Chapter 14

Memorializing a Controversial Politician

The “Heritagization” of a Materialized Vox Populi

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Smell of the Grave

It was still dark when we arrived, early in the morning of 7 April 2004, at the Westerveld cemetery in Driehuis, a small town that lies north of Haarlem and about a twenty-minute drive from Amsterdam. The archivist of the Meertens Institute had driven there in her van, while I had taken my station wagon. Between them, the two vehicles had enough room to carry all the material we had come to fetch. The old, out-of-the-way cemetery—which in daylight is one of the most beautiful in the Netherlands, situated as it is in the hilly and romantically overgrown dune landscape along the Dutch coast—was pitch black and totally deserted.

A small light was burning in the reception center at the entrance, where we met the cemetery director. We introduced ourselves and went through the rest of the procedure, speaking in somewhat hushed voices. This lent an extra charge to the excitement, precisely because our stillness suddenly began to contrast strangely with the swelling sound of a tow truck slowly climbing the dune behind the building. Speed was of the essence now that dawn was approaching, as our task had to be finished before anyone in the vicinity discovered what we were up to.

We followed the tow truck up the dune. We did not have far to go, as the grave was quite close to the entrance. When we arrived at the grave, we saw that the gravedigger had done the necessary excavation: He had carefully removed the flower bed around the grave and uncovered the
The tow truck maneuvered into position and long cables were fixed around the heavy stone slab covering the tomb. A small glass monument mounted on top of the slab was in the way of the operations and was in danger of being shattered by the cables. However, the tow truck operator skillfully avoided the danger and lifted the slab without problems. When a floodlight lit up the open vault, we breathed a collective sigh of relief: There was indeed no longer a corpse in the grave.

The Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn— for this was his grave— had specified in his will that when he died he wished to be buried near his vacation home, namely, in the cemetery of the Tuscan village of Provesano. And that is what happened. On 19 July 2002, slightly over two months after Fortuyn’s murder, his body was removed from this temporary resting place. The event received massive media coverage and was shown live on a national TV broadcast. The body was subsequently flown from Rotterdam to Italy. Out of reverence—and to avoid reinflaming the still heated feelings in Dutch society—the exhumation itself was carefully planned and shielded from public view. Large screens were set up around the cemetery to hide the grave from the gaze of the public and the media. As a result of the exhumation, the grave became a pseudo-grave; it is now no more than a memorial. The fact that Fortuyn had been temporarily buried there at all was related to his unexpected death. The monumental grave that Fortuyn had in mind for himself in Italy took some time to prepare. Moreover, in light of the immense social upheaval and the collective mourning sparked by the murder, it seemed desirable to offer people a safety valve in the form of a temporary focus for their grief.

But the screening off of the exhumation and removal of the body led to intermittent rumors that Fortuyn’s body had not been taken to Italy, but still rested in the cemetery at Driehuis, his town of birth. As witnesses to this operation, we could now confute these rumors. What we could discern there in the vague half-light of dawn were parts of the improvised memorial that had been assembled by visitors to the grave in the period between the burial on 10 May and the exhumation on 19 July, carelessly crammed into boxes. In that period about 130,000 people from all over the Netherlands visited the grave. They collectively created a memorial that was continually subject to change and constantly grew larger. Because the majority of the memorial gifts were flowers and plants, which soon withered, a permanent memorial management was set up to keep the site manageable and presentable. This meant that perishable elements were regularly removed, while written documents—such as letters and the mourning cards affixed to bouquets—were collected so that they could be given to the family. Every week most of the material deposited was cleared away; some was stored, while the rest was dis-
carded. Less-perishable objects were sometimes left at the graveside for a longer period. During these two months, the temporary memorial thus regrew every day by accretion.

After the removal of the coffin, the family decided to give the vault a new function by filling it with the letters and objects that visitors had left at the grave over the preceding two months. The emotional scenes during Fortuyn’s funeral on 10 May 2002, and during the period of mourning that followed, were still clearly in everybody’s mind two years later. It was for this reason that the director of the cemetery wished to open the vault for us under the cover of darkness, so that no one would be aware of the removal of the materials that had been placed in it.

The odor that arose after this second opening of the vault made it all too clear that burial had not done the material any good. The damp and unventilated space appeared to have affected various objects and documents. However, there was no time for further inspection or reflection, as dawn was breaking. The staff hastily lifted the boxes from the vault and put them on a tractor, which took them to our vehicles. Immediately thereafter we returned to Amsterdam, the stuffy, moldy smell in the vehicles forcing us to keep the windows rolled down. It was not until we arrived at the Meertens Institute that what we had brought back really began to sink in. There were no fewer than twelve large boxes filled with diverse

objects, letters, and cards. Because some of the boxes had been affected by damp, the material was laid out to dry so that it could be inventoried. At the time, the strong sensitivities related to the Fortuyn case were still widely felt in Dutch society, and not uncommonly fed by nondescript feelings of personal and collective shame and even guilt. The delicacy of the whole case prompted the described secluded and arcane behavior, especially concerning the memory and memorializing of Fortuyn, or what seemed to be the beginning of a dememorialization process. This last aspect makes it all the more relevant to know why these materials were nevertheless “saved” from decay and oblivion. After all, the collected ephemera were meant for a temporary purpose. In this partly autoreflective contribution, I analyze why and how an academic institution counterbalanced this process of dememorialization with a special case of heritage production. But before I present my analysis of such contemporary processes of memorialization and “heritagization,” it is necessary to contextualize and sketch how it was possible that the brand-new politician Pim Fortuyn could cause such an emotional upheaval and have post mortem such a profound impact on Dutch society, and for which a process of immediate heritage production seemed appropriate and relevant.

A Controversial Politician

The fifty-four-year-old Pim Fortuyn was killed on 6 May 2002 in the parking lot of the national Mediapark in Hilversum as he left a radio interview, which had formed part of his election campaign. He was slain by five shots from a Firestar pistol wielded by Volkert van der Graaf, a thirty-two-year-old environmentalist and animal rights activist.

Fortuyn was a complete political outsider, as apart from some flirtations with another conservative party six months earlier, there was only a month to go before the closing date for registering political parties for the parliamentary elections on 15 May 2002, when on 11 February, he founded a new party named after himself: the Lijst Pim Fortuyn (Pim Fortuyn List), or LPF for short. It had been only in mid-2001 that the former professor of sociology resolved to do something about the nation’s problems and became really politically active. His increasing opposition to the dominant political culture, combined with the incapacity or refusal of politicians to acknowledge the extent and depth of the country’s problems, acted as a catalyst for his success. From that moment, Fortuyn intensified his across-the-board attack on the established political order.

The government at the time was the “purple” coalition, named after the red and blue party colors of the Labor and Liberal coalition mem-
bers, respectively. This coalition had governed for eight years, in two cabinets. Fortuyn broke with the rigid sociability of Dutch management and politics, which sought to maintain the negotiated “polder model” of consensus politics in order to minimize conflict. Time and again, Fortuyn pointed out the problems that this supposedly caused and the problems that it could not solve. His central themes were asylum seekers (“The Netherlands is full”), foreign-born residents and their inadequate adaptation to Dutch life, criminality and a lack of safety on the streets, bureaucracy and political correctness, an inadequate healthcare system, poor infrastructure, and massive traffic jams (Akkerman 2005; Rydgren and van Holsteyn 2005). His message was taken seriously, especially by groups that had become alienated from conventional politics. These groups included those who were confronted in their day-to-day lives with the problems he was highlighting, as well as young people who felt no attraction to the “old” politics or regarded themselves as antiestablishment. Politicians and media commentators labeled him “populist” and his proposals “demagogic” or “too simplistic.” They tried to undermine his popularity by stereotyping and stigmatizing him as “extreme right” (Eckardt 2003; Lucardie and Voerman 2007). This was all brought up in the media, and as a consequence the press started to cover Fortuyn and his campaign even more intensely. Fortuyn was able to strategically use this demonization, the “underdog effect,” his role as a victim, and his openness about his shortcomings and personal peculiarities. It all helped to increase his popularity.

By the time of his assassination, polls indicated that his party would take between 20 and 38 of the 150 seats in parliament—which would have been an unprecedented political upheaval. He was even being spoken of as a potential prime minister. His killing was the first political murder in the Netherlands since the country had become a kingdom, and it sent an unprecedented shock wave through Dutch society. It was not only the political nature of the murder that shocked society—such a murder was perceived as anomalous to the so-called nonviolent and pacifist traditions of Dutch society—but also the sudden silencing of this powerful, new political voice and movement that was challenging the otherwise staid Dutch political establishment and presenting the image of a new society. Fortuyn represented a new political voice that reflected the views and feelings of a substantial, but regularly ignored, section of the nation’s lower and middle classes. Despite his death, on 15 May 2002 over 17 percent of Dutch voters voted for his party, giving it twenty-six seats. In one leap, the LPF became the second largest party in the country and a partner in the new government (Chorus and de Galan 2002; Nicolasen 2002; Dekkers 2002; van Holsteyn and Irwin 2003).
In only a few months, Fortuyn had managed to mobilize a relatively large group of nonimmigrant Dutch men and women who, in the preceding years, had taken practically no part in public political debates and had entirely lost interest in political and administrative electoral matters. To a great extent, these were precisely the people who were most often confronted with the problems of contemporary global and multicultural society, problems that were not being addressed because of the viscosity of administrators and the bureaucracy (Cuperus 2003). Through Fortuyn’s assassination, they suddenly lost their leader, who was perceived as a “prophet of redemption.” In their form and function, the public and collective emotion and the wave of condolence were massive (de Hart 2005). Their central function was not only a form of public mourning, but also an instrument of Fortuyn’s supporters to prevent the disappearance of their critique of politics and government and to maintain public attention to the issues they had raised. Despite the loss of their spokesman, they still wanted to be seen and heard. In this sense, the grassroots memorials and their media coverage facilitated a public and collective performance and expression of the self.

Memorialization

Cultural phenomena such as memorialization and commemoration are important instruments for creating and propagating values, and for influencing and manipulating personal and societal values. Setting up various monuments and memorial activities to Fortuyn could contribute amply to such processes. Through values that individuals and groups connect with memorialization, cultural differences can be normalized, reduced (process of “connectivity”), increased (process of “isolation”), or reassessed. The collective public action that was initiated after the murder was focused on retaining the substance and content of Fortuyn’s ideas. Pierre Nora observed that man is doomed to forget (cited in Perry 1999: 110). Thus, some months after the murder and the removal of the powerful grassroots memorials, worries arose within his political circles and his family that in the Dutch context of changing social circumstances and political machinations, Fortuyn’s significance would soon be forgotten—a development that the Fortuyn family and his political party wanted to counteract. On the one hand this was striven for via traditional commemorative ways, while on the other hand they received “support” from a national heritage institution.

The background to the nocturnal operation by the Meertens Institute can be traced back to a suggestion made by Pim Fortuyn’s immediate
family. Marten and Simon Fortuyn were sympathetic to their brother’s aims, concerned about the possible loss of his ideas and political heritage, and wanted to continue his political mission. They were initially driven by the desire to obtain redress for what in their eyes was the failure of the Dutch government to provide better security for their brother, a politician who had regularly been threatened. They subsequently tried to morally and, if possible, financially support the spread of their brother’s political thought, as embodied in the LPF. To do this they had to follow in his political footsteps, at least to some extent. Especially his older brother, Marten, therefore became a partner in the discussions at all sorts of national political and administrative consultations and activities that arose as a result of the murder. The family also encouraged activities that would perpetuate the memory of Pim Fortuyn, which was expressed in involvement in diverse projects, monuments, memorial processions, statues, books, etc.

The memorialization and monumentalization consequently took various forms during the three years following Fortuyn’s death. During that time, the Fortuyn family and several “Fortuynist” groups and organizations worked to devise more permanent material and immaterial symbolic, ritual, and political expressions of Pim Fortuyn and his ideas. In addition to the two monumental graves—one in the Netherlands, the other in Italy—they erected a conventional statue for him in front of his house in Rotterdam. His social and political constituents then attempted to realize a primarily immaterial memorial for society as a whole: They established the fully independent Pim Fortuyn Foundation, whose aim, regardless of Fortuyn’s actual political views, was to innovate society and public administration and to promote freedom of expression.\(^7\) Fortuyn’s brothers, however, tried to sustain the central political concepts in their murdered brother’s theories—administrative innovation and freedom of expression—through the institution of a ideological day of remembrance. With the help of Fortuyn’s political party, in 2003 the family decided to designate 6 May as a new national day of commemoration. This transformed the idea from an optional initiative into a socially and politically controversial proposal, as the suggested date immediately followed the Dutch days for commemorating the dead and the observance of the Netherlands’ liberation at the end of World War II, on 4 and 5 May, respectively. The intention of the family was for 6 May to become the new liberation day, a national day of democracy, and against violence, according to Fortuyn’s motto: “Let us uphold freedom of speech.”\(^8\) This was to be a “Day of the People.” Since the holidays on 4 and 5 May serve similar purposes, this proposal was an attempt to repeat the moral settling of scores with the “old” Netherlands, as Fortuyn had intended
to settle the score with the incumbent political system. Underlining the symbolic connotation, a provocative commemorative flag was also introduced: The Dutch national flag with a portrait of Fortuyn in its center. The whole idea was generally perceived as improper—being of another level—because it was too close or connected to both “sacrosanct” national celebrations.

The idea of a “Fortuyn Day” on 6 May subsided after a very low turnout at the 2003 commemoration. Notwithstanding the disappointing result, Fortuyn was still materially immortalized that same year, as the Statue of Pim Foundation had a rather large commemorative monument built in a square along the Korte Hoogstraat in the center of Rotterdam. The artist made the pedestal of cracked marble and placed a twisted obelisk on it to symbolize how Fortuyn transcended the established structures and the subsequent social turnaround he achieved. The obelisk bears Fortuyn’s bronze bust “in debate,” to represent his active proclamation of free speech. It was intended to be the focal point for future massive commemorations, but it proved only to symbolize the rapid déconfiture of the movement.

At roughly the same time, Harry Mens—an affluent real estate broker and television host who had embraced Fortuyn’s ideas—had sponsored, as a special tribute, a life-sized bronze statue of Fortuyn performing his characteristic salute. His aim was to create a semipublic commemorative site in front of Fortuyn’s residence. At first, neighborhood residents successfully resisted the erection of the statue in the square in front of Fortuyn’s former home, for fear that it would become a place of pilgrimage for right-wing extremists (Oosthoek 2005: 208). The statue was eventually erected in the front garden of the residence. The house itself was also turned into a monument. The house was purchased by one of Fortuyn’s wealthy admirers, and the interior was “immortalized” exactly as it was when Fortuyn left it on 6 May. On the anniversary of his murder, both statues became foci for commemoratives organized by small groups of Fortuyn supporters. The home also served as the last stop on a kind of pilgrimage, with prior stops at the murder site in Hilversum and the grave monument at Westerveld (Colombijn 2007).

In the meantime, Fortuyn’s family were working on a memorial book comparable to the one that appeared on the Virginia Tech shooting, but in this case made of the documents that were originally placed at the street memorials for Fortuyn (cf. Lazenby 2007). They conceived the idea of a book that would present the most beautiful, moving, and typical, and the politically most characteristic, letters and drawings from the temporary and improvised memorials, as a homage to Pim Fortuyn and his ideas. However, problems related to privacy, the editing procedure,
their inexperience with that kind of work, and the size of the work forced the shelving of the project.

At that moment, my request on behalf of the Meertens Institute to examine the mourning documents that had been preserved brought this draft book to the surface.¹² I was, however, less interested in this personal and glorifying selection as in the entire lot of existing material. For the time being, however, it remained unclear to me what precisely that material was composed of, what was left of it, and how the significance and the value of the items were to be assessed.

The Vox Populi

In the week following the murder, six major grassroots memorials became the preeminent temporary foci for a large part of Dutch society as it dealt with and processed the murder of Fortuyn, with people spontaneously gathering at these sites to express their feelings.¹³ Because there had never before been such a massive, spontaneous, and public display of mourning in the Netherlands for an “ordinary” citizen, these places received constant media attention from all the public and commercial networks, and thus they appeared on the television screen in every living room as virtual sites of remembrance, to fulfill a memorial or mourning function there (Kleinnijenhuis et al. 2003). As a result of the media attention, more people were mobilized to visit the memorials. A large number of them did not come purely as spectators, or stand in silence, but actively participated in the development and construction of the memorials. They did this by leaving not only flowers or personal objects, but also a huge number of notes, messages, and statements. People came together at these sites to express their feelings. This resulted in assemblages and piles of objects, messages, and statements.¹⁴ These were expressions of condolence and, especially, of anger and protest directed against the incumbent politicians and parties and their incapacity to do anything about the problems of the modern, multicultural society—something for which they believed Fortuyn would have had solutions.

Apart from grief, condolences, and dismay, the political dimensions of these memorial bricolages were more than evident. The great number of expressions of protest, grievance, criticism, and rage, calls for revenge, and protest messages about and against social wrongs, and against the “hate campaign” purportedly conducted against Fortuyn, gave the memorials extra meanings. These were primarily in the form of letters of protest or social critique that either were addressed to Fortuyn or were left as open, unaddressed manifestos. By far the most frequent reproach
concerned the loss of Fortuyn as the spokesman for the feelings and ideas of his supporters, and as their representative in society and politics. Many report that through him they had become interested and involved in politics and administration for the first time, or for the first time in many years, and that he was the first to give them hope of solving the major social problems with which they were confronted every day. Many said that he had “shaken the Netherlands awake,” but that his voice had been silenced. Others wrote, “We have all been silenced,” or “Pim, now that we have lost you, we are without a voice.” More generally, one finds the cry “No freedom of speech!” The most frequent formulation, in all sorts of variants, was, “You said what we thought.”

This quote is therefore one of the keys to explaining the surge of collective emotion that was felt by a large part of the Dutch population, and that was brought into the public domain by hundreds of thousands of shocked and mourning people, only some of whom were core Fortuynists (Margry 2003). It also points to the projection of the personal responsibilities of his supporters onto Fortuyn (“You said what we thought”) and to his functioning as an extension of them. This suggests that his death touched them in an especially fundamental and deeply personal way. For
those who felt themselves unheard and unrepresented, and who had identified with Fortuyn because of their social position, their voting history, or their marginal involvement in society, it seems that losing their voice, shepherd, and leader all in one go felt like the “amputation of a part of their being,” as one of the anonymous authors wrote. The rage that this sparked was intended by the Fortuynists to be heard loudly and clearly, and can to a great extent be seen separate from their grief. It should therefore be understood that such letters were often written to Fortuyn without words of address, or were addressed more generally to the people or to the motherland itself. In this way, the grassroots memorials functioned as a public whipping post, where the people pilloried politics and the administration. It was a ritual commemorative performance in which the ideas of Fortuyn and his criticism of current politics were recollected and reenacted (cf. Connerton 1989: 61–71).

All this formed a mediagenic setting that received constant live television coverage and extended the substantive discussions way beyond the physical sites. This process and the mobilizing power of the media further reinforced the suggestion of broad social discontent. It stressed the importance of the protest element of the memorials and claimed its historical dimension and impact. It was an implicit first step toward heritage creation.

From most of the television and newspaper commentators, and many of those interviewed by journalists, it appeared that there was a general consensus that the Netherlands would never be the same again. The events marked a fault line in history; this loss of “national innocence” is an important aspect in explaining the outbreak of collective emotionality in the days that followed. Because of the extent and seriousness of the dissatisfaction expressed, it has justifiably been called the “Fortuyn revolt,” and is regarded by many as a political earthquake, a turning point in Dutch history (Carle 2006; Chorus and de Galan 2002; de Vries and van der Lubben 2005; Wansink 2004).

Anyone who lived through the events of the week following 6 May 2002 will be able to bear witness to the singularity of what took place within Dutch affairs in the space of a few days. It was a postmodern revolt, one that would shake up the political system severely and influence the political agenda and political policy for years to come, as demonstrated by the continuing centrality of the debate on norms and values and immigration today. Proof that the significance of Fortuyn, and in particular of the political revolution connected with him, will not soon disappear from collective memory is the fact that in 2004, Pim Fortuyn was voted the “Greatest Dutchman” of all time. In 2007, at the Dutch
“Heroes” exhibition at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, Fortuyn was accorded a prominent position, based on Fortuyn material from the Meertens collection (van der Ham 2007). There, “Hero Fortuyn” continued to enjoy great public interest.17
Heritagization: The Meanings of Materiality

To return to the documents left at the impromptu memorials: several weeks after the murder, Fortuyn’s family received the objects and documents that had been deposited at the temporary memorials from the various municipal sanitation departments that had been responsible for clearing them away.18

In the meantime, questions about the significance and consequences of the murder, the riots that had broken out, and what for some were almost hysterical scenes of grief and anger had created a national wave of demands in the media for interpretation. Both the events surrounding the public memorials and the intense emotions were considered “un-Dutch,” at the very least, or as an indication that new forms of public mourning had also affected Dutch society (cf. de Hart 2005). As a cogwheel in the media machine, in my role as a fellow in Religious Culture at the Meertens Institute, I was asked by a national newspaper to write an article reflecting on how these temporary memorials were to be understood, and especially on whether the spontaneous post mortem veneration of Fortuyn implied a form of sanctity. Based on what I had experienced of the occurrences and on analogies with other traumatic death situations in Western religious culture, I wrote an initial, tentative analysis of the events.19 There indeed seemed to be a certain attributed saintliness, which I did not think would last very long. When I subsequently received invitations to delve more deeply into the subject at academic venues, it was necessary to have empirical material and harder data, so that I could arrive at a scientific analysis.20

The impact of the murder on Dutch society and the unique role that the memorials had played during the week of 6 May validated the materials as “national” heritage. The events had affected the nation so profoundly that the materials did not need a historical patina. In the meantime, the material attracted the interest of several Dutch national heritage institutions. They used the media to make their interest known, thereby laying claim to the material.21 These “premature” claims proved to be a counter-productive way of going about things, because the Fortuyn family—and the media—aired their feelings, letting it be known they did not appreciate such forms of “body-snatching” and turned them down.

It was only months later, in mid-February 2003, that I decided to seek contact with Fortuyn’s family to try to determine whether the documents had indeed been preserved and, if they had, whether I could consult them for my research. However, the family still appeared to be asserting their interests, and were also busy with the preparations for the first commem-
oration of Fortuyn’s death on 6 May 2003. I was therefore kept on hold. Despite the great expectations, the memorial day turned out to be a fiasco. It proved impossible to mobilize the masses who only a year earlier had come out so spontaneously. In any case, it appeared the movement had said all it had to say the year before. Moreover, through all its political machinations in the center of government—The Hague—the Fortuyn Party had by now played itself out in the national administration. And finally, after a long year of excessive media attention, both the media and the population were suffering from severe “Fortuyn fatigue” (Kleinnijenhuis et al. 2003; Bosman 2008).

In the interests of my research and other commitments, I could not wait much longer for the data, so in July 2003 I decided to contact the family again—at just the right moment, as it turned out. The prevailing mood in the family was now one of disappointment and frustration, for it seemed that politics had again returned to its old ways. With that, the failure of the first commemoration of the murder became a sort of unintentional conclusion to the movement (Pennings and Keman 2003; Vis 2004; Vijf jaar 2007). This disillusionment made the family unsure about how to proceed from there with Fortuyn’s legacy. Even the enormous sea container filled with all the cuddly toys that had been left at the memorials, and that had initially been regarded as an ideal gift for third-world children, was orphaned: the complicated regulations and the spiraling costs for cleaning them made the project unfeasible. Further, the family’s planned book of letters had come to a total dead end. Out of desperation, they had packed up all the letters and documents from the memorials and readied them for transport to Italy. There, in Provesano, the local stonemason was already at work preparing the spacious vault of Fortuyn’s grave so that the paper memories of the revolt could be buried alongside its auctor intellectualis.

However, when I asked whether I could first be permitted to examine the material, Simon Fortuyn invited me to come to his place in Utrecht, where it was stored in his envelope factory. Once there I explained to him that these time-stained and ephemeral documents had perhaps lost their topicality and apparently were of little value, but that one could also see them in a different light. At any rate, I would regard it from a historical and cultural perspective as a great loss if these documents were literally buried and lost to society for ever. He was curious about what the Meertens Institute wanted to do with them. I explained that in their entirety they were an extraordinary resource for the study of a unique form of grassroots sociopolitical action in modern Dutch society—the materialization of a strongly politically colored public outcry—a vox populi, and not a collection, like so many, compiled by administrations or ruling classes.
For the Netherlands, it was, in its nature, a totally new form of “collective” social action and a temporary inversion of Foucauldian power relations (cf. Foucault 1982). The documents were literally the physical record of the voice of the people—or better, the voices of individuals, and certainly not only Fortuynists—that had reverberated in the Netherlands in the tumultuous year 2002. They were ethnographic source material par excellence. For no other single crucial event or episode in Dutch history was there such an extensive and spontaneously formed collection of ego documents. As commentaries they could be turned into important material cultural heritage for the social and political history of the Netherlands. Thus in the end, the Meertens Institute—in its strategy and quest for cultural and scientific capital—won, by mere coincidence, the “national competition” and became the custodian of a major new expression of Dutch cultural patrimonium (cf. Lowenthal 1998: 227).

If the Fortuyn family would hand over the material, the Meertens Institute would assume the management and conservation of the material for them. This would mean cataloguing and making it accessible, physically and online, to both scholars and the general public. We realized that in practice this collection of “dissonant heritage” could also come down to the implicit creation of a lieu de memoire, a site of memory, for Fortuyn’s movement or as an important resource for supporters who feel “disinherited” of the material (cf. Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996: 21–33). At the time, we in the institute’s management team had discussions about whether the institute might not become too closely associated with this populist movement, and what the risks were that the institute might be used for its political ends. The movement had, however, already become so impotent that such fears seemed unrealistic. That the question arose at all in the context of “cultural heritage” may perhaps be more surprising. At the same time, it illustrates the odium with which Fortuynism was regarded.

After I had clarified our conditions and possibilities, Simon Fortuyn told me that he would consult the rest of the family. Several days later, he telephoned to confirm that they were convinced of the importance of preserving the material and keeping it accessible to the public. Burying it in a vault in Provesano was off the agenda. Shortly thereafter, on 10 July 2003, I was able to come back and take away fifteen large moving boxes, and deposit them in the Meertens storage room.

As a result of these developments, the enthusiasm among the Fortuyn family for a public function for this cultural heritage collection and its operationalization grew strongly: The family realized that by doing this it could still create a substantive memorial to their late brother, even though the Fortuyn movement and the public interest had practically gone silent,
and statues of Fortuyn had already been realized. The assumption of the management by a national cultural institution that would make it available to the public was an implicit confirmation of the lasting importance of the movement and of Fortuyn’s legacy. Encouraged by this thought, in 2004 the family decided to grant permission for and to support the nocturnal operation described at the beginning of this chapter, so that the documents in the pseudo-grave at Westerveld could be united with the Fortuyn collection that had already been turned over. A third expansion of the collection took place in 2005, when audiovisual material about Pim Fortuyn was offered to the Meertens Institute. This almost complete collection was a functional supplement to that already present, precisely because the media had played an important, and often supportive, role in Fortuyn’s meteoric rise as a politician, in response to the murder, and in the subsequent political revolution. The existence of the memorials led to a considerable part of the reporting taking place at the memorials, so that they assumed a central, performative role in shaping public images of the events, and in the medialization of those events (Margry 2007: 116–20; cf. Santino 2006b).

Never before has an extensive collection from grassroots memorials been housed in a Dutch heritage institution. Its size, however, does not guarantee its completeness. Most of the material from four of the six memorials that were set up after 6 May and lasted for a week has been preserved. In addition, the Schielandshuis (Rotterdam’s historical museum) acquired some objects and written material. One of the Fortuyn groups kept a collection of documents at its office in the “Kubus” houses in Rotterdam, but most of it was apparently stolen by fans and competing Fortuynist factions while it was exhibited and stored there. Collections like these will never be complete, also because individual objects or documents are kept by members of the Fortuyn family, or were blown or taken away from the sites. However, it does not make much difference to the general idea whether they are complete or not.

When one wants to use the preserved material as source material for research, one encounters methodological problems. For example, the items offer little or no information about their context or provenance. Only a few are dated precisely, or can be placed with regard to the town or city the author came from, or even the memorial they came from, and are thus difficult to link with the author’s social or political background. Unfortunately, after the material from the various memorials was handed over to the family, it was not kept separated according to its source. Documents from the six memorials are thus partly mixed together; only the material from Driehuis-Westerveld is clearly distinguished, as it was acquired later. However, as Fraenkel also points out in this volume, the
importance of the collection is to be measured not only by its individual postings and their contents, but also by its collectivity in writing, its performative value, and the visual or graphic display.

The collection further includes a large number of condolence registers that were opened in many Dutch cities and towns during the week, many of which, in contrast to usual practice, include extensive (and politically colored) comments. Within three hours of Fortuyn’s death, the first condolence page as a web register, based on the format of the paper registers, was opened as an Internet site or cybershrine. After some months, several of the Internet providers involved had, on their own initiative, thousands of the messages from their digital condolence registers printed out, exactly dated, and bound, to give to the family. That they did this is another indication of how very exceptional the events in society were seen as being. Because of the sympathy felt for the family, staff at the providers removed the insensitive postings from the digital files. This resulted in a subjective and somewhat one-sided document, from which the most negative remarks about the controversial politician Fortuyn had been filtered out.

The presence of realia in the collection raised yet another issue: Should these be included in a document archive? Many of these objects were intended as representations of Fortuyn as an individual or his lifestyle (neckties, cigars, small dogs (King Charles Spaniels), cars (Jaguars), etc.). It was decided to preserve these characteristic presents as much as possible, and especially those that, through the addition of texts, had been transformed into “documents.” In general, the collection will be preserved as it was collected, namely, without any cleaning or polishing of the material. The large number of unmarked stuffed animals were not preserved, as they would not produce enough additional relevant information for research. Moreover, the costs for disinfection, preservation, and storage would have exceeded the budget.

That the Fortuyn collection should have ended up at an ethnological research institute like Meertens is less of a coincidence than it might seem. History, the recent past, and current events are to an increasing extent labeled by professional “conductors of memory” as and transformed into “cultural heritage” (Lowenthal 1998). Research institutions should be aware of the political and educational dimensions of processes of “heritagization” through which cultural expressions acquire other meanings. This phenomenon can be identified worldwide; it is particularly influenced by UNESCO policy, and is strongly encouraged by national governments and organizations within countries.

The concept of “heritagization,” as introduced by Kevin Walsh (1992: 4), focused on the heritagizing processes of places and
spaces in connection with “acceptable national themes.” Walsh treats heritagization as a negative and destructive process that could even threaten democratic values (1992: 135). He employs a value-laden concept that I do not support.30 “Heritagization” is understood here as the process by which cultural phenomena or cultural objects, old and modern, are labeled “cultural heritage” by the involved actors and, as a consequence, get new meanings, undergo transformative changes, and become an instrumentalization of the past for the future.31 The Fortuyn case—where documents, especially those that were produced spontaneously and impulsively after the murder and that were intended as means of communication for that moment, but were subsequently acquired and preserved for scientific research and the extension of source collections, also made available for use by others, ended up in an academic, musealized context and had a cultural and scientific significance ascribed to them—is a textbook example of that process (cf. Ames 2006; Gardner, this volume).

The Meertens Institute is an institution for scholarly research, but like other institutes that come under the umbrella of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, it fulfills a double function: research, as well as documentation and archiving. In recent years the documentary task out of which the institute arose has to a great extent been overshadowed by its research functions. In 2002, the growing significance of cultural heritage and the discussions about national and regional identities and the drawing up of historical canons (Margry and Roodenburg 2007: 1–3) brought me, as a former Meertens archivist and management team member, to the conclusion that the institute should be more emphatically positioned as a heritage institution in order to enhance the possibilities for safeguarding relevant ethnological collections and archives, as there was no other institutional facility assigned for such a task.32 As a consequence, in practice the institute began to function as a national depot for ethnological data collections, and for the records and collections of the “culture of everyday life.”33 The collections already present were primarily the result of the institute’s own research projects and of incidental acquisitions or gifts that, in terms of content, strongly reflected the traditional canon of folklore studies. A clearly defined, active acquisitions policy had never been formulated. With an eye to acquiring more ethnological databases of a “national” and contemporary nature, the Fortuyn material would be a good start, especially because ephemeral and popular materials are usually not categorized as cultural heritage, and because the letters contradict Walsh’s proposition that modernity—including the heritage industry—is distancing people from basic processes that affect their lives (cf. Walsh 1992: 176–78).
The actual acquisition of this material went quite smoothly, partly because several delicate issues had already resolved themselves through the passage of time. The question of when the material from a memorial site should be secured was no longer relevant. Dismantling a makeshift memorial usually takes place when the initial grief has been considerably moderated, or when the assemblage due to weather conditions has decayed to such an extent that the “sacrality” of the site seems to be violated. Bad weather and decay directly influence the performativity of a memorial, as it will attract fewer people and less media. Moreover, the deterioration of the visual aesthetics will also diminish the interest of the media and weaken its performative power in general. In the Fortuyn case, no juridical or practical issues regarding the placing of the memorials were at stake. After a week of good weather, and with the funeral having been held, an upcoming disturbance made the various municipalities decide to collect all objects and documents and remove the remains (flowers, candles, etc.) of the memorials. This coincided with an implicitly perceived idea that a period of one week was the right timeframe for public mourning. The removal of the memorials did not raise any objections. The collected materials were subsequently given to the Fortuyn family.

Sensitivities related to the nature and ownership of the material largely no longer played a role because of the unconditional gifting by the owners and the lack of interest on the part of society at large. It should be noted, however, that after the acquisition of the material, several cases did arise where persons who had placed material at the memorials let the institute know that they wished their documents to be anonymized, as they no longer wanted to be associated with Fortuyn as a controversial individual, with the LPF movement, or with the mourning hype after his death. To a certain extent, these reactions can be attributed to the political obstinacy, incapacabilities, and clumsiness of the Fortuyn movement in national government, the subsequent political déconfiture, and the failure of Fortuyn’s memorialization.

Another ethical issue that the institute had to consider was where the material was to be preserved. Did these mourning gifts, farewell letters, and condolences not deserve to rest in Fortuyn’s grave in Italy, or in the pseudo-grave in Westerveld, for which the material was initially intended and, in the latter case, where some of it had already been deposited? After all, the Fortuyn memorials were much more than purely mourning sites: They had immediately become “soapboxes” and “whipping posts” where a national political and social debate was carried out publicly. In the end, a decision about the location did not have to be taken inside the institute, since the family did that themselves, allowing themselves to be guided by the importance of having the materials openly available...
to society. In contrast to, for instance, the 9/11 documents, in this case we were not dealing with items from relatives and friends, but almost exclusively with reactions from citizens at large. This does not detract from the fact that many documents are written as though the author were a friend or a relative. They are regularly accompanied with names, and sometimes also with addresses and photographs. This made it necessary that the letters placed online or on exhibition be anonymized. What the Meertens Institute did not want to do is create a new collection that could serve as an alternative memorial for future grief. We did not want to preserve (nor could we) “the sacred qualities of the shrine as the embodiment of the memory of the deceased,” which was the primary ground for preserving the Texas A&M University Bonfire memorial of 1999 (Grider 2007: 46–48). Our dedication was to preserve the material as national cultural heritage and to realize a neutral research instrument and a database for comparative analysis. In retrospect, one can see that the institute was not alert enough to, or was not prepared for, this new form of mourning and protest to have been able to realize the interviewing and the fieldwork and to document the memorials in situ more extensively than was actually done. An ethnographic film that documents at length the creation and performativity of the memorials and includes detailed photography is dearly lacking.

Because the family transferred the material of their own volition, on the condition of good management and public accessibility, no further ethically sensitive questions regarding property rights played a role in the negotiations. They gave the institute a free hand to administer it in a respectful manner. The collapse of the Fortuyn movement in fact made several things easier. For all practical purposes, the rapid collapse of the LPF (in part through the appropriation of issues that had been specifically Fortuyn’s by the other political parties), the decline of both the “popular” movement and the public memorialization process, and subsequently the 2004 murder of the agitator/film-maker Theo van Gogh, reduced Fortuynism to a more or less “historical” phenomenon (cf. Buruma 2006). The volume of research into this period and the acquisition of the related material culture sparked off a process of heritagization. This was not an autonomous development, because the Fortuyn family clearly recognized its importance. They were disturbed that there were too few “good” (i.e., written in line with Fortuynism) articles and reports about their brother and his movement coming out, particularly because these were too often based only on vague sources. They therefore hoped that through this participation in the heritagization of the Fortuyn legacy, the contested aspects would be reduced, neutralized, or even disappear. It was partly with
Institutional Creation of Heritage

What, in sum, can be said about the role of academic institutions in the creation of heritage? It is evident how the acquisition of, and even research on, recent material culture and its dissemination in print and image are in themselves forms of heritage production. The Fortuyn case shows how, more or less accidentally, academia and its institutional setting came to be in the position to contribute strongly to heritagization processes, and how the intrinsic value of otherwise neglected and concealed materials acquire completely new meanings. The preservation of the commemorative drawings and letters has provided a clearer view on the broad scope and impact of the Fortuyn movement in Dutch society and situates its ideological heritage in a new perspective.

Although the difficulties and effects of turning such materials into cultural heritage might be less for academia than for museums—which are obliged to display artifacts and explain them to a general public—managing emotions and privacy issues in relation to the public’s search for authenticity is nevertheless a problematic issue for both academia and museums. As became clear after 9/11, collecting has become an intrinsic part of the mourning and coping processes. This is why Appleton (2002) questioned the value of such collections as being too self-conscious, mediated, and emotional to serve as a public record. In my opinion, however, these materials form an individual and collective mirrored representation of the confusion, emotionality, anger, and intensity of contemporary subjectified, individualized, and mediatized society. These collections are crucial additions to our cultural heritage, as they—as uncommon heritage—had never previously come into being. Historiography has always been dependent upon other sources, without taking emotionality into account. Fortuyn or 9/11 collections can provide new perspectives on how societies deal with traumatic death, disaster, and fear. The implications for academic institutions that are dealing with cultural heritage (acquisition, management, and research) thus need to be thoroughly considered and evaluated, as these institutions are the creators of new heritages.
Notes


2. Number estimated by the management of Westerveld cemetery. The following year (i.e., from 21 June 2002 to July 2003), 120,000 people visited the pseudo-grave.

3. The Fortuyn materials have not been cleaned and polished, unlike the Theo van Gogh collection, from which such characteristic elements as protective sleeves were also removed (cf. https://stadsarchief.amsterdam.nl/archieven/archiefbank/overzicht/30051.nl.html). Nor is the material rigidly (and wrongly) thematically categorized; the Fortuyn materials are to a certain extent preserved as found at the various memorials and the pseudo-grave.

4. For this party, see: http://www.lijstpimfortuyn.nl/partij/partij.html.

5. Comparable feelings and shock were experienced by the Swedes after the murder of Olof Palme in 1986 (cf. Scharfe 1989).

6. It is an academic institution for research into and documentation of culture and language in the Netherlands; it functions under the aegis of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. The Department of Ethnology within the Meertens Institute is engaged in research into everyday culture; see: http://www.meertens.knaw.nl/cms/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=35&Itemid=98.


8. Based on the Latin maxim invoked by Pim Fortuyn, Loquendi Libertatem Custodiamus; explained at http://www.pim6mei.nl.


10. Precipitated by the credit crunch of 2008–9, the owners no longer wanted to maintain the preserved house and interior as a monument. The house was sold and its full inventory and library auctioned on 27 June 2009, after which the remaining documents and objects were dispersed all over the world. The auction rekindled the national interest and led to fierce protest by his followers, who felt “disinherited” as moral heirs to his legacy and depicted it as a “sale of national heritage.” See for the auctioned objects: Hessink’s Collectie Pim Fortuyn. Veiling 27 juni 2009. Auction catalogue. Nijmegen: Hessink. Fortuyn’s library was acquired by the Rotterdam Municipal Archives; the Rotterdam Historical Museum bought his writing desk and a portrait painting at the auction.

11. See for the Virginia Tech shooting in 2007, the contribution of Sylvia Grider in this volume.


13. These six memorials were: in front of Fortuyn’s home in Rotterdam; in front of the Rotterdam City Hall (Fortuyn was member of the city council); in the parking lot of the Mediapark in Hilversum (the scene of the murder); the monument to William of Orange, opposite the entrance to parliament in The Hague; the National War Monument in Amsterdam; and the Homomonument in Amsterdam. The material culture that was left at the memorials has to a large degree been preserved. The sites were “chosen” by the public as the appropriate ones already on the night after the killing; the first three because they were related to Fortuyn’s
life and political career, the last three because they are more regularly used for national commemorations and demonstrations.

14. The material can be roughly categorized as follows:
1. Floral tributes with or without short message cards (except for roses, few other specific types of flowers);
2. Textual documents: letters, notes, pamphlets, placards, cards, books;
3. Visual documents: posters, photographs, drawings (by both adults and children), paintings and frames with pictures and messages;
4. Material objects:
   a. Objects or symbols related to Fortuyn and his lifestyle: ties, cigars, bottles of wine, dog figurines (the statuettes of dogs generally referred to Fortuyn’s own King Charles spaniels, Carla and Kenneth)
   b. Emotional objects: hearts, artificial flowers
   c. Stuffed toy animals, including many teddy bears and dogs
   d. Novena and votive candles; paraffin tea warmers
   e. Cloth: flags, T-shirts, soccer scarves, caps.

15. Another anonymous author wrote, “Let us therefore proclaim 6 May a national day • for guarding freedom of speech • for democracy • against violence.”

16. The latter had previously been placed on the agenda, e.g., by Paul Scheffer in the case of the multicultural debate.

17. For the new National Historical Museum in Arnhem, for which the exhibits are now being planned, it will again be necessary to examine how this material can best express the “Fortuyn caesura” of the early twenty-first century and place it in a historical perspective.

18. With regard to the sites themselves, thanks to an unusually dry spell, the memorials remained intact until several days after Fortuyn’s funeral on 10 May and were then removed.


21. Shortly after the murder, both the National Archives in The Hague and the International Institute of Social History (IISG) in Amsterdam let it be known that they wished to acquire the material, cf. Los 2002.

22. The contents of the letters, cards, messages, and the web postings can be divided into four rough categories: 1. expressions of sorrow, condolence, grief, and dismay; 2. expressions of affection and love; 3. attributions of metaphysical qualities of holiness, sanctity, and messianic leadership; 4. expressions of protest, criticism, anger or threats of retaliation; protest messages directed at and against political and social evils. For an analysis of the contents in these categories, see Margry 2003: 115–25.

24. The presence of the Fortuyn collection made small Fortuynist pressure groups presuppose that the institute could be mobilized as an authoritative ally. They (vainly) tried to mobilize the Meertens Institute for commemorations or as authority for their goals.
25. A supporter of Fortuyn’s LPF had archived the TV and radio broadcasts with and about Pim Fortuyn on DVD and audio tapes. See: http://www.meertens.knaw.nl/pdf/etnologie/PIMaudiovisueel.pdf.
26. A comparable collection was acquired in 2004 by the Municipal Archive in Amsterdam, which had the material from the temporary memorial for the murdered filmmaker and agitator Theo van Gogh placed at its disposal. With regard to van Gogh and his memorial, see the contribution by Stengs in this volume; cf. https://stadsarchief.amsterdam.nl/english/archives_database/printversie/30051.en.pdf.
27. Material from the memorials in front of Fortuyn’s home in Rotterdam, in front of the Rotterdam City Hall, from the monument to William of Orange opposite the entrance to the Parliament in The Hague, and at the National War Monument in Amsterdam has to a large extent been preserved. It is not yet clear what happened to the materials from the parking lot of the Mediapark in Hilversum or from the Homomonument in Amsterdam.
28. Apart from the Meertens collection, in July 2009 there were still two sites with web page surveys and links to digital registers and some memorial sites: http://pim-fortuyn.startkabel.nl and http://www.pim-fortuyn.pagina.nl.
30. Walsh defined it as “the reduction of real places to tourist space, contested by the selective quotation of images of many different pasts which more often than not contribute to the destruction of actual places” (1992: 4).
31. David Lowenthal does not actually use the concept of heritagization, but describes modern developments in which heritage functions as a celebration of the past (Lowenthal 1998: x).
32. Although “heritage” is not an analytical concept, the use of the word does not always imply an intentional manipulation of history, as nowadays all categories of the past are, due to the political fashionability of the word, labeled “heritage,” and thus often overlap with more neutral former fields of research. For example, archival collections are now often depicted as “archival heritage.”
33. For an overview of all the Meertens collections, see: http://www.meertens.knaw.nl/archieven.
34. The memorial in Amsterdam’s Dam Square was initially contested, as two days earlier the national Remembrance Day ceremonies had taken place at the national war memorial. Anti-Fortuynists perceived it as a profanation that memorialization of this right-wing politician took place at the same site where the heroes of war are commemorated, cf. Margry 2003: 113.
35. Regarding the Smithsonian’s ethical problems related to the personal ephemera of loss, see the contribution by Jim Gardner in this volume.
36. Just a fraction of the material is now available online; the collection waits final inventorization and digitalization. An archival inventory is to be found at: http://www.meertens.knaw.nl/meertensnet/file/edwinb/20050421/Coll_Fortuyn_invent.pdf.
37. The national Institute for Image and Sound (Nederlands Instituut voor Beeld en Geluid) in Hilversum has the journalistic footage on the memorials; part of this material is stored on DVD in the audiovisual section of the Fortuyn collection at the Meertens Institute.
References


