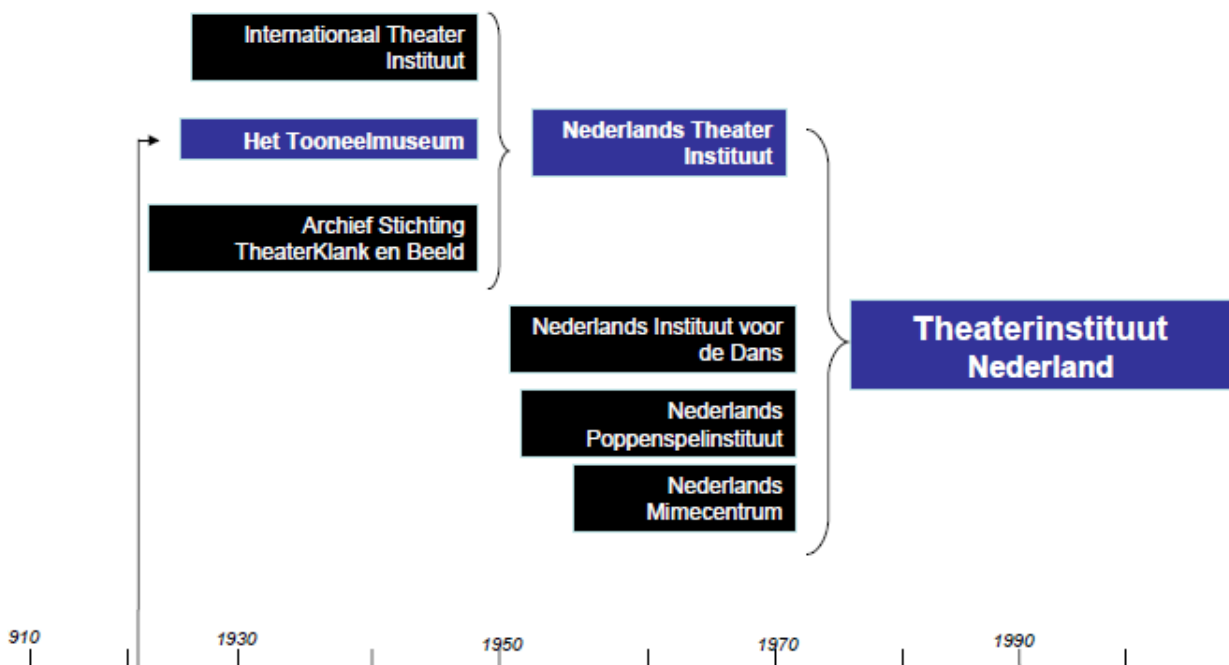


Riemer Knoop, **Assessing the value of the TIN collections**  
**Conference Revaluing Theatrical Heritage: challenges and Opportunities**, VU Brussels,  
 UnivGent, Artesis Hogeschool, Kortrijk 22-23 January 2013

In the spring of 2011, I was asked to carry out a quick scan of the TIN collections. The assumption was that ascertaining the paramount importance, the uniqueness of the TIN collections through an expert procedure, would offer an argument for the salvation of the TIN as an independent institution, and for it to remain fully subsidized on national government level. In various other heritage fields, the undisputed national importance of some collections had previously led to the explicit government responsibility for their maintenance, upkeep and sustainable access.

The moment in time was not a coincidence. Since the 1990s, a neo-lib urge was being felt that put culture, especially the arts, under increasing pressure, either to promote itself better, or to show itself economically independent. The bank crisis, then the debt crisis en now the general European recession caused many governments to turn the screw tighter and tighter. For the years 2013-2016 a slash of on average 20 percent in arts and culture subsidies is being carried out in our country. “Museums and heritage” are, however, relatively benignly treated and among the least effected. The first to go are independent, or self employed players, along with institutions in the secondary tiers, that of support and infrastructure. TIN is one such institute.

Assessing a value presupposes holdings and doings. I was set the daunting task in three weeks time to pass a fair, informed judgment on the TIN collections that would make sense to general decision makers and at the same time would uphold in the court of critical peers and learned specialists.



But let's first look at TIN itself. It started, like its big sister, the Gabrielle Enthoven Collection that now forms the core of the V&A Theatre & Performance Dpt, in 1924. An association of enthusiasts

purchased several private collections of costumes and memorabilia, to form a Museum of the Stage (Toneelmuseum). In a tortuous succession of mergers, take overs, combinations, fusions and transfers, it opened as a specialist library-cum-museum to the public in 1960 at the Amsterdam Herengracht, to next morph through several mergers with a number of institutions, such as the International Theatre Institute and the archives of the foundation for TheaterSounds & Image, into the Netherlands Theatre Institute. After joining with similar archives for mime, dance and puppetry, in the 1990s, the Theater Institute Netherlands, or TIN, saw the light of day.

Its functioned first of all to be an archive and a museum (up until now with over 300 exhibitions!), but gradually grew into a much broader centre, also covering documentation, information, debate, advice, education, representation, advocacy, international trade and sales, and, finally, a centre of expertise and knowledge exchange. This unbridled broadening of functions, appreciated by many in the optimistic postwar period as the *the Nutcracker's* wonderfully growing Christmas tree, began to be met with disapproval in more austere political climates. Government (and its advisory councils!) demanded more focus, less fuss, and reduced costs. A crisis enveloped TIN in 2000, leading to a much leaner and meaner institute, reorganized to operate on a dramatically smaller financial basis. The new directors, Henk Scholten and Pim Luiten, reset the engine, professionalized the team, chose digitization as the core medium for the institute, and started some truly novel ideas, such as:

- presenting the archives and collections in a wiki form (the *Theatre Encyclopedia*),



- selling the amazing, but barely fit for museum functions, Bartolottihuis on Herengracht, from 617 (built for Willem van den Heuvel tot Beichlingen, fabulously rich banker-

merchant and sole heir to the fortune of his uncle-by-marriage Giovanni Battista Bartolotti, Bolognese merchant; the house is among the best examples of Dutch Renaissance architecture, said to be designed by our fabulous Hendrik de Keyzer himself. On the ground floor of nr. 170 was the house, for his last 40 years, of the late musician Gustav Leonhardt, who wrote a whole book about his house).



and relinquishing the idea of in-house presentations, turning to traveling exhibitions instead. Scholten decided that it's far better to follow your costumers to where they already are (= in the theatre, and your exhibitions should therefore be co-productions with theatre houses) than trying to lure them to come to you at Herengracht, where one can be sure to find all "things Thespian' but not a theatre).

These choices struck and an energetic program of nomadic, co-produced presentations, very 21st century, had been developed and was in full swing by 2010.

Then a tragedy happened. In the latest re-appraisal of cultural subsidies in our country, under preparation in 2011 and to be effected in 2013, it became clear that the national budget cuts would regard above all the *non-producing* institutions. Since TIN was defined within the performing arts field as a subsidiary, second-level player with regard to theatre companies and festivals (the theater houses in our country are always county or municipality funded), it was not identified as a key player. Had it been in the archive sector, or better still, a special case in the *museum* family, the stakes could well have been different (though to be sure, also there competition was fierce).

That is where I came in (a former Council for Culture member, with expertise in the museum sector). Would it be possible to come up with a verdict on the quality and significance of the collections of the TIN that would justify it to be reckoned in a different league – a heritage institution in its own right?

Let us look at the collections then. A wondrous world, as many of you surely know. An aggregate and mirror of the many guises and forms the institute had known in its 90-year lifespan: designs, posters, photographs, prints, drawings, videos, films, tapes, texts, dossiers: archives about persons and companies; sheet music, booklets, old prints, flats, chamber theatres, props, masks, puppets, puppets theaters, models, mini-theaters, leather *wayang kulit* shadow puppets (a unique colonial legacy), models, scale models, mannequins, wigs, costumes, shoes, walking sticks, hats, busts, backdrops, memorabilia, books, periodicals, programs, tokens; from drama, comedy, burlesque, music hall, cabaret, show, circus, ballet, modern dance, movement theatre, jazz ballet, shadow play, puppetry, mime, pantomime, opera and musical.

A true parallel universe of life on stage, offering a quirky amalgam amassed since 1638, the first documented performance at the Herengracht, no less – but its chaotic nature is being balanced by a rigorous acquisition policy, adopted and refined during the last decades. With it, a representative, yearly documentation has been built up of all that went about in the world of live performances in the country – with over 1,900 opening nights per year.

How to make sense of it? Different from the V&A, that arranges its collections along the three lines of productions, buildings (houses), and biographies (plus some archives of extraordinary individuals), TIN organized its records and objects primarily according to the performances itself. The formal principle to select, collect, restore&manage, and offer access and interpretation to, was what was live performed to a live audience: production, consumption and reception.



The corpus amounts to ½ million objects, that can be qualified in various ways:

- Í according to the **database systematics** under 22 headings: those about the performances themselves take up ¾ of the total, in addition to sources, persons and buildings

## TIN collections according to AdLib CMS

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Material</b>	<b>No. items</b>
<b>Performances</b>	Pictures	123,000
	Reviews	75,000
	Programmes	55,000
	Posters	35,000
	Audio	32,000
	Designs	25,000
	Video	13,500
	Costumes	5,000
	Memorabilia	600
	Masks	200
<b>Primary sources</b>	Texts	40,000
	Sheetmusic	16,000
<b>Secondary sources</b>	Books	26,000
	Cuttings	2,300
<b>People, institutions</b>	Letters and personal files	20,000
	Portraits	4000
	Models	850
	Archives	440
<b>Puppets</b>	puppets, wajang, shadows	3,300
<b>Architecture</b>	Buidling dossiers	1,300
<b>Total items</b>		<b>478,500</b>

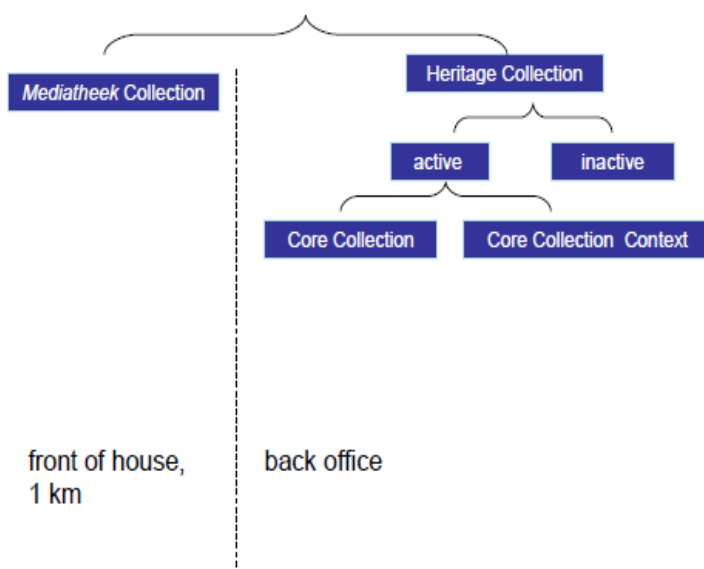
H according to a **distinction between museum and archival objects**: 75.000 (all 3D-objects and old prints) against 4 running kms of information-based documentation, whether printed or electronic

### TIN collections: museum v. archive

	material	# items/ volume
MUSEUM	posters	35,000
	designs	25,000
	costumes	5,000
	memorabilia	600
	masks	200
	Books < 1800	5,000
	Models, paper theatres	850
	Puppets, wayang, shadow	3,300
		75,000
ARCHIVE		4 kms

↳ according to the practical use: one km of books, recordings and selected documentation in open access (the *Mediatheque*), the rest in the institute's storage far away from the city centre with its forbidding real estate prices.

### TIN collections: public use v. storage



So what does this mean?

Two answers. First we may look to how other branches in the world of the arts and culture have fared with their institutionalized memories, both at home and abroad. Then we consider the significance of the collections in terms of their users.

<b>genre</b>	<b>institute</b>	<b>nature</b>	<b>volume</b>
Dutch music	Nederlands Muziek Instituut	sheetmusic collection Dutch composers	700,000 mss.
film	EYE institute	national film institute	37,000 titles
radio/tv	Beeld en Geluid	national broadcasting archive	800,000 hrs
books	Koninklijke Bibliotheek	national library	6,000,000 items or 110kms
archives	National Archive	national and state archives	110 kms
theatre	TIN	national archives performing arts	75,000 and 4 kms

It appears that in size, TIN's collections, though formidable, would be at the margin of other cultural documentation centres of national importance – but well comparable to other special interest archives like film and sheetmusic, and on the scale of the archives of a medium-sized city. As for esteem, the TIN collections can hold their own, since we hear them being favorably compared, for their variety, depth and breadth, with the performing arts documentation departments in both London (V&A) and Vienna (the Kunsthistorisches Museum).

The second approach at assessing the collections is from a user's position. Value and significance of heritage and culture reside in that unique intermediary domain of “in betweenness” – for what relationship with which audiences, to what social or artistic goal, end, purpose are they meaningful? We then have to make a distinction between users of performing arts archives and collections on various levels, from dedicated makers through lovers of the genre (the V&A website politely refers to them as 'persons who may have not had the opportunity to attend a production during its run') to chance visitors (is there such a thing?) of an exhibition or website. For each tier different sorts of significance hold, in the dynamics between memory and recollection (Aristotle), between the archive and the repertoire (or *staging*, Diana Taylor, 2003), between the *Gedächtnis* and the *Erinnerung*.

In other words, we tried to distinguish between the *use value* of the archives and memory banks, the *recollection value* of the nostalgic replay as museum exhibition pieces, and a societal *existence value* attributed to the very survival of historical documentation. Existence value is a somewhat controversial notion in classical economic theory. In addition to use value intrinsic to products, and exchange value attached to money (or branded goods), people may benefit from knowing that a particular resource exists, such as Antarctica or the Grand Canyon, or a certain level the very notion of biodiversity. Their bare existence is appreciated without anyone necessarily having to go there (except perhaps than Richard Attenbrough) or otherwise physically enjoy, own or consume it.

<b>relation</b>	<b>significance</b>	<b>level</b>	<b>criterion</b>
makers, study, reception	use value, memory, documentation	<i>need to know</i>	completeness
amateurs, fans	use value, memory, documentation	<i>nice to know</i>	representativity
wider audience	recollection / repertoire value, museum	<i>nice to engage</i>	representativityt
society	existence value	<i>symbolic</i>	decency

For the first group we checked in in-depth interviews some 20 representatives: makers, actors, play writers and playwrights, scholars, researchers, journalists and critics, and a handful of the second. For the other two we relied on press clippings and on the impressions we got from a long history of public protest during the several times the TIN's life had been under threat.

### Three observations

First of all we were struck by the fact that *all* interviewees pointed out that they *always* used the TIN's resources when preparing for a role, a production, an article, a revival, a review – and were almost *always* quite to very satisfied with the quality and completeness of the TIN's goods and services. (Barring a researcher's bias): Bravo!

We were likewise struck, but more painfully so, by the fact that the popular perception of TIN-like institutions is more often than not reduced to the least significant and smallest parts of their holdings. In most people's imagination a theatre museum or archive is interesting mostly for the dress of such and such an actress, the point shoes of Margot Fontyn, the funny hat of Tommy Cooper. There is a tragedy here which the documentation of the performing arts shares with archives in a more general sense. Without a show window full of nonsensical memorabilia – the very thing that started Mrs. Enthoven off on her collecting road, by the way – archives to most people will remain a total mystery. Performing arts archives, I think, are about the systematic documentation of processes involving events, intentions, decisions, contexts and outcomes, as well as occasional hardware – but you'll never be able to experience the performance ever again in the same way. The times and we ourselves changed. And this in spite of the rather constant number of visitors, during the last decades, (40,000 yearly) to both the TIN in-house and traveling exhibitions.



Johannes Buziau 1877 - 1958

Thirdly, we became aware of another use of the resources. Among the first group there were researchers who pointed out that within the holdings of the performing arts archives a unique historical source is kept. Over long periods of time, the common life and the direct are here uniquely mixed with the life of the elite and engagements with the experimental. This is the place where high culture and low culture meet. Performing arts archives contain material reflecting everyday entertainment and social life, political strife and moral innuendos, public uproar and scandal, the ephemeral events nowadays voraciously recorded in the press and on radio and television, and increasingly in and through new, social media (thank you Mr. McLuhan). To appreciate this point, not unfit to be mentioned by a Dutch historian speaking in Belgium, one has only to think back to the evening of August 25<sup>th</sup>, 1930, when during the performance of the Grand Opera *La muette de Portici* in the Brussels Munt Theatre, a set of patriotic lines drove the audience to a frenzy, sparking a revolution which would lead to the end of the Kingdom of the United Low Countries and the birth of Belgium. So this kind of collections serves a purpose of both an intrinsic and extrinsic nature: documenting a particular sort of artistic production and at the same time chronicling the heartbeat of the times.



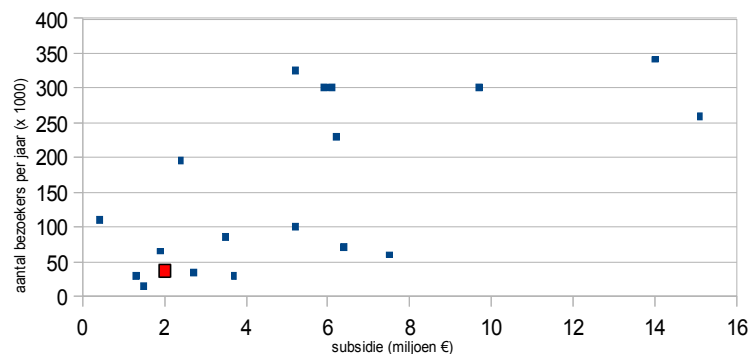


"Amour sacré de la patrie,  
Rends-nous l'audace et la fierté;  
A mon pays je dois la vie.  
Il me devra sa liberté"

This said, I could safely conclude that the TIN collections were worthwhile in relation to various communities and even highly significant to many in the live performance arts business (and outside!), and that they could well stand several comparisons internationally.

Additionally, we looked into the effectiveness and efficiency of the collection care and presentations. Suffice it to say that there was nothing to worry about here. All recent audits and reviews were positive, subsidy and earned income (including sponsoring) were on a par, the provision of access to the collections was found to be exemplary and highly satisfactory. And even the rate between subsidy and visitors was within acceptable museum parameters.

verhouding museale subsidies en bezoekers  
bron: onderzoek Gordion 2005



We did find reason to express, however, some concerns – mainly with regard to focus. All collecting institutions should regularly (though perhaps not all too frequently) re-assess their holdings for relevance and significance. De-accessioning of up to one fifth, according to the head of collections, which would markedly increase the TIN's health, was already in the planning.

In the final report ([www.gordion.nl/media/quickscan\\_collectie\\_tin.pdf](http://www.gordion.nl/media/quickscan_collectie_tin.pdf)), we found it safe to conclude also on a higher abstraction level, therefore, that the “heritage”-side of TIN was seriously worth while, meaningful for specialist and society alike, decently managed and – at last! – running quite well.

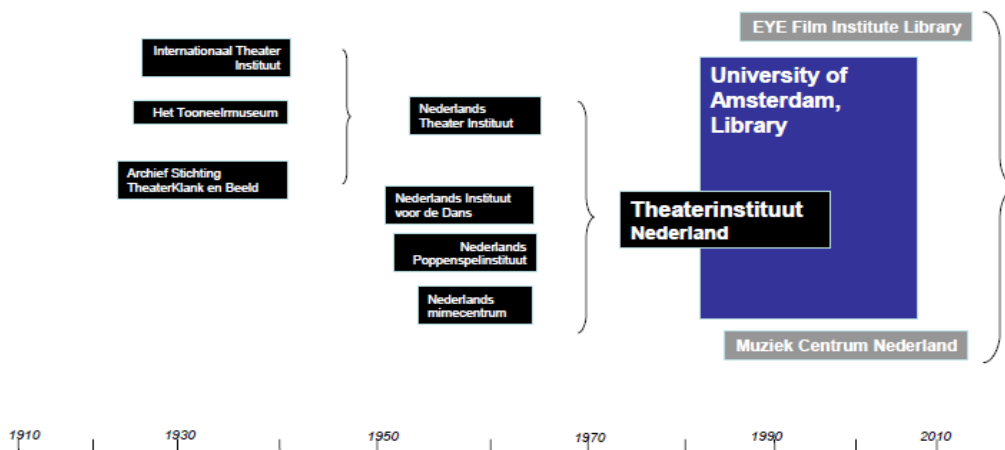
But the strategic choice, made a decade earlier, to inextricably entwine the TIN archive/museum aspects with the “sectoral tasks” (advise, debate, expertise), a choice that repeatedly earned TIN approval and even praise, proved fatal. In such a deliberately mashed complex it was impossible to separate the two sections. Cutting the one would inevitably lead to the demise, at least partially so, of the other. And so it turned out, a few months after TIN presented its new policy paper, proposed early 2012.



In its 2013-2016 plans, the Theatermuseum, as TIN was now to be called, would again shrink, from 40 to 20 people, let go of many of the non-collection related tasks, and turn into a full-fledged museum, however of a *nomadic* nature and with several added branch services (job switch board, international affairs). It proposed to take up a temporary abode, for 4 years, with highly visible exhibition spaces and service areas in Amsterdam city hall, opposite the opera / music theatre. To compensate for this “forward flight”, the collections would be brought into the library of the University of Amsterdam. Optimistic plans and funding requests were submitted both at municipal and national levels – though in vain. Government advisory boards were not convinced of the viability of the museum, not least because the vagrant nature of its proposed location was hardly understood, let alone appreciated.

It was only last November that a solution was found. Not with national government, though. It was the University of Amsterdam (1632) and its huge library, the former City Library since 1578, that

negotiated an all or nothing take over, including the use of the €4M profits from the sale of the prestigious Barlotti House to pay for both the transfer and for continuing the wages for four staff members. A *TIN Foundation* (Stichting TIN) will continue to exist, however (though without permanent staff), as owner of the collections which will be managed by the University of Amsterdam. In addition, the Foundation will provide several digital services, such as the Theatre Encyclopedia and the national “theatre job switch board” for career opportunities.



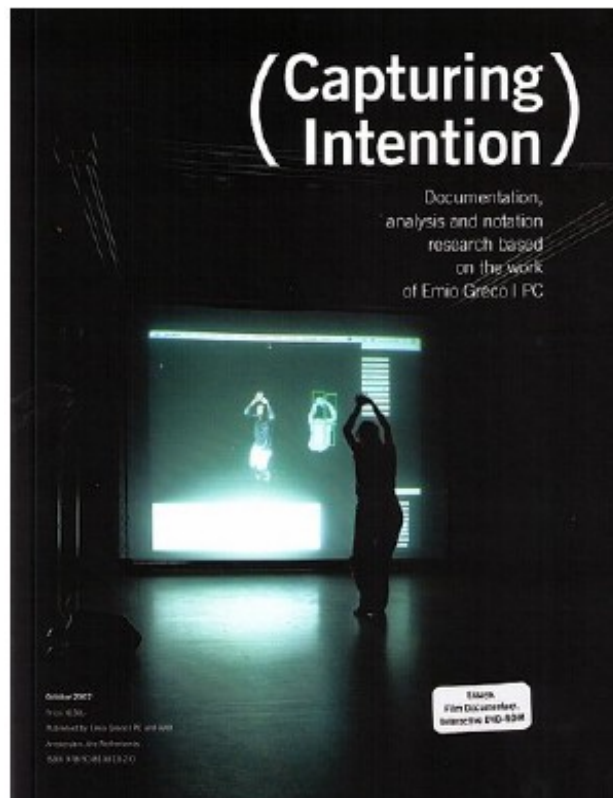
For the Amsterdam university library, which already boasts a dozen museums and archive collections, managing the TIN holdings requires it to rethink many points. A gradual shift is felt, which, in their own words, “we would never have chosen, but once it's here, let's make the best of it”. The heritage division of the library finds itself turning towards a no less than Smithsonian Institution model, in a process of *musealisation* that for many a hard-core librarian feels relatively new. “We're now about things, not texts” - to which I should like to add “you're about content, not about form”.

To appreciate this shift, it's useful to know that recently other heritage partners joined this Amsterdam Smithsonian, such as the archives and music collections (some 2 running kms) of the Dutch Music Centre (a recent merger of pop, jazz, new and contemporary music archives), while talks are being held about a merger with the library collection of the newly opened EYE film institute.

Let's draw some conclusions.

1. What we've seen, then, is a strong and rather swift *contraction* of collections over the last decades, with presently the Amsterdam University Library turning into a sort of mother collection institute with a remarkably broad remit. This has its pros and its cons. Positive no doubt will be the costs and organizational benefits of the much larger scale. Among the negative points, I think, may be the loss of visibility and the reduction of specialist staff and expertise, for theater archives and heritage.
2. There has been a long history of tension and misunderstanding between the two poles of theatre collections: the documentation and archives on the one hand, and the recreation of their significance, the staging if you like, of their heritage side on the other. I think that a blurring of the two has led to many difficulties. In hindsight, these could have been avoided, but this would perhaps not have greatly influenced the outcome, governments being what they are. One wonders where the bubble in theatre and performance collections during the

- lasts decades, that (in our country) has now brutally been put to a halt, came from.
3. The awareness that there is a heritage dimension in time-based and performing arts tradition, I feel, has been growing. At least in the Netherlands, the contemporary arts, both in the visual and performative fields, have been pervaded by a strong modernist sense of timelessness. “We can only create in as far as there is no history” (as modern dance choreographer Hans van Manen is supposed to have said in the early '70s). That is a remarkable historicist paradox, since such a negative definition is informed by the very thing that it denies. And yet the newest experiments in this most modern of modernist branches regard especially its own documentation, like the project by Emio Greco|PC *Capturing Intentions* (2004), co-funded by professor Marijke Hoogeboom, my colleague at the Amsterdam School of the Arts, or the Nederlandse Dansdagen programme Cover:ReCover, which investigated the perception of presently re-created '70s and '80s modern dance pieces.



Needless to say that for these reflective processes, conscious of the flow of time, theatre archives are indispensable.

Thank you

Dr Riemer Knoop, Gordion Cultureel Advies / Professor Cultural Heritage, Amsterdam School of the Arts AHK

[www.gordion.nl](http://www.gordion.nl) & [www.ahk.nl/reinwardt/](http://www.ahk.nl/reinwardt/)