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Memories of community: remembering and creating
farming tradition at Ramsey Rural Museum

MA Cultural Memory

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Introduction

This dissertation looks at a small local museum, Ramsey Rural Museum (RRM). RRM is unusual in being administered and staffed by volunteers. The motivations for its foundation and its stated aims, together with factors that influence the museum collection, the way it is displayed, and individual motivations for volunteers' ongoing involvement with this demanding project are all of interest to cultural memory.

After briefly reviewing some of the pragmatic, sociological and psychological factors that may affect involvement with the museum, the role of incorporated memory of farm work among some of the volunteers is examined with regard to the way in which it may be said to motivate and inform volunteer participation as part of the preservation and evolution of local tradition. I refer to work on body memory by Edward S. Casey, (Casey: 2000) and Paul Connerton; (Connerton 1989) I accept Connerton's assertion that body memory is

fundamental in the transmission of cultural memory and find examples from observations at Ramsey which illustrate some phenomena described by Casey.

Body memory is private and individual, but its manifestation may be public. I consider some instances in which body memory underlies re-enactment of work tasks that help define and perpetuate a community. It is my contention that public re-enactments of work tasks, such as the demonstrations that form part of RRM's end of season 'Country Fair', when grounded in habitual body memory, tend to obviate what Lowenthal describes as, 'the illusion that heritage experience suffices to know the past' (Lowenthal: 1998, 168) and to promote the 'local moments of self-determination...in which an increase in both rationality and personality is possible' that Patrick Wright calls for. (Wright: 1985, 258)

While body memory, manifest only in its performance, is a difficult concept to fully define, it arguably falls within the concept of intangible cultural heritage described in the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage. This convention includes under 'intangible' a wide range of oral and performative traditions described as embodied.¹ While it is oriented towards the preservation of indigenous cultures in under-developed

¹ See appendix I

countries, its remit for the preservation of cultural diversity could be more widely applied.

Background: Ramsey Rural Museum and its community

The town of Ramsey is situated in the East Anglia fens, about thirty miles north of Cambridge in what was, until 1974, the county of Huntingdonshire. It has a long history as a market town which grew up around its abbey. Ramsey Abbey, founded in 969, was one of the richest and most important in England. At the dissolution of 1539 it came into the ownership of the Cromwell family, with whom the area has many associations. Most residents are aware of the main points of the town's history and many, feeling that their local area has distinct, integral features, resent being administratively subsumed into Cambridgeshire. The secondary school is on the site of the abbey and the surviving gatehouse is a prominent landmark. The town continued to be an important economic hub for the area as a market town having transport connections via river and canal, road and later rail with the neighbouring larger towns of Ely, Peterborough, and Huntingdon. The rail link was closed in 1947 and the town has been in decline since the late 1960s, losing social amenities such as its cinema and other entertainment venues, and many small shops and businesses.

The museum project was started in nineteen seventy-seven by a curate attached to the parish church, Robert Gwynne, not as a museum per se but as a social project to combat the depression he had observed in some of his parishioners. He felt this could be connected to the eroding identity and status of the town and its surrounding areas, as agriculture declined and large 'agri-business' companies displaced smaller farmers and reduced the employment prospects of farm labourers. Demographics and economics were also changing due to an influx of commuters who worked and, significantly, shopped in neighbouring, larger towns. The Rev. Gwynne made an informal suggestion to one of the larger farmers in the area, Michael Perkins, who was quite interested in the idea of a museum for Ramsey, and an ad hoc committee was set up. In an interview conducted for this dissertation², Mr Perkins recalled setting up the museum project:

M.P.: And what happened after that, we called a public meeting for those interested in starting a museum and, I think I'm right in saying that they all met at our house, it was in the summer of '77. And we agreed that we would try to approach Lord de Ramsey to see if we could use the wood yard premises, what is now known as the wood yard premises.

SS: So, at that time, had you already thought about what kind of a museum you wanted to have?

MP: No, no. To be quite honest, having got that far, we had our first, sort of, committee meeting for those interested in forming...in Blenheim Road, at the Rev. Gwynne's. They made

² Full transcripts of these interviews can be made available on request.

him an honorary member because it was him who...got people together, to get a start.

SS: What... do you recall what sparked his interest?

MP: His interest...was not really in anything to do with the museum. He was just interested in getting people together. And from there it snowballed.

The Lord de Ramsey referred to above was the Third Baron de Ramsey, the present Lord de Ramsey's father, who was also Lord Lieutenant of Huntingdonshire (1947-1968). The wood yard premises was a range of farm buildings, some dating from the seventeenth century, which were in a derelict condition in 1977 and had last housed a sawmill. It is notable that the question of defining exact aims for this project is elided, both at the time the museum was being set up and in this answer. At the time referred to, of course, none of the participants could have known how big the museum project would prove to be. Personal interest and enthusiasm were sufficient to prompt setting up a committee, which was done in quite a formal manner with a chair, secretary and other officers, minutes being kept from the very first meeting.

Ramsey Rural Museum (RRM) is unusual in that it is fairly large yet it is entirely a private, volunteer-managed and run, local project. One result of this is that it is completely independent. The volunteers, who are mainly retired people, need only consult their own wishes-subject

to the collective agreement of their steering committee- in determining what should be included in the collection and how things are exhibited. None of the volunteers is a professional in museology or local history, although they occasionally seek professional advice. Other factors that determine what goes into the collection include what is made available to them (almost entirely by donation) and restrictions on display space.

The collection that RRM started to amass was largely serendipitous. Those volunteers who formed the original committee did so through an underlying interest in the local area and its history. Many had things of their own stored in barns and attics that were no longer in use but which, through personal attachment or from a feeling that these things had some representative importance, they were loathe to throw away. As the museum project was publicised locally, increasing numbers of people came forward with donations. Michael Perkins once more;

'Every Saturday of the month during the spring and summer of 1978 we had a little stall...on Great Whyte [market place] It consisted of an old farm-haul tractor that we'd had given to us and a large galvanised tub...anyone who was interested in the museum-and there were a lot at that time who were only too pleased to donate stuff to it-we would sort of write it down, what they'd got...'

This illustrates the degree of informality, but also of community involvement that typified the project. Some of the larger items in the

collection were solicited by volunteers whose work took them to different farms, like Robert, an agricultural engineer;

'I get around most of the farms. I mean, a lot of these exhibits you see here today-I probably found and, er, 'rescued', (laughs) you know...the pump [large land drainage pump] was standing there [on a farm] and the scrap man was coming, destined to come. So, well, I said, "You can't let an exhibit like that go!"'

Robert offered the farmer the scrap value of the pump, which was considerable, but when he learned it was to go into the museum he gave it free of charge.

There was, evidently, much enthusiasm for the project but little reflection, at that time or since, on the purpose of the museum or on how it should go about its work. The manner in which items were exhibited was, and is, often dictated by practical restrictions, for example; a large trunk of 'bog oak', a very heavy object, was placed alongside the aforementioned pump only because it coincidentally was delivered to the site on the same day, thus a prepared space, lifting equipment and enough men to complete the job were available. It stayed in this position for many years. Items that cannot be kept in the open must be housed in whatever space is available; indeed, it is only this year that a plan has been drawn up and accepted, though not yet begun to be implemented, to arrange the scattered machinery collection according to the seasons of the agricultural year.

People who donated items did so with the general sense that, 'Being collected means being valued and remembered institutionally'. (Crane: 2000, 3) Some donations are very personal; a harrow used by a deceased family member restored and donated by his brother carries a commemorative plaque. Others, 'only too pleased to donate stuff', may wish to disembarass themselves of family relics to which they no longer feel emotional attachment. The museum holds very few items of any monetary value or unique historical importance. The most valuable tend to be those of interest to the more obsessive type of collector, railway and World War II 'memorabilia': there is not infrequent pilferage of these items.

The original committee was made up almost entirely of men and the focus of their attention was on 'outdoor' farming equipment. This focus was widened by the variety of the donations that were coming in unsolicited, and the involvement of more women in the project. The collection today can be broadly divided into; farming equipment-large outdoor pieces, domestic items, a wide range of trades displays-thatching, brick making etc-civic and World War II displays and a growing archive of local records.

The museum as constituted, with no employees and no professional curator, is ineligible for most sources of public funding, therefore fund raising activities take up a lot of volunteer time. Used book sales, bric-a-brac sales, a tea room and renting space for various special events,

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supplement the entrance fees. Many volunteers enjoy fund raising activities for their own sake and bring experience of managing other charitable concerns to the project, while feeling that the museum is a particularly worthwhile enterprise. The museum today covers an area of 2.5 acres, has (approximately) 6,500 exhibits, is served by 40 volunteers and welcomed over 9 thousand visitors in 2007 with a gross profit of over £36,000.

The size of the museum is making it increasingly difficult to manage on an ad hoc basis and the absence of clear curatorial direction is becoming problematic. The museum has always worked from project to project as the enthusiasms of the volunteers take them; there has never been an overall plan. Several members of the original committee have since died, others, in their late 80s no longer take an active day-to-day part in running the museum.

There is sometimes conflict between enthusiasts of different aspects of the collection, particularly over the amounts spent on 'indoor' as opposed to 'outdoor' displays.

'They were going to build a hovel [lean to shed] along that fence [to get some of the machinery under cover] but then we couldn't because of having to have the roof, you know, [the landlord had demanded pantiles] and that was too expensive. Then there's this cottage [reassembly of a wooden cottage rescued from the Great Fen (re-flooding) Project. There always seems to be something else to spend the money on, but I don't know...' (Pat)

A recent attempt (on the part of a younger volunteer from outside the local area) to move the museum onto a business footing, with theme park style features (rare breeds zoo, mini railway) was strongly resisted. It caused dissention among volunteers and bad feeling between the museum and its landlord. There is now a strong sentiment that, 'we should go on as we always have', but this is made possible only because a small number of volunteers are willing to devote large amounts of time to administering the museum.

In brief: RRM was instituted in a community that felt itself to be well defined yet under threat, by people with experience of running community organisations and with much enthusiasm for the idea of having a local museum as a defining feature for the town and its surrounding districts. The factors of largely undefined aims and little expertise in museum curation have been productive in that they have allowed people to explore their own priorities, but problematic to the administration of a project which has grown beyond expectations.

Ramsey Rural Museum as a 'folk museum'

At the time that RRM opened to the public in the 1980s, so-called 'open-air', or 'living history', museums that focus on a particular locality or industry were enjoying increased popularity, while the larger, more traditional museums were turning to 'instant illuminations, stellar events and blockbuster shows' (Huysen: 1995, 14) to attract

visitors. Open-air museums frequently have a particularly commercial outlook and may consequently manipulate the aspects of life in the past that they choose to represent, to this end. This has attracted much criticism. Tony Bennett finds that they frequently display a 'picturesque yokeldom' in a patronising manner, 'so mortgaged to the dominant culture [that] 'the people' are encountered usually only in those massively idealised and deeply regressive forms that stalk the middle-class imagination.' (Bennett: 1995, 110) Raphael Samuel maintains that 'In place of facts ['living history'] offers us images...in which the old is faked up to be more palpable than the here and now.' (Samuel: 1994, 195) Such critical and academic concerns, clearly appropriate to the consideration of museums with a national or, as Huysen terms it, universalist perspective, apply less clearly to local museums, which are not simply scaled down versions of larger institutions. The people who put RRM together are essentially portraying themselves, their own past, and life as experienced by the two or three preceding generations, a past that is, if not within living memory, only just beyond it. Although some of the original committee were from the local elite, larger farmers and landowners active in many spheres of local public life, there were also a 'middle-class' of local businessmen and a teacher as well as farm labourers and employees involved from the start.

Bennett rightly observes that, 'The open-air museum and the theme park are on the same tourist's itinerary ... [and] tourism demands the picturesque.' (Bennett: 1995, 160) RRM, dependent as it is on visitors for its income, does supply some 'picturesque' features. The publicity leaflet advertises 'Victorian' schoolroom and kitchen displays, among others. These are popular with visitors, as Michael Perkins says,

'I think...the [majority of] people who come round are not, technically so interested in the machinery. They're more interested in the little knick-knacks...The ladies like those nightdresses...and all the toys and various things like that.'

Yet RRM, fundraising activities notwithstanding, is unlikely to adopt 'Disneyland' style manipulations of the visitor experience. Two immediate reasons for this are, as mentioned above, that it lacks sufficient curatorial intention to orient the whole project in any one ideological direction, and also that any more commercial plan has already been firmly rejected.

RRM has developed from what was, at its inception, almost a private club. In many ways it could now be said to fit Didier Maleuvre's description of an 'eco-museum';

'In many instances, the ecomuseum functions as a locally operated community centre that not only preserves the past but also actively promotes consciousness raising, public participation, and economics and social development. The museum has evolved from the role of guardian of the past to that of patron of the present local life.' (Maleuvre: 1999, 108)

Such a museum would seem to invite the objection, cited by Kavanagh, that museums which include a large proportion of social context, ' can come 'dangerously close to social work'. But, he counters, 'without a feeling for people's lives and histories, museums become remote and irrelevant.' (Kavanagh: 2000, 7) Maleuvre was considering the case of museums with some strong political bias, set up by minority communities. While RRM volunteers are hardly an ethnic minority, they are, generally, characterised by two defining features; they are farmers, or closely connected with farming, and/or over retirement age. Both of these groups feel themselves to be marginalised, nationally, to some extent and, as stated above, the effects of marginalisation -loss of identity, concomitant depression- as observed by Rev. Gwynne were precisely what originally prompted the project. The idea of a museum having a role in the social life of a community might be seen as part of what Huyssen described as museums today fulfilling 'a vital anthropologically rooted need under modern conditions: it enables the moderns to negotiate and articulate a relationship to the transitory and to death, our own included.' (Huyssen: 1995, 16) The modern conditions that Huyssen refers to are those associated with 'the planned obsolescence of consumer society'. (ibid 14) I feel that the loss of control associated with planned obsolescence is similar to that caused by loss of personal or

local identity due to subsumation of the local to the national and international.

As noted above, most of the volunteers at RRM are retired people; many are in their seventies or older. This brings a perspective described by Kavanagh; 'In later life, we are more fully who we are, the person shaped by all that life has had to offer or deny, the sum total of personality and engagement.' (op. cit. p. 35) Later life also frequently demands a re-ordering of personal possessions, as when people give up large family houses for small, 'retirement' homes. 'Considering that things embody relations and memory and that memory is selective, it follows almost logically that the sorting out of things becomes a metaphor for the sorting out of relations and memories.' (Marcoux: 2001, 83) Both of these factors are operational among the RRM volunteers to a greater or lesser extent. Also, in as much as many volunteers have donated personal or family items, the 'sorting out' gains a double, private/public aspect. As a consequence, many objects at RRM come ready supplied with the kind of context that museums often seek by soliciting oral histories. Kavanagh points out that, 'Memories as product [oral history preserved as an archive] place the museum in a situation which is about taking. No matter how well done and how thoughtfully organised, the basic motive is one of appropriation.' (Kavanagh: 2000, 4) RRM currently has no facilities for creating and preserving the oral

history associated with its artefacts (this is under consideration), however, volunteers act as guides and 'explainers' and, if they choose to, will share personal memories associated with the objects. This makes the situation 'about giving', rather than taking.

Kavanagh concentrates on the older person in a largely passive role, as the informant of a museum professional, or as the beneficiary of 'reminiscence work' as a geriatric therapy. The dynamic is different at RRM, where the informant and the curator are one and the same person; the bearers of memory retain a much higher degree of control over what is conveyed to the visitor. As noted above, this can result in an uneven and disorganised curatorial position but the volunteers strongly feel that their control over the museum is of the highest importance.³ In my opinion this demonstrates a feeling of confidence among the volunteers about the usefulness of what they are doing, which may also be a product of the ongoing success and longevity of the project.

³ This is true even where the outcome is negative. An unusual example is furnished by the relationship between the museum and the local secondary school; they are located close to each other and share historical links through the abbey and the De Ramsey family. The museum has, for a number of years, refused to welcome secondary school visits after an elderly volunteer, a decorated veteran of the Normandy landings, was outraged by pupils' inappropriate questions (How many jerrys did you kill?) and their unruly behaviour towards their teacher, who was unable to maintain discipline.

Thus it can be argued that RRM, begun at a time when museal consciousness was in the public eye with the foundation of 'open air' museums that claimed to present a history of everyday life in a popular format, but with little awareness of the issues, highlighted by cultural critics and historians, that surround such museums, best fits the category of 'ecomuseum', where present needs of a local community are addressed alongside preservation of the past.

Intention and motivation at RRM

Despite the lack of curatorial direction, volunteers at RRM display a high degree of motivation. Volunteers give at least one working day per week, many devote three or more days, either on site or working on museum related projects at home. Volunteers' enthusiasm and enjoyment were immediately obvious, even when engaged on tasks that were physically demanding and rather unglamorous; for example, concreting wheelchair ramps.

When I first approached studying RRM, I thought that the best way to pursue the question of volunteers' motivation for investing so much time and effort into the museum would be to conduct oral history type interviews. I supposed that the formality of the recorded interview format would lead people to reflect on what they were doing and articulate their reasons for doing it. I was enthused by Portelli's claims for oral, as opposed to written, history; that, 'it tells us less about *events*

than about their *meaning*, I was looking for 'the unique and precious element ... [of] the speaker's subjectivity'. (Portelli: 1998, 67) In practice I found that people were quite willing to talk about events: but I was not asking them about events. They were frequently quite nonplussed when I pressed them on the question of why they worked so hard for the museum. Several used the same words, 'I don't know what you want me to say.' There was a general consensus of opinion that the museum was a good thing for Ramsey and that this obvious fact required no further justification.

When directly asked about the purpose of the museum, rather than about their purpose in working there, RRM volunteers frequently cited the responsibility to pass on received memory/tradition. Robert, a volunteer since the 1970s, gives a representative comment;

'I mean...If we don't preserve the heritage...whether it be the farming community or whatever, you know-everything down this museum is related to it. Like your cobblers, your tradesmen, your schools-everything is, you know, in relationship to it. I mean...in future generations where's the kid's gonna...get it all from-if we don't preserve it *now*. I know we can't preserve everything, but if we don't-we gotta start preserving some of it, er, for the future.'⁴

When asked, 'What do you like about working at the museum?' those who gave an answer most commonly mentioned 'camaraderie'.

⁴ [...] here represents hesitation, I have included hesitation and repetition in this quotation in an attempt to indicate the difficulty with which Robert articulated his opinion; he has the reticence typical of the older 'fenman'.

These vague and general answers were insufficient motivations to explain the degree of commitment evident in work at the museum, but I was in danger of seriously annoying, or even distressing, my informants by pressing my enquiries. It was as if, because they could not think of a substantial reason for working so hard, perhaps I would think they were foolish to do so. A different approach was clearly called for.

I speculated on possible explanations. Is the museum project simply a showcase for members' abilities? Volunteers point with pride to work they have completed and to find, in later life, that one's practical skills and knowledge are still in demand affords no small satisfaction. Does involvement with the museum serve as an entrée to other local groups, the golf club, for example, whose past president is now active at the museum? I found no evidence for this⁵. Is the museum simply a kind of social club? Although it shares some features of such a club, the demanding nature of work undertaken seems to argue against this, and there are several social clubs available in Ramsey. Would habit or family tradition of public service or interest in local history be sufficient to explain involvement? Or, perhaps, older people are drawn to museum work as part of a retreat into the past—a symptom of obsession or geriatric depression? Elements of any of these motivations may be present at any given time and, obviously, no individual shares

⁵ Although when a volunteer who was also a Freemason resigned following the disagreement over commercialisation, others who were Freemasons followed suit.

exactly the same motivation. Yet, none of these, even in combination, seem adequately to account for the depth of commitment that many volunteers displayed. I decided on a more anthropological approach; I would work alongside volunteers as a participant/observer repainting machinery and limit interviews to informal conversation.

The machinery collection is largely made up of equipment that the volunteers have used themselves in the past, or have seen used. The sight of a once familiar piece of equipment ordered in a museum collection inevitably elicits memories, associations, and strong reactions of many kinds, some perhaps unsettling. Huyssen speculates that,

'one might even see the museum as our own memento mori, and as such, a life-enhancing rather than mummifying institution in an age bent on the destructive denial of death: the museum thus as a site and testing ground for reflections on temporality and subjectivity, identity and alterity.' (Huyssen: 1995, 16)

Alterity, that feeling of subject viewed as object can induce a sort of existential panic that the trope of haunting has been used to discuss.

'...the haunted house is a mythic form that constructs-at the level of myth-a resolution to a problem. The problem is the discrepancy between longevity of homes and the relative transience of their occupants.' (Miller: 2001, 107)

The opposite situation can also be said to obtain with reference to the machinery collection at RRM; that of people 'out-living' their

possessions. The slow pace of change in the beginning of the twentieth century, giving way to a very rapid pace from mid-century, has meant that equipment from the later horse-drawn machinery to that superseded only in the last twenty years, can be spanned by a single lifetime. One volunteer, in his eighties, surveying the collection said, not sadly, 'My life's here, with the old stuff.' (Bob) Knowledge of the latest equipment also provides the viewpoint for (relatively) younger people to, 'cast...an "early" glance at what has only just become old.' (Benjamin: 2005, 284)

These very personal reactions and connections to the collection possibly suggest interaction at a deeper psychological level. A theoretical explanation of the psychological aspects involved may, in some cases, be sought in Freud's formulation of the mechanisms of mourning and melancholia as it relates to strategies for dealing with loss, or lack perceived as loss. (Freud: 1995, 584-589) Slavoj Žižek's interpretation of some remarks of Theodor Adorno, grounded in Freudian theory, is also useful.

'In his perspicacious characterization of Wilhelm Furtwängler's conducting, Adorno claimed that Furtwängler "was concerned with the salvaging of something which was already lost...This attempt to salvage gave him something of the excessive exertion involved in an invocation for which what the invocation seeks is no longer purely and immediately present." [Today] It is not only that we are fascinated...by Furtwängler's 'naïve', immediately organic passion...the very lost object of our fascination already involves a certain loss...what we are longing

to recapture in old Furtwängler recordings is not the organic-immediacy of classical music but, rather the organic-immediate experience of the loss itself that is no longer accessible to us...melancholy at its purest.' (Žižek: 2001, 145)

If the organic-immediacy of labour is substituted for the organic-immediacy of classical music, an analogous situation may be posited in the context of the work/life histories of some of the volunteers at RRM. Several kinds of loss or lack may be cited; loss of the organic-immediate experience of farming work through the advance of technology, going from horse to tractor power, to air-conditioned, computer-assisted combine; loss of contact through partial or complete retirement; having been forced by economic pressures, to seek a career outside farming, thus giving up family small holdings. The nature of farm work and of life in a farming community is a major factor to consider.

Farmers and farm labourers usually live and work in the same place; the farm is 'home', with all of its connotations, as well as the means of sustaining life via income generation and more directly through eating the produce. In our culture, ownership of land, and also rights of tenancy, are traditionally and typically inherited. Work knowledge and practice are transmitted principally from father, or father figure, to son, or younger man. Thus the image of what constitutes 'man's work' is bound up at many points with images of home and family.

Another distinguishing feature of farming work is its stability. The land requires constant and extensive personal, long-term commitment to maintenance if it is to remain productive. The word 'husbandry' is illustrative of the level of personal/family involvement in the work. The surrounding community also retains a significant degree of stability. The individual will grow up, be educated and enculturated, and is likely to live his entire life in, essentially, the same group. This pattern is likely to persist over generations, producing marriage and family bonds. While these patterns may be changing among younger farmers, for the generations involved in creating RRM the occupation, into which many were born, has encompassed their whole lifestyle.

The degree of interrelationship between the people, their work and each other is evidenced at RRM in the detailed knowledge among the volunteers of the provenance of donated machines. For any given piece of equipment, the previous owner, past owners, their work habits, where, how and for what purpose the piece had been used and how well it had been maintained and stored, are likely to be common knowledge. The previous owner's whole personality and judgements on his moral worth may be read in, or into, his machine with either admiration or derision; the most dire pronouncement, which provides an oblique glance at the arduous nature of farming life and the interdependence of neighbouring farmers, being; 'He was a waster!' It can be seen that farm work is more freighted with

significance, both personal and collective, than other occupations. Loss/lack of this occupation must, therefore, be deeply felt. It seems possible that the volunteer, and to a certain extent visitor, may seek to redress his sense of loss/lack through interaction with the material collection, feeling that it recalls 'an aspect of embodied persons' interaction with things' (Hallam & Hockey: 2001, 127) even his own past 'interaction with things'. The volunteer is afforded the opportunity to reintegrate with the past community via his involvement with the exhibits.

A reason frequently cited by volunteers for working at the museum is the real companionship to be found in working alongside others. While this is true of many sorts of volunteer work, it is particularly pronounced when people are doing something they feel a strong personal connection with. Many volunteers cite 'the camaraderie' of work at the museum as one reason they continue to work there. The largest number come on Thursdays and work all day. They all eat lunch together, two or three volunteers making it their business to provide the food. These lunchtimes are particularly convivial during the winter months when the museum is closed to the public. The real and present companionship, combined with working with the exhibits, mirrors past experience, yet dislocates it to the present, paradoxically re-enforcing the fact of its loss.

To summarise: individual motivation for involvement with the RRM project must be seen in the context of two factors; firstly, that most volunteers come from a farming or rural community environment, which involves the influence of work and community to an unusual extent in shaping and supporting the individual. Secondly, that almost all volunteers are well over retirement age, therefore bringing a particular perspective to working with the past; one which may involve dealing with personal loss or lack. Also, volunteers may have a personal relationship both to objects in the collection of which they have themselves become the curators, and to the ways of working together at the museum, which mirror their past work experiences. In my opinion these two conditions, taken together, form the field from which individual motivations and collective intentions for work at RRM emerge. I will now turn to one particular phenomenon which I see as informing motivation for some volunteers: incorporated memory.

Incorporated memory

The effect of habitual action, such as that associated with sport, military training or work, on the body, the extent to which this is ingrained and to which this habituation will dictate future

performance of the action, has been an area of study in anthropology at least since Marcel Mauss noted some of his own experiences with the phenomenon (Mauss: 1979) Farm work and the

use of agricultural tools and machinery is physically demanding and requires the acquisition of a variety of specialist skills. These skills change with changing technology, over time.

In the course of my research as a participant observer, my attention was drawn to this aspect of memory through working with Bob, an eighty-year-old retired farm worker who had begun his working life as a child, leading plough-team horses and progressed to be an accomplished horse-ploughman. He continued to work with horses as a breeder and trainer, active in showing and competition judging. Bob wanted to restore a late-model horse plough that was beginning to rust badly. It was necessary to disassemble the plough, remove old paint and rust, refinish then reassemble it. Although still strong enough to lift heavy iron components and to loosen seized bolts, Bob's eyesight was too poor to allow him to see small areas of corrosion or to get a good finish on detailed paintwork. I performed the tasks that required visual acuity or a steady hand, locating awkwardly placed bolts, picking out lettering in contrasting paint, under his direction. He manipulated the heavier parts, checking the results mainly relying on touch. Being a late-model, the plough had a two-part set-up for clearing the ground in advance of the ploughshare; a spear-shaped 'greve'⁶ and a large coulter disc cutter. These had to be assembled with regard to their distance from the

⁶ I believe this to be an East Anglian dialect term.

ground, the ploughshare and each other and also to their relative angles. The heavy greve and coulter were provisionally attached to the shaft, then nudged into position before tightening the several, difficult to access, bolts that secured them. This was a tricky operation. Bob aligned the unwieldy components and held them in place while I replaced the bolts. We had to loosen and re-align several times before the task was completed to Bob's satisfaction. Throughout, Bob measured and checked the angles and distances by touch, using his fingers as a gauge. He held up his hands to show me the measurements, 'So as you can do it yourself, next time.' Two of Bob's work worn fingers made four of mine. My palm is much too small, my wrists and arms too weak, to possibly hold coulter and greve in one hand while measuring their proximity to ground and ploughshare with the other. Bob's memory of how to set up a horse-plough was embodied. It did not occur to him to draw a diagram or describe distances and angles in numerical terms; he had only ever performed the operation in a field, or shed. To perform the task without recourse to an incorporated memory would have required diagrams and measurements.

I observed the effects of incorporated body memory again at the museum's end of season 'Country Fair', until recently called 'Plough Day' but renamed to reflect the inclusion of a wider variety of attractions. Bob 'dressed' a Suffolk Punch horse in show harness from

his own collection. He had not done this for several years, following a heart attack. As he is well known in horse showing circles, many friends and well-wishers stopped by to watch him braid up mane and tail in his particular style, conscious that his was likely to be the last occasion on which he would be capable of doing it. Even a very docile horse can be a dangerous animal and people who are accustomed to work with horses develop behaviours aimed to avoid startling them, patting the horse and muttering to it and letting it see the pieces of harness so that it is never surprised. When the handler wants a horse to move slightly, a quiet but authoritative, 'Ay-up' is accompanied by a firm, back-handed pressure of the knuckles. Bob is rather deaf, when a visiting horseman noticed that, concentrating on the task, he had neither seen nor heard him approach, he used the identical gesture to attract Bob's attention. These patterns of gesture and movement were common to the older generation of horsemen and particularly noticeable when several were gathered together. This contrasted with the behaviour of younger horse handlers who, while exercising caution, tended to rely more on vocal communication, with the horse and between each other.

Edward S. Casey defines three types of body memory, of which the first, habitual body memory, is the type that applies here. Casey offers a 'compact definition of habitual body memory: an active immanence of the past in the body that informs present bodily

actions' (Casey: 2000, 149) and he elaborates, 'In such memory the past is *embodied* in actions. Rather than being contained separately somewhere in mind or brain.' (ibid) He characterises this embodiment as being, 'performative, pre-reflective, pre-supposed and pre-articulate' (op cit 150)

These features are borne out in Bob's example. Although conscious of his sight problems and worried that he would overlook something that would be noticed as a fault in the restored plough, Bob did not worry that he would not be able to remember how to reassemble it- even though decades had passed since he had last been required to do so. With the pieces in his hands he knew what to do with them; the memory pre-reflective and pre-supposed.

Casey maintains that, 'Body memories tend to situate themselves on the periphery of our lives so as not to preoccupy us in the present' (op cit 163) The experienced horse handler concentrates on completing the task, his manner of moving simply 'comes over him' in the presence of a horse. Action pre-supposed to the horse handler stood out as an unusual behaviour only in my observation.

These aspects of habitual body memory are brought into sharper focus in the context of working with museum exhibits; something that is immanent, alive within the body is relating to an object which is defined as part of the past: dead. As mentioned above, there are

aspects of the RRM machinery collection that, in some sense, seem to reverse the expected patterns; owners who have out-lived the useful life of their things, the 'early look' at the past. These phenomena form a changing, kaleidoscope effect between past and present, the focus shifting between present needs and past abilities.

'In matters of body memory we should speak of *immanence* rather than intersection between past and present. Instead of taking up a perspective on the past-in body memories we allow the past to enter actively into the very present in which our remembering takes place.' (Casey 2000, 168)

Casey goes further; 'Carried to an extreme...the co-immanence verges on an identity of past and present.' (op cit 168) A person seeking to redress a feeling of loss would find comfort in this.

However, allowing habitual body memory to inform a present action is not simply a repetition, contingent circumstances surrounding the later performance, or re-enactment, including aim and ultimate outcome, are 'new'. The present does not repeat the past, 'it modifies it by extending intentional threads to ever-changing circumstances' (ibid) Such circumstances involve body memory in one of the primary aims of a museum; to communicate something of the past to a wider public.

Communicating incorporated memory

Casey turns to literature and that consummate observer of himself, Proust, to illustrate the reality of the past's immanent existence within

the body's present, quoting Proust's meditation on the information supplied by his body as to where, and when, he is upon waking unexpectedly in the night and the way it is communicated. (Casey: 2000, 170. Proust: 1954, 8, 9) Proust communicates this to a reader in patiently elaborated prose, his meticulous consultation and review of data contained within the medium of the body suggesting comparison with Walter Benjamin's celebrated archaeology metaphor, 'memory is not an instrument for exploring the past but rather a medium.'; (Benjamin: 2005, 576), with its implication that the medium is actually present to the 'explorer'.⁷

Within the 'medium' of body memory, the remembered skill necessary to set up a horse-plough was immediately present to my informant, Bob. I understood that this was the case through close observation and active sharing in the task.

Susan Sontag's stricture, 'All memory is individual, unreproducible-it dies with each person.' (Sontag: 2004, 76) is most obviously true of body memory. What could be more private than something that is 'pre-reflective, pre-articulate'? Yet Sontag's corollary, 'there is collective instruction' (ibid) can also be applied. In *How Societies*

⁷ This quotation begins, 'Language has unmistakably made plain that...' relating this metaphor to Benjamin's wider theories of language and mimesis. Further consideration of mimetic aspects of language and their possible bearing on habitual action and incorporated memory is beyond the scope of this paper. It is, however, interesting to note that, in a more philosophical passage, Casey claims that 'there is no memory without body memory' (Casey 2000, 172), embodied experience being the only kind possible to the individual.

Remember, Paul Connerton, who concentrates on the different ways in which bodily participation in commemorative, culture specific, body practices serves to 'embody' memory within members of a collective, turns to work contexts to illustrate body memories incorporated within the individual;

'Patterns of body use become ingrained through our interactions with objects. There are the apparently automatic, long familiar movements of artisans, the way a carpenter wields a plane and the weaver uses a loom, so habitual that, if asked they would say that they had a feeling of the proper management of the implement in their hands; ' (Connerton: 1989, 93)

This assertion was repeatedly borne out in my observation by volunteers who, when questioned about a procedure would reply, 'I'll show you.', rather than with a verbal description Connerton continues,

'...there are the ways that working at a machine or at a desk imposes and reinforces a set of postural behaviours which we come to regard as 'belonging' to the factory worker or the sedentary white collar worker. Postures and movements which are habitual memories become sedimented into bodily conformation. *Actors can mimic them, doctors can examine the results.*' (my italics) (op. cit., 94)

In this sense the private becomes public; is communicated, if only to another individual, as with my own apprehension of the memory immanent within Bob. Yet in the case of an actor or a doctor, the primary motivations for investigating habitual memory of posture and movement -entertaining others, treating a physical complaint- set the investigator at a greater remove from the bearer of the memory than

is the case for someone who is primarily interested in body memory for the insight it may provide into the ways in which cultural memory is carried forward.

Body memory operates at the interface between private and public, individual and collective. The effect of a habitual memory can be observed, its causes seen or deduced, and even something of what the bearer's bodily memory actually feels like, intuited. Casey's point (above) that performance of an action that is made accessible due to immanent body memory is not simply repetition—that the present performance modifies the memory 'by extending intentional threads to ever changing circumstances', gains a further dimension when the memory is, in some sense, communicated.

Kirsten Hastrup's remarks on agency, 'people are not passive bearers of culture but active agents in its reproduction.' (Hastrup: 1995, 79) may be of use here ('memory' can be substituted for 'culture' in Hastrup's usage). Of course, it is at least imaginable that a person may be a 'passive bearer' of a body memory, a tacit component of memory that, by sheer coincidence is never evoked. And a body memory may be said to exist even when not put into practice. However, the concept of the bearer of culture/memory as an active agent, reproducing and transforming that which he bears, the 'extending intentional threads' modifying with each repetition,

provides a mechanism by which the body's inarticulate memories, '[so dense that] their rootedness in the heft, the thick palpability of the lived body [renders] them mute' (Casey: 2000, 165) can be manifested and communicated in a public arena.

Habitual body memory becomes manifest only in performance and, unlike the Proustian *mémoire involontaire*, can be evoked, more or less deliberately called upon⁸, by the practical requirements of a present situation. It can, therefore, be explored and considered via performance or re-enactment. This re-enactment may be 'private'-the individual, performing the action alone, is solely aware of the memory, or 'public'-where there is transfer in some form and to some extent to one or more others, not of the primary body memory but of the physical knowledge requirements of an action. For example, I could extrapolate⁹ from Bob's setting up the plough, no doubt assisted by my own body memory record of having performed similar types of manipulation of multiple objects, the way that the correct alignments would feel to my own hands, if my hands were big enough. On a later occasion I needed to remove and then replace the grebe without assistance. I modified the procedure to match my own bodily resources by jamming one foot under the point to maintain one

⁸ Casey's example of his friend's recovery of the memory of how to drive a Model-T, when this became necessary, by sitting in the driving position and simply following whatever promptings he felt (Casey: 2000, 149)

⁹ Although outside the scope of this paper, 'mirror neurons', as described by Rizzolatti and Craighero 2004, may be operational here.

dimension, while adjusting the other two to the remembered width of Bob's fingers in relation to my own with one hand and tightening the bolt with the other: evolving the memory?

If body memory is difficult to discern in the living body, it is more difficult to apprehend in the absence of a living body. An object, such as a tool, may logically suggest its user but, to approach a comprehension of how that user felt I think art provides the best perspective.

Annie Coombes describes two works that she feels address the problem; Roderick Sauls' installation 'Rod's Room', in the District Six Museum in Cape Town, and Rachel Whiteread's sculpture 'House.1993', as 'strategies for producing embodied memory' (Coombes 2003, 138) Both works are concerned with the absence of past inhabitants, with the interruption of their corporeal presence. Coombes' 'embodied memory' is not the same as Casey's 'body memory' or Connerton's 'incorporated memory', it is, rather a tangential field of meaning concerned with the remaining effects within a space of peoples' having had a corporeal existence within them. A somatic effect of the two works is to put the viewer in mind of the fact that the spaces represented once enclosed bodies and bear the imprint of those individuals' dynamism and intentionality, and of the ways in which these may have been shaped by their dwellings. This link through art with body memory is necessarily an abstract one.

Re-enactment: remembering and creating tradition

Demonstrations and re-enactments of various kinds are now common currency with open-air type museums and, as noted above, have attracted opprobrium from serious historians. The 'heritage fashioner' (Lowenthal: 1998, xi) cynically manipulates the 'spoils of history' (ibid) while the 'heritage monger' rapaciously peddles the results. Demonstrations and re-enactments at RRM are on a much smaller scale than, for example, the 'mediaeval' pageants presented as tourist attractions at grand venues around the country. Events that are closer to home, such as ploughing and harvesting using old equipment, do draw in the crowds, and their much needed cash. Also, negative aspects of life in the fens (flood, drought, malarial infections) are indeed ignored. I do not intend to join the 'history versus heritage debate here, but to keep a narrower focus on re-enactment in the sense of repetition of tasks learned in the past and retained as incorporated memory by their re-enactors.

Edward Shils sees re-enactment, in general, in terms of the transmission and evolution of tradition within a community:

'A human society, made of human actions, has as it is at any moment the same evanescence of physical movements, sequences of words, social actions. They cease when they have been performed... Unlike a written manuscript... performed

actions have to be commenced "anew" when desired or demanded or required. A society to exist at all must be incessantly re-enacted... The re-enactments *...are guided by what the individual members remember about what they themselves ... did before'* (my italics) (Shils 1981, 166/7)

Continuity is maintained and identity preserved 'by keeping some of the past in the present and by sustaining the sense of identity through time. These identities rest on the consensus of the present with the past. (op. cit, 168) the founders of RRM would be very sympathetic to these sentiments; they match the volunteers' resources, memory, with their stated aims, preservation of local identity. Casey finds the role of habitual body memory of the routines of daily life in orienting the individual in time and space to be analogous to that played by tradition in a society. (Casey 2000, 151) When both are deliberately invoked, I feel that a synergy may come into operation that reinforces and highlights the interdependent relationships between past and present, and between the individual and the community.

Shils identifies family, church and school as conservative elements for society, but points out that these do not have a monopoly on tradition. He does not consider work or occupation *per se* as a conservative force, but I refer to my remarks above on the special circumstances of farm work.

I will illustrate this part of my discussion with two more examples of the operation and communication of body memory, observed at the

museum's 'Country Fair' in 2006. I later discussed one of them with a participant, Neville, an agricultural supplies salesman.

SS: I saw you at last year's Plough Day, forking hay [not hay but wheat] on top of that old machine...

Neville: Oh! The [steam] thresher. Yes!

SS: You seemed to be enjoying yourself. (N.B. laughs) you looked like a happy man...

Neville: Yes. I can do that. I know how to...I wouldn't want to do it all week, mind! My family used to farm, down the fen, and they used quite old-fashioned machinery down there. Not like the bigger arable farms further west. So, I used to help on the farm.

I am reminded of Lowenthal's comment; 'The past is a foreign country...this is what historians now tell us... [but for most people] so alien a past is hard to bear...Probably most people, most of the time, view the past not as a foreign but a deeply domestic realm.' (Lowenthal: 1998, vv) For Neville this aspect of the past is literally 'a deeply domestic realm', he immediately associates working with the old equipment with working on the family farm. The reason he can work with the steam thresher, a smoke-belching, clattering monster one would have to feel very certain of before trusting oneself to, is that he knows how because he had done it on the family small holding, it was among his earliest experiences of work. But he has no sentimental illusions about it, 'I wouldn't want to do it all week'. The skill of catching sheaves as they were pitched from a cart and turning them smoothly

into the thresher was something Neville could do, 'I know how to', this knowledge an incorporated memory.

On the same occasion I stood with a visitor- a man, old but not elderly- watching a team load a cart from the field for delivery to the thresher. I remarked that they seemed to be going quite slowly. The man agreed but said they were 'making a good job of it. [It was a task he was familiar with.] He needs to build up that back corner a bit.' The load was sagging at one corner of the cart. As the worker on the cart turned the next sheaf, the visitor inclined his shoulders and arms slightly in the direction he knew the sheaf should be placed, in unpremeditated physical sympathy.

These 'visceral' reactions to participation at the re-enactments presented at the 'Country Fair' are evidence of deeply personal involvement. The importance of these deeply felt connections may be illustrated by looking at a case of re-enactment in which they did not exist: a production for Channel 4 television entitled, *The Nineteen Hundred House*. This was presented as an experiment in which a family of five attempted to live for three months as their counterparts in 1900 would have lived, in an elaborately restored house with all verisimilitude possible concerning costume and daily routines. The results were mixed. The eleven-year-old daughter, Hilary, attempted to

express the difficulty she faced in trying to re-enact the life of a girl in 1900;

'I think...a girl in 1900 would have been able to cope, because she would have been brought up like this. She would have known where everything was. She would have known how to do the washing, because she would have done it when she was younger, grown up with it. What I'm trying to say is that this 1900 girl would have known everything.' (McCrum and Sturgis: 2000, 143, 4)

The people re-enacting work tasks at the Country Fair possess what Hilary knew that she lacked; memory that 'allows the past to enter actively into the present'. This memory is Shils' 'identity resting on the consensus of the present with the past', very different from any concept of tradition as a straitjacket for a present to which it is no longer relevant, 'conjured up by means of citations because "It's important to have tradition"' (Adorno: 1967, 175) On a small scale the Country Fair re-enactments represent that 'history for the sake of life and action' Nietzsche called for. (Nietzsche: 1997, 59)

Body memory's very direct connection with the past is, in my opinion, also a most reliable one. Being 'pre-reflective, pre-supposed', it is, in the otherwise mentally healthy individual, not liable to the vagaries of amnesia or of selective re-interpretation. In my opinion, this provides a foundation of confidence, a sort of underlying honesty, to re-enactments staged by the volunteers at RRM.

When, for example, Neville participates in the Country Fair demonstrations, he chooses to wear older style clothing; tweeds, collar and tie, flat cap. These still make up the everyday wardrobe of several of the oldest volunteers, others, including Neville, usually wear T-shirt, fleece and baseball cap covered by overalls for work. Neville would not think of dressing in an Eighteenth century farmer's smock for the Country Fair, even though the museum does possess such a garment and it would indeed be 'picturesque'. Such an unfamiliar garment would immediately restrict Neville's movement, interrupting- and belying-his incorporated memory. To imagine oneself doing a familiar task impeded by unfamiliar clothing may illustrate the way in which body memory is private memory; the primary memory is private and does actually 'die with each person'-the communicated memory being evolved rather than repeated.

Another aspect of the Country Fair celebrates an unbroken link between past and present work tradition in a direct fashion: the inclusion of ploughing competitions, organised among the local farmers, RRM and the Young Farmers' Association. Competition in skills has long been a part of rural life. Prizes are given and results published in the local press. Alongside the main events at the museum enthusiasts' events, using equipment, often refurbished as a hobby, are offered to all comers. Here, the owners of old tractors compete in a separate mixed event in ploughing skills. Ramsey no longer stages

fairs other than these events in conjunction with the museum. In the past, as befitted its importance in the local area, the town held regular fairs as commerce, celebration and entertainment. Now, echoing Maleuvre's observation on 'ecomuseums' functioning also as community centres, RRM is the obvious place to stage the competitions (it has sufficient parking and access to open fields for people and equipment) and the museum's end of season event the obvious time to hold them.

RRM has also revived a lapsed tradition at its Country Fair, that of 'blessing the plough'. A representative plough from the museum collection is ceremonially blessed by the local vicar. Combining blessing the plough with a brief harvest festival service, prayers are offered and two traditional hymns sung. This short ceremony is particularly popular among older volunteers and visitors, but attracts attention from all age groups. The current Church of England vicar, Rev. Richard Darmody, interviewed for this study, points out that, although the of blessing farm equipment has died out in this area, similar services for blessing objects used in daily life are a current part of Church of England practice and that he values the museum's 'Plough Sunday' as a part of maintaining connection with the church in national life. He adds that the ceremony might be made more relevant to the present if a piece of modern farm equipment were the representative object. This has not (yet) occurred to the museum

organisers. This mix of remembering and evolving memory in the Country Fair re-enactments, to an extent, mirrors that co-immanence of past and present claimed by Casey for body memory.

Conclusions: the past and the present

Examples cited show that the independent constitution of RRM has provided the people who create it with an unusual opportunity to explore the past, in Huyssen's words, 'to negotiate and articulate a relationship to the transitory' (Huyssen: 1995, 16). Motivations for engaging in such a process vary widely but, in as much as RRM is centred on rural life, motivations coalesce around memory of work. Habitual body memory, central to memory of physical work, informs re-enactment of past work tasks. This is demonstrated in the manner in which the memory bearers approach and accomplish physical tasks. It has been claimed that body memory is, to an extent, communicable through re-enactment, but that there is a limit beyond which the primary body memory necessarily remains private, and therefore essentially lost to anything that might be called collective or public, with each memory bearer's death.

In my introduction I claimed that re-enactments, performed in the context of participants being themselves memory bearers, maintain an authentic connection with the past through the medium of habitual body memory. In my opinion, this is demonstrated in

volunteers' choosing to re-enact those tasks with which they have a deep, personal familiarity; Neville using the steam thresher, or Bob restoring the horse plough. Public support for and participation in these activities establishes re-enactment traditions that form part of a wider engagement with the past, which is felt to be on-going and vital by its participants and serves to define and preserve community identity.

Kavanagh, reviewing critical objection to 'museum mania' and the more commercial type of 'open air museum', counters that; 'the worst examples are not so numerous and most are short-lived.' (Kavanagh: 2000, 5) He continues, 'Cultural critics also underestimate the visitors' capacity to answer back, to disassociate from [overly prescriptive] museums ...and to find their own meanings.' (ibid p.6)

In my opinion, the RRM project has been, and continues to be, an exercise in finding their own meanings, and negotiating relationships to the past for its volunteers and visitors. Among its functions, acknowledged or not, as a community centre RRM provides a theatre for that re-enactment of tradition that cements the ongoing identity of the community.

Susan Crane maintains that 'Museums, like individual minds, constantly select and discard from the limitless realm of material memory.' (Crane: 2000, 9) Oral history archiving and 'exhibition' is now an accepted part of a museum's remit alongside the material object;

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re-enactment as a context for the individual to access body memory can add another dimension. On an individual level, re-enactment facilitates the performance of that 'sorting out of relations and memories', recognised by Marcoux in relation to material possessions, for the case where memory is sedimented in the body rather than primarily associated with an object. When re-enactment is done in a collective context, the body memory tends to ground the performance in real experience.

A possible objection to the recognition of body memory in such a role lies in what Casey called body memory's muteness, (Casey 2000, 165) the fact that it is manifest only in performance: definition of body memory is complex, collection, impossible. However, in a context such as that described for RRM, where the memory bearers control the conditions of performance, re-enactment can be the vehicle for incorporated memory to form an integral and coherent part of a community's intangible cultural heritage.

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Appendix 1

What is Intangible Cultural Heritage?

- **In the text of the Convention**
- [Article 2](#) – Definitions

- **Meetings**
- [14/17-03-2001, Turin](#): Round table of experts on "Intangible Cultural Heritage – Working Definitions"
- [20/23-10-2004, Nara](#): International Conference on « The Safeguarding of Tangible and Intangible Cultural...

According to the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, the intangible cultural heritage (ICH) – or living heritage – is the mainspring of our cultural diversity and its maintenance a guarantee for continuing creativity.

The Convention states that the ICH is manifested, among others, in the following domains:

- [Oral traditions and expressions](#) including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;
- [Performing arts](#) (such as traditional music, dance and theatre);
- [Social practices, rituals and festive events](#);
- [Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe](#);
- [Traditional craftsmanship](#).

The 2003 Convention defines ICH as the practices, representations, expressions, as well as the knowledge and skills, that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage.

The definition also indicates that the ICH to be safeguarded by this Convention:

- is transmitted from generation to generation;
- is constantly recreated by communities and groups, in response to their environment, their interaction with nature, and their history;
- provides communities and groups with a sense of identity and continuity;
- promotes respect for cultural diversity and human creativity;
- is compatible with international human rights instruments;
- complies with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, and of sustainable development.

The ICH is traditional and living at the same time. It is constantly recreated and mainly transmitted orally. It is difficult to use the term authentic in relation to ICH; some experts advise against its use in relation to living heritage (see the **Yamato Declaration**: [English](#) | [French](#)).

The depository of this heritage is the human mind, the human body being the main instrument for its enactment, or – literally – embodiment. The knowledge and skills are often shared within a community, and manifestations of ICH often are performed collectively.

Many elements of the ICH are endangered, due to effects of globalization, uniformization policies, and lack of means, appreciation and understanding which – taken together – may lead to the erosion of functions and values of such elements and to lack of interest among the younger generations.

The Convention speaks about communities and groups of tradition bearers, without specifying them. Time and again it was stressed by the governmental experts who prepared the draft of the Convention that such communities have an open character, that they can be dominant or non dominant, that they are not necessarily linked to specific territories and that one person can very well belong to different communities and switch communities.

The Convention introduces, by establishing the Representative List, the idea of “representativeness”. “Representative” might mean, at the same time, representative

for the creativity of humanity, for the cultural heritage of States, as well as for the cultural heritage of communities who are the bearers of the traditions in question.

See also the [Preamble of the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage](#).

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