



# **Imagine IC Series**

## Intangible Heritage with “Pop” # 3 with Crispin Paine

A series co-produced with the Reinwardt Academy and funded by the Mondriaan Fund

## Intangible Heritage with Pop # 3 with Crispin Paine Urban Spirits, present-day believing and the things by which we do it June 19th 2014

Since the ratification of the Convention for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage in the Netherlands in 2012, intangible cultural heritage has become the subject of strongly increased attention in this country. In response to this development, Imagine IC and the Reinwardt Academy established the series Intangible Heritage with "Pop". With these series, we aim to produce knowledge on definitions and methodologies of intangible heritage by focusing on daily lives in the big city.

**Hester Dibbits**, Professor of Cultural Heritage at the Reinwardt Academy, put it as follows: "Instead of engaging straightaway in all sorts of procedures to nominate items for the inventory of Dutch traditions and rituals and embarking on initiatives to keep them alive, Imagine IC and the Reinwardt Academy intend to critically investigate alternative ways of addressing intangible cultural heritage in the Netherlands, which includes giving the floor to practices and people that are easily overlooked, for example because the practitioners are less well-organized than others, or because they have other things to bother about. In this series, we will collect two cases for each edition and raise questions while confronting them with each other and with ourselves."

During the first event, Saidiya Hartman (Columbia University) spoke on the traditions of slavery remembrance. One of our findings was that people do not always want to share their rituals with other people. New rituals especially "designed" for new, mixed audiences might be welcomed as a nice alternative, as a "barrier", a shield. In this way, both "old" private rituals for the so-called "ingroup" and "new" public rituals for a diverse audience may exist next to each other. During the second event, Paul Moore (Ulster University) described city sounds as a shared experience and document of our time. In this session we learned that it is not easy to determine which elements are to be labelled as cultural heritage and which not, provided you would want them labelled at all. We concluded that something may be experienced as heritage from the very moment you start labelling it as such, even before having decided which are the actual items to be labelled.

In recent discussions about intangible heritage, UNESCO also urges the safeguarding of ritual practices. It is in this light that the third event with the title Urban Spirits, present-day believing and the things by which we do it tries to explore this theme. Urban spaces have always functioned as cradles and laboratories for religious and spiritual movements. Belief is topical, the city and country are full of ancient and modern religions and spirituality. Furthermore, belief is "typically immaterial". Yet is it really as immaterial as it is believed to be? "Things" play a major role in the practice of beliefs.

The afternoon was set up in its own characteristic way, with a cross-disciplinary dialogue. **Rikko Voorberg**, a Dutch theologian in charge of the so-called "PopUp church" since 2013, chaired the conversations and contemplations. We were invited to observe a private Hindu morning meditation by **Soeroedj Baladien**, followed by a short scene from the theatre play OBIA on Winti culture. Both events served as statements. Dr. Hester Dibbits and **Pooyan Tamimi Arab** (PhD Candidate Social Sciences; Cultural Anthropologist) reflected on and responded to this. What are we talking about when we want to safeguard rituals? How to deal with the private aspects of rituals? Or embodied knowledge? Should

we transform rituals, redesign them to make them shareable? Is the museum the place for the dynamics of the intangible? Can we present the importance of things by showcasing them?

The final speaker, historian and religious heritage expert [Crispin Paine](#) (UCL, UK), internationally known for his books *Godly Things* (2000) and *Religious Objects in Museums* (2013), explored the stories, rituals and emotions of religion. He argues that “religion is essentially about doing- it's not, for most people in the world, primarily about believing things with one's mind, it's primarily about doing things with one's body. And when people do religion, they usually do it with things.”

## 1. Introductions

The afternoon started with a word of welcome by [Marlous Willemsen](#) (director of Imagine IC). She introduced the topic of the afternoon in connection with the exhibition *Believe it or Not*. The presentation on the floor of the Public Library, with which Imagine IC shares its building, was realized with a class of secondary school kids from the Bindelmeer College in Amsterdam Southeast. About the process, Marlous explained: “The students commented on items of religious heritage in both public and private Amsterdam collections, such as the one owned by the people of OBIA whom you will meet shortly. They found that objects that were old and previously unknown to them could appeal to them too, while at the same time they discovered that the items by which they themselves believe are often not yet part of the formal heritage collections in Amsterdam.”

Chair Rikko Voorberg continued by saying that the field of intangible heritage is new to him, while at the same time, once the academic terms have been taken away, it is actually something he knows very well. As a theologian, religion is his “thing”, so to say. The questions about doing religion, feeling it, the emotions and the things involved in doing it, were at the core of the discussions this afternoon. Issues of “matter” were discussed in connection with two religious performances that were presented at the event and led up to a discussion on such issues as: How is religion material? What role do “things” play in the intangible narrative? How can we accommodate for sharing experiences and for additional or new meanings to objects? In museums, religious objects effortlessly tell the story of their meaning to those who recognize them. But how can we imbue their artistic and cultural-historical value with spiritual meaning and preserve this so that it can be shared with a new audience?



Exhibition Believe it or Not, photography Jordi Wallenburg/ Imagine IC

## 2. The religious cases

Soeroedj Baladien started off with a shortened version of his daily ritual called puja. The ritual entails proceedings of lighting up a candle, silent meditation but also chanting and bell sounds. The audience was present as a silent witness of this personal and private moment.

Then the theatre formation Untold performed a scene from the play OBIA. The play is about passing Winti traditions on to new generations along with the objects that support these rituals. You see a teenager living in the Bijlmer. He feels he is “haunted” by spirits that have no meaning to him and therefore frighten him. In the scene performed this afternoon, we met the entity Leba, who cleans the spiritual way. Through the play, the rituals and the meaning of these rituals are explained.

After the performances, the day's host, Rikko Voorberg, invited Soeroedj Baladien, [Desta Deekman](#) and [Vanessa Felter](#) to the stage to discuss what was shown, and also to talk about authentic vs staged. Did we see a performance?

Soeroedj Baladien: “You saw a puja. I do this every morning. For me it's like cleaning my desk before I get to work. The little bowl is made of crockery, which is breakable: it represents our body; the cotton is light and white and represents our soul; ghee is in milk – you cannot see it but it is there – like God. The bell is the house. Every step in the puja shows what the aim of your live is, who you are, what your goal is. The ritual you saw is the same as the one I do it at home. It did not feel different for me, knowing you were all watching. I go inside myself and forget my surroundings.”





Desta Deekman & Vanessa Felter: "OBIA is about our culture, about Winti. It is a story about opening up to your culture. Not to be afraid of the unknown. If you don't know who you are, you don't know what your path should be. We included the rituals in our play. In general, the community is pleased with this effort to find new ways to spread the knowledge, though it has also been suggested that we should keep it private. Indeed there are parts of rituals that we choose not to show in the theatre because they are too private."

Rikko Voorberg: "So what did we see, and maybe even feel? One ritual is a shortened version of an original and private ceremony normally performed in the seclusion of the private home. The other has been shaped as a theatre play, and in that sense adapted to a new form. Is the experience different?"

### 3. The annotations

#### **Staging religious rituals**

Hester Dibbits had been one of the two persons invited to respond to the cases. She outlined a rationale on two concepts, shareability and safeguarding, which would lead to the questions she wanted to pose to keynote speaker Crispin Paine.

#### *Shareability*

"We looked at two rituals, or elements of rituals which, in their original context, are experienced as private rituals with a religious - or some might say spiritual - significance. But, in order to address and annotate them, we took the rituals, or elements of rituals, and "staged" them, introduced them to a new, mixed audience. One of the selected rituals is part of a theatre play. Can we call this a ritual at all? Or is it theatre? Or both? Is it a ritual in a theatre play? Is it a ritual that turned into a theatre play? And the first case, the Hindu ritual: is it something private made public? Or is it still a private ritual? We, the audience, are just sitting here, quietly watching. Maybe you cannot say that it has been taken out of its context, because it is not context-bound. What we see is someone who is praying, that's all. Nothing more, nothing less."

Dibbits reflects on the way in which the rituals themselves change; not only the setting, but also the forms, the gestures, the objects: in what way are they adjusted to the occasion? "Indeed, making private rituals public, sharing them with new audiences or staging them often leads to rituals getting adjusted, changed, 'commodified'. **The role of the tangible objects that are part of the ritual often becomes a more prominent role, and more so: the objects themselves may even change in appearance.**"

"What happens to the religious dimension, the religious power of a ritual when we stage it, when making it public and making these adjustments, when making it more beautiful, more attractive, in order to have an attractive experience? Will it add the spiritual religious power? A staged, aestheticized ritual might be considered by some of us as 'inauthentic', as fake, but it can have a very powerful effect on people, both for those familiar with the ritual and for new audiences. There might be a major sensory, emotional response. We may wonder if it is a religious or spiritual experience, or a feeling of nostalgia that affects us. But the effect is there, and it might help us to keep 'the spirit' alive, so to say."

### *Safeguarding*

In the current discussion about intangible heritage, UNESCO urges the safeguarding of ritual practices. "When making private rituals public, we might decide to use religious objects in museums, or replicas, but what are the precise implications of such a decision? Could it cause damage, and if so, for whom?" Dibbits notices that since the ratification of the UNESCO Convention for Intangible Heritage, many people have started talking about the importance of "safeguarding the intangible". "But in the development of new policies, there seems to be a focus on material things, on tactile objects, on matter. It seems as if we cannot escape the dominance of the tangible and that we are attributing increasing significance to the tangible. By stressing the importance of the intangible, we are doing just the opposite: we show the importance of the tangible, by pointing to the products used in the intangible practices."

"Concluding, we could say that the plea for the involvement of museums in the process of safeguarding is open to debate. It seems as if museums keep focusing on what they are used to doing. Instead, they might become more involved in 'folkloristic shows', while continuing collecting tangible items that are the outcome of a process of redesigned rituals."

Consequently, Dibbits' questions to Paine were: a) Is there a role for professionals, for folklorists, for museum or heritage professionals and b) is it a good idea to focus on making rituals "shareable" with new audiences? Is this something professionals/heritage institutions should be involved in? To what extent should professionals, in your opinion, have a role in facilitating (or maybe even advocating) the "safeguarding" of religious practices? Should we as professionals want to actively help "safeguard" and/or collect rituals, and is the museum the place to do it?

### **On Kant and Spinoza**

The second person to annotate is Pooyan Tamimi Arab from Utrecht University. He is currently working on his PhD dissertation in Cultural Anthropology, which is on the use of loudspeakers for the Islamic call to prayer in the Netherlands. Pooyan takes the opportunity to share some of his personal experiences and thoughts. He starts off with an observation: "We are not used to diverse and public religions, here in the Netherlands".

“Let me tell you about a few experiences I had that made me come to this conclusion. Having grown up in the Netherlands, I thought I was used to religious diversity. Only when travelling to the US and living in New York for some time, I found out I was not. Living in the Netherlands did not teach me to live with religious diversity. In NY, you really see religion everywhere, it’s being practised out in the open. The same goes for Malaysia. In some way, the statement by the Amsterdam Museum – that tolerance is in the Amsterdam DNA – is surprising. I do not dispute that we are tolerant in some ways, but we could do a lot better. There is a great deal of anxiety of the unknown.

Why do we in the Netherlands have such an aversion to rituals?” Pooyan cites a piece by Spinoza from the 17th century, wondering if this explains the root of the aversion.

*[... Wat betreft de uitwendige erediensten is het zeker dat zij tot de ware kennis van god en de liefde die daaruit noodzakelijk voortvloeit, helemaal niets bijdragen maar deze ook niet kunnen schaden. En om die reden moeten er niet zoveel gehouden worden dat omwille van die erediensten de vrede en publieke rust verstoord worden...]*

*[Free translation: ...As to the subject of public worship, we can state for a fact that it does in no way contribute to the true knowledge of God and the love that inevitably ensues from that, nor that it could do any harm to it. For this reason we should not have too many of such worship services, so as to prevent the peace and public tranquility from being disturbed...]*

*(p. 330, Margaret Gullan-Whur Jabik Veenbaas, Spinoza)*

“Though times are changing, this sentiment still exists and persist in the Netherlands in the 21st century. That’s why we are not used to public expressions of religious diversity in our shared public space.” He proceeds by referring to both Spinoza and Kant and how they make a clear distinction between inside and outside. “There is religious content and religious form. Content is what it's all about. Religious form is mere form. It’s about private and public. The content can be private. He refers to the Judaic traditions. Kant, for example, writes that what we need is a complete departure from Judaism.” In Pooyan's mind, Kant refers to a departure from externalities, rituals. “But I believe today we are departing from this enlightened and Protestant background. We now have processions in Amsterdam, we have the Muslim call for prayer in The Hague and Leiden, but also in smaller rural towns like Deventer.”

“We need to accept religious pluralism. But it’s still in transition. Till the '80s, there was a law in the Netherlands: the procession prohibition. It was not allowed to express any form of religion publicly. This is why we have such things as silent processions and silent churches in the Netherlands. What you see now in the Netherlands is that we are slowly distancing ourselves from this heritage. We do have processions now; we are slowly shifting. It is not about a competition with exteriority, but an issue of Mediation and Immediacy.”

His question to Paine was: “So I said some things about pluralism, diversity, and so forth. That’s all great, but religious practices are in the first place religious practices. Essentially, they are not supposed to be used by researchers and activists as expressions of pluralism. Some groups like to remain their particular selves and retain a certain exclusivity. How can we make sure to preserve religious practices without reducing them to an ideology of pluralism? How to preserve exclusivity within a pluralist context?”

## 4. Crispin Paine

### On museums and their ambiguities

The final speaker, Crispin Paine, was an international museums and heritage consultant for twenty years. He also ran the Museums Studies MA course both at Southampton University and UCL Institute of Archaeology. Nowadays, he spends his time writing, editing and occasionally lecturing. He is currently editing a volume of essays on religion and museums, and seeking funding for a study of emerging "religious theme parks" in India. His books *Godly Things* (2000) and *Religious Objects in Museums* (2013) are read internationally.

With his insight on religious museums, he tried to create a clear image of issues that are far from clear. "Museums are really quite complicated. For their effect, they depend on a complicated interaction between the objects in their collections, their staff with all their prejudices and expertise, their visitors of many different backgrounds, the communities the objects came from - they may still be very interested in them - and the reputation and image of the museums themselves. It's into this sometimes confusing constellation that Intangible Heritage now falls."

"Because it's my own field of interest, I'll concentrate on the tangible - on the things, and the role they play in all this. I hope to shed some light on what can happen when museums are asked to help preserve both intangible and tangible heritage. I'll start this presentation from the assumption that religion is essentially about doing - it's not, for most people in the world, primarily about believing things with one's mind; it's primarily about doing things with one's body. And when people do religion, they usually do it with things. The doing, I take it, is the intangible heritage, and the things the tangible. We need to understand and preserve both."



Crispin Paine photography Jordi Wallenburg/ Imagine IC



## Re-enactment

Paine starts off by mentioning several examples of churches and religious services in different settings. "In an ordinary medieval Church of England parish church, a medieval English Mass is re-enacted for visitors. It is a real Mass, in the sense that everyone involved believes it's real – the re-enactors are just carrying it out using ceremonies a bit different from those they use on regular Sundays. At the same time, in a 19th-century-style Protestant Communion, a service takes place in the reconstructed Presbyterian church in the open-air museum in Belfast - the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum. These re-enactors are also 'real' Protestants led by a 'real' Presbyterian minister. The same open-air museum also reconstructed a Catholic church. Here they stage Masses for visitors, dressed in early-20th-century clothes. Yet the performers are real Catholics. What is real, and what emotions are shared?"

"The Museum of the History of Religion in St Petersburg is one of the handful of museums in the world specifically dedicated to celebrating the world's religions. This museum is particularly interesting because it doesn't just rely on its displays and exhibitions to tell the story of religion. One of the interesting things it does is run group tours, where you can visit for example a great mosque, a synagogue, a Catholic church and a Tibetan Buddhist temple. And maybe in some cases you can even experience a service."

"Another example can be seen in Aksum, Ethiopia. Here they celebrate the church festival of the Discovery of the Cross of Christ, and at the same time they celebrate the end of the rainy season. Over time it has changed, maybe because tourism has increased. Does this matter? My colleague Brent Plate says we should accept change as inevitable: 'Tradition is not the same old thing done in the same old way, but a chain of changes.' So when we talk about 'reconstructions' or 're-enactments' of religious rituals, we are entering a world of ambiguities. Is this just play-acting? And where exactly does the border between ritual and theatre lie? Some museums face this dilemma daily."

## Objects as data carriers

"It is a well-known fact that the meaning of objects tends to change as soon as they enter a museum. What was once a religious icon, the focus of devotion of the faithful, turns into a work of art - the focus of a quite different kind of aesthetic devotion. Or it may become a historical document, or a scientific specimen. But these days, this simple transformation is increasingly challenged and problematized. On the one hand it's challenged by the museum staff, who want to help visitors understand the object's background, or who may hope the object will attract new visitors. On the other hand it's challenged by outsiders who feel they have a particular interest in the object - they feel that in some way it belongs to them."

"This is a different kind of ambiguity. Often people do religious things in museums without asking anyone's permission. At the recent exhibition of reliquaries in London, the cleaning staff had to do a lot of extra work, cleaning lipstick off showcases, where devout visitors had kissed them. Sometimes faith communities want, or even claim things back from museums they care about, so that they can treat them religiously once again. Some museums simply say 'no' - they insist that the object is now a secular work of art or a 'museum object'. This response is often found in France and India."

"More often, religious or faith communities ask museums to treat the objects they think of as theirs with respect – usually in a ritual manner. This may be as simple as asking that the Qur'an be placed on a

top shelf. But it may also involve asking a qualified practitioner to come regularly to the museum to carry out ceremonies. The National Museum of the American Indian not only provides a large space for Native American groups to dance and hold other ceremonies, but also has a special room in their collections store where objects can be 'smudged' with the smoke of burning sweetgrass."

### **Private vs public**

"Some more ambiguities lie in the field of private vs public. Many religious rituals are essentially secret. How far should a museum go in respecting that secrecy? Hester Dibbits and Marlous Willemsen suggest in their publication 'Stills of our liquid times' 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'. (An observation that also came up in the first event with Saidiya Hartman.) To be honest, I'm not sure I quite understand what this could be."

"A family friend has in her bedroom an 'altar' on her chest of drawers, on which is displayed a crucifix, an image of the Holy Trinity, figures of Guan Yin, Siva and Buddha, and family photographs. Each morning she lights incense and meditates in front of it. She isn't so very unusual. There has probably always been a distinction between the religion of ordinary people and the religion of the churches. And whereas in the past the sources available to construct one's own religion were quite limited, today the whole universe of religions is available for us to plunder, adapt and reuse. Syncretism, at least among the Western middle classes, is almost becoming the norm. Still museums reflect little of this. When they present faith, it is always the official religion they turn to, the muddled mixture of ordinary life is seldom seen."

"This brings me to another observation. Religion, or spirituality if you prefer, is always changing. Who is responsible for recording this change? Modern-day New Age type spirituality doesn't have institutions, so there's no formal mechanism for passing on the tradition, nor any mechanism to claim behaviour like my friend's as 'intangible heritage'. As far as I am concerned, the responsibility lies with the local history museums. They should record a pattern of local behaviour - linked inevitably to class, gender, etcetera - that has a local significance."

### **Concluding**

"Part of the object's meaning - which I see as almost the object's soul - lies in the way it is used, how it has been used, how it might be used in the future. That's why it's so helpful to approach this from the other direction - from the behaviour, activity, attitude that created the meaning. That, I take it, is what intangible heritage is all about. If we are to understand this religious business and share it with others, we must understand not only religious belief and practice, but also the religious impulse - what 'devout' feels like on the inside, what the devotee's motives are and how they explain those to themselves."

"It's not until one has seen religious objects in use - either in an actual way or in some virtual way - that they truly come alive, that one can get a glimpse, if you like, into the souls of these objects. That's why museums need to concern themselves with religious intangible heritage. And why I'm so glad to be here today and so grateful to you for your invitation, and patience."

## 5. Questions

The presentations gave much food for thought and discussion. The last part of the afternoon, the floor was open to the audience to discuss what had been shown, told or maybe even felt.

First question from the audience: "Religious objects are supposed to generate emotions, which are also used to identify a group. A side effect of this might be the creation of hatred. Isn't that also a difficulty when preserving these objects and trying to present them authentically? And isn't a museum actually a place where religion is neutralized?"

Pooyan Tamimi Arab: "Paine writes in his book that museums are not a neutral space. After 9/11 you see a lot of museums including Islamic art. This is all highly political."

Crispin Paine: "Museums should accept they are always political. Accept the risk."

Annemarie de Wildt: "We have recently acquired a mask from a project by Marian Markelo and artist Boris where Winti people are given back their statues. Markelo and Boris created a 3D mask from an example of an original mask of the African museum. The object is now part of the collection, but it will also remain to be used in Winti rituals and will therefore be taken out of the museum from time to time. As a museum, we are also interested in recording what happens. Markus Balkenhol will help us with that. Doing things with it is part of the intangible heritage related to the mask."

Desta Deekman: "It's a new thing in the Winti tradition. It needs time to fit in with the religion again. After years of doing without statues, we have to get used to this re-invention."

Arjen Kok: "I have a question for Soeroedj. We deal with material culture a lot. What should museums collect as rituals? What would you like to bring into the museum from your ritual?"

Soeroedj Baladien: "A statue, a few of the attributes that I use every day. And a description of what it does."

Arjen Kok: "But do you think the museum can also collect your intention?"

Soeroedj Baladien: "That's not that easy. Every person believes in his or her own personal way. I believe it's very hard to put my personal intentions in a museum."

Desta Deekman: "Maybe you can introduce small elements of traditions and invite people to do it themselves. Then, if they are interested, they can go to the library and read more about it."

Riemer Knoop: "I am very impressed with the diversity and the intellectual presence this afternoon. Now I have a question. One of the highlights of the Holland Festival some time ago was a Sufi performance. A trance ritual. It was not a performance; we saw the real thing, or so we were led to believe. Comparing it to OBIA – you are performing a theatre play in which a ritual is taking place. Is there a boundary of appropriateness between performing privately or within a community of believers on the

one hand and performing for a paying audience in a theatre on the other hand? What is the primary function? Personally I felt uneasy."

Crispin Paine: "Looking at the history of the Sufi - under the government of Atatürk, all Sufi organizations in Turkey were declared illegal in 1925 - I believe it went through some changes. So in this case, there could be a fine line between being authentic and staged."

Hester Dibbits: "What do you think of what we saw today?"

Rierner Knoop: "You contextualized it – therefore it felt more like I could respectfully observe it. We are here to study and to learn. We are not here to be entertained."

Desta Deekman: "If I feel it's appropriate? Tough question. We also had a few challenges. During the rehearsals, we were sometimes confronted with entities taking over one of the actors. They are always with us, you know. Still, we want to explain as much as possible. I believe it's all about finding a balance."

Annelies Moors: "Regarding the Sufi performance, I believe it would also be interesting to know what the dancers feel when they are on stage. Another thing I was wondering about is where the unease comes from. Is it also the unease of being touched? The fear of being affected, of being drawn into it?"

Pooyan Tamimi Arab: "That's an interesting observation. It reminds me of a story a friend of mine told me. He organized an event in a mosque at the Rozengracht. They organized a session where people living in the neighbourhood could visit the mosque. A non-religious, highly-educated, upper-class couple came in. They felt really uneasy. Then they were invited to participate in the Wudu. They had to walk up the stairs, take off their shoes, wash their feet, go down the stairs, again take off the shoes, move around a lot. Finally they sat down in the prayer space and then the imam started the call to prayer. When the sound entered their bodies, it seemed like icebreaking. It is like you said, religion is about doing. There is a fear of bodily performance. Participation can help overcome this fear. Tropenmuseum Junior collects rituals from particular countries, covering a period of three years. The children participate in rituals and traditions together with practitioners. They experience it not only by observing, but also by participating, by doing."

Hester Dibbits: "I'd like to get back to the intangible heritage debate. When we talk about safeguarding heritage, about keeping it alive, about transmitting it to the next generation, it is often stressed that we would have to change things in order to reach new audiences so as to keep it alive. Soeroedj, how do you feel about your morning ritual and about changing it to reach new audiences, to safeguard it?"

Soeroedj Baladien: "I was born in Surinam. I never performed any of the Hindu rituals when I was living there. When I came here, and became part of a minority, I started to think about my identity. Who am I? What does my religion have that I can use to make me happy? That's when I started to study Hinduism and started practicing it."



Hermine Pool: "I work at the Biblical Museum and I am wondering why we should want to collect the intangible. I'm asking because I have a lot of bibles and objects, and I know a lot about them. I don't think I could collect what people believe, how they feel about this bible. Everybody has different feelings. I think churches and communities are very capable of collecting their heritage, their belief."

Crispin Paine: "Well, you can collect bibles and you can collect stories about how they are used at home, or in wider community services. That at least would give you some insight. But yes, until we find a way to download our emotions onto a hard disk, one can't actually collect people's thoughts and understandings."

With these final words by Crispin Paine, Rikko Voorberg closed this inspirational afternoon on present-day believing and the things by which we do it.

## 6. Reflections

### **safeguarding of significance**

The discussion regarding the safeguarding of religious intangible heritage made clear once more that it is not as simple as the convention might suggest. There is still a wide range of equations to solve. Apart from the questions as to who decides, who represents, who is represented and what is safeguarded, the afternoon presented us with issues on authenticity, private vs public, and the safeguarding of meaning and emotions that are connected with rituals and traditions.

Crispin Paine showed us many museums with religious objects and the ways in which they include intangible aspects of religion. In his book *Religious Objects in Museums*, he argues that museums should become much braver. Museums should challenge and engage with their audiences by allowing visitors to do "their own thing" in the galleries, like burning incense or applying gold leaf. Another point he makes is that museums should help visitors to come to a better understanding of religious belief, practice and impulse. Some museums resist this idea. They don't want to "play church". Therefore there will be no staging, no performance. They might choose to collect private stories and connect these to objects. Others do not feel this restraint and stage live performances to show rituals or use multimedia to make the experience more complete. The object retains a centre stage.

Hester Dibbits warned us that it seems as if we cannot escape the dominance of the tangible. Even for the practitioners, ['the way of' weg] safeguarding and sharing is done through objects. We seem to have the tendency to materialize the immaterial. Even by staging our cases and annotating them as if they were museum objects, we try to make them tangible. How come it seems impossible for us to shake off the focus on tangibility?

During the discussion, it became also apparent that for the religious communities, there are the issues of ownership (whom does the heritage belong to?) and sharing (should heritage be made available to others in society, and how?). There was some deliberation with the practitioners on the question what to collect when the subject is highly private and sensory. You can collect objects or stories, but it is hard to collect people's intentions. Furthermore, there are things that should remain private and should therefore not be disclosed to a wider audience in any way or form. In order to disclose heritage to new

audiences, you could decide whether it should be redesigned in such a way that it could be shown in the public sphere. But then again, making decisions about this is not as easy as you would think. Why would you do it in the first place, and what would be the consequences?

Are intangible items harder to detach from the persons who embody them than tangible ones? Professor of Performance Studies, Diane Taylor, writes in her book *The Archive and the Repertoire* (2003): "What we know is radically altered by how we know it. There is a difference in the physical collection opposed to archival collections, the way it is interpreted, transmitted and transformed. Performance constitutes a repertoire of embodied knowledge learning in and through the body as well as a means of creating, preserving, and transmitting knowledge. It is always in situ, participated in social systems, dynamics... It is an embodied practice, a way of knowing as well as a way of storing and transmitting." In her book, she shows how knowledge travels transnationally, transforms and transmits via the body and manifests itself over and over again in events and performances. How can we use this line of thought when trying to develop new definitions and methodologies of intangible heritage? How to safeguard the knowledge that is collected and transmitted physically? How to deal with the emotions that are inseparably connected with the transmission of rituals and traditions?

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**English-language editing**  
**Photography**  
**Film recording**

**Daniëlle Kuijten**  
**Medea**  
**Jordi Wallenburg**  
**Vernon Roberts**