

# Intangible Heritage in France Between Museographical Renewal and “Project Territory”

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Volume 36, numéro 1-2, 2014

Patrimoine culturel immatériel  
Intangible Cultural Heritage

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1037606ar>  
DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1037606ar>

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Éditeur(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (imprimé)  
1708-0401 (numérique)

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Citer cet article

Poulot, D. (2014). Intangible Heritage in France: Between Museographical Renewal and “Project Territory”. *Ethnologies*, 36(1-2), 177–206.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1037606ar>

Résumé de l'article

Dans cet article, Dominique Poulot présente un survol historique de la notion de patrimoine culturel immatériel et de sa relation avec les études en muséologie en France. Il ramène cette étude au temps présent pour examiner l'impact actuel du patrimoine culturel immatériel sur les musées. Depuis 2006, lorsque la France a signé la *Convention pour la sauvegarde du patrimoine culturel immatériel* de l'UNESCO, le patrimoine culturel immatériel est devenu un sujet actuel de préoccupation. Dans le monde muséal, on a recours à divers intermédiaires institutionnels pour informer les conservateurs sur le patrimoine immatériel, par le biais d'ICOM France par exemple. Dans le même temps, la Mission du patrimoine ethnologique (MPE) a lancé une réflexion collective au sujet des nouvelles catégories et du nouveau cadre d'activités relevant du patrimoine culturel immatériel que l'on ne considère de nature « ethnologique » que depuis peu. Par conséquent, le patrimoine immatériel devrait être au programme de différents corps administratifs officiels suivant le processus vertical qui caractérise la tradition centralisée des organisations patrimoniales et des musées français. La situation est apparemment devenue plus propice de ce point de vue depuis qu'un certain nombre d'événements récents ont mis en lumière le fait que l'opposition entre l'espace social constamment changeant des anthropologues et l'enfermement des objets conservés dans les musées cher aux spécialistes de la culture matérielle est à présent chose du passé.

# INTANGIBLE HERITAGE IN FRANCE

## *Between Museographical Renewal and “Project Territory”*

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Since 2006, when France signed the UNESCO texts,<sup>1</sup> intangible cultural heritage has emerged as an issue of current concern. In the museum world, various institutional intermediaries are being used in order to educate curators about the matter, by way of ICOM France, for example (Jadé, 2005). At the same time, the Mission du patrimoine ethnologique (Ethnological Heritage Mission, or MPE) has initiated a collective reflection concerning the new categories and new framework of activities for intangible cultural heritage issues only very recently considered “ethnological”<sup>2</sup> in nature. Hence intangible heritage would seem to be on the agenda of various state administration bodies according to a top-down process characteristic of the centralized tradition of French museum and heritage organizations. The situation has apparently become even more propitious in this regard since

1. The safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage as formulated by UNESCO was adopted in the form of legislation passed on July 5, 2006, carrying France’s approval: *ad hoc* decree no. 2006-1402 dated November 17, 2006.
2. A certain indecision, or confusion, may be noted, moreover, as regards the terms intangible heritage and ethnological heritage. For instance the Benzaïd report defined ethnological heritage as follows: “A country’s ethnological heritage includes specific modes of tangible existence and of the social organization of the groups that compose it: their various sorts of know-how, their way of representing the world, and, generally speaking, the elements that serve as the basis for the identity of every social group and that distinguish each one from the others...” (Benzaïd, 1980: 27). In 2003, the *La Documentation française* website proposed the following definition of the 2002 Declaration concerning intangible heritage: “This heritage, founded on tradition and transmitted orally or through imitation, labelled ethnological heritage, presents at one and the same time an intangible character and also a constant renewal in its various forms of expression.” (Unless otherwise indicated, this and subsequent quotations have been translated into English for the text at hand.)

a certain number of recent events have served to highlight the fact that the opposition between the notion of an ever-changing social space dear to anthropologists and the enclosure of objects conserved at the museum dear to tangible-culture specialists has become a thing of the past.

This has been particularly clear since the opening, in the summer of 2006, of the Musée du Quai Branly (Quai Branly Museum), a new institution dedicated to “world cultures,” whose very architectural thrust, according to its architect, Jean Nouvel, proclaims an entirely new sensitivity to the intangible. For Daniel Fabre, an eminent witness to the history of French ethnology, the debate concerning this museum has, on a broader scale, inaugurated a reference to intangible culture in public space. In fact, implicit in the two main criticisms levelled against this institution are new values which French heritage management must take into account in future years: “on the one hand, there are those denouncing the exclusive cult of the three-dimensional object to the detriment of all other expressions of culture, and on the other, those underlining the absence, in the very conception of the museum, of the creative communities that engendered the assets exhibited.” (Fabre in Ciarcia, 2006)

Lastly, if the most general trends of French society are kept in mind, it will be noted that the notion of intangible economy has been highlighted in a report commissioned by the nation’s economy and finance ministry, which would seem to be making the intangible a centrepiece of new national resources.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, private-property law has recently undergone changes that take intangible property, particularly the image, into account. A fledgling jurisprudence bases ownership of the image of an asset on the right to property (Section 544 of the Civil Code). The French court of appeal has, most notably, acknowledged this with regards to an image of a café (the Café Gondrée, which was one of the first buildings to have been liberated in Normandy at the time of the landing of the allied forces).<sup>4</sup>

For some, this situation explains why the episode of the Convention signed by France appears as a founding event, inaugurating a rupture in the long history of the national culture. For Jean Guibal, director of one

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3. April 23, 2007 order creating a service with a national jurisdiction called the “Agence du patrimoine immatériel de l’Etat” (State Intangible Heritage Agency) NOR ECOP0751395A, J.O. of 12/05/2007, No. 26, pages 8684/8685.

4. Nevertheless, the use of the image in itself does not open up a possibility of control. The owner must provide proof of having been disturbed in the enjoyment and use of his or her property. Cass. civ. 1<sup>ère</sup>, March 10, 1999; Mallet-Poujol and Bruguière (2001: 84).

of the most important museums of French ethnology, and also the author of a report on the crisis of the Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires (Folk Arts and Traditions Museum, or ATP), what has emerged is the end of any restriction to “major” cultural assets only – to wit, artistic and monumental assets as designated by Western art historians – accompanied by the beginning of a new era characterized by a recognition of human cultural diversity (Guibal 1999; 2006). Daniel Fabre is also delighted to see a qualified ratification of the “historical” while noting in passing that “for the first time a significant reorientation in the institution of culture does not have Western jurisprudence and historical experience, especially their French versions, as its point of reference.” The rupture had to be produced from the outside, since, if we accept Fabre’s argument, “never in its history has the French nation recognized itself – in other words been embodied – in its own oral knowledge, just as it has never recognized itself in its national ethnographical museums.” For these two main players and witnesses to the recent history of French ethnological heritage, France’s ratification of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage is “a decision that breaks with two centuries of state hierarchization of cultural assets.” It also most certainly coincides with an opening of French museology to international norms and requirements, of which many examples may be provided, including professional quality, satisfaction of a demand for global tourism, the success of certain architects whose market is also global in nature, and, last but not least, the legitimacy of unanimously recognized models.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the most significant example is that of the Cité de l’immigration (Immigration City) program at the Musée national des arts d’Afrique et d’Océanie (National Museum of African and south Sea Islands Art, MAAO). Jacques Toubon, a former culture minister and the project’s patron, has explored the world of immigration museums with his team in search of inspiration. An international conference on immigration museums worldwide has been organized at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (French National Library), and lastly the minister and his team have repeatedly admitted to having been inspired by the example of Ellis Island.<sup>6</sup>

This change in direction on the heritage front will in any case have important legal ramifications. Up until now, the definition of French heritage has been dominated by the pre-eminence of national collections and of the built heritage. It is, for example, more restrictive than the definition

5. A possible comparison with the Imperial War Museum and the museum in Ypres can be found in Whitmarsh (2001).

6. See Green (2007) for an excellent contextualization in this regard.

coined by the Council of Europe concerning the European cultural heritage, “made up of natural and human creations, of material riches but also of moral and religious values, of learning and convictions, of hopes and fears, of visions of the world and of ways of life whose diversity is the source of a shared cultural wealth on which the European construction is based.” For French jurists, in fact, certain activities or practices, such as customs, traditions and expertise, do not “need any judicial framework in order to flourish. In this sense, heritage in the legal sense of the term covers only a sub-bracket of heritage in its broad sense. The lawmaker selects a certain number of elements in order to organize a policy to protect them. Current French law is focused on protecting the elements of tangible heritage, whence a much more restrictive approach has emerged” (Cornu, 2003). The adopting of the international convention is therefore sure to cause the national conceptions of heritage protection to change and develop.

The stakes are even higher given that there are all sorts of examples to prove that the most purely classical definition of heritage is still being reaffirmed today. The first edition of *Patrimoines*, a new journal published by the Institut national du patrimoine (National Heritage Institute, or INP) in 2006 testifies to this phenomenon: its feature article examines the issue of protecting historical monuments. Moreover, the museum world, which has barely emerged from the debates linked to the application of the “loi musées” (Museums Act) that reformed – considerably less than was expected, or feared, as the case may be – the definition of the institutions, until then governed by a text from 1945,<sup>7</sup> has been mobilized by disputes centred exclusively on the future of museum collections. Arguments have raged over the international policy (implemented at the highest echelon of the State) affecting the lending of works from national museums to foreign institutions in exchange for remuneration, in particular with respect to the Louvre d’Abou Dhabi. The hypothesis of a deacquisition of public collections, as outlined in a number of reports, is a second subject of concern, which in turn engenders what former curator, art historian and pamphleteer, Jean Clair (2007), calls “discontent in the museum ranks.” All these episodes seem therefore to reaffirm the fact that collections (especially art collections) alone always carry the day, both for administrations – on the lookout for potential revenues to be drawn from their rental or sale – and for public opinion, as well as in academic circles.

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7. Law no. 2002-5 relative to French museums, especially as regards granting the label “musée de France” (museum of France) and the creation of a high council of museums.

French museums are nevertheless undergoing a number of rapid transformations, marked by a series of closings and constructions, at the very least of some projects of rather considerable dimensions, all of this following the building of new art museums during the 1980-2000 period. Various institutions are scheduled for completion in approximately 2010-12, including a museum of Convergences (Lyon) and a museum of European and Mediterranean civilizations (Marseille). The phenomenon is worth noting, for the emergence (albeit relative) of French ethnography in the public domain, a discipline made accessible by way of certain success stories from the 1960-80 era and linked to a wave of nostalgia for a lost rural world,<sup>8</sup> did not lead to a renewal of exhibits or museums. It is true that, henceforth, the contemporary museum seems less likely to play the role of an academic work instrument than of a tool designed to make its acquisitions more accessible to visitors.<sup>9</sup> Even though there was a certain public for eco-museums during the 1970-90 period, the most rigorous among them from a scientific standpoint have since then closed their doors, abandoning their mission to institutions with an approach closer to that of outdoor or assimilation museums, or to museums whose energies are entirely devoted to attracting a broader public (Poulard, 2007).

As early as 1991, Jean Jamin noted that “museums, collections, and objects hardly seem of interest to anthropologists anymore. Due to both a physical and an intellectual defection on the part of the professional community, these objects or institutions have, for all intents and purposes, been left to their own devices or reduced to serving a commemorative function.” (1991: 113) This observation may well apply to the discipline of ethnology as a whole, but it especially pertains to the French case, where post-war ethnologists, as though paralyzed by the memory of Vichy, have maintained very strained relations with the heritage of their discipline, and especially with the history of their museums. Conferences linked to the Folk Arts and Traditions Museum (the ATP) have fluctuated between an attempt to avoid vexing memories and passionate settlements of scores involving the intellectual heirs of the vast family of French ethnology. Even retrospective exhibits organized within various institutions have often been no more than pious tributes to founding fathers, respectful of a soothing vulgate characteristic of the national museographical tradition (Georgel, 1994; Pommier, 1995; Joly and Compère-Morel, 1998). Due to this very

8. See in particular Philippe Joutard (1983).

9. The reader may refer to the reflections of Le Goff (1977) and to the preface by Marc Bloch (1997). A contemporary overview of the professional framework may be found in Kavanagh (1990).

fact, the museum is generally addressed by some in a condescending if not a scornful manner, whereas an equally stereotyped discourse put forth by curators and other institutional professionals defends the unique nature of the museum vocation and space against concerns expressed in academic circles. In this context, it is worth showing how a change which seems to be terminological only – with intangible heritage replacing ethnological heritage – can foster transformations both as regards the orientation of a discipline and the will to intervene on a political level.<sup>10</sup>

### **The energy of the primitive and the folklorist policy**

Throughout the lengthy period encompassed by the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the ethnological approach seemed to be equated with inventorying an ever-increasing number of empirical objects likely to become material for exhibits or for museography. The “paradigm of the last survivor,” as defined by Daniel Fabre, lies at the origin of such a construction: the ethnologist is in this sense

“the last to be able to say that *such and such a practice, belief, object or piece of knowledge has existed; or such and such a word has been uttered...* of which no official archive will keep a trace.... From the point of view of knowledge, the justification is always the same: it is necessary to hurry to gather, at the very source, what will perhaps become *source* material for future researchers.... But the effect of this unanimous option is a tacit and insidious selection of subjects for study characterized by a preference for an ethnography of works, in the broadest sense of the term. Objects from daily life, forms of knowledge and expertise, tools and products of work, sites and settlements, *folk* arts, music, and oral literature... are always the first to be selected since their external description, their numbers and therefore their heritage value are immediately conceivable.” (Fabre, 1986)

The situation changed at the end of the century with the emergence of a grassroots discourse that led to a new foundation for the discipline, especially around the writings of Van Gennep.

In fact, as David L. Hoyt has demonstrated,

“the ethnographic subject underwent a reanimation at the *fin-de-siècle*... Thereafter it stood in no need of new life, coming instead fully into possession of its own. Unlike the ‘culture fossils,’ artefacts or phantasms studied before the closing decade of the nineteenth century, a good deal of what was construed as evidence by ethnographic writers after 1890 was

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10. Gérard Derèze (2005) demonstrated as much for French-speaking Belgium.

avowed to be *alive* - at least in all the various regions of 'savagery.' There was, under such circumstances, no need to 'restore life' to weathered ethnographic relics." (Hoyt, 2001)

This affirmation of the ethnographic subject is played out through recognizing that a primitive element is still active, linked to the present, not the past. It is no longer a matter of collecting the fossils of a vanished culture, the last specimens of one custom or practice or another, but rather of abandoning the historical and positivist perspective in favour of a synchronic approach that puts an end to the thesis of survival, and instead leads scholars to carry out their observations in the field, in the heat of the action. The primitive element is approached directly and spontaneously, thus making it possible to understand the future as well as the past. Such a reversal of temporal reference points leads to a coherent linkage of regionalism and folklore, whose maintenance is a powerful political tool. The interest in dialects and local languages falls within this perspective – as seen for example in the case of Mistral (Hoyt, 2006: 86).

It will suffice for our purposes to cite Arnold Van Gennep, regularly held up as the founder of French ethnology, in order to grasp the extent of the gap thus proclaimed: "what is of interest to the folklorist," he wrote,

is the living, direct fact, which might be termed sociological biology, such as ethnography is wont to pursue. It is all very well to collect in museums the objects used in our various provinces; but this is merely an adjunct to folklore, its dead part. What interests us is how these objects are used by living, breathing human beings, the customs actually played out before our eyes, and research into the complex conditions, especially the psychic conditions, of these customs. Now it just so happens that the social life is constantly changing and as a result folklore research cannot be halted either. (Van Gennep, 1924)

In this way Van Gennep refused to identify folklore with material culture and its museography, preferring instead to highlight, as he wrote in 1931, "the mechanisms of production, technical manufacture, and the underlying physical and social conditions, of which the objects themselves are nothing more than mere witnesses."

Numerous nationalists therefore define their programs in this sense, especially the neo-traditionalists of the regionalist movement organized by Charles-Brun, who criticize centralization and whose primary concern is to defend regional differences and cultural specificities (Charles-Brun, 1911; Barrès, 1913). The antiquarians of previous generations are their enemies, accused of having embalmed culture, of merely casting a scholarly



glance at their subjects of study; hence folklore pioneers from *Mélusine* or the *Revue des traditions populaires* come across as ivory-tower scholars unable to contribute to the French recovery process. From this perspective, Maurice Barrès condemns the way in which France's churches, following the separation of church and state, in 1905, were protected in the form of museums or cultural spaces, without actually defending Catholicism as such. It is in the name of the national *energy*, of the strength of these landscapes and ways of life, that monuments, like traditions, must not only be protected for purposes of study or archiving, but also mobilized so as to nurture a current project. There is nothing worse than the embalming of museums and scholarly procedures in the style of Viollet-le-Duc.

In 1884, a French exhibit hall was established in the Trocadéro ethnographical museum; the hall closed in 1928. The turning point was the opening of regional museums such as Bayonne's *Musée Basque*, Quimper's *Musée Breton* and Arles' *Museon Arlaten* as conceived in 1898 by Frédéric Mistral based on a quasi-ethnographical observation of Provence, a conception that would later serve as a model. This was followed in 1904 by Grenoble's *Musée Dauphinois*, designed by Hippolyte Müller in order to "recreate the thought process that created the object in the first place." Nevertheless, as opposed to the open-air home museums that proliferated at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Scandinavia, the Netherlands and Germany, as well as in Romania, Great Britain and the United States, France could not claim to have any institution of importance. Neither did our nation experience the subsequent highjacking of these institutions by the various authoritarian regimes of the 1930s, regimes that mobilized such museums for purposes of ideology, and/or of racist and xenophobic propaganda, etc. The French folklore program, at one and the same time scholarly and political in nature, led to a first version of the National Folk Arts and Traditions Museum, or ATP, due to the efforts of Georges-Henri Rivière, with this occurring at the same time as the *Musée de l'Homme* (Museum of Humanity) was also being established. Folklorism was part and parcel of certain projects, but nothing convincing would come of these programs, which were quickly interrupted when war was declared. Although the principle of an application of the discipline had a long history in France, it disappeared once and for all along with Vichy (Lenclud, 1995: 79-80).

On a broader scale, the link between the ethnologist and the museum could be described using the three figures that Noël Barbe located in the French intellectual tradition, i.e. "the deplorer of the useful, the fraternal expert, and the inventor of detached science," identified respectively

with Claude Lévi-Strauss, Michel Leiris and Roger Bastide (Barbe, 2007). “Whereas Claude Lévi-Strauss intended to instil a new discipline in the social sciences as a whole by demonstrating the social utility of the discipline, Michel Leiris attempted to reply to the discomfort created by ethnographical practice in a colonial situation by politicizing it, and Roger Bastide tried to turn anthropology into a discipline that could ‘control social forces,’ just as human beings had subjugated ‘the forces of nature,’ in order to transform applied anthropology into the scientific centrepiece of general anthropology.” The renewal of French ethnology after 1945 at first took place outside the main current of ethnology, then became part of a movement of introspection characterizing anthropology, a shift in focus from far away to close at hand: the discipline in a sense developed and grew by replacing an anthropology of the other with an anthropology of the same (Weber, 2003). The causes of this change were many and varied; an intermingling of the decolonialization process, the restructuring of academic anthropology, and later, the development of public demand thanks to the Mission du Patrimoine ethnologique (Ethnological Heritage Mission, or MPE) whose arrival on the scene made the prevailing situation as regards research and the museums more complicated still without this link ever being fully analyzed, let alone overcome.<sup>11</sup> Today, moreover, the importing of “intangible heritage,” both the term and the approach, is often interpreted in terms of the repatriating of measures implemented in exotic lands and henceforth applied back home in France. The author of a recent report on intangible-heritage policy in France has written that “he concentrated his examination on the migration of the concept of intangible heritage in France based on a comparative approach involving African and European contexts and public uses of the concept.” (Ciarica, 2006)

### **A militant modernity: the “musées de société” (social museums)**

It was also after World War II that a network was formed of regional and local museums, based on the model imagined by Rivièrè.<sup>12</sup> In particular, the program of the *Musée de Bretagne* (Museum of Brittany), an institution opened in Rennes in 1957, was designed to present “the time and space around a given territory and the links between human beings and nature.” The Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires (Folk Arts and Traditions

11. Two works of a partly autobiographical character are useful in this regard: Segalen (2005) and Cuisenier (2006).

12. Born in 1897, founder of the Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires in France then director of the ICOM (*International Council of Museums*, UNESCO) from 1948 to 1966.

Museum, or ATP), for its part, did not open until much later (between 1972 and 1975) in an outlying middle-class neighbourhood of Paris, located on the edge of the Jardin d'Acclimatation, under the auspices of the structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss as regards intellectual inspiration and post-Le Corbusier modernism as regards architecture. (Jean Dubuisson was a major exponent of French architecture of the Glorious Thirties.) Lastly, the category of "social museum" was coined within the Direction des Musées de France, France's museum administration, in 1991 as a means of bringing together different types of museums, thus enabling them to transcend their petty quarrels: ethnological museums, folk arts and traditions museums, technical and industrial museums, history museums, site and open-air museums, maritime museums, and last but not least, eco-museums. All these museums share a deep connection to a given territory and a desire to showcase the entire range of its cultural expressions, of which they offer a reading for their respective publics. Moving beyond the classical exhibit of objects and documents, their museography also shares certain similarities as regards the use of various technical mediations (audiovisual aids, handling, etc.) and human ones (presence of residents of the heritage community).

The word "écomusée" (eco-museum) first appeared in France in 1971, the year that the nation's environment ministry was established, in conjunction with the creation of France's regional natural park system, as a tool for learning about the space in question and the "life project" of a given population. The first eco-museums, conceived in Marquèze within the confines of the Parc naturel régional des Landes de Gascogne (Regional Natural Park of Gascony's des Landes Area), then at Ouessant within the Parc naturel régional d'Armorique (Armorique Regional Natural Park) served as points of reference in developing the definition of these institutions.<sup>13</sup> In principle, an eco-museum brings together various sites within a given geographical region and enables visitors to understand the history and geography of the place in question; it serves to illustrate the close links forged by the resident community with respect to the environment, natural resources, and farming, arts and crafts, manufacturing and industrial techniques. In this way, the eco-museum defines itself in reaction to the

13. The first definition of the eco-museum, as proposed by Georges-Henri Rivière, was adopted in 1971 at the ninth conference of the International Council of Museums in the following terms: "an eco-museum is a museum that is eclectic, interdisciplinary and 'hip'; it showcases human beings in time and space, in their natural and cultural environment, inviting the entire population to participate in its own unique development through various forms of expression based essentially on the reality of sites, buildings and objects, i.e. real things that speak more eloquently than the words and images that invade our lives."

traditional museum, with the latter being seen as a “temple of culture” reserved for an elite and showcasing a collection of objects as well as its own building. The eco-museum characterizes itself, *a contrario*, in terms of a territory, its landscapes, and its resident humans. The decisions leading to the creation of the regional natural parks, and simultaneously of the eco-museums (in some cases) were made by political authorities, associations, and scientists who intended to rally residents to the cause of protecting naturally and culturally homogenous territories. In 1976, Georges-Henri Rivière outlined his definition, which has been tirelessly taken up by all proponents of this new museology ever since. The spotlight was henceforth squarely on the local population: “[the eco-museum] is a mirror in which this population can look at itself, and recognize its own reflection, where it can seek an explanation of the territory to which it is attached, along with the peoples who preceded it, in both the discontinuity and continuity of the generations. The population will also hold up this mirror for its guests, so as to be better understood by them, in terms of generating respect for its work, patterns of behaviour, and private life.”<sup>14</sup>

As a museum of humans and nature, the eco-museum was designed to illustrate both traditional and industrial societies, to go back in time before the appearance of humankind, to set out the pre-historic and historical stages of human life, and to lead into the future, in theory without weighing in as a judge or decision-maker, but rather in order to “play a role in providing information and critical analysis.” The ideal eco-museum claims a dual quality as protector of the natural and cultural heritage of the populations concerned and as a sort of laboratory since it is at one and the same time the focus of theoretical and practical studies and the author of these studies. More concretely, the eco-museum is often a collection of small local museums that form a network, helping the local populations become aware of a heritage, and run by staff members whose status often varies between volunteer and professional, sometimes in the name of self management. In 1990, looking back on the previous 20 years, Isac Chiva judged that “in circumstances of crisis, French society reacts with a return-to-the-past movement, with a longing for nature, and, lastly, with a coming

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14. “A few simple principles: the objective is the service of humankind and not the reverse; time and space do not imprison themselves behind doors and walls and art is not the sole cultural expression of humanity. The museum professional is a social being, an actor for change, a servant of the community. The visitor is not a docile consumer, regarded as an idiot, but a creator who can and should participate in the building of the future – the museum’s research.” (de Varine, 1986. Patrick Boylan’s translation)

together under the banner of the local," all features which force ethnologists to ask themselves very serious questions indeed (Chiva, 2000: 235). A few years later, Christian Bromberger recognized that the decade of the 1980s was characterized by "a proliferation of feverish and more subdued projects – probably explaining why ethnological-heritage concepts and administrations appeared as an institutional response inclined to coordinate, direct, and dominate this erratic yet creative outflow" (Bromberger, 1996).

In other words, the first generation of eco-museums originated with a social demand, or at the very least could make such a claim, since they were generally the product of the activism demonstrated by elected representatives or passionate coordinators who found pathways to collective recognition. The most famous examples of these eco-museums include the institutions of Fourmies-Trélon, Nord-Dauphiné (no longer in operation), the new city of Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines and the Creusot Montceau-les-Mines urban community. Over the last few decades, they have undergone important restructurings, often intended to turn them into "real" museums, or even to launch a tourist development process that was not their primary goal; and they have sometimes simply closed up shop. Many eco-museums originated with a desire to protect vestiges of an activity, technical or otherwise, linked to local history, and belong to the categories of open-air or site museums. Hugues De Varine, one of the fathers of this new museology of the 1970s, especially of the Creusot,<sup>15</sup> would later make the following statement: "What I do feel able to claim to have invented, however, is the name 'eco-museum,' a general-purpose word that was intended to cover all types and sizes of community museums, in both town and rural areas. The fact that the term has been so often misused is not my fault. There are those, for example, who fail to distinguish between an eco-museum and an open-air museum, ignoring the fact that a true eco-museum, like a true community museum, is essentially and at its best a museum that contains and reflects a double input, an input from the community itself and an input from outside advisers."<sup>16</sup>

These museums do indeed respond to a certain demand, nourished by more obvious resources in the area of mediation than those possessed by classical museums. In particular, such institutions can resort to the oral testimony, whether living or archived, of the various players in question,

15. Hugues de Varine joined ICOM as Deputy Director to Georges Henri Rivière in 1962, became Interim-Director in 1964 and Director in 1967. He left ICOM in 1974.

16. In a talk given on October 15, 1993, at the University of Utrecht, "Tomorrow's Community Museums."

making them more accessible, or at least apparently so. They cater to a public made up mainly of families: according to recent surveys (carried out since 2002), some 51 percent of visitors are frequently accompanied by youngsters under 15 years of age. The number of visitors varies greatly depending on where the institution is located, but the permanent public observatory of France's museum administration estimates that between 10,000 and 20,000 people visit rural or technical museums every year (between 1,000 and 370,000 for the 100 or so institutions studied in the sample). The vast majority of French people, 95 percent according to an IPSOS poll conducted in 2001, consider it important to "protect and showcase rural heritage, so as to ensure the transmission of an identity to future generations, preserve a shared framework of life, and help develop the economic, social and cultural activities of the various regions." Expectations are as high with respect to emotions and sensations as they are in terms of services to be offered to the visitor (the boutique or the café must offer products representative of the collections or intangible heritage being exhibited).

The intention of many social museums is to illustrate the environment of a community as well as a culture: as true enlighteners of the "spirit of a place" as regards what characterizes it and gives it a fundamental originality, they provide a picture revealing a region and its landscape, a community and its ways of life. Confronted with threats of uniformization and banalization with respect to local cultures in an increasingly globalized world, they partake of the exaltation of the particular, choosing to find sustenance by recalling a time when there was a basic congruence between the ways things were developed and the resources of the community. What occurs is at one and the same time an evocation of – and often a lament for – an environmentally friendly development process and a promotion of respect for the human values of conviviality and voluntary solidarity associated with life in tiny rural or semi-rural communities of the pre-industrial and pre-urban era. Following this logic, a four-sided museology has been established: a search for authenticity – for the "true" – in its human and material dimension; a passion for the particular, including the curious and the rare; a cult of historical denseness or patina; and, lastly, an attention to detail that serves to reveal a society that has either disappeared or been submerged by modernity.

The territories of the eco-museums are therefore composed of disparate places selected for their exemplary landscapes and architecture: the buildings reflect the various activities of the inhabitants (or the various eras

of their main activity). In Grande Lande, located in the Landes Regional Natural Park, the central place is a clearing in a pine forest, home to the “Marquèze aïrial,” an operations building and living space for the basic unit of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century forest world; buildings dispersed in the forest, sheeps, and cultivated lots have also been added to it. The eco-museum located in the Armorique Regional Natural Park is composed of a network of 15 different places, some evoking the various landscapes of the Mounts of Arrée region, from its peaks (382 m) to rias at the edge of the sea, and including its peat basins, with others exhibiting the animal species of the area (complete with an eco-museum dedicated to the wolf) and/or past and present activities (wind and water mills, tanneries, farms, etc.).

Most of these museums are built around one or a number of activities on the road to extinction and by this very fact are celebrating a lost past. They serve as witnesses to the wholeness of a given territory and illustrate both the rurality and the industry of yesteryear, so much so that the period being showcased has constantly expanded, now drawing on its roots in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and concluding in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup>. All of these institutions exhibit traditional tools and techniques, thanks to objects and documents often lent or donated by individuals living in the park itself; they invite former craftspeople to provide visitors with explanations, and even to carry out various demonstrations, since “immersion in past practices, far from being nostalgic in nature, raises present problems” (preface of the Fédération des Ecomusées (French Eco-museum Federation) brochure, 1990).<sup>17</sup> The eco-museum has developed a new representation of heritage conceived as a self-realization by society, thanks to an (ongoing) updating of its “holdings.”<sup>18</sup> In this way, it has become part of a new “heritage” dynamic in the society, as various research projects simultaneously sponsored by the Mission du Patrimoine (Heritage Mission) concerning cultural practices and identity policies have attested. Whereas the classical museum mobilizes the past for purposes of the future, the eco-museum, for its part, represents instead “a provocation of memory,” as Freddy Raphaël so aptly put it (Raphaël and Herberich-Marx, 1987). During the halcyon days of the 1970s, the Rivière eco-museums in this way attempted to adopt the position of players vis-à-vis their visitors, even though, as Octave Debary

17. *Ecomusées en France: Premières Rencontres nationales des écomusées*, L'Isle-d'Abeau, November 13 and 14, 1986, Grenoble, Agence régionale d'ethnologie Rhône-Alpes, Ecomusée Nord-Dauphiné, 1987.

18. See the manifesto in *Terrain*, the journal of the Mission du Patrimoine ethnologique du Ministère de la Culture (Fleury, 1988). A summary of this ethnology is provided by Segalen (1989).

has demonstrated with respect to Le Creusot, such as theses were sometimes based on the failure of an incomplete work of memory.

In any case, this museum-renewal process has been structured around the opposition between the intangible and the museum related, between the novelty of the movement and the conservatism of the institutions. The development of these new museums engendered a veritable struggle between antagonistic values. This initial opposition was intensified a few decades after the founding moment by a controversy around the cost and future of these museums, as compared to traditional art museums. In an article, Edouard Pommier, the inspector general of museums at the time, spoke out against the abuse of social museums, firing off a broadside that proponents of ethnological and anthropological museology immediately attempted to refute (Pommier, 1991). The scope of the confrontation was considerable, in direct proportion to the sudden proliferation of ethnographical museums: beginning with approximately 40 during the decade of the 1950s, their number swelled to around 800 institutions, created or reinvented around the notion of identity (Cuisenier and Segalen, 1986: 34). Since then, ethnographical collections, in the broadest sense of the term, have come to represent between 20 and 25 percent of the total number of museums: the harshness of the politico-administrative debates is linked to the brutal competition faced by traditional institutions.

Nearly an entire generation later, the bitterness of Le Creusot's founder remains palpable:

We soon fell afoul of the traditional museum world and its centralized authority in Paris. We were made aware that we were breaking all the rules and that we should have to be excommunicated. The regulations, sanctified by the passage of time, laid down, among other things, that museums must have collections, and they must have visitors, a public. But Le Creusot had no collections, no mass of objects which had been entrusted to the museum for safe keeping, and it had no public. The public, that is, the community, was the museum and the museum was the public. No clear line could be drawn between the two, nor was it our intention to do so. The whole point of the eco-museum, as we conceived it, was that there was no division between the two. Our offence, and the reason for our excommunication, appeared to be rooted in the fact that museums were officially controlled by a powerful network of priests and bishops, with an accepted theology to justify their status and the structure of the organization they controlled. We at Le Creusot had decided to establish a new kind of non-conformist, democratic museum-church, in which the congregation was the church and vice-versa. We fought a long and hard battle over this and its effects have been felt all over the museum world.



All in all, rarely has the opposition between intangible and tangible heritage provoked so much passion, not to mention simmering hatred, within the museum world. It is impossible to understand the current situation, and the obstacles that it is likely to generate with respect to the adoption of an intangible-heritage cultural policy, if the strength of this institutional logic is underestimated.<sup>19</sup> The administration back in Paris has never really understood or accepted the issues considered critical by the 1970-90 generation concerning both new and renewed museums: the institutional response has largely remained frozen in the *a priori* realm of prestigious material collections made up of objects snatched from contexts where they had a purpose, in order to be placed in a museum. In contrast, all the new institutions swear only by the *in situ*, i.e. by the banal, everyday nature of the objects exhibited, as well as by community involvement in projects (even though such involvement has remained mainly a matter of rhetoric). The example of the evolution of history museums may serve to illustrate, above and beyond these difficulties, a change in direction toward a sort of “professionalism” that at least some of these social museums have subsequently been forced to take.

### The issue of an intangible-heritage inventory

Taking an intangible-heritage approach to the museum first requires that a sociological, even sociographical, issue be resolved concerning the representative nature of the artefacts and recordings conserved and exhibited in relation to the various manifestations of and players involved with this form of heritage. As regards inventorying and classifying intangible heritage, France’s Architecture and Heritage Administration, or DAPA, has no established tradition or expertise in the area, except by way of the Ethnological Heritage Mission (MPE), an agency that has become the Ethnology Mission divided among three services of a DAPA administrative unit of the culture and communications ministry. The 2006 decree stipulated that the purpose of the Ethnology Mission was “[the] *study and promotion*, as it was for other qualified bodies, of the various aspects of tangible and intangible heritage throughout the entire nation which

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19. Nicolas Perruchot, Special Rapporteur for the finance commission made the following statement before the French National Assembly on Tuesday, October 30, 2007: “For lack of time, I am unable to raise all the issues that concern me, especially those dealing with the credits earmarked for maintaining historical monuments, with assessing patronage legislation, and with promoting the notion of intangible heritage” (*Official analytic summary, session of Tuesday, October 30, 2007; Commission des affaires culturelles, familiales et sociales*).

are of interest to ethnologists or which fall within the administration's field of action, especially architecture and the regions." The first mission, which originated with a report entitled *L'ethnologie de la France. Besoins et projets* (French Ethnology: Needs and Projects), presented in 1979 by Redjem Benzaïd, then the French inspector general of finances, had already addressed all the objectives of the UNESCO convention: beginning in the 1980s, its competitive bid solicitations undertook to study them on a regular basis before publishing the results<sup>20</sup> in the *Terrain* journal, whose guiding principle was a refusal to take or apply any ideological position, at the risk of seeming to lack ambition. (In this the historian Jean-Pierre Rioux saw nothing more than a platitude.) The entire approach reflected a spirit of inquiry into identity in general, along with its transmission, although without any particular spirit of conservation (Grenet, 2008). What it involved was conducting research into the cultural expressions and manifestations experienced at a local level as marks of community identity. It should be remembered that during the 1980s two eminent representatives of French anthropology insisted on the importance of ensuring that the subjects studied (celebrations, practices, manifestations, etc.) were "no longer treated as surviving relics of apparently debased antique facts, but, on the contrary, as the contemporary expression of conflicting identity representations... and the social groups that embody it." (Cuisenier and Segalen, 1986: 87) The task of the CNRS-related research centre included in the ATP museum has been conceived from this perspective: to analyze the museum object less as an element of heritage than to provide a reading of its appropriation as heritage, recognizing it as a sign or symbol within the various social groups that cause it to exist as heritage through the exercising of various strategic choices.<sup>21</sup>

20. The *Mission du Patrimoine ethnologique*, has an important editorial role with *Terrain*, a biannual journal launched in 1983, with the "Ethnologie de la France" collection initiated the next year in the form of two series, "Les ouvrages," and "Cahiers," and with the *Répertoire de l'ethnologie de la France*, the 1990 yearly that today provides an on-line listing of 700 researchers and specialists and 950 agencies and organizations, such as research centres, museums, associations, etc. (<http://www.culture.fr/documentation/repethno/pres.htm>).
21. "Three central dimensions serve to differentiate this laboratory from all the rest: a reflection on memory and on heritage appropriation, concerning the role of the social museum with regards both to history and to memory, in particular the transformation of what is contemporary into memory; a reflection on the meaning of the object and on the relationship – both practical and symbolic – of the objects of daily life; and a questioning of the role of researchers in a museum, i.e. whether they have a critical role, a role as mediator between museum-related discourse and the discourse of social players."

Henceforth, museums, in their turn, could be tempted to actively intervene in the updating of this sort of process. One such experiment was conducted in 2003, at the Archeology Museum of the Jura, located in Lons-le-Saunier, on the occasion of the exhibit entitled “Patrimoines singuliers-Chacun son patrimoine. Inventaire intime des jurassiens du début du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle” (Singular Heritages: To Each his or her own Heritage. An intimate inventory of Jura residents at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century). Held between April 5, 2003 and November 30, 2003, it began with an appeal process launched by the museum in newspapers, by mail and through various other means. These appeals, produced on trademark yellow sheets, were made up of two parts. The first contained a message from the museum’s curator under the headline “La prochaine exposition du Musée sera... la vôtre!” (The next exhibit at the Museum will be... yours!) where she wrote that “this exhibit will be made up of a collection reflecting the answer(s) provided to the following question: ‘What, for you, brings to mind heritage or memory?’” Everyone was called upon to lend any sort of object related to “his or her image of heritage” in order to help put together a temporary exhibit. The very words “heritage and memory” contained the goal to be attained. There had already been similar attempts to co-produce exhibits made by history museums, for example, during the inaugural exhibit of the musée de Péronne in order to collect local traces of the First World War. In 1987, the Historial organized a movement entitled “Faites entrer votre nom au musée” (Have your name entered in the museum) as a means of collecting objects: on the one hand, donors’ names would be recorded among the Historial’s activities, and on the other, the objects collected would become “an inalienable part of the national historical heritage” (*Le Courrier picard*, 1987).<sup>22</sup> This would be associated with the highly publicized initiatives concerning the “parole des poilus” (words of the hirsute) (France Inter), a process of collecting contemporary testimonies as regards the spreading of scholarly literature pertaining to the subject. Such initiatives are generally scattered rather than coordinated; nevertheless PORTETHNO, France’s repertory of ethnological research and resources, which provides information about actions and initiatives concerning tangible and intangible heritage issues of interest to the ethnologist, does propose a selection of organizations (research centres, associations, museums, eco-museums and social museums, national centres for ethnological research and resources (referred to in French as “ethnopôles”), regional natural parks, libraries, archive centres,

22. Concerning the issue of objects and their memories, the reader may refer to the studies assembled by Debarry and Turgeon (2007).

learned societies, etc.) and heritage initiatives, such as an analysis of the main resource material (academic papers and printed matter, background music, audiovisual documents, illustrations, ethnographers' funds and collections, etc.) that do in fact have a conservation vocation.

The special situation of French ethnology explains why one of the ongoing debates of the last few years has focused on the opposition, or at the very least, the ambiguous relationship, between applied ethnology (called "government ethnology" by its adversaries) and disinterested science. It also explains why this debate has essentially channelled the actions and reflections of professional ethnologists, who not long ago served as ethnological advisors at the regional cultural affairs administrations (commonly referred to as DRACs), in direct association with the ministerial administrations and the Ethnological Heritage Mission, and who have since become "academic" ethnologists, i.e. laboratory colleagues of other ethnologists who have remained pure "researchers." Thus proponents of "critical" sociology seized upon the publication of a work on rural heritage to attack colleagues from the cultural ministry, eliciting vigorous rebuttals from many different fronts.<sup>23</sup> According to a number of different observers, from an institutional point of view the Convention finally enables this administration to take its principles to their logical conclusion, and to model its operations upon those of previous administrations, which were both more prestigious and better endowed. For example, Daniel Fabre argues that the ethnological heritage council of the cultural ministry, created in 1980, was concerned from the very start with looking after "intangible" assets that characterized ways of life, of thought and of learning. "This intangible-ness was therefore decisive, justifying the mission's association with the heritage administration, with two- or three-dimensional assets

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23. This file brings together the attack mounted by Laferté and Renahy (2003a); the riposte of the authors of the "offending" work, André Micoud, Laurence Bérard, Philippe Marchenay and Michel Rautenberg (2003) entitled "Et si nous prenions nos désirs en compte?"; and lastly the response (Laferté and Renahy, 2003b) "L'ethnologue face aux usages sociaux de l'ethnologie." Not part of the controversy itself but worthy of notice nevertheless are the analyses of Jean-Louis Tornatore (2007) entitled "Qu'est ce qu'un ethnologue politisé? Expertise et engagement en socio-anthropologie de l'activité patrimoniale." For him, the debate over involvement vs. application, "rediscovered" in practice by the Mission's "ethnologists," was not connected to a fertile reflection upon the links between anthropology and colonized peoples, states (the traditional continents of the discipline), and non-governmental organizations. Ethnological involvement as understood in France has never been measured against the notion of involvement in the sense of anthropological advocacy as outlined by Bruce Albert (1995).

remaining the main prerogative of the museums. The council nevertheless brought together all the players making up the heritage hierarchy, including the various ministerial administrations dealing with music, dance, live performance, archives... and, obviously, museums.”<sup>24</sup> In the final analysis, the signing of the Convention would serve exactly the same purpose for intangible culture as the adoption of legislation served for the protection of monuments, legislation that Mérimé clamoured for in order to guarantee his intervention policy. In a way, the signing of the Convention would come to symbolize the “arrival” of ethnological heritage, the long-awaited normalizing of French practices in the area, in the form of an adoption of international modernity.

### **A museological and museographical challenge**

Any eventual successful grafting of intangible heritage upon French museums will depend on the intellectual and material capacity of these institutions to handle this type of project and to make sense of it in terms of “objects” that have been collected. The paradox of protecting the intangible may lead curators to restrict their reading to affects or aesthetics as the only mode of apprehension. What is at stake here, in other words, is the actual museographical and museological reflection process apt to capture and showcase the intangible. It presupposes a linkage, as yet to be established, between inventory on the one hand, and museums, on the other; certain isolated events are indicative of an attempt of this sort.<sup>25</sup>

24. It should be recalled that in 1980 two distinct bodies were established at the ministerial level: the Conseil du patrimoine ethnologique (Ethnological Heritage Council, or CPE) and the Mission du Patrimoine ethnologique (Ethnological Heritage Mission, or MPE), both reporting to the Direction de l'architecture et du patrimoine (Architecture and Heritage Administration, or DAPA) whose mission is “to inventory, study, protect, conserve and raise awareness concerning France’s archeological, architectural, urban, ethnological and photographic heritage as well as her artistic wealth.” With a four-year mandate and made up both of delegates from the administration and experts, the CPE is “the scientific authority that establishes the orientations of a national ethnology policy for France.” Made up of a group of central civil servants and of “regional ethnologists” or “ethnological advisors” (normally 14), belonging to the Directions régionales des Affaires culturelles (regional cultural affairs administrations, or DRACs), the MPE is the executive organ of the CPE.

25. The Institut national du patrimoine (National Heritage Institute, or INP) organized a study day entitled “Le patrimoine culturel immatériel de l'Europe: inventer son inventaire” (Europe’s intangible cultural heritage: inventing its inventory), on Friday, November 30, 2007, an occasion to call upon the testimonies of foreign inventories, especially the Quebec initiative designed by Laurier Turgeon, and

The now defunct ATP museum as conceived by Georges-Henri Rivière provided an eternal view of French traditions through a relationship characterized by empathy, even complicity, whose disappearance within the general public was very likely one of the causes of its failure. On a contrary note, the future institution in Marseille must consider objects as firmly rooted in history, according to Michel Colardelle, its new director. In 2001, he decided to expand both his geographical territory and his stated objective (“civilization” rather than simply “popular culture”). The Musée des Civilisations de l’Europe et de la Méditerranée (Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilizations, or MuCEM) therefore focuses on the civilizations of Europe and the Mediterranean region from the Middle Ages to contemporary times, drawing support from all the social sciences, with ethnology as the central discipline in this regard. Running counter to the so-called Malraux ideology, Michel Colardelle calls upon contextualization, that of the contemporary Mediterranean world, in a questioning process broken down into five themes, themselves to be renewed every five years: Paradise, water, the road, the city, and the Masculine/Feminine. While awaiting completion of the project and the resolution of its funding issues, which remain uncertain on a number of points, the MuCEM has organized a series of temporary exhibits that define its collection campaign as well as its ambition. An exhibit hall entitled the “Atelier de l’ethnologue” (Ethnological Workshop) has been designated to demonstrate the work of the ethnologist as conceived in social museums. The visitor is to be introduced to the history of ethnology through the example of the museum itself, coming to understand the daily practices of the ethnologist and the collection of information by way of interviews with ethnologists and ethnological films, among other means. As such, the new museum appears to be the heir apparent to the ATP tradition, as it can still be discerned in regional institutions that continue with their work, while pursuing the project of covering a geographical area that remains problematic both as regards its collections and its chances of providing a coherent reading for its visitors.

Running completely counter to such an ambition, the Dauphiné Regional Museum has continued to explore the resources of regional ethnology in order to invent new types of exhibits. Those showcasing the minorities that have left their mark on the Grenoble area – Greeks, Italians, and North Africans – represent the first relatively large-scale manifestation of any recognition for such communities and for the history of immigration

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to showcase the *maison des cultures du monde* (House of World Cultures) for its precedence as a major French player, especially as regards live exhibits.

to be seen in French museums (Duclos and Marderos, 1999). According to its curator, Jean-Claude Duclos, the Museum of Regional Heritage cannot claim to completely fulfill its mission if it limits its field of intervention only to historical periods and dominant indigenous cultures. Hence, in its approach the museum integrates contemporary history, even current events, and is increasingly focusing upon foreign cultures as subjects for exhibit. As part of its plan, the institution has, since 1989, successfully organized a series of exhibits evoking the memory of the communities making up the population of the Isère region, for instance, in exhibits featuring the Italy of the Puglia region (Corato – Grenoble, 1989), Greece (Des Grecs, 1993), Armenia (D’Isère et d’Arménie, 1997) and the North African community (D’Isère et du Maghreb, *Pour que la vie continue...*, 2000). This cycle of exhibits dedicated to the scientific exploration of identities transplanted into the Dauphiné region has aimed to establish a collective memory and to contribute to learning about difference, respect for other cultures, and the sharing of a same identity, albeit a composite one. The museography chosen, i.e. the presentation of characters acting as spokespersons for their various communities, recalls the North American model of life histories or testimonies scripted by a museographical team in order to provide visitors with a “participant’s” perspective. In this respect, the approach has its pitfalls, but it does address at least one of the key issues that the intangible raises for museums, to wit, how testimonies can and should be exhibited (Idjéraoui and Davallon, 2002).

In fact, commemorative museums are proliferating in various forms, from those showcasing the colonial history of North Africa, to commemorations of sites and victims, to peace museums.<sup>26</sup> These are what Annette Becker refers to as “open museums,” created on the very spots where the dramatic events that they commemorate took place, and reflecting a historiographical climate characterized by what Annette Wieviorka has called “the witness era” when referring to genocides, a term that can henceforth be applied to other histories, whether those of victims or otherwise (Becker 1998; Wieviorka, 1998). This situation leads to classic difficulties when it comes to organizing such exhibits, which require the material support of local memories, the retranscription and interpretation of orality and the exhibiting of objects and observable phenomena. Annette Wieviorka points out that for the historian “a testimony addresses not reason, but the heart. It elicits compassion, reverence, indignation, and occasionally outrage,” that also begs the question as to the influence of emotional pressure on

26. For an overview of this issue, see Laurier Turgeon (2003), and the thematic issues that he devoted to the matter, in collaboration with Elise Dubuc (2002; 2004).

historical rigour. As the anthropologist Jean-Yves Boursier laments, one risk inherent in the museology of contemporary history is that of becoming a mere message bearer: “the horror of war, disgust with barbarism, compassion for its victims, but also a ‘dehistoricizing’ of the Resistance, immersed in the eternal combat of Good versus Evil.” (Vergnon 2005: 162) Thus, he adds, “we have gone from otherness (the museum supported by a group) to the norm of political and moral correctness, supported by communications operations.” (Boursier 2005: 241) Another danger inevitably faced by any museum that takes into account the intangible heritage of testimony is the risk of becoming a mouthpiece for the memories of individuals and groups with special interests.

### **Intangible heritage and cultural policies**

The role of ethnology in cultural projects carried out on various political scales has been marked, after the generation of the eco-museums, by the recent delineation of increasingly numerous and diverse “project territories.” In particular, the showcasing of intangible heritage, and its connection to the museums, is explicitly included in the 2007-2013 program for the rural development of Corsica, in the expectations of the regional economic and social council of the Rhône-Alpes, in reflections on the territory of the Vichy-Auvergne country project, in the Basque country territory 2020 project, and in reflections carried out in the Languedoc-Rousillon region, among others. In the latter case, the 2003 creation of the Narbonnaise Regional Natural Park has led to various systems of producing a territory, including the 2006 operation “Les archives du sensible” (archiving the sensitive) focusing on intangible heritage. Languedoc-Roussillon, an area that experienced considerable tourist development in the 1960s, has in turn spawned a very powerful regionalist movement concerned with how to safeguard traditions, local know-how and the regional language (known as *langue d’oc*). Following in the wake of a policy designed by a DRAC ethnological advisor with a focus on matters of maritime heritage, the current policy “maps out an undertaking intended to promote an understanding of the most fragile of practices and the most discreet symbolic relationships maintained by a segment of the population with its territory... it has a double-sided relationship with tourist consumption: born of a desire to affirm a resistance offered by ‘autochthony’ confronted with mass tourism, it has ended up proposing another way of encountering the area, or rather the hinterland, invisible to the major waves of tourists converging on the coast, and therefore guaranteed to be ‘authentic.’” (Ciarcia, 2006) This



sort of example is very indicative of the reinvented, and often outmoded, identity constructions of these last years, ranging from the spaces of parks and eco-museums to the framework provided by various “project territories” linked to country contracts. For example, an analysis of current country projects reveals that “developing and showcasing natural and cultural resources” appears among 41 percent of the themes proposed and that among the 97 files that include projects of a cultural order – out of 140 – 70 contain measures linked to heritage showcasing and development.” (Landel and Treillet, 2005) This demonstrates just how much the “dialectical” game played out between “territorial recompositions and the invention of new cultural policies whose novelty resides in their being designed on the basis of territorial resources” has become crucial.

Sylvie Grenet, director at the culture ministry’s ethnology mission, observed in the summer of 2006<sup>27</sup> that, according to the logic of the Convention, “the supporting of communities by the various member states should not compromise the identity constructions linked to the practices and various forms of knowledge and know-how borne by these same communities.... Intangible cultural heritage therefore appears as a societal notion – this is undeniable – but also, and above all, remains political, even strategic, for both communities and states.” By all accounts, in the years to come this will be one of the key issues linked to an interaction of state/communities/individuals that is still difficult to imagine in the French administrative tradition. In this regard, the possibility of a coexistence between regional tongues and the French language may be evoked; the subject of recurring debate, it is taken up in numerous reports and considered by the general delegation to the French language and the languages of France.<sup>28</sup> To make a long story short, on the regional scale, the plan seems most of all to pursue “the impossible quest for the geosymbol,” each time consigning a component part of the society and the territory to the realm of the forgotten.<sup>29</sup> On the national scale, and at a moment when France’s culture ministry, faced with budget cuts and a crisis of legitimacy, sounded

27. “Problématiques et enjeux du patrimoine culturel immatériel au Ministère de la culture,” Papers presented during meetings with the theme *Patrimoine culturel immatériel et transmission la polyphonie corse traditionnelle peut-elle disparaître?* (Intangible Cultural Heritage and Transmission: Could traditional Corsican polyphony actually disappear?), Centre des musiques traditionnelles corses, June 22 and 23, 2006, Ajaccio.

28. <http://www.vie-publique.fr/politiques-publiques/politique-patrimoine/protection-patrimoine/patrimoine-immateriel/>.

29. A series of corroborating analyses may be found in Jousseume and David (2007), especially Bonerandi and Hochedez (2007).

by numerous commission reports,<sup>30</sup> seems to be forced to postpone its missions concerning the profession, the intangible-heritage issue only adds the difficulties involved in tackling such a problem to a series of other unresolved issues. As for French ethnology, it is directly challenged by the principle of an intangible-heritage policy that has moved from the application of a documentary position to a participatory one, changing from *stricto sensu* inventory to the construction of mechanisms for analyzing how heritage is actually constructed.

Nowadays the legitimacy of protecting and showcasing heritage, whether intangible in whole or in part, depends upon public and community interest in memory, both in how it works and how it is represented. As such, it has been pointed out that the interest of object museums lies in their remaining open to the many and varied discourses of memory, as opposed both to the selling of history as a show that excludes any sort of critical or academic approach, and to an amalgamation of museographical talk and historians' knowledge that in turn elicits a frustration of memory (Sherman, 1995). At the same time, academic interest in cultural showplaces, historical monuments, and territories affected by heritage conversion is concentrated on how they are received: both the resident and the visitor focus their attention on examining the details of a relationship meant to "domesticate history" (Fabre, 2000). The limits of a protection policy restricted to buildings is especially noted, i.e. to the tangible without regard for any personal history that has attempted to establish a link; such is the case for the neo-rurals and the entrepreneurs of heritage in "secondary" residences (Ortar, 2005). The academic link with intangible heritage clearly resides in this perspective of a reading of constructions, always volatile to a lesser or greater extent, of identity and its transitions, between a continuity of intentions and shifting reference horizons. In many cases, this is added to already existing mechanisms that have, sometimes for nearly 200 years, taken charge of tangible assets, both buildings and furnishings, the frames and tools of these spiritual productions.

Above all, this serves to reinforce the key element which no doubt makes for the special nature of the ethnology museum, deprived as it is of "treasures" of any sort: the consecration of a given territory. From this point of view, the situation of France is paradoxical. Solidly identified with a national territory – the Hexagon, its ultimate representation, is a memory place in the fullest sense of the term, and the idea of borders has profoundly marked its historiographical and intellectual heritage

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30. Especially Jacques Rigaud (1996).

(Weber, 1986; Nordman, 1998) – France has nevertheless been grappling for nearly two centuries with a dizzying array of territorial divisions. The recent observations of a geographer are widely shared in this respect: “This profusion of territorial reconstitutions sometimes disconcerts average citizens and does not properly address their desire to be involved in decisions concerning their framework of life.” (Marconis, 2006) The latest figure in political use with respect to the territory project, “the country,” (in the sense of a region with a distinct history) in all its potential for promoting a real grassroots participatory democracy, would appear to provide proponents of this point of view with an anchor point with respect to inventories of manifestations of intangible heritage, most notably after the utopia of the eco-museum. For all that, the weaknesses of the heritage approach as applied to the intangible are plain for all to see: the risks of an emblematic and sentimental future for intangible heritage remain very real indeed, and falling into such a trap would distance France from the academic challenge that the affirmation of an ethnological heritage represented during the 1980s. Such being the case, the possibility of defeat would henceforth weigh down the process of adopting international standards for defining and governing heritage matters, standards which would serve to replace the national legacy of a centralized administrating of disciplinary knowledge and museographical management.

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