

Postcolonial Agency, Proactive Archiving, and Applied Ethnochoreology: The National Dance Archive of Ireland

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Abstract This paper examines the construction of archives and in particular dance archives with special focus on the National Dance Archive of Ireland. The paper provides a contextual background to the establishment and workings of the archive and explores issues relating to postcoloniality. It suggests that proactive archiving and applied ethnochoreology within the context of dance archives can potentially play an important role in contributing to postcolonial agency in the construction of social and cultural identities.

Keywords National Dance, Archive, Ireland, Ethnochoreology, Postcolonial Agency, Proactive Archiving.

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The 21st century has been witness to a rapidly changing world; Ireland has been no exception. Ease of travel, technological advancements, information saturation through the World Wide Web, and multiculturalism have all been characteristics of the Western world. These characteristics have contributed to increased opportunities for constructing a globalized sense of self and community and increased connectedness (see Appadurai 1996; Castells 2004; Giddens 1990). Within this context of globalization and the increase in postcoloniality internationally, cultures have endeavored to position themselves globally through diverse means. One of these means has been the establishment of sound and audiovisual archives. In this paper, I suggest that although associated with colonial and nationalist discourses by some scholars, including ethnomusicologists (see for example Landau and Topp Fargion 2012), such archives can potentially play an important role in contributing to postcolonial agency in the construction of social and cultural identities.

This paper first provides a brief background to archives and collections in general. It then focuses on the National Dance Archive of Ireland (NDAI): its emergence, objectives, and development to date. It argues that proactive archiving (Landau and Topp Fargion 2012), borrowed from Edmonson's proactive access (Edmonson 2004), collaborative partnerships, and the involvement of applied ethnochoreologists are important to the work of this National Dance Archive. It suggests that the dance archive is an important location for applied ethnochoreologists whose work can be of mutual benefit to ethnochoreologists, the archive and the wider communities of dance.

Archives and Collections

Archives imply collections and collections in the broader sense, in the Western world, that is publications, date back to the eighteenth century and to the Age of Enlightenment (see Anya Peterson Royce 1977, et al), while institutionalized collections of sound recordings of music and audio-visual recordings of dance for archival purposes are more recent – the turn of the twentieth century.¹ Archival collections of sound recordings were established in Vienna, Austria (1899), Berlin, Germany (1900), and elsewhere during the early decades of the twentieth century within a context of comparative musicology. Dance collections came later as they were dependent upon the development of appropriate technologies to capture the moving image. In *Research in Dance: A Guide to Resources* (Bopp 1994), 75 library collections and archives in the United States are listed. The most significant of these dance collections in the United States are reported to be in The New York Public Library (NYPL),

1 See Landau and Topp Fargion (2012) for a more detailed discussion on sound archives; see Smith (Ed. 2012) for a discussion on the history of recording Irish traditional music and dance in Ireland and North America; see Foley in Smith (2012) for a discussion of collecting and recording Irish traditional music, song and dance for Muckcross House, Killarney, County Kerry, Ireland.

The Harvard Theatre Collection, and The Library of Congress. In Europe, significant dance archives include The National Resource Centre for Dance at Surrey University, England; the traditional dance archive at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Institute for Musicology, Budapest, Hungary; the Rådet for Folkmusikk og Folkedans, at Trondheim University, Norway; and The National Dance Archive of Ireland, at the University of Limerick. This paper will later focus on the latter.

James Clifford suggests that in the West “collecting has long been a strategy for the deployment of a possessive self, culture, and authenticity” (1988: 218). Therefore, we can argue that collecting in the West gathers what is *selected* to be of value or worth to an individual, group, or institution. I argued elsewhere that

... collections assist in shaping, articulating and reinforcing self, group, and cultural identity. These collections, made in the name of education, research, interest value, history, heritage or tourism, give structure and continuity to communities and are significant for the formation of Western identity (Foley in Smith 2012: 108).

Archives in the modern world therefore play an important role in collating, cataloguing and preserving collections of a tangible nature. In the case of dance, an ephemeral art form, archives can preserve moments in the histories of the dance as cultural and historical legacies through both tangible and digital multimedia. Archives can provide access to multimedia dance collections relating to changing dance practices: they can be sites for scholarly research; they can allow for the freeing up of memories to allow artists and scholars to work on new material, knowing that representations of dance practices are safely archived, preserved and made accessible; and they can present opportunities for dancers and others to revisit earlier dance work for inspiration and learning, and to reconstruct earlier dance works for performance. It is important to bear in mind, however, that these collections are not complete histories. They give us partial views and portals into history and culture through mnemonic artefacts which the reader, dancer, or ethnochoreologist needs to contextualize and historicize for a deeper understanding.

Archives and Postcolonial Agency

Archives can potentially play an important role in contributing to postcolonial agency in the construction of social and cultural identities. Ireland is a postcolonial country. With eight hundred years of colonization, Ireland endeavored from the end of the eighteenth century to become an independent nation state. In 1922, it became the Irish Free State. Since then, individuals and diverse cultural institutions and organizations in Ireland have

attempted to assert an Irish cultural identity through the establishment of different cultural nationalist institutions and organizations. For example, *An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha* (The Irish Dancing Commission), under the auspices of the Gaelic League, a cultural nationalist movement established at the end of the nineteenth century, constructed hierarchically structured staged competitions in Irish dancing (see Foley 2001; 2012b; 2013; Hall 2008; Wulff 2007; and others); and *Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann*, established in 1951, constructed similar staged competitions in the indigenous performing arts (traditional music, song and dance). Postcoloniality also saw an increase in the publication of Irish and English language literature, and the development of theatrical dance with Irish themes and artistic collaborations (see for example Crosbie 2011; O'Brien 2011; Wulff 2007). Throughout most of this time, however, the division between 'high' culture (ballet, Western classical music) and 'low' culture (the indigenous performing arts) was palpable and only rarely did the two meet.

A proverb in the Irish language states "*ní neart go cur le chéile*" (trans. "there is no strength without unity"). This proverb forms an important part of the ethos and vision of the National Dance Archive of Ireland, a vision shared by Dance Research Fóm Ireland (DRFI), an organisation established earlier in 2003, and of which I was Founding Chair. It is important to provide a brief background to DRFI to historicise and contextualise the establishment of the National Dance Archive of Ireland.

DRFI was established in 2003 as a non-profit, international, interdisciplinary, inclusive, and all-embracing society for scholarship of dance in Ireland, conceived in both local and global senses. The purpose of DRFI was, and continues to be, to encourage, promote, develop and support scholarship of dance (academic and practice-based), in all its manifestations, in Ireland and abroad. The summary of the aims of DRFI included:

- To encourage, promote, develop and support scholarship in dance in Ireland and elsewhere in all its manifestations, within an open, interdisciplinary research context
 - To provide an international and collaborative network for Irish dance scholars
 - To make available a discursive platform for dance scholars to present, share, and develop ideas
 - To provide an international and collaborative network for Irish dance scholars
 - To promote an interactive and collaborative exchange of ideas, concepts and methodologies through conferences and workshops
 - To make this dance knowledge available through publications and dissemination events

The ethos of DRFI was inclusive and, as we will see, this inclusive ethos was also central to the National Dance Archive of Ireland (NDAI). This inclusive ethos was an attempt to embrace the many dance practices and scholarly perspectives, representative of diverse dance communities in Ireland and elsewhere, as opposed to the selection of one dance genre, a strategy utilised by cultural nationalist movements from the end of the nineteenth century (see Foley 2013).

The next section examines the history and vision of the NDAI; the work of the NDAI in collecting, preserving, digitizing and cataloguing dance material; and how today it is used as a public educational and research resource by dance artists, scholars, and others interested in accessing it.

The National Dance Archive of Ireland (NDAI): Emergence and Vision

The NDAI was pioneered from 2005 by Dance Research Forum Ireland in partnership with the Glucksman Library and the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance at the University of Limerick. As Founding Chair of DRFI, the establishment of the NDAI was a primary objective of the organisation. In 2008, following a number of correspondences with the Arts Council of Ireland, it awarded funding to Dance Research Forum Ireland for a feasibility report to be carried out which² provided proof of the existence of multiple collections of dance in Ireland. These collections, representative of different dance genres, were held by individuals, dance companies, and institutions.

In 2009, the Arts Council awarded NDAI two-year seed funding for the set-up phase of the Archive at the Glucksman Library, University of Limerick. The location of the University of Limerick was seen as critical to the success of the NDAI as strong support came from the Glucksman Library³ and the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance⁴ at the University. Also, most of the university dance programmes in Ireland at the time were situated at the University of Limerick.

The seed funding awarded to the NDAI allowed for the part-time employment of an archivist⁵ and development officer;⁶ the latter was responsible for collecting material for the archive, over a two year period. The Archive was directed by the author, as Founding Director, and managed by Ken Bergin at the Glucksman Library. After this initial funding phase, the University of Limerick, as home to the NDAI, would be responsible for all matters relating to the NDAI including collecting and cataloging archival materials, providing proper storage to ensure endurance of materials, acquiring archival packaging materials, providing archivist and digitization resources, and ensuring a policy of open access to materials.

2 The Report was written by Dr. Victoria O'Brien.

3 Director of the Glucksman Library, Gonnait O'Riordan.

4 Director of the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, Professor Micheál Ó Súilleabháin.

5 The part-time Archivist was Anna-Maria Hajba.

6 The part-time Development Officer was Dr. Victoria O'Brien

The Purpose and Aims of the National Dance Archive of Ireland

The purpose of the NDAI was, and continues to be, to collect, catalogue, preserve and make available dance materials in its holdings. These materials represent different dance genres: traditional dance, social dance, theatrical dance, urban dance and world dance. The archive endeavors to represent the many dance genres existing in Ireland and beyond and does not select one dance form over another. Contrary to nationalist cultural discourses in Ireland throughout the twentieth century, when indigenous, traditional cultural practices were selected for promotion, the NDAI does not promote a hierarchy of dance practices. It acknowledges the different dance practices existent in Ireland in the past and present, and their journeys or routes to and from other places internationally. Also, it acknowledges those dance practices that have recently emerged in Ireland due to immigration and globalization. The NDAI thus plays an important and active role in contributing to Ireland's postcolonial legacy. Its inclusive approach to diverse dance practices assists in acknowledging different social and cultural identities. Although some dance forms are more represented in the archive than others, this is due to the dance specializations of the individuals, companies and institutions who have donated to the NDAI.

The Aims of the NDAI are as follows:

- To identify and collect archival data within the Archive's scope that are considered to be worthy of permanent preservation (these include oral histories)
 - To ensure appropriate storage, security, preservation and access conditions for the Archive's records (online digitization of the collections is in process)
 - To arrange and list the Archive's holdings according to recognized archival preservation and conservation standards⁷
 - To promote and encourage increased awareness and use of the Archive's records through exhibitions, reconstructions, publications, symposia, workshop-demonstrations and events
 - To collaborate with other relevant archival collections and dance organisations in order to seek advice, share expertise and collaborate on initiatives
 - To raise the profile of dance in Ireland and further afield
 - To provide a greater understanding and appreciation for how dance has developed in Ireland and elsewhere in the past, to the present day, and into the future
 - To be an important public resource for dance education and research

Today, the NDAI is home to numerous collections of dance generously donated by individuals, companies and dance organisations.

7 See website: www.ndai@ul.ie

The National Dance Archive of Ireland Collections

The NDAI houses 73 collections (a collection may have from one to hundreds of items of different media) representative of diverse dance artists, dance scholars, dance teachers, and dance communities, past and present, working in Ireland and further afield. These collections contain programmes, posters, photographs, audio and audio-visual recordings, films, documents, books, press cuttings and dance memorabilia; dance costumes and dance shoes have also been donated. These collections represent and give a taste of the creative and dynamic dance cultures at work at particular moments in the dance histories of Ireland, and elsewhere.

The following table provides an indication of the estimated breakdown of archival materials in different dance fields:

Nature of Collection	No. of Collections	% of Collections
Ballet	18	25
Contemporary Dance	28	38.9
Irish Dance	14	18.1
World Dance	5	6.9
Organisations/ Schools	5	6.9
Venues/ Festivals	3	4.2
Total	73	100 ⁸

The NDAI collections are representative of dancers, scholars, companies and organisations working in Ireland, the diaspora and further afield. Since all items are donated, each collection is dependent upon what the individual, company or institution selects to be donated; they have total control over what items represent them in their collection. To donate, each donor signs a transfer agreement which formally hands over the item or items to the NDAI. There are two types of transfer agreements: one hands over the item or items to the NDAI giving complete copyright to the NDAI; the second hands over the item or items to the NDAI allowing the archive to use the donated items for research, educational and promotional purposes but they retain copyright.

Each collection is named after one, the individual dancer, scholar or choreographer who has donated their own material; two, a dance school, company, or organization; or three, a dance event or festival. All collections have a reference code, a biographical note of the dancer or choreographer; a brief historical context to a dance company/organization or event; a very detailed descriptive list including the description of the scope and content of the collection; conditions governing access and use including physical characteristics

8 Information on the actual collections can be found on the NDAI's website:
http://www2.ul.ie/web/WWW/Services/Library/National_Dance_Archive_Ireland

and technical requirements; and archivist's notes. There is also a section for questions to be sent to the NDAI about a particular collection.⁹

Each dance collection is catalogued according to its content; there is no one system of cataloguing applied to all collections in the NDAI. For example, collections can be organised chronologically by date; thematically according to the various subjects a collection covers; or according to the form of materials contained in the collection (e.g. photographs, posters, recordings, correspondence). Once each collection is completely catalogued, digitized and finished, it is made available online. The combination of the online descriptive lists with detailed information, together with multimedia materials in the NDAI, provide a rich resource for all interested in dance in Ireland and further afield.

Structure and Access to the NDAI

The NDAI is governed by the Director of the Library and a Management Group consisting of the Director of the NDAI, the Archive Manager, the archivist, an administrator, and the Development Officer.¹⁰ A board of advisors is presently being appointed for the further development of the NDAI. Access to the NDAI is open to all and is by appointment only.¹¹ And, although the NDAI is physically situated within a university campus and is an important resource for undergraduate and postgraduate dance students at the University of Limerick, it is accessible to the public.

Proactive Archiving and Reactive Archiving

According to Landau and Topp Fargion (2012; following Edmonson 2004) there are two kinds of archiving: proactive archiving and reactive archiving. Proactive archiving is when the archive initiates access to the archive while reactive archiving is when the users take the initiative to access the archive. According to Edmonson, "the only limit to proactive access is imagination" (Edmonson 2004: 20). This can involve seminars, lectures, presentations, exhibitions, the digitization and delivery of archival material online, and so on. The NDAI is a proactive archive. As Director of the NDAI, I have presented lectures, presentations and seminars on the work of the NDAI. Five exhibitions of the NDAI in Ireland have occurred and currently all material is being digitized. Archival material, depending on copyright, will also be accessible online and will be available to international users for research and educational purposes.

9 See for example The Terry and Nancy Bowler Collection at: http://www2.ul.ie.proxy.lib.ul.ie/web/WWW/Services/Library/National_Dance_Archive_Ireland/Bowler%2C%20Terry%20and%20Nancy

10 The Director of the Library is Gohnait O'Riordan and the Management Group consists of the Director of the NDAI, Dr. Catherine Foley, the Archive Manager, Ken Bergin, and the archivist, Anne-Maria Hajba.

11 Contact details: info@ndai.ie; Telephone: + 353 61 202690; Email: ndai@ul.ie

Applied Ethnochoreology

Applied ethnochoreology can take many forms but, generally, it entails applying ethnochoreological methodologies and its perspective to benefiting the wider community. This can involve contributing to knowledge and understandings of cultures and societies as they relate to health, education, social and cultural issues – particularly as they relate to disadvantaged or marginalized communities, work with non-governmental organizations, and so on. Social activism relates very much to the field of applied ethnochoreology.

The following definition for applied ethnomusicology is useful for applied ethnochoreology:

Applied Ethnomusicology is the approach guided by principles of social responsibility, which extends the usual academic goal of broadening and deepening knowledge and understanding toward solving concrete problems and toward working both inside and beyond typical academic contexts. (The ICTM's Study Group on Applied Ethnomusicology 2007. ICTM website <http://www.ictmusic.org/group/ictm-study-group-applied-ethnomusicology>. Accessed July 18, 2014)

I would suggest that applied ethnochoreologists can mutually benefit the archive and the communities that donate and contribute to it by viewing the relationship as a mutually beneficial partnership. As an ethnochoreologist, I am not only interested in the archival product but I also wish to learn more about the individuals, institutions and companies who have donated the product, together with the cultural and historical contexts or circumstances surrounding the generation of the archival product. In other words, I am interested in the who, where, why, what, when, and how questions. To this end, I initiated *Conversations from the Archive* in 2015. This entailed conducting audio recorded interviews with those who have donated materials to the Archive or who are central to collections or items within the Archive. These recordings will also be made available online as podcasts to enhance knowledge around the different collections. They also present the voices of those who have donated materials to the Archive and those who have experienced the dance histories being represented. *Conversations from the Archive* also provide dancers, and others, with the opportunity to tell their story, their history/herstory, and their life in dance. These recordings contribute to NDAI's archival holdings and, as stated above, assist to contextualize and historicize the related archival materials. Continued work in the field, including building on the NDAI's resources on audio and video recordings of dancers, is an ongoing project.

Applied ethnochoreologists can, therefore, contribute much to dance archives by gathering information relating to the respective dance communities

who have donated or who intend to donate to the dance archive. This information can assist in enhancing and contextualizing the archival materials and can, potentially, provide a deeper cultural understanding through the lens of dance.

Conclusion

Dance archives are important resources for research and education but they also assist in contributing to identity construction within an increasingly globalized world. This article has suggested that this is particularly relevant within the context of postcoloniality where archives can give back to a colonized people a sense of identity – be it self identity, ethnic identity, or a multiplicity of identities. This is the case in Ireland where the National Dance Archive of Ireland houses multimedia dance materials of diverse dance communities that represent the dance work of multiple artists, scholars, and institutions in Ireland and elsewhere, past and present. These collections represent the many and diverse voices and value systems that make up the creative and dynamic tapestry of dance in Ireland and beyond.

Through collaborative partnerships, proactive archiving, and open access dance archives, like the National Dance Archive of Ireland, gaps may be bridged between the institution, the university and the wider community. Applied ethnochoreologists can also bridge this gap and can contribute to, and benefit from, dance archives in their abilities to contribute to, contextualize and historicize archival materials for deeper cultural knowledge and understandings. Further, they can influence the work of the archive by looking at process as well as at the archival product or item. They can place importance on the human, social and cultural aspects that comprise dance and the act of making and performing dance. *Conversations from the Archive*, as discussed above, is one example of this. Applied ethnochoreologists can also contribute to the archive in their development of policies for the archive; policies which acknowledge and benefit those who are the archive.

Dance archives, like the National Dance Archive of Ireland, are places of learning for dancers, dance scholars, dance artists and others and with their numerous multimedia materials, and online resources, they can potentially inspire further research and learning thus contributing to our knowledge and understanding of dance and dancers and their diverse roles within culture and society. They can also potentially play an important role in contributing to postcolonial agency in the construction of social and cultural identities through dance.

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