be the creation of public spaces in which we can get to know and understand people we do not know yet. To that end, *Pop* will gather, present and annotate intangible heritage items from contemporary society, in collaboration with museums and further stakeholders. *Pop # 1*, about traditions of commemoration of the Dutch slavery past, teaches that people are not always willing to share their most meaningful practices with “everybody”, and that the public space might then resort to substitute practices, sometimes using newly invented intangible cultural heritage.

*Pop* regards collecting as a process, and consequently continues its search for ever more insights that transcend the individual cases and could as such offer handles for collecting practices of cultural-historical museums. It is a quest – a collecting programme – set up as a series of public meetings with and on emotion networks around concrete intangible heritage cases. These networks include cultural heritage professionals. The results will be laid down in reports to be published online on the Imagine IC website and in other places. Their usability in museal collecting strategies and their effectiveness as an ingredient in the recipes that museums are creating in order to face the challenges of our liquid times, will be on the test. You are kindly invited to participate in the process.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


Regina Bendix; Aditya Eggert; Arnika Peselmann: Heritage Regimes and the State (Göttingen Studies in Cultural Property, 6). Göttingen 2013 (2nd. rev. ed.).
Hester Dibbits; Sophie Elpers; Peter Jan Margry; Albert van der Zeijden: Volkscultuur en Immaterieel Erfgoed. Almanak bij een actueel debat. Amsterdam 2011.
Jordi Halfman: Sounds of Street Soccer (master thesis University of Amsterdam). Amsterdam 2013.
Léontine Meijer-van Mensch; Elisabeth Tietmeyer (eds.): Participative Strategies in Collecting the Present. Berliner Blätter 63 (2013).