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ARTICLE

FROM FLUID ART TO FLUID ARCHIVE

A DIVE INTO AN ONLINE DOCUMENTATION PROJECT OF EPHEMERAL HERITAGE FROM THE 1960s ONWARDS

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In June 1971, citizens of Amsterdam collaborated to move a large inflatable cushion through the streets of the city [Figure 1]. A similar manifestation had taken place in 1969, but this time the event was part of a week-long festival (known as the 'Nieuwmarkt Feesten') in the so-called 'Nieuwmarktbuurt.' A large part of this old neighbourhood in the Dutch capital was slated for demolition in the construction of a new metro line, a motorway and high-rise office buildings. This instigated action and protest in the city. To boost resistance and morale amongst the local population, and stimulate social cohesion, a special action group ('Aktiegroep Nieuwmarkt') organised workshops, performances and street activities, also involving inflatables of the Eventstructure Research Group (short ERG).¹ Since the late 1960s the members of ERG had pioneered with inflatable art and design. Their airy *Cushion* brought residents of the Nieuwmarktbuurt together in a playful way and encouraged them to collectively keep it in motion and ensure its safety.² ERG also presented a large inflatable yellow-and-red dragon to the visitors of the festival, with which they could interact [Figure 2]. Originally commissioned by filmmaker William Klein for his film *Mr. Freedom* (1969), the animal was now 'defeated' by children from Amsterdam.³

Since the projects *Cushion* and *Dragon* invited the involvement and collaboration of audience members or passers-by, and allowed these people to



Figure 1.
Eventstructure Research Group,
Cushion, at the Nieuwmarkt Feesten,
Nieuwmarktbuurt, Amsterdam, The
Netherlands, 1971.
Photo: Pieter Boersma.
Image courtesy of the artists and the
photographer.



Figure 2.
Eventstructure Research Group,
Dragon, at the Nieuwmarkt Feesten,
Nieuwmarktbuurt, Amsterdam, The
Netherlands, 1971.
Photo: Pieter Boersma.
Image courtesy of the artists and the
photographer.

‘animate’ the works, they can be considered examples of what has been defined as ‘participatory art.’ Reciprocity, teamwork and co-creation are central to this type of art practice, which experienced a first flourishing period from the late 1950s until the early 1970s (also referred to as the ‘long sixties’).⁴ Participatory art projects do not necessarily result in a clearly-defined, tangible end product that can or should be stored and saved for the future. They tend to be focused on temporary processes in the here-and-now and their effects or outcomes are in many cases defined by changeability, multiplicity and ephemerality. Like many other participatory art projects of the long sixties, *Cushion* and *Dragon*, eventually, vanished into thin air. From a heritage practice perspective, concerned with conserving sources from the past and passing them on to future generations, this provides quite a challenge.

In this article, I want to argue that participatory and ephemeral art projects like *Cushion* and *Dragon* can be regarded as forms of fluid art, that ask for fluid practices of documenting and archiving. To this end, I will mobilise the notion of the

‘fluid,’ as defined by the actor-network theory-inspired scholars Annemarie Mol and Marianne De Laet in their 2000 article on the Zimbabwe Bush Pump. Subsequently, I will scrutinise an example of what I consider a ‘fluid archive’—that is the *Art Action Academia* project, initiated by Tjebbe van Tijen—in order to evaluate the potentials and challenges of such an archive. By focusing on art practices that are both ephemeral *and* participatory, by analysing a specific online and participatory documentation project that has its historical roots in volatile practices of art, action and academia of the long sixties, and by introducing the theoretical perspective of the fluid actor, I aim to contribute to the debate and scholarship on how to care for ephemeral forms of heritage.⁵

ART WHICH IS ‘FLUID IN ITS NATURE’

In 2000, Marianne de Laet (an anthropologist of science and technology) and Annemarie Mol (an anthropologist of health, care and the body) published an article in the journal *Social Studies of Science*, in which they discuss the so-called Zimbabwe Bush Pump, a particular hand water pump. Their study is inspired by actor-network theory (ANT), as it emerged from the field of science and technology studies (STS) and was developed, in an early stage, by scholars such as Bruno Latour, John Law and Michel Callon. From an ANT point of view, any given effect is considered a collective effort that can come from both human and non-human entities. Thinking with ANT can help scholars from a wide range of disciplines to regard very diverse phenomena, including technology, legislation or—discussed here—art, as the product of the co-work of an entire army of active, heterogeneous people, things, ideas and other so-called actors.⁶ De Laet and Mol try to demonstrate in their 2000 article that not only can actors be non-rational and non-human, but also fluid without losing their agency.⁷ The classic ANT idea was that things, techniques, can move from one region to another if their syntax remains constant, if they keep the same network around them. Latour used the term *immutable mobile* for this.⁸ Law and Mol, however, described how some objects actually manage to move by adapting to their new circumstances, by changing. According to them, these are *mutable mobiles*.⁹ De Laet and Mol elaborate this further in their text on the Zimbabwe Bush Pump, by analysing the actorship of a piece of technology which is “fluid in its nature.”¹⁰ Their ideas of a fluid actor form—as this paper aims to demonstrate—a useful and insightful lens to analyse participatory and ephemeral artworks, but are also particularly relevant for thinking about the continuation of such fluid art.

The Zimbabwe Bush Pump, as discussed by De Laet and Mol, was originally designed for people living in Zimbabwean villages, in order to pump water out of the ground in a simple, efficient and durable way. Since the 1930s, the object was under constant review and new models came into being. In their text, De Laet and Mol focus on the so-called ‘B’ type of the pump, that was at the moment of their writing spreading most rapidly in Zimbabwe. The two scholars argue that though the pump (made of steel and wood) is solid and mechanical, “its *boundaries* are vague and

moving, rather than being clear and fixed.”¹¹ The pump has, in their view, a “striking adaptability” and flexibility “that allows it to travel almost anywhere.” It is, in other words, a technology that transports and adjusts well, and De Laet and Mol introduce the metaphor of the *fluid* to further discuss the Zimbabwe Bush Pump ‘B’ type. It should be emphasised that the two authors do not consider fluidity a weakness; on the contrary. They write that an object “that isn’t too rigorously bounded, that doesn’t impose itself but tries to serve, that is adaptable, flexible and responsive—in short, a fluid actor—may well prove to be stronger than one which is firm.”¹² For the Bush Pump they demonstrate that its elements are not rigidly linked, and that for long-term performance, such fluidity may be just what this entity needs. For instance, some of its mechanical parts are easily replaced or dismissed and when this is done “the whole’ does not necessarily fall apart” but can continue acting.¹³

De Laet and Mol further state that as a fluid actor—without the clear-cut boundaries that come with a stable identity—the Bush Pump is “entangled, in terms of both its performance and its nature, in a variety of worlds.”¹⁴ The authors discuss processes of installation, operation and maintenance that are entwined with the pump and point out that *community participation* is key to these processes. According to them, the Zimbabwe Bush Pump includes the villagers that put it together, use and maintain it: “The pump is nothing without the community it will serve.”¹⁵ But the pump not only *requires* a community to keep it up and running, the scholars argue; a working pump also *constitutes* a community.¹⁶ Because of these type of entanglements and interdependencies, it is not entirely clear where this actor ends. According to De Laet and Mol, the Bush Pump ‘B’ type has “a number of possible boundaries” and is framed in different ways. However, the fluidity of the pump’s boundaries does, in their view, “not imply that it is vague or random; that it is *everywhere* or *anything*.” The actor’s various boundaries define a limited set of configurations and they each “*enact* a different Bush Pump.”¹⁷

I want to argue that participatory and ephemeral artworks like *Dragon* and *Cushion* can, just like the Bush Pump, be considered fluid actors. Made of air and soft plastic foil, and in dialogue with environmental factors (like the wind or cars parked on the street) and the movements and interactions of participating audience members, *Dragon* and *Cushion* were constantly changing shape and position, demonstrating their fluid nature. These airy and interactive works were—to use the terms of De Laet and Mol—characterised by adaptability, flexibility and responsiveness. The inflatable constructions were also presented at different locations, were temporarily featured in various contexts and could, if needed, even be repaired by members of ERG. Similar to the pump discussed above, they thus travelled and adapted smoothly. Moreover, in their being and doing, these inflatables were intertwined with and dependent on a variety of actors and practices, including members of the audience. They would not have functioned properly without the participation of the community. This makes their boundaries vague and not fixed, and aligns them with the fluid actor discussed by De Laet and Mol.

Across practices as diverse as community art, happening, interactive art or

do-it-yourself art, one can find all kinds of examples of what I want to define here as 'fluid art,' including Allan Kaprow's *Fluids* (1967). Kaprow invited residents of the Los Angeles County (California, United States of America) to contribute to the building of rectangular enclosures of ice blocks throughout the area. Functioning as a proper fluid actor, the different elements that constituted this artwork (such as the ice blocks, the participants and the instructions of the artist) were not rigidly linked and their groupings changed over the course of time. Just like the pump, the work required the participation of the community and, temporarily, constituted one. After the 'happening' the ice structures were simply "left to melt," making them fluid from both a theoretical and empirical perspective.¹⁸ The concept of the 'fluid actor' can, thus, help to identify and analyse artworks—across various media and practices—that are adaptable, flexible and responsive, and may—as De Laet and Mol also remark about the Bush Pump—even 'prove to be stronger' than so-called stable ones.

There is, however, at least one manifest difference between the fluid water pump and artworks like *Dragon*, *Cushion* and *Fluids*. The pump is "made to last" or "created to survive," as De Laet and Mol write.¹⁹ This does not apply to the fluid art projects that are discussed here. Their ephemerality was planned, desired or foreseen. Kaprow knew from the start that the ice constructions would never withstand the Californian sun and the members of ERG had no problems with recycling and, eventually, throwing away their plastic structures.²⁰ Of course, a Zimbabwe Bush Pump *may* also stop working in many ways and for various reasons, even though it is not intended to. De Laet and Mol use the term 'failure' in this regard. In the case of ephemeral art it is not necessarily a failure when a work stops functioning or vanishes; it can be simply one outcome of the creative process and part of the project's nature, goal and, maybe, success. But even though De Laet and Mol write about 'failure,' they also nuance things: they state that when a particular Bush Pump stops being used and fails, "the pump project and the Bush Pump 'B' type do not necessarily die with it." They explain that alternative arrangements of actors are possible, in order to make the Zimbabwe Bush Pump 'B' Type *live on*. For instance, the operation and maintenance of the pump may be shifted to another kind of unit with an alternative kind of responsibility and ownership. Or it may be installed somewhere else. In a similar manner, I want to state, fluid artworks may also live on after their (physical) dissolution, through an "alternative arrangement" or "regrouping" of actors.²¹

One needs to accept that fluid works of art, like *Dragon* and *Cushion*, are physically no longer there. But it does not mean that one needs to completely forget about these fleeting projects or should stop considering (alternative) ways to pass them on and make them 'last.' After all, they are part of our histories of art, communities and cities, have contributed to the formation of our identities and, as such, they are worth transmitting to next generations and 'move' new audiences. Moreover, even though there might have been a clear wish of the artists to initiate *ephemeral* works of art—and for various reasons, including challenging institutional systems and escaping forms of commodification—this does not

automatically mean that they desired their work to be forgotten or wanted the effects of their projects to stop. But how can fluid artworks—perhaps through alternative arrangements or with replaced elements—continue to function in some way, continue to make an impact, continue to act? How to ‘maintain’ them, without limiting or stabilising them? One way to do so, as I want to emphasise, is through (fluid) practices of documenting and archiving.

DOCUMENTING AND ARCHIVING THE FLUID

In recent decades, inside and outside academia, a debate developed regarding the relationship between forms of ephemeral visual art (with a focus on performance art) and practices of documentation and archiving.²² On the one hand, scholars such as Peggy Phelan argued that an ephemeral art form like performance cannot be “saved, recorded, documented or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations.”²³ She claimed that any attempt to document, capture or preserve performance art is a betrayal of its ephemeral nature.²⁴ On the other hand, a scholar such as Philip Auslander states in his writing about performance art that documentation is not “merely a secondary iteration” of an original event that is no longer accessible, but a “vehicle that gives us meaningful access” to such an event.²⁵ In his view, interaction with documentation allows for a *reactivation* of a performance in the present moment, through mental and (imagined) corporeal activity.²⁶ This applies, in my view, equally to other forms of ephemeral art, including the *participatory* practices that are the focus of this paper and rarely considered in the current debate. I want to argue that documents and other remains can play a key role in fluid practices of reactivation and continuation, which are in line with the nature of the original works—not a betrayal of it.

Auslander explains that, because of the reactivation through interaction with documentation, performative and ephemeral works “can have meaning outside their original contexts.”²⁷ By introducing the concept of the fluid actor to the debate, I want to even argue that through documentation—in the form of, for instance, photographs, video recordings or newspaper reports—a different version of a work can be generated. Through a *regrouping of actors* (the words used by De Laet and Mol) a work can be enacted again in a new context, even after its physical dissolution. True, some ‘bolts’ and ‘nuts’ may have to be replaced by other elements (for instance, the grouping of actual human bodies and inflatables may be replaced by a photographic representation of it, that new audiences can interact with), but still another version of the same actor is brought forth, that has a clear connection with its earlier version. This version can make sure that an artwork continues acting and can have a ‘strong,’ lasting impact.

It relates to what sociologist Yaël Kreplak has described as the “multiple realities” of an artwork, or the “plurality of an artwork’s modes of existence,” which can be an artifactual mode, a written mode, a visual mode, an oral mode, etcetera.²⁸ In her article ‘Artworks in and as practices,’ Kreplak demonstrates how artworks are

continuously and reflexively reshaped and redefined through different practices, including practices of installation and conversation.²⁹ She particularly discusses the conversational version of a work of art, and points out how an artwork ‘lasts’ in conversation and eventually ‘dies’ again when the talking stops. In a similar way, we can think of a *documentational version* of a fluid artwork, which on its turn may instigate conversational versions of a work, which could also be documented again. I am not suggesting this with the illusion or wish that an artwork can be fixated or automatically lasts forever through a document. As theatre and performance scholar Dorota Sajewska rightly wrote: “Each repetition of an event—whether reenactment or providing a spoken, written, photographic or video account thereof—is itself subject to the laws of ephemerality.”³⁰ Moreover, stabilisation is not what fluid art needs. However, documents and documentational versions—and the public interactions with them—may play a mediating role in keeping a fluid work in motion, instead of fixating them. Practices of art production and documentation may, in this way, inform—instead of oppose—each other and may contribute to one and the same life trajectory of an artwork. In other words, forms of archiving and documentation can play a role in keeping fluid art alive. They can help *enact* (to use a term of De Laet and Mol), instead of reenact, different versions of an artwork. How this can function in practice will be demonstrated in the next section, where I discuss a documentation system initiated by artist, activist and archivist Tjebbe van Tijen.

TJEBBE VAN TIJEN’S WILL TO ARCHIVE

The fluid art practices of the 1960s and 1970s, despite their ephemerality, left many immaterial and material traces in the form of, for instance, photographs and memories. Furthermore, some actors involved in volatile art practices of the 1960s and 1970s were from an early stage concerned with archiving them for future generations, which also challenges the myth of the ephemerality of these art practices.³¹ One such actor is Tjebbe van Tijen. Since the 1960s, he worked as an artist in the fields of sculpture, happening and (multi-)media art, and was, for instance, involved in the projects of ERG. Van Tijen also developed as an activist in the long sixties, being part of the above-mentioned ‘Aktiegroep Nieuwmarkt’ and protesting against urban renewal restructuring in Amsterdam and for housing opportunities for all. Additionally, from an early stage, he started to archive his own actions and those of others.³² In 1967, for example, he initiated the ‘Documentation centre for art, technology and society’ and from 1973, Van Tijen worked as archivist for the library of the University of Amsterdam and later the International Institute for Social History (IISG). In various functions, he collected and stored journals, pamphlets, posters, photographs, meeting minutes and other documents, covering artistic and social movements in and around Amsterdam from the 1960s onwards. As media theorist Geert Loving once described it: “For many, Tjebbe van Tijen embodies the Will to Archive.”³³

ART ACTION ACADEMIA 1964 - 2009

a growing documentation system of EVENTS as products of shifting collaborations, set in their esthetic, social and technical context

documentation by Tjebbe van Tijen/Imaginary Museum Projects assisted by Pieter Boersma and Remko Scha with thanks to many people who have supplied or added materials

This is the second on-line version (launched 21/02/2010) of the AAA documentation system and has 147 events starting with the Amsterdam street happenings of Robert Jasper Grootveld in 1964 that set a new stage for other forms of creativity and critical action and ending with a street happening at the same spot 45 years later being Grootveld's funeral. The first version of AAA was launched in 2006 and had 49 events. Links to this first version which has many detailed texts and on-line visual references are provided. A new version with over 200 events is in the making. There is a text page with a tentative list of 'events' to be added. The third version of the AAA documentation will be constructed as a collaborative work directly involving the people involved, allowing them to add information and to suggest corrections and alterations. For each event a Wordpress Blog' version will also be generated, thus adding public participation options to the project.



The basic ideas for the AAA documentation project have been formulated in an essay by Tjebbe van Tijen "ART~ACTION~ACADEMIA 1960-2006" published in May 2006: "Starting point has been my own involvement in such events, often products of collaborative work. Tracing back crossing paths, producing a reconstruction that can not be complete, but will still be inspirational. Documenting, like the weaving of a social tapestry" This text was published as A2 size poster and can also be found in an [on-line version](#). The actual data for the AAA web site is entered and kept in a series of databases (the Ars Memoria System) from which these webpages have been generated. This second version focusses on the visualization of 'events' and specific links to scattered resources on the internet, which will be also archived a the coming period, as internet resources tend to be instable or fugitive. This project has (partly) been supported by the ThuisKopie Fonds.



In 2006, Van Tijen launched the online *Art Action Academia* (AAA) project, with the aim to digitally document events in the domains of art, action and academia that took place since the 1960s, primarily in Amsterdam [Figure 3].³⁴ Its focus on fluid forms of art and action makes the online archive an interesting case to introduce here. Moreover, I want to demonstrate that AAA itself can also be considered a fluid actor. Starting point for the project has been Van Tijen's own involvement in the cultural events to be documented, although most of them were the result of a collective endeavour. Collaborative work is also what is at the heart of the archival project itself: the documentary system was designed as a "growing repository as the project develops, stimulating public participation, allowing for adjustments and modifications by those who were involved, facilitating adding of new material."³⁵ Van Tijen even wanted to generate a 'WordPress Blog' for each event, providing users with the possibility to add information, to suggest corrections and to comment on data. Internet seemed to him the obvious medium for such forms of audience participation.³⁶

Another important characteristic of AAA is that it is a continuous growing and changing entity, or "work in progress," as Van Tijen also describes it.³⁷ The

Figure 3.

Screenshot of the second version of the online documentation system *Art Action Academia*, launched by Tjebbe van Tijen in 2010.


Image courtesy of Tjebbe van Tijen.

initiator of the digital repository stays away from the paradoxical idea that safeguarding ephemeral, intangible heritage is simply a matter of capturing and freezing that which is meant to be volatile and moving.³⁸ He is not interested in creating a stable and fixed site for preserving fluid events, but allows AAA to take different shapes over time, also through the input and additions of (unknown) users. It is his purpose to make AAA both permanent *and* temporary. On the one hand, Van Tijen is concerned with “a ‘passing on’ from generation to generation” (making sure that things continue and endure), but on the other hand, he is very aware of the “unstable and fugitive” character of internet sources or particular constellations.³⁹ In the meantime, also two versions of AAA have been launched and, according to the website, a third version is in the making.

Figure 4.

Screenshot of the first version of the online documentation system *Art Action Academia*, launched by Tjebbe van Tijen in 2006, showing the section with information on the Nieuwmarkt Feesten in 1971. Image courtesy of Tjebbe van Tijen.

One of the events that is documented in the AAA database is the 1971 festival in the Nieuwmarktbuurt, of which ERG's *Cushion* and *Dragon* were part [Figure 4]. The documentation system provides a visualisation of the event (a blend of photographs) and textual information on the what, why, who, where and when of the festival. It is, for instance, noted that the Eventstructure Research



what

During one week a series of playful and cultural festivities was organized in the Amsterdam Nieuwmarktbuurt in which many volunteers from all kind of social and cultural backgrounds took part. The initiative was taken by the "aktiegroep Nieuwmarkt (action group ..) that had been active for two years in this neighbourhood that had on the drawing boards of the municipal planners already been wiped of the map. To boost the resistance and the local morale these festivities were organized, initiated by squatters and their supporters. At first there had been some mistrust on the part of the local population, but with the help of a few original inhabitants who recognized that the neighbourhood was almost doomed and that such social activity could help in changing that, many more people joined in.

A former factory hall (De Smederij/Smithy) had been converted in a cultural center and also many street activities took place. The action group had already for four years published a regular weekly newspaper called 'Nieuwmarkt' that conveyed the latest critical news on the town planners undertakings, interviews with older people, photo reportage, poetry and the like. The print shop was also based in the Nieuwmarkt neighbourhood and helped also with leaflets, flyers and posters. This print shop had been started by people who had been active in the Dutch provo movement in the mid sixties.

In the same neighbourhood some collective carpenters and construction workshops had been set up that helped out with setting things up for the festivities. Also there was a workshop of the artists that formed the Event Structure Research Group (ERG) that followed up the earlier group called Sigma Projekten. They joined the festivities with some inflatables, one of them being made for a movie by the French American filmmaker William Klein Mr., Freedom. This was a huge inflatable dragon that proved a nice play thing for the kids of the neighbourhood.

What was most interesting in the program of that week was the combination of very traditional cultural forms like small orchestras, opera singing, and brass bands with outside movie shows, school children making hand painted posters, inflatables and the outside projection of independent movies and p slides by photographers living in the neighbourhood.

why


Amsterdam had decided in 1968 to build its first underground system that would have four lines: East, West, North and South. As the subsoil of Amsterdam is very soft and muddy there was at that time not a technique to go underneath the existing buildings. So were an underground/metro line was planned everything had to be

Nieuwmarkt Feesten Amsterdam 1971 (neighbourhood festival)
collective undertaking
41 contributing persons
3 contributing organizations
4 locations


who
persons
Beeren, Gerrit van: support
Berg, Gerard van de: radio
Boersma, Pieter: slide projection
Botschuyver, Theo: inflatables
Bouwman, Tom: reportage
Breebaert, Dick: production
cafe, Wouter (Jazz cafe): jazz podium
Clement, Muriel: production
Davidson, Steef: organizer
Elksen, Ed van der: slide projection
Francken, Wim: carillonneur
Haas, Polo de: pianist
Hak, Koos: singer
Harn, Piet van: organizer
Heemskerk, Willem: production
Hoeben, Max: poet
Hofman, Hannes: organizer
Hofman, Tini: organizer
Jansens, Magda: story teller
Jong, Jan de: production
Jozef, : children's activities
Keuken, Johan van der: film projection
Landkroon, Jan: guitarist
Leen, Tante: singer
Merwen, Jaap van der: singer
Mona, : children's activities
Mullens, Harry: magician
Nimwegen, Lou van: printer
Onderwater, Jelle: singer
Poncia, Klaas: organizer
Post, Leo: singer
Rietveld, Marieke: support
Rijn, Cor van: standing-up comedian
Schat, Peter: singer
Schiks, Carine: singer
Shaw, Jeffrey: inflatables
Stolk, Rob: printer
Stranger, Miek: organizer, singer
Tamminga, Mini: production
Tijl, Tjebbe van: organizer
Zijl, Sietze: organizer

organizations
NLD Amsterdam, Buurtcentrum De Boomspijker: organizer
NLD Amsterdam, Event Structure Research Group (ERG): supporter
NLD Amsterdam, Wijkcentrum d'Oude Stadt : subsidiser


where/when
locations
(1971) NLD Amsterdam, De Smederij
(1971) NLD Amsterdam, Koningsstraat (Nieuwmarkt)
(1971) NLD Amsterdam, Nieuwmarkt (plein/square)
(1971) NLD Amsterdam, Nieuwmarkt (speel plein/play ground)



1968/1969; Klein, William; Mister Freedom; Poster for movie for which the Event Structure Research group made an inflatable dragon.



1971; Nieuwmarkt no.15; Weekly neighbourhood paper for neighbourhoods around Nieuwmarkt, Amsterdam. This is a special pictorial reportage of the festivities in June..



1984; Nijenhuis, Tineke; de beste aktiegroep ter wereld ... : 40 dorpsverhalen uit de Nieuwmarkt; (the best action group in the world ...) 40 interviews with activists, supporters, outsiders, observers and targeted officials all related to ten years of conflicts and creativity in the Amsterdam Nieuwmarkt neighbourhood. How cultural festivities became a part of the struggle...

Group contributed to the programme. There are also three links provided to related digitised documents and publications, including a contemporary neighbourhood newspaper reporting on the happening. The original aim of the AAA system was to include written and oral interviews with people who were involved in the documented events, and reactions from insiders and outsiders; but these are (still) lacking. Moreover, as a visitor of the website you would have hoped for more visual materials, especially since it is known that these do exist.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, this section of AAA demonstrates how different actors (including various (digitised) documents, the contributor(s) who provided the information and the hyperlinks) collaborate together, in order to generate a particular narrative of the festival or, as explained above, a specific documentational version of the event in Amsterdam. The online archive and its documents help, through an alternative arrangement of actors, to keep works like *Cushion* and *Dragon* alive and to continue their affect. Users of the database encounter traces of the complex, collaborative networks of art and action in the 1960s and 1970s, but these traces also cooperate, in the present, to bring about knowledge, art history and heritage. AAA furthermore shows how different networks of production—then and now, artistic and archival—are intertwined and inform each other.⁴¹

Considering AAA's dependence on collaborative work and community participation, its growing and changing nature, its entanglement with other actors and practices, and its vague and moving boundaries, it can be stated that the documentation system functions as a fluid actor, as described by Mol and De Laet. Starting from their definition, the archive could be regarded as a fluid archive. To what extent does this online, fluid, community archive, moving between ephemerality and permanency, link up with broader tendencies of archival practice and thinking? Can the fluid approach of AAA, even though operating in the margins, set an example for other (more established) institutions and actors, concerned with archiving fluid and solid heritage? What are its potentials and challenges? These questions will be considered in the concluding part of this article.

CONCLUDING WORDS:

POTENTIALS AND CHALLENGES OF A FLUID ARCHIVE

Traditionally, archives are considered to be concerned with fixating things, stabilising things and preserving things the way they are. This creates tension with the fluid art practices of the past, which were introduced above. Documenting such practices and keeping them 'in motion' (instead of fixating them), requires alternative, fluid archival models. In the field of archiving—luckily, in this regard—mindsets and practices have been shifting in the last few years. For instance, the adoption of UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2003, defining intangible cultural heritage as both dynamic and living, instigated a new approach to heritage and stimulated a rethinking of archiving practices. As alluded to by scholars such as anthropologist Chiara Bortolotto, it represented a move

away from a traditional (European) archival approach that focused on history and fixed objects, to an approach that “was fluid and changeable.”⁴² At home in the world of archiving, Van Tijen and his AAA link up with this fluid approach.

Moreover, scholars such as Wolfgang Ernst and Wendy Hui Kyong Chun have pointed out that in times of digital technology and digital memory, archives are in transition. Ernst writes that “[a]lthough the traditional archive used to be a rather static memory, the notion of the archive in Internet communications tends to move the archive toward an economy of circulation,” characterised by “permanent transformations and updating” and “permanent recycling of information.”⁴³ This is in line with what Chun has defined as the “enduring ephemeral” of the digital.⁴⁴ She writes that digital media were believed to solve archival problems, to make things more stable, more lasting. However, if they enable a form of permanence at all, Chun continues to argue, it is because memories are constantly refreshed, so that their ephemerality endures. This form of permanence that is achieved through dynamic refreshing instead of fixation, is also at the core of Van Tijen’s fluid archive, as discussed above.

It can be concluded that the AAA system, launched in 2006, fits in with recent and broader developments in archival thinking and doing, and related calls for embracing fluidity.⁴⁵ The case of AAA demonstrates how such an embrace can function in practice and may lead the way for future initiatives in this regard. It offers, first of all, an online system that suits and respects the ephemeral, fluid practices that it wants to document and ‘preserve’: not by stabilising them, but by keeping them moving and acting. In this way, it provides a concrete and promising example of how to care for this form of (ephemeral) heritage. Moreover, the fluid archive initiated by Van Tijen offers possibilities for the involvement of different communities and audiences, which is in line with the collaborative and participatory practices it documents, but can also offer a solution for passing on other forms of heritage. This also ties in with the Faro Convention of the Council of Europe (2005), which promotes a participatory approach to cultural heritage, recognising the importance of human rights and democracy in managing and preserving heritage.⁴⁶ In addition, Van Tijen’s initiative sets a promising example by offering space for subjects, materials and voices that are easily overlooked or fall outside existing systems, categorisations and criteria of established institutions.⁴⁷

Apart from these potentials, the AAA system also reveals the challenges of a fluid archive. In order to continue acting, it requires—just like the Zimbabwe Bush Pump—a supporting and caring community; the larger and stronger the network of care, the better. But what if only a small circle of actors is participating in a project and these actors grow older and (eventually) die? In the case of AAA, the system is depending heavily on the effort of Van Tijen (born in 1944) and people from his inner circle, making community involvement limited and rendering its future vulnerable.⁴⁸ There is also a hazard that this online, fluid archive, started by a private individual, although accessible to everyone with an internet connection, is invisible and unfindable for larger groups of people. If an archive remains isolated

and untraceable, no documents, stories or knowledge will be passed on, and, consequently, heritage will (still) remain unknown and in danger of disappearing. In other words, operating on the margins, without the care of a larger community (similar as with the Bush Pump) or the support from established institutions, an archive like this is at risk. In order to remain operating in a visible and sustainable way, more human care and institutional support is needed, but also continuous technical updates and—most likely—more financial resources. Bringing back to mind ERG's *Cushion* project, more networking, linking and collaboration is needed in order to keep the 'cushion' (i.e. the fluid AAA) up in the air.

The analysis of AAA has elucidated the links of this digital archive to and its suitability for the continuation of fluid art practices. The networks of actors bringing forth AAA are demonstrated to be connected to the networks that effected the art practices it documents, displaying an interesting entanglement between artistic and archival practices. Furthermore, the study has not only shown AAA's value as a source of information about a volatile past, but also the potentials (like encouraging participation) and challenges (such as its sustainability) of such a model for future forms of care for ephemeral art and heritage. The concept of the 'fluid actor' as discussed in this paper, yielded—in addition—a new frame for (scholarly) thinking about and dealing with these fluid art and archival practices, and making them last. The concept stimulated consideration of rearrangements of actors and the enactment of different versions, and the role documents and archives can play in this. By analysing specific cases of fluid art and archiving—which are not broadly known—this study has, moreover, aimed to connect theory and practice and to demonstrate concretely how a fluid archive, like AAA, helps to keep fluid artworks, such as *Cushion* and *Dragon*, alive. With these new insights, perspectives, and connections, the paper has aimed to contribute to the existing scholarship on fleeting forms of art and heritage and, moreover, hopes to stimulate further dialogue and co-work among actors concerned with making, studying, archiving and caring for them.

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1 See the website *Art - Action - Academia: social and technical context of events and collaborations 1966-2006* initiated by Tjebbe van Tijen, accessed October 14, 2024, https://imaginarymuseum.org/imp_archive/AAA/index.html#16.

2 See for more information on ERG and *Cushion* also Theo Botschuijver, *Playful Inventions* (Lecturis, 2021) and the *Jeffrey Shaw Compendium*, accessed October 14, 2024, <https://www.jeffreyshawcompendium.com/>.

3 See "Draak door kinderen verslagen," *Nieuwsmarkt*, no. 15, June 19, 1971, 4. See also the *Jeffrey Shaw Compendium*, accessed October 14, 2024, <https://www.jeffreyshawcompendium.com/portfolio/dragon/>.

4 Anna Dezeuze, ed., *The 'Do-It-Yourself' Artwork: Participation from Fluxus to New Media* (Manchester University Press, 2010); Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (Verso, 2012); Samuel Bianchini and Erik Verhagen, eds., *Practicable: From Participation to Interaction in Contemporary Art* (The MIT Press, 2016); Annemarie Kok, *Pioneering Participatory Art Practices: Tracing Actors, Associations and Interactions across the Long Sixties* (Transcript, 2024).

5 The issue of care for ephemeral art and heritage has been increasingly foregrounded in recent years in scholarly publications and (related) research projects inside and outside academia. The topic is scrutinised by scholars from various disciplines, including art history, heritage studies, museum studies, and dance and performance studies. With regard to the visual arts, a focus on performance and media art predominates. See, for instance, Caitlin Jones and Lizzie Muller, "Between Real and Ideal: Documenting Media Art," *Leonardo* 41, no. 4 (2008): 418–9, <https://doi.org/10.1162/leon.2008.41.4.418>; Alexandra Saemmer and Bernadette Dufrêne, eds., "Patrimoines éphémères," *Hybrid*, no. 1 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.4000/hybrid.1061>; Fernando Domínguez Rubio, "Preserving the Unpreservable: Docile and Unruly Objects at MoMA," *Theory and Society* 43, no. 6 (2014): 617–45, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-014-9233-4>; Vivian van Saaze, "In the Absence of Documentation: Remembering Tino Sehgal's Constructed Situations," *Revista de História da Arte*, 4 (2015): 55–63; Dietmar Rübel, "Die Musealisierung des Ephemereren," in *Plastizität: Eine Kunstgeschichte Des Veränderlichen* (Verlag Silke Schreiber, 2012), 268–305; Fernando Domínguez Rubio, *Still Life: Ecologies of the Modern Imagination at the Art Museum* (University of Chicago Press, 2020), <https://doi-org.proxy-ub.rug.nl/10.7208/9780226714110>; Jessica Gogan, "How to Care for an Act? Lydia Clark's Caminhando and Rosácea Toward Curating Inside/ Out," *Stedelijk Studies Journal*, no. 12 (2023), <https://stedelijkstudies.com/journal/how-to>.

[care-for-an-act/](#); Hanna Hölling, et al., eds., *Performance: The Ethics and the Politics of Care*, vol. 1 (Routledge, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003309987>. Noteworthy research projects have been developed at Tate, London, including: 'Collecting the Performative' (2012-2014), 'Performance at Tate: Collecting, Archiving and Sharing Performance and the Performative' (2014-2016) and 'Cartography Research Project' (2016-2017).

6 See also John Law, "Notes on the Theory of the Actor Network: Ordering, Strategy and Heterogeneity," *Centre for Science Studies*, Lancaster University (2003), <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/resources/sociology-online-papers/papers/law-notes-on-ant.pdf>; Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, (Oxford University Press, 2005); Annemarie Mol, "Actor-Network Theory: Sensitive Terms and Enduring Tensions," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 50, special issue (2010): 253–69, <https://hdl.handle.net/11245/1.330874>; Ignacio Fariás, Celia Roberts, and Anders Blok, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Actor-Network Theory* (Routledge, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315111667>.

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8 Bruno Latour, "Visualization and Cognition: Drawing Things Together," *Knowledge and Society: Studies in the Sociology of Culture Past and Present: a Research Annual*, no. 6 (1986): 7. See also Annemarie Mol, "Heterogene ingenieurs en performatieve methoden: een interview met John Law," *Tijdschrift Sociologie* 10, no. 3/4 (2010): 398–404.

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10 De Laet and Mol, "Zimbabwe Bush Pump," 225.

11 Ibid., 225.

12 Ibid., 226.

13 Ibid., 247.

14 Ibid., 227.

15 Ibid., 234.

16 Ibid., 245.

17 Ibid., 237–8.

18 Allan Kaprow, poster for *Fluids*, 1967, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Allan Kaprow Papers, no. 980063.

19 De Laet and Mol, "Zimbabwe Bush Pump," 228, 238.

20 Theo Botschuijver in an interview with the author on July 11, 2023.

21 De Laet and Mol, "Zimbabwe Bush Pump," 246, 260n48.

22 See on this also Annet Dekker and Gabriella Giannachi, "Introduction," in *Documentation as Art: Expanded Digital Practices*, ed. Annet Dekker and Gabriella Giannachi (Routledge, 2022), 3–4, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003130963>. See also Gabriella Giannachi, *Archive Everything: Mapping the Everyday* (The MIT Press, 2016), EBSCOhost.

23 Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (Routledge, 1993), 146.

24 See also Anja Foerschner and Rachel Rivenc, "Documenting Carolee Schneemann's Performance Works," *Getty Research Journal*, no. 10 (2018): 180–1.

25 Philip Auslander, *Reactivations: Essays on Performance and Its Documentation* (University of Michigan Press, 2018), 97, back cover.

26 See in particular *ibid.*, 19, 98, 101.

27 *Ibid.*, 60.

28 Yaël Kreplak, "Artworks in and as Practices: The Relevance of Particulars," in *Practicing Art/Science: Experiments in an Emerging Field*, ed. Philippe Sormani et al. (Routledge, 2018), 153–4, 158, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315175881>.

29 *Ibid.*, 144.

30 See the English translation of Dorota Sajewska, "Mit efemeryczności teatru," *Dialog*,

- no. 1 (2015): 80-92, <http://re-sources.uw.edu.pl/reader/the-myth-of-the-ephemerality-of-theater/>.
- 31 Ibid. See for a discussion of the 'myth of ephemerality,' particularly in the field of theatre. As pointed out by Auslander, *Reactivations*, 1–4, the ephemerality of performance is also called into question in recent years.
- 32 Geert Lovink, "We No Longer Collect the Carrier but the Information: Interview met Tjebbe van Tijen," *Mediamatic Magazine* 8, no. 1 (1994), <https://www.mediamatic.net/nl/page/12834/we-no-longer-collect-the-carrier-but-the-information>. English translation via *Networkcultures.org*, <https://networkcultures.org/geertlovink-archive/interviews/interview-with-tjebbe-van-tijen-english-version/>.
- 33 Geert Lovink, "Unbombing & Ars Memoria: An interview with Tjebbe van Tijen," in "(No) Memory: Storing and Recalling in Contemporary Art and Culture," special issue, *Open, cahier on art and the public domain*, no. 7 (2004), <https://onlineopen.org/unbombing-ars-memoria>.
- 34 See for the first online version of AAA launched in 2006: https://imaginarymuseum.org/imp_archive/AAA/index.html#21. See for the second online version of AAA launched in 2010: <https://imaginarymuseum.org/AAA/indexAAAtest2.html>. The basic ideas for the AAA documentation project have been formulated in an essay by Tjebbe van Tijen published in May 2006 on one A1 sheet for a lecture of PSWAR (Public Space With A Roof) in Amsterdam for the manifestation 'Pictures of Reality, What Do You Know, What Do You See,' see: <https://imaginarymuseum.org/PSWAR/AAA01.html>.
- 35 See Van Tijen's 2006 essay, <https://imaginarymuseum.org/PSWAR/AAA01.html>.
- 36 See Van Tijen in Lovink, "Unbombing."
- 37 See Van Tijen's introduction to the first online version of AAA: https://imaginarymuseum.org/imp_archive/AAA/AAAintro.html.
- 38 See on this paradox also Marilena Alivizatou, "The Paradoxes of Intangible Heritage," in *Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage*, ed. Michelle L. Stefano et al. (Boydell & Brewer, 2012), 9–22, Cambridge eBooks.
- 39 See Van Tijen's 2006 essay, <https://imaginarymuseum.org/PSWAR/AAA01.html>. See also Van Tijen's introduction to the second version of AAA: <https://imaginarymuseum.org/AAA/indexAAAtest2.html>.
- 40 For instance, photographer Pieter Boersma took various photographs during the event, which are now part of his personal archives.
- 41 See on similar processes and mechanisms of production in physical archives also Albena Yaneva, *Crafting History: Archiving and the Quest for Architectural Legacy* (Cornell University Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501751837>.
- 42 Chiara Bortolotto, "From Objects to Processes: UNESCO's 'Intangible Cultural Heritage,'" *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, no. 19 (2007): 21–33, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40793837>. See also Jeannette A. Bastian, *Archiving Cultures: Heritage, Community and the Making of Records and Memory* (Routledge, 2023), 16, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003091813>.
- 43 Wolfgang Ernst, "Archives in Transition: Dynamic Media Memories," in *Digital Memory and the Archive*, ed. Jussi Parikka (University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 95, 99, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctt32bcwb.10>. He continues: "The aesthetics of fixed order is being replaced by permanent reconfigurability."
- 44 Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, "The Enduring Ephemeral, or the Future Is a Memory," *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 1 (2008): 148–71.
- 45 See also Bastian, *Archiving Cultures*, 110. Interested in archives for the performing arts, the editors of the e-journal *MAP - Media | Archive | Performance* also made a plea for fluidity, fluid access, as a basic prerequisite for a more open kind of knowledge acquisition "which could link up the scattered potential of protagonists in different fields" (see: <https://perfomap.de/map1/editorial1engl>).
- 46 The Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro, 27 October 2005) [CETS No. 199] can be found online: <https://rm.coe.int/1680083746>.

47 See on this issue also Van Tijen in Lovink, "Unbombing."

48 Lena van Tijen, daughter of Tjebbe van Tijen, also worries about the future of the archival practices of her father. See Lena van Tijen, "Mag het weg? Wat te doen met een kunstenaarsarchief?" *De Groene Amsterdammer* 146, no. 1-2 (2023), <https://www.groene.nl/artikel/mag-het-weg>.