

The Metamorphoses of the Trocadéro and the Re-invention of the Musée de l'Homme*

Fabrice Grognet

This contribution originally appeared in French as a chapter in the edited volume Les musées d'ethnologie: culture, politique et changement institutionnel. It tracks the organizational and intellectual history of the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro, including its historical relationship with more recent institutions in French museum anthropology, including the Musée de l'Homme, the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, and the Musée du Quai Branly.

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The evolution of the ethnographical and anthropological museums in France is far from being linear and smooth. The duality between museum and anthropological sciences has always been a source of conflict, especially with regard to the periods considered and the influence of the State at particular times. The patrimonial institutions depending from the State have thus often been subject to great changes and even “metamorphoses.” And in this history, Chaillot hill has always been at the center, even if its story does not start with the Trocadéro.

It is in 1882, at the time of the French universal exhibitions and other fairs (Py and Vidard 1985) that the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro (MET) is inaugurated. It is built over part of the Palace of the Universal Exhibition of 1878, and is the first institution in France to assemble in one place the material productions of populations from all continents. The MET thus creates a structure charged to regroup the collections that are scattered in various institutions and helps to establish a new discipline still marked by the authority of physical anthropology: ethnography.

However, after a promising start, the MET, criticized by those who claim for a sociological approach and ignored by the public, becomes obsolete at the beginning of the 20th century.¹

At the occasion of the Exposition Intere des Arts et Techniques dans la vie moderne (“International Exhibition of Art and Technology in modern life”), the ancient Palais du Trocadéro becomes the Palais de Chaillot. The Musée de l'Homme, inaugurated the 20th of June, 1938, becomes, according to its creator and director Paul Rivet, the natural “heir of the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro” (Rivet 1938:31).² It takes over the site and the collections

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of the previous MET, with the exception of the regional collections of metropolitan France, and is enriched by the osteology and prehistory collections from the laboratory of anthropology of the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle.

Unfortunately, after a triumphant inauguration, this “museum-laboratory,” destined to the study and presentation of man in all his dimensions and that defines the relations between museum and science (Jamin 1988), is also subject to a slow degradation.

In 1995, the presidential decision to promote “primitive arts” in France sounds the death knell for the Musée de l'Homme as conceived by Paul Rivet. The collections of the Musée National des Arts Africains et Océaniens (MNAAO) and those of the laboratory of ethnology of the Musée de l'Homme are assembled in 1998 to create the Musée du Quai Branly. Furthermore, the collections of the Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires (MNATP) and the European ethnographic collections of the Musée de l'Homme are transferred in 2000 to the future Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et la Méditerranée (MuCEM) in Marseille.

Was the Musée de l'Homme destined to disappear, like the MET, once these collections had gone to the creation of two new museums?

Since 2002, the French government, in the framework of a vast reform of the Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle, encourages a redefinition of the Musée de l'Homme based on the relation between man and nature that will give a second life to the institution for the year 2015.

As we can see, the creation of the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro, the Musée de l'Homme, the Musée du Quai Branly, and the actual redefinition of the Musée de l'Homme are milestones in the history of relations between museums and anthropological sciences. The question is what is the meaning of these metamorphoses decided by the State? Why these recurrent architectural modifications and transfers of collections? What is the heritage of these institutions and what is at stake?

The Assembling of Ethnographic Collections at the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro

The idea of an ethnographic museum, as distinct from museums of Fine Art or Natural History, is born in France at the end of the 18th century, with Barthélémy de Courçay (1744-1799) and Aubin-Louis Millin de Grandmaison (1759-1818), at the Bibliothèque Nationale and with Louis-François Jauffret (1770-1850), the founder of the Société des Observateurs de l'Homme (“Society of the Observers of Man”).

After the seizure of the royal, manorial, ecclesiastical collections that become the legitimate property of the Nation, the young Republic draws the new basis of its heritage to include past, present, and future generations. Thus, the “curios” and “antiquities” produced by the different populations become “relics” of “customs” and “traditions.” The French Republic proclaims itself the keeper of all and as such must share the seized cultural collections with the people.³ It becomes responsible for the safeguarding of the “relics of the savages” who, according to the

humanism of the Enlightenment, are close to the “early days” of humanity. Will their collection and conservation not lead to the discovery of the lost traces of “pre-Celtic man?”⁴

However, and in spite of the presence of ancient collections, the idea of an ethnographic museum is not easily accepted in France. It is considered a minor discipline, subject to the comparative archeology of the Bibliothèque Nationale, or the natural history of the Muséum National.

The creation of the Musée de la Marine in 1827, which regroups objects issued by colonial explorations, adds to the institutional and epistemological ambiguity of ethnography. In fact, ethnographical collections can cover and justify many fields of study, and at a time when the axes of the National Heritage are defined, the creation of a purely ethnographic museum does not seem to be essential.

Between 1855 and 1878, Paris universal exhibitions throw a new look on the “ethnographical collections.” In the context of the valorization of “progress” and “industrial artifacts,” some “remarkable” objects made by distant or lost populations are considered from an aesthetic point of view and become an inspiration to the Western craft industry.⁵ Thus, an object representative of another civilization is shown by the end of the 1860s alongside Western craft industry in “retrospective” exhibitions of “Fine Arts applied to modern industry.”

But this effort to combine ethnology and the comparative history of “art and civilization” is not enough for the creation of a museum. In the ideological context of the theory of “races,” ethnography is above all meant to be the savior of the “otherness,” destroyed by the colonial tendency to uniformity, and the industrialization of the Nation. Ethnography is considered then of benefit to society and is encouraged by the State to collect all material evidence (often produced by populations without written language) of the supposed stages of humanity destined to disappear with “modernity.”

At the occasion of the preparation of the World Exhibition of 1878, scientific research and republican patrimonial logic are finally in harmony with the political thought of the time. Oscar de Watteville (1824-1901), director of the department of Science and Literature at the Ministry of Public Instruction, encourages the establishment of an ethnographical museum where man would be the object of study as a “creator” and not as a “creature” (Watteville 1877:4), as is the case at the Natural History Museum. This way, instead of competing with the existing establishments, would bring the complementary information made necessary by the uniqueness of the ethnographical objects, fundamentally different from artistic, archeological, and anthropological objects.

The new MET, the safe keeper of lost or endangered cultures, thus becomes the mirror of the “civilization” of the colonial State and of the unification of the metropolitan State.⁶ The discipline of ethnography, destined to preserve a presumably endangered object, can now be developed in the privileged environment of a museum as a fully-fledged science for the preservation of the human heritage and not only of a particular nation.

However, at the moment of the State’s decision of the creation of the Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro for the representation of “the history of the customs and traditions of peoples of all

ages” (Jules Ferry 1880 quoted in Dias 1991:176-177), the scientific community is hesitant between a monogenetic and a polygenetic conception of humanity. It aspires not just to a “simple” ethnographic museum where only the material culture will be studied, but more to a real anthropological museum, combining the search of the origins of man and the filiation between “races” and the populations of the earth based on the description of the “otherness” of humanity.

This means that from the beginning there seems to be a difference of opinion, or a misunderstanding, between the political intention to create an ethnographic museum and the scientific community’s wish for an anthropological museum.

The Invention of the Musée de l’Homme or the Heritage Fracture

The creation of the Musée de l’Homme, and its relation to anthropological sciences and museums, depends on the institutional death of the Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro. However, it is not the only consequence of the end of MET. The Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires (MNATP) is also created and the Muséum National d’Histoire Naturelle is renovated.⁷

The ethnographic collections of the MET are divided into two parts. The first goes to constitute the MNATP, and the other is enriched by the anthropological collections of the Jardin des Plantes, which were originally separated in two entities (gallery of anthropology of the Museum National/MET) at the end of the 19th century.

In the history of the collections and from an institutional point of view, the invention of the Musée de l’Homme in the frame of the Museum National, as desired by Paul Rivet and supported by Paul Lemoine (1878-1940), the director of the Muséum National d’Histoire Naturelle at that time, corresponds to the centralization at the Trocadéro of all that concerns the study of man “fossil and modern” (laboratories, galleries, collections, and personnel)⁸ with the exception of the Institut de Paléontologie Humaine.⁹ Thus, the laboratory of anthropology moves to the Trocadéro but remains under the administration of the Muséum National and leaves space for the Gallery of Paleontology at the Jardin des Plantes. For the first time, the natural history of man, developed by the scientists of the Muséum, finds itself separated from the animal and vegetable kingdom of the Jardin des Plantes. In this way, the Musée de l’Homme is much more the heir of the Muséum National than of the Musée d’Ethnographie (which was originally separated from the anthropological collections) and corresponds fundamentally to a partial autonomy, at least physically, of the natural history of man within the Muséum National.

Regarding the collections, the Musée de l’Homme is the recipient of skulls, skeletons, “hair from all the races of the world, series of foetuses, brains from various races or belonging to eminent personalities like Broca, Gambetta, General Faidherbe, Mortillet’s prehistorian, or, inversely, from criminals” (Vallois 1956:26), as well as of the mummies, pathological deformities of the human body, and the busts belonging to the Laboratory of Anthropology of the Jardin des Plantes. Thus, the gallery of “fossil and modern races,” first a gallery of the museum visitor, marks the difference between the new Musée de l’Homme and the old Musée d’Ethnographie du

Trocadéro, presenting in its showcases the skeletons of each “race,” with a map showing the air of repartition and a text giving their principal characteristics (color of the skin, height, hair growth, shape of the head, habitat, religion).

The new Musée de l’Homme is also rich with 200 thousand objects belonging to archeological and ethnographic collections that, in accordance with the precepts of natural history at the end of the 19th century, could not be properly classified before the creation of the MET. However, the Musée de l’Homme does not inherit all the collections of the MET. The ethnography of France is transferred to the Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires in the other wing of the Palais de Chaillot. At the time, this was justified by the necessity to find space for the increased collections, but more recently (Dias 1991) the reason appears to have been the incompatibility in size between the ethnographical collections of French provinces and the “exotic” collections. But, already from the moment of his nomination as director of the Trocadéro in 1928,¹⁰ Paul Rivet wishes to get rid of the collections of metropolitan France (he closes the “Salle de France”) and he encourages George Henri-Rivière,¹¹ at the time assistant director of the MET, in his project of creating a separate museum devoted to this type of collections.¹²

Actually, the two museums, supported by the government of the “Front Populaire,” “twins” as to the date of their creation, the origins of their collections, and their situation in the Palais de Chaillot, do not deliver the same message. The museum on the Passy side (Musée de l’Homme) and the museum on the Paris side (MNATP) correspond to two programs on different levels of the study of the material production of populations that are, at that moment in history, distinct from French inheritance. In fact, the evolutionist and ethnocentric representations of the time do not allow placing the objects representative of French regions on the same plane as those used by the “primitives” of the rest of the world. In France, the “original races” have disappeared and have become “the French nation,” as is taught in schoolbooks and popular scientific publications.¹³

The objects in provenance of French regions and inherited from the MET are a “testimony,” according to an expression of the 19th century and adopted by Paul Rivet, but by changing their institution they become the witness of certain “sociological facts...something alive,” as explained by Rivière (1936:13) when establishing the basis of the future MNATP. In other words, French material culture, in spite of inevitable changes owed to industrialization, is made to “last” and cannot be shown alongside the “primitives” that are expected to “disappear” with the colonization. The first belongs to the world of sociology, the study of a culture and of a national history that can be written in the future sense, whilst the second represents the “archaic” cultures of humanity and have their place in the universal natural history.

This epistemological separation that implies a discontinuity between natural and cultural history (notably with the invention of writing) and makes a division in French heritage (metropolitan French population versus exotic races) legitimates the two different institutions. The Musée de l’Homme, heir to the Musée d’Ethnographie, part of the Muséum National d’Histoire Naturelle since 1928, remains under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of National Education, whilst the French ethnographic collections inherited from the MET pass under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Fine Arts and become part of the Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires.¹⁴

The historical side of France regional cultures is thus recognized, contrary to that of other populations pushed back in the epistemological frame of natural history (man as “creature”), when before the MET had taken them out of this frame and presented man as “creator.” The ethnography in the Passy wing of the Palais de Chaillot has the object to present the universal study of “the civilization of archaic populations” (Communiqué de presse 1936:1) whilst the Paris wing deals with the sociology of French traditional regions that can be preserved in a renewed future. In both cases, ethnography is destined to be the “savior” of the cultural fact represented by the objects collected in the museum (Fabre 1997:3594).

This separation leads the new museum in the Passy wing to become an institution with a universal vocation to represent the natural history of man, but limited in France to the Neolithic age.¹⁵ Thus, and contrary to the publicity in the newspapers of 1938 inviting the visitors of the Musée de l’Homme to “tour the world in two hours,” it is not the cultural and demographic present of the peoples in different continents that is shown but the research in a more or less recent past (according to different geographic zones) in the diversity of races and the originality of their cultural production. In both the anthropology and ethnography galleries are represented the “original” differences, placing every “race” and every “ethnic group” in a sort of mythic “original pure state” prior to colonization.

However, if the Musée de l’Homme excludes the ethnographic collections of French peasantry, it admits, not without a certain ambiguity, those inherited from the MET concerning the peasantry of pre-industrial Europe. Same as at the MNATP, or even at the defunct MET, it develops the notion of “popular arts,” but the presence of these collections in the context of an institution theoretically dedicated to natural history appears more as an “institutional vacuum” than as an epistemological attitude.¹⁶ The “European rural tradition” becomes the heritage of MET that places the time of the “otherness” either before the arrival of colonization or before industrialization.

This way, with the creation of the new museum in the Passy wing of the Trocadéro, it officially focused on the natural history of man and the concept of race. The ethnographic objects from all regions of the world except France seem to return to the status from which they had been rescued by the creation of the Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro and the professionalization of ethnography in the second part of the 1920s.

The acknowledgement by the French anthropologists at the end of the 19th century that “primitive populations” could no longer be considered “original,” the existence of ethnographic missions in the 1930s occasionally in an anthropological context, the methodological observation of the objects collected to differentiate the “typical” object from the “contact” object (Grognet 2005), and the historical research in the so called “primitive” cultures should have taken the “testimony” object out of the archives to show the “enormous progress made by humanity” (Musée d’Ethnographie 1931:5). On the contrary, the concept of the Musée de l’Homme, as part of the natural history of the Musée National d’Histoire Naturelle, confines the ethnographic research to the role of Rivet’s “ethnology,” whose aim is to present a “panorama” (Rivet 1938: 31) of humanity and of the technology of races before their contact with European civilization or the industrial age and “reveals the aesthetic value of nearly all the objects manufactured by hand by the populations who have, or had, kept their identity” (Gallotti 1938).¹⁷

Success of a Museum Built on the Principles of the 19th Century in the Troubled Context of the End of the 1930s

The ethnology developed at the Trocadéro from June 1938 resembles the study of the races carried out since the 19th century at the Muséum National. The Musée de l'Homme is in fact the institution that allows Paul Rivet to develop his scientific project of a science of Man, ethnology, fairly identical to the one called “anthropology” by Armand de Quatrefages de Bréau (1810-1892), holder of the chair of anthropology at the Muséum National since 1855. This project, begun in the second half of the 19th century, finds its consecration at the end of the 1930s, which guarantees its social acceptance, its utility, and finally its legitimacy.

However, this “whole complex of the human sciences” (Communiqué de presse 1936:1) that combines in the tradition of the 19th century ethnography, anthropology, paleontology, prehistory, sociology, linguistics, and study of European folklore is not so easily accepted:

The new concept of the Musée de l'Homme is often criticized. It is accused of putting together totally different sciences. That anthropology is part of natural sciences cannot be denied, contrary to ethnography that belongs to moral sciences like prehistory. Its name shows that it is part of historical sciences, “the reunion” of these three disciplines under the denomination of natural sciences would be to the detriment of these last two. [Vallois 1944:53]

Things have changed since the days in 1938 when the Muséum National was the only reference concerning the study of man. Sociology in particular is no longer an epistemologically weak and institutionally non-existent science. The study of European folklore is carried out by a scientific community independent from the study of nature. Ethnography, that already in 1878 could not quite find its place in the epistemological frame of natural history, is still in the same position. The populations—not the races—studied by sociology from a comparative and historical point of view are not “without a history.” “Primitive” populations are more complex than expected, and the migrations and influences during the course of their history make it impossible to talk of “modern races” for many anthropologists.¹⁸ And the terms of *populations* and *ethnic groups* are more usual, with all they consist of arbitrary on the part of the authors concerned (Amselle and M'Bokolo 1985).

Thus, the Musée de l'Homme, open to the public in 1938, shows an ambiguity on the central notion of “race.” The anthropology proposed by Paul Rivet is refuted by some anthropologists who deny the existence of races and their classification and by those who want to make anthropology a science capable of improving “national races” and “purifying” their “undesirable” elements.¹⁹ However, “racialist anthropology” defended by Paul Rivet is still the dominant current at the end of the 1930s and supports the racial climate of the time (Reynaud-Paligot 2006).

By assembling on the same site the “fossil and actual” races of humanity, the Musée de l'Homme tries to give the same importance to the varieties of human species, showing at the

same time their particular identity that will disappear or that is already lost. “Safe value” against the uprising of nationalism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism in French society (Noiriel 2007) and the “artificial” world projected by industrialization,²⁰ the Musée de l’Homme presents a “world of reconstructed origins” where an appeased physical and cultural diversity is opposed to the otherness resented by the French population at the time.²¹

The Musée de l’Homme, the only scientific authority concerned with the study of the objects of the primitive populations, thus becomes a “memorial to the difference” (L’Estoile 2007) where non-occidental arts have the main role and prove to the world the universalism of France and the confirmation of its colonial policy and its position against racism.

Fearing a “conflict between races and colors” (Chollet 1929), the French government at the end of the 1930s finds a political and social interest in the creation of the Musée de l’Homme that it did not perceive in 1878 when the scientific community, represented by the Société d’Anthropologie of Paris, was demanding an anthropological museum (Bulletins de la Société d’Anthropologie de Paris 1878:495-496).

But, in view of the development of sociological and anthropological sciences at the end of the 19th century, should not the Musée de l’Homme have been created then instead of the Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro? On the contrary, and with regard to the specialization in sciences, should a museum of the cultural history of man (i.e. an ethnographical museum) not have seen the light of day in 1938, as suggests the creation of the MNATP or of the Musée des Colonies following the Colonial Exhibition in 1931? In other words, was the founding concept of the Musée de l’Homme, based on the natural history of man in society (as against the concept of the specialization in sciences) and benefiting from the ideology of the racial question, not already scientifically dated and practically obsolete even before its inauguration?

The “Primitive Arts” and the Second Life of the Musée de l’Homme

In the year 1990, just before the presidential decision to valorize “primitive arts” that is going to change radically its aspect, the Musée de l’Homme exhibits in its galleries the origins of man (prehistory), the biological unity and diversity of the human species (biologic anthropology), and the production and activities of world populations (ethnology) with the exception of France. The permanent galleries still follow the pluridisciplinary “ethnologic” approach wanted by Rivet that gives the Musée du Trocadéro its identity.

However, fifty years after its triumphal inauguration, and at the time when the disengagement of the Ministry of National Education towards the museums it administrates is evident (Héritier-Augé 1991), the press describes the Musée de l’Homme at best as “dusty” (Pierrard 1996:109) and at worst as a “bric-à-brac” (Spiteri 1990), including a “museology that hesitates between the (bad) décor of a comic strip and the back of the attic” (Roux 1995).

These criticisms and expressions, identical to those used for the defunct Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro before the 1930s, seem to reflect a certain museology inertia. During the preceding years (1987, 1992, 1995, 1996), many renovation projects associating prehistory, anthropology,

and ethnology failed to emerge but returning to the history of the institution of the Trocadéro may even allow distinguishing changes—even revolutions—like the renovation of the gallery of anthropology conducted in 1974, which removes the concept of race in the galleries (Grognet 2007).

However, the ethnographic section, the largest of the museum, has never been renovated and has become over the years a “museum inside a museum” with certain small sections being renovated when the opportunity arose (Jamin 1998). It would appear that it is not simply the “crisis of ethnographic object” (Gruenais and Ferry 1990) that is must be criticized, but more the situation of ethnology itself in the context of the Musée de l’Homme.

With the presidential project of “primitive art” in 1996, the Musée de l’Homme tries to define ties between ethnology and a museum independent from the Muséum National, but for which there is no existing scientific background.

But after relinquishing this ambition, to the benefit of the Musée du Quai Branly,²² the problem arises of the exhibition of the prehistoric collections (500 thousand objects) and anthropology collections (30 thousand objects) of the Musée de l’Homme and of the future of the museum.²³

Actually, the possibility of the renovation of the Musée de l’Homme is dependent on the renovation of the Muséum National started in 2001. Since the end of the 1990s, the Ministries of National Education and Research intend to rationalize the administration of this institution created at the Jardin des Plantes in 1793. A temporary administrator is nominated in 1999. To assist him in his task, following official reports on the management and scientific activities of the museum, Claude Allègre, Minister for National Education, sets up in January of 2000 a committee presided by Guy Ourisson, president of the Academy of Science.²⁴ The “Ourisson Report” proposes to redefine the strategic orientation of the Muséum by the organization of research around departments. The Report also takes into consideration the atypical situation of the Musée de l’Homme as it deals with ethnology, “a discipline outside the science of nature and life” (Ourisson 2001:29). The institution of the Trocadéro “whose geographic situation at the Palais du Trocadéro and its title (Musée de l’Homme) do not justify in the eyes of the public its unification with the Muséum” (Ourisson 2001:29) is seen as a declining institution in its ethnological research:

Whilst the Musée de l’Homme has known between the 1930s and the 1970s an important development in the field of ethnological research, it must be recognized that since the cessation of the help of the CNRS to ethnological research in 1987, its aura has inevitably declined. [Ourisson 2001:29]

In order to remedy this situation, the members of the Committee recommend a “re-foundation” of the Musée de l’Homme in order to make it part of the “great project of the MNHN” where “human ecology and the place of Man within nature” (Ourisson 2001:30) will have their place.

Following the “Ourisson Report,” the Muséum National d’Histoire Naturelle is endowed with new statutes (decree of the 3rd of October 2001). The previous organization that associated a general scientific direction to a tradition of self-management by the professors in charge of each

laboratory becomes obsolete.²⁵ It is replaced, in the imitation of what has been done by the Ministry of Culture for other public institutions, by the management by a general director and an administrative board, which includes the president of the Muséum and the scientific committee.

With the nomination of Bernard Chevassus-au-Louis as the first president of the Muséum on the 14th of January, 2002, the reform of the Muséum can start. In June 2002, the 26 scientific laboratories disappear and are replaced by seven departments of teaching and research²⁶ and three educational and cultural departments.²⁷ Thus, the “Musée de l’Homme” department becomes officially an exhibition gallery and a site for the diffusion of culture.

With this reorganization of the Muséum that separates the functions of research and exhibition, the cultural department of the Musée du Trocadéro becomes the showcase for the scientific department, “Men, Nature and Societies.” It covers at first all the research of the Muséum concerning man. This research domain of was that associated with the chair, namely, “the ethnology of fossil and modern man,” a conception carried forward from 1936 when ethnology was still a field of natural history.

After the re-election of Jacques Chirac, the new ministers for Research (Claudie Haigneré), National Education (Luc Ferry), and Ecology (Roselyne Bachelot) ask Bertrand Pierre Galey, the nominated general director of the Muséum National d’Histoire Naturelle in October 2002, to “give special attention to the definition and the realization of the new Musée de l’Homme, in harmony with the progression of the construction of the Musée du Quai Branly” (extract of the “lettre de mission,” Roméro 2002), in keeping with the structure of the global renovation of the Muséum.

Bertrand-Pierre Galey wishes to reassure the personnel concerning the future of the Palais de Chaillot and declares “he has not been nominated to destroy the Musée de l’Homme, but to renovate it...President Chirac knows that the Musée du Quai Branly cannot account for the whole of ethnology, and he wants a Musée de l’Homme” (Huet 2003).

However, on the 13th of January, even before the beginning of the transfer of the reserves to the Quai Branly, a press release from the Musée de l’Homme announces the “definitive closing” of the “African gallery” for the 2nd of March, 2003, and gives a calendar of the closing of the other galleries of ethnology (10th of March for Oceania, 16th of March for the Americas, 20th of April for Asia).

For the press this means the “end of the era of the Musée de l’Homme” or even “the end,” as it has happened for the MNAAO at the Porte Dorée, that has closed its doors on the 31st of January, 2003.

Thus, the announcement of the nomination of the prehistorian Jean-Pierre Mohen at the head of a renovation committee is perceived by the personnel of the museum as a “smoke screen” destined to mask the scheduled end of the Trocadéro. And, on Monday, the 3rd of March, 2003, the personnel of the museum decides to strike.

However, the work on the renovation of the Musée de l'Homme starts, and at the beginning of 2004, the publication of the book by Jean-Pierre Mohen (2004), *Le Nouveau Musée de l'Homme*, based on the reflections of the committee, confirms that the project of renovation is well under way, in spite of the opposition of its personnel to the transfer of the collections to the Quai Branly and of declarations by the press that the museum was closing down.

According to this publication, which fixes the basic principles of the “Nouveau Musée de l'Homme,” it will remain a science museum but will also “become a museum of society open to contemporary issues: the evolution of Man in a radically new environment” (Mohen 2004:7). The “new” museum will thus become an extension of the Grande Galerie d'Evolution of the Jardin des Plantes, where man is presented as the agent of evolution: “the Musée de l'Homme, thanks to its connection both with history and environment, complements other national museums that may deal with similar subjects from different angles, like the Palais de la Découverte, the Cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie, the Musée des Arts et Métiers, the Musée des Antiquités Nationales, and the Musée du Quai Branly” (Mohen 2004:8).

The new museum will be able to fill the institutional gap existing in French museums concerning the relation between Homme and Nature, through the unifying concept of “the natural and cultural history of the human species,” as described by Buffon. The general orientation of the future project is to present the origins of man, his natural history, and at the same time show the cultural history of nature influenced by man's presence.

A New Museum Open to the Political Preoccupations of the Time

As specified in the government letter of mission dated the 20th of March, 2003, addressed to Jean-Pierre Mohen, the new museum's role will be to transmit a political and civic message:

You will specify the means of information and interest of the public according to the vocation of the site: to pursue the knowledge and the awareness of the frailty of humanity and its environment and its collective responsibility towards nature, in a long term perspective, notably through the example of ancient and primitive societies. [Ferry et al 2003 quoted in Mohen 2004:139-140]

Thus, ecology, with the disappearance of biodiversity, the “decline of the natural to the profit of the artificial,” the “sustainable development,” and “the endangered natural resources” (Mohen 2004:123), in short, the future of man “on and within the planet” (Mohen 2004:57), will join the old message about the unity of the human species “in the perspective of a civic responsibility” (Ferry et al 2003 quoted in Mohen 2004:58).

The new message of the museum is the study of man's origins and its “actual concern when faced with the responsibility of its actions” (Mohen 2004:61), with the contribution of “primitive populations” to illustrate “the beauty and fragility of humanity” (Mohen 2004:112).

This reference to “ancient and primitive societies” seems take its place in an historical context of man and his environment, where the first human populations (limited in number) are shown to

protect the ecosystem, whilst modern industrial man destroys it (Mohen 2004:112). Thus, the world has become artificial (megapoles) and the question arises of the survival of the species in such an irremediably destabilized environment. Can man adapt himself to the world he has created (Toussaint 2012)?

The “new Musée de l’Homme” thus matches the political preoccupations of the time and defines its new social role. The Musée de l’Homme of 1938 concretized the association of the institutional and scientific development of ethnology—“a science with a conscience” (Jamin 1988) proposed by Rivet—and the universal humanism and antiracism defended by the State at that time in a climate of mounting xenophobia. At a time when the ecological question becomes a political and economic issue, the new project defined by the ministerial orientation states, as the principal objective of the scientific community, to make the citizens face their responsibility regarding the problems of the environment due to the development of modern industry. And over a century after the Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro, faced by a globalization that tends to destroy the cultural diversity of humanity, the new Musée de l’Homme seems to return to the humanism that had prevailed at the time of colonialism at the beginning of the 20th century and that had contributed in part to its creation in 1938.

Beyond the Apparent Metamorphoses: The Failed Rendez-vous of the Trocadéro

Looking at the many metamorphoses of the Trocadéro, we observe that approximately every sixty years (1878, 1937, 1996), the national institutions in charge of the “ethnographic” collections undergo reorganization and redefinition. With the creation of the Musée du Quai Branly and the renovation of the Musée de l’Homme around the natural history of man, France disposes of an institution similar to the one of 130 years ago, with, on one side, the cultural productions of the populations and, on the other side, the natural history of humanity. Thus, the Musée de l’Homme inaugurated in 1938 seems to find itself in an institutional deadlock.²⁸

The successive creations of the Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro, of the Musée de l’Homme, and the Musée du Quai Branly are evidence of the constant division of national heritage and of the permanent divergence between science, the institutionalization of the national heritage, and the political aspirations of the different governments of the time.

There seems to be a recurrent cycle of “failed rendez-vous” between the museum, its social ambitions, and science. In fact, even if since the end of the 19th century the ethnographic collections belonging to the State seem to be constantly displaced, this is more due to ideological and political reasons than to epistemological ones. Since the beginning, the Parisian ethnographical or anthropological museums are created at particular moments to justify the republican message or restore the balance between public opinion and the position of the state. The Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro at the end of the 19th century becomes a place of storage where are kept out of sight the memories of the “mission of civilization” of the State in its colonies and the unification of the Nation over the regional identities.

The Musée de l’Homme and its antiracist views emerge at a time marked by a racial paradigm, the rise of fascism in Europe, and the upsurge of xenophobia in metropolitan France.²⁹ In the

1990s, at a time when immigration (a recurrent “problem” since the 1980s) becomes a major electoral question and when the republican model fears an American style communitarian model, the French government decides on the creation of the Musée du Quai Branly in order to give a new dignity to foreign cultures through a representation of their art. At the same time, following the “choc” of the 2002 elections,³⁰ it announces the creation of a “Center for the History and Memory of Immigration in France.”³¹

Also, at a time when public opinion is hesitant regarding the European constitution, the State promotes the project of a Musée National de l’Europe et de la Méditerranée (MUCEM) that will house the collections of the Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires and the European collections of the Musée de l’Homme, excluded from the Quai Branly. At the same time, the redefinition of the Musée de l’Homme that becomes a cultural department institutionally linked to the Muséum National, seems to encourage this institution to perform nostalgic research for the authenticity of “primitive populations” who lived in harmony with nature, and for the preservation of their cultural diversity, confronted with a technological world against nature that threatens the survival of the human species. Also, this programmed museum of the natural history of man risks falling into the eternal problem of the dichotomies between nature, culture, purity, and adulterated “gordian knot” (Morin 1973) of occidental thought, that, in the end, opposes the occidental populations to the “others.”

These metamorphoses of the Trocadéro and the musical chairs of the national collections seem to follow a plan as if the museums responsible for national heritage were now asked to settle—even “purify” (Price 2007:128)—the internal problems of the Nation, carefully leaving out the colonial history of France “unwanted” by the national museums. This omission renders problematic the inscription in common national heritage of the objects coming from nations that have since become foreign. “The museum of the Other,” as announced by Stéphane Martin in his presentation of the Musée du Quai Branly, results in the denial of the double dimension of the collections that are the heritage of the long time relations between metropolitan France and its colonies.

These objects, part of France’s heritage, but not represented as such, become, once rid of their negative colonial past, the “representatives” of “traditional” practices, thus underlying their “otherness” and the fundamental cultural dichotomy between us and the others.

In spite of a certain ambiguity, the Quai Branly’s approach to the fine arts and the universal history of art must be seen as a project of unification between the populations. Heir to the universalist tradition of the national museums, it proposes an alternative to the difficulties that the scientific republican museums have to face—similar to the ones encountered by the Trocadéro—to represent at the same time the biological unity and the cultural diversity of humanity. But has the representation of “unity” or “national cohesion” not also been the “problem” of the Republic since the end of the 19th century?

The series of missed rendez-vous between the Musée de l’Homme and anthropological science makes us think of a certain structural fatality of communication between the institutions owing to the political issues of the various governments.

However, if the history of the ethnographical or anthropological museums of the Trocadéro and of the Quai Branly is subject to recurrent influences, the actual mechanism has considerably evolved since the 19th century. Initially, politicians decided on the creation of an institution based on existing collections and nominated the scientists who defined its contents and became its directors. Today—as it has happened with the Quai Branly, the overhaul of the Muséum National, and the renovation of the Musée de l’Homme—the decision to create or redefine institutions still lies with the governments who also determine the orientation of the presentation before even considering the collections or consulting the scientific community.³² The directors named at the head of the institutions do not belong to the scientific community or museum curators but are *enarques* belonging to the government’s elite of the time.³³

At the same time the State puts officials issued from the administration at the head of the Nations’ museums, arguing that they will be better administrators, it encourages the reform of the cultural and scientific institutions (on the lines of what has already been decided for the institutions under the authority of the Ministry of Culture and Communication), making them responsible for the partial funding of their budget. The national museums thus become public institutions (EPA) and on top of the State subventions have to find other sources of income (admission fees, sponsoring, partnership with business enterprises, etc.). In other words, the “museum-laboratory,” scientific and pedagogic (but not much appreciated by the public), must be replaced by a more “seductive” cultural institution that has to tend towards self-financing.

At the moment when the political and cultural functions of the museum seem to merge more and more and take place over its scientific activity (that thus becomes the caution of the other two), the management of the collections and organization of the exhibitions is handed over to professionals issued by the National Heritage Institution. In this way the research is put to “practical use” and loses its prevailing role.

For a long time the scientific community had asked itself what the Trocadéro could contribute to science but the patrimonial and cultural new logic inverts the question. The ethnographical museums disappear (Turgeon and Dubuc 2002; Hainard 2006), or rather they undergo a metamorphosis and become art and history museums (i.e. national heritage museums).

It is therefore clear that, since their creation, French anthropological museums have promoted a vision of the Occident versus the rest of the world based on the difference that restrains the museum object to the role of witness or vestige of ancient and traditional practices already lost or on the way to disappearing. The separation becomes ineluctable between the “museum conservatoire” dedicated to the “traditional object,” representative of reputed unchanging cultures, and the anthropological approach that entails a constant observation of the various identities and refutes the idea of “cultural purity.” Does this mean the end of the relation between anthropology and the museum? Not necessarily. The shared study of objects or subjects representative of mirror identities and mutual traditions could be today a link between anthropology and museum.

The recent history of the main Parisian institutions once representative of the discipline shows the need to redefine the relationship between museum and anthropology, or even the relationship between anthropology and civic society, no longer based on a scientific approach, but on a

system of alliances and strategies destined to promote a new visibility of its social role. At the moment when, according to the expression of Marc Augé (1994), “the consciousness of the others” becomes exacerbated or lost, and when a geneticist—Axel Kahn—reminds public opinion that the family is a social construction, will it be possible for ethnology to get rid of its image of the science of “traditional societies” and impose its expertise in this field?³⁴ Will museums then become the driving force that will allow science to show its true colors? What if the future of the discipline could find its place in today’s museums?

Notes

In producing this translation, *Museum Anthropology Review* has preserved this work’s original citation format. References are included in this notes section but also given inline in the body of the text.

1. Notably, Arnold Van Gennep in 1907 and Marcel Mauss in 1913.
2. Born on the 7th of May, 1876, at Wasigny (Ardennes), Paul Rivet is a pupil at the Ecole du Service de Santé Militaire de Lyon (Health Service for the Military) when he accompanies a geodesic mission of the army geographic services in Ecuador between 1901 and 1906. On his return, he joins the laboratory of anthropology of the Muséum National d’Histoire Naturelle headed by Ernest-Théodore Hamy. He becomes the assistant of René Verneau in 1909 and in 1928 he takes over the chair of anthropology of the Muséum National. He obtains the unification of the Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro with the Muséum National, and, with the assistance of Georges Henri Rivière, totally re-organizes the museum that becomes the Musée de l’Homme in June 1938. See Laurière (2008).
3. “The people must have the possession of all that is the universal property of humankind. Science, and art and objects relating to these disciplines are the instruments of Reason and Freedom and must be legally returned to them” (Deloche 1987:39).
4. The claim that the origins of French populations go back to the Celts and Gaul is promoted during the Revolution at the creation of the French nation-state that must regroup the distinctive regional identities into one collective identity and establish its own authority.
5. The European rural world is not included.
6. The Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro is inaugurated in 1882 but is not quite completed before the 20th of April, 1884, when it opens a section of European ethnography and another of French ethnography. From that moment “otherness” is displayed along a chronological more than a geographical axe and the presentation shows a panorama of different civilizations, starting with the more “primitive,” those already disappeared, less industrialized, or in danger of disappearance.
7. Already in 1889, Armand Landrin, director of the MET, had tried to create a “Musée des Provinces de France” (Museum of the French Provinces) that had not been favorably accepted by the State (Jamin 1985; Fabre 1997).

8. In 1936, Paul Rivet changes the name of the chair of “anthropology” of the Muséum National into the “chair of the ethnology of fossil and modern man.”

9. Monegasque enclave founded by Albert I of Monaco.

10. The same year, Paul Rivet gets the MET placed under the administrative supervision of the Muséum National. The director of the laboratory of anthropology of the Muséum thus becomes the director of the Musée du Trocadéro.

11. Born in Paris on the 7th of June, 1897, George Henri Rivière, a pianist, administrator of private collections, and an art critic, becomes assistant director of the Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro in 1928, after meeting Paul Rivet at the occasion of the exhibition at the Pavillon Marsan of the “Ancient arts of America.” He takes an important role in the reorganization of the Trocadéro. The 1937 International Exhibition of Art and Techniques in Paris becomes the occasion for him to ratify the decision to create a “French Museum” that will become the Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires in the Passy Wing of the Palais de Chaillot that he will direct until 1967, two years before its transfer to the Bois de Boulogne. He is both a curator and a museologist. Director of ICOM from 1958 to 1964, he promotes modern museology and is prominent in the creation of the “ecomusées” in the 1970s. He dies at Louveciennes (Yvelines) on the 24th of March, 1985. See Gorgus (2003).

12. “When the Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro became part of the Muséum and I its director, I was authorized to transfer to the Musée du Folklore Français whose creation I had solicited, the very precious ethnographic collections owned by the Musée” (Rivière 1931:2).

13. “A French ‘race’ does not exist, same as English, Italian, German or American. French soil has been, since thousand years ago, a melting pot for the different elements of multiple races, most of them already mixed” (Laurière 2008).

14. The 3rd of January, 1936, a department of Folk Arts is created at the Musées de France. At the instigation of Georges-Henri Rivière, the old folklore collections become the recognition of the people cultures, within a museum of the people for the people (Christophe 2003).

15. The exhibition of prehistoric France at the Trocadéro implies the previous establishment of the Museum of National Antiquities at the Château de Saint Germain-en-Laye.

16. The Musée de l’Homme presents in its geographic showcases only “native” civilizations: North America is seen uniquely through the Indians; European immigrants and descendants of African slaves are excluded.

17. See Rivet’s presentation of “what is ethnology” (1936:7’06-1).

18. Franz Boas, Etienne Patte, and Henri Neuville.

19. For example, Georges Montandon and René Martial.

20. “Exoticism is in fashion, probably due to a certain weariness about the uniformity of our civilizations, or the manufacture of series of everything that affects our habits and tastes and encourages us to look amongst the ‘savages’ to compensate the banality around us...If we could return to the simplicity of our origins, we would be happier” (Thévenin 1933:5).
21. In the same way, the project of Georges Henri Rivière of a museum based on the presentation of “the French people” meets with a favorable reception at the time of the “Front Populaire,” whilst the proposition of Armand Landrin of a “museum of the French provinces” was not accepted at the end of the 19th century.
22. In order to “definitively put an end to evolutionism and represent a ‘different world’ at the time of the impact with our civilization” (Desveaux in Roux 2002)
23. Worried by this situation, the personnel of the Musée go on strike in November 2001, at the moment when the first collections must leave for their new destination.
24. Report of the “Cour des comptes” for the years 1985-1994, National Committee of Evaluation, June 1996; joint report of the Inspection Générale des Finances et the Inspection Générale of the administration of the Ministère d’Education Nationale in 1999.
25. The decree of the 1793 Convention, which founded the Muséum National, specified that it should be directed collectively by the professors responsible for their laboratories. The 1985 statutes replace them with a scientific committee and an administrative committee.
26. “Ecologie and biodiversity,” “Systematics and evolution,” “Regulations, development and molecular diversity,” “Men, Nature, Societies,” “History of the Earth,” “Environment and earth populations,” and “Environment and sea populations.”
27. “Galleries of the Jardin des Plantes,” “Zoological park and Botanical Gardens,” and “Musée de l’Homme.”
28. With the separation of the library into two parts—prehistory and anthropology at the Trocadéro and ethnology at the Quai Branly—the situation is back at before 1938.
29. The Museum of Colonies was also created to justify colonial operation, unpopular in metropolitan France.
30. Presence of Jean-Marie Le Pen, president of the Front National party, for the second turn of presidential elections.
31. Now the Cité Nationale de l’Histoire de l’Immigration.
32. The existing collections of the Musée de l’Homme, in provenance from the old laboratories of prehistory and physical anthropology, are not sufficient to develop this orientation. Equally,

the Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration, inaugurated in 2007, has been created without any existing collections, an unprecedented fact in the history of museums in France.

33. The *enarques* who have been nominated directors of these institutions have all before held political appointments: Stéphane Martin for the Quai Branly, Bertrand-Pierre Galey for the Muséum National, Bruno Suzzarelli for the MuCEM, and Jacques Toubon for the Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration.

34. In September 2007 at the time of the proposition of a law on the use of DNA tests to prove filiation on the occasion of the entry and settlement of families.

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Fabrice Grognet is an ethnologist and was in charge of the ethnographic collections and the Galerie des dons in the museum of the Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration from 2006 to 2011. He was also the project manager for the permanent exposition of the new Musée de l'Homme until 2011. He is the author of many works on the history of anthropology and of French museums.

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