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Revisiting UNESCO`s Concept of Intangible Cultural Heritage – some Semiotic Reflections

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Abstract:

The article explores the significance of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), emphasizing the role of UNESCO in its preservation. It highlights the shift from focusing solely on tangible artifacts to recognizing the importance of intangible elements like oral traditions, rituals, and craftsmanship. The article discusses, in particular, the intrinsic relationship between intangible cultural heritage and its tangible elements, advocating for a semiotic approach to this relationship and, thereby, to inventorying ICH – with an emphasis on the concept of meaning and meaning-making processes. It underscores the need for community involvement in these processes and involves Peirce`s concepts of interpretant (and some of its divisions) and collateral experience as well as Eco`s three types of intention regarding (textual) interpretation: Intentio auctoris, intentio operis and intentio lectoris. The article is, first and foremost, theoretical, aiming to present a semiotic perspective on intangible cultural heritage only tentatively and briefly touching upon a few implications for inventorying practices.

Keywords: UNESCO, intangible cultural heritage, tangible culture, archiving, inventorying, meaning, community, value, Peirce, Eco.

1.0 Introduction

The terms intangible culture and intangible cultural heritage have gained prominence in recent decades, largely due to the safeguarding efforts of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The year 2023 marked the twentieth anniversary of UNESCO`s *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2003) and prior to the *Convention* did UNESCO launch the *First Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity* (2001). However, the first UNESCO activities concerning intangible culture heritage already began in 1989 with the adoption of the *Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore* centering around folklore and the cultural communities' tradition-based creations reflecting social identity (Bouchenaki 2003; Rudolf 2006; Lenzerini 2006). We can say that both the *Proclamation* and *Convention* and supplementary documents (Committee documents, Basic Texts etc.), over the years, have contributed to a paradigmatic shift. Traditionally, cultural heritage preservation has primarily focused on tangible artifacts like monuments, buildings, and archaeological sites. Yet, the *Proclamation* aimed to raise awareness about exceptional intangible heritage and it highlighted its various elements, such as oral traditions, rituals, performing arts, and craftsmanship – which were deemed essential for the cultural diversity of humanity. And with the *Convention* was the importance of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage strongly re-accentuated, provisions and organs for the *Convention* described, and a framework for international cooperation, assistance, and funding established. Both the *Proclamation* and the *Convention* emphasize the role of communities, groups, and individuals in safeguarding intangible culture heritage – as active bearers and practitioners of the culture. UNESCO`s movement towards (also) safeguarding intangible culture heritage was, and still is, motivated by several factors. Not least globalization, cultural diversity and human rights – as globalization impacts local cultures and social transformation, safeguarding becomes crucial to maintain viability and authenticity; furthermore, does intangible cultural heritage reflect the rich diversity of human expression, knowledge, and creativity, and preserving intangible heritage can thereby contribute to cultural rights. In short, for more than twenty years has UNESCO focussed on raising the awareness of the importance of intangible culture heritage, and the urgent need to safeguard and revitalize it. Countries which ratify the *Convention* (known as State Parties) take on certain obligations; hence, State Parties

shall, seen from an overall perspective, safeguard, develop and promote intangible culture heritage which is present in its territory. However, with the *Convention* also follows an obligation for State Parties to draw up inventories of intangible cultural heritage; that is, with a view to safeguarding shall elements of intangible cultural heritage be identified, defined, and documented – with the widest possible participation of communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals. Thereby is also, with the *Convention*, introduced an archival focus, involving different objectives (Rylance 2006). UNESCO`s safeguarding intangible culture heritage and its relationship to archives and archiving is multifaceted; archiving intangible culture heritage involves organizing, preserving, and providing access to recorded materials, and inventorying is one of the first steps in safeguarding and part of the process leading to documentation as a possible baseline for subsequent concrete community safeguarding activities. The multifaceted relationship between safeguarding intangible culture heritage and archives and archiving is also reflected in the rich diversity in the interest of researchers, policymakers and specific communities – not least with the (dramatic) development of digital technologies (Bonn, Kendall and McDonough 2017; Bastian 2023). UNESCO recognizes that there is a deep-seated relationship between intangible cultural heritage and tangible elements. This is noticeably reflected in UNESCO`s definition of intangible cultural heritage in which artifacts are mentioned, as well as when UNESCO points towards different domains where intangible cultural heritage may be manifested. Furthermore, in UNESCO`s possible outline for collecting data for inventorying, we find how tangible elements, if any, associated with intangible cultural heritage, should be mentioned. Yet, we claim that the relationship between intangible cultural heritage and tangible elements is more intrinsically linked and interdependent than UNESCO seems to suggest in the *Convention* (as in other texts).We furthermore claim, that intangible cultural heritage is first and foremost a phenomenon of meaning; or, more precisely, a phenomenon of meaningfulness and meaning-making (including interpretation) (see also Rylance 2006; Dewi et. al. forthcoming); and, therefore, it should be addressed as such (see also Eco 1975, 1979; Danesi and Perron 1999; Johansen and Larsen 2002) – also when it comes to identifying, defining, and documenting its different elements for inventorying. Addressing intangible cultural heritage from this perspective is semiotic, and it is fruitful, we believe, in order to understand how intangible cultural heritage and its tangible elements are intrinsically linked and interdependent. Getting at meaning concerns getting at “intellectual purport”; and looking at inventorying elements of

intangible cultural heritage from a semiotic perspective therefore opens up for a focus on purpose, intentions and content. Intangible cultural heritage gives meaning to tangible elements or confers upon them intelligibility and direction; while the tangible elements, on the other hand, manifest (parts of) intangible cultural heritage or makes it exist in a (spatio-temporal) context. Hence, inventorying elements of intangible cultural heritage should consider both these aspects of culture – at the same time. Finally, a semiotic perspective should acknowledge/include how intangible cultural heritage means something for somebody; this naturally aligns with UNECO`s contention that communities/groups shall participate in inventorying activities, e.g., determining what elements, indeed, concern intangible cultural heritage. Or meaningfulness involves value; something is valuable for someone, a community/group – in relation to their feelings, actions and thoughts.

The article has the following structure: First, we briefly look into the *Convention*, its *Operational Directives* (2023), as well as the *Guidance Note for Inventorying Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2017), concerning what can be called UNESCO`s archival perspective, including inventorying objectives. Then, we will discuss UNESCO`s definition of intangible cultural heritage and the five domains where it may be manifested. Thereafter, we will address the intrinsic and interdependent relationship between intangible cultural heritage and its tangible elements. And, finally, from this relationship we will, tentatively, deduce a few consequences for inventorying intangible cultural heritage – (critically) remembering the community/group for whom something will be intangible cultural heritage. That being said, the article is, first and foremost, theoretical; or formulated differently, the reader will not find, for example, any method or concrete guidelines for inventorying intangible cultural heritage. Rather, the article aims at making an argument for why and how intangible cultural heritage is a semiotic phenomenon; this may have a number of positive practical consequences for inventorying intangible culture – but such consequences will not be unfolded in detail here. Finally, let us notice how the semiotic points of the article stem from Peirce`s theory of signs and Eco`s theory of (textual) interpretation.

2.0 The archival perspective of intangible cultural heritage

The *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* was created with the following purposes in mind:

(a) To safeguard the intangible cultural heritage;
(b) To ensure respect for the intangible cultural heritage of the communities,
groups and individual concerned;
(c) To raise awareness at the local, national and international levels of the importance of the intangible cultural heritage, and of ensuring mutual appreciation thereof;
(d) To provide for international cooperation and assistance.
(UNESCO 2003, Article 1, p. 5).

Intangible cultural heritage provides a sense of identity and continuity for communities, groups and individuals – relating the present with the past and pointing towards the future; hence, intangible cultural heritage is transmitted from generation to generation, as an evolving response to their changing environment, and the continuous interaction with nature and history (UNESCO 2003, Article 2, p. 5). The *Convention* gives safeguarding measures aimed at ensuring the viability of intangible cultural heritage which includes:

[T]he identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education, as well as the revitalization of the various aspects of such heritage. (UNESCO 2003, Article 2, p. 6)

In spite of the seemingly "non-archivability" of what the *Convention* is aimed at safeguarding (see also Rylance 2006: p. 110 pp.), more of these measures clearly concern archiving or relates to archival objectives – identification, documentation, preservation. UNESCO`s archival perspective on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage is also accentuated in the *Operational Directions* when different entities are mentioned (such as archives) which (should): "…play an important role in collecting, documenting, archiving and conserving data on intangible cultural heritage, as well as in providing information and raising awareness about its importance." (UNESCO 2023, p. 65). Central to UNESCO`s archival perspective is the focus on inventorying. Hence, the Convention introduces the specific obligation of State Parties (states which have ratified the convention) to draw up inventories of elements of intangible cultural heritage. That

is, as a safeguarding measure, State Parties shall identify, define and document various elements of intangible cultural heritage. In the *Convention* we can read as follows:

To ensure identification with a view to safeguarding, each State Party shall draw up, in a manner geared to its own situation, one or more inventories of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory. These inventories shall be regularly updated. (UNESCO 2003, Article 12, p. 10)

Drawing up inventories is central to the safeguarding measures of the *Convention* because inventories can raise awareness about intangible cultural heritage and highlight its importance for individual and collective identities. Creating and sharing inventories of intangible cultural heritage can furthermore foster creativity and self-respect in communities, and, perhaps most importantly, help concerning the development of concrete plans to protect it – or inventorying is, first and foremost, an instrumental activity. Each State Party will decide itself, whether it will have one or more inventories, and determine the scope of the inventory, its principles of classification and level of details as well as the activities via which the inventory is organized, maintained and regularly updated. The *Guidance Note* describes that State Parties can:

…draw up their inventories 'in a manner geared to their own situation'. This means that they are free to organize and present their inventories according to their own circumstances and needs. This includes the number and design of the inventories, the criteria for inclusion, and the definitions or classification systems used therein. (UNESCO 2017, p. 3)

However, the Convention requires that communities, groups, and sometimes certain individuals, shall be involved, as much as possible, in the activities of inventorying – not at least concerning the identification and definition of the elements of intangible cultural heritage. Hence, the *Convention* states how:

Each State Party shall:

b) among the safeguarding measures referred to in Article 2, paragraph 3, identify and define the various elements of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory, *with the participation of communities, groups* (our italicizing) and relevant nongovernmental organizations. (UNESCO 2003, Article 11, p. 10)

The primary archival criterion for inventorying elements of intangible cultural heritage therefore is the recognition of these elements by the very communities/groups which "live the culture" – because they, for example, create, maintain, and transmit the intangible cultural heritage (see also *Guidance Note* UNESCO 2017, p. 5). This *Convention* requirement, of course, rests on the

premise that an inventory can be representative and involves the archival objective that the inventory shall be as representative as possible. And, the premise itself involves, we can say, a double perspective – namely, that by identifying (true) representatives of a community/group or perhaps of more communities/groups, (true) representative elements of intangible culture can be inventoried. UNESCO acknowledges that inventorying elements of intangible cultural heritage is an ongoing activity due to, for example, intangible cultural heritage is an evolving response to an ever-changing environment of a community/group. Yet, the *Guidance Note* nevertheless accentuates the following point:

Although inventorying is an ongoing task, and inventories of intangible cultural heritage will never be fully complete, inventorying processes developed in States Parties should in principle aim to incorporate all the intangible cultural heritage of all communities present on the territory of the State concerned. (UNESCO 2017, p. 11)

This principle of inventorying UNESCO also calls the "principle of inclusiveness"; it is closely related to the beforementioned *Convention* requirement of "representativeness", and it clearly points towards, we can say, an archival objective – namely, that inventories of intangible cultural heritage should be as comprehensive and complete as possible. This principle is also implied in the *Convention* when it says how: "Each State Party shall: (a) take the necessary measures to ensure the safeguarding of *the* (our italicizing) intangible cultural heritage present in its territory." (UNESCO 2003, Article 11, p. 10). We have italicized the word "the" – as indicating here the totality of intangible cultural heritage within a State Party territory to be covered. Formulated differently, the process of inventorying intangible cultural heritage aims at completeness and, even though we should be careful of overinterpreting what lies within the archival objective, there is in principle (at least) no knowledge about the intangible cultural heritage which is beyond the ken of the process.

3.0 Semiotic reflections I

So, in what way can semiotics be relevant for our understanding of the key points of these previous paragraphs concerning the archival perspective and inventorying intangible cultural heritage? Addressing this question, we can begin by remembering Peirce`s, probably, most famous definition of the sign:

A sign…is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its *object*. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the *ground*. (CP 2.228; c. 1897)

Inventorying intangible cultural heritage is, in itself, a semiotic process; no matter what activities more specifically will take place, such as planning, gathering and analyzing/systematizing information, as well as publishing inventory entries (*Guidance Note*, UNESCO 2017, p. 5), these activities are all semiotic activities because, again with Peirce, "all thought is in signs" (EP I: 24). It seems therefore, we believe, that addressing inventorying intangible cultural heritage means, that we are facing simultaneously the roots of processes of semiosis, or meaning making, in general. So, with Peirce`s sign definition in mind we can say as follows: Inventorying intangible cultural heritage presupposes it (the cultural heritage) as an *object* of a *sign* (or *de facto* more signs); this *object* is represented, by the *sign*, as something meaningful in the inventory entry, from the perspective of *some respect* or *capacity* of the intangible cultural heritage, according to certain classification/systematization. Furthermore, does the *object* of intangible cultural heritage *mean something to somebody*; that is, it means something for the community/group "living in or with the culture" as well as the "inventorying body". And, when intangible cultural heritage (potentially) means something for the community/group this is due to the *interpretant*; the *interpretant*, for Peirce, takes on different significative forms and effects, including intentions, concepts, feelings, efforts, habits and habit-changes etc. (CP 5.480-6; 1902). The above mentioned is important for at least two reasons; firstly, is intangible cultural heritage stipulated as a phenomenon of meaning – it means *something for somebody*, a community/group. Secondly, is inventorying intangible cultural heritage also a meaning-making process and it (potentially) addresses someone. That is, the inventory of intangible cultural heritage is at the same time, then, both representative and (potentially) performative in relation to the elements inventoried (see also Acebal, Guerri and Voto 2020); last mentioned because the inventory (or inventories) may (hopefully) evoke future interpretations as well as uses. This forward-looking aspect of inventorying also aligns nicely with Peirce's developmental idea of the *interpretant*; which emphasizes the future-oriented nature of meaning or the well-known idea of infinite semiosis – where signs interpret signs which again are interpreted by other signs, and

so on (CP 1.339; c. 1893-5). Finally, the community/group for which the elements of intangible cultural mean something, is central to the very process of identifying and defining the meaning of these elements. And meaning and the reality of intangible cultural heritage become related via the community/group. As Peirce accentuates is the:

real…that which, sooner or later, information and reasoning would finally result in, and which is therefore independent of the vagaries of me and you. Thus, the very origin of the conception of reality shows that this conception essentially involves the notion of a COMMUNITY, without definite limits, and capable of a definite increase of knowledge. (CP 5.311; 1868)

In close connection is the concrete meaning and general meaningfulness of intangible cultural heritage relative to a community/group; or more precisely described, with another reference to Peirce, is it relative to the collateral observations of the community/group members. Peirce describes as follows:

All that part of the understanding of the Sign which the Interpreting Mind has needed collateral observation for is outside the Interpretant. I do not mean by "collateral observation" acquaintance with the system of signs. What is so gathered is *not* COLLATERAL. It is on the contrary the prerequisite for getting any idea signified by the sign. But by collateral observation, I mean previous acquaintance with what the sign denotes. (EP II: 494; 1909)

Formulated differently, is intangible cultural heritage meaningful in relation to the background knowledge of a community/group (Sørensen, Thellefsen and Thellefsen 2014) – including, for example, the background knowledge of heritage bearers, practitioners, interpreters etc. And we should understand this knowledge in the widest sense possible – involving, for example, practical knowledge, knowledge by acquaintance as well as propositional knowledge (about facts). The collateral observations of a community/group are probably central to why (besides ethical considerations of course) UNESCO privileges the community/group members in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in general and identifying and defining elements of intangible cultural heritage in particular. We can also say that this concerns an epistemological argument for the involvement of communities/groups because they, for example, have an insider perspective involving local knowledge, contextual understanding etc. of the intangible cultural heritage. And this insider perspective, of course, furthermore, is related to what can be called the "ontological" and the axiological" arguments, respectively – underlying the UNESCO requirement of involving communities/groups in inventorying elements of intangible cultural

heritage. Firstly, the communities/groups live and experience the intangible cultural heritage (or are to a certain extent part of it) and, secondly, they know the important "value" of it (that is why it means something for them). This concerns, we think, what anthropologists will call an "emic approach" to the analysis and understanding of cultural (heritage) phenomena (see also Harris 1976; Mostowlansky and Rota 2020).

In the above we have mentioned the seemingly "non-archivability" of intangible cultural heritage; now we can simply say, from the perspective of (Peirce`s) semiotic, that the activity of inventorying elements of intangible cultural heritage concerns the very meaningfulness of intangible cultural heritage or that it means something for some community/group (see also Bal 1994; Cook 1997; Rylance 2006). The consequence is also, of course, that we are dealing with "living semiosis" which needs to be transmitted from generation to generation.

Now it is time to look into the definition of intangible cultural heritage and the domains where intangible cultural heritage may be manifested.

4.0 The definition of intangible cultural heritage and its major domains

In the *Convention* we find the following definition of intangible cultural heritage:

The 'Intangible Cultural Heritage' means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. (UNESCO 2003, Article 2, p. 5)

We notice first how the definition seems somewhat "messy"; it is not exactly clear, for example, what the features or characteristics are in virtue which intangible cultural heritage is, indeed, "intangible cultural heritage" (see also Hibberd 2019). Remembering etymology, and that the word intangible is derived from the Latin root of non tangere, meaning "untouchable", the definition, perhaps to some one's surprise, also involves a mention of artifacts (see also Rudolff 2006). Furthermore, do "practices" and "skills", to some extent, presuppose "knowledge" – knowledge "itself" being a hard concept to define as witnessed within, for example, the long tradition of epistemology (see also Pavese forthcoming). All that being said, the definition is still

most frequently used when State Parties are inventorying elements of intangible cultural heritage; or the definition works as the criterion of compliance for State Parties` inclusion of elements into inventories. We can read in the *Guidance Note* as follows:

States Parties are free to develop criteria for the inclusion of elements of intangible cultural heritage in their inventories… A commonly used criterion is compliance with a definition of intangible cultural heritage; the definition used in Article 2 of the Convention is frequently referenced. (UNESCO 2017, p. 16)

And the definition still merits our attention, we believe, because it points towards an important relationship of mutual dependency between the intangible and tangible in cultural heritage; or the definition taps directly into the consideration of the *Convention* mentioning: "the deep-seated interdependence between the intangible cultural heritage and the tangible cultural and natural heritage." (UNESCO 2003, Preamble, p. 3). This mutual dependency is further indicated in the *Convention*, when different major domains are mentioned, where intangible cultural heritage may be manifested. Hence, it is stated:

The 'Intangible Cultural Heritage' is manifested *inter alia* in the following domains:

a. oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;
b. performing arts;
c. social practices, rituals and festive events;
d. knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe;
e. traditional craftsmanship

(UNESCO 2003, Article 2, p. 5-6)

As was the case with the UNESCO definition of intangible cultural heritage, is the list of domains also somewhat conceptually problematic; that is, even though these domains refer to the different ways in which intangible cultural heritage can be manifested, a single heritage is not confined to just one domain. The intangible cultural heritage of a community/group can be expressed in various forms. For example, festivals are complex manifestations of intangible cultural heritage which both include performing arts, oral traditions, social practices, as well as

different examples of craftsmanship. This is also recognized in the *Guidance Note*: "In fact, organizing inventories by domain is often difficult as many elements of intangible cultural heritage could be classified under two or more domains." (UNESCO 2017, p. 18). Therefore, the proposed domains are inclusive rather than exclusive, and they intersect with each other. The manifestation of a single intangible cultural heritage often will involve multiple domains. Furthermore, the fourth domain, "knowledge and practices", is pivotal for the enactment of the other manifestations. Performing arts, for example, can also stem from oral traditions or the craftsmanship of instruments (see also Baker, Osman and Bachoc 2011; Smeets 2003). In all fairness we must also remember that the *Guidance Note* accentuates how the five different domains do not necessarily exhaust the possibilities of manifestations of intangible cultural heritage; hence, other domains can be formulated or added by the State Parties considered relevant to the local context (UNESCO 2017, p. 17). Yet, what is most interesting is not so much, we believe, whether there are five or more specific major domains where intangible cultural heritage may be manifested or if some elements of intangible cultural heritage should be inventoried under one or more domains. Rather, our focus is on the relationship between intangible cultural heritage and tangible culture (localized in domains) – as a relationship. This relationship is also vaguely hinted at in the UNESCO website where we find the page "Safeguarding without freezing":

[T]o a large extent, any safeguarding measure refers to strengthening and reinforcing the diverse and varied circumstances, *tangible* and *intangible*, that are *necessary* for the *continuous evolution* and *interpretation* of intangible cultural heritage, as well as for its transmission to future generations…some elements of tangible heritage are often associated with intangible cultural heritage. That is why the Convention includes, in its definition of intangible cultural heritage, the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated with it (our italicizing).

If both diverse and varied tangible and intangible circumstances are at play, as necessary for the continuous evolution and interpretation of intangible cultural heritage, then there must also be, we believe, a continuous contact between these circumstances. Understanding the relationship between the tangible and intangible in intangible cultural heritage is not unfolded more precisely in the *Convention* or other supporting texts as far as we can tell. Yet, it should not come as a surprise by now that we will argue this relationship is a semiotic relationship involved the production, communication and interpretation of meaning – whereby, most importantly,

something, whether an oral tradition, art performed or a festive event, can mean something – and be valuable – for a community/group as part of their intangible culture. Understanding this relationship, as semiotic, should also have some consequences for inventorying elements of intangible cultural heritage.

4.1 Semiotic Reflections II

With the above mentioned in mind what more can we say, semiotically speaking, about the relationship between the intangible and the tangible concerning intangible cultural heritage – that is, with a particular focus on the relationship itself. First, as described already, does UNESCO recognize the relationship between intangible cultural heritage and artifacts, a relationship, they say, concerns "association"; furthermore, is it mentioned in the *Convention* that there are different domains where intangible cultural heritage may be manifested. Finally, we remember that the UNESCO definition of intangible cultural involves knowledge, skills and practices. So, how can we, meaningfully, relate these three aspects of intangible cultural heritage? Again, it makes sense, we believe, to take a look at one Peirce`s definitions of sign. And here he addresses the sign and knowledge:

As we know a sign, it is something which represents the real Truth, in some aspect of it, to somebody; that is, determines a knowledge of that Truth…But knowledge is nothing, quite nothing but a counterfeit unless it would under some circumstances, determine conduct. It must have real effects. In fact, any outward sign must, not merely as a thing, but as a sign produce physical effects in order to be communicated. (CP 2.242; 1903)

This quotation points nicely towards not only how knowledge, but also skills and practices we will add, become meaningful phenomena; we notice, indeed, how their meaningfulness, somehow and to some extent, is related to the tangible. That is, for knowledge, and skills and practice, to be meaningful they involve or have a reference to practical consequences. However, it is important to understand that the practical consequences mentioned here are the consequences which would follow under certain circumstances – or, again with a reference to Peirce, these consequences are "conceivable practical" (CP 5.196; 1903) consequences. This is of central importance. Because knowledge, skills and practice, for example, do not simply

concern present or past practical consequences but also future practical consequences that would follow from certain circumstances (hence conceivable consequences) – this continuity at the same time underlines, we believe, what is meant by intangible cultural heritage as indeed "living heritage". Furthermore, can intangible cultural heritage therefore be understood as a meaning potential; that is, a meaning potential open for continuous actualization in conduct. Yet, no finite series of actualizations in conduct can exhaust the meaning potential of intangible cultural heritage; because intangible cultural heritage concerns a "would-be" (CP 5.453; 5.457, 1905) or always refers to the future – potentially conferring meaningfulness upon action making it conduct. That is also why intangible cultural heritage can, and often does, evolve – due to, for example, changes in the (community/group) environment. And, therefore, on the other hand, without any actualizations in (series of) conduct, intangible cultural heritage will, in the end, cease to mean anything for a community/group and simply die out. From the perspective of Peirce`s definition of sign we can understand, then, why there is an intimate and interwoven relationship between the intangible and tangible in intangible cultural heritage – as a phenomenon of meaning. Formulating it briefly, to be meaningful, intangible cultural heritage involves an idea (often more ideas) referring to conceivable practical consequences, and these conceivable consequences are related to the tangible and the possible manifestation of the idea(s) – whether involved in conduct concerning oral traditions, performing arts, craftmanship and so on. This is also why, from a Peircean perspective, developing the meaning of intangible cultural heritage concerns determining the habits it produces (EP I: 131; 1878).

4.2 The "why" of intangible cultural heritage and the Piribebuy poncho

Looking semiotically at intangible cultural heritage we must also remember that the meaningfulness of intangible cultural heritage is not only about the potentially where and how – it is also very importantly about the why. Or meaningfulness involves intellectual purport, purposes and intentions. We think that some of Eco`s ideas, from his semiotic theory of interpretation, can help us understanding further how this is the case. First, no cultural sign is an isolated affair; a sign is always part of a combination of signs. These signs (potentially) make up a coherent meaning-bearing arrangement which can be identified as, for example, a ritual, story,

song (see also Danesi 2024: 13) – or a culturally significant garment such as the Poncho Para'í de 60 Listas de Piribebuy (Paraguay), which stands for something in the cultural world of a community/group and the artistic imagination of the weavers. The Piribebuy poncho, therefore, not solely concerns practical use, protecting against sun and rain, and a potential income, but also lends itself to cultural interpretation(s) and involves processes of meaning making – for example, the oral transmission of knowledge of weaving techniques and craftmanship (which were first used by native peoples) to younger generations who are learning by observing and practicing. Looking at intangible cultural heritage from this perspective we can argue, inspired by Eco, that it involves utterances and thereby the intentions to "say something" (Eco 1992). And consequently, can intangible cultural heritage, as a semiotic phenomenon, be addressed both from 1) the intentions of the creators of intangible cultural heritage (the intentio auctoris), 2) the intentions of the bearers/interpreters of intangible cultural heritage, for example an audience (the intentio lectoris), and 3) the meaning potential (intentio operis) in the manifested intangible cultural heritage – such as an exemplar of the beforementioned Piribebuy poncho. It may seem strange to call a cultural artifact, including the Piribebuy poncho, a text to be read (Eco`s concepts concern textual interpretation); and that is not our point either. Rather, what we try to get at here is the meaning making potential of intangible cultural heritage, seen from three different perspectives – in relation to its important intellectual purport or involved purpose(s). Of course, does intangible cultural heritage not create itself; the Piribebuy poncho, for example, is created by weavers from the local area practicing traditional techniques. However, each weaver is specialized in and carries out making a particular part of the poncho – the body, the fringes and the guards. Thus, the finished poncho is the result of a collective process or its creation builds on the purposeful union of individual knowledge bringing to live the traditional craft and techniques. The weavers understand the collective process of creating the poncho as a cultural manifestation (intentio authoris), and the poncho stands out (artistically) due to its fine design and originality, also connoting unity and identity in the city of Piribebuy. A manifestation of intangible cultural heritage can, of course, take on a number of meanings; yet, from the perspective of Eco, it cannot take on all meanings (Eco 1992: 141). The meaning potential of the Piribebuy poncho (intentio operis) is closely related to the materials, combination of colours, design, weaving techniques and so on used in its production – as well as the historical context in which the poncho has evolved. Regarding the latter, the Piribebuy poncho, as its name suggests,

is closely linked to the history of the city of Piribebuy and, more broadly, to the history of Paraguay. During Paraguay's war against the triple alliance (Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay) (1864-1870) (Bethell 1996), the city of Piribebuy was attacked and overrun by an excessive military force causing massive destruction and the death of more than a thousand soldiers and civilians. Yet, the city was rebuilt and culturally reborn after the war, and the re-accentuation and development of cultural expressions, meant that the poncho, high-lightning ancestral practices, became, and still is, a potential sign of unity and identity – representing the city of Piribebuy as well as Paraguay. Today the Piribebuy poncho is worn, for example, at political and cultural events by politicians (including governors) and artistic personalities such as (folk) musicians; and when the poncho is brought into a number of different concrete contexts it lives as cultural expression in relation to the intentions of (intentio lectoris) its bearers/interpreters and their collateral experience (background knowledge). Politicians wearing the Piribebuy poncho, for example, intent to show sympathy with people living in rural areas or musicians represent Paraguayan culture outside the borders of the country. Thus, introducing Eco`s "three intentions" is a way to address, not only how, but also why, creators, bearers, interpreters and so on of intangible cultural heritage voice their identity and, thereby, what is meaningful to them – on the backdrop of a living community/group. Clearly, this "why" in relation to intangible cultural heritage is also closely connected to value or what is valuable for a community/group. In the *Operational Directives* and the *Guidance Note* the words value and values are mentioned more times; concerning guiding inventorying elements of intangible cultural heritage, referring to different types of values including community value, non-monetary value, monetary value, and entertainment value – as well as value appearing together with meaning. Yet, the more precise relation between value(s) and meaning is left open to interpretation, a relation which we find central in understanding how intangible cultural heritage and its manifestations have value for a community/group. So, let us, tentatively, look into that in the following.

4.3 Value, intangible culture and Xeedho

For Peirce, value and meaning are closely related; so closely related, as a matter of fact, that they almost seem synonymous (see also Nöth 2021: 57). He reflects in this way:

Meaning is something allied in its nature to value. I do not know whether we ought rather to say that meaning is the value of a word or whether we ought to say that the value of anything to us is what it means for us…Suffice it to say that the two ideas are near together" (MS 598; 1902)

Thus, inspired by Peirce, we will say that intangible cultural heritage and its manifestations have value for a community/group because these make sense. This may seem as a mere truism; yet, it is not a truism, at least, in what ways intangible cultural heritage and its manifestations make sense and, therefore, are, or become, valuable – for a community/group. It will be futile, we believe, to begin and list different types of values possibly making sense for a community/group (the list will probably never be complete) (see also Rudolff 2006: 60). Rather, it seems more fruitful to remember how for Peirce the category of meaning concerns the *interpretant* of the sign relation. Or, stronger formulated, the interpretant is the meaning expressed in the sign or its possible significative effect (see also Nöth 1995: 43; Liszka 1996: 24-25). Peirce divides the interpretant into different trichotomies; of particular relevance here, we believe, is the trichotomy involving the emotional, energetic and logical interpretants, respectively. Peirce writes: "there are three interpretants or meaning" (R318: 369; 1907. Cited from Jappy 2024) and he explains how: "…there are emotional meanings, or meanings that are feelings; there are existential meanings, or actual things or events, whether physical or psychical resulting from the significance of signs; and conceptual or logical meanings" (R318: 397; 1907. Cited from Jappy 2024). Thus, addressing how intangible cultural heritage and its manifestations may be valuable for a community/group, the mentioned interpretant trichotomy could perhaps contribute to our understanding; because these interpretants are meaningful effects modifying consciousness and action(s) of the members of a community/group finding living intangible cultural heritage valuable. Let us try and exemplify what we mean. Xeedho is a wedding ritual of the Somali community in the Republic of Djibouti and other countries of the Horn of Africa. In the ritual a mother-in-law gives her son-in-law a dish as a gift both celebrating the first week of her daughter's wedding, including honoring her as a bride, but also showing the appreciation of her son-in-law. The Xeedho dish consists of small pieces of dried dromedary meat; the meat is fried in butter and preserved in ghee. Furthermore, does the dish involve dates and spices. In short, all ingredients stemming from a nomadic environment. The dish is held in a container carved from a trunk of tree which is placed into a finely decorated basket; the whole arrangement is, thereafter, covered in different fabrics – which represents the clothing of a woman. According to the Somali

society is it the expected duty of the mother-in-law to prepare the Xeedho as a gift for the son-in-law; the ritual makes sense and is valuable because it strengthens the social ties between families of the community/group (logical interpretant). Seen from the perspective of the mother-in-law the duty to prepare the Xeedho combines the meaningfulness of the duty (logical interpretant) with a series of valuable actions (conduct) (energetic interpretants) – leading to a carefully prepared/arranged Xeedho accompanied by feelings of pride and commitment (emotional interpretant). Furthermore, seen from the perspective of the son-in-law, the ritual makes sense and is valuable because he feels appreciated and welcomed (emotional interpretant) by the mother-in-law into a new family – ensuring his happiness and health (logical interpretant). The knowledge and skills associated with the Xeedho (logical interpretant) is passed on (informally) from mothers (and grandmothers) to their daughters and nieces; that is, the young female generation is prepared for participating in the ritual themselves by observation and practice (energetic interpretant) – also learning and feeling (emotional interpretant) why the ritual makes sense and is valuable (logical interpretant). Thus, the interpretants described here (and many more could be added) are part of the conceivable practical consequences of the ritual – making it both meaningful and valuable to members of the (Somali) community/groups. Furthermore, it shows (here in a superficial way of course) how feelings, actions and thoughts are interwoven, when something is meaningful, and thereby valuable, for members of a community/group – in relation to their intangible cultural heritage. Perhaps, most importantly, however, returning to the discussed relation between the intangible and tangible in intangible cultural heritage, is, we can argue, that it is the interpretant which mediates between the two – thereby integrating meaning with the valuable. Finally, let us also remember how the interpretant with Peirce (and Eco) is a dynamic concept; hence, the interpretant, is a reaction to the sign (and the object) and has the meaning potential to be interpreted by another sign relation involving a new interpretant and so on. Thus, Peirce`s famously describes as follows:

The meaning of a representation can be nothing but a representation. In fact, it is nothing but the representation itself conceived as stripped of irrelevant clothing…So there is an infinite regression here. Finally, the interpretant is nothing but another representation to which the torch of truth is handled along; and as representation, it has its interpretant again. Lo, another infinite series. (CP 1.339; no year)

When we, or some members of a Somali community/group interpret, for example, something as "Xeedho" this perhaps further causes a process of meaning-making – *Xeedho* suggesting wedding ritual, suggesting the role of a mother-in-law, suggesting how to prepare the Xeedho, suggesting frying dried dromedary meat in butter and so on, potentially, ad infinitum. This semiotic process lies behind the transmission of knowledge, skills and practices of intangible cultural heritage from generation to generation; but it also concerns the possibility of intangible cultural heritage to continuously develop in relation to changes in the cultural/natural environment. Intangible cultural heritage, therefore, is a function of a more or less vast socio-semiotic network of meaning organized into, and developing through, interpretants of different types – which make possible the meaningfulness of intangible cultural heritage, regarding, inter alia, the intentions and values of the members of a community/group.

5.0 Inventorying elements of intangible cultural heritage – a few semiotic remarks

From the previous pages it should not come as a surprise when we say that inventorying intangible cultural heritage is a question of inventorying meaning; there is, of course, nothing new in such a statement (see also Rylance 2006: 113-115). UNESCO also recognizes how: "Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage is about the transferring of knowledge, skills and meaning." However, our point is (much) more pronounced: Semiotic activity is the always already presupposition for intangible cultural heritage, including the transfer of knowledge, skills, practices and so on (see also Eco 1979: 22). This is not the same as saying, however, that all aspects of intangible cultural heritage must be studied as semiotic phenomena; rather, what we want to say is that all aspects of intangible cultural heritage can be studied from a semiotic perspective (see also Eco 1979: 22). Thus, we understand intangible cultural heritage and inventorying its elements as (possible) contents of semiotic activity. In the *Guidance Note* we find the following interesting introduction to inventorying elements of intangible cultural heritage:

Inventories should be more than mere presentations of the names of elements, indexes or simple repertoires; yet they should not be scientific treatises either. Rather, they should *identify* each

element in an easily accessible way. This means *providing an actual description of its essential characteristics*. (UNESCO 2017, p. 12)

The introduction emphasizes the importance of creating inventories of intangible cultural heritage that strike a balance between simplicity and details of the elements. And concerning the description of the elements of the intangible cultural heritage this should cover the following points:

1.) the name of the element in the language of the community concerned and – if necessary – a more explanatory name for the general public, translated, if necessary, into another language

2.) the name of the community(ies), group(s) and, if applicable, individuals concerned and their geographic locations

3.) details about the present-day practice and transmission of the element, including its preparation and organization;

4.) its present-day function and value for the community(ies) concerned;

5.) its state of viability and, if applicable, any threats and risks to that viability, including threats caused by natural or human-induced hazards;

6.) if relevant, information on the capacity of the element to mitigate potential natural or human-induced hazards, as well as proposed safeguarding measures that could address the potential vulnerability of the element in an emergency;

7.) information concerning when the entry was collected and processed and how this was conducted with the participation and consent of the community(ies) concerned;

8.) the date of inclusion in the inventory and when it was most recently updated.
(UNESCO 2017, Guiding Principle 4: Substantial information, p. 12)

As far as we can tell this guiding principle for inventorying elements of intangible cultural heritage appears overall sound; the points 1-8 seem to come nicely together, as a method, to ensure that each element is both identified (points 1,7,8), contextualized and assessed for its current practices, significance (points 2,3,4), and sustainability (points 5,6). Or this methodology helps in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage by providing detailed information on its present state, potential risks, and necessary measures for its protection – and continued relevance.

However, remembering our previous ”Semiotic Reflections I and II” we would like to offer some comments, particularly on the points 3 and 4. Thus, let us address very briefly:

5.1 Details about the present-day practice and transmission of the element, including its preparation and organization (point nr. 3)

Regardless of the specific methods used to identify and define elements of intangible cultural heritage (e.g., field studies, interviews, textual analysis etc.), and regardless of the phase in the inventory process (e.g., planning, gathering information, systematizing/analyzing information etc.), it is crucial to understand that the primary focus of the inventory is meaning. Or that the inventory shall document/describe culturally meaningful expressions – regardless of concrete physicality (see also Ryland 2006: 103). That being said, a reflective focus must also always be on, secondly, the intimate (semiotic) relationship between the intangible and tangible at play in intangible cultural heritage. This relationship can be addressed by understanding that the meaning of intangible cultural heritage lies in its conceivable practical effects (Peirce). Formulated more precisely, perhaps, this implies understanding the meaning of intangible cultural heritage through the conceivable impact/effect it has on the community/group (its behaviour/conduct). And, this impact/effect of the intangible cultural heritage can of course be observed in how and where it is practiced, transmitted, and valued by the community/group. By understanding that the meaning of intangible cultural heritage lies in its conceivable practical effects, the context in which intangible cultural heritage occurs is also emphasized methodologically; that is, this understanding should make it (more) likely that the inventory will reflect the real-world setting and the tangible elements associated with the intangible cultural heritage, also making the documentation more accurate and thereby potentially instrumental for subsequent safeguarding activities. Finally, by addressing the meaning of intangible cultural heritage through its conceivable practical effects also involves the acknowledgement that intangible cultural heritage is not a static phenomenon but evolves over time. And, indeed, by documenting the practical effects of the intangible cultural heritage, the inventory will remain relevant and reflective of the current and tendential intangible cultural heritage expressions – or, in short, it will reflect the living intangible cultural heritage.

5.2 Its present-day function and value for the community(ies) concerned (point nr. 4)

The meaning and value of intangible cultural heritage are semiotically closely related; so closely related that they almost seem synonymous; and the present-day function of the intangible cultural heritage shall be understood in relation to both and the community/group. Thus, the value of intangible cultural heritage for a community/group can be addressed by looking at the (different) perspectives of the community/group members – also remembering the value potential of the intangible cultural heritage itself. This involves, we believe, addressing the two different types of intentions of community/group members, namely, intentio auctoris and intentio lectoris (Eco) – or the intentions of, for example, the creators and/or practitioners of the intangible cultural heritage as well as why it is meaningful, and therefore valuable, for other community or group members to engage with this heritage, such as an audience. Concerning the latter, the significance of a festival may vary, and therefore have different value, among different generations within the same community/group. The elements of intangible cultural heritage cannot, however, take on all meanings (due to intentio operis); a traditional craft, for example, might be documented in terms of its techniques, materials, and historical context – and this objective account functions as a form of restraint on the community or group members and their (possible) too far-reaching inclinations and idiosyncratic interpretations concerning the elements of the intangible cultural heritage, including its value (see also Chodun 2019). By considering these perspectives, then, the inventory can capture the values of the intangible cultural heritage which resonates with the members of the community/group as well as preserving its intrinsic (but developing) meaning. This, of course, also aligns with the ambition of ensuring the highest possible degree of representativeness and inclusivity of the inventory (UNESCO). Finally, because meaning and value are almost synonymous, and because the meaning of intangible cultural heritage lies in its conceivable practical consequences, its value, for a community/group, can also be assessed via the concept of interpretant (Peirce). Thus, the value of intangible cultural heritage for the community/group members is intertwined with their emotional responses, actions/conduct and intellectual understanding; in short, their emotional, energetical and logical interpretants. This means that there is a complex and dynamic interplay between meaning and value which highlights the importance of interpretation in the construction of meaning of the intangible cultural heritage; also, regarding values internalized at a deep

emotional level – which sometimes can be difficult to inventory due to, for example, that the members of a community/group cannot, themselves, identify the values or articulate these in a manner open for evaluation (see also Ellis 2011: 163-164). Finally, in the above we have not addressed, explicitly at least, how a community/group probably never is a homogenous whole; that is, in the community/group there can (or will?) be different perspectives at play (anchored in for example authority and power) concerning the identification and valorisation of elements of intangible cultural heritage, including the characterisation of sense of identity. However, knowing how different "intentions" (Eco) and different types of potential significative effects (interpretants, Peirce) are involved in intangible cultural heritage, as a living culture, can open a way to describe diverse community/group "stakeholders", and their different experiences, understandings, purposes, and so on.

6.0 Final remarks

Within the framework of UNESCO inventorying intangible cultural heritage involves documenting and preserving practices, expressions, knowledge, and skills that communities/groups recognize as part of their cultural heritage. These elements are reflected, we believe, in a necessarily interdependent relationship between the intangible and the tangible within living cultural heritage. And this relationship concerns continuous processes of meaning interpretation and meaning-making involved in the conceivable practical consequences which intangible cultural heritage have for a community/group. Therefore, is intangible cultural heritage open for semiotic studies – including, having a possible practical relevance for inventorying its elements. Semiotics, here with Peirce and Eco, can help us understand how intangible cultural heritage always already is related to meaning – which again always is related to purposes/intentions and values. Therefore, does this semiotic framework point towards that the inventory of intangible cultural heritage shall address the multifaceted nature of its elements of meaning, reflecting their dynamic, contextual, and interpretive dimensions regarding a community/group. For UNESCO safeguarding intangible cultural heritage means, inter alia, inventorying its elements – that is, the elements which provide a community/group with a sense of identify and continuous contact to its cultural/natural environment and history. Inventorying

these elements, concerns, we will add, the semiotic safeguarding of meaning. No more and no less.

7.0 Literature

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