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Materializing the Immaterial

Paper Presentation at: Association of Critical Heritage Studies. Inaugural Conference, Gothenburg, Sweden, June 5-8, 2012. The Re/theorisation of Heritage Studies.

One of the central aims of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage is to raise international awareness of immaterial cultural practices. To achieve this, these practices need to be transformed into media representations that can transcend space and time so as to reach wider audiences.

Medializing intangible heritage comprises many complex and diverse processes: selecting, picturing, adapting, disseminating, digitizing and archiving being only some of them. Every media representation of reality is achieved at the cost of its derealization, materialization and virtualization, which fundamentally change the characteristics of immaterial cultural practices.

This creates a paradox because a central attribute of immaterial culture is its ability to remain open to changing circumstances. A few fundamental thoughts are presented regarding the problem of materializing the immaterial in general, and of medializing intangible cultural heritage in particular.