Linton, L-J.

THE RESURFACING OF TRADITIONAL FEET
The Role of the Media in the Renewal of Traditional Cultural Forms
The Example of Irish Dance
THE RESURFACING OF TRADITIONAL FEET
The Role of the Media in the Renewal of Traditional Cultural Forms
The Example of Irish Dance

Lisa-Jayne Linton

Submitted as the long essay/dissertation component (which counts for 50% of the degree) in fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Cultural and Media Studies, University of Natal, Durban.

December 1997
PREFACE

The entire dissertation is the candidate’s own original work, unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, and has not been submitted to any other university.

The financial assistance of the Centre for Science Development (HSRC, South Africa) towards this research is hereby acknowledged. The opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at are those of the candidate, and are not necessarily to be attributed to the Centre for Science Development.
Abstract

This essay is an examination of John Thompson’s articulation of the "mediazation of tradition" (180) from his book *The Media and Modernity* (1993). He identifies the double-edged nature of the media’s contact with traditional practices and asserts that even though the media is a destabiliser of traditional practices, it can also alternatively provide the very means for their enhancement, both within and outside of their contexts of origin. The paper examines this theory with specific reference to traditional Irish dance. The renaissance of traditional Irish dance in the years 1994-1997 can be contributed almost exclusively to the ubiquity of the media. The filming of the Irish step-dancing production *Riverdance: The Show* and the subsequent communication and transmission primarily through televised and videoed displays of performances to a global audience, has assisted in the renewal of this dance form.

(P)rophecy has accompanied the arrival of most every new communication (Jones :1995:2).

But all the while Irish dance was biding its time (Brophy :1997:9).

In our electronic Baudrillardian world of the hyper-real, where copies exist without originals, signs have become detached from referents, and "computer-mediated communities" (Jones :1995) are a startling reality, the decline of traditional practices as theorised and predicted by classical social theorists writing on processes of Modernity, would appear to be an obvious end-result. However, the contraction of space and time, tendencies towards accelerated globalisation, and the concomitant disruption of marked frontiers, has by no means elbowed out ùtraditionù from our post-modern techno-cultural picture. Teleconferencing, e-mail, the Internet, as well as the more-established media of radio, print, television, and the photograph, have far from assisted in the envisaged ùradication of cultural differenceù (d’Agostino and Tafler :1993:47) and the entropy of traditional forms. Rather, with the post-war proliferation of mass media products and a pre-millenial scenario of the world media-panopticon, the increased ùmediated visibilityù (Thompson :1993:5) of all aspects of life, has resulted in the resilience of many traditional cultural forms aided, by extension, in their commodification. Nowhere is this more palpable than in the current (1994-1997) renaissance of traditional Irish music and dance, both internationally and locally.
With promotional clips on the David Letterman talk show; hilarious mimicry of dance style by sitcom comedienne Ellen Degeneres at the 1997 Grammy Awards Ceremony which was televised live to 170 countries and a global audience of 1.5 billion (http://riverdance.com); parody of the central dance piece by a family of aliens on the American sitcom 3rd Rock From The Sun and outright derision as a mail order video purchase in British magazine The Face (February 1997) under their "Catalogue of Horrors" (36); the ubiquity of commentary on this show would appear to mark it as a formidable cultural export and as the primary contemporary transmitter of Irish culture. Indeed, since its inception in 1994 when it was just a seven minute single dance sequence performed on a live television show broadcast to hundreds of millions around the world (Brophy :1997:9), Riverdance has inspired the erection of several Internet sites dealing with Irish history, dance and culture in general, and in South Africa, the establishment of an Irish Dance Commission (to be effected in January 1998). Furthermore, in the process it would seem that this show has become an unwitting site of Irish nationalism in its presentation, through music and dance, of an "allegory for the history of Ireland and its people from the dawn of civilisation to the present" (Smyth :1996:82). For a nation whose history consists of a succession of brutal political and cultural oppressions, this show has become a tool of cultural empowerment.

Quite striking about this renewal of Irish culture is that it has occurred primarily through the televised display of dance. The nature of dance is such that it is ephemeral - the same performance can never be repeated. However, technical media allow for reproduction, for the production of multiple copies of a symbolic form (Thompson :1993:20), and can thereby unlock a traditional form from its fixed geographical locale and national context of origin, as well as provide the storage space for it to become an historical document. It is doubtful whether this proliferation and reaffirmation of Irish dance throughout varied countries could have occurred - on the large scale that it has - outside of a context of global media circulation.

This paper will examine John Thompson's (1993) articulation of the "mediazation of tradition" (180), using Riverdance: The Show as an example of the way in which the media, although strongly perceived as a destabiliser of older ways of life, can, on the flip-side, provide the forum for the resurfacing and legitimation of traditional cultural forms, and thereby facilitate the bolstering of national identity.

MODERNITY, TRADITION, THE MEDIA

Not all televangelists are American. The Ayatollah Khomeini used the media with Hollywood finesse. Indeed, the Islamic Revolution would have been impossible without TV (Taylor and Saarlinen :1994:4).
From the social science of Karl Marx and the economic history of Max Weber, to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a recurring premise has been prevalent throughout:

With the advent of Modernity and the progression of industrial capitalism, there would be an irreversible decline in the role of tradition (Thompson: 1993:179). The mutation of known boundary markers brought on by this emergence of capitalism would, it was held, lead to a collapse of the traditional practices, anchored onto the familiar grids of space and time, that historically had lent understanding to the support structures of kin and neighbour. This assumption manoeuvred its way into the modernisation theories posited by the communication-for-development scholars (Lerner, Pye, Rogers) of the 1950s and 1960s. Developed specifically to bring the industrially underdeveloped Third World countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America, in line with the First World nations of Europe and North America, the dominant communication paradigm of development-modernisation held that there should exist a rigid dichotomy between traditional societies and their modernised successors. After mechanisation and industrialisation, the residue of traditional practices into the middle of the twentieth century could therefore, according to these development initiators, only be understood as a return to the past, a refuge for backward souls, a refusal to give up something that is doomed to disappear (Thompson: 1993:183).

Accepted by these scholars was the notion that the mass media would assist in this bipolarisation of the traditional and the modern society, by challenging the existing patterns of social interaction - the interpersonal communication - which usually forms the fabric of a traditional practice.

Mass media produce and transmit symbolic forms which, in order to be meaningful phenomena, need to be transmitted within a social context from producer to receiver (or consumer) (Tomaselli: 1994:125). Mass communication allows for the fixation, reproduction, institutionalization, and time-space distansation of symbolic goods (Tomaselli: 1994). The fixation of symbolic forms initially referred to print media's capacity to store information, to be preserved for subsequent use (Tomaselli: 1994:125). Here, information consumption need not be instantaneous: A newspaper does not need to be read/consumed immediately (Tomaselli: 1994:125). Thus, production and consumption can occur across different locations of time and space. With fixation, and the subsequent technological innovations which produced the durability of these fixed symbolic forms, the reproduction of symbolic goods could occur. Once tied into institutions which seek to exploit new opportunities for the fixation and reproduction of symbolic forms (Tomaselli: 1994:125), commodification of these forms was made possible. These aspects of the media meant that under Third World conditions, media could weather down the need for the intensive face-to-face interactions existent in traditional societies - one of the
fundamental ways in which traditions are transmitted. This element of media transmission was viewed as a boon to modernisation scholars who realised that the media—specifically the media of film and television, in the production and transmission of symbolic forms—would expose people to new ideas and alternative attitudes, enabling them to envisage the adoption of an array of surrogate lifestyles. For development theorists, the specific aim was to encourage the relinquishing of those ways of life grounded in tradition that would pose as obstacles to modernisation. A contemporary example of the media’s ability to catalyse change as latterly described occurred in China in the late 1980s when, through local and international television broadcasts, the people were encourag(ed) to question traditional values and official interpretations.

By itself, this certainly did not bring about the audacious demonstration at Tiananmen Square, nor did it determine the course of the subsequent confrontation. But in the absence of television, it seems unlikely that the events of Tiananmen Square could have unfolded in the way they did (Thompson:1993:178).

Under this main communication paradigm, the mass media were believed to contain a “strong pro-development” (Melkote:1991:149) bias and could act as a modernising implement. Here, “development” was viewed quite generally as “improved living conditions.” However, this understanding of “development” was formatted within a Western perspective which contained strong “economic” overtones. Western scholars shifted the blame for the industrial underdevelopment of traditional societies onto the traditional individual’s unwillingness to change—to abandon traditional ways of life. Because economic improvement is measurable—measured by the rate of growth of output (GNP)—and an individual’s psychological, emotional and spiritual well-being is not as easily assessed, the latter factors are often sidelined or ignored completely when theories are advanced. In 1970 however, the United Nations Heritage Conservation (UNV)—a subsidiary association of the United Nations General Assembly—was established to concentrate on the conservation of cultural heritage. This association recognises the importance of the preservation of cultural heritage. The programme’s reason for existence is the following:

Cultural heritage is for every people part of what they are. If it is lost by neglect, they are diminished; if lost by force, they are uprooted. Security of the home as the focus of our culture and safety of the books, music, dance,
Robert White has pointed out that social theory has fairly systematically refused to examine ‘culture’ as pivotal to an individual’s life. ‘Culture’ is the way in which people understand and make sense of their worlds. Integral to any culture are the traditions that contribute to its composition. However, ‘culture’ implies meaning and subjective values. Culture comes too close to the metaphysical foundations of society to be taken seriously (White: 1994:4). The genesis of traditions in any one village, region, country or nation, occurs for a reason. They do not appear simply as superfluous details that serve only to aestheticise and accessorise life: people know their way of doing things; they know a customary mode of thought and performance. They do not necessarily value it simply because it is traditional but because it suits them. It developed, after all, to meet their own requirements and conditions, and, if those requirements and conditions remain, theirs is the most practical means of doing whatever is required - until they can be convinced by means other than those of mere proof that it is not so (Cohen: 1982:5).

Indeed, proving that an ascetically non-traditional way of life was preferable, was what communication scholars in the fifties and sixties set out to propound in order to encourage modernisation. However, the importance of traditions - not only at the village and rural levels, but in the cities of intense modernisation - was underestimated by many academics, whose scholarly discourses were bound up in Western Cartesian dualisms that deal in processes of ‘hierarchising’ and essentialising binarisms. These dualisms were obviously reflected in the modernisation paradigm’s belief that there should be a sanitary split between traditional and modern society.

The conviction that modern times would result in the decline of tradition, is a view that has been revitalised
in recent years, albeit in a more qualified fashion, by theorists who contend that the development of modern societies involves a process of ‘detraditionalisation’ (Thompson:1993:179).

While it is held that the media of high technology can destabilise traditional practices, religious and local forms of expression, it ‘mediazation’ (Thompson:1993:180) frees traditions from fixed sites of space and time, and creates an arena for diverse cultural encounters. When cultures ‘rub up’ against one another, an awareness of difference is heightened, and often spurs a desire to retain that very difference which separates one culture from another.

Contact between traditions can also give rise to intensified forms of boundary-defining activity. Attempts may be made to protect the integrity of traditions, and to reassert forms of collective identity which are linked to traditions, by excluding others in one’s midst (Thompson:1993:205).

These outcomes and the desire to retain traditions, even in Western society, had not been foreseen by the earlier communication scholars, many of whom had been influenced by Social Darwinism:- Social development is evolutionary, and more importantly, universal. Thus, all societies should be on the same development trajectory.

**Tradition**

If traditions were bound to be swept aside by the development of modern societies, then why do traditions - including religious beliefs and practices - remain such pervasive features of social life today (Thompson:1993:183).

A broad definition of ‘tradition’
is taken to mean a set of practices normally grounded by overtly or tacitly accepted rules of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past (Hobsbawm and Ranger:1993:1).

In daily usage, tradition evokes ideas of ‘changelessness’, ‘authority’ that which is of an enduring and unmodified nature. However in The Invention of Tradition (1983), Eric Hobsbawm underlines the malleability of traditions, their potential for rearticulation precisely because of their grounding property of ‘invention’. Hobsbawm draws a distinction between ‘custom’ and ‘tradition’, the two of which are often conflated. Custom is that which is a repeated action and often serves as a basis out of which laws emerge. Custom maintains a tenacious lock into ‘so-called traditional societies’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger:1983:2) where it is held to serve as a context for the justification of specific acts. Hobsbawm provides a practical illustration of the difference between the two:

‘Custom’ is what judges do; tradition (in this instance invented tradition) is the wig, robe and other formal paraphernalia and ritualized practices surrounding the substantial action. The decline of ‘custom’ inevitably changes the ‘tradition’ with which it is habitually intertwined (Hobsbawn:1983:2-3).

For my purposes however, I will be appropriating John Thompson’s (1993) spacious definition of tradition as ‘anything which is transmitted and handed down from the past’ (184) and is specific to a particular culture, community or nation, whether it be the dance, art, music, religion or traditional clothing, that form part of any culture’s ‘heritage’.

Most investigations into the reasons behind the staying power of traditions in a time of late Modernity or Post-Modernity, have a widespread disposition to ignore this ‘invented’ nature of traditions in the sense that they contain, in their make-up, the
maintain a use-value for a new generation of people. In
dynamic religion has proved useful to the military who have
used it as a rallying cry for their support during times of conflict (Thompson :1993). The
different faces of ‘invented tradition’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger :1983) show how openings
are created for the entrance of innovations that can renew traditional values and practices,
thereby restoring their utility:

In any period of human history a culture and
society are partly sustained by the tensions
between that which is thought to be of value,
inherited from the past, and that which is the
product of energetic, dynamic and deliberate
innovation (Corner and Harvey :1991:1).

Thompson outlines four fundamental aspects of tradition, explaining the ways in which
traditions are of use in social life. The four sides are the ‘hermeneutic’ ‘normative’ ‘legitimation’ and ‘identity’ aspects. These aspects are often tautly interdependent, and thus
the weeding out of one from the other, often proves difficult.

The ‘hermeneutic’ approach to tradition views traditions as a way to
furnish a culture with a framework for understanding social reality:- ‘It is not a normative
guide for action but rather an interpretative scheme’ (Thompson :1993:184). Thus
hegemonic ideologies and their associated traditions allow for the ascendancy of certain
cultural values, identities, and practices, at the expense of other cultural groups, and ‘provide
the frame for defining cultural competency’ (White :1994:2). In this vein, traditions tend to
yield a backdrop against which the singular and the deviant can be measured. In a scenario
of divergent cultural encounters within a physical setting, one culture - or traditional practice -
usually attains dominance and assumptions are then made about national identity for
example, based on the ‘assumed superiority’ (Corner and Harvey :1991:12) of the dominant
culture. - the ‘interpreting community’ (Hansen et al :1991:209). This then results in
monopoly of definitions, and productions of images and representations of the marginalised
cultural Other, by the dominant culture which purports to present an accurate description of
reality. An example of this ‘authority’ of cultural stance can be seen in

the assumed superiority of the values
of white, western Christendom; of
This assumed superiority often strengthens a nation’s resolution to hold onto its inheritance: In the late nineteenth century, resistance to British rule in Ireland became increasingly militant. Douglas Hyde, who was later to become the first President, formed the Gaelic Headquarters in 1893 to promote Irish language, music and dance in tandem with the struggle for independence (Smyth:1996:13).

Vested interests in the continued rule of one group means that traditions can be seen to subdivide into those traditions that arise spontaneously, and those that are actually imposed. The former are regarded as ‘authentic’ traditions arriving out of the social life of the people; while the latter are viewed as ‘artificial’ since they are not rooted in the day-to-day lives of individuals; they are not created and sustained by them through their practical activities but, instead, are imposed on them by political elites, entrepreneurs, promoters of the tourist industry and an odd assortment of self-proclaimed guardians of the past (Thompson:1993:202).

The subjective nature of traditions meant that they were violently rejected by the Enlightenment philosophers as explanatory frameworks. Prejudices, intolerance and superstitions, were thought to be endemic to traditional social forms. As irrational and mystificatory practices, the Enlightenment philosophers believed that the dissolution of tradition was a goal to be achieved in order to attain the full potential of human emancipation, and greater political and social understanding. Similarly, Karl Marx theorised that the corrosion of traditional forms, as met through capitalism, would reveal man’s true conditions:

By sweeping away the train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions...
which shrouded social relations in the past, capitalism enables individuals to see their social relations for what they are - namely, relations of exploitation - and prepares the way for the kind of enlightened revolutionary transformation envisaged by Marx (Thompson :1993:182).

However, as Thompson points out, by setting up the Enlightenment values of rationality, scientific knowledge, and ‘reason as guiding principle’ against myth and tradition, the Enlightenment thinkers were merely establishing yet another tradition - a set of values - ‘taken-for-granted assumptions which provide a framework for understanding the world’ (Thompson :1993:185), and setting the tone for the future. While it may seem that the hermeneutic use of traditions was destroyed by Enlightenment thinking, ‘it was only because the rise of modern societies was accompanied by the emergence of a new set of concepts, values and beliefs’ which appeared to some as self-evident (Thompson :1993:194).

To add another layer to ‘tradition-as-explanatory-framework’ Thompson deals with the normative aspect of tradition. By approaching tradition in this way, it can be seen to serve as an ideal, a standard or moral code that provides historical precedents to guide actions in succeeding contexts. This means that practices often become routinized - that is, they are done as a matter of routine with relatively little reflection on why they are being done in that way (Thompson :1993:185). Furthermore, justification for practices is attained by reference to tradition (Thompson :1993:185). Reference to past times also tends to infuse traditions with a particular brand of conservatism, respect and validity.

The validity of actions performed through the exercise of power and authority, can gain affirmation through reference to traditional behaviour. This third aspect of tradition is the ‘legitimation’ aspect. Max Weber has pointed out that claims to legitimacy of domination can be established through recourse to three grounds: rational, charismatic or traditional grounds (Thompson :1993). Where traditional authority is concerned:

obedience is owed to the person who occupies the traditionally sanctioned position of authority and whose actions are bound by tradition (Thompson :1993:186).
Through traditional reference, means that traditions become ideological - used to establish or sustain relations of power which are structured in systematically asymmetrical ways (Thompson :1993:186). In contexts of national disruption, traditions - heritage culture (Robins :1991:22) - are often called upon to reinfuse the feeling of community that has been threatened. Traditions tend to shut down differences of race, class and gender, in their use of the bolstering of national identities. Britain's loss of identity as an Empire, coupled with loss of credibility for the way in which the notion of Empire often manifested in racism and insular nationalism (Robins :1991:23), means that Britain has sought rehabilitation by just such a call on heritage.

(The Prince of Wales has been sensitive to the deepest disruptions and disappointments in the nation's post-war experience and his invocation of so-called traditional and spiritual values is again intended to restore the sense of British community and confidence that has collapsed in these modern or maybe postmodern times (Robins :1991:22).

Traditions thus far can be seen to exist as guides to both social and political actions.

The final aspect of tradition is that element that relates to the formation of identities. Identity-formation through the employment of traditions can occur on two different levels: the collective and the individual:

Self-identity refers to the sense of oneself as an individual endowed with certain characteristics and potentialities; as an individual situated on a certain life trajectory. Collective identity refers to the sense of oneself as a member of a social group which has a history of its own and a collective fate (Thompson :1993:186).

While traditions establish and nurture these two levels of identity-formation, they are basically shared practices. It would seem that it is the sense of being part of a specific social practice - of displaying traditional behaviour as a part of a particular social setting - that would foster the growth of the individual identity. This has the effect of imparting to the
individual activities as well as a sense of shared history and "collective fate" (Thompson 1993:194). The French sociologist, Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), developed the concept of anomie out of his belief that Modernity, in its breakdown of tradition - especially familial ties - would destroy this coagulation of collective identity. In its wake would come anomie - a sense of uncertainty, loss of direction, and a feeling that the individuals were somehow on their own (Lyon 1994:30). Individuals would feel divided as she or he felt trapped between adherence to the known values of the past, and the attitudes and values that were future-oriented (Thompson 1993).

The physical mobility that Modernity ushered in as boundaries shifted, was a catalyst in this breakdown of traditional ways. Mobility was held to be an essential ingredient in assisting modernisation and dissolving the traditional religions or practices, dependent on known social structures that might pose as handbrakes to these modernising developments. The Third World nations were discovered to cling to values that made modernisation difficult. As an example of the latter, Melkote (1991) appropriates Weber's insight from his Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capital (1920-1921), and relates the way in which such religious values of karma can inhibit progress in terms of the Western understanding of progress as industrialisation and urbanisation:

Weber identifies the theological ideas of samsara (rebirth) and karma (fate) as the dogmatic foundation of Hinduism. When combined with caste ritualism, they made the rationalization of the economy and progress and modernization impossible (50).

In order to modernise India therefore, sociologists took over Weber's ideas and called for the rejection of the joint family, the caste system, ritualism, and almost all other practices, institutions and beliefs characteristic of Hinduism (Melkote 1991:52). A crucial insight made by the early communication scholars was that the media could act as a mobility multiplier (Lerner 1958:52), steering people from such aforementioned lifestyles. In 1997, it is not difficult to see how people - through exposure to media - can become detached from, and disillusioned with, traditional practices and authority: The global mediated visibility of life attained through the diffusion of media products, has had severe ramifications for a traditional familial structure such as the English monarchy. Their appeal stems from the capacity to stand above the mundane world of party politics and to present itself as a body whose integrity and probity is beyond reproach, a body clothed in ancient costumes and governed by time-honoured customs (Thompson 1993:201). Yet, this visibility by media means that the dirty washing of the monarchy is publicised to an unknown audience, thereby upsetting their traditional authority and integrity.
Though dated in its theorising and criticised in the work of the subsequent Third World communication scholars, the dominant communication-for development paradigm did serve to illuminate the fracturing of traditional life that the media, linked to processes of Modernity, could effect. As such, it is useful to examine this paradigm in cursory fashion, for in terms of opinions on media impact, it has remained a touchstone.

The Modernisation Paradigm of Development

In the immediate post World War II years, the North Atlantic nations tried to solve the Third World’s problem of underdevelopment by an exact imitative transplantation of the Western economic and political systems and structures onto the Third World countries. However, this process turned out to be, at the end, simply the maintenance of the colonial structural legacy. This paradigm was a model which proved to

place great emphasis on the location of the mass media in the hands of a modernizing elite working through a structure of development bureaucracies centred in the westernized capital cities and extending out into the rural hinterlands of largely peasant, agricultural societies (White :1993:25-26).

Development came to be understood in terms of economic growth and was claimed to achieve the linear, unidirectional, and irreversible transformation of traditional societies into modern participant ones. Traditional societies under this paradigm are described as rural, with the existence of strong ties of kinship, and the use of oral tradition, where the individual lacks knowledge as well as curiosity, and the community operates under strong ties to traditionalism. Alternatively, the modern society is described as urbanised with the boundaries between social classes dissolving; the development and extension of the franchise; the establishment of democratic participation; mass media usage; and an increase in social mobility. The use of the mass media as modernising stimulus pointed out that the

basic idea is that communication stimulates and disseminates values and supports institutions that are
The economic emphasis of this model was shifted when it was proved that not only economic variables should be factored into this model of growth. Determinants of "psychology" and "education" emerged as obstacles to be overcome in the process of modernisation. Daniel Lerner’s classic and seminal study - *The Passing of Traditional Society* (1958) - investigates the use of the mass media for modernisation and is not economics-bound in its analysis. This communication paradigm known generally as the "modernisation paradigm" has lost widespread academic endorsement and has been discredited for its ethnocentricity: In the final analysis the communication strategies of this paradigm were proved simply to be a "veiled synonym for Westernisation" (Servaes:1995:41):- 

Sociologists sought to identify a set of cultural values in Asian religions that inhibited modernization. The recommendations of these studies was to continuously extend the modern (i.e. Western) component and displace all traditional (i.e. Asian) elements in developing nations (Melkote:1991:61).

However, it is helpful in highlighting how cultural autonomy can be debilitated, and how dependence by nations - in this case Third World on First World nations - in the economic, cultural and information spheres, can be entrenched. While this study had far-reaching influence in terms of the media's impact on social change and mass media use as a "modernising variable" the exposition is to a large extent flawed because of the universalising tendency of its analysis:- Lerner, in keeping with the whole understanding and impetus of the modernisation model, makes recourse to Western precedents and patternings without taking into account the colonial damage endured by many of these industrially underdeveloped countries. Yet to reiterate, it remains useful as an illumination of how the very cultural imperialism and transformations that Third World countries contest work, through media, and how specific values or traditions can gain supremacy.

**Synopsis of *The Passing of Traditional Society* (1958)**

In attempting an analysis of the modernisation of the Middle East, Lerner tries to locate exactly what opened up traditional societies to a "climate of acceptance of change" (Melkote:1991:24). Lerner employs a parable of a grocer and a chief to set up a comparative in order
characteristics of traditional societies versus modern ones, and
one individual ones came to move out of his traditional setting. A rough synopsis of the parable goes as follows:- In 1954, Lerner returns to Balgat in Turkey to perform follow-up investigations based on hundreds of interviews conducted in the Balgati village in 1950. At the time of the interviews, there had not as yet been the experiment of a national election, universal suffrage, or the existence of an opposition party - the Middle East modernising process had not yet begun. The two strains of opinion of the villagers are set up in the polarised views and attitudes of the village chief and a grocer. The former exemplifies traditional society, while the latter represents the impending forces of modernisation. The chief is a contented authority figure, not really capable of projection - of visualising his life as other than it is; whilst the grocer is more of a restless, cosmopolitan character, who maintains strong links with the nearby town, and is desirous of other possible situations. The grocer and the chief live in an underdeveloped village that is not untouched by modern influences. However, the latter are controlled and contained:- the only radio in the village is owned by the chief who explains the information received through the radio, and as such, entrenches his position of power by reinforcing his image as the wise elder. By 1954 however, a road from the town to the village had been built, and Balgat had been incorporated as a suburb of the town of Ankara. The village had entered history(Lerner:1958:39) as traditional attitudes to power and authority are then affected:- In traditional societies, information is dispensed by the elders or the chiefs, but with the increased interaction between town and village, the power to dispense information changed hands - the information fell into the hands of those men who travelled between town and village. The parable ends on an ironic note, for the chief who had prized the notions of his sons fighting and dying bravely through admittance to military service, instead watched them become shopkeepers; while the grocer who had envisaged the opening of big gleaming department stores - like the kind he seen in American movies - died.

Lerner suggests that an increase in literacy allowed for the emergence of a mobile personality highly empathetic to modernisation(Melkote:1991:24). The media viewed as mobility multiplier eliminates the physical travel previously necessary to experience the new - experiences are mediated by the mass media (specifically television). The mass media audience undergoes a vicarious experience. By presenting them with a new mediated experience, the expansion of the individual's imagination occurs and the individual, like the grocer, is able to project his or her self into a new situation. As imagination is stimulated, the former traditional ways move into a stage of collapse for the individual envisages new possibilities and is no longer averse to change:- the traditional individual's psychological constraints have been overcome. The new ability to project one's self elsewhere, to realise that one's state need not necessarily be fixed, transforms not only individuals, but entire cultures. Thus

(t)oday's Middle East chaos is largely due to the shift of modernist aspirations from the discreet discourse of a few in Oxford colleges and Paris salons to the broadcast exhortations among the
Lerner called this ‘projection’ ‘empathy’ (Lerner:1958:47), holding that this capacity is central to modern life.

Empathy enables individuals to take an interest in matters that do not bear directly on their day-to-day lives.

With the development of empathy, the self becomes more expansive, desirous, open-ended; rather than seeing oneself as located at a fixed point in an unchanging order of things, one sees one’s life as a moving point along a trajectory of things imagined (Thompson:1993:190).

In the eyes of the Third World’s intellectual elite, this new-found ability to ‘empathise’ to possess a ‘mobile personality’ developed through media exposure - was to the detriment of their countries as it simply aided in the further strengthening of the First World processes of cultural imperialism. The texture of ‘realism’ that extends across such media as news and documentary programmes, and the unmediatedness and entrance onto the world that the camera eye affords the spectator, is dangerous: - ‘It brings with it the baggage of a western tradition that conflates description with representation, information with knowledge, evidence with sight’ (Hansen et al:1991:224). Elementary film theory tells us that even with limited editing techniques, the filming process is never ideologically innocent. There will always be selectivity of camera position, and decisions made - determined by personal conceptual frameworks - as to when to turn the camera on and off - all influencing the picture of ‘the real’ gained at the end of the day. Thus, this media genre of documentary and news, ‘grades on its truth value’ (Hansen et al:1991:201). Such insights have helped identify the ‘ethnocentrism’ (Servaes:1991:57) of this paradigm which was criticised especially as the findings of studies conducted on this developmental model were released:

(Studies) emerged of how US capitalist values - distorting national social and economic development goals - were embedded in popular media, such as comic strips, television comedy, and so on.
In the early 1970s, there were a series of studies of western film and television flows, international advertising which confirmed that US cultural products with a strong US bias were dominant in the media of many developing countries (White :1993:27).

With these development initiatives in the less developed countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, the international news agencies came to dominate these countries - Reuters from the United Kingdom, TASS from Russia, and Associated Press and United Press International from the US - meant that the transnational corporations (TNCs) had virtual free reign in the cultural production as well as the national political and economic development of these countries. These TNCs were viewed as a western ideological and political tool to disseminate western values and extend the western spheres of influence and control in the Cold War. The effect of this model was that it did not permit ideas, initiatives and decision-making to come from the people served (White :1993:26). The Third World dependence on and domination, by the First World industrialised countries and multinational corporations for technology, technological skills, and communication equipment, meant that communication was quite obviously a commodity. Thus, the richer countries could dictate to their poorer counterparts thereby leaving much play for misinformation and misrepresentation. Resultantly, poorer countries came to be absorbed into the First World Western systems, leading to a renewal and strengthening of cultural imperialism, and to the importation of foreign ideologies which in turn threatened and aided in the dissolution of local cultures.

A Homogenised World Culture: The Future?

Three kids in rock tee shirts are drinking colas at the outdoor café table - they don't look a bit out of place in their alternorock even though they're a hundred miles from any radio station worth listening to. There's no rock club here. There's no hip record store. There's just the modern fabric of life in America in which MTV has set the tone and alternative rock has provided the content for the homogenization of the world. It's a monochrome GAP wonderland from sea to shining sea, and any attempt at dressing alternatively is immediately co-opted by some New York designer who plasters the same tortured individuality across a two-page advertising spread in *Vanity Fair* or *Details* or *Q*. In fact these kids could just as easily be on a photo shoot for unisex cologne
The belief that Western culture and its entanglement in capitalism would usurp the authority of local and regional cultures, has persisted, and descriptions of popular culture in the nineties, often presents the reader with a bleak and negative summation of an apathetic homogenised world culture that is awash in Western American culture. The blurb on the inside sleeve of the above 1997 retrospective compact disc release, betrays an analogous belief that commodified world culture is the flavour of current times, and the American Big Mac world king. The CD insert deals specifically with the television station MTV. The music videos which make up the consumer-based stations such as MTV which screens music videos 24 hours a day - uses the editing and cutting technique of montage. Felicia Feaster (1993) proposes that this has become the means for communication in our age (20). This technique was developed by the Soviet historical materialist filmmakers (Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Kuleshov) who, armed with a political agenda to incite people to revolutionary action, juxtaposed images in this montage manner. However, in MTV-land, images from a specific era are appropriated and employed until they become the stock images for an era. The particularity of a happening is ironed out and most of history is buried (Feaster :1993:21). The effect of this is to cut off a people or class from its own past (They are far less free to choose and to act as a people or class than one that has been able to situate itself in history (Berger in Feaster :1993:21). The relevance of history is then lost, traditions fade, and the connections needed for analysis of cultural output are absent. We feel emotions from the viewing of these images, but we are not able to act on what we feel. Even CNN (Cable News Network) which broadcasts news to all over the world, uses the editing technique of montage, relaying image-bytes to a global audience:

We respond to a combination of music and pictures, not as coherent narrative, but as emotive cues. A picture of a child can create a varied response, but a picture of a child intercut with a flag, a US service man/woman in the Gulf and Saddam Hussein elicits a particular response - one not coherently formulated but definitely felt (Feaster :1993:24)

Through montage, the American transnational corporation CNN is able to summarise history as it selectively sees it. Once again, as was the case in the earlier described Third World dependency contexts of the sixties and seventies, the TNCs are believed to set the pace. To survive in an environment of integrated global economies, corporations must be ubiquitous to ensure a global presence (Robins :1991:28).

While he does not deny the existence of the global citizen (Robins :1991:26), Kevin Robins presents an alternative picture of the effects of globalisation processes on cultures. He contends that there has been a tendency to overemphasise the standardization of products and the homogenization of tastes (Robins :1991:27). For Robins, in a world cultural
industry where symbolic forms are continuously commodified, differences need not be abraded. In a global economy striving for ever more profit, where all is potential commodity, the result is that cultural products are assembled from all over the world and turned into commodities for a new cosmopolitan market-place: world music and tourism; ethnic arts, fashion, and cuisine; Third World writing and cinema. The local and exotic are torn out of place and time to be repackaged for the world bazaar (Robins:1991:31).

The unearthing of the exotic and the foreign to metamorphose them into cosmopolitan specialities (Robins:1991:31) has the effect of focussing the world spotlight on subaltern or peripheralised cultures:- “The western city has become a crucible in which world cultures are brought into direct contact” (Robins:1991:32). Global media, while able to sink the marginal still further in either its apathy towards representing a sidelined culture and its traditions, or through the negative portrayal of a culture, can also aid in its renaissance through the very cultural encounters forced onto people in a context of globalisation.

The effects of global media, as John Thompson has stressed, need not necessarily be of a putrefying nature, atrophying the composition of foreign traditions. Rather than this one-sided media-meets-tradition approach where the outcome sees traditional practices as the loser, the link is actually two-fold; on the one hand, the development of communication media facilitates the decline of traditional authority and the traditional grounding of action; on the other hand, new communication media also provide the means of separating the transmission of tradition from the sharing of a common locale, thus creating the conditions for the renewal of tradition on a scale that greatly exceeds anything that existed in the past (Thompson:1993:188).

The live broadcast of the interval performance of Irish dance at the 1994 Eurovision Song Contest is just such an example of the latter. This broadcast was the initial inspiration for the revival of Irish culture specifically done - outside of Ireland:

It was seven minutes that shattered the hermeneutically sealed world of television, seizing the attention and igniting the imagination of 300 million viewers (Smyth:1996:33)
When I think of dancers, I think of their bodies. I think about them because I am thinking of the way these people figure themselves out as culture bearers—collective motives that influence the generation and maintenance of a traditional choreographic form of self conduct, about the way that a culture makes up its minds and its Œthrough a dance (Ness :1992:627).

The modernisation paradigm of development did not really consider the relations between states and how these very relations would then affect development initiatives within a region (Thompson :1993). Under changing geographies, the physical mobility deemed so desirable to modernisation, meant that migrations were effected. The upheaval and displacement of many ethnic groups and their subsequent relocation to other parts of the globe, meant that traditions travelled from their historically-fixed geographical locales. Before the debate of media as a disruptive force versus media as an element of reinforcement even enters the discussion, the uprooting of traditions from their usual spatial units, does not mean that they won’t be replanted in new environments. Traditions are just as likely to be sustained as diminished in new locations:- The displacement of people into unfamiliar contexts means that, swamped by a dominant unknown culture, they feel the need to reinforce, rediscover and create anew, the sense of identity of community that was ruptured by migration. Recourse to traditions is a sure way to enable the identity consolidation that people seek in uncertain conditions. An example of this call on traditions occurred in the period following the Declaration of the State of Israel (1948). A new culture had to be established as Jewish people migrated from all over the world to this Jewish homeland. Dance was an example of just one traditional form that was called on to enable the cohesion of national identity:

The dance creators took their inspirations from the rich characteristics of the various communities outside of Israel in the Diaspora; from the traditions and rituals of Judaism; from the colorful life-styles of those who had continued to live in Israel. The folk dance creators forged all these factors in their individual yet Jewish experience, creating dances that spoke to the kibbutzim, the villages, the cities, and the immigrants. The dances gathered a swift momentum and the result has been a spirited dance, Mid-Eastern yet reflective of the experience of the Diaspora (Ingber :1974 in Kraus and Chapman:1981:251).

These Israeli folk dances were created to commemorate and reflect the historical happenings and biblical stories that were of import to the Jewish people.

Unlike ballet and modern dance, the dances of various folk and ethnic dance traditions are not known and recognised on a world-wide scale. In fact, they tend to be quite insular forms of dance, geographically contained and specific to a particular nation. Often used
interchangeably for descriptive purposes, ethnic and folk dance are closely allied to national history and social customs. The term ‘ethnic dance’ is more often tagged to the dances of non-Western cultures in Africa, Asia and Latin America (Kraus :1981), while folk dance tends to be applied to dances of somewhat recent origin or dances of the people which are related more closely to social custom and recreational events than to ancient religions and ceremonial sources (Kraus and Chapman :1981:249).

Dance is a communicative act transmitting narratives, no matter how rudimentary in scale. Folk dance is exemplary as a transmitter of the historical narratives that imbue cultural practice with meaning. Passed down through the centuries, folk dance becomes significant as a ‘bearer of culture’- a conveyor of a nation’s history. Folk dance need not necessarily arise for this specific purpose. However in transmission, ‘cultural heritage’ (is) inevitably transformed (Kraus and Chapman :1981:249) and through time, folk dance can take on political overtones and acquire the added dimension as bearer of a cultural history. Some of the best examples of how a neutral form of dance can be layered in this way are revealed in the Celtic dance traditions of Highland and Irish dance.

Highland (Scottish) dancing is one of the oldest forms of folk dance and modern ballet and square dancing can trace their roots to this art form. Highland dancing was originally used by the Highland military regiments as calisthenics for their troops (excellent exercise (http://thorplus.lib.purdue.edu/~psmith/XLII/dancer.html)). Eventually, dances such as the well-known ‘Highland Fling’ came to be performed as a dance of celebration when victorious in battle. The lesser known ‘Sean Truibhas’ (meaning quite literally ‘old trousers’) was choreographed for the specific purpose of political celebration after the lifting of the act of proscription placed on the Scots by the English:- Defeated at the Battle of Culloden by the English, the Scots were forbidden to wear kilts or tartan. This dance depicts a person in the act of shedding his trousers. It is said the dance came about in 1783 when the British Disarming Act of 1747 was finally repealed and Scots were allowed to wear their tartans and kilts once again. The dance mimics a Scot shedding his britches (during the slow, first part of the dance) and returning to his tradition of Highland dress and custom (during the final, up-tempo fling-like step) (http://www.dance.html)

This defeat at Culloden also resulted in the choreographing of a dance to honour Flora MacDonald, the woman who helped Prince Charles (Bonnie Prince Charlie) - the man who challenged English dominion - escape to the Isle of Skye. She was believed to have smuggled him, hidden under her skirts, on to a boat. This dance ‘The Flora MacDonald’ ‘Fancy’ thus makes use of a skirt held out in front of the dancer in a wide fashion.

Irish dance, like Highland dance, is believed to have originated as a form of pure entertainment:

Throughout history Irish men and women have kicked
out in time to express an inner joy and stepped in
time to consolidate their social circle. No-one
knows when dancing became a separate and recognised
artistic expression, although people probably leapt in
time with their whoops when lunch came home on the
end of a spear (Smyth:1996:10).

However, as traditional Irish music and dance came to be feared by the English as a means to
catalyse Irish nationalism and foster dissent (Smyth:1996:10), Irish bards and musicians
were outlawed by Queen Elizabeth I in the sixteenth century. The authorities even hanged
some pipers (Smyth:1996:10). In the 1600s, (p)enal laws enacted crushed Irish commerce and
industries. The laws also banned the education of Catholic children leading to hidden (hedge) schools.
Traditional Irish culture was practised with some degree of secrecy. This period of severe repression
lasted for more than 100 years, explaining some of the initial secrecy of teaching Irish step dance
(http://tigger.cc.uic.edu/~aerobin/irhist.html).

Irish history is potted with struggles for cultural survival under not only the externally-imposed rule of the English, but also from within its own borders:- Dance and music have
previously borne the brunt of local religious backlashes that endeavoured to bring these traditional practices under its control:

The Catholic Church lobbied the government
to outlaw dances in houses, claiming them to be unhygienic,
fire hazards, and frequently organized by the owner of a public house.
In 1936, The Dancehall Act required any building used
for dancing to be licensed: church halls became the new

The controversial Irish singer Sinead O’Connor released a song as recently as 1994 that
dealt with the famine in Ireland in the years 1845 - 1850. The latter occurred as a result of the
failure of the potato crop and led to the death of one million Irish. It devastated the
country and led to sweeping social changes (Smyth:1996:13). The resultant emigrations
meant that Irish dance was taken to North America, the Appalachian mountains and the East
Coast (Smyth:1996). As already discussed, migrations can encourage the renewal of
traditions. The continuation of Irish traditions in new contexts arose not only out of the
need for community in a new environment, but it was a call to make a defiant political
statement. Sinead O’Connor recounts the true nature of the famine relating the way in
which it has left a lasting scar on Irish society:

I want to talk about Ireland
Specifically I want to talk about the famine
About the fact that there never really was one
There was no famine
See Irish people were only allowed to eat potatoes
were shipped out of the country under armed guard
To England while the Irish people starved
And then in the middle of all this
They gave us money not to teach our children Irish
And so we lost our history
And this is what I think is still hurting me

See we’re like a child that’s been battered
Has to drive itself out of its head because it’s frightened
Still feels all the painful feeling
But they lose contact with the memory

And this leads to massive self-destruction
ALCOHOLISM DRUG ADDICTION
All desperate attempts at running
And in its worst form
Becomes actual killing

And if there ever is gonna be healing
there has to be remembering
And then grieving
So that then there can be forgiving
There has to be knowledge and understanding

An American army regulation
Says you mustn’t kill more than 10% of a nation
Cos to do so causes permanent psychological damage
It’s not permanent but they don’t know that
anyway during the supposed famine
We lost a lot more than 10% of our nation
Through deaths on land or in ships of emigration
But what finally broke us was not starvation
BUT IT’S USE IN THE CONTROLLING OF OUR EDUCATION
Schools go on about Black 47
On and on about the terrible famine
But what they don’t say is in truth
There never really was one

So let’s take a look shall we
The highest statistics of child abuse in the EEC
And we say we’re a Christian country
But we’ve lost contact with our History
See we used to worship God as a mother
WE ARE SUFFERING FROM POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER
Look at all our old men in the pubs
Look at all our young people on drugs
We used to worship god as a mother
Now look at what we're doing to each other
We've even made killers of ourselves
The most child-like trusting people in the Universe
And this is what's wrong with us
Our history books THE PARENT FIGURES lied to us

I see the Irish
As a race like a child
That got itself bashed in the face

And if there ever is gonna be healing
There has to be remembering
And then grieving
So that there can be FORGIVING
There has to be KNOWLEDGE and UNDERSTANDING

"Famine"
Sinead O'Connor
(written by O'Connor/Clayton/Simenon/Reynolds, Copyright © 1994 Ensign Records Limited)

It is precisely because of this kind of suppression that a traditional practice can take on political overtones. Its suppression however, also allows for the accretion of negatives on the side of the subjugated culture and this can leave a lasting attitude of shame towards one's heritage. When interviewed on what he thought of Riverdance: The Show, the Irish actor Gabriel Byrne, commented that Irish dance had been something of which his generation had been ashamed:

The things that we were ashamed of in the good old days are all taken out now, dusted down and made sexy (Moreover) all guys that used to go to Irish dance classes can now come out of the closet (Riverdance: A Journey).

Even Eileen Martin, a principal solo dancer in the Riverdance show, has admitted that her study of Irish dance was not something that she would readily reveal: "Because anybody outside the Irish dance circle wouldn't understand and I preferred to keep it quiet" (http://www.riverdance.com). Yet, the show makes no reference to the internal ethnic conflicts between Catholics and Protestants, nor the 26 years of hostilities between England and Northern Ireland, that have shaped Irish society as a whole, nor does it betray a sense of the shame that had previously existed towards Irish culture. Rather, the picture of a nation unified surviving emigrations, poverty and famine, is presented through the use of music and dance. Here, folk dance can be seen to contain restorative, healing properties for the Irish
Beyond the theatre, a great swell of national pride overflowed from Riverdance: The Show into the consciousness of a people (Smyth:1996:49).

Irish dance was influenced by dance masters who travelled to different regions in Ireland and surrounding countries, staying several weeks at a time in one spot to teach the locals the traditional dances. Sometimes the dance masters held competitions amongst themselves. The winner of the competition, known as a feis, was determined by the master who knew the most steps, not the one who displayed the most technical execution. These dance masters established the first schools of dancing. On their travels, these dance masters learnt from other cultures and incorporated foreign movements into the Irish dances. Irish dance consists mainly of solo step dances, set step dances and ceili dances. The set step dances are performed to specific tunes and the dance steps remain fixed over time. Ceili dances are group dances derived from the French quadrilles. The importance of these ceili dances is that they are participative group dances that rely on fixed patternings and sequences that seldom allow for solo performances. Thus, this form of dance aids in a sense of identity cohesion. These dances are structured as sword dances, line dances, progressive line dances, and round dances. The four main types of solo dances are the reels, jigs, hornpipes and slip jigs.

The reel was brought by the Irish dance masters from Scotland around 1750 and is performed at a relatively fast tempo. Legend has it that the reel originated with well wishers waiting for the minister to arrive at the church for a wedding on a cold day. The church group danced as a means of keeping warm.

The hornpipe originated in approximately 1760 from English stage acts, while the jig is almost certainly completely endogenous to Ireland. In Highland dance, a parody of the Irish jig can be found in the Highland dance 'The Irish Washerwoman Jig'. It is viewed as ‘a humorous salute (by the Scots) to their Celtic brethren across the Irish Sea', and is an example of innovations that occur when cultures come into contact with one another.

Irish dance is performed in either soft pump shoes, or hard shoes which contain fibreglass toe tips and hollow heels in order to give a battering percussive sound during the execution of steps. The soft shoes were originally intended solely for use by the female dancer, while the male dancer wore the hard shoe. Women challenged this convention and from the late eighteenth century have performed in both types of shoes. The actual style of the dance requires a rigidity of upper body without the use of hand movements, while the feet perform either the battering hard shoe movements or the balletic-like soft shoe steps. In general parlance, Irish dance has been described as 'ice of body and fire of feet'.

The good dancer kept the body rigid, moving only from the hips down and with the arms extended straight at the side. The good dancer could dance on eggs without breaking them and hold a pan of water on his head without spilling a drop (Smyth:1996:14).
The style of Irish dance was more recently a
and amusingly described in the cult comic strip 'Get The Freebies' where it was described by the female superhero, Whitey Action as "a well choreographed epileptic fit" (*The Face* :October 1996:232).

**Traditional Irish dance costumes are quite ornate in design for**
the women: Dresses are often made out of velvet and busily embroidered with Celtic symbols. Men dance in kilts or pants. The chosen colours for costumes were, in recent history, green, white or saffron. The colour red was avoided due to its association with England. However due to the availability of local dyes in Ireland, red was likely a traditional colour. In recent time, all colours have come into use (http://tigger.cc.uic.edu/aerobin/irhist.html).

The Celtic inspiration drawn from these traditional outfits can be seen in the less intricate costumes worn by the dancers in Riverdance, while jigs, reels and slip jigs are choreographed for the show.

The traditional or less modernised Irish communities were initially dependent solely on the dance masters, skilled in the art of Irish dance, to transmit knowledge of Irish dance steps. This required face-to-face interaction. However, in a time of media ubiquity where information can be accessed through means other than personal communication, not even dance need be reliant on face-to-face, personally-mediated, dance knowledge. In fact, rather than its decline because of the uprooting from traditional spatial units, traditions and traditional dance have entered another phase of transmission:- One need only make a trip down to the local newsagent, video or music store, or surf the Net to order, or purchase directly, dance instruction videos. The likes of Seamus Kerrigan's *Irish Dancing Made Easy* and Olive Hurley's *Irish Dancing Step by Step*, promises the individual that he or she can learn to dance in the comfort of their own TV lounge. Like televangelists who have removed the necessity of physical communion on a church site to practise religion, dance instruction videos have removed the conventional requirements of dance class attendance. While the dilution or outright removal of communication on a personal level may appear to depersonalise (Thompson :1993) traditional practises, television involves a form of repersonalisation (Thompson :1993:190) as these televised instructors of religion or dance become comfortably and domestically familiar:

(I)t is a quite distinctive kind of personalisation: for most people, it lacks the reciprocity of face to face interaction and it is dissociated from the individuals encountered in the shared locales of everyday life. It is a form of non-reciprocal intimacy at a distance (Thompson :1993:196-197).
The importance of television, as televangelists so crucially identified, is that it brings its massive audience into a direct relationship with particular sets of values and attitudes (Newcomb:1987:614). With attachment to a particular personality, social, gendered, ethnic and traditional practices of the viewer are shaped in accordance with those of the familiar T.V. personality.

Logically and practically however, there is only so much that one can learn off a video tape. If one desires continual advancement in a specific art form, a personal mediation of knowledge and skill transferral is inevitable. With dance classes, an instructor who is skilled in the performance of the dance style can correct the aspiring dancer in the logical way that instruction beamed out from a video tape can not. Even 'surfing the Net' web sites on dance relay information about dance teachers and their locations. This signals the importance of dance interaction on a physical level. There are check boxes that once clicked on will send the individual information regarding dance classes and answer any other queries. (See http://www.geocities.com/CapeCanaveral/3452/whatis.html, for an example of this kind of information relay). Video and audio clips of Riverdance can be downloaded from the Riverdance website so that people can not only read about Irish dance, but see it in action. Even though Riverdance showcases Irish dance out of its rigidly traditional format in terms of dance sequences and costumes, an aspiring Riverdancer has to return to traditional Irish dance basics before being able to reach the standard of the choreographed rearticulation. This serves to strengthen this dance style's roots. It can be assessed that media products can encourage a return to traditional practices, but in an unconventional sense:

(Media products are commonly appropriated within contexts of face-to-face interaction and hence renewal of tradition may involve a constantly changing mixture of face-to-face and mediated quasi-interaction. This is evident to parents and teachers who come to rely more and more on books, films and television programmes to convey to children the main themes of a religious or other tradition, and who see their own role more in terms of elaboration and explication than in terms of the cultivation of tradition from scratch (Thompson:1993:196)

The reproducibility of symbolic forms, through media products, is obviously double-edged:-Traditional practices need to be fixed in a visible material substratum to be transmitted in a century where personal physical interaction is on the decline. This then requires access as a consumer to the technologies of transmission. It is ironic that in an age where most things are visible and practically accessible, and the potential for global democratic processes is in sight, economics would determine who can gain entry to a symbolic form. For example, the use of an Irish dance instruction tape requires its purchase. Following the purchase of the video, one needs the technology on which to run it:- the video recorder and television. Even 'surfing the Net' requires payment for use. For many who lack money, pursuing traditional practices pales against more pressing needs. However, the reproducibility of
who are removed from locations of the practice of traditions at a distance. Irish dance in South Africa is a prime example of the positive elements of the latter:- For years, and at this present moment, the transmission of the skill of Irish dance in the virtual absence of traditional Irish dance instructors in this country, has meant that its transmission hinged completely on instruction tapes. Another beneficial side to the media's confrontation with tradition is that practices that might have been lost, can now be recorded for posterity:- If it had not been for a fortuitous trip to South Armagh, the discovery of at least two traditional Irish dances would never have been made and therefore lost:

The 'Sweets of May' and 'A Trip to the Cottage' were discovered in South Armagh being known only to a group of elderly men and women. (http://tigger.cc.uic.educ/~aerobic/irhist.html).

I do not believe that it can be disputed that Irish dance would not be enjoying its current renewal without the filming of Riverdance. As a trained Highland dance teacher, and a less qualified Irish dance teacher, my pupil numbers have increased since the televised and videoed arrival of this show to South Africa. Students of all ages come to me asking me if I can teach them to 'Riverdance'. Riverdance has become the main vehicle for exposing the outside world to not only Irish dance, but Irish culture in general. The main creative forces behind the creation, production and direction of the show, Bill Whelan (composer), Moya Doherty (producer), and John McColgan (director), were acutely aware of the factor of cultural responsibility when piecing the show together:

They all knew that they would be held accountable if the integrity of their production did not match up to the rigorous standards demanded by the Praetorian Guard of Ireland's cultural heritage. They represented the first generation since the Republic of Ireland's independence to experience material prosperity and were conscious of suspicions that they might sell out their responsibility to a heritage passed down through centuries. In a country where cultural identity was repressed for hundreds of years and freedom was in living memory paid for in blood and tears, no one dare play fast and loose with its unique artistic expressions of national pride (Smyth : 1996:39).

RIVERDANCE AND THE MEDIA

Riverdance is an outstanding example of the way in which media permits traditions to be showcased on a greater scale than they could ever hope to be through pure physical performance. The actual thematic progression of the show was reliant on finding dancers, musicians and singers, from all over the globe. The Russian folk ballet dancers were employed after John McColgan (director of Riverdance) viewed the performance of their
The music of composer Bill Whelan was flown to Jean Butler (principal female dancer) in England, and Michael Flatley (lead male dancer) in Beverley Hills, in order to choreograph their parts before physical rehearsals with the rest of the team began in Dublin, three weeks before the legendary 30 April 1994 Eurovision Song Contest.

The Eurovision Song Contest 1994 was broadcast live by R.T.E. (one of Europe's smallest national broadcaster companies (Smyth :1996:18)) to a television audience of 300 million from the Point Theatre in Dublin. The voting panel from around Europe was linked up via satellite. In the interval between the performance of the songs and the voting, the “Riverdance” number was inserted to fill the space. It was the unforeseen reaction to this piece - it received an uproarious standing ovation - that led to the creation of the two hour stage show. People began to demand an extension of this piece, while copies of the actual seven minute performance were vehemently sought after in Ireland. The video became the fastest selling video in Irish history (Smyth :1996:38), and it was decided that the proceeds from this first video copy of the dance would be donated to fund relief work being carried out in Rwanda. It raised nearly 300 000 pounds for relief in Rwanda (Smyth :1996:38).

It was John McColgan, a television production executive, Managing Director of Tyrone Productions (an independent television and film production company) and Chairman of the National broadcaster Radio Ireland (Brophy :1997:19) ,who first spotted the commercial potential of this show:

John McColgan said that if people were forking out 10 pounds for a seven minute video, they would pay the market price to watch a two hour stage show (Smyth :1996:38)

A visit to a music store or supermarket, shows that Riverdance: The Show (with the original cast members); Riverdance: The New Show (the performance at Radio City Music Hall in New York); and Riverdance: A Journey (the making of Riverdance); are all top video sellers. Furthermore, the web site underscores precisely how successful this show has proved, with all manner of Riverdance memorabilia available to order via the Net:- The official merchandise includes the 1000th show t-shirt (out of stock due to overwhelming demand); all manner of other styles and colours of shirts with different Riverdance logos; accessory bags; mugs; baseball caps; keyrings logo metal pins; wallets; sterling silver bangles with the logo engraved on it; videos;cds;cassettes; and my personal favourite, the official Riverdance pen which features dancers moving up the barrel of the pen (http://www.riverdance.com). There is also a guest book where surfers can leave their names and comments on the show. The purchase of these souvenirs and the invited Internet participation, creates a sense of identity and a link to traditional Irish culture, as well as a feeling of cultural empowerment enhanced through consumer empowerment. Additionally, those individuals not of direct Irish descent show support for the show and by extension Irish culture through the purchasing of these items.

The show uses the dance skills of over thirty world Irish dance champions, one flamenco (Spanish) dancer; The Moscow Folk Ballet dancers; African-American tap dancers and gospel choir - the Deliverance Ensemble from Atlanta Georgia, the Dublin-based Irish choir Anuna, and many internationally-recognised musicians from all over the world. Since 1994, the show has travelled to London, Scotland, Australia and America. In the official
It took Riverdance, albeit presented and packaged in a new and exciting format, to awaken the people of Ireland to the rich heritage of our traditional dance. Perhaps, too, it has shown that innovation and imagination need not damage a living tradition but can actually enhance it (15).

However, while the theme of this show has universal stories of cultural celebration and suffering, it is the media that have made this show. Through concentration on the dancers' personal lives and the in-fighting, the cast have been raised to the levels of celebrity star status:

The Sun shone throughout August and the country basked in its second summer of peace. Riverdance was the only show in town for newspapers denied their dramatic staple of politics and courts, and the gossip columnists treated its principal dancers as international stars. There were pictures of Riverdance people doing mundane chores, with every utterance of the principals reported in large type. Some stories homed in on Michael Flatley's personal life and his excursions to fashionable nightclubs; others told of his irritation with co-star Jean Butler. Flatley was said to be unhappy (Smyth :1996:63-64).

Additionally, suggestions on radio talk shows that Riverdance tickets would make fantastic Christmas gifts caused ticket sales to soar: "It seemed that everybody, and their mother, got a present of Riverdance tickets for Christmas 1994" (Smyth :1996:46). In South Africa, we were first introduced to Riverdance through television pay channel M-Net's broadcast of the Royal Variety Show 1994, at which the Riverdance sequence was performed.

Thematically, the show draws on Irish mythology, and celebrates the seasons and the natural elements of earth, fire and water. Riverdance from which the whole show emerged, opens with Cloudsong where the spirit of the Riverwoman is summoned up by song and called onto land to awaken the earth, symbolised by the hard-shoe routine of Earthrise which leads to Riverdance itself where earth and water come together, bringing the first half of the show to a close in a spectacular climax (Smyth :1996:88).

Act 1 deals primarily with Celtic mythical history, while Act 2 grapples with the trauma of familial separation through forced emigrations and poverty, where many Irish came to rest in the New World of nineteenth century America. In this second section, there is the meeting of the diverse cultures who historically sought refuge in the New World. In a dance dialogue
Two exciting young dancers, Tarik Winston and Nick Holmes joined the company to beef up the New World sequences and it was obvious from the first rehearsal that they were show-stoppers. ‘Trading Taps’ featured another world champion, Colin Dunne, who later became the principal male dancer, pitting his virtuoso steps against the astonishing tap-dancing skills of Tarik Winston. Bill Whelan came up with a fascinating blend of American swing and Irish music that flirted effortlessly between two traditions, integrating the intricate dance steps of both cultures, seamlessly.

Choreographed by Dunne and Winston themselves, it was a competition between two world-class dancers tapping their way across the stage, each urging the other to faster and more daring routines. ‘Pit(ting) their wits and barter(ing) their different skills in a dazzling display of contemporary and traditional dance (Smyth :1996:64-90).

The final piece in Riverdance, ‘Riverdance International’, showcases the dance, music and songs from the entire cast. It represents the ‘the journey’s end when the circle is completed and the island of Ireland assumes its place in the world’ (Smyth :1996:90). The feeling gained from this finale number is that Irish people can take pride in their cultural artistry and traditions: ‘Every generation has to find a new way to express an old idea. Riverdance is explaining a people to themselves. It is part of a new confidence for us to express our music and culture in a new way’ (Smyth :1996:90).

CONCLUSION

Does the development of the media merely seal the coffin of a traditional way of life whose fate was already decided by the transformative impact of modernity? (Thompson :1993:178).

In the case of traditional Irish dance, I think that it is safe to say that the media’s coverage of the Riverdance Irish dance show, and its circulation as a video, has only contributed positively to a show which can stand on its own as a showcase of cultural innovation and performance skill. An Internet site on traditional Irish dance points to this mode of entry into Irish culture in its opening sentence: ‘Many people today have been introduced to Irish dance through stage productions such as Riverdance’ (http://www.inx.net/~mardidom/rcidance.htm). With the shifting of geographical boundaries, and the inevitable ‘encounters with the alien’ and the ‘exotic’ (Robins :1991:32), there can be no doubt that traditions are more vulnerable than ever before in the past. If theatre critics had given Riverdance: The Show adverse criticism, it could have been quite possible that the Show might have bombed rendering traditional Irish dance fairly insular. Videos of the shows bring the Irish traditions into an ever more accessible
The exhibition of this traditional dance has an additional effect of encouraging other cultures to resurrect their forgotten traditional practices. The contact between traditions brought about by globalisation, can serve to strengthen their desire for retention, and encourage the innovation, creativity, and reshaping, that is needed to keep them useful and functioning into another era. Pupils who attend my Highland dance classes and not my Irish ones - I have pupils who study both styles - often give as their reasons for study that they are of Scottish descent and want to keep to their own tradition. Comments such as these, would seem to support the quotation cited earlier by John Thompson (1993), that in an era of globalisation, there occurs unavoidable cultural encounters, that serve to heighten differences and thereby support cultural forms, while even negative media coverage of a tradition can ironically present a new reason for communities to rally round and protect their traditions rather than allow them to be discontinued through loss of confidence and cultural pride:

The strength of local culture thus does not necessarily diminish as the locality becomes increasingly precarious: quite often the reverse seems to be the case when the maintenance of the culture becomes the raison d'être of the peripheral community (Cohen :1982:6-7).

The reasons for the continuation of any one tradition are numerous. The social disruption inflicted on traditional society by Modernity, and Postmodernity with its fragmentation and collapse of grand narratives, relativism, and exposure of the contingency of truth, provides sufficient cause for any one person to seek refuge in the past - in traditions which provide a foothold in the world (Thompson :1993:193). However, why they have resurfaced has not really been my main concern here. Rather, like Thompson, I have tried to understand the way that the media affects their existence. In view of the work of Thompson and even the narrow, yet not necessarily completely invalid work of Daniel Lerner, I can only concur with Thompson’s assessment of the two-fold nature of the media contact with tradition. Cases need to be examined individually. General, sweeping statements that attempt to standardise the effect of the media on any social form, can not be made: Human reaction and evolution is always uncertain, always ready to spring a surprise, just when one thinks that it has been finally tagged.

References

Brophy,E (1997) Beyond Words - The Story of Riverdance in Riverdance - The Show Official Programme


Feaster, Felicia (1993) Montage in Jump Cut no.38

Frederick, Howard (1993) Communication, Information And New World Orders in Belmont, C.A. Global Communication And International Relations, Wadsworth


Ness, Sally Ann (1992)  
*Body Movement in Culture: Kinesthetic And Visual Symbolism in a Philippine Community*, United States of America: University of Pennsylvania Press

Robins, Kevin (1991)  
*Tradition And Translation: National Culture In Its Global Context* in Corner, J. and Harvey, S.  *Enterprise and Heritage: Crosscurrents of National Culture*, London: Routledge

Servaes, J. (1991)  
*Toward A New Perspective For Communication And Development* in Casuit, F.  *Communication In Development*, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation

*Communication In Development*, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation

Smith, Guy (1997)  
*Death to the Pixies © 4AD*

Smyth, Sam (1996)  
*Riverdances: The Story*, Great Britain: Andre Deutsch

Taylor, Mark C. and Saarinen Esa (1994)  
*Media Philosophy*, USA and Canada: Routledge

Thompson, J. (1993)  

Tomaselli, Ruth (1994)  
The Mediazation of Culture: John Thompson and the vision of public service broadcasting in *S.-Afr. Tydskr. Wysb. 1994, 13(3)*


*Communication For Development In The Third World*, London: Sage
The New Order And The Third World
in Gerber, G., Mowlana, H. and
Wordenstreng, K. The Global Media
Debate: It's Rise, Fall And Revival, New
Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation

http://www.geocities.com/CapeCanaveral/hab/3452/whatis.html
http://www.inv.org/projects/div/html
http://www.inx.net/~mardidom/reidance.html
http://thorplus.lib.purdue.edu/~psmith/XLII/dancer.html/
http://tigger.cc.uic.edu/~aerobin/irhist.html

Filmography
Riverdance: The Show
Riverdance: The New Show
Riverdance: A Journey

Olive Hurley’s Irish Dancing Step By Step Volume I
Ainm Records, 95th Prince Street, Dublin 2

Seamus Kerrigan’s Irish Dancing Made Easy
Kellyvision Productions © 1990