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Public reforms and professional autonomy: How segments may play in

Léonie HÉNAUT
Frédéric POULARD

Abstract. This socio-historical study of museum curators in France since 1945 shows that not only is professional independence negotiated between professional associations and the state, it is also determined by interactions between intraprofessional segments. Struggles between local and national museum curators—respectively, “territorial” civil servants and “state” civil servants—actually increased the impact of collective curator action on the course of public decision-making in the 1990s. The group of museum curators became more unified in terms of status and careers, and extended its prerogatives. How segments “played in” to this reform process is itself a symbolic process in the interactionist sense. The article both contributes to recent research on relations between professions and civil service and public administration reform and, in the conclusion, argues for reconsidering the classic antinomy between profession unity and diversity.

Keywords. PROFESSION – PROFESSIONAL GROUP – THE STATE – SEGMENTATION – INTEREST GROUP – REFORM – STATE CIVIL SERVICE

A group that would be the quintessentially centripetal and harmonious pure ‘union’ is not only empirically unreal but would also manifest no real life process.
(Simmel [1908] 2009, 228)

Studying the effects of implementation of New Public Management reforms on professionals operating in the public sector led sociologists to break from an understanding of professional groups and the state as strictly unified and opposed entities (Bezès et al. 2011) and to pull closer to Andrew Abbott’s ecological approach to professions (1988, 2003). In the wake of those studies, this article examines the role of internal divisions in the evolution of professional groups subjected to multiple exogenous reforms. In addition to the disruption caused by changes to the organizations they work in—and new public management regulations are only one source of such changes—professionals working in France’s public sector are often disrupted by public administration system restructuring (Le Lidec 2007) and changes in public-sector employment management (Biland 2012).

Studies of relations between government reforms and professional groups seldom take into account existing internal divisions; when they do, it is only to show the differentiated impact of reforms within a profession¹ or to point up the emergence of new actor categories.² But as was

noted quite early on by Rue Bucher and Anselm Strauss (1961), who forged the widely used concepts of intraprofessional segments and segmentation,³ profession dynamics are constantly driven by internal tensions and struggles that modify a group’s contours and composition and actively work to shape its future. Bucher and Strauss’s program for studying what segmentation does to professional groups has not really been taken up; and the segment and segmentation concepts have been used mainly to describe professional group heterogeneity in terms of gender, areas of expertise, work environments, training, types of clientele, employment statuses, and generations.⁴

The present in-depth socio-historical study of museum curators in France (*conservateurs de musées*) since 1945 (Box 1) aims to improve our understanding of how tense relations between intraprofessional segments may inflect government decisions affecting group member autonomy. We focus on two manifestations of such autonomy: specific legislated civil service protections and statuses, or “institutional autonomy”; and a group’s ability to define its own tasks and activities, or “professional autonomy” (Boussard et al. 2010).⁵ We show that although group statuses and prerogatives in France are indeed negotiated face-to-face by the group and the state, they are also determined by what is going on within the group between the segments that comprise it and that may find themselves in conflict.

The activity of museum curators was first codified and organized in France in the late nineteenth century, with the most important changes made gradually over the twentieth century (Poulard 2010). The dynamics of this group—a profession constituted by the French state to take charge of sovereign state missions—are characterized by multiple internal divisions along the lines of civil service status, generation, and specific themes (Octobre 1999), lines that became intertwined and offer a view of quite different, even antagonistic notions of what cultural policy can or should be (Poulard 2010). The divisions and struggles between the country’s national-level “state curators” and their “territorial”—that is, local-level—counterparts were particularly intense in the 1980s, despite the fact that civil service statuses⁶ were undergoing a thorough revision at the time that would necessarily affect both segments. And yet, even though the principle that the two *fonctions publiques* (public functions)—national and local—had to be *paritaire* and comparable came under threat from the new political majority that took over the government in 1986, French curators obtained an improvement in and harmonization of their statuses, the extraordinary creation of a shared training school, and confirmation of their vocation to run museums. Clearly, then, *this profession emerged stronger and more unified from the ordeal of reform*, at a time of fierce intraprofessional battles that bore directly on the aforementioned issues.

³ Bucher and Strauss’s article had a profound impact on French sociology of professions, which, in the 1990s, took the direction of non-normative studies whose primary concern was to document professional groups and practice diversity and demonstrate that professional autonomy was unstable and negotiated (Dubar 2003; Demazière and Gadéa 2009).

⁴ Cases in point are surgeons (Bercot et al. 2011), court bailiffs (Mathieu-Fritz 2005), and museum curators (Octobre 1999).

⁵ We do not discuss a third manifestation of professional autonomy: discretionary power in the execution of daily work, or what is known as “work autonomy,” i.e., freedom to do something other than prescribed work.

⁶ [All public museum curators in France are civil servants of one type or another—Trans.]

¹ For example, the differentiated impact on academics in France caused by the 2009 law on university autonomy (Bezès et al. 2011).

² For example, the emergence of new actors among general practitioners in England, where recent health system reforms led to the emergence of a new administrative elite (Saks 2015).

Box 1. — *Methodology*

The article draws primarily on documentary sources. For the 1960s and 1970s, a period marked by rising demands from local curators, we consulted public archives of the École du Louvre as well as private archives on the activity of particular curators within the Socialist Party's National Secretariat for Cultural Policy (*Secrétariat National à l'Action Culturelle* or SNAC).

For the 1980s and 1990s, a period of intense debate around the creation of a national heritage preservation training school and tough negotiations on civil service statuses, we systematically examined the journal of the group's professional association, the General Association of Curators of France's Public Collections (*Association Générale des Conservateurs des Collections Publiques de France*; hereafter AGCCPF or the Association), paying particular attention to editorials and reports on general assemblies and taskforce meetings. We later enhanced this corpus through analysis of Association archives, recently filed at the Archives Nationales site at Pierrefitte-sur-Seine. The archives include both correspondence between the Association chair and his or her interlocutors at the Ministry of Culture and between the chair and Association members and local section heads, exchanges that offer insight not only into internal operations and routine work but also more urgent Association responses to state reform plans as they were being developed. Among these private archives we also discovered AGCCPF member directories from 1960 on, which we processed statistically to capture group morphology (see Table 1 below).

Last, we studied Ministry of Culture and Communication archives (from the minister's cabinet, the ministry's General Administration and Cultural Environment Department, and the Department of French Museums) along with Interior Ministry cabinet archives. We also consulted all material on reforms affecting museum curators and related groups, including correspondence from curator associations other than the AGCCPF.

We had already conducted in-depth interviews with sixty curators, half from national museums and half from local ones, as part of our doctoral theses and postdoctoral research. Those respondents included representatives and active members of AGCCPF and other professional associations, as well as curators who had at one point in their careers held positions of responsibility in state administrations or training schools. We also observed some of those respondents in their workplaces, associative bodies, and at some meetings. While we have not used those ethnographic materials directly in this article, they enabled us to grasp the importance that curators in France attach to status differences—a dimension that to this day has not been studied in any depth by researchers interested in this group. Moreover, having already interviewed protagonists of certain events made it easier to interpret archives around those events.

The history of museum curators in France therefore calls into question the presumed antinomy between profession unity and diversity, a notion central to debates between proponents of functionalist approaches to professions and those in favor of an interactionist approach (Chapoulie 1973; Dubar and Tripiier 1998; Champy 2009). Functionalists portray “professions” [in English in the text]—that is, professional groups that enjoy considerable autonomy because they are assumed to perform particularly important functions in society and are therefore distinct from other groups, as opposed to persons engaged in “occupations” [in English in the text]—as communities of

professionals who share the same values and preoccupations (Goode 1957). Interactionists, meanwhile, taking their cue from Bucher and Strauss, criticize this irenic vision of unity, arguing that every profession is run through with divergences and tensions. The interactionist vision counters the functionalist one by depriving it of a foundation for its claim that professional and occupational activities differ such that the former are superior to the latter. However, an interactionist approach that also implies systematically denying the consistency of professions and an inability to identify what unifies them, however fragile or controversial, impedes understanding professional dynamics. Together with and in response to authors who have recently stressed the need to reconcile these two antagonistic readings by way of in-depth case studies (Champy 2011; Ollivier 2012), we aim here to open up new avenues for studying and capturing profession unity and understanding professions' abilities to negotiate with the state.

In our first section, we retrace the history of French museum curators in terms of segmentation by their official civil servant statuses, showing how, in the 1970s and 1980s, the initial, heteronomous dividing line between local curators and their state counterparts belonging to the *corps d'État* gave rise to an intense agonistic struggle. In the second section, we show how intraprofessional battles not only did not weaken the profession's capacity for collective action but actually inflected public decision-making in the early 1990s that would affect the profession as a whole, thereby leading to status and professional training unification for curators in the two *fonctions publiques* (national and local). Analysis of interactions within the group and between various group representatives and their many distinct state interlocutors brings to light how segments and their divergences played into reform negotiations. We conclude with a discussion of what this case study teaches us about analysis of professions.

Segmentation based on official civil service statuses: A new history of museum curators

In her pioneering research on museum curators in France, Sylvie Octobre (1999, 2001) offers an invaluable portrait of the profession in the mid-1990s. At the time, France had approximately a thousand curators working in slightly over 1,200 state-recognized museums, most of them in the public sector.⁷ The official mission of curators is to enhance, study, preserve, and promote the collections they are in charge of; they may also be called upon to run their museums. With a few exceptions that we will return to below, curators working in state-owned museums are members of the *corps d'État* and therefore “state” civil servants, whereas curators working for or running museums officially overseen by local governments are local civil servants (*fonctionnaires territoriaux*). In the mid-1990s, the two groups represented, respectively, 24% and 70% of active museum curators (Octobre 1999); the remaining 6% were working either contractually or on a volunteer basis.⁸ Of curators working in 1995, 57% were women; 55% were under 40; and the younger generations had higher educational attainment than their predecessors: 90% of museum curators who entered the profession after 1986 had the French equivalent of a Master's or the more advanced DEA [*diplôme d'études approfondies*] as against 30% of those who started between 1966 and 1975, a finding that led Octobre (2001, 366) to conclude that “the modal profile of the museum curator suggests a feminized profession whose members are relatively young and highly educated.”

⁷ The corresponding figure in the 1960s was 430 curators: in thirty years' time their number had more than doubled.

⁸ Information on local curator numbers before this period is disparate and unreliable because in the 1970s not all of them had been recognized—and therefore counted—by the state.

Drawing explicitly on the interactionist concepts of segments and segmentation, Octobre observed that a range of different museum curator communities defined by practices and values began to emerge in the 1980s, communities defined by generation and specialization, particularly in connection with the development of networks around contemporary art and ecomuseums. This led her to the conclusion that “museum curators are not a unified profession” (Octobre 1999, 381). However, her purpose in exposing curator diversity seems to have been to qualify the functionalist account of this group’s professionalization, which, as she saw it, involved gradual, hard-won acquisition of “professional unity (training programs, national and regional competitive qualifying examinations, official statuses, missions)” (371). However, her account of professional unity achieved despite fragmentation factors is only tenable because she says nothing of segmentation along the line of official status. She does not seem to have realized that the laws defining particular civil service jobs, and how long-standing and fixed those laws are, might be a source of tension between professional communities. In this first section, we draw on entirely new morphological data from AGCCPF member directories (Box 2) to show that the history of museum curators in France deserves to be examined further, and analyzed this time through the prism of segmentation based on legislated civil servant statuses.

Box 2. — AGCCPF member directories (1960-2016)

Founded in 1922, the AGCCPF (*Association Générale des Conservateurs des Collections Publiques de France*: General Association of Curators of France’s Public Collections) is the oldest, largest, and most diverse professional organization for museum curators. In consulting the Association’s archives, we discovered member directories from 1960, 1969, 1983, and 1990. We had all directory information on individuals entered into a database and statistically processed. We then added information recorded by the Association in 1999⁹ and in member files from 2008 to 2016.¹⁰ The resulting seven-observation time series enabled us to capture how Association membership and composition evolved from 1960 to the present (Table 2).

The directories and files provide information on sex (determined on the basis of first name), place of work, whether the member was active or honorary, job title (director, inspector, assistant director, assistant, acting director, deputy director, librarian, etc.), and the status of the curator’s main job site (municipal museum, national museum overseen by either the Culture or National Education Ministry, central administration, library, etc.). For the first years, we were also able to learn members’ academic titles (PhD equivalent, *agrégé* [qualified to teach at the *lycée* level], archivist-paleographer, École du Louvre higher education graduate), any decorations they may have received (Orders of the Legion of Honor and/or Arts and Letters), as well as their seniority in the profession and how long they had or have belonged to the association. For all the years except 1999, we also know who sat on the Association’s administrative board (*conseil d’administration*; hereafter CA).

There are two limitations to member directory data. First, data quality depends on how carefully member files were kept and whether or not directories were checked and any lapsed member names removed before printing. Some listed individuals had not paid their Association dues; others had retired without informing the Association; still others may have died. What we can be sure of, however, is that all those listed had paid their dues at least once in the preceding years. And there is no reason for data quality to vary by member category, so while the numbers cited here should be handled with caution we can assume that member distribution is relatively accurate. The second limitation has to do with category consistency over time. Some institutions and position categories may have changed or disappeared altogether, and particular museums or other institutions may have changed category. As our only concern was to capture general trends, we took the liberty of adjusting and grouping components to harmonize the series.

Heteronomous segmentation: Museum organization and professional stratification

The civil servant status-based segmentation that structures the museum curator profession in France is heteronomous in the sense that it results from external differentiation:¹¹ in this case, differentiation introduced by the state through its “organization” of museums that manage public collections. The profession was initially segmented by the decree of March 6, 1874, on national museum organization. Once the missions of public museum curators had been ratified, their professional training was systematized, most notably by the founding in 1885 of the École du Louvre. The most important stipulation, however, was that national museum curators, recruited through a nationwide competitive examination, would belong to the *corps d’État*: they would be state civil servants. Immediately after World War II, a government order of July 13, 1945, temporarily organized fine arts museums. Later, the state ranked “territorial” (local-level) museums in three categories by the historical and esthetic importance of their collections, as follows: local museums to which Napoleon and his minister, Chaptal had loaned works of art (*depôts d’État*) in 1801 or later, or that had other works of particularly high value, were designated “listed museums” and were to be run by state civil servants; other local museums recognized by the state were designated “controlled museums” and were subdivided into first- and second-category institutions by the value of their collections.¹² It was also decided in 1945 that “controlled museum” curator positions would be regulated by the Ministry of Culture’s Department of French Museums (*Direction des Musées de France*; hereafter DMF).¹³ But this legislated framework only partially determined how they might operate. In fact, many “territorial” curator positions were filled by local governments as they saw fit, and their recruits did not necessarily figure on the DMF’s “qualified” list and had not necessarily trained at the École du Louvre.

¹¹ Florent Champy (2009) distinguishes “heteronomous segmentation,” due to differentiation in the demands made of the profession, from “organic segmentation,” related to task specialization, and “agonistic segmentation,” wherein members of a single profession develop different conceptions of their work and the different “segments” confront one another, each acting to impose its view as the legitimate one.

¹² In the 1960s there were slightly over 30 national museums, 30 listed museums, and approximately 825 controlled museums, 40 of them first-category.

¹³ However, in contrast to local government-regulated jobs, municipal museum curator positions were regulated by France’s central state administration, meaning that the nature, number, and regime of these jobs were partially determined by the overseeing ministry, either the Culture or National Education Ministry (Ortiz 1992).

⁹ See AN [Archives Nationales] 20070141-51, in which the AGCCPF chair reports on an in-house statistical study of the Association’s 1999 member list.

¹⁰ Our thanks to the AGCCPF for its cooperation; specifically, to former Association chair Éric Blanchegorge, who authorized us to consult the archives at Pierrefitte and transmitted member files to us, and Carl Jubineau for his explanations on Association directories.

Organizing museums into four categories this way—national, “listed,” first and second “controlled” museums—stratified the profession. The intraprofessional hierarchy can be apprehended through salary levels and career advancement opportunities: first-category “controlled museum” curators were higher on the pay scale than nearly all of their counterparts at second-category museums but lower than state “listed museum” curators. The status division between state and local curators became firmer in the 1960s. The first set—regardless of whether they were working in national or listed museums—were grouped together in 1963 as “curators of French museums,” a corps structured by a separation between hierarchical level (*grade*) and type of position. The second set, similarly to many other local civil servants (Biland 2012), were called upon to remain in the position they had, resulting for them in heavy dependence on local officials and low professional and geographic mobility.

Moreover, the 1945 order increased the prerogatives of state curators and consolidated their dominant position in the profession. The DMF called on them to inspect listed and controlled museums and evaluate any plans for museum development, extension, or changes submitted by their local counterparts. Several state curators also sat on the influential provincial museums commission, whose roles were to allocate state subsidies and coordinate all DMF actions to promote local museums. The model followed by these listed and controlled museum inspectors was the generalist fine arts museum as embodied by the Louvre. This meant they found themselves working alternately to correct wrongs to specific museums and to offer technical and scholarly support. The sense of working for a common cause—museum modernization, artistic heritage preservation, and the reorganizing of collections throughout France—comes out strongly in professional accounts from this subgroup; their “missionary tone” recalls that of France’s Third Republic school teachers (Poulard 2010, 54). The AGCCPF journal, first entitled *Bulletin des Musées de France* and later *Musées et collections publiques de France*, was a tool for diffusing this subgroup’s professional practices and the museography norms they were establishing.

The 1960 membership roll of the AGCCPF shows how the Association mirrored (and in some respects relayed and reinforced) the internal ranking dynamics that characterized the museum curator profession in France in the 1950s and 1960s. The AGCCPF was this profession’s sole organization at the time. Of its 551 members, 365 were working in a curator position or the equivalent (Table 1). Of the 365, 46.8% were working in local museums (not including municipal listed museums)—a figure that attests to the Association’s openness and inclusiveness at the time, consistent with the will of the small group of curators who founded it. However, only 19% of CA members were local curators, whereas nearly 62% of the CA were *corps d’État* members, including members working in central administrations. “Controlled” museum curators as a group had lower educational attainment, fewer decorations, and were younger than national museum curators, who in turn were more highly educated, far more decorated, and much more senior.¹⁴ This asymmetry worked to legitimize not only the subordination of controlled museum curators within the museum system but also differences in status-related guarantees, career advancement opportunities, and pay between the two groups. “Territorial” curators only began to challenge the preeminence of the *corps d’État* in the late 1960s.

TABLE 1.—*Official working curators belonging to the AGCCPF in 1960*

	N	% members	% members CA	% women	% university or elite school graduates	% decorated	Year entered the profession
All	365	100	100	25.8	26.3	39.2	1945
Local museums	Controlled	164	44.9	19.0	17.7	22.6	1947.5
	Listed	19	5.2	9.5	36.8	42.1	1947
	City of Paris	7	1.9	0	14.3	71.4	1940.6
National museums	Culture Ministry	53	14.5	33.3	32.1	73.6	1937.5
	National Education Ministry	18	4.9	14.3	77.8	44.4	1943.8
Central administrations	27	7.4	4.7	33.3	25.9	51.8	1946.3
Libraries	37	10.1	4.7	51.3	32.4	40.5	1940.8

Source: AGCCPF directory, 1960.

Agonistic segmentation: Coalescence of the local segment

For decades, state museum curators were the only members of the profession united around common values and interests. Socialization in the framework of the École du Louvre or the École des Chartes, early acquisition of state civil service status, as well as these curators’ dominant hierarchical and symbolic position, combined to create a feeling of belonging to a community both specific and limited, a group endowed with a collective identity in Rogers Brubaker’s (2001) sense. Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel (1969, 142) were quick to note this feature, calling the group “a ‘society’ (in the narrow sense of the term).” Among local curators the corresponding feeling emerged later but became quite apparent: the curator taskforces that came together in different union, association, and political circles in the mid-1970s enabled thitherto isolated curators to become aware of what united them and set them against their *corps d’État* counterparts, thereby causing them to coalesce.

Local curators first acted as a group when the question arose of founding a *grande école* (elite training school) for heritage preservation. The project put forward by the director of the DMF in 1976 concerned state curators only and was soon contested by a small group of local professionals, who created a taskforce of “scientific” (rather than administrative) staff working in listed and controlled museums and enrolled in the CFDT union (*Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail* [a politically moderate union]) and, later, an AGCCPF commission to examine controlled museum curator status. They also brought in the Socialist Party’s National Secretariat for Cultural Action (hereafter SNAC) and created a “museums” taskforce to develop a common leftist platform in anticipation of the 1981 presidential elections. The narrative presented at a 1977 AGCCPF study day on the beginnings of this movement attests to the self-awareness and identity construction dynamics underway at the time:

About fifty curators, most of whom were working in the municipal framework, requested and obtained permission to form a taskforce within the Association in the first months of 1977, to study the “official statuses of museums and curators”—but [they] only [received permission] after a long collective proceeding. [...] The group’s undertaking turned out to be threefold: disseminating information, raising awareness, and defining a critical stance. [...] The group’s primary task, then

¹⁴ Most curators at national museums overseen by the Ministry of National Education worked at the Museum of Natural History. Most were scientists (biologists, paleontologists, zoologists, etc.), many with a PhD; this explains the high proportion of university graduates in this group.

and to this day, has been to attain detailed awareness of the problems in the profession and facilitate the diffusion of information.¹⁵

The AGCCPF commission produced a strategy document demanding the creation of a single training program for curators at all levels and the same curator salary index for all museums regardless of their collections. Their argument was that all curators were confronted with the same problems of heritage preservation and presentation.¹⁶ Relayed by the AGCCPF, these demands obtained results: a delegation of the Association's CA was finally received by the head of the DMF in June 1977. That discussion led to an agreement to establish a single training program for the different statuses. While its effects were not immediate, the episode marks the first time local curators assembled and mobilized around shared demands.¹⁷

The group gradually became aware of specificities other than civil service status differences—especially what it was to practice the profession in particular localities—and thus of what distinguished them from *corps d'État* curators. The split between the two segments should also be understood in light of how local curators came to think of their missions and their publics. *Corps d'État* curators were fundamentally attached to the notion that museums should be centered on preserving art works, a view limited to fine arts collections, as became clear in the debates on creating a single heritage officer training school. Local curators, on the other hand, were led to adopt the profile of generalists rather than specialists, and to develop specific management and public relations skills (Poulard 2007). Responding to French society's rising enthusiasm for different types of heritage, and to a strengthening of cultural action at the city and regional levels (Poulard 2010), they developed an anthropological approach to cultural goods. This in turn led them to criticize listed and controlled museum acquisition committees—from which they were excluded—for refusing to subsidize the acquisition of archeological, ethnographic, and historical collections on the grounds of low artistic or esthetic interest.

These divergences on the role of museums crystallized in the form of a political opposition. Taking inspiration from the May 1968 social movement, strongly mobilized curators began calling into question the legitimacy of salary inequality within the profession and observing that the status differences overlapped with—and intensified—a hierarchy in members' social origins. While at the 1977 Association study days they had diplomatically argued for “expanding the profession to include people from highly diverse social strata” (Poulard 2010, 152), their tone at SNAC meetings became more combative. Thinking of themselves as part of “the base,” participants at these meetings spoke unabashedly about “dividing lines based on social background,” denouncing the “elitist conception of museums” diffused by the central administration, as well as its “Jacobinism.”¹⁸ Likely to be university trained (Octobre 1999), and inspired by the international innovations publicized by the International Council of Museums (Poulard 2010), these local curators did not hesitate to criticize the order established in 1945 as obsolete: as they saw it, that order had “ratified the near-monopoly

of a social caste (the ‘cultured elite’ that had graduated from the École du Louvre) over public collections management” (55).

To summarize, the history of museum curators in France in the 1970s was marked by the emergence of a new voice within the profession, a local “us” developed in opposition to the *corps d'État*. In addition to causing antagonism, the status-based segmentation that now structured the profession was multidimensional in that it resulted from the aggregation of *several* dividing lines: curators' conception of their work, generational differences, political convictions, place of work, and working conditions.

Segments in tension: Particular interests and multiple affiliations

Sharp intraprofessional tensions led to intense associative activity from the 1980s through the early 1990s. AGCCPF membership rose by 35.2% (Table 2) between 1960 and 1990. The increase was primarily accounted for by new local curators, both within the Association and on its CA (Figure 1). That segment's growth compared to national museum curators' was such that in forty years the power balance between the two segments was reversed. The shift was due in part to profession demographics: from 1970, local museum staff not only grew in number but were renewed, further increasing the Association's membership recruitment base. But from the mid-1980s, the number of local curators within the Association was further bolstered by the fact that the other segment, *corps d'État* curators, was creating its own associations to defend its particular interests: the Association of Museums of France Curators Working in Listed Museums (*Association des conservateurs des musées de France exerçant dans les musées classés*), founded in 1983, and the Association for the Enhancement of the Status of the Museums of France Curator Corps (*Association pour la revalorisation du corps de la conservation des Musées de France*), founded in 1985.

Significantly, state curators did not desert the AGCCPF: the proportion of listed museum curators in both the Association and its CA, for example, remained stable over time. Still, the Association for the Enhancement of the Status of the Museums of France Curator Corps began with 105 members,¹⁹ only 54 of whom were also listed in the 1983 AGCCPF member directory, a number that dropped to 40 in the 1990 directory. The rise in the number of professional associations available to *corps d'État* curators means that AGCCPF not only lost members but also missed opportunities to recruit new ones. Moreover, the increased number of demand-focused associations ultimately implied renewed insistence on limiting professional representation to curators with that title (as opposed to assistants, for example). Whereas, by definition, the two new associations represented “titled” curators only, the number of titled curators in the AGCCPF also increased (Table 2). Meanwhile, the number of assistants and other subordinate staff, as well as the number of librarians, fell. There is no evidence to suggest that official curators actively “purged” the profession in this way. However, there is reason to think that in a context of intensifying discussions of civil service statuses and a training school, the Association became first and foremost a place for the profession to construct and define itself.

¹⁵ *Musées et collections publiques de France* (1977): 140, 148-49.

¹⁶ “La commission d'étude pour le statut des conservateurs de musées contrôlés” [Commission to study the status of controlled museum curators], September 29, 1977, drafted at Châlons-sur-Saône (private archives).

¹⁷ The late 1970s discussions that took place around the training school project were an opportunity for “territorial” curators to lament their professional isolation, lack of training, the fact that the DMF organized so few internships, as well as the lack of legal specifications on collection status and the curator civil service function as a whole.

¹⁸ “Musée” file of the Culture and Information Commission of the Socialist Party (“Musées” taskforce), April 1983, SNAC (private archives).

¹⁹ AN 19920294/48, letter sent in December 1985 to the Minister of Culture by Henri de Cazals, curator at the Musée National d'Art Moderne and chair of the new association.

TABLE 2.—AGCCPF members, 1960-2016

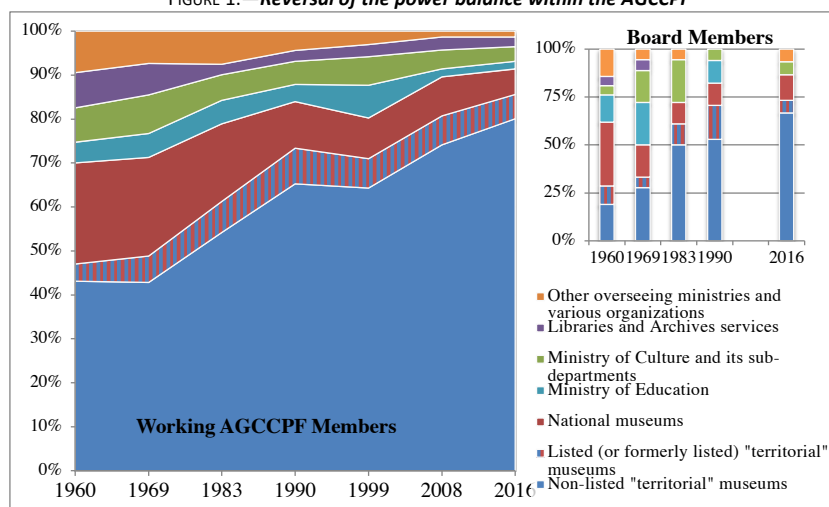
	1960	1969	1983	1990	1999	2008	2016
No. of members listed in directory	551	594	751	851	1 000	986	598
% working members	88.4	84.5	82.8	82.7	85.7	85.4	77.6
% women among working members	36.1	40.8	49.6	55.5	—	62.2	72.0
% Parisians among working members	45.0	44.2	34.4	23.3	—	17.2	11.9
% curators or equivalent among working members	71.3	73.1	85.2	86.6	—	69.4	63.6

Sources:

AGCCPF member directories for 1960, 1969, 1983, 1990, 2008; in-house statistics for 1999; member files for 2016.

Note: While the decline in AGCCPF membership from 2008 is likely related to a fall in curator numbers, it is also due to a thorough editing of member files in 2016.

FIGURE 1.—Reversal of the power balance within the AGCCPF



Sources: See Table 2.

In the early 1980s, then, the profession became both louder—as more titled curators from both segments joined associations—and more polyphonic, as curators developed organizations to frame their discussions and represent their particular interests. On the training school project, those interests were diametrically opposed. The AGCCPF favored creating a single school for the two segments while the state curators' Association for the Enhancement of the Status of the Museums of France Curator Corps called for maintaining two separate training systems:

France currently has more than a thousand Controlled Museums, most of which have collections that are, of course, interesting but of modest dimensions and that came into being through local [archeological] digs or donations, usually of regional interest. Clearly, the preservation of these collections—which must, of course, be high quality work because that is the price to be paid for

preserving and promoting our heritage—does not require the same qualifications as those required for National Museum or Listed Museum Curators.²⁰

Generally speaking, *corps d'État* curators were attached to maintaining heteronomous status distinctions and symbolic hierarchies whereas local curators denounced them. These divergent positions fueled internal tensions in the profession, exacerbated by the fact that the hierarchies in question were reflected in the respective levels of resources allocated to national and local museums and their professionals.²¹ *Corps d'État* curators working in listed (and therefore, officially local) museums occupied their own particular position in this context and may be considered “secant” or dividing-line individuals.²² They were likely to have nuanced views or call for new policies that would facilitate curator mobility between local and national museums.²³

Representatives of all these professional associations competed energetically to get the administration's ear, each using the “figures strategy” (Offerlé 1998) of communicating statistics and name lists to demonstrate number and representativeness of the given association's members. Nonetheless, the two segments were not entirely separate when it came to formulating curator demands. State curators, including a number of national (rather than listed museum) ones who were militant about their particular interests, did not desert the AGCCPF.²⁴ This means that in the 1980s and early 1990s, while the two segments were making separate demands, they were nonetheless maintaining close relations through the AGCCPF and through a number of individuals with multiple affiliations. In this configuration, how did the agonistic struggle work to shape the future of the profession at a time of civil servant status reforms? What processes were involved?

How segments played in: Museum curators' response to the ordeal of exogenous status reform

Since the mid-twentieth century, museum curators' situations have been affected by incessant public reform of civil servant status, “territorial” (local) government status, cultural policy, and the organization of public service in general and museums in particular. While the first wave of reforms, from the 1940s to the 1960s, enlarged and stratified the profession, the second wave, in the early 1990s, worked to unify the profession and raise entry requirements. The status reforms that followed from France's decentralization laws of 1983 and 1984²⁵ led to establishing a shared

²⁰ AN 19929294/48, letter of January 23, 1986, sent in the name of the Association for the Enhancement of the Status of the Museums of France Curator Corps to the Minister of Culture.

²¹ For example, local curators active in SNAC contested the government's 1983 funding bill as “custom made for Parisian tastes” because it was much more favorable to the great national museums than provincial ones (document produced by the “Musées” taskforce of the Socialist Party, April 1983, p. 7; private archives).

²² The case of Jean-Jacques Bertaux, AGCCPF chair from 1989, is exemplary here. Though Bertaux belonged to the Museums of France Curators Corps, he was recruited as director of France's only listed ethnology museum, the Musée de Normandie, in Caen, thanks to support from the dean of the University of Caen—two characteristics that made him sensitive to the preoccupations of controlled museum curators and their cause (interview, March 2014).

²³ AN 19920294/48, report on the May 30, 1986, meeting of the commission on organizing early curator training.

²⁴ Thirty-two members of the Association for the Enhancement of the Status of the Museums of France Curator Corps remained loyal to the AGCCPF from 1983 to 1990. Three of these AGCCPF members also held positions on their new association's administrative board.

²⁵ Law 83-634 of July 13, 1983, on civil servants' rights and obligations, and Law 84-53 of January 26, 1984, on status-defining laws for the “territorial” public function, led to establishing three categories of civil servants: state, hospital (not relevant here), and territorial.

training school for the two segments, the *École Nationale du Patrimoine* (ENP; French national heritage preservation school),²⁶ and to a 1990 decree redefining state curator status and a 1991 decree redefining local curator status.²⁷ These revisions represented an improvement—first and foremost for state curators, for whom career advancement in the various specialization areas (archeology, archives, inventory, historical monuments, museums) was harmonized and enhanced by the creation of a new corps, *conservateurs généraux du patrimoine* or general heritage curators, designed to validate the careers of the small number of elected officials heading central services, “decentralized” services, and major public organizations.²⁸ Local curators, meanwhile, obtained a status modeled on that of their state counterparts, with a better salary scale and a genuine career advancement path in which advancement was decoupled from museum type and job type.

Retrospectively, several factors seem to have facilitated museum curator status unification, while others were more likely to compromise it. Professionals’ demands for better employment conditions and higher entry qualifications were of course consistent with elected officials’ growing interest in heritage material, as attested at the time by a spectacular rise in museum building and renovation.²⁹ However, instead of presenting a united front, the profession had shown sharply divergent interests represented by multiple entities that did not conceal their disagreements. Furthermore, its representative associations were speaking to audiences whose own intentions were far from homogeneous or immutable. There were divergences, for example, between the Ministries of Culture, Finance, and the Interior, as well as within the Ministry of Culture between the General Administration and Cultural Environment Department (*Direction de l’Administration Générale et de l’Environnement Culturelle* or DAGEC)³⁰ and the DMF, as we shall see. Last, the political and legislative context in which the status reforms were prepared was riven with paradoxes and several U-turns were made. Unquestionably, France’s new decentralization laws were a favorable framework for improving and unifying the statuses of public service professionals. They led to the creation of a full-fledged “territorial” civil service (*fonction publique territoriale*), distinct from the state civil service but at least partially organized on the principle of “structural homology” between the two (Ortiz 1992). Meanwhile, equal pay scales for staff in the two *fonctions publiques* ceased to be an imperative, and in 1987, when a new parliamentary majority came to power, they made clear their desire to substitute a “similarity” requirement for the “comparability” one, to avoid what they considered an excessive increase in spending on “territorial” administrative units and to leave local officials free to recruit their own organization directors (Ortiz 1992). That proposed change would have meant discarding the very idea of shared training for the two curator groups—at precisely the time when the National Center for Territorial Civil Servants (*Centre National de la Fonction Publique Territoriale* or CNFPT) was being called upon to organize competitive qualifying examinations and training for just that set of civil servants (Biland 2012).

For all these reasons, the changes to museum curators’ situations cannot be explained by either interest convergence or a favorable political or administrative environment. On the basis of

that observation, we decided to analyze interactions both within the profession and between its various representatives and their many interlocutors. What we found is that not only did intraprofessional struggles not weaken curators’ collective action capacities but they actually inflected the public policy decisions that would affect them in a way that worked to unify curator statuses and increase curator prerogatives. We identified three processes—vigilance, tension calming, and comparison—by means of which the segments helped produce this outcome. Although these processes were concomitant and mutually reinforcing, they can be analyzed separately. In each case, we show what professionals’ internal struggles “made” them do, how those struggles worked to shape the responses of their state decision-maker interlocutors, and how they affected the reform process.

How segments’ mutual vigilance may increase audience attention and professionals’ participation in shaping reforms

What played out between segments was due first and foremost to the fact that internal tensions increased the vigilance of these civil servants with regard to reform plans, which in turn improved their chances of contributing to the legislative work steered by their overseeing ministries. While each segment’s members were particularly attentive to how the proposed reforms would affect their own situation, they also kept a close eye on initiatives and demands originating in the other segment. This meant that state curators belonging to the AGCCPF participated in taskforces on decentralization and the revision of “territorial” civil servant status. Conversely, for matters affecting state curators only, such as the “Grand Louvre” project—an elitist Parisian project *par excellence*—and the later plan to “enhance” their situation (improve status and pay), local curator AGCCPF members took part in the debates and voted on the motions later transmitted to the DMF.³¹

Segment members did not demonstrate any particular altruism towards their colleagues in the other segment; rather, each segment kept a vigilant eye on what the other one was doing, a way of proceeding that seems to have had several different effects. First, each segment’s involvement in the others’ affairs, sustained by the many encounters between their respective representatives at assemblies, meetings, and taskforce sessions in the Association or at ministries, stoked and fanned tensions within the profession. Every discussion was an opportunity to reactivate old divergences and invent new ones. But the encounters were also an opportunity for curators from different horizons to discover and appropriate each other’s strategies and “action repertoires” (Tilly 1984). For example, the 1985 creation of the Association for the Enhancement of the Status of the Museums of France Curator Corps was directly motivated by the fact that “listed” museum curators (the most prestigious sub-category of local ones) had formed their own association two years before and been consulted by the cabinet of the Ministry of Culture. Intraprofessional vigilance thus increased curators’ collective mobilization abilities through imitation.

Second, segment competition to obtain a hearing from the administration seems to have won the profession as a whole greater attention. When speaking to the DMF and Culture Ministry cabinet members, each association called on the government to simultaneously consider improving the status of its members in three areas: pay, recruitment and career organization, and training. And

²⁶ Created by Decree 90-406 of May 16, 1990. In 2001, the school changed its name to the *Institut National du Patrimoine* (INP; French national institute for cultural heritage).

²⁷ Respectively, decree 90-405 of May 16, 1990, and decree 91-839 of September 2, 1991.

²⁸ Decree 90-405 of May 16, 1990.

²⁹ In addition to the emblematic projects of the Musée d’Orsay and the Grand Louvre, launched under the respective presidencies of Valéry Giscard d’Estaing and François Mitterrand, the DMF endorsed the opening of 250 museum sites in the 1980s (Ministry of Culture, 1991, *La politique culturelle 1981-1991*).

³⁰ This department, foreshadowing the future Secrétariat-General of the Ministry of Culture, encompassed the Ministry’s information and communication office and assumed management and coordination roles.

³¹ See, for example, AN 19920294/48, “Motion adoptée par l’assemblée générale le 31 janvier 1985 concernant le corps des conservateurs d’État” [Motion adopted by the general assembly of January 31, 1985, on the state curator corps], letter from AGCCPF chair Jean-Pierre Sainte-Marie to the Minister of Culture.

these were precisely the terms in which the state later framed the problem—despite the fact that the legislative process was more conducive to handling the three matters separately, if not simply dropping the training issue. Another indication of the professionals' effectiveness was the state's decision to prioritize improving museum curator status, before extending the measures to other *corps d'État* involved in heritage preservation. It was very much as if the dissonant points of view expressed by the segments required the DMF to bring all parties together again and so to pay increased attention to the demands of each.³²

Last, intraprofessional vigilance led the different components of the profession to turn to a wider spectrum of state interlocutors. The Culture Ministry's proposals were favorably echoed by the Inspectorate General of Finance, which came out in favor of greater autonomy and better pay for national museum officials—just in time for the launching of the Musée d'Orsay and the restructuring of the Louvre.³³ Despite the fact that there were fewer of them, national museum curators had privileged access to the highest state spheres and could therefore get the government to take up their case more quickly than that of other groups.³⁴ It was still not clear what the reform would consist in, but the advances made by the different segments were perceived positively by the entire profession while reminding each of the need to stay alert. Vigilance was a self-sustained process that captured the attention of the curators' hearers and facilitated professionals' own involvement in the labor of reform.

By showing an ability to calm internal tensions, professionals helped legitimate their demands

Segments were implicated in a second way, which can be described thus: manifestations of internal tensions forced profession representatives to act to preserve their legitimacy in the eyes of their governmental and political interlocutors; those actions in turn increased their gravitas in those same eyes. Several times in the mid-1980s, state curators engaged in isolated actions—demonstrations, statements to the press, leaflet distribution—the net result of which was to plunge the profession into crisis. In 1986, the press published five articles on museum curators in less than two months, texts in which state civil servants [who are not at liberty to give their opinions] publicly denounced the shared training school plan and expressed concerns about its possible effects on their status. Status-based divisions were likewise rekindled by a number of controversial events, the most significant of which took place in 1986 and concerned integrating a “territorial” curator, Jean-Pierre Laurent, into the *corps d'État*. Laurent, who headed Grenoble's Musée Dauphinois, a museum focused on societal phenomena rather than fine arts and then considered to be on the cutting edge of museography, was appointed “head curator” of the Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires. At the time, the “head curator” level did not exist for local museums; nor was it granted

liberally to state civil servants. The DMF's assent to the appointment elicited unanimous protest by the *corps d'État*, to which the Culture Ministry responded by withdrawing the appointment order.³⁵

In this context, the AGCCPF chair and other Association members, including state curators, were extremely concerned to calm tensions and worked hard to formulate proposals that would improve group cohesion:

We need to calm down. This is hardly the time for curators or museums to be pitted against each another—the stakes are too high. Obtaining the successful creation of this curator training school is key to our future and that of our museums, wherever and whatever they may be. We all need the same training, as it will enable us not only to meet the needs of curators of all statuses but also to create a heritage preservation spirit among people who will all be practicing the same profession despite belonging to different corps. A school is also a collective state of mind. If our work and responsibilities, those of each one of us—state curators, territorial curators, and association curators—were mutually recognized, surely we would not be in this malaise. The training school must come into being. It is the culmination of a museum revival movement that has been manifest for some fifteen years; it will produce a new generation of curators, fully trained for their mission. Only by way of this melting pot will we attain a favorable reassessment of our profession, a revaluing that will encompass the *corps d'État*, the future *Corps des Collectivités Territoriales*, and association museums.³⁶

The fact that some state curators intended to “go it alone” in response to the challenge of exogenous reform gave the heads of the AGCCPF an opportunity to argue for the existence of a professional “we” without denying or condemning internal differences. They thereby elevated the debate above particular interests, working to convey the idea that the only way everyone's situation could be improved was by consistently acting together for all curators. And in the aim of remaining the largest and most legitimate representative organization, AGCCPF heads also made the point that the Association represented all points of view. After the new government took power in 1986, the AGCCPF administrative board got its members to sign a declaration supporting the new ENP school, and proudly pointed to the fact that the signatures came from curators of all statuses: *corps d'État*, territorial, and association museum professionals.³⁷ The work of calming tensions and promoting group unity was therefore addressed as much to profession members themselves as to external audiences.

The success of the AGCCPF's unity rhetoric can be seen in the fact that their interlocutors used it when speaking to Ministry members and the Prime Minister.³⁸ When the proposal was floated to substitute “similarity” for the requirement of comparability between the two *fonctions publiques*—a move that, as explained, would have threatened the shared training school project—local curators reactivated their demands to receive the same training. And their lobbying efforts bore fruit: in 1989, what amounted to a remarkable accord for local training was finally signed with the National

³² Under the aegis of the DMF, a considerable number of meetings on creating a shared training program were held in quick succession—after which the various association and union representatives managed to reach a compromise with the administration.

³³ AN 19980086/3, August 1984 summary no. 84-318 by Yann Gaillard, inspector-general of finance, on running the Museums of France and organizing new acquisitions for national art collections [through the Réunion des Musées Nationaux].

³⁴ AN 19920627/1, “Revalorisation du corps de la conservations des musées de France” [Reassessing the Museums of France curators corps], letter dated July 5, 1985, from the Minister of Culture Jack Lang to Henri Emmanuelli, then state secretary for budget and consumption with the Ministry of the Economy, Finances, and the Budget.

³⁵ AN 19920294/48, letter dated June 13, 1986, by Michel Boyon, head of the Culture Minister's office, to Ségolène Bergeon, chair of the National Union of Museums of France Curators (*Syndicat national des conservateurs des musées de France*).

³⁶ Editorial by Roland May, *Musées et collections publiques* (1986-2): 171.

³⁷ Report on the General Assembly of April 3, 1987, *Musées et collections publiques* (1987-3): 176.

³⁸ For example, the chair of the National Center for Territorial Civil Servants (*Centre National de la Fonction Publique Territoriale* or CNFPT) stated in the daily newspaper *Le Monde* of December 18, 1985, that it was not necessary for the two corps to have “the same qualification level.”

Center for Territorial Civil Servants (*Centre National de la Fonction Publique Territoriale* or CNFPT). The story of the founding of the École Nationale du Patrimoine (ENP) validates the hypothesis that the intraprofessional struggles that peaked in 1980 led profession representatives to take particular care in how they addressed the public authorities, and that this in turn gave them greater legitimacy and better equipped them to succeed in the reform negotiations.

Comparing and being compared: Leveling statuses at the higher level

Third, the perception of salary, training, and career inequalities within the profession, which became more acute with the coalescence of antagonistic segments, triggered a labor of comparison across the board that worked to level statuses at the higher level. To begin with, museum curators presented comparisons of each other's situations, and of their own situation in relation to those of other public service professions operating under the same overseeing ministries, to attract attention to the "injustices" of theirs—the well-known strategy of "scandalizing" interlocutors with their findings (Offerlé 1998). Local curators pointed to their low pay compared to other types of municipal employees—technicians, local École des Beaux-Arts directors, etc.—whom they presented as having "comparable" qualifications and responsibility levels.³⁹ Then, strategically drawing on the country's relatively new decentralization laws, they made it clear that the standard to apply in improving their conditions was the *corps d'État*.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, state curators compared their level to that of *lycée* and university professors in an effort to demonstrate that their status was "indecent and unacceptable."⁴¹

The comparisons were not merely rhetorical. Profession members were meticulously counted, pay scale and career advancement differences and equivalencies painstakingly calculated, budgets drawn up, and projections made that covered several years. Professionals then used this information jointly with ministerial administrations to formulate a diagnosis and proposals. The tables and analyses the associations produced were studied and discussed at the DMF and among Culture Ministry cabinet members, who, in turn, produced forecasts for the government. The curators performed this labor of comparison through the mid-1980s to compel lawmakers' attention and to have a role themselves in determining the various status reform projects. Separately, each segment sought to convince its interlocutors not only of the need but also the feasibility of reassessing pay levels and career advancement. But after a May 1990 decree creating the new civil service corps of heritage curators, the terms of the comparison changed.

Whereas the DMF supported local curators' demands for strict status comparability between the two *fonctions publiques* and accepted the principle of their being integrated fully into the new employment framework, the Finance Ministry opposed them for budget reasons. The Culture Ministry's DAGEC department was ordered to prepare "amendments" that would allow instead for *partial* integration of the civil servants in question.⁴² Citing the advent of the Musée d'Orsay and the Grand Louvre, the DAGEC compared curators in the two segments and concluded that there was a

difference in the nature of their activities and responsibilities and that it followed from museum size and status—a position clearly aligned with the state curators' demands. Accordingly, the proposal was put forward in October 1990 to grant "heritage curator" status to first-category museum curators, archivists, and librarians only, while all second-category museum staff would become *attachés de conservation* with lower pay and slower career advancement. Numerically, this meant that 270 of the 520 territorial museum curators in the administration's records would become *attachés de conservation* or deputy curators.

The AGCCPF was immediately hostile to the new proposal, which amounted to ratifying the material and symbolic hierarchy it had been denouncing since the 1970s. Given how long the profession had been segmented, local curators had already developed a range of arguments to demonstrate that their work was the same as their *corps d'État* counterparts, regardless of museum nature and size. With lightening speed, the Association orchestrated an unprecedented protest movement. At the invitation of local Association section heads relaying the chair's call, second-category local curators began a personal letter-writing campaign addressed to the Prime Minister, the Ministers of Culture and the Interior, and members of the High Council for the Territorial Public Function (*Conseil Supérieur de la Fonction Publique Territoriale*). One such letter was sent by the museum curator for the city of Autun. Following the model provided by the Association, he detailed his educational trajectory, administrative responsibilities and achievements, scholarship, and public relations activities, concluding thus:

For the last few months, the prospect that a framework for local civil service positions would be defined in which the professional qualifications of municipal and *département* level museum curators would be recognized as equal to those of state museum curators has seemed to promise a positive revaluation of my job—like a much needed gust of fresh air. [...] The announcement of employment framework clauses that call instead for second-category curators to be integrated into an A' corps has ruined all those hopes and devalued my responsibility and work—devalued my function—by differentiating between the statuses of colleagues who received the same training and are performing the same job with the same responsibilities.⁴³

It is important to note that the comparisons in the letters did not concern formal employment framework features or type of museum but rather curators' individual accomplishments and real work. In addition to eliciting sympathy, the accumulation of individual professional histories worked to disqualify the very idea of trying to organize the profession hierarchically on the basis of old, heteronomous categories.

Although the local curators' mobilization was not able to prevent the creation of a new employment framework for "attachés de conservation,"⁴⁴ it did succeed in obtaining a ministerial amendment stipulating that second-category museum curators might be integrated into the future territorial "heritage curator" employment framework. State curators, meanwhile, obtained a guarantee that the only way professional curators could gain access to a position of extremely high responsibility such as major museum director or central administrator, would be through admission

³⁹ *Musées et collections publiques de France* 149 (1980): 9-11.

⁴⁰ Report on the General Assembly of May 7, 1983, *Musées et collections publiques* (1983-2): 159.

⁴¹ AN 19920627/1, statement of intention of the Association for the Enhancement of the Status of the Museums of France Curator Corps, March 1985.

⁴² AN 19930367/7, memorandum sent by Jean-Ludovic Silicani, head of the DAGEC, to Francis Beck, head of Culture Minister Jack Lang's cabinet, October 20, 1990.

⁴³ AN 20070141/40, letter of November 8, 1990, by André Strasberg, curator of the Musée Rolin, Autun.

⁴⁴ The top state administrations did not unanimously support this development: the head of the DMF Jacques Sallois and the head of the DAGEC Jean-Ludovic Silicani did not see eye to eye. To fully analyze this particular episode, additional research approaches would be needed, especially sociology of the state, to better understand the structure of the public employment market.

to the highly exclusive corps of “general heritage curators,” and that there would be no equivalent to *that* corps in the new territorial *fonction publique*. While this difference attests the administration’s agreement with the arguments put forward by state curators and the DAGEC, it also seems to owe something to a mobilization by local officials of incorporated communities, who were opposed to the creation of a general corps for territorial curators because they wished to maintain their own authority over that group.⁴⁵ In any case, the early 1990s leveling of status “at the higher level” for curators in the two segments was due to a comprehensive labor of comparison by both professionals and administrations.

It is not our purpose to identify all determinants of negotiation outcomes, as these civil service status reforms were carried out in a singular reform context involving a considerable number of actors intervening at many levels of responsibility and in accordance with their own time frames and logic. However, our analysis does bring to light a series of generally neglected phenomena that work to enrich Abbott’s (2003) linked ecologies model. In particular, we have called attention to conflict between segments, not just between professions. We have also shown the high level of reflexivity professionals are capable of in situations of competition (Kling and Gerson 1978; Castel et al. 2016). The processes of vigilance, tension calming, and comparison imply concrete interactions for which actors have been prepared and equipped, and they develop out of professionals’ perceptions of their position in the division of labor.

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Whether reforms take the form of new laws or managerial changes, they are an ordeal for professions. And whether they are demanded by the profession itself or imposed upon it, reforms are a moment for redefining the terms of a professional group’s autonomy, namely in connection with particular legislated protections and statuses and the group’s ability to define its own tasks and activities (Boussard et al. 2010). As the case of museum curators in France demonstrates, to understand these dynamics we need to be attentive not only to a profession’s modes of representation (Maresca 1983) and the political context that determines its members’ demands and how much influence they have with public authorities (Hassenteufel 1997), but also to internal divisions and intraprofessional relations between segments. First, the coalescence of a local museum curator segment and the agonistic struggles between what were now two curator segments transformed the morphology of the profession and its configuration—in this case into a polyphonic, dissonant, *and* highly mobilized group—as it headed into the status reform process that unfolded in the 1980s. Second, due to its symbolic dimension (Hughes 1996; Blumer 1969), segmentation itself worked to shape the group’s future. Intraprofessional struggles, like interprofessional ones (Hénaut 2011), should be thought of as interactions in which protagonists adjust their actions in response to those of others, to the effects they believe their actions will have, and to their own aspirations, which are subject to change.

The play of segments brought to light here can be seen as a further development of Florent Champy’s (2011) and Carine Ollivier’s (2012) ideas on the antinomy of professional group unity and diversity. Champy suggested that architects do indeed comprise a profession, one that has subsisted over time thanks to its foundation of “epistemic and ethical values” common to all members and despite practice diversity and struggles between some segments. Those who diverge, he explains,

simply do not rank those shared values in the same way. For Ollivier, who studied interior designers, the continuous segmentation process characteristic of profession dynamics should not conceal the development of “stable group configurations” at certain historical moments when the organization of the corresponding services market becomes relatively stable. In both cases, the work done to resolve the antinomy produced ideas on how to enable unity and diversity to coexist, ideas not unrelated to the notion of concession. In Champy’s thinking, the narrative of unity involves some tolerance of diversity in practices; conversely, in Ollivier’s, the narrative of ongoing segmentation *nonetheless* encompasses moments in which the profession assumes form—a form—around a community of work practices, interindividual competition strategies, or collective interests. Our study of museum curators in France opens up a new approach to resolving the antinomy, in which professional group unity can also occur *thanks to* diversity, not just despite it. Echoing Georg Simmel’s writings on conflict ([1908] 1999), this notion leads to thinking of professional group unity not as something harmonious and stable but rather as a collective capacity to act—in response to the threat of exogenous reforms, for example—a capacity that may in fact benefit from segmentation.

While the consolidation of distinct statuses within the French civil service system and the need to interact with a variety of central administration interlocutors may hinder a profession’s ability to mobilize and unify (Le Bianic 2013), those factors are not prohibitive. In the early 1990s, the three processes we have identified worked in favor of an improved, more closely unified status for curators. Segments’ vigilance over each other meant professionals themselves became more involved in the work of reform; tension calming enabled some profession representatives to maintain their legitimacy and so their influence within the profession as a whole; and segments’ comparisons with each other and other groups worked to level statuses at the higher rather than lower level. These are relational processes in the sense that they are produced by concrete interactions between members of different segments—while also driving them. Although other case studies would be needed to understand how the effectiveness of these processes varies by context and possibly to capture others of the same kind, having identified them at all sheds new light on the internal mechanisms supporting a profession’s self-assertion as an “interest group” (Offerlé 1998). We have drawn attention to a type of collective action that cannot be reduced to a sum of strategies and action repertoires emerging within a profession, or to its spokespersons’ development of a synthesis acceptable to all, or even to the supremacy of one interest or “mediator” over others (Jobert and Muller 1987). On the contrary, the relational processes described here are consubstantial with segments whose relations are characterized by tension.

Bringing to light how segments may operate to affect outcomes does not mean there are no other explanations. While what we have recounted is similar to an “intrigue,” in the historian Paul Veyne’s (1971) sense, it is also part of a context made up of constraints and opportunities, and this partially explains how segments played in to the decision-making process, as well as the limits on that ability. But though we cannot presume to know the effects of segments in other contexts, the interaction processes we have brought to light here widen the analytic spectrum available to account for the trajectories of professions coping with reforms. To further our knowledge of these processes and their effects, we would have to examine situations where, in contrast to our case, internal struggles do not work to unify the group; this would enable us to construct a fuller set of propositions on how segments play in. One parameter to take into account would be *reform time-frame*. The fact that a profession is subjected to reforms that affect its different segments at the same time seems likely to facilitate simultaneous action by professionals and to make it necessary

⁴⁵ Interview with Jean-Pierre Bady, first director of the École Nationale du Patrimoine, February 2014.

for political and administrative interlocutors to coordinate. Another parameter would be the role of “*secant*” or *hybrid individuals*; this needs to be studied in greater detail. Alongside professionals with similar attributes though in different segments, we would examine the role of professionals who join a central administration or whose trajectories are more political, leading them to join a Culture Ministry cabinet, for example. Because such professionals understand a variety of concerns, can relay actions and discussions that occur in separate arenas, and help professionals determine which interlocutors they need to turn to, they would seem to be activating vectors for the relational processes that drive the play of segments. Last, we would need more systematic study of objective, accessible *points of comparison*, such as civil servant pay scales, that are likely to facilitate perceptions of hierarchical ranking and thus to fuel internal tensions while helping professionals to better identify and fully formulate their demands.

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