

Current Trends in French Ethnology

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French ethnology today is a very active discipline that deals with the concepts and methods of social anthropology in so far as they are relevant in accounting for the specificity of a complex, industrialized society. The paper summarizes the history of the discipline, its relationships with folklore and museums, and delineates the main fields of contemporary research: the city, culture, symbols and values, kinship. The most influential titles published in the last twenty years appear in the detailed bibliography.

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L'ethnologie contemporaine de la France is both an old and a new discipline. It has deep roots in folklore studies, close connections with museology, and has been rejuvenated by the interest of researchers in the concepts of social anthropology (Cuisenier & Segalen 1986) – concepts stemming from and applied to the study of so-called exotic societies.

This is why the very translation of the name of the discipline presents difficulties. Nowadays, French scholars do not associate “ethnology” with the specific fields of Europe or our own society while reserving “anthropology” for the study of non-European countries. Instead, both words are applied to different stages of research, wherever it is carried out. After the detailed ethnographical stage of fieldwork, the ethnological phase consists of comparisons between cultures, while anthropology brings in other sciences devoted to the study of human behaviour – such as history, linguistics, psychology and philosophy (Levi-Strauss 1975: 6). For the sake of convenience we will call the domain described “French ethnology”, while keeping in mind that we do not make the same distinctions as other European countries, notably in the university courses.

At present, this discipline can take advantage of the double experience of anthropology and folklore studies: the former provides the distance necessary for us to become aware of

different forms of behaviour, and thus reinstate our own within a more general framework of cultures; the closer perspective of the latter discipline helps us to look at minute details, and the inquiries of its researchers have accumulated a wealth of knowledge about events, rituals, techniques and beliefs.

Nowadays the field of French ethnology is a rather elastic one. Its practitioners are becoming interested not only in French society and culture, but also in French cultures and societies outside France and non-French cultures and societies in France. The construction of local cultures, incorporating both old and contemporary elements and leading to the formation of specific (regional, technical, class) cultures within French society in general, is, as we shall see in the following, a well-investigated area. These general interests also cover a wide range of actual fields of work.

The past twenty years have seen a change in the dimensions of areas of research: there is now a quite marked shift from comprehensive, multidisciplinary enterprises towards more detailed topics, leading to broader generalizations. New disciplines – like urban anthropology, which has made a belated but strong appearance – are also entering the field. All these new developments in ethnology may alter the traditional links between research and the ethnological museums, links partly due to the fact

that until very recently there were no university chairs in France for folklore or social anthropology. This deficiency is only very slowly being remedied, more or less at the expense of traditional regional museums, whose collections tend to reflect a dead rural past.

Development of folklore

Before the French ethnologist there was the folklorist; and before that, the traveller or the curiosity of the *honnête homme* of the seventeenth century, acknowledging differentiations in society between nobles, the bourgeoisie and "the people" – a generic term clearly referring at that time to peasants, farmers and artisans. In the eighteenth century an interest developed among priests and physicians in "superstitious" or "strange" practices and beliefs. Their descriptions, along with the surveys of local languages in France carried out at the time of the Revolution, and those of the Prefects of the First Empire, today constitute remarkable sources for the study of behaviour and beliefs. But these observers shared the same goal of eradication – either in the name of rationalization or for the purpose of establishing a unified, centralized state. Thus, if the approach of the folklorists was not fundamentally different from that of the priests, doctors or prefects in the way it was carried out, it diverged inasmuch as it aimed at knowing "traditional" French society scientifically, not at destroying it.

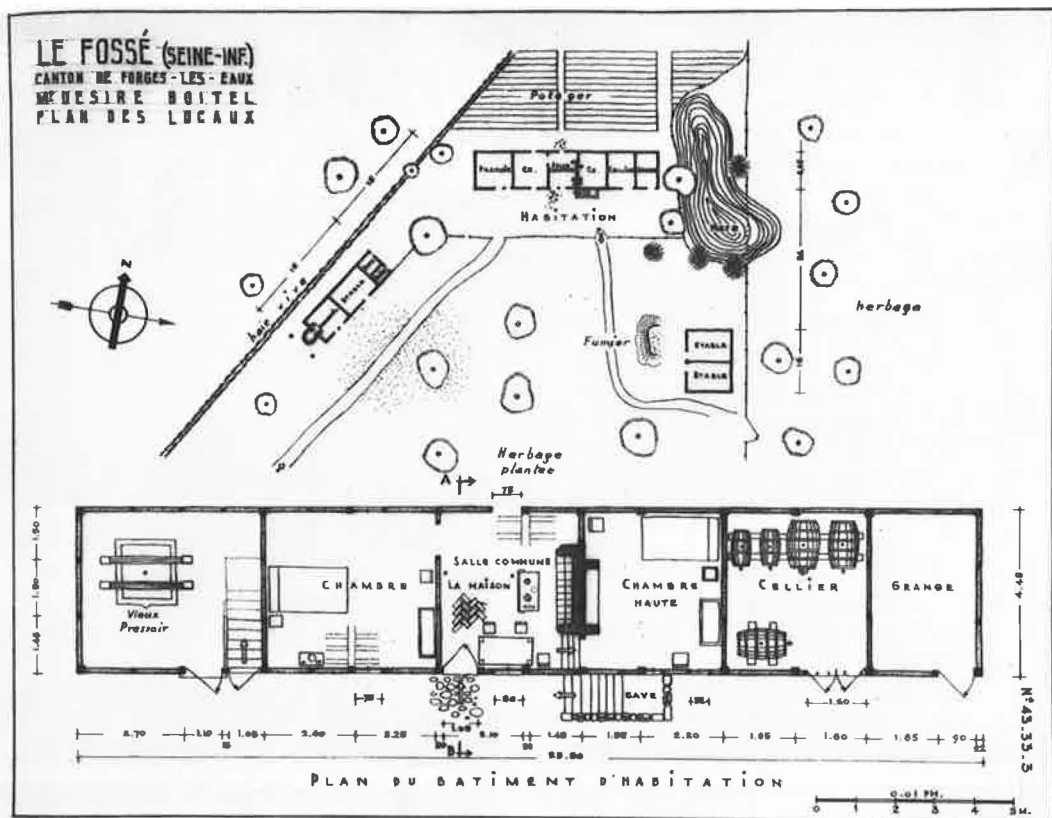
Although there were early attempts by the *Académie Celtique* (1804) and the *Société royale des Antiquaires de France* (1814), folklore studies only developed on a large scale in the second half of the nineteenth century. The very name of this new field was a subject of dispute. Some wanted to call it *traditionnisme*; but slowly the archaizing English word took over, and the scope of interest became ever wider. The first folklorists were mainly interested in "popular culture", defined as a wealth of traditions transmitted orally down through generations, beyond the influence of schools and printed material. At first they only dealt with "oral literature" – tales, common sayings, proverbs, songs – and music. Then interest was

extended to beliefs and superstitions. Pierre Saintyves says that "*folklore* studies all the works produced by the hands of the people" (1936: 5). In the middle of the nineteenth century, in connection with the development of ethnographical museums, folklorists started collecting objects and artefacts and extended their interest to techniques.

Among all the folklorists the name of Paul Sébillot should be commemorated first. In his *Folklore de France* (1904) he classifies over 15 000 facts, presenting an exhaustive inventory of French popular traditions and beliefs. *Folklore* is used here with one of its two meanings, i.e. the knowledge carried and preserved by people about plants, animals, places etc., as opposed to the scientific discipline concerned with traditional society. Sébillot's method is weak, in that he brings together a wealth of facts without trying to look for any internal coherence or correlations between them. However, having been forgotten for some time, the *Folklore de France* is at present enjoying a renaissance as a rich source of interesting comparisons because of the new interest that has developed in symbolism.

The second interpretation of the term folklore was preferred by Arnold Van Gennep, who analysed popular culture and society. At a time when folklore was trying to establish itself as a scientific discipline alongside the *Ecole sociologique* of Durkheim, Van Gennep insisted on the social aspects of culture rather than its symbolic side. Investigating the various meanings of the word "people", he considered that folklore dealt with the culture of various human groups, notably peasants, and what was left of it in urban areas. Folklore was not a science of facts, he said, but a science of human groups. Against the idea that folklore was disappearing under the pressure of urbanization and industrialization he asserted that traditions constantly renewed themselves.

Arnold Van Gennep appears to be at the turning-point between French folklore and French ethnology, and not only because of this view. Like all previous folklorists he was concerned with comparing facts and data in cultures and societies, but stressed the limitations of the comparative method (as used by Sain-



General plan of a farm at Le Fossé, Seine-Inférieure. Calque Atp 43.33.3.

tyves and Sébillot, or in the anthropological field by Frazer): no social act has any intrinsic meaning or value defined once and for all; on the contrary, its meaning changes according to social circumstances, and according to the facts that precede and follow it. Thus, the understanding of rituals requires that they should all be examined as organized in sequences, not in isolation from their ceremonial context. The theory of *rites de passage*, now so common in anthropological analysis, dates from 1909 and was used in his subsequent works: field studies in Dauphiné and Savoie, studies based on correspondance with informants in other areas of France (Bourgogne, Auvergne), and his great work – unfortunately left incomplete after his death – the *Manuel de Folklore Français contemporain* (1943–1946). The concept of rites of passage introduces order into the disorder of rituals – particularly obvious in the case of matrimonial rites.

Whatever their various theoretical positions, folklorists were always earnest collectors, striving for the exhaustive collection. Between 1931 and 1945 several national surveys were launched with the aim of covering all aspects of some particular topic, inspired by the vast projects of German *Volkskunde*: children's folklore, traditional agriculture, blacksmiths, food, harvests, etc. Surveys devoted to rural houses and furniture were the most comprehensive. The scientific aim was to produce maps of the specific cultural features of various areas of France, along the lines of the development of linguistic atlases. Their results, however, were mixed. The work on rural houses, led by professional architects, has generated a solid corpus that has recently been updated and is in the process of being published (*L'Architecture rurale française*, 1977–1985); other surveys had to rely on the answers given by local corre-

spondents, and their quality is thus very erratic. Moreover, the scientific aim of these endeavours is questionable: by mapping beliefs and customs one can at best, like Van Gennep, pinpoint the areas where they existed, or look for areas of “regression”, following the path of their disappearance. Such a method aims more at cataloguing than understanding. When folklore was suddenly inspired by the concepts and methods of social and cultural anthropology these wide-ranging enterprises were completely dropped. Along with the reports of the priests and physicians of the eighteenth century they now constitute sources of information about this or that belief, custom or social practice in rural areas, provided that the quality of the answers given by informants was satisfactory.

However rapidly it can be summarized, the contribution of folklore to our discipline certainly remains an outstanding one. The body of data and analysis produced by the folklorists until the middle of the nineteenth century in a sense constitutes the indispensable corpus of knowledge about the society of the past on which everyone has to rely when developing current research. Nevertheless, in order to evolve into the scientific discipline of ethnology, folklore had to change its methods, alter its way of dividing up the field of study and come into contact with other disciplines. The scientific impulse came at first from its association with museums.

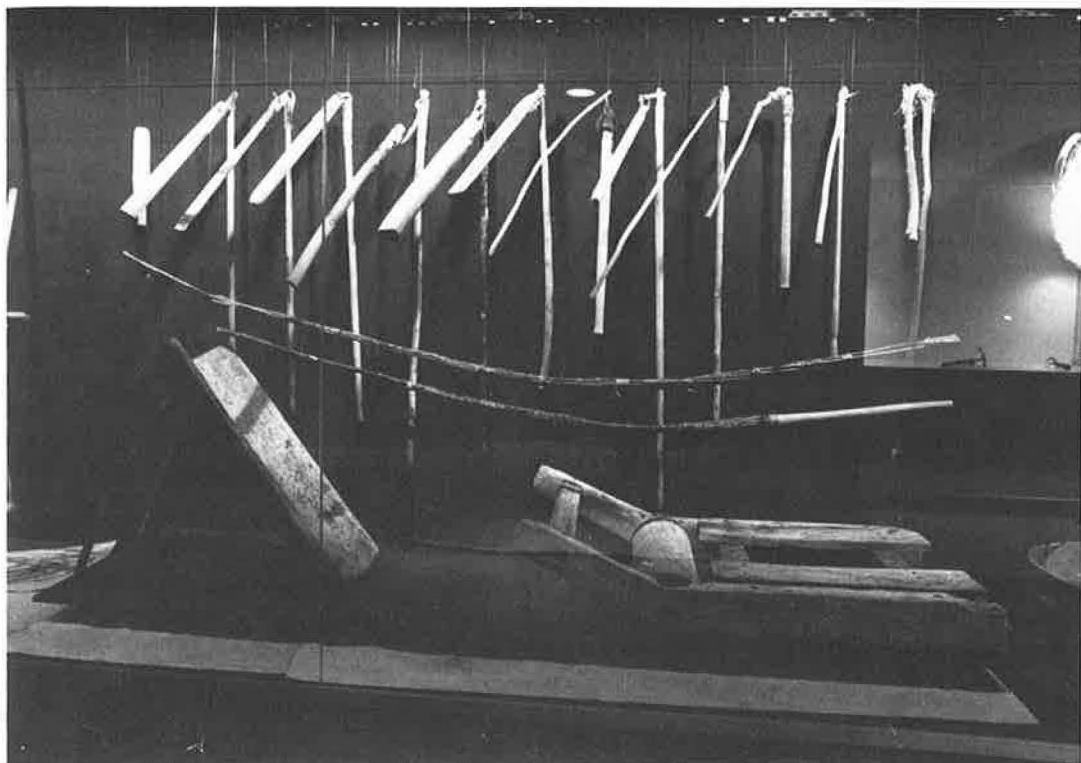
Folklore, ethnology and museums

For various historical reasons folklore was never taught in universities, and no chair of folklore existed comparable with those for the *Volkskunde* of Central Europe or the Nordic countries. The base for the development of folklore into ethnology was a different one – museums – and this has to a great extent affected the theoretical directions taken by French ethnology for the last fifty years.

Slowly, folklorists began to take an interest in objects. In connection with the Universal Exhibition held in Paris in 1879, where the newly created Nordic Museum made an impression, a *Salle de France* was eventually or-

ganized in the Palais du Trocadéro, next to the rooms exhibiting objects and artefacts from what were then called ethnographic expeditions. In 1937, after the second Universal Exhibition, a branch of the newly created *Musée de l'Homme* evolved into the *Musée national des Arts et Traditions populaires*, which stood out from the start by combining research with the collecting and exhibiting of objects. It was from this museum that some of the most comprehensive surveys were launched, notably those devoted to rural architecture and furniture. Most of the French ethnology from then on until the 1970s stemmed from these beginnings. Under the active and sensible supervision of Georges Henri Rivi  re (1897–1985), a systematic interest was developed in all fields of “traditional” society, with its artefacts, objects, customs, beliefs, songs, music, literature, techniques, etc. Research was often spurred by the idea of *ethnologie d'urgence* – the effort to save what was left of the past – and its domain was mainly rural society with its farmers and artisans, but without its social hierarchies and conflicts.

Thus the link between the development of French ethnology and the museums was inextricably bound up with an interest in material culture. Tools, agricultural implements, social institutions and beliefs were studied in their social milieux, and efforts were made towards building up typologies of the material objects under the influence of Andr   Leroi-Gourhan's classifications (1953–1965). In the days of “GHR”, as Rivi  re was called, systematic collections of objects were built up, the layout of the galleries of the museum was planned and eventually they were opened to the public in the 1970s. The *Galerie Culturelle* offers the public a grand and coherent vision of rural society, supplemented by the *Galerie d'Etude*, where objects are grouped in strict typological order, giving the visitor another perspective in which to grapple with the reality of artefacts. GHR invented a new museology which gave preeminence to the objects. Their status was thus suddenly changed. Through the sheer interest invested in them and their spatial presentation, humble trivia are taken out of obscurity and bask in the light and honour of be-



Attractive display of agricultural implements in the Galerie d'Étude. Picture Atp 71.94.68.

ing "museum objects". Some gain the status of works of "popular art". This is not the place to go into the consequences for rural societies of their study by ethnologists; but it should at least be noted that the spade and the spinning wheel suddenly became as precious (and actually prized) as a Rembrandt because of the interest of the museum.

During these years, 1950–1970, French ethnologists were at once collectors of objects in their special fields and researchers conducting local surveys in order to understand the social, economic and technical contexts of the objects collected. Meanwhile as museum curators they did all the work that turns objects into state property, while preparing exhibits – at first temporary ones on the provisional premises of the museum, then in the galleries that can now be visited on the permanent premises of the museum in the Bois de Boulogne. The Parisian museum was developed in close cooperation with local ones, and the name of GHR is asso-

ciated with a host of ethnographical museums throughout France, not to mention those abroad.

But he also developed another original type of museum after 1970, the *éco-musée*. This was conceived in order to associate spaces and building constituting a national heritage worth preserving, documenting and exhibiting more closely with local environments and populations. Buildings are preserved *in situ* instead of being transplanted into a central area, and the cooperation of the local population is actively sought. The first *ecomusée* was set up in Marquèze (Landes) in south-western France, and here the local flora and fauna are protected, as well as traditional farms of the nineteenth century. In Le Creusot, for example, it is a closed mine that is kept potentially alive, and the memories of the miners serve to revive the techniques and social life associated with mining. As we shall see in the following pages, these institutions, sprouting up all over

France, were instrumental in the development of a local ethnology, so that the *Centre d'Ethnologie française* of the *Musée des Arts et Traditions populaires* became just one among other contemporary research centres for French ethnology.

While the museum framework established ethnology as a serious scientific domain, new influences inspired the directions which the discipline is taking today.

History meets ethnology

The relationships between folklore and history and between ethnology and history have varied over time, while history itself has changed its methods and shifted its interests. The study of folklore in the nineteenth century was in a sense at odds with that of history: the former developed a comparative method, while the latter used evolutionary or diffusionist schemata. Under the influence of the English school of social anthropology, methods of field research were developed where the observer tried to discover a model in the relations between facts gathered during fieldwork.

Thus, in the years preceding and following World War II, everything seemed to separate the two sciences. Ethnology was interested in small-scale societies with hardly any connection with the state, and apparently without a history, or at least without historical data to provide the analysis with a dynamic dimension. History was dealing with great civilizations, and complex, hierarchical societies dominated by the state, church and other centralized institutions. Its data were numerous, and buried in archives. The objects of ethnological study were daily events, beliefs, social organization, technology and relationships with ecological and technical milieux. Facts were gathered by direct observation and inquiry, and the emphasis was on the oral. History was concerned with monarchies, political events, etc., and the emphasis was firmly on written material.

However, history and ethnology moved towards one another as both disciplines changed. The birth of the so-called *nouvelle histoire* was linked with the development of new methods

and new interests. There was a quantitative revolution involving a shifting of interest from political figures to the people, and to the changes, slow or fast, in demographic, economic and ideological behaviour that stem from social strata seldom studied. Suddenly the interest of the historian, like that of the ethnologist, turned to the unconscious and collective behaviour of the people. Anthropological history, as developed by the *Annales* school, deals with the history of mental, emotional, physical behaviour, behaviour related to food, etc. Its new objects of research, borrowed openly from ethnology – rituals, the family, kinship, medicine, inheritance, myths, etc. – have nourished the *histoire des mentalités*.

Ethnology, for its part, has developed a new interest in the historical dimension of the human groups studied. First, the field of comparativism has been extended to include historical communities. Secondly, ethnologists working on non-European societies are now looking for evidence of historical change. Thirdly, it has been considered more necessary to include the diachronic dimension when studying our own societies, even though the contemporary aspect is still dominant. Ethnologists working in France now take into account the complex demographic, economic and social forces of the past that have led to the present-day situation. Some topics specifically required the long perspective: for instance, in order to understand current attitudes to the body and illness, where behaviour involves other features than the purely rational, one has to investigate representations of the body that go as far back as the middle ages, when a split is observable between scientific and popular medicine (Pouchelle 1983). When looking for matrimonial regularities and strategies one must follow many generations down through the genealogies (Segalen 1985).

Developments in historical anthropology (or anthropological history) tend rather to blur the previously clear-cut boundaries between disciplines. And this is just as well, as the discussions between historians and anthropologists have shed new light on aspects of the societies of the past (among many examples, we

can mention Klapisch 1985). History has also exerted an influence through the discussions with social anthropology dealing with non-European societies, transmitting in that way many of its concepts to French ethnology.

The relevance of social anthropology

In France, the meeting between folklore (the ethnology of French peasants) and ethnology (the study of primitive societies) took place in the works of Marcel Mauss, who used the term "social anthropology" for the first time in 1938. But it was only in the sixties and seventies, notably in the debates between historicism and structuralism, that the concepts and methods of social anthropology came to influence the themes, objects and methods of French ethnology. Of course it took some time before the sacrosanct concept of "distantiation", of objectivizing the topic of research by preserving cultural and social distance, was given a more relative status. Strict distantiation would have made it completely impossible to work on or in one's own society.

Social anthropology brings to light unconscious processes and some fundamental characteristics of social life that go unnoticed by the social actors. It attempts to account for a total system by showing how its various aspects are tightly woven together. Social anthropology requires fieldwork, participant observation and long intimacy with the group studied, so things can be perceived "from below", the way they are lived and felt by the group itself. This new research method, far removed from the questionnaires of the folklorists, found application in monograph studies of villages. A number of the concepts of social anthropology have been extended to our own societies. This can be both helpful and dangerous. In the field of social organization, for instance, it has proved very fruitful to substitute the precise concepts of "household" and "kinship" for the vague one of "family". However, there are limits to the extent to which one can transplant concepts from one society to another.

French ethnology has been influenced to a great extent by the works of Claude Levi-Strauss and Pierre Bourdieu, along with cer-

tain lines of thought derived from Marxism, and to a lesser extent by Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes. The influence of structuralism was at first direct. The methods of structural analysis have been applied to two topics: myths – although only Nicole Belmont (1971) has used them on European material – and matrimonial alliances. The complexity of kinship groups had previously made them unintelligible: the discovery of the universal principle of exchange reduced their variety to a small number of types, and this enabled the kinship systems of our own societies to be inscribed in the continuity of the systems Levi-Strauss calls "elementary" and "semi-complex". The structural principle, which has guided recent research on French society, sets up a principle of order even in systems where there are no prescribed mates and apparently no fixed rules.

Apart from these direct influences, structuralism has made other distinctive contributions to French ethnology, first through the debates of the 1970s with historians, and secondly by asserting a definite continuity between the societies formerly studied by ethnologists and our own. It has validated the use of the same methods and concepts in the fields and domains of the formerly separated, but now reunited, disciplines of folklore and ethnology.

The thoughts, concepts and terminology of Pierre Bourdieu have also had an extensive influence on French ethnology. His works formed the bridge between French ethnology and exotic ethnology (with his study of Kabyle societies, 1972a), and then between ethnology and sociology, as he developed an interest in the cultural differences between various French social strata and the reproduction of these differences (1979). In contrast to the structuralists, whom Bourdieu accuses of formalism, he developed the concept of "strategies" (1972b). These are not individual behaviours or choices, but the product of social rules where demographic variables and economic and "symbolic" capital intervene. He thus reintroduces to the analysis of marriage patterns the economic dimension which is basic to the understanding of our own societies.

The economic dimension is also at the heart of the Marxist analysis, which has inspired a great deal of work among ethnologists, mainly those concerned with the technological aspects of society. The categories of production, consumption and the exchange of commodities are being reconsidered as economic analyses take into account the social relationships connected with them. This reveals how economic transactions are related to political and symbolic domains.

The French ethnologist Charles Parain, who died in 1984, analysed the concept of the “productive forces” lying behind a given tool or technique (1979). Instead of just classifying them, he investigated the material, economic and social conditions under which they were used or developed. The historical dimension was applied again in order to study the changing relationships between man and his environment. For instance, Parain shows that in Aubrac the cheese-producing system of the nineteenth century, based on cows’ milk, and a more or less collective organization of work, replaced a previous agricultural system based on sheep farming (1971).

The interplay of these various theoretical influences has also profoundly affected the choice of the units to be observed. One of the most striking features of the last twenty years of research has been the change in scales of observation (Bromberger, 1986).

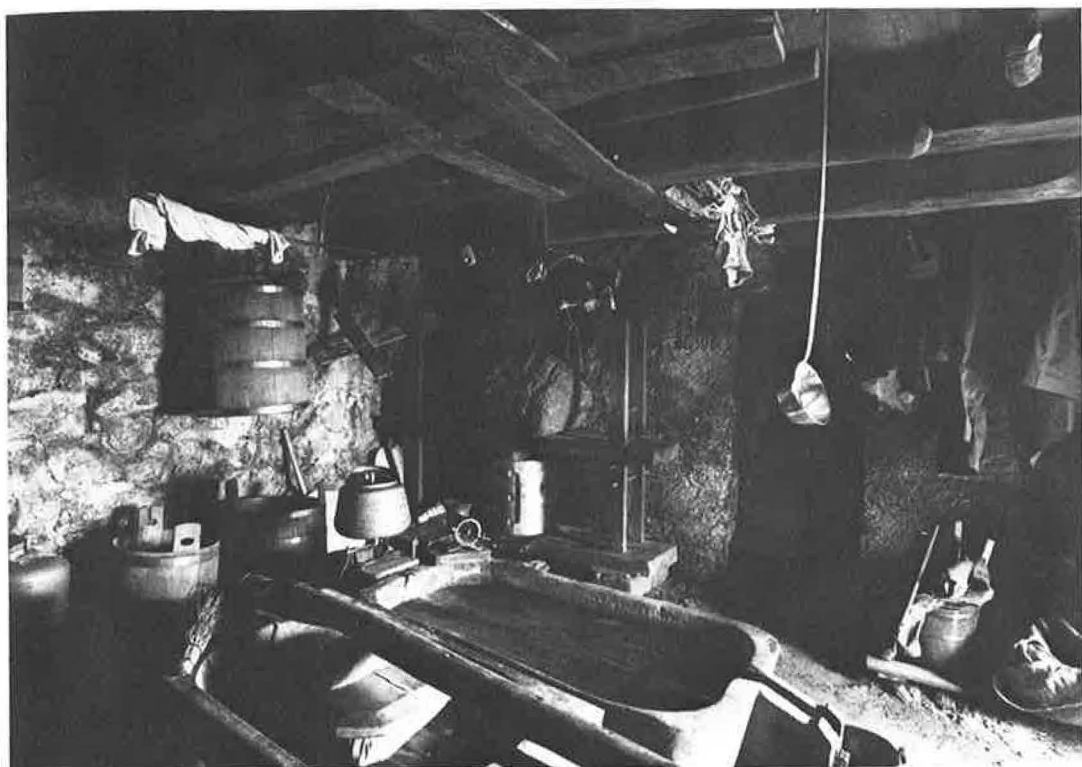
Monographs, multidisciplinary research and micro-ethnology

As a definite departure from the vast surveys and questionnaires used at first by folklorists and later in a more controlled form by the *Musée des ATP*, French ethnologists in the 1950s focused on village studies. Emulating the social anthropologists’ studies of small, closed communities whose unity could be grasped, they started intensive field studies of villages that were supposed to offer similar conditions of investigation. Robert Redfield’s “community studies” were very influential at the time.

Typical of this new interest in the nature of the unit of research was the work of Bernot and Blancard (1953), which investigated all

the social, cultural and symbolic aspects of a village in Picardy where were two distinct social groups, farmers and glassworkers. Although the attempt to comprehend all aspects of the life of the village made some of the analysis rather superficial, other aspects have not lost their freshness, and this book is still well worth mentioning despite the fact that it is already thirty years old. Its detailed ethnographical study of the social and family relationships of the two groups, and its interest in previously untouched topics like sexuality, child care and courtship practices, are even today remarkable justifications of the fieldwork approach. Other works from the same period are Laurence Wylie’s study of a Provençal village (1957), and Louis Dumont’s analysis of the urban festival of La Tarasque (1951), which opened up a new line of analysis directing research towards the internal exploration, rather than external interpretations, of symbolic activities.

While monograph studies of villages multiplied, interdisciplinary studies developed as a necessary tool for the assessment of the complexity of society. The skills of one type of researcher are not enough to cover all the various aspects of social life, and the crosslight of social anthropology, sociology, history, demography and linguistics can help us to a better understanding of all these facets. The landmarks of the sixties and seventies were the multidisciplinary projects that brought together a number of specialists to study the same village or regional area. Between 1962 and 1967 a number of researchers studied the *commune* of Plozevet in Finistère (Brittany). Here, 3800 inhabitants – farmers, fishermen, artisans and shopkeepers – were living either in scattered houses or in the small borough town. The overall theme of the whole project was a problem in human genetics: the area was supposed to be an “isolate” or closed intermarriage zone, which accounted for the high frequency of a genetic deficiency – a congenital dislocation of the hipbone causing heavy limping in many people. The data necessary for a demographic study were assembled. In order to integrate the various domains of investigation, more specific sociological questions were



A "buron" of Aubrac with the traditional cheese-making equipment. Picture Atp. 65.109.378.

asked. When did the isolate "burst open"? How was this connected with the recent transformations in the rural world?

The Plozevet survey initiated new research methods, such as the use of films shown regularly to the inhabitants, and directed interest to new fields of inquiry. There was a rather successful attempt to study marriage regularities from the point of view of the structural hypothesis. Yet the true interdisciplinary debate that was supposed to take place never happened, and the overall synthesis had to be done by a single historian who used the various reports to present the social, economic, demographic and political changes that had occurred over the previous hundred years in the Breton village (Burguière 1975).

Another drawback of the enterprise was the fatigue that set in among the local population, which had now been over-investigated by a large group of researchers. The lessons learned from this influenced the choice of ensuing mul-

tidisciplinary research on regional spaces. After twenty years, the *Recherche coopérative sur Programme (RCP) Aubrac* must be seen in the perspective of *ethnologie d'urgence* or salvation ethnology, which led researchers to study social groups whose cultural specificity was on the point of disappearing. In Aubrac, the central part of the Massif Central, an original form of social and economic organization had developed: on the highland pastures or *montagnes*, men produced cheese, the *fourme de Laguiole*, for sale at the market, while self-sufficient villages used communal pastures. The surveys were carried out between 1963 and 1966, and the complete results were published in a series of volumes (*L'Aubrac*, 1970–1986). The team, led by Georges Henri Rivière, was composed of ethnologists from the Musée des ATP, along with sociologists, historians, linguists, agronomists and experts in zootechnics. This project was more successful in achieving the multidisciplinary goal, and it is well known



An association of Aubrac immigrants holding its annual dinner in a Paris hotel in 1969. Picture Atp 69.7.52.

that this research subsequently exerted great influence on the work of rural experts. Objects were collected systematically: the almost symbiotic process by which they were collected, acquired by the Museum and exhibited in the galleries exemplifies the integration that existed then between the work of the researcher and the museum curator.

In addition to the technological surveys of the process of cheese-making and its social organization, a study of the cultural aspects of this community revealed the importance of patterns of migration. It appeared that folkloristic aspects of music and dancing from this poor area, with a traditional tendency to out-migration, were perpetuated in new areas by the nostalgia of migrants for their origins. The influence of urban music and dancing was also revealed, and this shook assumptions about so-called "traditional culture", which in Aubrac was constantly interpenetrated by external influences.

The study of Aubrac migrants in Paris was one of the new themes of research: in a way it pioneered the urban anthropology which was to develop later. The life cycle of an Aubracien moved from teamwork on the highland pastures during the Easter period to migration to Paris, where he would be hired by a fellow Aubracien in a small *bougnat* (or *café-charbon*). Eventually he would buy his own café, marry a country girl from his village, who would come over and work with him in Paris, while the children would be sent back to the home village to be brought up by grandparents. The *Amicales* (associations of regional immigrants) played an outstanding role here, helping the migrants to keep up contact with the villages they came from. Their organization of communications served to help the group to preserve an identity in the Parisian area (Chodkiewicz 1973).

A point came, however, where Aubrac seemed too "rural" and "traditional" and an-

other area was selected because of its more modern character. In the Chatillonnais agriculture was being integrated into a capitalist framework, and, although predominantly rural, the region was centred around a small town with active industries. There was no leading hypothesis, as there had been in the Plozevet and Aubrac regions, to guide the work of the sociologists and ethnologists. Besides, the area seemed to have no real unity. Thus, the various research projects were rather scattered, with no dominant direction. Yet some of the research work marked a turning-point in French ethnology. A study of leisure associations in the town of Chatillon oriented interest towards urban ethnology (Gutwirth 1972). Detailed ethnographical descriptions of the village of Minot in Burgundy were produced, using the basic concepts of social anthropology: social reproduction, popular knowledge and representations, the role and uses of kinship, symbolism, matrimonial strategies and regularities (Jolas & Zonabend 1970; Jolas, Verdier & Zonabend 1970; Pingaud 1978; Verdier 1979). The main result of the Chatillonnais project was not a justification of the interdisciplinary approach, but the evidence that it was possible to deal with the classical topics of social anthropology in a French area.

The impossibility of carrying out vast interdisciplinary projects was striking, and the last of them only confirmed this. A number of biologists, historians, demographers and ethnologists, rather than making a coordinated effort, scattered their research projects over the Baronnies area of the Pyrenees – an area including 27 *communes* arranged in three *cantons*. The Baronnies exhibited no more overall unity than any of the other areas studied. even the administrative units of the *communes* were irrelevant for the study of domains like kinship and domestic groups. On the contrary, the *oustau* (household, home) was suddenly thrust into the light as a more relevant unit for studying matrimonial and inheritance patterns (Augustins & Bonnain 1981).

The development of units of observation through time, from those of folklorists to those of ethnologists, thus seems to have come full circle. The folklorist starts with a fact which he

tries to cover exhaustively; then the ethnologist shifts to rural community units with the delusive appearance of unified wholes on which comprehensive monographic research is conducted; the complexity of the social facts of the unit leads to the summoning of an array of specialists to explore and compare the various facets of the society studied. In the face of the failure of these Utopian projects, the ethnologist goes back to other units of observation, sometimes very tiny ones. But the approach dealing with detailed facts is linked with the search for internal explanations, not external ones as was the case with the folklorists. The inevitable consequence of changes in the units of observation is that new objects of research are developed whose emergence we can now better understand in the light of this brief outline of the history of French ethnology.

New units of observation, old topics with new approaches

Forsaking the close territorial unit, the interests of the ethnologist have turned from the totality to the study of differences, and from the group to the individual inserted in his various networks. The changes that have taken place in French society over the past twenty years have made this reassessment necessary.

Rural areas, the traditional fields of observation for ethnologists, have been profoundly affected by mechanization, the intrusion of capitalism into agriculture, industrialization and rural migration. More recently, though, a shift in population movements has been observable that sends people back to the small villages and towns with extensive housing development. But these are not farmers any more: they work in the cities, and only live in a rural environment. The new groups, along with people keeping a *résidence secondaire* (country house) have seriously disturbed old rural hierarchies and relationships; and the spaces in which relationships are formed have also been remodelled. Instead of looking for groups marked by outward, expressive signs of their identity (such as costumes and languages) the ethnologist now looks for social differences and investigates the various networks an individ-



Cultural differentiation exemplified by the various types of hunting: A. Members of a local hunting association in Chatillonnais. Picture Atp 67.117.56.

ual can rely on – friends, neighbours, kin. The identity of the individual is seen as something undergoing a constant process of recomposition (Balfet & Bromberger 1976; Kayser 1984).

The various kinds of social institutions that have traditionally been the subjects of much research are now also considered dynamically. For instance, festivals are no longer seen as “survivals” of the past but as the focus of conflictual representations of the social identities in the village. Revivals of harvest festivals distress old farmers who have seen a succession of changes they cannot control, while for the new population groups in the villages (*néo-ruraux*) and tourists (often the children of emigrated families who have kept a piece of land and built a country house there) these events are a way of building up an image – but a false one – of the village community: they are staging a golden age forever gone (Collomb 1980).

Old research themes such as hunting and

gathering have been rejuvenated by new approaches (Bromberger & Lenclud 1982). Hunting, for instance, as well as being analysed symbolically, can be studied within the framework of sociability, with an emphasis on the differences between social classes, in the manner of Pierre Bourdieu. One can contrast hunting associations rooted in the village community and bourgeois hunting-parties, competing for status and land control (Bozon & Chamboredon 1980).

These trends in research also provide us with an account of the changing relations between “urban” and “rural”: the difference is much less pronounced than was before the 1950s. Patterns of migration are an important topic in the cultural and political debate going on in contemporary France. Studying them helps us to understand the specific social and cultural features of these groups, both in their area of origin and in the area in which they ar-



B. Elegantly dressed stag-hunters in the same area. Picture Atp 68.10.3.

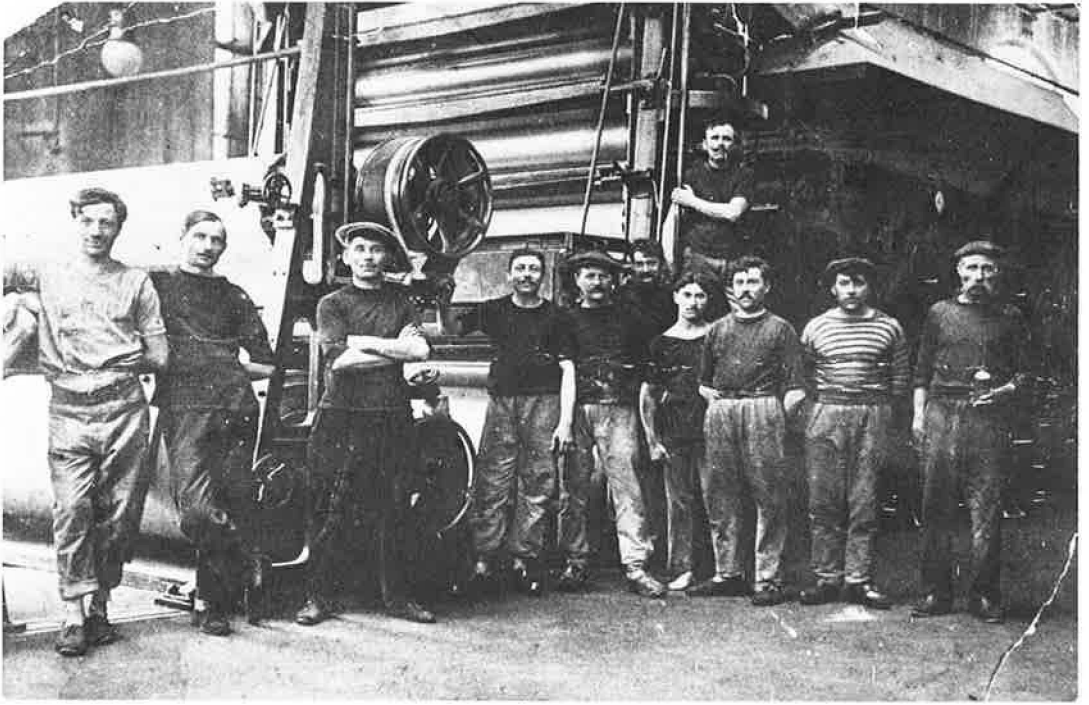
rive. This sheds light on the process whereby the migrant is assimilated into the arriving group and the city (*Provinciaux et Provinces à Paris*, 1980). French ethnology has thus redrawn some of its units of observation and dealt in fresh ways with some traditional themes. However, a truly new dimension has appeared recently with the advent of urban ethnology.

A new direction: urban ethnology

For the last ten years researchers have been trying to identify the specific features of the city (Gutwirth 1982; Perrot & Petonnet 1982; *Ethnologie urbaine*, 1984). In the traditional rural contexts the ethnologist studies a supposedly stable group occupying a demarcated territory, a group whose culture and technology change very slowly over time and can be observed and described. In comparison with this,

urban ethnology seems to be an area of work as changeable, elusive and yet permanent as the city itself. Besides this, there is a still unresolved debate about whether urban ethnology is the ethnology of the city itself or just takes place within the city. Whatever its methodological uncertainties, urban ethnology retains an ethnographical interest in culture, material objects, words and gestures. Ethnologists, given the impossibility of making a classical monograph study, have tried to identify specific sub-spaces (like the neighbourhood), groups (like migrants) or institutions (the *café-bistrot*, strikes, carnivals) in the city.

There is still a debate about what is specific to urban ethnology. How does it differ from or merge with social anthropology? How should fieldwork techniques be used? Access to people in the cities is more difficult than in rural areas: the ethnologist is not as conspicuous as he is in a small rural area; in the anonymous



Workers standing in front of the paper-making machine in a Nanterre plant, at the beginning of the 20th century. Picture Atp 84.3.1.

crowd he loses the status and identifiability he benefits from in the small village; his relationship with an informant has to be built up anew for each individual. Participant observation is often difficult, and the urban ethnologist often comes to function more as a collector of verbal evidence that has to be checked against historical data or by other investigative techniques. Even more than elsewhere, research in the city requires the tailoring of the unit of observation to the problem or group studied. For instance, an *HLM* (low-cost, high-rise building) can serve as a homogeneous milieu where a few interviews will give a reasonable picture of the whole. In a socially diversified neighbourhood it is necessary to select representatives of the various groups in order to take the social differences into account. In some cases there may be interconnections between the people interviewed, in others none.

Up to now, French urban ethnology has been equated with the study of the poorer social strata – the environments of workers and mi-

grants living in suburbs or low-cost housing projects. The work of Colette Petonnet has shed new light on the shantytowns (*bidonvilles*) of the Paris area. Among the misery she has discovered social order and organization by examining classical ethnological factors: uses of space, the body, kinship (Petonnet 1968, 1980, 1982). However, the study of the processes of social reproduction, and the use of family memory and networks among the middle classes and *haute bourgeoisie* has been begun (Le Wita 1984).

Another strong line of research deals with industrial ethnology. It studies the social organization of workers in cities dominated by some specific industrial occupation. Industrial archaeology is also involved when the workplace has been closed or turned into an *éco-musée* like the Le Creusot mine. Researchers in this field try to determine the worker's relationships at work and within his family or group. When the industrial activity is abandoned it becomes the focus of nostalgic feelings about a

common cultural past and helps the people involved to carry on a social life in spite of economic difficulties. In this context the role of the ethnologist in his field of research can be compared with that of the folklorist: simply by expressing an interest he turns common, humble objects into works of "folk art", and often sparks off a local production that will paradoxically invade the museum collections twenty years later as "traditional" material! When investigating the technology of urban culture, the ethnologist helps to legitimize it and contributes to the process of identification which will eventually become a subject of ethnological study.

Symbolic dimensions

In the past, museum classifications attempted to divide up all aspects of social life under clearly separated headings (agricultural techniques, clothing, music, literature, etc.). But one domain always resisted classification – "customs and beliefs", which seemed to be a catch-all for what was left over once the other specialized domains had taken their share. This was a somewhat vague category which, unlike the others, had no artefacts, objects or corpus, only various data and sources referring to representations. Some of the topics traditionally placed in this category were religion, rituals, festivals and medicine.

This type of classification has been abandoned today: symbolism appears to cut across all categories, as there is a symbolic dimension to every aspect of social or technical life. In this respect the much-maligned monograph studies were useful for grasping the unity of thought in a group and giving an integrated picture of social, economic and symbolic aspects of daily life. The books published about Minot were highly influential, as they showed that a comprehensive local study is not bound to follow the classic progression from "material" to "mental" culture, but can reveal the complex interplay of these levels by concentrating on one factor. Yvonne Verdier (1979), for instance, investigates feminine roles and rites of passage in a completely original way, while Françoise Zonabend (1980) shows the variety

of time-scales in the village. This is all the more interesting because Minot, located in the economically advanced area of Chatillonnais, while thriving agriculturally, has none of the cultural features formerly cherished by anthropologists: no witchcraft, no popular literature, no spectacular festivals. Symbolism was treated there, and is now generally treated, mainly through the study of language, as an intrinsic property of all social activities (Fabre-Vassas & Fabre 1986: 5).

Investigations of symbolic activities or forms of expression do not so much attempt to understand meanings as reveal the various relationships involved. For this purpose minute ethnographical details, both technical and lexical, are considered. For instance, in Corsica, when someone had been stung by a spider he was cured by being locked in a warm oven. Physicians and museum curators have described this custom either compassionately or with amused indulgence. Max Caisson (1976) has given a convincing interpretation of this custom and belief by marshalling a whole array of data: field studies, proverbs and tales, observations of parental behaviour in other Northern Mediterranean areas, works by Greek philosophers, and psychoanalytical literature. He shows that the spider and the oven are two conflicting representations of the mother – the castrating mother on the one hand and the nurturing one on the other. Starting with one small localized fact, and making intelligent use of relevant comparative material, his explanation brings out one of the most complex, hidden dimensions of symbolic life in Mediterranean culture.

This example gives us some measure of the methodological and theoretical shifts that have occurred in the treatment of the familiar themes of folklore. Instead of looking for external explanations, or trying to establish the frequency of a given custom or belief in time or space, the ethnologist tries in a very localized and specific context to come up with a global explanation of the facts observed at the place where and the time when the research is done. Eschewing grand collections and superficial explanations, he investigates minute details, combining various orders of reality – daily words, metaphors, legends, rituals, etc. Al-

though geographically limited, the subsequent explanation integrates precisely the kind of overall explanation the anthropologist is looking for, and enables him to enlist the help of other disciplines, in this case psychoanalysis.

Among the domains which have most concerned recent French ethnology is cooking. A strong influence here is the analytical approach of Levi-Strauss, which brings out the associations between body and world, nature and society. Studies of the various forms of hunting, going beyond social and technical analysis proper, help us to understand the relationships between man and nature, civilization and the savage. The historical dimension is also taken into account, not to look for survivals, but to understand the dynamics of social institutions – rituals, for instance. A detailed ethnological investigation can reveal how the same formal aspects encapsulate different social and symbolic meanings at different times, and how these meanings eventually bring about changes in the forms of the rituals themselves. For instance, the Nanterre suburb of Paris has celebrated a *Rosière* – a virgin girl – from 1819 until 1984. This figure has carried different meanings through time. At the beginning of the 19th century, the young girl was chosen for her religious virtues, but as we come closer to the present day she is more likely to be a “deserving” elder sister in a large family who has had to raise her brothers and sisters (because of the illness of her mother) and is thus rewarded for her sacrifices with a dowry. In the context of growing industrialization and Catholic control she was expected to suffer her miseries without trying to escape her social condition. After the Leftist city council came into power in Nanterre in 1935, the *Rosière* symbolized the struggle of the working class for a better life. She was also the living embodiment of the city. As the result of urban development the route of the procession in which she appears for the public has changed over the years (Segalen & Chamarat 1979).

The new rituals and new aspects of the sacred in contemporary society are being investigated: for instance, football (i.e. soccer) has been compared to a new religion (Augé 1982). This new opium of the people stimulates re-

gional, national and class consciousness, and sociological investigation of it reveals the various types of identification connected with the practice and perception of the sport. The game itself is highly ritualized and emotional. For the supporters, there are heroes and villains, and victory and defeat are felt as important positive or negative shocks. Sometimes (and not only in the metaphorical sense) there is even human sacrifice. At present various groups of French ethnologists are doing research along these lines.

Other more “traditional” topics have been rejuvenated by the new symbolic approaches. For instance, a local study of pilgrimages in the Perche (Normandy) shows the symbolic distribution of space, like “a medical dictionary on the ground” (Bensa 1978). Festivals are now studied in terms of the new actors in them. They can be interpreted as signs of the conflicting identities of various groups, or be concerned with urban emblems, like the “Giants” of the cities of Northern France (Guesquin 1985).

In folkloristic studies the investigation of witchcraft has traditionally been associated with that of popular medicine. But the folklorist, as usual, was studying the subject from the outside. It was by placing herself *within* the relationships established by witchcraft that Jeanne Favret-Saada (1977) managed to understand the logic of “being caught”. This work was highly influential in French ethnology, as it revealed the complex problems of practicing ethnology on home ground. Comparing her position to that of Evans-Pritchard studying the Zandé, she remarks that the English social anthropologist could reject the irrational aspects of “them” – a group to which he knew he did not belong. To begin to understand the spells cast in the Norman Bocage, she had to become part of the local network instead of preserving a “distancing” attitude. Thus she could show the importance of the concept of “strength” and the efficacy of magical procedures: sorcery is a coherent, logical system for explaining the repeated misfortunes that happen to the individual in his daily life. Only participant observation, here taken as far as personal involvement could bear, could lay bare

the internal coherence of beliefs and behaviour connected with sorcery.

Similarly, much research has been devoted to the study of traditional medical practices, notably those used by mothers with their newborn and infant children. Demographers and historians have sometimes gone so far as to accuse mothers, with their "prejudices" and "ridiculous superstitions", of deliberately putting an end to the lives of their children. Here again the comparative use of field observations and proverbs and the analysis of medical remedies restores dignity to the human body of the peasant, and at the same time shows the coherence of attitudes and behaviour. Françoise Loux (1978) shows how it was the efforts of mothers to protect the much-threatened lives of their newborn and young children that led them to use magical or "empirical" medicine.

The above examples show that symbolism is deeply embedded in all aspects of human life. Henceforth, it will be difficult to disentangle and classify all these various strands of research. Is it even necessary? For the sake of clarity, however, we will examine other subjects of research under specific headings – mainly research on culture and kinship. These approaches, like urban ethnology, also integrate an important symbolic dimension, either explicitly or implicitly.

Cultural ethnology

The investigation of the cultural values of specific groups is a type of research closely connected with the preceding area of study. For example, there are the societies of "honour and shame" in the Mediterranean area of Southern France, associated with the *ousta* and the subjugation of women in an apparently agnatic system. Elizabeth Claverie (1979, 1981) has illuminated the relationships between the judicial system and customary revenge in the *ousta* system, where each *ousta* competes for honour in the marriage race. In contrast, some northern societies (in Brittany or Lorraine) can be seen as being dominated by egalitarian values: this is evident, for example, from the well-balanced relationships between man and wife and from the constant redistribution of parcels of land,

as people openly reject the idea that some should be richer than others (Lamarche, Rogers, Karnoouh 1980).

Beyond these endeavours to identify dominant cultural patterns, the concept of the "popular" has been modified by new types of research. Folklorists emphasized the autonomous aspects of popular culture, and this position is now being reconsidered. The Aubrac study showed the influence of the city on peasant dancing and musical culture, and Jean Michel Guilcher's work has revealed the influence of formal institutions on dance traditions. For instance, the influence on Béarnais and Basque dancing of dancing teachers trained in military schools was strong (1983). Similar approaches have been developed to clothes, furniture styles and music (Cheyronnaud 1984).

Other researchers are investigating the cultural dimension in daily life among the working classes: as we have seen, this is a strong theme in urban ethnology. Culture is studied as a culture of work, so the ways in which techniques, crafts and other types of know-how are learnt must be investigated. The various channels for transmitting knowledge in this learning process are considered: schools, books, direct observation, information from the family and other oral information. These investigations are not, however, restricted to the technical knowledge of the urban and industrial worker. The interest traditionally given to techniques, departing from former classifications and typologies, is now devoted to the study of processes. At the saltworks, for instance, the technical operations of the *paludiers* appear to vary according to the amount of time they give to the work – whether they do it exclusively or combine it with agricultural activities (Lemonnier 1980). The study of techniques thus reveals the stakes involved in social control (Cresswell 1983). By building up this kind of knowledge one can identify the investment of a group in a cultural identity – as one might, in a regional context, by studying a specific dance, procession or language.

Popular culture is also analysed as political culture through the study of the images and strategies associated with the control of cultural power – for instance, when striking wor-

kers elaborate a counterculture, borrowing emblems of mockery from the Carnival, and generating their own language and slogans.

Many questions remain open. How are we to view the adoption of "bourgeois" patterns by the working class? Is upper class behaviour slowly pervading the lower classes, or is there a demand ("Why not us?") coming from below? What happens when the upper classes adopt what used to be typical of working class culture – the celebration of Labour Day on the 1st of May, or rock culture?

Here, as in other domains, French ethnology is sensitive to group or class differentiations as well as to the historical dimension of changes (Les Cultures Populaires, 1983).

Kinship, inheritance and social reproduction

This new field of research, now a major concern of French ethnology, has been directly inspired by social anthropology, where the study of social organization is dominated by that of kinship and the family. The topic is a good example of the kind of genuine interdisciplinary discussion that has now been going on for nearly twenty years among historians, demographers, sociologists and social anthropologists.

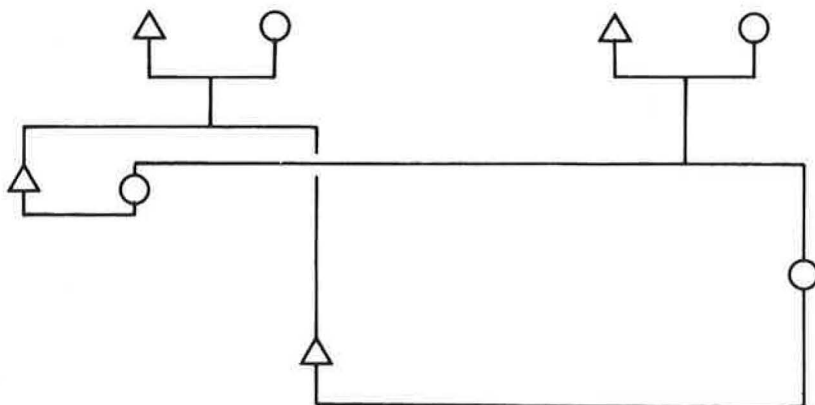
The use of the classical parameters of residence, descent and marriage has made it possible to go beyond the indistinct whole that is "the family" – generally a unit limited to that of the nuclear group by sociologists or seen in terms of *rites de passage* by folklorists. Bringing in the historical dimension has been conducive to a better understanding of changes and continuities in the groups studied, while historical communities are being taken into account for the sake of comparison and as an aid to setting up models. Research on these themes has predominantly been done in rural areas, where landed property and inheritance have been given close study in terms of the size and structure of household and matrimonial regularities. The general hypothesis put forward in the 1970s by the Cambridge Population Group concerning the nuclear pattern of the European domestic group has been reexamined in

the light of studies of central and southern areas of France, where an original model appears to contradict Peter Laslett's hypothesis. In these areas, farmers own their land and pass it on intact to one heir. The other children receive a small sum as a dowry. The heir, his wife and his children all live together in the house (*ousta*, *ostal*) with his parents, perpetuating a system of unilateral descent. Historians and ethnologists have endeavoured to analyse differences within this general model, taking into account the family life cycle, status and wealth variables, regional variations, and showing how far into the 20th century this situation has endured (Assier-Andrieu 1981; Augustins & Bonnain 1981; Collomp 1984; Fine-Souriac 1977).

There is a matrimonial model associated with this pattern of inheritance and residence: the heir is married to a non-heir from another household, who brings along a monetary dowry that will be used by the *ousta* to marry off a non-heir. A frequent and practical pattern involves a simultaneous double marriage of siblings from two households. The heir from each marries a non-heir from the other; both dowries are equal and are exchanged on the same day – or never paid – so as not to impoverish either of the households. By studying marriage patterns over generations and following lines of inheritance, Pierre Lamaison has been able to discover formal patterns of restricted and generalized exchanges between lines, where the dowry paid by a household follows a path that will eventually bring it back to the donor, after it has circulated among various *oustas* (Lamaison 1976).

In the northernmost and easternmost parts of France one finds a rather different pattern of inheritance, although what happens in practice often draws together systems that formally seem to be quite distinct. There, farmers are not generally the owners of their land; there is little attachment to the farmhouse, which will change hands many times during a family life cycle. Here, too, there has been a development towards geographical mobility. The elusive nature of these populations has made it difficult to observe any formal pattern comparable with those of the more stable southern

“Relinking marriage”,
formal pattern.
Picture Atp 86.4.1.



communities. However, given a precisely defined area of observation in Brittany, it has been possible to find “relinking” marriage patterns that ally lines by a series of marriages over an extended period of time. The stable unit to which families refer is not the household, but the kinship network (Segalen 1985). In other areas, such as Franche-Comté, the dominant kinship pattern is that of the sibling group, enduring over generations (Salitot-Dion 1979). Although the variety of French kinship and inheritance patterns is far from having been totally clarified, it is now possible to build tentative models (Augustins 1982) and to link them with studies of “elementary” and “semi-complex” systems of marriage (Héritier 1981). Among theoretical questions yet to be answered is whether the principle of patrimony and inheritance is consistent with principles of descent in non-European societies.

Patterns of residence, marriage and inheritance are not the only fields of interest to ethnologists studying the family. Like social anthropologists, students of French ethnology also investigate kinship terms, the uses of kinship and its role within various social and economic contexts. The importance of cognatic kin in various social groups has been discovered – in rural societies, where they help during migrations, and even in industrialized communities. The distribution of sexual roles and prerogatives has been scrutinized (Segalen 1980). Rituals, a classic topic of social anthropology, are being analysed either in historical communities or among contemporary ones (*Les Rituels de Parenté*, 1978). The rituals associated with

the life cycle of the individual seem to have been displaced: for instance, the christening of children takes place long after birth and tends to be an important family gathering; death, on the other hand, seems to have become invisible in our world. Celebrations, which formerly took place within the family, are being taken over by other institutions: for instance, preparations for the relatively new ritual of Mother’s Day are mostly made in schools, etc. Like the new objects and domains of French ethnology, this classic theme of social anthropology is being studied in terms of its contemporary aspects.

The study of all these topics has gained from the combined interest of historians and ethnologists, as well as from the historical dimension introduced by ethnological research itself. Typical of this interdisciplinary approach are works dealing with naming patterns (*Formes de nomination en Europe*, 1980). Each individual has a family name, a patronym transmitted in patrilinear succession; everyone also has a first name, and often a nickname. Naming identifies and classifies individuals within their own social group; it relates each new member of a family to past generations (for instance, where first names are passed on from grandfather to grandson) and it helps to create a family memory. The family memory can also be activated by objects, mementos, furniture passed down through generations (Zonabend 1980): in wealthy houses, as in the flats of the affluent bourgeoisie, the history and permanence of the family are there to be read.

Research dealing with kinship, the family

and inheritance patterns has until now been done mostly in rural areas; however, ethnological research, in connection with the development of urban ethnology, has begun to focus its interest on other social groups and milieux. Yet many more studies are necessary to account for the variety of kinship patterns in French society, distant as this field is from the body of knowledge pertaining to small exotic societies.

Summary and conclusions

The purpose of the present study has been to select a few examples of the fields currently of most concern to French ethnology and of the new approaches used. It does not pretend to cover the whole body of knowledge in the field, which has begun to be impressive, but rather attempts, in a historical perspective, to point out the changes that have taken place in the last thirty years.

At present, the discipline is characterized by three institutional features:

- 1) The ethnological landscape today has rather vague contours. Until the 1970s the only research centre was the *Centre d'Ethnologie Française*. Today many active regional centres have sprung up throughout France (Toulouse, Aix, Montpellier, Brest, Strasbourg, Grenoble, etc.) where ethnologists are committed to the study of their local environments and also contribute to current general discussions.

- 2) The educational situation has hardly changed in relation to the immediate post-war situation. Chairs of social anthropology are very few in French universities, and there is not a single chair of French ethnology. Hence, students have to turn to "parent disciplines" (history, sociology, geography, linguistics) when they want to prepare a thesis, or to local museums and eco-museums.

- 3) However, the relationship between contemporary French ethnology and museums is rather ambivalent. As we have seen above, new directions in research are concerned with symbolic, cultural and social aspects of groups that are not directly linked with material objects. On the one hand, the study of artefacts is not arousing as much interest as it has done in the past; on the other, the new research to-

pics do not easily lend themselves to traditional museum presentation. Marriage rituals, for example, could be presented by means of costumes, jewelry, ceramics or furniture; but kinship models, rather abstract structures, are difficult to present in glass cases!

The split between museum and research will continue as long as the domain of the museum is not expanded beyond its interest in traditional peasant culture. The *Musée Dauphinois* of Grenoble has proved that it is possible, if difficult, to make a "museograph" of a city and its various social groups based on the dynamics of its specific history (Guibal & Laurent 1984).

Institutional problems will become critical in the years to come as a stronger interest develops in the ethnological approach to our society.

At a general level, ethnologists are those who hold up a mirror to society in order to understand the processes of change. For instance, alarmist statements in the media about the "crisis of the family" are put into the proper perspective when one compares the contemporary situation with those that have prevailed in former centuries. Widowhood and remarriage have broken up and rebuilt families in the past about as much as divorce today. The widespread interest in alternative medicine becomes understandable in the light of anguish in the face of sickness and death, and the response to highly technologized modern medicine.

Ethnology also has an important impact in the new context of French decentralization. Heritages of all types, now celebrated and valued, appear to have become a new issue in social and political debates. For example, in the Ardennes (in Northeastern France) both bird life and hunting traditions are classified as national heritages worth preserving; but the hunters (*tendeurs*) kill thrushes (*grives*) that are protected by an international European agreement. The hunters, of course, assert that the *tenderie* is a very old local custom belonging to the Ardennes heritage, and should accordingly be preserved as a sign of cultural differentiation. When Jean Jamin first studied the *tenderie* he was rejected by the hunters because they thought that the investigation of an

ancient technique for museum purposes would automatically lead to its disappearance. A few years later, when the administration tried to suppress the custom to protect the birds, he was called back by the *tendeurs*, who needed the ethnologist on their side to legitimize their activities, just as the birds had the ornithologists on their side (Jamin 1982).

The above tale, exemplifying the tensions affecting French ethnology, caught between the classic approaches of social anthropology and the difficulties, contradictions and risks involved in practicing anthropology on home ground, provides a suitable ending for this study.

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