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**THE RESURFACING OF TRADITIONAL FEET**

**The Role of the Media in the Renewal of Traditional Cultural Forms**

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# THE RESURFACING OF TRADITIONAL FEET

## The Role of the Media in the Renewal of Traditional Cultural Forms
## The Example of Irish Dance

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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.

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**Abstract**

This essay is an examination of John Thompsonøs articulation of the õmediazation of traditionö (180) from his book *The Media and Modernity* (1993). He identifies the double-edged nature of the mediaøs 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 Baudrillardrian world of the hyper-real, where copies exist without originals, signs have become detached from referents, and õcomputer-mediated communitiesö (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 ÷traditionø 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 õeradication of cultural differenceö (døAgostino 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 õmediated visibilityö (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

worldwide audience through the Irish step-dancing stage

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 ―Third 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).

... 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 õirreversible decline in the role of traditionö (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-modernisationø, 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 õmeaningful phenomena, need to be transmitted within a social context from producer to receiver (or consumer)ö (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 mediaøs capacity to store information, õto be preserved for subsequent useö (Tomaselli :1994:125).  Here, information consumption need not be instantaneous:-  õA newspaperí  does not need to be read/consumed immediatelyö (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 ÷durabilityøof these fixed symbolic forms, the reproduction of symbolic goods could occur.  Once tied into institutions which õseekí  to exploit new opportunities for the fixation and reproduction of symbolic formsö (Tomaselli :1994:125), ÷commodificationøof  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

...aditions are transmitted. This element of media ...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 mediaøs ability to catalyse change as latterly described occurred in China in the late 1980øs when, through local and international television broadcasts, the people were

> encourag(ed) to question traditional
> values and official interpretationsí
> 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 õstrong pro-developmentö (Melkote :1991:149) bias and could act as a modernising implement. Here, ÷developmentø was viewed quite generally as ÷improved living conditionsø. However, this understanding of ÷developmentø was formatted within a Western perspective which contained strong ÷economicø overtones. Western scholars shifted the blame for the industrial underdevelopment of traditional societies onto the traditional individualøs 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 individualøs 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 Nationsø General Assembly - was established to concentrate on the conservation of cultural heritage. This association recognises the importance of the preservation of cultural heritage. The programmeøs 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,

rise that culture
...ecurity, vital to
stability and development
(http://www.unv.org/projects/chv.html).

Robert White has pointed out that social theory has fairly systematically refused to examine ÷cultureø as pivotal to an individualøs life.  ÷Cultureø 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, õ(c )ulture implies meaning and subjective values.   Culture comes too close to the metaphysical foundations of society to be taken seriouslyö (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 ÷hierarchisingø and essentialising binarisms.   These dualisms were obviously reflected in the modernisation paradigmøs 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

it in a more
_____ heorists who
contend that the development of
modern societies involves a process
of ÷detraditionalisationø (Thompson
:1993:179).

While it is held that the media of high technology can destabilise traditional practices, religious and local forms of expression, itøs õmediazationö (Thompson :1993:180) frees traditions from fixed sites of space and time, and creates an arena for diverse cultural encounters. When cultures ÷rub upø 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 oneøs 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 ÷traditionø

x

> 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 –changelessnessø, –authorityø, 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 –inventionø. Hobsbawm draws a distinction between –customø and –traditionø, 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 õso-called traditional societiesö (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:

> –Customø 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 –customø
> inevitably changes the –traditionø with which
> it is habitually intertwined
> (Hobsbawn :1983:2-3).

For my purposes however, I will be appropriating John Thompsonøs (1993) spacious definition of tradition as õanything which is transmitted and handed down from the pastö (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 cultureøs –heritageø.

Most investigations into the reasons behind the staying power of traditions in a time of late Modernity or Post-Modernity, have a wide-spread disposition to ignore this –inventedø 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 _____ mic 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  õinvented traditionö (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 –hermeneuticø, –normativeø, –legitimationø and –identityø aspects.   These aspects are often tautly interdependent, and thus the weeding out of one from the other, often proves difficult.

The –hermeneuticø 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 schemeö (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 õprovide the frame for defining cultural competencyö (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 õassumed superiorityö (Corner and Harvey :1991:12) of the dominant culture. - the õinterpreting communityö (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 –authorityø of cultural stance can be seen in

> the assumed superiority of the values
> of white, western Christendom; of

Scotland over
omen;  of the
metropolis over the regions
(Corner and Harvey :1991:12).

This ‑assumed superiorityø often strengthens a nationøs resolution to hold onto its inheritance:‑   In the late nineteenth century, resistance to British rule in Ireland õbecame increasingly militant í  Douglas Hydeí  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 independenceö (Smyth :1996:13).
Vested interests in the continued rule of one group means that traditions can be seen to sub-divide into those traditions that arise spontaneously, and those that are actually imposed. The former are regarded as ‑authenticø traditions arriving out of the social life of the people; while the latter are viewed as ‑artificialø 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 manøs true conditions:

By sweeping away the ‑train of ancient
and venerable prejudices and opinionsø

relations in the
... 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 principleø, against myth and tradition, the Enlightenment thinkers were merely establishing yet another tradition - a set of values - õtaken-for-granted assumptions which provide a framework for understanding the worldö (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, õit was only because the rise of modern societies was accompanied by the emergence of a new set of concepts, values and beliefsí   which appeared  to some as self-evidentö (Thompson :1993:194).

To add another layer to ‑tradition-as-explanatory-frameworkø, 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 õroutinized - that is, they are done as a matter of routine with relatively little reflection on why they are being done in that wayö (Thompson :1993:185).    Furthermore, justification for practices is attained õby reference to traditionö (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 ‑legitimationø 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).

ough traditional reference, means that traditions become ... sustain relations of power which are structured in systematically asymmetrical waysö (Thompson :1993:186). In contexts of national disruption, traditions - õheritage cultureö (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. Britainøs loss of identity as an ÷Empireø, coupled with loss of credibility for the way in which the notion of Empire often manifested in racism and õinsular nationalismö (Robins :1991:23), means that Britain has sought rehabilitation by just such a call on ÷heritageø

> (T)he Prince of Wales has been sensitive
> to ÷the deepest disruptions and disappointments
> in the nationøs post-war experienceø, 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

or chosen behaviours as well as a sense of shared history 1993:194). The French sociologist, Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), developed the concept of ÷anomieø out of his belief that Modernity, in its breakdown of tradition - especially of familial ties - would destroy this coagulation of collective identity. In its wake would come anomie - õa sense of uncertainty, loss of direction, and a feeling that the individuals were somehow on their ownö (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 Weberøs insight from his *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capital* (1920-1921), and relates the way in which such religious values of ÷karmaø 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 Weberøs ideas and called for the rejection of the joint family, the caste system, ritualism, õand almost all other practices, institutions and beliefs characteristic of Hinduismö (Melkote :1991:52). A crucial insight made by the early communication scholars was that the media could act as a õmobility multplierö (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 õappeal í 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 customsö (Thompson :1993:201). Yet, this visibility by media means that the ÷dirty washingø 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

...nent, mobility,
...nption - all part
of the western conception of ÷modernisationø
(Servaes :1991:55).

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 ÷psychologyø and ÷educationø emerged as obstacles to be overcome in the process of modernisation.   Daniel Lernerøs 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 paradigmø, 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 õveiled synonym for Westernisationö (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 mediaøs impact on social change and mass media use as a ÷modernising variableø, 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 õclimate of acceptance of changeö (Melkote :1991:24).   Lerner employs a parable of a grocer and a chief to set up a comparative in order

...ristics of traditional societies versus modern ones, and ...d, 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 ÷explainsø 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 õentered historyö (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 heøs seen in American movies - died.

Lerner suggests that an increase in literacy allowed for the õemergence of a mobile personality highly empathetic to modernisationö (Melkote :1991:24).   The media viewed as ÷mobility multiplierø eliminates the physical travel previously necessary to experience the new - experiences are mediated by the mass media (specifically television).   The mass mediaøs audience undergoes a õvicariousö (Lerner :1958:53) experience.   By presenting them with a new mediated experience, the expansion of the individualøs ÷imaginationø 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 individualøs ÷psychologicalø constraints have been overcome.   The new ability to project oneøs self elsewhere, to realise that oneøs state need not necessarily be fixed, transforms not only individuals, but entire cultures.   Thus

(t)odayøs Middle East ÷chaosø 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

media

Lerner called this =projectionø õempathyö  (Lerner :1958:47), holding that this capacity is central to modern life.

> Empathy enables individualsí   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 oneøs life as a moving point along
> a trajectory of things imagined
> (Thompson :1993:190).

In the eyes of the Third Worldøs intellectual elite, this new-found ability to =empathiseø - to possess a =mobile personalityø 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 =realismø 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:-  õ(I)t brings with it the baggage of a  western tradition that conflates description with representation, information with knowledge, evidence with sightö (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 realø gained at the end of the day.   Thus, this media genre of documentary and news, =trades on its truth valueø (Hansen et al :1991:201).    Such insights have helped identify the õethnocentri(sm)ö (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 oní   In

> were a series of studies of
> ision flows, international
> advertising which confirmed that US cultural
> products with a strong US bias were dominant
> in the media of may 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 õpermit ideas, initiatives and decision-making to come from the people servedö (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 í   they donøt look a bit out
> of place in their alternorock even though
> theyøre a hundred miles from any radio station worth
> listening to.  Thereøs no rock club here.  Thereøs no
> hip record store.  Thereøs 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.   Itøs a monochrome
> GAP wonderland from sea to shining sea, and any attempt
> at dressing ÷alternativelyø 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

(Smith :1997).

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' is world king. The CD insert deals specifically with the television station MTV. The music videos which make-up the õconsumer-basedö (Feaster :1993:20) 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 õbecome the means for communication in our ageö (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 õmost of history is buriedö (Feaster :1993:21). The effect of this is to õcut off a people or class from its own pastí (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 historyö (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 õensure a global presenceö (Robins :1991:28).

While he does not deny the existence of the õglobal citizenö (Robins :1991:26), Kevin Robins presents an alternative picture of the effects of globalisation processes on cultures. He contends that there has õbeen a tendency to overemphasise the standardization of products and the homogenization of tastesö (Robins :1991:27). For Robins, in a world cultural

continuously commodified, differences need not be
striving for ever more profit, where all is potential
commodity, the result is that

> (c )ultural products are assembled from all over the world
> and turned into commodities for a new ÷cosmopolitanø
> market-place:   world music and tourism; ethnic arts,
> fashion, and cuisine;   Third World writing and cinema.
> The local and ÷exoticøare 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 õcosmopolitan
specialitiesö (Robins :1991:31) has the effect  of  focussing the world spotlight on subaltern
or peripheralised cultures:-   õThe western city has become a crucible in which world cultures
are brought into direct contactö (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 ó 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 bearersí
> (about)í   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 õIøsö through 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 reinforcementø even enters the discussion, the uprooting of traditions from their usual spatial units, does not mean that they wonøt 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 Israelí  .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

...oses, ethnic and folk dance are closely allied to national ...rm ÷ethnic danceø 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 cultureø - a conveyor of a nationøs history.  Folk dance need not necessarily arise for this specific purpose.  However in transmission, õcultural heritageí (is)í inevitably transformedö (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 õas calisthenics for their troops í  (T)he dances were í  excellent exercise (http://thorplus.lib.purdue.edu/~psmith/XLII/dancer.html). Eventually, dances such as the well-known ÷Highland Flingøcame to be performed as a dance of celebration when victorious in battle.  The lesser known ÷Sean Truibhasø (meaning quite literally ÷old trousersø) 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.
> Itøs 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 MacDonaldøs Fancyøthus 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

> an inner joy and stepped in
> 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 õfosterí dissentö (Smyth :1996:10), Irish bards and musicians were outlawed by Queen Elizabeth I in the sixteenth century.   The õauthorities even hanged some pipersö (Smyth :1996:10).   In the 1600øs,

> (p)enal laws enactedí 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
> entertainment centres (Smyth :1996:14).

The controversial Irish singer Sinead Oø 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.   õIt devastated the country and led to sweeping social changesö (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 Oø Connor recounts the ÷trueø 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 õfamineö
> About the fact that there never really was one
> There was no õfamineö
> 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 weøre like a child thatøs been battered
Has to drive itself out of its head because itøs
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 mustnøt kill more than 10% of a nation
–Cos to do so causes permanent õpsychological damageö
Itøs not permanent but they donøt know that
anyway during the supposed õfamineö
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 ITøS USE IN THE CONTROLLING OF OUR EDUCATION
Schools go on about õBlack 47ö
On and on about –the terrible famineö
But what they donøt say is in truth
There never really was one

So letøs take a look shall we
The highest statistics of child abuse in the EEC
And we say weøre a Christian country
But weøve lost contact with our History
See we used to worship God as a mother
WEøRE SUFFERING FROM POST TRAUMATIC STRESS
DISORDER

...n in the pubs
...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

it was appreciated by a global audience: õBeyond the ... ide overflowed from *Riverdance : The Show* into the consciousness of a peopleö (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. (http://tigger.cc.uic.edu/~aerobin/dance.html). 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 (http:www//inx.net/~mardidom/rcidance.htm). The four main types of solo dances are the reels, jigs, hornpipes and slip jigs.

The ±reelø was brought by the Irish dance masters from Scotland around 1750 and is performed at

> a relatively fast tempoí  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 (http://tigger.cc.uic.edu/~aerobin/irhist.html).

The ±hornpipeø originated in approximately 1760 from English stage acts, while the ±jigø is almost certainly completely endogenous to Ireland. In Highland dance, a parody of the Irish jig can be found in the Highland dance øThe Irish Washerwoman Jigø  It is viewed as õa humorous salute (by the Scots) to their Celtic brethren across the Irish Seaö (http://dance.htm), and is an example of innovations that occur when cultures come into contact with one another.

Irish dance is performed in either ±softø pump shoes, or ±hardø 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 feetø

> 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 dropø(Smyth :1996:14).

...cently and amusingly described in the cult comic strip ó *Get The Freebies* ó where it was described by the female superhero, Whitey Action as õa well choreographed epileptic fitö (*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 Kerriganøs *Irish Dancing Made Easy* and Olive Hurleyøs *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 ¬depersonaliseø (Thompson :1993) traditional practises, television involves a form of õrepersonalisationö (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 ó to ó face interaction and it is dissociated from the individuals encountered in the shared locales of everyday life. It is a form ofí ønon-reciprocal intimacy at a distanceø (Thompson :1993:196-197).

evangelists so crucially identified, is that õit brings its _____ _____tionship with particular sets of values and attitudesö (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 Netø 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 ÷Riverdancerø 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 styleøs roots.  It can be assessed that media products can encourage a return to traditional practices, but in an unconventional sense:

> (M)edia products are commonly appropriated
> within contexts of face ó to ó face
> interaction and hence renewal of tradition
> may involve a constantly changing mixture
> of face ó to ó 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 ÷accessø 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 Netø requires payment for use.   For many who lack money, pursuing traditional practices pales against more pressing needs.   However, the reproducibility of

who are removed form 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 Mayø and ÷A Trip to the
> Cottageø were discovered in South
> Armagh being known only to a group of
> elderly men and women.
> (http.//tigger.cc.uic.educ/~aerobin/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 ÷Riverdanceø 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

Ballet Company) by videotape; while the choreography
ʻdanceʼ -was effected from different parts of the globe:-
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. (õone of Europeøs smallest national broadcaster companies õ (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 õRiverdanceö 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 õfastest selling video in Irish historyö (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 õnearly 300 000 pounds for relief in Rwandaö (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 bookø 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

*Story* Seamus OøSe who runs an Irish Dance School is

> 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 ÷madeø this show.   Through concentration on the dancersø 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 Flatleyøs
> 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:-  õ(I)t seemed that everybody, and their mother, got a present of *Riverdance* tickets for Christmas 1994ö (Smyth :1996:46).   In South, Africa, we were first introduced to *Riverdance* through television pay channel M-Netøs broadcast of the Royal Variety Show 1994, at which the õRiverdanceö sequence was performed.

Thematically, the show draws on Irish mythology, and celebrates the seasons and the natural elements of earth, fire and water.   õRiverdanceö

> from which the whole show emerged, opens with
> ÷Cloudsongø 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 ÷Earthriseø which leads to ÷Riverdanceø
> 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

e of õshared identityö (Smyth :1996:88) and cultural
rn from each others dance styles:

> 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 Tapsø 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, seamlesslyí
> 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,í   .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*, õRiverdance Internationalö, showcases the dance, music and
songs from the entire cast.   It represents the õthe journeyøs end when the circle is completed
and the island of Ireland assumes its place in the worldö (Smyth :1996:90).   The feeling
gained from this finale number is that  Irish people can take pride in their cultural artistry and
traditions:   õEvery 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 wayö (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 mediaøs 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:   õMany people today have been introduced to Irish
dance through stage productions such as *Riverdance*ö
(http://www.inx.net/~mardidom/rcidance.htm).   With the shifting of   geographical
boundaries, and the inevitable õencounters with the ÷alienø and the ÷exoticøö (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

...te with its merchandise fosters a sense of heightened ... aditional dance style. And again, those who buy the show memorabilia, profess their approval of the show and by extension, Irish culture. 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 =ownø 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 throughj 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 døetre
> 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 õwhich provide a footholdö 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 Thompsonøs assessment of the =two-foldø nature of the mediaøs 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.

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Filmography

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**Seamus Kerrigan's Irish Dancing Made Easy**
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