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Ethnochoreology as a Mediating Perspective in Irish Dance Studies

Up until the 1980s, dance in Ireland existed as an important human activity, engaged in for various reasons: socialization, entertainment, competition, performance, tourism, ceremonial occasions, and so on. It was not, however, researched and examined on a par with other fields of study within the social sciences. From the 1980s on, however, the academic study of dance within the context of culture increasingly gained ground in the West, due to the influence of a number of anthropologists in the United States interested in human movement studies.¹ Academicians also began to note the work of ethnochoreologists in Europe who, since the 1960s, had been involved in field research and studies of dance in their respective cultures.² Dance and the role that it played—together with the meaning that it embodied within diverse societies around the world—gradually became a significant field of research and study. Scholars within multidisciplinary fields of study—including anthropology, ethnochoreology, ethnomusicology, dance ethnology, sociology, philosophy, cultural studies, cultural geography and feminist scholarship—argued for the significance of dance and the body as a way of illuminating and understanding issues relating to human

1. See, for example: Adrienne Kaeppler, “Method and Theory in Analyzing Dance Structure with and Analysis of Tongan Dance,” *Ethnomusicology*, 16, 2 (May, 1972), 173–217, and “American Approaches to the Study of Dance,” *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 13 (1991), 11–12; Drid Williams, “The Human Action Sign and Semasiology,” in *Dance Research Annual*, 10 (New York: CORDE, 1979), pp. 39–64, and “Fieldwork,” in *Dance in the Field: Theory, Methods and Issues in Dance Ethnography*, ed. Theresa J. Buckland (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 26–40; Anya Peterson Royce, *The Anthropology of Dance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977); Judith Lynn Hanna, *To Dance is Human: A Theory of Nonverbal Communication* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979); and Joann Keali’inohomoku, “An Anthropologist Looks at Ballet as a Form of Ethnic Dance,” in *What Is Dance: Readings in Theory and Criticism*, ed. Roger Copeland and Marshall Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 533–49.

2. See: Péter Morvay and Ernő Pesovár, “A Structural Analysis of the Hungarian Folk Dance,” in *Acta Ethnographica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 10 (1961), pp. 1–40; Anca Giurchescu and Lisbet Torp, “Theory and Methods in Dance Research: A European Approach to the Holistic Study of Dance,” in *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 13 (1991), pp. 1–10; Buckland, “Fieldwork.”

movement, culture, and humanity. Certain themes or concepts became prominent in this scholarship: for example the linguistic, ethnicity, identity, politics, cultural embodiment, and gender.³

In Ireland, the ethnochoreological perspective emerged in the 1980s with work by myself, followed by Helen Brennan and Frank Hall.⁴ My work included physically learning, documenting, and examining a marginalized traditional step dancing practice in North Kerry; it also looked at how the cultural politics of the cultural nationalist movement, specifically the Gaelic League, assisted in urbanizing, popularizing, and institutionalizing step dancing in Ireland. Brennan investigated *sean nós* (old style) dancing, another marginalized step dancing practice in Connemara, while Hall explored Irish dancing as ideology, sport, art, and duty.

In 1996, ethnochoreology entered the university system in Ireland in the form of an MA in Ethnochoreology at the Irish World Music Centre at the University

3. On the linguistic theme, see: Kaeppler, "Method and Theory"; Catherine E. Foley, "Irish Traditional Step-Dancing in North Kerry: A Contextual and Structural Analysis," PhD diss., London: The Laban Centre for Movement and Dance, 1988; *Dance Structures: Perspectives on the Analysis of Human Movement*, ed. Adrienne Kaeppler and Elsie Ivancich and Dunin (Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 2007), 277–302. On ethnicity, see: J. Clyde Mitchell, *The Kalela Dance*, Paper No.27 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1956); Keali'inohomoku, "An Anthropologist. . . ." On identity, see: *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*, ed. Martin Stokes (Oxford: Berg, 1994); Jane K. Cowan, *Dance and the Body Politic in Northern Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); Catherine E. Foley, "Perceptions of Irish Step Dance: National, Global and Local," in *Dance Research Journal*, 33, 1 (Summer, 2001), 34–45; Judy Van Zile, *Perspectives on Korean Dance* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2001); and Theresa J. Buckland, *Dancing from Past to Present: Nation, Culture, Identities*, ed. Theresa Jill Buckland (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), pp. 3–24. On politics, see: Hanna, *To Dance is Human*; Susan A. Reed, "The Politics and Poetics of Dance," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 27 (1998), 503–32; On cultural embodiment, see Deidre Sklar, "On Dance Ethnography," *Dance Research Journal*, 23, 1 (Spring, 1991), 6–10, and *Dancing with the Virgin: Body and Faith in the Fiesta of Tortugas, New Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Sally Ann Ness, *Body, Movement, and Culture: Kinesthetic and Visual Symbolism in a Philippine Community* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992); Barbara Browning, *Samba: Resistance in Motion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); and Tomie Hahn, *Sensational Knowledge: Embodying Culture Through Japanese Dance* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2007). On gender, see: Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal*, 40, 4 (December, 1988), 519–31; Judith L. Hanna, *Dance, Sex and Gender* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Jane K. Cowan, *Dance and the Body Politic in Northern Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); and *Dance, Gender, and Culture*, ed. Helen Thomas (London: Macmillan, 1993).

4. See Catherine E. Foley, "Irish Traditional Step-Dancing in North Kerry"; Helen Brennan, "Dancing on a Plate: The Sean-Nós Tradition of Connemara" masters' thesis, Queens University Belfast, 1994; Frank Hall, "Irish Step Dancing: Discipline as Art Sport and Duty," PhD diss., Indiana University, 1995.

of Limerick.⁵ This was the first program of its type in any university in Europe, and it validated dance and human movement as legitimate fields of study within the social sciences. I designed this MA program, and have directed it since its inception. In 1999, the university added an MA in Irish Traditional Dance Performance program at the Irish World Music Centre. I was invited to design this program as well, and, again, have directed it since its inception. This was likewise the first such program—in fact, the first at any university in the world. They coexist among a suite of nine MA multidisciplinary programs and two undergraduate programs in music and dance.

Starting in the 1970s, modules and programs of dance had emerged at third-level colleges and universities throughout the developed nations of the West; in Ireland, however, such programs emerged a full decade or more later. The general tardiness in the rise of dance studies can be ascribed largely to inherited notions of Cartesian dualism in the West, a worldview that separated the mind from the body, and which favored the mind over the body. Descartes's famous dictum, "Cogito ergo sum," or "I think therefore I am," has been interpreted as being representative of this position. Indeed, the scientific name for human beings, *homo sapiens*—the wise man or knowing man—has placed an emphasis on knowing by means of the mind, not the body. In the logocentric culture of Western civilization, verbal and literate modes of expression and communication have dominated the nonverbal and the visual.⁶

This was made manifest within the educational system in Ireland; until relatively recently, academic-based subjects took precedence over the more vocational and practice-based subjects such as woodwork, metal work, home economics, art, and music. Currently, dance as a subject is available at the Leaving Certificate Applied level in Ireland and is included in the curriculums of primary and secondary schools as part of the Physical Education program. For Irish students, however, dance is not as yet available as a subject in its own right, neither in the Junior nor Leaving Certificate examination programs, the two state examinations.⁷ The "Cartesian dualist" mindset persists in Ireland: it is evi-

5. The Irish World Music Centre has since been renamed the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance.

6. See, for example, Paul Filmer, "Methodologies in the Study of Dance—Sociology," in *International Encyclopedia of Dance*, vol. 4, ed. S. J. Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 360–62.

7. The Leaving Certificate Applied was introduced in Ireland in 1995, and is a self-contained program. It is pre-vocational and is designed for those students who do not wish to proceed directly to higher education or for those whose needs, aptitudes, and learning styles are not fully catered for by the other two Leaving Certificate programs. Participants in the Leaving Certificate Applied are mainly engaged in work and study of an active, practical, and student-centered nature. Students do the Leaving Certificate Applied at about the age of eighteen. The Junior Certificate Examina-

dent in the ostensibly jocular remark heard in Ireland that separates the mind from the body: “Up here for thinking, down there for dancing.” However, as dancers know, dance is also a way of knowing—an embodied way of knowing that may take many years to master. In *Frames of Mind* (1983), Howard Gardner posited his theory of multiple intelligences, where bodily-kinesthetic intelligence is an intelligence in its own right and, therefore, a potential field of research and study.⁸

When dance studies emerged in the latter part of the twentieth century, it was met with skepticism; many academics perceived the subject as “soft,” compared to the “hard sciences” or such disciplines as economics, mathematics, and political theory. This attitude stayed entrenched well into the 1980s. In addition to being implicated in the deep-seated dualism of mind and body, dance was also implicated in other dualisms—for instance, masculine and feminine, or culture and nature. Generally speaking, within these other dualisms, men were traditionally associated with culture, agency, and a rational mind; women with nature, passivity and an irrational mind.⁹ These dualisms have by now been addressed in available scholarship in the West. In gender studies, for example, the work of French feminists Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous—influenced by the philosopher Jacques Derrida—has focused precisely on deconstructing such oppositions, arguing for “a more fluid interchange of diverse elements.”¹⁰ Christy Adair, speaking of dance in *Women and Dance: Sylphs and Sirens* (1992), observes that, “Analysis of the body which resists binary oppositions offers a challenge to traditional perceptions and possibilities of new identities.”¹¹

These dualisms and gendered identities have further been examined by such anthropologists as Jane K. Cowan (1990), such sociologists as Helen Thomas (1993) and Cultural Studies scholars, among them Susan Lee Foster (1996).¹² The period from the 1980s and 1990s to the present has increasingly produced scholarship in the field of dance, the body, and human movement. This work has convincingly contributed to a growing awareness of the significance of this

tion is taken at about the age of sixteen; the Leaving Certificate Examination at the age of about seventeen or eighteen. The Leaving Certificate examination is the culmination of the secondary school system in Ireland. The State Examinations Commission oversees these examinations.

8. Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York, Basic Books, 1983).

9. See, for example, Hanna, *Dance, Sex and Gender*.

10. Irigaray and Cixous as noted in Christy Adair *Women and Dance: Sylphs and Sirens* (London: Macmillan Press, 1992), p. 29

11. Christy Adair, *Women and Dance: Sylphs and Sirens* (London: MacMillan Press, 1992), p. 29.

12. See Cowan (1990); Thomas (1993); and Susan Lee Foster, *Corporealities: Dancing Knowledge, Culture and Power* (London: Routledge, 1996).

scholarship, particularly as it adds to increasing understandings of diverse societies and cultures and their worldviews.

Dance scholarship in Ireland, including traditional dance, was not only marginalized within academia until the 1980s; it was also rarely addressed within the literature on Irish Studies. Dance, along with music and song, is one of the trinity of the indigenous performing arts in Ireland—yet it was conspicuously under-represented in the printed collections of traditional arts projects fueled by a cultural nationalist climate, that appeared between the eighteenth century and the end of the nineteenth century. Verbal descriptions of traditional dances came into print for the first time in Ireland from the early decades of the twentieth century.¹³ This would support what the sociologist Paul Filmer has suggested, that dance “has been even more marginalised than the other arts” in the West.¹⁴

The dances, which were verbally documented in these publications, were disseminated both in Ireland and abroad. They were generally group dances and were referred to as “Irish dances,” “Irish Folk Dances,” “Irish Figure Dances,” or “Dances of Ireland.” Most of these publications used a “recipe-style” format of dance documentation—that is, the authors provided verbal instructions concerning the movements and figures of the dances and the musical time it took to complete the specific figures in question. This type of dance documentation functioned for the most part as an *aide memoire* for those already familiar with this particular style of dancing; little or no contextual or historical information was supplied with the dances (though an exception was O’Keeffe and O’Brien’s 1902 *Handbook of Irish Dances*). Further information was deemed unimportant: the authors presumed that those using these publications would already have embodied knowledge of Irish dancing and Irish culture, or alternatively, would have had access to somebody who had.

These publications were perceived to be representative of a body of Irish national dances. By the mid-twentieth century and later, Ireland—a firmly established postcolonial nation since 1922—had an established canon of these specifically “Irish” group figure dances. This canon, for the most part, had been selected, institutionalized, and popularized by the step dance organization An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha, established in 1930 by Conradh na Gaeilge, the

13. These early compilations include J.J. Sheehan, *Guide to Irish Dancing* (London: Jon Denvir, 1902) which was reprinted in 1986 by Peggy and Maureen McTeggart of the Irish Traditional Dance Foundation; James G. O’Keeffe and Art O’Brien, *A Handbook of Irish Dances* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1902); Elizabeth Burchenal, *Rinne na hÉireann—National Dances of Ireland* (New York: A. S. Barnes and Company 1925); Peadar O’Rafferty, *The Irish Folk Dance Book: Book 1* (London: Paterson’s Publications Limited, 1934), *The Irish Folk Dance Book: Book 1* (London: Paterson’s, 1950); and Peadar and Gerald O’Rafferty, *Dances of Ireland* (London: Max Parrish and Company, 1953).

14. Filmer, p. 360.

Gaelic League.¹⁵ (Other prominent organizations of Irish dancing include Comhdháil na Muinteóirí le Rincí Gaelacha (commonly abbreviated to An Comhdháil), CRN (Comhdháil le Rincí Náisiúnta), the Festival Dance Teachers Association, the World Irish Dance Association, Cairde Rince Céilí na h-Éireann, Cumann Rince na nGael, and Cumann Rince Dea Mheasa.)

In addition to producing a canon of group dances, the Gaelic League cultivated and developed a particular configuration of solo step dancing, beginning in the early twentieth century. Step dances were not, however, documented, as step dancing was understood by the cultural nationalist fraternity to be popular and not to be in danger of decline. The canon of group figure dances has functioned up to the present day within the competitive step-dance structures of An Coimisiún and other organizations of step dance in Ireland. This canon of dances is designated as Irish dances and is prescribed by step dance organizations and made available in booklets titled *Ár Rinncidhe Fóirne (Our Figure Dances)* published by An Coimisiún in 1939 (Book 1), 1943 (Book 2) and 1969 (Book 3). These dances are consistently performed by schools of Irish dancing in organized competitions and at step-dancing exhibitions. This canon of dances, has, in effect, become nationalized and, indeed, globalized, through the large numbers of Irish step-dancing teachers registered with the organization and their students within Ireland, the diaspora and beyond. In other words, Irish dance became institutionalized through the efforts of the Gaelic League to unify Ireland as a nation-state through Irish cultural practices. In constructing this canon, however, different regional dance styles and repertoires became gradually marginalized at the expense of promoting and disseminating the institutionalized “national” canon.¹⁶

These publications, with their emphasis on documenting and disseminating specific group dances, illustrated a particular process. The dances, written in a recipe-style format (see Figure 1) were treated as objects cut out of their specific culture, time, and place; they were ethnographic metonyms for the culture out of which they had emerged. This process resonates much with Susan Stewart’s research. In her wide-ranging study *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (1984), Stewart illustrates how collections attempt to create illusions of adequate representations of a world by first cutting objects out of specific contexts and then making them “stand for” abstract wholes. She gives the example of a Bambara mask, which, when placed within

15. Conradh na Gaeilge, the Gaelic League, was established in 1893 in Ireland to promote the Irish language as the spoken language of Ireland. Irish literature and such cultural activities as Irish singing, music, and dancing were also included in its cultural nationalist agenda.

16. See: Foley, “Step-Dancing in North Kerry,” and “Perceptions of Irish Dance”; Brennan, “Dancing on a Plate.”

the context of a museum becomes an ethnographic metonym for Bambara culture.¹⁷ In the same way, from the early decades of the twentieth century in Ireland, documented dances in these publications “stood for” and were metonyms for Irish culture.

Currently, in Ireland, there are multiple and distinct notions and understandings regarding what “Irish dance” is or is not. The label is used loosely, and its meaning would very much depend on the dance background of the dancer; the phrase “Irish dance” means something quite different to an Irish step dancer, and a ballet dancer, or a contemporary dancer in Ireland. Nonetheless, from a general perspective, “Irish dancing” is still widely understood to be the institutionalized and nationalized form of step dancing as promoted by An Coimisiún and the other organizations.

But this should raise an immediate question: To what extent does An Coimisiún—or any institution or organization in Ireland—actually speak for Irish dance or Irish dancing? Behind this question is a larger one: What is the Irish nation? Is Ireland a small, bounded, territorial entity that looks inward on itself for notions of its identity, or does it look elsewhere, to the diaspora and to other places outside itself to gain an understanding of what and who it is? Today, a vision of the Irish nation as multifaceted prevails. Historically, nation-states presented themselves as being unified with projected, illusionary, singular mindsets, and consequently appropriated and promoted cultural manifestations to represent these. They did not represent the diversities and multiple realities. But the Irish nation is not only one voice; it is multivocal, and consists of multiple identities.

Ethnochoreology documents and examines the many voices and human movement systems represented in the diverse collectives within and outside political and cultural geographical boundaries. It assists in providing an awareness and understanding of varied aesthetic human movement systems (domestic and other), and also in providing a deeper cultural understanding of the people who perform and participate in them both as practitioners and as active observers.

Ethnochoreology is interdisciplinary. It addresses and engages with both academic-based and practice-based knowledge, and also with the relationship between them. It examines issues of an epistemological and ontological nature for a more comprehensive and, importantly, a felt appreciation and understanding of dance and other human movement systems with the cultures that they reference.

Generally speaking, ethnochoreologists seek to understand dance (or any other human movement system) and its importance within its cultural context; they also seek to understand culture through dance. Fieldwork as a research

17. Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984) pp. 162–65.

method has been the hallmark of the discipline of anthropology since the 1920s, particularly since the work of Bronislaw Malinowski and Franz Boas.¹⁸ It remains the primary research method in ethnochoreology. Intensive periods of fieldwork bring researchers into direct contact with the people being studied, allowing them to observe, to participate in their culture in a role that is acceptable to those being observed, and to socialize with them. Thus, when researching dance from an ethnochoreological perspective, firsthand experience in the field is required. Ethnochoreologists do fieldwork for specific, often lengthy, periods of time in their selected fieldwork sites in order to witness and to examine human beings dancing in their “natural” cultural contexts. Questions that guide ethnochoreologists include, Who dances a particular kind of dance? Is it confined by age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic factors, locality, or political or religious belief systems? Where is it danced? Are particular types of places or contexts associated with it? What relationship does music, song or text play in its practice? When is it danced? Does it occur only at particular times of the year, as in calendrical customs or specific rituals? What function does it hold in the society being studied? Why do people dance it? And what meaning does it have for the people whose dance it is?

In their practice of fieldwork, ethnochoreologists also select themes or concepts to focus their research theoretically. Some may focus on dance and politics, while others may focus on dance and identity, dance and gender, dance and tourism, dance and transmission, the symbolic meaning of dance, semiotics and dance, dance made visible through ritual, dance and the media, dance and meaning, dance transmission, dance and the aesthetic system that generates, informs and shapes it, and so on. Whatever theoretical focus the ethnochoreologist takes, the objective is to provide what Adrienne Kaeppler called “insights into a sociocultural group by studying its movement systems.”¹⁹

Ethnochoreology includes all movement systems including social dance, theatrical dance, urban dance, and world dance. In Ireland these may be dance forms indigenous to Ireland, new to Ireland through immigrant populations or other dance practices that have accompanied globalization trends. Some ethnochoreologists—among them myself—have focused on indigenous dance practices in Ireland, of which step dancing is a ready example. Many of these researchers are themselves Irish step dancers (as I am). These studies challenge them to embrace and negotiate issues relating to inherited notions, concepts and cultural understandings from within Irish orthodox discourses on “Irish” dance.

18. Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1922); Franz Boas, *The Mind of Primitive Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1911)

19. Adrienne Kaeppler, “The Mystique of Fieldwork” in Buckland, *Dance in the Field*, p. 15; see also Kaeppler, “American Approaches.”

ḃallaí luimní—THE WALLS OF LIMERICK

Ni dóca sur simplí don rince ḡaelac ná an ceann so. Is oiriúnac ḡo mór é leis don lucht tosaithe aḡus do dhaoine nac bfuil bri ná hóige iontu a tuillead óir nac bfuil ann ac an éois-céim aḡus an luascad.

The Walls of Limerick is the simplest of all dances from the point of view of execution. At starting, the dancers line up in couples, lady on gentleman's right, each set of two couples facing each other. It is danced to reel-time, and consists of four movements, as follows.

1. AR AḡAIÓ IS AR ḡCÚL. **Advance and Retire.**

This is an essential feature in the majority of "long dances." Gentleman takes partner's left hand in his right, both advance to meet the opposite couple [2 bars], retire to place [2 bars]. Repeat the movement.

2. TREAḡNA LEAC-TAOÓ. **Half Right and Left.**

Ladies exchange places by side-stepping across to the left, passing each other face to face, and finishing with two short threes [4 bars]; gentlemen now exchange places, but side-step to the right [4 bars].

3. FUR IS MHÁ CAILL. **Dance with Opposite.**

Gentleman takes hand of opposite lady, both sidestep to gentleman's left, finishing with two short threes [4 bars]; sidestep back, finishing with two short threes [4 bars].

4. LUASCAD IS IOMPÚ SIAR. **Dance Round.**

Gentleman takes own partner's hands, both dance a complete circle around opposite couple [8 bars], finishing up to face in the opposite direction.

Repeat the movements with the next couple and with each succeeding couple until the music ceases. In this manner each couple progresses on the completion of the set of movements with the result that the couples dancing opposite each other are constantly varying.

They encounter these challenges both within the ethnographic process, and through their engagement with relevant literature in multidisciplinary fields.

Ethnochoreologists are most assuredly aware that they carry their own prejudices and biases, personal biographies, cultural backgrounds, and dance experiences. Being aware of and reflexive toward these biases can illuminate issues related to held perceptions and understandings of dance within and outside the ethnochoreologist's own ethnocentric world.²⁰ All ethnographic work is a dialogue. In the field, and when reading, analyzing, and interpreting the related literature, ethnochoreologists address notions of "self," "Other," "Othering," and self-reflexivity.²¹

This process assists researchers in the field in several ways. It enables them to acquire a sufficient degree of distancing to appreciate and understand the role, meaning, and importance of specific movement systems for diverse communities of practitioners. Moreover, it allows them to become aware of their own position in relation to these communities. Finally, it enables them to document and represent these communities ethnographically as social, cultural, and historical facts.²² Researchers may combine both emic ("insider") and etic ("outsider") research methods and perspectives, but the aim is to acquire an *emic* understanding of the culture through dance.²³ By negotiating what the theorist of anthropology Clifford Geertz calls "experience near" and "experience far," ethnochoreologists may assist in providing a deeper understanding of diverse dance communities and cultures and their respective movement systems.²⁴

Ethnochoreology may also challenge existing power and knowledge relations, and inherited imbalances in dance representation. In researching marginal or minority dance practices, ethnochoreologists place importance on these practices and the individuals and communities that practice them. By making recorded ethnographic interviews and video recordings available, ethnochoreologists give the previously marginalized an opportunity to be heard, to be seen, and to be understood.²⁵

20. For a discussion of reflexivity, see Drid William, "Fieldwork" in Buckland, *Dance in the Field*.

21. See, for example: Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books 1979); *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, ed. Gregory Barz and Timothy Cooley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

22. See Paul Rabinow, "Representations Are Social Facts: Modernity and Post-Modernity in Anthropology," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 234–61.

23. See Kenneth Pike, *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structures of Human Behavior* (Glendale: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1954).

24. Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

25. This ethnochoreological perspective gave rise to my establishment of Tráth na gCos, an annual dance festival at the Irish World Music Centre, in 1997. The festival attempted to foster an awareness

My own ethnochoreological research into step dancing in North Kerry was based on intensive field research. It began when I worked as a collector of Irish traditional music, song, and dance for Muckcross House near Killarney from 1980 to 1985. During the summer months of 1983 through 1985, I lived in the area. During that time, I participated in the culture as a musician, dancer, collector, and researcher. I learned the dances from the elderly holders of this marginalized dance practice; I interviewed and recorded primary informants; I made observations and took fieldnotes; I arranged to have dancers video recorded; and, using Labanotation and a mnemonic system of terminology used by the step dancers, I documented and structurally analysed the dances.²⁶ The latter provided a “kinetic dictionary” of this regional dance practice in the form of hierarchical inventories of movement. This provided important knowledge about the dance itself, and was essential to the research, as the practitioners of this movement system were elderly, and the practice as a “living” tradition was in decline at the time.

The study therefore provided an insight into the movement system and into the community who practiced and observed it. The study also provided an understanding of the ethno-aesthetic knowledge that governed the dancers’ conceptualization and practice of step dancing, as well as the cultural values held by the people of North Kerry, and how these values were embodied in performance.²⁷ Timing was important to them, as was neatness of movement. They danced in small spatial areas and they valued an upright torso. They respected how dancers percussively, and accurately, sounded out the beats of the accompanied traditional dance music played on fiddles, melodeons, flutes, and concertinas. And the dancers clearly took pleasure in the ways in which various dancers improvised within the system, and in doing so, illustrated the different personalities of the individual dancers. The decline in this dance practice suggested a decline in the values that were embodied in its practice, as well.

of the richness and diversity of dance practices in Ireland and abroad. At these festivals, diverse dance practices were recorded within workshops, seminars, and concerts for archival, pedagogic, and research purposes. This was followed in 2003 with the establishment of Dance Research Forum Ireland, a nonprofit, inclusive, and international society to develop and support an interdisciplinary dance research culture in Ireland. In 2009, the National Dance Archive of Ireland (NDAI) was established at the Glucksman Library, University of Limerick; the NDAI is inclusive of all dance.

26. See: Foley, “Irish Traditional Step-Dancing in North Kerry” and “The Creative Process within Irish Traditional Step Dance,” in *Dance Structures: Perspectives on the Analysis of Human Movement*, ed. Adrienne Kaeppler and Elsie Ivancich Dunin (Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 2007), pp. 277–302. Labanotation is a standardized system for recording movements of the human body. It was developed by Rudolf Laban in 1928.

27. See Foley “Traditional Step Dancing in North Kerry”; the PhD is to be published in 2012 by North Kerry Literary Trust. Listowel. Also see Foley, *Step Dancing in Ireland: Culture and History* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., forthcoming).

Ethnochoreology—as an interdisciplinary field of study—has developed in Ireland in a manner that accommodates Western, nationalist, and marginalized discourses of dance. It has integrated academic-based and practice-based knowledge; and has engaged in discourses of both an epistemological and ontological nature. Through documenting and representing particular dance communities and their dance practices in Ireland, ethnochoreology contributes to the development and understanding of dance knowledge and practice in Ireland and abroad. With its focus on understanding human beings who dance or move in particular systematic ways in culture, ethnochoreology provides a unique perspective on culture, and therefore has much to offer studies on Irish culture. Examining dance and the body—including mind, body and the senses—in society provides an understanding and appreciation of the values, ideologies, and sentiments of culture as embodied in its dance and movement practices. Ethnochoreology as a perspective allows for such an examination. By extension, ethnochoreology also allows for wider cultural understandings of ourselves and others through dance and human movement.

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