

IMAGINING KITTY O'NEIL: TRANSMISSION, SOMATIC MEMORY,
AND COMMUNION IN AMERICAN PERCUSSIVE DANCE

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DEDICATION

In loving memory of my father, George Thomas Denney (1920-2008), and my mother, Helen Jean Burns Denney (1921-2011) who did not live to see this achievement. For my husband, Dan Grotewohl, my children, Lilianna and Nora, and my friends John A. Niemi and Kevin Campbell, whose constant aid, support, and sacrifice made this project possible. This research is dedicated to Theodora Deane Ruffner (1956-2007), Doctoral Cohort 2006 colleague, dancer, and friend, whose untimely passing left us all wanting.

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ABSTRACT

JEAN DENNEY GROTEWOHL

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This dissertation focuses on how ten contemporary practitioners of various American percussive dance and music traditions discuss somatic and aesthetic experiences of performance. Participant experiences are then used as primary data for historical dance inquiry. Participants provide examples of how living traditions remain constant yet provoke change to dance forms over time and across traditions and therefore, link past practice to contemporary practice. Specifically, this study investigates Kitty O'Neil (1852-1893) and connects her "extinct" dancing to contemporary practice of Irish step dancing, Irish *sean-nós* dancing, Tap dancing, Clogging, and Flatfooting in the U.S. The connection between O'Neil and present dance practice becomes clear as participants share experiences of inherited repertoire that reflect dance practices of the past. This study investigates how to research dance practices of the past when limited textual or visually recorded documentation exists.

Participants describe living tradition as a paradoxical process in which dancers transmit historical and consistent elements of dance and music repertoire while simultaneously changing that same repertoire through improvisation and innovation. The imaginative and somatic experiences of practice allow contemporary artists to manifest both continuity and change within his/her individual practice. The research suggests that past dance enactments are brought into the present through these unique transmission and performance processes.

The archive provides one significant artifact about O'Neil's dancing, an anonymous tune penned in her honor. While the recorded archive contains fixed and limited moments about dance and dancers, dancing repertoire provides dynamic information about past practice. Enfolded into the repertoire of multiple, contemporary American percussive dance forms is useful data about the genealogies and legacies of dancers like O'Neil. Repertoire is transmitted through time within the social context of these dance traditions as a part of how dancers learn to participate in the form. The ethnographic data from the dissertation's participants provides examples of how and when dance and music enactments connect to each tradition's past and have been embodied within each dancer's personal practice. By examining transmission, the research also examines the possibility that O'Neil's repertoire continues to live somatically and aesthetically within the contemporary practice of diverse American percussive dance traditions.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

For ethnography personifies, in its methods and its models, the inescapable dialectic of fact and value. Yet most of its practitioners persist in asserting the usefulness—indeed the creative potential—of such “imperfect” knowledge. They tend both to recognize the impossibility of the true and the absolute and also to suspend disbelief. Notwithstanding the realist idiom of their craft they widely accept that—like all other forms of understanding—ethnography is historically contingent and culturally configured.

John and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (1992)

Kitty O’Neil (1852-1893) was an American dancer who performed at a time in American dance history when Irish born and Irish American entertainers dominated concert, variety, and eventually vaudeville stages. As an American and Irish American percussive dancer myself, I have a life time of experience dancing multiple forms of dance that I understand to be related to O’Neil’s possible repertoire¹. I have personally experienced how the repertoire and performance of Irish competitive dancing, Irish *sean-nós* dancing, Appalachian clogging, flatfooting, buck dance, and tap dancing not only share similarities of movement material, but similar processes for transmission. If, as the epigraph to this chapter states, forms of understanding are both historically contingent and culturally configured, I can assume a meaningful connection of understanding between the past and the present can be formed for practitioners through oral tradition. In the case of American percussive dance, such a connection is understood through aural transmission as well.

I designed this dissertation research hopeful that, if I could not find evidence of O'Neil's repertoire in a recorded archive, I might at least find dancers like me; dancers who share experiences about transmission of American percussive dance of the past directly through the social exchange of dancing. This is important because culturally shared dance knowledge and processes of transmission do not readily appear in the recorded archive; rather, this knowledge is transmitted as trading steps, as stories, as memories, or as boasts that accompany the dancing, the music, and the culture. My own experience as a dancer within a particular tradition guided me toward an understanding that how one dances is, in fact, more important than what one dances. Deciding what to dance is a highly personal matter, and understanding how one makes such a personal choice includes understanding how dancing the form is achieved. If, as I believe, this statement is true, the archive cannot provide a complete record for neither what nor how one dances any of the forms I research in this dissertation. However, an examination of oral tradition and transmission among practitioners could provide an additional record of knowledge.

The participants in this study define their dancing and music making practices as living traditions. As described in this dissertation, the data collected defines the phenomenon of living tradition and provides vital details about each form, genealogies of repertoire, and legacies of past dancers. While this research has an historical component in that I use the existence of a dancer from the 19th century and her lost repertoire as impetus for research, the study focuses on how transmission of repertoire can move through time and human experience for the dance form in this research. The main

research question centers on how I might understand, imagine, or discover the repertoire of a past dancer when no record of her dancing or quotidian existence remains in the archive. Therefore, the ethnographic design of this research is intended to utilize somatic experiences of current practitioners in order to understand how each participant links present dance practice with antecedent enactments and/or practices from the past, thus explaining how transmission connects pieces of repertoire and moments of performance within a contiguous, living tradition of dance. The intent is to explore how transmission occurs and provide a model for researching American percussive dance forms in particular.

Early in the research I realized I could not know O'Neil's specific repertoire precisely, but I also came to understand that it was not lost entirely. Therefore, my goal was not to discover what she danced inasmuch as to know how she may have approached her dancing and how she created her own unique, personal style. Approaches to performing and/or processes for creating a personal style are habits that dancers establish in practice and transmit to others by participating in a living tradition.

Why Kitty O'Neil? A Particular Historical Research Problem

My research began as a physical response to a line in an article written by Irish traditional musician Don Meade (2002) in which he describes the tune "Kitty O'Neil's Champion Jig." He states: "All we have are the syncopated rhythmic accents, long upward-sliding notes and cascading triplet runs in the written music—fossil remains of a now-extinct dance that delighted variety audiences in the 1870's and 80's" (Meade 19). The tune, "Kitty O'Neil's Champion Jig" is notated in *Ryan's Mammoth Collection*

published in 1882ⁱⁱ. When I read Meade's sentence about O'Neil's now-extinct dance, something inside me wanted to stand up and dance. My whole being urged me to express that Kitty's dancing exists within my movement repertoire, a repertoire I inherited as an American percussive dancer today. Next, I asked myself how I might substantiate such a claim. Clearly I was identifying with O'Neil from a very personal standpoint. I imagined O'Neil to be like me. How could I research such a personal response with rigor and validity?

Point Of Entry: Researcher as Dancer within a Living Tradition

I think it's really important that people get a sense of what you're connected to and what you're part of and how you're using it — [this] is far more important than being an individual and completely original dancer.

Ann Kilkelly, research participant

When I re-read the quotation from participant Ann Kilkelly above, I was reminded of my first traditional dance experience, age 12. It was in the warm, sunny kitchen of my maternal grandmother's birthplace in a large wooden farmhouse at Lanark #4, Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada. My cousin, Sarah MacDonald, taught me the Highland Fling while also washing her hair. We danced next to the old woodstove and large set tub. I remember three distinct things about Sarah launching me into traditional dance and these three memories shape how I collect data; determine which phenomena I see and how, how I view data; and what sense I make of them (Charmaz 15). As sociologist Kathy Charmaz remarks, researchers are "not passive receptacles into which data are poured;" rather, researchers come to a study with assumptions, stocks of knowledge, and influence (15).

My three memories with cousin Sarah include: my notes for how to do the dance, which included little stick figure drawings representing the movements; the vinyl LP record album she gave me to help me remember the movements and practice them; and Sarah stopping to rinse her shampooed hair in stale beer (apparently to keep it curly). What remains indelible about these three memories is a realization that I have established particular process of recognition that, in turn, create key assumptions I hold about dance. To this day I recognize and assume that: 1) to record non-discursive dancing using discursive means leaves a great deal of knowledge unrecorded; 2) to dance is not only to value the importance of the dancing, that is, moving the actual steps, but to also value and understand the steps as they fit, and sometimes do not fit, one's own body with regard to ease and enjoyment; 3) to dance is to value the importance of the music you dance to and with, how the tune itself is a teacher of the dance; 4) and lastly, to dance is to understand that the meaning and value of a dance experience is shaped by social exchange including the unique personalities and environmental surround that converge at the moment of sharing, learning, and/or performing the dance.

These four recognitions ground me in this research as well as my own practice of dance. My personal experience as a dancer within a tradition allowed me to create historical research questions that examine contemporary dancers' experiences of repertoire related to archival records rather than search for answers in the archive alone. I further assume that other dancers who practice living traditions of dance also create meaning about their culture from dancing. I assume each dancer values his/her experiences in unique ways with shared common themes about the dance experience as it

is attached to people, personalities, memories, places, spaces, music, and musicians. Specifically, I wanted to know if other dancers practicing American percussive dance forms believe that their knowledge about how each form is practiced now was transmitted to them from the past. If this shared belief did emerge from the research data, I then wanted to explore with the participants how they sensed transmission happening.

I came to imagine Kitty O'Neil's possible dancing from the specific standpoint of interlocutor; that is, I am a mediator in the imagined conversation between the multiple forms of dance that are, in their materiality, related to Variety performance of the mid-19th century in the U.S. I used my own contemporary experience in tandem with that of those I interviewed as heuristic tools to inductively connect an imagined, past experience of Kitty O'Neil dancing to current American percussive repertoires. While O'Neil's dancing has potential to be identified in multiple ways, she is framed in this study as an American dancer whose practice was likely influenced, in part, by Irish dance, but also by unique cultural and historical realities in which legacies of African and British Isles dancers converged in the U.S. yielding distinct new American identities, sub-cultures, and dance genealogies. While O'Neil's precise steps cannot be known, this dissertation attempts to open a path for deeper repertoire recovery and suggests why particular forms, traditions, and practitioners may be important to future historical inquiry for American dance.

Percussive Dance Forms as Living Traditions

Living tradition, a term used in the study of folklore and folklife, has been applied to folk dance practices such as social, group, and individual dance practices. The dance

forms of stepping, tapping, and clogging are percussive dance forms emerging specifically within the United States and are discussed in this dissertation by practitioners as creating and further shaping their distinct, but often connected, living traditions over the past 200 yearsⁱⁱⁱ. Practitioners interviewed for this dissertation further point out that “living tradition” is a term more familiar to Americans, or those from diasporic cultures living in America who practice percussive dance, than to those still living and practicing dance forms in their nation/place of origin. For example, Americans who practice Irish music and dance may refer to their practices as a living tradition while those who practice Irish music and dance in Ireland, or even England, do not (Meehan, Burke). It is a term I have used in presentations on this topic to describe how Irish step dancing contains both old steps passed down from previous generations and new ones. Living tradition describes how dancers use old steps to inform and inspire the addition of newly created repertoire considered by the current practitioners to be contemporary expressions. The form of a living tradition is lively in its practice as it continues to be reinvented by present practitioners acting as curators of the form’s history and genealogy. “Living” as a modifier of the term tradition is meant then to describe how dance, art, and music practices can remain constant in their referencing past enactments (materiality), yet change to suit the artistic and cultural needs of the present practitioners and their audiences.

Living tradition also describes cultural and artistic expressions that are informally learned and performed in the every day life of individuals, yet collectively practiced within a culture. Individual people in communities--as opposed to formal institutions,

theatre schools, state touring ensembles, or even organized social groups--generate these expressions and communications through activities such as dancing, music making, singing, telling jokes, etc. Everything from objects such as buildings, to processes such as canning vegetables, to experiences such as celebrations, can be considered part of, connected to, and meaningful or significant to any one individual's practice of music, song, or dance and continue to generate meaning as a living tradition over time (<http://folklore.usu.edu/what.aspx>).

Therefore, the repertoire of a living tradition cannot be fixed or discussed only within the context of its dance practice. Since people and communities change, practices of every day life and expressions of the current community reflect changing traditions that further result in changes within the production/performance of artistic expressions, objects, and communications altogether and separately. Traditions adapt and continue to "live" with new generations of arts practitioners, while these practitioners also continuously use traditions for creative expression about self, group, and community. I understand, therefore, the modifier "living," when applied to the term tradition to signify how communities collectively change the cultural and artistic expressions they practice to suit their changing needs. At the same time, the individual practitioners within these communities continue to identify their particular repertoires or processes as emulating music, song, and dance done in the past, a past they sense as important to who they are as a collective community and culture.

My research for this dissertation has led me to assert that a living tradition of dance exists when practices of individual dancers are collectively experienced within a

culture or social group of people as exhibiting variety in expression while also demonstrating enough similarity in practice/performance that both dancers and observers of the dance group the practices together as similar. Even though individual practitioners within a dance tradition may, or may not, share and demonstrate historical, aesthetic, or material knowledge of the dancing and tradition in the same way, their specific, individual knowing about time (history), style (aesthetic value), and how-to (pedagogical and material knowledge) is inherent in the dancing. This relationship between how the dancers individually work with the elements of a shared culture means that they are all participating in the social construction of their shared tradition by contributing and responding to how the collective culture changes over time.

Since dancing informs creative, expressive, pedagogical, and transmission processes of many kinds within a culture, these processes further function as interdependent systems for each individual dancer. However each individual perpetuates the dancing as well as other cultural activities in order to continue communicating to others within that culture while expanding the possibilities of those communication processes. As individuals access and engage any number of interdependent systems of transmission, they demonstrate that both continuity and change exist within the majority of creative, expressive, pedagogical, and transmission processes as a living tradition.

My definition of a tradition and explication about the term living tradition, therefore, initiates a re-examination of both tropes and begins to re-define previous nomenclature about dance as emerging from culture into stabilized forms known and recorded broadly as folk dance or vernacular dance. My definition asserts that practices

of dance as living traditions also include processes of continual self-identity making for individuals, whether they are artists or artisans, within the context of an ever-changing culture over time. In this line of thought, a living tradition of dance includes processes of transmission that contain more than the material knowledge of how to do the steps.

Further, doing the dancing, performing the steps, includes both aesthetic and evaluative markers for best practice often located exterior to the dancing itself and apparent in other related, and interrelated aspects of the culture, its people and its values. Executing the steps in performance, particularly for those forms of non-codified solo percussive dance practiced by the participants in this research, means that the dancer simultaneously performs the values of his or her tradition and the tradition's host culture in addition to an individual interpretation of that host culture's histories and/or the dance form's genealogy. Therefore, these performances of steps represent a history of a particular dance tradition, and often a particular practitioner, while also transmitting an individual dancer's personal values about dancing the form, experiencing the culture, and presenting its histories.

The Art(Official) Facts of the Archive and Nomenclature of the Repertoire

Whether as a representation of individual or cultural states of being . . . dance, as a fundamentally ephemeral and transitory event, can only reflect cultural value and meaning.

Susan Leigh Foster, Introduction to *Worlding Dance* (2010)

To dig into this notion of a living tradition, in this dissertation I further question: Where did turn of the century Irish American variety dancer Kitty O'Neil vanish and where has she been if only partially recorded in the archive? Then, how did her lost

legacy connect to the living tradition of American percussive dance forms still existing within the stories shared by Irish and Irish American dance practitioners living in twenty-first century America? O'Neil's presence in C.D. O'Dell's "Annals of the New York Stage," (1942) documents that she was both a singer and dancer and that she performed as soloist and ensemble player. The archive names the venues in which O'Neil danced, as well as those in which her contemporaries danced. These are literal, historical records, words used to also name or categorize the specifics of the performer's activity, the kind of performing he/she performed. For example, C.D. Odell parenthetically noted, albeit inconsistently, the kind of performing a particular artist did in the venue discussed. These notes include humorous qualifiers that are sometimes capitalized to infer an established style or category, with lower case qualifiers designating only a general reference. Some examples of these side notes include: (acrobats), (Irish), (Clog), (card manipulator), ("the human fly") or (banjo and dances) (369-370).

For his article in 2002, Irish banjoist Don Meade reviewed all the volumes of Odell and noted that as performer O'Neil is called a Clog Dancer, a Jig Dancer, and a Sand Dancer^{iv}. The variety of labels for the kind of dancing she performed are meant to describe, in some way, the dancing she did, but the labels are only indications. What we imagine as the result of the label cannot be confirmed and is only further complicated by the fact that there are no moving, visual records of her dancing.

The archive and its descriptions created by Odell are static, but the repertoire of 19th century solo percussive dance enactments seeded continued dancing and also moved through social and aesthetic activities of people^v. This continual seeding of continued

and new percussive dance over time can, therefore, be understood as a living tradition of dance socially constructed by a culture-on-the-move.

Traditional historical research values textual (written) sources as primary, while valuing aural and visual sources as secondary (Layson 20). The research problems, and therefore methodological challenges, of this dissertation are: 1) how to research O'Neil's dancing given the lack of primary sources as they are valued in traditional historical inquiry and 2) how to establish that transmission of repertoire, movement genealogies of American percussive dance, operates to shape differing dance forms and contribute to dance traditions contemporaneously. Central to each of these dilemmas is the question, "What does performance communicate and how does it communicate?"

Contemporary cultural theorist Judith Hamera furthers this notion of living tradition through her germane definition of performance that explains how performance is communication in/as culture. Hamera states:

Performance is both an event and heuristic tool that illuminates the presentational and representational elements of culture. Its inherent "event-ness" ("in motion") makes it especially effective for engaging and describing the embodied processes that produce and consume culture. As event or heuristic, performance makes things and does things, in addition to describing how they are made or done (2006, 5).

Hamera's definition is particularly helpful to how I will present ideas in this dissertation and further connect them to the stories shared by the research participants. Hamera continues to discuss how performance lives within a cultural context by noting that scholars attempt to ascertain how performance can both "produce and consume culture" because what is presented, represented, and transmitted (consumed) happens during the

doing of activities that constitute culture (Hamera 5). The bodily practices and activities of dancing become cultural traditions as they are done, that is, when performed in the moment and transmitted by people performing repertoire over time. This means that codified movement, non-codified movement, and shared or individual habits of a cultural activity all have potential meaning, significance, and importance within a living tradition. What comes into question is the nature of the transmission, specifically how, when, where, and why does a dancer experience, translate, and express a tradition? How do researchers of the present identify practices with shared cultural markers of the past and relate them to shared practices of the present? How are these shared cultural markers noted as still communicating within a group of people who identify as sharing the culture? How has the communication changed and expanded? When is the communication lost, a totally new “language” formed that no longer relates to the living tradition of the dance form? Trying to develop insights into these questions was and is the purpose of this dissertation research.

If the transitory nature of dance performance leaves only a reflection of culture and its values, as Foster suggests in the epigram to this chapter, scholars must first fix performance in order to critique it. For most scholars this means creating a text, a written account of the event, a description, or as cultural theorist Vincent Crapanzano discusses, one in which there is “no primary and independent text that can be read and translated” prior to a researcher’s text. Basically, “[n]o text survives” the scholar “other than [her] own” (Crapanzano 51). Therefore, in order for scholars to discuss performance, the knowledge potentially transmitted through performing and performances is regularly

translated, critiqued, and analyzed through literary strategies as if all dances are stories or all performance develops as dramaturgy^{vi}. The “living” movement, gesture, and embodied knowing of the performer is analyzed and reduced to text, standing in for, and sometimes against, embodied experience (Taylor 16).

Performance studies scholar Diane Taylor suggest that, “By taking performance seriously as a system of learning, storying, and transmitting knowledge,” we might “expand what we understand by ‘knowledge’” and avoid reducing social relationships, memory, and individual identity to textual descriptions (16). Taylor emphasizes that to interrogate and analyze a living tradition of dance is to take the practice of the repertoire and its particular genealogies seriously, precisely because dancing them means being socially active in a culture that creates knowledge as experiential. Taylor’s assertion agrees with Hamera’s suggestion that performance considered, “[a]s event or as heuristic . . . makes things and does things, in addition to describing how they are made or done (6).” Further, a shift away from the reification of text and/or textualizing lived experience “necessarily alters what academic disciplines regard as appropriate canons, and might extend the traditional disciplinary boundaries to include practices previously outside their purview,” including scenarios of dance held in the bodies of contemporary dancers who learned from, watched, or simply heard stories about dancers of the past (Taylor 17). For Taylor then, the repertoire, in contrast to the enduring, supposedly incorruptible textual archive, remains ephemeral and embodied. The difference between the written archive and the performed repertoire is the myth that one is enduring (archive) and the other is not (repertoire).

My research with dissertation participants, many of whom identify as practitioners of living traditions, leads me to suggest here that there exists what I now call a *soft archive*, an archive that accompanies the repertoire when performing emerges. This soft archive is neither written nor spoken. Rather the *soft archive*, as explained by the percussive dancers participating in this research as living tradition, is a process of dance doing and dance perpetuation that is moved, learned, translated, and expressed as a bodily practice of a dance form within a tradition of dancing and music making. Living tradition, as described by the voices of the participants in the following chapters of the dissertation, comes alive in the communion between movement and music, listening and sounding, memory and moment, performer and audience, all simultaneously expressed as improvised, percussive dancing. What I am naming the *soft archive* is attached to repertoire, but it also represents other ephemeral knowledge available to the individual practicing and communicating within a living tradition. Therefore, the concepts inhering within all three terms (repertoire, soft archive, and/or living tradition), and emerging from and supported by the voices of the research participants in this dissertation, make clear that percussive dance practices are enduring forms perpetuated by repetitive processes in which knower, knowing, and knowledge about the form and its history emerge from the act of dancing: They are practices which continue to live through the liveliness of shared anecdotes, social experience, and memory of the dance as it continues to communicate new cultural possibilities.

In summary, I return to my opening questions in this section about the written archival disappearance of Kitty O'Neil's dancing, while I also sensed her living presence

within the repertoire of current American percussive dance forms being practiced today. In order to delve more deeply into these opening questions, it becomes necessary, therefore, to engage dancers who experience repertoire of multiple dance forms seeded in O'Neil's era and which have been in continual performance in some variety of expression to the present time. The performing genres that coalesced into early American musical theatre during O'Neil's time have separately perpetuated numerous, distinct styles of dance and music making practices. Some of these practices are apparent as particular performers and their performances endure as part of the textual archive. This "hard" archive, however, does not equitably represent the multiplicity of music and dance genres continuing alongside the development of concert hall variety, vaudeville, and theatrical productions and whose formulaic and programmatic particulars helped codify musical theatre as a genre. In order to explore the living traditions of percussive dance emerging from and through the 19th century American popular culture and public performance, investigating the "soft" archive of a multiplicity of practitioners is needed. This dissertation is my attempt at creating possibilities for how this *soft archive* might emerge through the voices and movement of the dancers.

Summary of Dissertation Chapters

Chapter II outlines how I came to design the research for this dissertation as an ethnography that utilized data sets from interviewees and a data set generated by me as researcher. This chapter introduces each of the ten dancers and musicians interviewed and details my personal relationships with each. Procedures for data collection and data analysis are also reviewed in this chapter.

Chapter III outlines historical and theoretical underpinnings that allowed me to situate this study within the greater fields of dance performance and historical dance inquiry. This chapter reflects on the recorded archive of American percussive dance. Some discussions in this chapter further theories about the nature of dance performance as embodied and moving in contrast to the nature of the archive as static and incomplete. Additionally, discussions include the onset of a high/low art divide in American culture, and nomenclature is discussed as a means of problematizing the research of percussive dance forms, examples of dubious nomenclature in the recorded archive, and historical, social, and cultural considerations of 19th century dancing.

I enact in Chapter IV my performing of a fictitious relationship with Kitty O'Neil as creative writing whilst also providing a history of her era by listing historiographies that I sampled, interpreted, and sometimes contested. Many of the theoretical ideas I engage in Chapter II motivated the creation of this data.

To further contextualize and validate the epistemological experience of transmitting American percussive dance forms, Chapter V provides definitions of living tradition according to the contemporary dancers and musicians I interviewed. This chapter explains how it is that living tradition is termed paradoxical and details exactly how the paradoxes of transmission happen as pedagogical enactments of learning and sharing (teaching) the dancing.

Chapter VI clarifies how and when each participant feels he/she has achieved a best practice in his/her form through the definition and examples provided in Chapter V. Achieving best practice is possible through multiple modes of action: imitation,

improvisation, innovation, emulation, communion, and creation. Since the more time one spends dancing and/or playing directly effects how one practices and what one practices, participants describe differing levels of best practice. The identified modes of action proportionately indicate the extent of cultural, social, and technical saturation each participant has experienced in his/her culture as each practices his/her dance or music form. Finally, Chapter VII represents a full interpretation of the data in visual and relational terms and serves to summarize how it is that when one experiences and practices repertoire in a living tradition and achieves best practice to a high degree, the dancer moving, those in communion with the dancer, the repertoire, the tradition, and the culture are all transformed. Beyond simple perpetuation of the culture, tradition, and/or form, the moment best practice emerges for the dancer is a moment that also has the power to move the past into the present as well as set the future of the tradition and culture in motion.

Notes

ⁱ In general, most dance history texts reference the influences of English, Irish, and African cultures when discussing the origins of American tap dance. In her 1947 article “Juba and American Minstrelsy,” Marian Hannah Winter set forth what has been a long held belief in dance studies that tap dance originated solely with one man, William Henry Lane or Master Juba. Winter claims, however dubious, that white Irish and English Minstrel men simply danced their own native jigs “with topical allusions to Negroes (quoted in Dils and Cooper Albright 2001, 250). This notion runs counter to more recent scholarship about Minstrelsy. While I do not doubt Juba’s ability to dance, I doubt he is the sole progenitor of tap dance. Even Winter admits that Juba learned from Jim Lowe, “a Negro jig and reel dancer of exceptional skill (251),” yet Lowe’s teacher remains unknown to the archive.

ⁱⁱ Elias Howe and William Bradbury Ryan, *Ryan’s Mammoth Collection: 1050 Reels and Jigs, Hornpipes, Clogs, Walk-arounds, Essences, Strathspeys, Highland Flings and Contra Dances, with Figures, and How to Play Them; Bowing and Fingering Marked, Together with Forty Introductory Studies for the Violin, with Explanations of Bowing, etc.* (Boston: Elias Howe, copyright 1883, actually issued 1882), reprinted by Mel Bay Publications, (1995), Patrick Sky ed.

ⁱⁱⁱ Participant Rodney Sutton mentions William Henry Lane as a past practitioner of America “tap” dance with which he personally feels a connection (Sutton, Rodney. Telephone interview. 11 November 2010). Sutton is not alone as many scholars note Lane as the progenitor of tap dance in the United States. See note 1.

^{iv} See Meade, D. (2002). “Kitty O’Neil and Her ‘Champion Jig’: An Irish Dancer on The New York Stage.” *New Hibernia Review*, 6(3), 9-22. ID: 2; Volume 6, Number 3, Autumn 2002.

^v In his book *Highbrow Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (1988) Lawrence Levine makes clear that the audiences and performers of 19th century culture are viewed in hindsight via a hierarchical ordering that does not represent the reality or experience of the time. He argues that past Americans did not create the aesthetic and vertical categories of Highbrow and Lowbrow art, which currently divide dance discourse. Much scholarly discourse about performance divides Minstrelsy or burlesque, for example, as separate and lower than opera or ballet on the hierarchical scale. Levine states, “American culture, from the very outset, was a divided one, replete with ethnic, class, and regional distinctions. It was this very cultural variety that fascinated a visitor . . . to speculate . . . about the forces capable of uniting this heterogeneous people. What I mean, in referring to a shared culture, is that in the nineteenth century, especially in the first half, Americans, in addition to whatever specific cultures they were part of, shared a public culture less hierarchically organized, less fragmented into relatively rigid adjectival boxes than their descendants were to experience a century later (9).” Levine examines the nature of hierarchical ordering in 19th century performance and advocates for a more horizontal comparison. He suggests that scholars consider the message of the form/performance about and toward culture, how the form “works” or functions for culture and quantitatively how “expressive forms of expressive culture are diffused throughout the society (8).” The percussive, jig, clog, and sand dances of O’Neil’s era varyingly appeared as tap dance, Irish dance, clog dance, and soft shoe, within the next 50 years of American performance and beyond. See Constance Valis Hill’s *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History* (2010), and Rusty Frank’s *Tap! The Greatest Tap Dance Stars and their Stories 1900-1950* (1990).

^{vi} There have been many ethnographers and performance/cultural studies scholars who have addressed this reality in research methods across qualitative research. See *Writing Culture: The poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, Clifford and Marcus, eds. (1986); *Choreographing History* (1995) and *Worlding Dance* (2010) Susan Leigh Foster; *Opening Acts: Performance in/as Communication and Cultrual Studies* (2006), Judith Hamera, ed. Particularly applicable to this discussion is Leonard Clyde Hawes' article "Becoming Other-Wise: Conversational Performance and the Politics of Experience" in Hamera's volume where Hawes examines the micro-practices of conversation in terms power.

CHAPTER II

A RESEARCH DESIGN FOR EXPLORING TRANSMISSION WITHIN LIVING TRADITIONS

For ethnography personifies, in its methods and its models, the inescapable dialectic of fact and value. Yet most of its practitioners persist in asserting the usefulness—indeed the creative potential—of such “imperfect” knowledge. They tend both to recognize the impossibility of the true and the absolute and also to suspend disbelief. Notwithstanding the realist idiom of their craft they widely accept that—like all other forms of understanding—ethnography is historically contingent and culturally configured.

John and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (1992)

As an American and Irish American percussive dancer myself, I am an “insider” to the phenomenon of living tradition. I have experienced and practice of Irish dance traditions, Appalachian dance traditions, and American tap dance traditions. Each of these forms is practiced in distinct cultures, yet each culture and, therefore each dance form, is and has been under the influence of the other forms and cultures as all are contemporaneously practiced in the United States. Practitioners migrate inside, outside, across, and through American percussive dance cultures geographically, socially, and aesthetically. If, as the epigraph to this chapter states, forms of understanding are both historically contingent and culturally configured, I can assume a meaningful connection of understanding within a tradition of dance between practitioners of differing cultures as well as between the past and the present. I designed this dissertation research hopeful that, if I could not find evidence of O’Neil’s repertoire in a recorded archive, I might at least find contemporary dancers who share dance experiences that are likely contingent

upon and configured from how American percussive dancers of the past transmitted their knowledge of dancing. This is important because culturally and socially shared dance knowledge and processes of transmission do not readily appear in the textual or recorded archive; rather living traditions transmit knowledge as stories, as memories, or as boasts that accompany the dancing, the music, and the culture. My own experience as a dancer within a living tradition guided me toward an understanding that how one dances is, in fact, more important than what one dances. Deciding what to dance is a highly personal matter, and understanding how one makes such a personal choice includes understanding how a best practice of dancing the form is achieved. If, as I believe, this statement is true, the archive cannot provide a complete record for what or how one dances any of the forms I name here as living traditions of dance. However, examining oral traditions and the phenomenon of transmission provides a different record of knowledge and therefore different data.

The participants in this study define their dancing and music making practices as living traditions. As described in the Introduction to this dissertation, the data collected defines the phenomenon of living tradition and provides vital details about each form, genealogies of repertoire, and legacies of past dancers. While this research has an historical component in that I use the existence of a dancer from the 19th century and her lost repertoire as impetus for research, the study focuses on how transmission of repertoire can move through time and human experience for the dance form in this research. The main research question centers on how I might understand, imagine, or discover the repertoire of a past dancer when no records of her dance steps (repertoire) or

quotidian existence remain in the archive. Therefore, the ethnographic design of this research is intended to utilize somaticⁱ experiences of current practitioners in order to understand how each participant links present dance practice with antecedent enactments and/or practices from the past, thus explaining how transmission connects pieces of repertoire and moments of performance within a contiguous, living tradition of dance. The intent is to explore how transmission occurs and provide a model for how to research American percussive dance forms in particular.

Early on in the research I realized I could not know O'Neil's specific repertoire precisely, but I also came to understand that it was not lost entirely. Therefore, my goal was not to discover what she danced inasmuch as to know how she may have approached her dancing and how she created her own unique, personal style. Approaches to performing and/or processes for creating a personal style are habits that dance practitioners establish in practice and transmit to others by participating in a living tradition.

Qualitative research theorist Max Van Manen suggests that researchers of lived or somatic experience are collectors of anecdotes (69). Researching a living tradition requires a methodology that reflects the diverse, somatic, and aesthetic experiences of its practitioners. To this end, the research is designed as a qualitative ethnography.

Ethnography, loosely defined, is the study of what people do, how they do it, and why. I wanted to know how each dancer and musician I interviewed experiences living with the tradition each practices. I wanted to understand how each came to participate in both the tradition and the culture, and how transmission happens for each as a learner and a

teacher. My questions were designed to collect stories about how each participant experiences other contemporary dancers/musicians in each form as well as performers from the past. Additionally, I wanted to record descriptions about what it feels like to dance or play music in each form.

While each of the five dance forms and two music forms detailed in this dissertation are separate and distinct spheres of practice and knowledge, they are, in fact, inseparable when the history of American percussive dance is considered. Each is considered a contributing practice to American percussive dance styles, which include many forms of social, vernacular, and codified dance such as musical theatre, tap, and jazz. However, the recorded historical archive, in its task to fix and label people and enactments for posterity, cannot honor the fluid nature of movement material that inevitably occurs among practitioners who imitate, innovate, and create with current or past movement material. Such flux between what is fixed in the archive and what is alive in a living tradition of dancing creates a tension for historical inquiry and its researchers. Attempting to define a form's movement material is literally like attempting to hit a moving target. Therefore, beyond collecting ethnographic data, particular theoretical lenses were researched in order to sharpen my research perspective so that I might meaningfully interpret the experiences of those I interviewed given the nature of the ever-changing repertoire within American percussive dance forms. These perspectives are discussed in Chapter III.

Kathy Charmaz's methods for constructing a study using a grounded theory approach to qualitative research helped influence an awareness of my position as an

“insider” and member of the dance cultures I was researching, including intimate relationships and shared performance experiences with many of those participants I interviewed. While I understood that my “insider” position could create bias, a sense of nostalgia, and even a reification of concepts I myself had experience to support, my “grounding” in the area I was studying allowed me valuable and unique access to and immediate understanding of the language used and the practices described. I have a direct, personal, and experiential knowing of the materiality, cultural surround, history, and practitioners of each dance and music form. Therefore, it became important that I specifically design the research procedures so that ideas came directly from the data, or from participants in their own words. Also, I chose not to deduce a hypothesis from existing theories prescriptively or from my own assumptions; rather, I chose to attend to properties (characteristic of each dance practice), theoretical categories (variations in the description of both practices and definitions for living tradition), causes and conditions for the phenomenon (experiences of learning, teaching, and performing within a living tradition) as each exists in the data and emerges from the data (Charmaz 9).

I am positioned throughout this dissertation as researcher: I am an interpreter of history, a creative writer, and performer simultaneously. The historiography I’ve written (Chapter IV), and conclusions I assert, remain contingent upon my position within a multiple cultures of dance as well as my relationships with participants whose individual creative enactments helped construct this dissertation’s research world. To achieve clarity with regard to participant data and my interpretation, I chose two related methodological practices, which shaped the procedures of this project: Critical

Ethnography's principles for interviewing (Madison 2005) and Adele Clarke's *Situational Analysis* (2005) for data and discourse analysis. Additionally, concepts from Performance Ethnography (as well as how other qualitative researchers have interpreted these concepts) concerning writing as active performing influenced the manner in which I combine creativity and historical research (Alexander 2005, Crapanzano 1986, Foster 1995, Van Manen 1990).

While the procedures of this study follow a general model for collecting ethnographic data, data was also synthesized relative to the creation of a historiography for Kitty O'Neil in which my experiences with the data collection and data analysis processes impacted the resultant documents (texts). The development of a contextual historiography for O'Neil in Chapter IV was important in order for me to give the reader needed background information when further contextualizing the shared stories of the research participants in the dissertation's later chapters. However, I also wanted the reader to clearly see how I was constructing O'Neill's history in my own imagination with support from diverse historical archives as well as my own lived experience in dance forms I assume relate to that of O'Neill. The impact of these theoretical and methodological choices is discussed in relation to procedures for data collection and analysis as part of the subsections that follow, as well as in Chapter III.

The notion of a living tradition as a moving, changing representation of culture yielded basic questions that guided this research, including the following question that initiated the research process:

- Can the assumed lineage of O’Neil’s participation in American dance traditions relating/ed to Irish dance, Irish *sean-nós* dancing, Tap, Clogging, and Flatfooting be traced and identified? If so, how?

However, after working with textual and archival sources, it became abundantly clear that discovering what O’Neil danced was impossible. My focus, therefore, shifted from what she danced to how she may have danced and how this earlier dancing was still connected to contemporary dancers identifying themselves as practicing within O’Neill’s dance form. This notion of connecting an imagined past to the practices of the present created my sense of a living tradition, a tradition that lives within the dancers’ bodies.

Researching a living tradition requires a methodology that reflects the diverse, somatic, and aestheticⁱⁱ experiences of its practitioners. A research design then would also need to utilize theoretical lenses that sharpen the researcher’s ability to meaningfully interpret the experiences of those who practice living traditions. My new focus became designing an ethnography that could explain somatic experiences of current practitioners in order to understand how each links present practice with antecedent enactments and/or practices from the past. My main research question shifted toward understanding how individual practices and experiences of living traditions of dance connect within a

contiguous, singular living tradition of dance and even across traditions. This shift caused me to then ask:

- In what ways does historiography, as a methodological lens, deepen the researcher and/or participants' relationships to their dance practices and connect their collective histories? How are these meaning-making and valuing processes articulated?

While each of the five dance forms and two music forms discussed in this dissertation are separate distinct spheres of practice and knowledge, they are, in fact, inseparable when the history of American percussive dance is considered. However, the archive in its task to fix and label people and enactments for posterity cannot honor the fluid nature of imitation, innovation, and creation of movement material that inevitably occurred among practitioners both then and now. Such flux between what is fixed in the archive and what is alive in a living tradition of dancing creates a tension for historical inquiry and its researchers.

In order to study the tension between past and present, archival record and human experience, and similar yet distinct dance practices, I designed and carried out an ethnographic research project that also utilized theories and analytics from performance theory and historiography, which I will discuss later in this chapter. In this way, I also worked to create a particular and local act of historiography for Kitty O'Neil, after historian Keith Jenkins's theory (25). Jenkins encourages the work of history to include a reflexive and positioned standpoint, one that reflects the reality that history is actually

histories and that historical work is biased, singular, and assembled in the present moment from the researcher's unique point of view.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore how interviewees experience and practice particular American percussive dance forms as living traditions. The participants' comments contribute to the generalized knowledge of these dance forms within the field of dance studies and American studies as well as adding these artists and experiences to the archival record. Additionally, as qualitative researcher and scholarly performer, I create a theoretical framework for how these dance practices (improvised Irish step dance, Irish *sean-nós* dancing, flatfooting, tap, and clogging) specifically transmit repertoire. This research is important because it provides another approach for bringing "lost" dance of the past into the present through contemporary practices and performances.

Collectively, the assumptions within the theoretical frames outlined in Chapter III helped to shape my procedural choices for data collection and the resultant imagined history created through and exchange of letters between performers across an American century. Additionally, the scholars mentioned above and their examples provided specific models for how I might carry out procedures for data analysis and presentation of the stories shared by contemporary American percussive dance practitioners concerning their insights as performers continuing a living tradition. What follows is a detail of methods and procedures I used for data sources, data collection, participant selection, interview questions, data coding and other analytics.

Methods and Procedures

In order to interpret and to generalize—to earn conclusions—folklorists gather information from specific individuals because tradition is enacted only through an individual's acts of creative will.

Cashman, Mould, and Shukla, *Studies in Ethnographic Imagination* (1992)

This research utilizes multiple kinds of data that can be divided into two large groupings; 1) ethnographic data collected from contemporary practitioners, and 2) historical data collected from the archive and other historical scholars. Additionally, I created a third data set by performing my musings about Kitty O'Neil's life through a fictional correspondence between myself as O'Neil, and myself as researcher. In the following sections, I discuss how I collected the ethnographic data, and the data I used to support my imaginings, from diverse people, sites, and historical archives.

Data Sources

Traditional sources of ethnographic research such as interviews, observation, and documentation (video and audio) were utilized to collect experiences of contemporary practitioners of American percussive dance traditions and music traditions from the United States. Their experiences, histories, demonstrations, imitations, and translations were considered *primary sources* for this study's ethnographic and historical inquiry. To assert and categorize such data as primary sources constitutes a departure from traditional historical research practice and presents a potential model for researching "lost dances" (Thomas 34). Since I choose to consider the voices of my research participants as primary, I take up dance historian Helen Thomas's encouragement to create a usable past out of current practitioners' experiences and in so doing extend and connect a "firm

dance heritage” for percussive dance practices in American dance history over time (35). These data were then combined with, compared against, and imaginatively connected to historical data from the recorded archive.

Archival sources. I own Volume XIII [1885-1888] of George C.D. Odell’s (1886-1949) *Annals of the New York Stage*. Odell spent a lifetime chronicling the stage events of the New York City theatre scene from circa 1798 until approximately 1894, and published his work in fifteen volumes from 1927 until 1945 as *Annals of the New York Stage*, Columbia University Press, New York. Odell’s volumes have been indispensable for performing arts research and AMS Press reprinted the entire set in 1970. Odell was Brander Matthews Professor of Dramatic Literature at Columbia University from 1924 until 1939 when he became an Emeritus Professorⁱⁱⁱ. My information on Kitty O’Neil’s performances draws from Don Meade’s research at the New York City Public Library where he had full access to all fifteen volumes of Odell’s work^{iv}.

Beyond Odell, I was able to search the Library of Congress’s digital collection “Chronicling America - Historic Newspapers” for listings about Kitty O’Neil. Multiple listings confirmed O’Neil’s prolific touring activity with various ensembles from Baltimore to Pittsburgh from the late 1860’s through the 1880’s. I flew into New York City, en route to a conference in Philadelphia, to spend one last day in the archive on November 15, 2011. Instead of reviewing Odell’s works as Meade had done, I worked in New York University’s Tamiment/Wagner newspaper and print media collection reviewing the Irish newspapers, *The Irish Citizen* and *The Emerald*, dating from 1867 to 1871 in the hopes of finding some personal information about O’Neil. This search did

not yield any new information about how O’Neil danced and led me further to believe an ethnographic data collection might be an important method for opening new insights into American percussive dance practice during the late 1800’s.

Ethnographic data. The ethnographic data was collected between August of 2007 and March of 2011 and includes the following: observation of participants as they performed live to live musical accompaniment, observation of recorded teaching and performing from some of the participants’ self-produced DVD’s, listening to recordings of music on CDs, viewing of YouTube clips online, and telephone and live interviews with each dancer/musician.

Live performance. Two events proved invaluable for this study, namely the Irish Connections Festival (ICONS) in Boston, MA in 2007, and *Sean-Nós* Northwest Festival in Evergreen, WA in 2010. It was at each of these festivals that I became acquainted with participants Kieran Jordan, Maldon Meehan, Shannon Dunne, Alicia Guinn, and Niall O’Leary. During the festivals, I observed each dance, danced with the research participants, and learned a little about the forms each practices. I also discussed with the dancers how they experience the cultures in which they live. I remain indebted to Irish traditional musician Myron Bretholz for introducing me to Kieran Jordan, and to Kieran for negotiating accommodation in exchange for my participation in ICONS 2007. During ICONS festival, Kevin Burke and I talked about the project and he graciously played “Kitty O’Neil’s Champion Jig” during his solo set at ICONS festival. This was a great surprise, as I had not heard the tune played live until he did so for me.

In the middle of my research, I decided to attend *Sean-Nós* Northwest Festival,

which is organized, in part, by research participants Maldon Meehan and Alicia Guinn. I attended this festival in order to experience the culture and community of Irish traditional music and *sean-nós* dancing of the northwest U.S. I had never visited Seattle or Oregon before and both dancers were excited to host me for the duration of the festival.

Additionally, participant Kieran Jordan was featured as a teacher for the event and Kevin Burke was slated to perform. During the festival, I was able to take part in dance classes taught by Alicia Guinn and Kieran Jordan and, once again, perform with all three dancers plus Kevin Burke as musician. The event and time spent within the culture helped me compare my own east coast community and cultural impressions and biases to these new experiences within a west coast community and culture.

More than any concrete knowledge I may have gained about *sean-nós* dancing, I was able to enjoy the company of, and move creatively with, four research participants for a second time during the *Sean-Nós* Northwest Festival. The performance I shared with them was memorable and allowed me to establish an easy rapport during our upcoming telephone interviews.

Videography, discography and sheet music. To gather a sense of how research participants presented their ideas about their dance forms, I viewed the following two video recordings: *Dance Sean-Nós* (2005) self-produced by participant Maldon Meehan with dancing partner Ronan Regan with a visual tutorial for Irish *sean-nós* dancing accompanied by John O'Halloran on melodeon; and *Secrets of the Sole: Irish Dance Steps and Stories with Kieran Jordan* (2008) with interviews, demonstrations, and performances of fellow Irish and Irish American dancers Aidan Vaughn and Kevin Doyle

accompanied by musicians Sean Gannon (accordion) and George Keith (fiddle) with additional dancers Jackie O’Riley and Terry McCarthy. Jordan’s documentary provides in-depth discussions about Irish *sean-nós* dancing from Vaughan and an American percussive dance practice as influenced by tap from Irish American dancer Kevin Doyle.

I further listened to the following two recordings of music from O’Neil’s era: Kevin Burke and Cal Scott’s *Suite* (2010), which features a section of the tune “Kitty O’Neil’s Champion Jig,” and Mick Moloney’s *McNally’s Row of Flats* (2006), which features contemporary interpretations of Harrigan and Braham’s hit songs and musical compositions from the 19th century variety theatre shows. From these recordings, I imagined how Kitty O’Neil might have performed with Harrigan, Hart, and Braham at various times throughout her career. Lastly, I was able to view digital copies of original sheet music (arranged for piano) for three songs O’Neil performed; Harrigan and Braham’s “Such an Education Has My Mary Ann” (1878)^v, “The Gallant Sixty-Ninth” (1875)^{vi}, and “The Nerves” (1865)^{vii} which my colleague, Rebecca Schlöner, played for me on piano.

As mentioned in the Introduction, I am indebted to Mike Seeger for his ethnographic research on solo Southern dance and his film *Talking Feet* (1992). Seeger states his project was a first attempt “to visually document the repertoires of traditional dancers from the southeastern mountains” and his film and book have yet to be matched in terms of scope or validity as Seeger’s participants dance and speak for themselves in both the film and the book (5). To help me create a new chronological map of solo Southern percussive dancers (see Table 1 below), I utilized Seeger’s biographies and

interviews. Further, I incorporated the stories shared by two of the dancers I interviewed concerning dancers who appear in Seeger's 1992 film *Talking Feet*. These storied dancers include Algia Mae Hinton, Willard Watson, Robert Dotson, and The Fiddle Puppets (Eileen Carson, Edie Carson, Amy Fenton). I am also indebted to Don Meade for sharing his research on Kitty O'Neil's theatrical appearances. Meade graciously sent me his own chronology of O'Neil's career gleaned from his research in the New York Public Library, which I was unable to access (Meade, Don. Personal communication. April 2007). To round out my chronological map, I then added my own familial history and basic information for each participant in this dissertation. Later, I added dancers each participant mentions in his/her interview as important to his/her individual practice.

Table 1

A Combined Chronology of Performers, Research Participants, and Other Influential Dancers to this Research

1772-74	John MacDonald (my maternal great-great grandfather) VIIIth Laird of Glenalladale, Captain 84th Regiment of Foot, finances emigration to Prince Edward Island, Canada from his home in South Uist Island, Scotland aboard <i>The Alexander</i> . He is credited as founder of the First Scottish Catholic Settlement on Prince Edward Island. (www.electricscotland.com).
1750-1850	Itinerant Dance Masters taught deportment, continental social dance, native Irish social dance and step dance throughout Ireland
1796	John MacDonald acquires 700 acres in Antigonish, Nova Scotia
c. 1825	William Henry "Master Juba" Lane born
1829	Daddy Rice performs his "Jump Jim Crow"
1834	David Braham born, England – musician and composer; Harrigan and Braham teamed up after Hart died.
1836	Daddy Rice performs his blackface routine in Dublin, Ireland
1844	Ed Harrigan born, New York's Corlear's Hook near the famed Five Points District of 3rd generation Protestant from New Foundland, eastern Canada; his mother used to sing and dance Minstrel numbers at home; banjo player, singer, and dancer

1848	William Henry “Master Juba” Lane performs in London at the Free Trade Hall
1855	Tony (Canon) Hart born, Massachusetts, of 1st generation parents from Clare Island, County Mayo, Ireland; singer and dancer
1852 or 3	Kathleen O’Neil Born in USA (according to death certificate), place unknown
1859	William MacDonald, my maternal great-grandfather, born to John MacDonald and his second wife, Catherine Fraser (1820-1859), Antigonish, Nova Scotia December 12, dies 1925.
1862	First Odell listing for Kathleen O’Neil: singer, Canterbury Music Hall, 585 Broadway, March 17th
1863-1866	Kathleen “Kitty” O’Neil works with Tony Pastor at the American Theatre (Butler's Varieties), 444 Broadway, as well as Brooklyn shows, summer to fall 1866. Also performs at Wood's Minstrel Hall, 514 Broadway.
1866	Ed Harrigan worked in a wealth of Minstrelsy and variety programs in San Francisco; sang and wrote songs for the Olympic theatre this date.
1866-1868	O’Neil has no New York listings from fall 1866 to 1868. Possibly performed at the Howard Athenaeum or other Boston theaters. According to M.B. Leavitt, Josh Hart was the manager at the Athenaeum 1867-70, followed by Stetson. The first "Kitty O'Neil" jig was published c. 1867 in Boston (Howe’s 1000) from minstrel fiddler Jimmy “the Boss Jig Player” Norton.
1869-1870	West Coast tour. “Kathleen O’Neil” performed in San Francisco at the Bella Union in April, 1869; Rejoins Tony Pastor’s company; 8/70 - 12/70 unknown. Probably married Harry Kernell this year.
1870	Ed Harrigan worked in the Globe Theatre, New York. Meets Tony Canon “Hart” in Chicago while touring with Manning’s Minstrels
1871	Harrigan & Hart settle in at Howard Athenaeum, Boston. Hart changes name from Canon to Hart; Tony Pastor invites the pair to Union Square Theatre, New York; Before leaving Boston, band leader John Braham writes a letter of introduction for them to his Uncle David at the Theatre Comique, New York.
1871	O’Neil’s first billing as “Kitty” rather than “Kathleen”; 3-5/71 at Howard Athenaeum, Boston.
1871-1874	O’Neil joins Josh Hart’s troupe at Theatre Comique (former Wood’s Minstrel Hall) and Olympic Theatre in Brooklyn. May have toured with Stetson in ’73 and was at Howard Athenaeum with him in July and August of that year. 4/74-8/74 - No New York listings for O’Neil. May have toured with Stetson’s Athenaeum troupe, who were in Pittsburgh 6/74

1874-1875	8/74 – 4/75 Boston Theatre (8/74), Theatre Comique and Olympic, Brooklyn; 5/75 – 2/76 -no New York listings; Harry Kernell was on tour during this period with Pastor, but there is no mention of Kitty in those playbills.
1876	3-4/76 Theatre Comique, now under Harrigan's management. Howard Athenaeum in March; 5-9/76 unknown. No New York listings.
1876-1877	10/76-3/77 Theatre Comique, Josh Hart's Eagle Theatre, Tony Pastor's, Howard Athenaeum (1/77); 4-8/77 joins company organized by Billy Barry and Ed Power to play at Pastor's theatre while he was on tour. Toured with Barry Company summer '77
1877-1878	9/77-3/78 Theatre Comique; 4-10/78 with Tony Pastor at Park Theatre, Grand Opera House; in Boston at Howard Athenaeum (9/29/78) and Globe Theatre (5/19/78); 10/78 Theatre Comique; 12/78 Windsor (former Stadt Theatre)
1879-1880	Last Odell citing at Comique in January. Then with Josh Hart company on tour (Howard Athenaeum in Boston, Pastor's theatre in NY while Pastor toured), at Hyde and Behman's in Brooklyn, Boylston Museum in Boston (8/18) and first appearance at Miner's Bowery Theatre; 12/79 – 3/80 no New York listings
1880- 1882	Divorces Harry Kernell (according to his obit); 4/80-3/81 Tony Pastor's, Hyde and Behman's, Miner's London Theatre, National Theatre, American Theater; 8-10/81 Hyde and Behman's, Brooklyn; 11/81-8/82 unknown; 8/82 Howard Athenaeum, Boston
1881	Harrigan & Hart move uptown into their own 1200 seat building, the New Theatre Comique
1882-1888	11/82 – 4/88. Regular appearances at Harry Miner's Bowery, Eighth Avenue and London Theatres, as well as Tony Pastor's, Hyde and Behman's in Brooklyn. Boston appearances at Howard Athenaeum 2/83, 4/83. 11/86 in Boston. For week of 2/6/87 "Miss Kitty O'Neil's Best Double Company" advertised at the Windsor Theatre in Boston.
1884	New Theatre Comique burns to the ground; Hart loses everything, Harrigan is saved by royalties from his songs with Braham.
1888	John MacDonad marries Sarah MacDonald (1862-1951), my maternal great-grandmother
1891	Tony Hart dies
1892	My maternal grandmother, Isabelle (MacDonald) Burns born February 13, Antigonish, Nova Scotia, dies 1934, Boston
1892	Kitty O'Neil Marries Buffalo saloonkeeper Alfred Pettie
1893	4/16/93 Dies in Buffalo General Hospital of peritonitis after operation for kidney stones
1896	My grandfather Charles V. Denney born, Philadelphia, PA

1905	Southern Flatfoot dancer Willard Watson born June 1, died September 22, 1994, Deep Gap, NC. Recognized by the North Carolina Arts Council as the 1994 Heritage Arts Recipient, Watson is also a designated Historic Artist within the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area as a wood carver.
1910	Buck and Wing dancer Ruby Keeler born in Halifax, Nova Scotia, 25 August. Dies 28 February, 1993.
1911	Ed Harrigan dies in New York Tap Dancer Honi Coles born 2 April, Philadelphia, PA and died 12 November 1992, NYC
1913	Tap Dancer Cholly Atkins born, September 30, Pratt City, AL and died April 19, 2003
1918	Southern dancer John Reeves born October 11, Lake Janaluska, NC Southern Buck dancer Quentin "Fris" Holloway born December 29, Durham County, NC
1919	(Daniel) Joseph "Joe" O'Donovan born, Cork, died April 30, 2008
1920	My father George Thomas Denney born, Philadelphia, PA, May 28
1921	My mother Helen Jean Burns born, Boston, MA, October 5
1927	Irish <i>sean-nós</i> Dancer and Set Dancer Willie Keane born, May 26, Doonbeg, died December 6, 1998
1929	Southern Buck and tap dancer John Dee Hollman born April 4, Orange County, NC Southern Buck dancer Algia Mae Hinton born August 29, Raleigh, NC
1929	Irish Dance Commission established as a separate organization from Gaelic League
1939	Southern Flatfoot, Buck, and Clog dancer Kyle Edwards born August 25, Maggie Valley, NC Tap Dancer Brenda Bufalino born September 7, place unknown
1943	Irish <i>sean-nós</i> dancer Aidan Vaughan born in Miltown Malbay, Galway. Day unknown.
1946	Tap Dancer Ann Maureen Kilkelly born, December 18, Stillwater, MN
1950	Flatfoot Dancer Rodney Sutton born, November 5, 1950 Mt. Olive, NC Irish traditional fiddler Kevin Burke born June 9, Hackney, London, England
1954	Clogger and fiddler Earl White born, February 14, 1954 Greenville, NC
1963	I was born, in Washington, D.C.; 2nd generation Antigonish, Nova Scotia, England, Levin fife, Scotland, and Galway, Ireland; 4th generation County Down, Northern Ireland
1964	Southern Flatfoot, Buck, and Clog dancer Burton Edwards born April 1, Haywood County, NC
1971	Green Grass Cloggers formed by Dudley Culp in Greenville, NC

1974	Irish Step Dancer, Irish <i>sean-nós</i> Dancer Kieran Jordan born, November 4, Philadelphia, PA Irish traditional fiddler Tes Slominski born, January 2, Blacksburg, VA The Fiddle Puppets formed by Eileen Sutton Carson and Rodney Sutton, Arnold, MD
1975	Irish <i>sean-nós</i> Dancer, Clogger Maldon Meehan born September 26, Portland, Oregon
1976	Irish <i>sean-nós</i> Dancer and Tap Dancer Shannon Dunne born, June 24 Point Pleasant, NJ
1977	Irish <i>sean-nós</i> Dancer Alicia Guinn born, April 13, Portland, Oregon

Selecting and Interviewing Performers

Since this research assumes that American percussive dance forms currently in practice in the U.S. have an antecedent relationship to O’Neil’s Variety performances, and the main textual source for O’Neil’s dance is an American tune notated from the period, I felt it best to interview both musicians and dancers from various American dance and music traditions. I followed the protocol for research involving human subjects in accordance with the Institutional Review Board of Texas Woman’s University 2010 while creating my interview questions and conducting interviews.

I contacted a select group of dancers and musicians with whom I personally performed, observed and/or interacted with socially, listened to, or heard stories about throughout my own lifetime as an Irish American percussive dancer. It was important that each dancer be seasoned in their practice and recognized by their culture for his/her skills. Six of the nine participants engage in Irish dance and music practices and five of the participants are female. Earl White is the only African American interviewed^{viii}. This balance seemed in line with the research focus on a female dancer who was lauded for her performances with Irish American theatre of the 19th century.

Each participant was mailed a statement of research purpose and procedures for data collection along with a timeline for commitment to the study. Each agreed to the parameters outlined and signed a consent form before the interviews began. In the following paragraphs, I introduce each participant, provide a brief history of their dance practice, explain my relationship to him/her, and provide rationale for choosing each to participate in this research.

Participants Kieran Jordan and Niall O’Leary each spent a significant amount of time in the culture of Competitive Irish dancing, Jordan in the United States, O’Leary in Ireland until he emigrated to New York City as an adult. Jordan, a native of Philadelphia, rose to the highest category of competitive dance, Open Championships, and was also the first dancer to receive the Cyril McNiff Memorial Scholarship for academic excellence awarded by IDTANA^{ix} in 1992. Jordan used her scholarship to attend Boston College and study English and Irish Studies. Both Jordan and O’Leary are certified teachers of Competitive Irish Dance passing thorough written and practical examinations, *Scrudu Teastas Mhuinteora* (T.C.R.G.) administered by *An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha*, which includes music listening and identification in addition to dancing and teaching demonstrations.

While O’Leary continues to perform and teach contemporary Irish dance, Jordan’s focus turned toward Irish *sean-nós* dancing as the result of her exposure to older dancers. At Boston College, Jordan witnessed Mick Mulkerrin dancing *sean-nós* as part of Gaelic Roots, an event within interdisciplinary Irish Studies degree programming she chose as her minor. Jordan completed a Junior Year Abroad while at Boston College

attending University College Cork where she met and studied with master teacher Joe O'Donovan, Old-style Irish dance (1994-1995). Jordan went on to pursue a Master's degree in Contemporary Dance at University of Limerick, Ireland where she initiated her relationship with Aidan Vaughan from West Clare known for his *sean-nós* solo "battering steps" and his set dancing.

For Jordan, seeing Mulkerrin dance was a revelation that Irish dance could be "spontaneous and comic" and provide for a deep "expression of personality" that, in her experience, was less obvious in Competitive Irish dance (Jordan, Kieran. Telephone interview. 16 October 2010). While I never made Jordan's acquaintance as a youngster, she and I were familiar as competitors growing up a scant 90 miles from one another. Like other Irish American dancers, neither of us had seen nor heard of *sean-nós* dance until the 1990's. So limited was my own exposure that even after a trip to Ireland in 1992, and memorable times spent dancing in the home of Joe O'Donovan, I did not fully understand the difference between Old-style and *sean-nós* dance until I discussed our shared experiences with O'Donovan in a preliminary phone conversation with Jordan. I finally met Jordan at the Irish Connections Festival 2007 (ICONS) in Boston. This event is where I also met "American Women in Sean-nós Dance," namely Kieran Jordan, Alicia Guinn, Maldon Meehan, and Shannon Dunne. Jordan coined the name of this grouping of dancers and put them together as a group specifically for this festival in 2007. At the same festival I met Niall O'Leary.

O'Leary began dancing in Dublin with his sister, but when his family saw Kevin Massey perform on an Irish television (RTE) program, they switched dance schools to

work with Massey (O’Leary, Niall. Telephone interview. 12 January 2011). O’Leary went on to win the coveted titles of both the All-Ireland and World Championships in Irish dancing (<http://irishecho.com/?p=61869>). O’Leary creatively explores differing performance connections between music and dance, specifically those forms outside of The Commission’s regulation for music accompanying competitive dancing. He has performed in sand, for example, to “Kitty O’Neil’s Champion Jig,” the anonymous composition penned in Kitty O’Neil’s honor.

Alicia Guinn’s only dance experience has been Irish Set Dancing and Irish *sean-nós* dancing. Guinn spent two long periods living and studying in Ireland at the University of Ulster (1997-98) and the National University of Ireland-Galway (2001-03). Guinn’s enthusiasm for set dancing brought her back to Ireland to learn to dance sean-nós, which she learned within the *Gaeltacht* (Irish speaking) culture of Connemara, County Galway. At home between her study abroad experiences in Ireland, Guinn was frustrated that there were so few Irish Set Dancers in the U.S. She, therefore, found herself teaching others to dance so that she could enjoy Irish traditional music. When she returned to Ireland in 2001, she deliberately pursued *sean-nós* dancing so that she did not need “seven other dancers to get up to enjoy herself” (Guinn, Alicia. Telephone interview. 22 September 2010). In her interviews, Guinn discusses the many, shared qualities between regionally established and individually performed percussive rhythms in both Irish Set Dancing and Irish *sean-nós* dancing. Both forms share stepping patterns and rhythms that are, in fact, identical. Guinn teaches *sean-nós* dancing regularly, although she earns her living as a preschool teacher.

Maldon Meehan also spent significant amounts of time living in Ireland where she completed an MA in Ethnochoreology at the University of Limerick. Her exposure to dance and music before visiting Ireland included growing up participating in New England Contra Dancing, hearing Old-time fiddle music, and Clogging along the west coast of the United States. Guinn and Meehan both live in the northwest U.S. where they initiated and continue to support the *Sean-nós* Northwest Festival, now in its sixth year. In 2010, I attended this festival, one of the only events to gather experts in the following three areas of *Gaeltacht* culture: Irish *sean-nós* singers, Irish *sean-nós* dancers, and Irish language speakers and teachers. Meehan makes her living teaching both Irish Set Dance and Irish *sean-nós* dance.

Shannon Dunne grew up in an Irish American family in New Jersey. She studied Broadway style tap dance with local teachers Rebecca Martin and former Rockette Patricia Tully. Dunne encountered Irish *sean-nós* dancing while learning to play *bodhrán* (Irish frame drum) at a summer school on the island of *Inis Oírr*, Galway, Ireland. Dunne's immediate response to witnessing *sean-nós* dancer Sibéal Davitt's solo performing was, "Oh my God! I don't know what that is but I *have* to do it! I have to! Like just . . . show me something *right* now" (Dunne, Shannon. Telephone interview. 16 September, 2010). Like Guinn, Meehan, and Jordan, Dunne studied *sean-nós* dancing in Ireland at summer schools such as Willie Clancy Week, and she also worked with dancer Aidan Vaughn. Dunne, like me, discovered Irish *sean-nós* dancing after learning other American percussive dance forms and, like me, she also danced with Footworks Percussive Dance Ensemble, formerly The Fiddle Puppets. Dunne and I share the exact

same repertoire from artistic director and choreographer Eileen Carson who established The Fiddle Puppets in 1979 and then Footworks in 1994.

Rodney Sutton, a native of Duplin County, North Carolina, grew up listening to his father play piano at local square dances on Saturday nights. It was not until 1971, while attending Eastern Carolina University that he saw The Green Grass Cloggers dance. As he watched, he recognized another student, Earl White, with whom he shared a work-study assignment in the cafeteria. It was White who helped Sutton connect with Dudley Culp, leader of the Green Grass Cloggers, and from whom Sutton eventually learned the basic step. Culp and Sutton finally ended up performing as part of a team. Sutton and I also performed and toured together as members of The Fiddle Puppets from 1982 to 1988. Sutton's dancing, in particular his free-style improvisations, were always different and unique to his body and his rhythms. I often hold an image of Rodney Sutton in my head when I move to Old-time music and remember, with great fondness, many joyful moments of his dancing.

Earl White hails from Greenville, NC and began clogging when his housemate Dudley Culp came home from a folk festival and started clogging in the living room. Later Culp would found The Green Grass Cloggers and Earl White would be one of its first dancers, certainly one of the only African-American Cloggers to dance publically in decades. White saw Papa John Creach play fiddle in 1975 while touring with The Green Grass Cloggers in Evergreen Valley, Maine. Creach was the first African-American White had seen play Old-time music on violin (fiddle). White has been playing Old-time fiddle ever since and remains equally infatuated with both music and dance. White

currently lives in California, is a practicing R.N., and routinely brings his fiddle to work so he can play music for his patients. White is highly sought after to play and perform at many national festivals of American traditional music and dance.

I have yet to meet Earl White, but I dance a step I learned from Sutton called *The Earl*. Until conducting interviews with both Sutton and White, I did not understand just how deeply clogging repertoire connected me to their friendship, the legacy of The Green Grass Cloggers, and my own unwitting perpetuation of contributions by these dancers to the tradition. I learned that my own repertoire of clogging/flat footing is deeply rooted in the innovations of The Green Grass Cloggers, including Earl White and Dudley Culp, in addition to the remarkable creative expressions of The Fiddle Puppets (Rodney Sutton, Eileen Carson, Eddie Carson, Amy Fenton, Ira Bernstein, and Matt Gordon).

Ann Kilkelly grew up in Minnesota in the 1950's, and says her "parents were working class people with a memory of better times in Ireland; my dad anyway. And my mom was the daughter of a Cockney prizefighter" (Kilkelly, Ann. Telephone interview. 28 October 2010). Kilkelly's parents taught her to dance Charleston, Black Bottom, and Suzie-Q in the living room of their home. Kilkelly says that early memories include dancing African American dances that other "people were not doing [in Minnesota in the 1950's] . . . they were really very weird." She believes that her family's working class status and association with other "new" immigrants to the area added to the oddity of "a little child that's doing the Charleston or the Black Bottom, and nobody has any context for this at all. [laughter]." She identifies that her family was among those of the "othered" or minority community within the dominant culture in her region which included some

“Swedes and Norwegians, and a few Irish” who “were the black people of the town” where she grew up (Killkelly, Ann. Telephone interview. 28 October 2010). Her early exposure prepared her for later encounters with some tap dance’s legends, many of which were working class and African American.

Kilkelly studied dance while in graduate school at the University of Utah. When she took her first job in Kentucky, Kilkelly met and began dancing/performing with Katherine Kramer and subsequently met Brenda Bufalino and Honi Coles. Kilkelly sought out and danced with many accomplished tap dancers and preservationists at festival (Eddie Brown, Cholly Atkins, Steve Condos, and Martha Kern), all the while continuing a life-long friendship with Bufalino. Kilkelly has three degrees in English literature and drama, and her vocation is that of university professor. A scholar and a dancer, she is quick to point out that she does not have a dance degree nor did any of the best dancers with whom she was privileged to share tap dancing. I met Kilkelly at Swannanoa Gathering, a summer heritage school on the campus of Warren Wilson College in Swannanoa, NC. We were both teaching percussive dance styles and I had the pleasure of taking her tap dance class.

Irish traditional music is recorded in short tracks designed for listening pleasure, not dancing practice. To my great delight, Kevin Burke’s first solo recording in 1978, *If the Cap Fits*, included a very long track of ten tunes, one reel after another. At last I had enough music for uninterrupted dance practice. Burke grew up in London, but his parents were both from Sligo, Ireland. Burke came to Irish traditional music through his parents who loved to dance. Along with family, Burke learned to play fiddle within the

pub culture of the immigrant Irish community of London in addition to many visits back to family and friends in the west of Ireland. Burke would go on to tour and record with The Bothy Band, one of the most influential Irish traditional music groups to date who, in the 1970's, set a new standard for concertizing and recording Irish traditional music^x. I remain grateful for his enthusiasm for "Kitty O'Neil's Champion Jig" and his willingness to play the tune for me when we first talked about his participation in this research during ICONS 2007 in Boston.

I met Tes Slominski in 1996 also at Swannanoa Gathering. We have shared the stage numerous times and she has tutored me, patiently, about fiddling. A native of Blacksburg, VA, Slominski played classical violin as a youngster. When she heard Irish music on the radio it prompted her to learn more by attending classes at Swannanoa Gathering in 1995. She was assigned to accompany my dance classes the next summer. Slominski was one of two fiddlers in the Irish traditional music ensemble *Roaring Mary* with Sara Nisenson, Rob Greenway (flute, guitar), and Paddy League (banjo, guitar, percussion). She also co-founded the Blue Ridge Irish Music School in 1999, a not-for-profit community music organization. She studied ethnomusicology as a graduate student at University of Limerick and completed a Ph.D. in ethnomusicology at New York University. Slominski is the recipient of the American Musicological Society's (AMS) Alvin H. Johnson AMS 50 Dissertation Fellowship and a Woodrow Wilson Women's Studies Fellowship for her extensive research on Julia Clifford and other women in Irish traditional music. Her expertise in regional Irish fiddle styles and female players is invaluable to this research.

Procedures for Ethnographic Data Collection

In 2010, I received approval to conduct my research with participants via Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Texas Woman's university. I also successfully completed The National Institutes of Health web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants" in 2009 and again in 2011.

Interview Protocol, Process and Timeline

I conducted open interviews with questions influenced by D. Soyini Maddison's text *Critical Ethnography* (2005). I sought out this resource in order to be sure that my position as researcher neither intimidated nor over powered participants' free choice when responding to interview questions. Critical ethnographers inscribe the ethnographic process with critical theory that strives to investigate hegemony within a particular phenomenon. In Maddison's text, she provides two models for interview questions, Spradley and Patton. In each of these models, the concrete experience of research participants, their beliefs, emotions, and sensations are addressed. More importantly, the questions from each model allow participants to provide descriptors and examples of his/her concrete experience in their own words. The questions I created combined ideas from each critical method and focused on behaviors, feelings, sensory experience, knowledge, and background of participants relative to the living traditions of dance or music each practiced. I also asked each interviewee to explain the terms each chose to describe or define his/her experiences within their interviews (Madison 26-30).

Specifically, I used a set of nine questions for each of the nine telephone interviews and the one in-person interview. Each interview was recorded digitally with

the permission of each participant. The opening prompt was: “Please tell me a story about someone else dancing [I filled in the specific dance form].” This beginning prompt was fortuitous since it immediately took the focus off of the individual and placed it on another dancer while also providing me with a glimpse into how the interviewees shaped stories about their dance community, past connections, values, humor, and likes and dislikes. Subsequent questions and prompts queried each participant on what it feels like to dance, when each knows they are dancing one form definitively as opposed to another, and how each learned to dance as well as how each shares the form with others.

I also asked each participant to reflect on and respond to the term “living tradition.” This was followed by questioning who each enjoyed dancing with and why, as well as which dancer they might like to visit in the past. Lastly, I asked each to share a story about his/her most memorable or enjoyable dance experience. The interviews were open and the questions were prompts for conversation. I often interjected and responded to their stories. Each session lasted between 25 minutes and 1.5 hours.

I transcribed all ten interviews. Once transcribed, I listened to the audio recording of the interview whilst reading the transcription to connect intonations and rhythms with the written text. I further made corrections throughout each transcription, inserting proper spelling of names and locations, and then filling in difficult spots in the transcription due to colloquial dialect and/or the use of dance jargon. Once checking transcriptions and proof reading each printed transcript was complete, I began coding each interview line-by-line.

Coding Interviews and Other Analytics

Since I was so intimately involved with the participants and the subject, I was aware that my assumptions about the forms and their practice might cloud my ability to discover new ideas in the data I had collected. I coded the data as actions in a line-by-line initial analysis and kept a list of action words for reference, adding to the list with each subsequent interview I coded. By focusing on action words as I went through each transcript, I kept my focus on the data rather than on my own interpretations and conclusions. Next I coded each interview thematically and wrote a summary memo for each interview based on central ideas discussed by each participant. In between each round of coding, I went back to the data and listened to each interview again. A review of the summary memos yielded *in vivo* codes in the form of actual phrases and language from the participants themselves. The *in vivo* codes describe how the dancing feels, as well as when dancing seems "best" for each practitioner. *In vivo* terms were then used to create axial codes that led to a categorization of data. I compared axial codes with thematic codes and looked for particular coherence within the emerging analysis as well as outlying themes. The coherent elements across sets of codes included definitions for living tradition, common pedagogical experiences (learning and sharing), descriptions of best practice (imitation, personal style, improvisation, innovation, creation, and emulation), and shared and unique dancers and musicians across various traditions of dance considered to be influential to the interviewees. Later, these influential dancers, and those dancers from the past that were mentioned by each participant, were added to *A*

Combined Chronology of Performers, Research Participants, and Other Influential Dancers to this Research (see Table 1).

Additional data memos were labeled “side memos” and functioned as a research journal in which musings, outlying codes and experiences from participants, and research process interruptions were logged. For example, I noticed how often one participant laughed during her interview and this led me to muse in a side memo about how much enjoyment each practitioner garners from their practice, even as it is remembered in conversation. I decided to go through each interview and count the how much enjoyment each practitioner garners from his or her practice, even as it is remembered in conversation. I decided to go through each interview and count the number of times laughter occurred for each participant as a way to substantiate how pleasurable simply talking about these enactments is for participants in general.

Mapping Situations

Once coding and memo writing were complete, I turned to Sociologist Adele Clarke’s mapping strategies in order to understand the “situatedness of knowledge producers,” or the participants, and shift the emerging data into a discourse among participants and their unique relationships. Clarke’s particular strategies helped to organize codes into visual representations of the broader research situation. I used Clarke’s examples of: situational maps to articulate and examine relationships among research elements; and social worlds/arena maps to determine sites, actions, and definitions of the group collectively as well as individual differences (Clarke 86). Mapping was also done so as to expand the emerging data interpretations to include

historical texts, visuals, and narratives about dancing across sources, including my own experience and the participants' alongside theoretical lenses and historiographies of other scholars (Clarke 19). I created six maps that specified differences and variations as well as similarities across the following sets of data and research elements. These maps included: 1) my world as dancer and an imagined world of Kitty O'Neil (Figure 2); 2) research fields, theoretical lenses, and tools; 3) thematic codes that describe how best practice feels for each participant; 4) definitions for the paradox of living tradition (Figure 3); 5) thematic codes for when best practice happens for each participant; 6) an overlay of time on axial codes to visualize a chronology and comparison of past to present dance practice within a living traditions of American percussive dance (Figure 1).

Interestingly, several maps became outlines for data chapters while others, such as the map of axial codes, signaled the existence of an emerging theory that, as a visual, provided a summary of the experiences of participants in living traditions and an ontological map of the nature, value, and function of transmission within those traditions as they perpetuate both the forms and the cultures contingent upon them. Accordingly, I used Chapters I and II to set up where I, and other historians, believe Kitty O'Neil is situated in dance history and American history in general. Within Chapter II, I also chose to explicate the limits of this research and its importance. I stress that repertoire as experienced by participants is, in fact, a useful cache of knowledge that is neither static like the archive, nor is it fixed. For this reason Chapter II sets forth theoretical and historical considerations was needed and required a review of literature that examined

theoretical practices and principles across multiple disciplines to provide a logical path for how I arrived at the mixed methods I have described here.

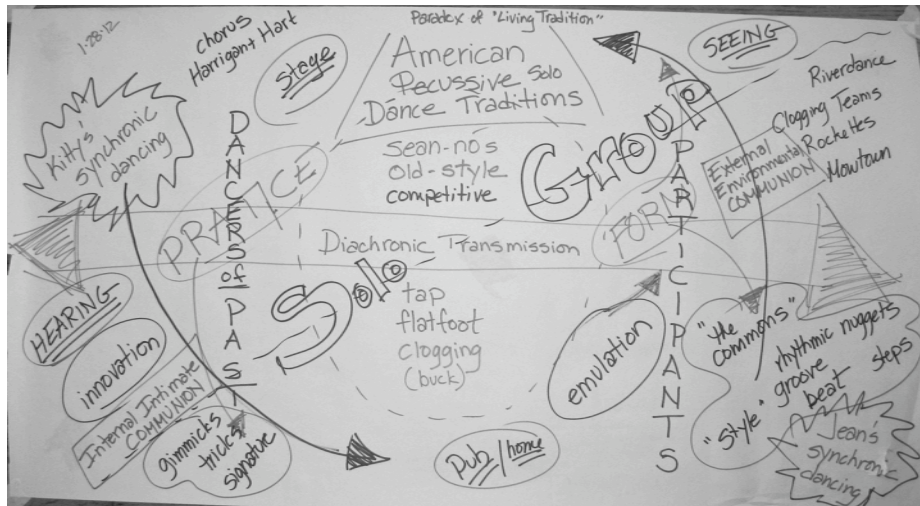


Figure 1: Map of Data for Paradox of Living Tradition

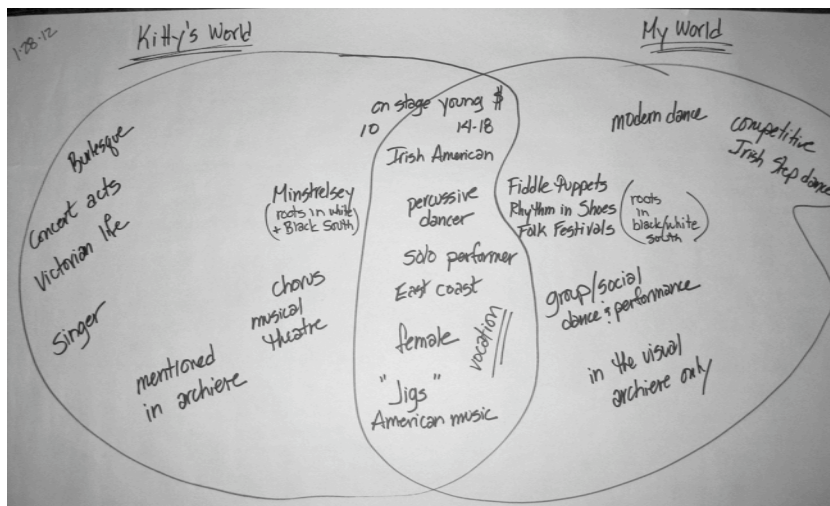


Figure 2: Personal Worlds Map for Kitty O'Neil and Jean Denney Grotewohl



Figure 3: Map of Data for Participant Definition Living Tradition

Presenting Data and Member Checking

As I formulated my conclusions, I took advantage of several scholarly conferences and presented portions of my research findings. I presented data and theories from within sections of this research for academic critique at Society of Dance History Scholars conference at Stanford University in 2009, American Conference in Irish Studies, Southern Regional annual conference at Winthrop University in 2010, and the joint conference of The Society of Ethnomusicology and Congress on Research in Dance at University of Pennsylvania in 2011. My academic and performing artist peers found the research to be timely, salient, and beneficial to the study of American dance and dance history inquiry. Additionally, each participant was electronically mailed pertinent chapters of this dissertation for review and correction. Participants sent comments directly back to me and I revised my text accordingly between February and March 2014.

Creatively Combining Data: The Archive and My Imagination

In Chapter IV of this dissertation, I practice mental and kinesthetic metempsychosis as described by Gay Gibson Cima (see Chapter III). I imagine living the life of Kitty O'Neil as an Irish American percussive dancer. During doctoral coursework I experimented with writing as performance creating a letter to Kitty O'Neil that I also answered. My doctoral committee turned this exercise into a direct question for the history portion of my Qualifying Exams, a preparatory written examination that evaluates a student's readiness for doctoral research. Writing the exam allowed me to creatively move the historiographies written by scholars on various aspects of 19th century culture into and through my own lived experience of dancing multiple forms of American percussive dance. This exam question eventually formed a unique data set for the research and provided an appropriate opportunity to discuss traditional historical data researched for this dissertation.

As ethnographer and historian, I interacted with primary and secondary historical records and reflected upon and synthesized historiographies of the period 1750-1900 in the United States delimited to social, political, and cultural possibilities of a woman working in the theatre business of the era. The historical archive that I used to create the discourse between myself and an imagined O'Neil includes a wide variety of sources from past and present. Germane sources regarding Irish emigration and social integration into U.S. culture include works Kirby Miller's exhaustive *Immigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (1985) and David Hackett Fischer's seminal *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (1989). Regarding Irish America and

Victorian America I consulted writings from Hasia Diner's *Erin's Daughters in America* (1983), Dale Knobel's *Paddy and the Republic* (1986), and L. Perry Curtis Jr.'s *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (1997 2nd ed.), John F. Kasson's *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (1990) and Amanda Frisken's *Victoria Woodhull's Sexual Revolution: Political Theater and the Popular Press in Nineteenth-Century America* (2004). Theatre culture and Minstrelsy resources included Gillian M. Rodger's *Champagne Charlie and Pretty Jemima: Variety Theatre in the Nineteenth Century* (2010), Rosemarie K. Bank's *Theatre Culture in America, 1825-1860* (1997), Eric Lott's *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (1995), and Dale Cockrell's *Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and their World* (1997). Throughout the discourse I cite many other sources including online sources for viewing original dance and music manuals, playbills, song sheets, and advertisements from O'Neil's era. These visuals were further animated by listening to the music of Harrigan and Hart played live on piano and via recording as well as reading Charles Dickens' descriptions of America, Harriet Beecher Stowe's fiction and Walt Whitman's poetry.

While Chapter IV is not a complete historiography of Kitty O'Neil, the chapter allows for a dialog between my imagination, my experience, my interpretation of the realities presented in historiographies and archival collections of O'Neil's era. Van Manen, Alexander, Foster, and Crapanzano provided theories that helped to shape the manner in which I approached structuring the letters as a performance (see Chapter II)

and specifically organize the sections as creative writing (letters) and labeling explanatory sections as *Art(official) Facts*, and as *Imaginings*.

Given Crapanzano's statement that ethnographers do not interpret texts as translators do, rather must first write them, I chose to include, for example, uninterrupted quotations from interviews as often as possible in my data chapters so as to allow the participants full representation in their own voices. This choice became critically important after I received a very perturbed response from one of my participants about how I interpreted her statements in a first draft of a data chapter.

Chapter III reviews particular theoretical and historical underpinnings for this research from a wide variety of scholars, methods, and models. As the opening epigram to this chapter asserts, as researcher and ethnographer I am caught in the "inescapable dialectic of fact and value" when attempting to combine an ethnography of contemporary dancers with the incomplete historical record of a past dancer. Reading and musing about the work of other historians, performance studies scholars, performance ethnographers, sociologists, and cultural specialists helped me balance and understand the hegemony between the archive and the repertoire. These scholars helped me to know when to suspend disbelief, note the impossibility of the "truth," and find usefulness in much of my data and its "imperfect" knowledge.

Notes

ⁱ The term *somatic* in this project is utilized in manner after Thomas Hanna in which the soma is a descriptor of a human being's experience of living. This *lived experience* is a compendium of all manner of processes for learning, adapting, expressing, coping, and making meaning of and from the action of living. Such action includes exchanges, interactions, and responses to and with the environment and other living beings within that environment. In this way, *soma* and *somatic* experiences represent the biological, cognitive, sensory, and emotional processes and functions possible for being in the world.

ⁱⁱ The term *aesthetic* in this project is utilized in a very basic sense. Aesthetic here describes how humans come to value their lived experience. In this sense, an aesthetic evaluation is the manner in which a human comes to identify and appreciate those processes by which they do their living.

ⁱⁱⁱ George C.D. Odell obituary (www.americanantiquarian.org/proceedings/44807193.pdf)

^{iv} Kitty O'Neil came to my attention through an article written about the tune "Kitty O'Neil's Champion Irish Jig" by Don Meade. Meade references George C.D. Odell's *Annals of the New York Stage* that catalogs the New York stage from its beginnings until mid-1894 published by the Columbia University Press in fifteen volumes between 1927 and 1948. O'Neil and her contemporaries are commented upon by way of production and venue (theatre) and there are many photographs. I own volume XIII (1885-1888) in which Kitty is mentioned thirteen times.

^v Library of Congress (<http://www.loc.gov/item/sm1878.12239>)

^{vi} Johns Hopkins University, Levy Sheet Music Collection (<http://jhir.library.jhu.edu/handle/1774.2/15883>)

^{vii} Library of Congress (<http://www.loc.gov/item/sm1876.03928>)

^{viii} In our interview, White explained that Old-time music is stigmatized for African Americans because of its immediate, if not misunderstood, association with Minstrelsy's racism. He states that he made it his "quest" to find African American fiddlers, but found very few. White attributes a lack of interest for Old-time music and dance in black communities to "some of the stigmas that the older generations put on, they want to get past, they don't want to remember things that they saw as regressive. Things that represented what more of them associated with negative aspects of their past" (White, Earl. Telephone interview. 18 March 2011).

^{ix} Irish Dance Teachers Association of North America (IDTNA).

^x For a discussion of the impact of The Bothy Band on Irish traditional music, see Óhallmhuráin's *Pocket History of Irish Traditional Music*, page 158.

CHAPTER III

SITUATING O'NEIL'S IMAGINED PRACTICE WITHIN DANCE HISTORY

The strongest memory is weaker than the palest ink.

Chinese proverb

The percussive dance forms researched in this dissertation are frequently outside of the purview and traditional disciplinary boundaries of dance scholarship because of their limited presence and documentation in the cannon of Western concert dance practices. While dance scholarship strives to comment on and document the living art of movement and dance performance, scholarship demands, quite reasonably, that scholars find ways to make non-discursive, lived experience part of the discursive world of text. Such translation strives to continue the existence of an ephemeral action and make it lively beyond the moment of performance. To translate, comment upon, and/or document -- and therefore archive the living moment -- is a creative challenge of both cognitive and kinesthetic proportions.

Theoretical Underpinnings

For it so happens that I have never been able to convince myself that the dead are utterly dead.

Saul Bellow, *Henderson the Rain King*

The following scholars helped to sharpen my perspective on researching dance and culture. Many methods and theories echo Diana Taylor's assertion that knowledge about dancing the repertoire, or lived experience, and performing contain both knowing

and knower. Each scholar also presents unique ways to resolve the reality of culture's mobile state and the myth of the archive as either official or enduring. The theorists that follow demonstrate how researchers might come to value the flux inherent within a research agenda focused on cultural experience and archival data while accepting that both sources are socially constructed and historically contingent. Each of these scholars' methods or theories became important to the standpoint I developed in this dissertation.

Social theorist Andrew Hewitt's concept of "social choreography" assumes that the aesthetic values lived in culture operate at the level of the body, and that methodologically dance, for example, provides viewers and researchers with a way to somatically understand the operation of aesthetic values as rehearsed, produced, and consumed by culture. When I say somatically understand, I am interpreting Hewitt to mean that dancers and their dancing do not simply identify those sociopolitical determinants (race, gender, class) for the performance, performers, and performing, they actually show them, live them, and move them as they perform. For Hewitt, social choreography is performative in that it uncovers how the aesthetic operates and mediates the political in culture. The aesthetic, "functions . . . neither as quasi-metaphysical realm separate from the sociohistorical nor as a practice that can be fully explained in terms of sociohistorical analysis"; rather, it is a space or zone where rhetorical and embodied possibilities for social order are rehearsed, performed, and refined (Hewitt 4).

Therefore, according to Hewitt, social choreography models, through performance, how to incite change and transformation at the personal and social levels. A dance performance suggests a way the world or person might be, and for the duration of

the performance, that *is* the way the world or person exists for the performer behaves as both subject and object of performance merging ideology (subject) and performance (object) in the performing (Hewitt 1-35). For Hewitt, this moves culture positively by “testing” a new way of being as a singular performance. Hewitt’s ideas enabled me to think of Kitty’s gendered performances as less an anomaly and more a signpost for the positive cultural changes that women were creating in the 19th century. Rather than think of O’Neil as a typical example of Variety female performer, representative of pulchritude under public gaze, I saw her as more akin to suffragettes, moving a burgeoning political presence for women into theatre performance as she lived and worked; she was an artful and beautiful dancer, an independent woman. Therefore, in my story of O’Neil, she was as capable as any man in her industry, as evidenced by her successful 26-year career in a challenging theatrical world.

On the other hand, cultural historian Joseph Roach analyzes how performance can negatively erase, occlude, and disrupt the social choreography transmitted to and absorbed by culture. Roach (1996) suggests that when a person’s physical body can *only* lie, that is perform what is socially acceptable, there erupt tensions that can be acted out by surrogates in the form of characters or performers-objects, whose movements in performance substitute the character’s/performer’s desire to fulfill actions in real life. Roach discusses the actions of the body and the person of the performer as behaving in confluence with the cultural construction of history, memory, personal and national identity, specific geographic culture, and an ever-shifting politics of power and possession. Roach’s study, *Cities of the Dead*, is about the trade of slaves, chocolate, and

coffee between the Americas, Africa and Europe, and particularly between the cities of London and New Orleans. Roach compares the history of the cities, rituals of celebrities and codes of behavioral conduct for all manner of performances from stage to daily work and leisure, which he views as instruments used to complete and perpetuate cultural memory. For Roach, performance has a power in its kinetic nostalgia to remember what has been forgotten, show the present how performance can powerfully substitute the insignificant for the significant, find surrogate or parallel behavior for what is inappropriate, erase what is painful, and make vulnerable what is repressive (82).

For example, I came to understand O’Neil as re-surrogation of 18th - and 19th - century Irish caricature of “Brigid,” the side kick to the simonized “Paddy” and the female personification of a weak, untenable home rule movement in Irish politics of the era. I envisioned O’Neil then, as not simply a performer of dance, but also a performer of culture, specifically an American culture dominated by Irish immigrants and their stories. These Irish stories were not only played out on stage by Harrigan and Hart productions, with whom O’Neil intimately worked, but also played out in every urban center throughout the U.S in the form of racial, class, and economic tensions that erupted in riots throughout the eastern seaboard prior to the Civil War. Following Roach’s concept, O’Neil’s performances can likewise be understood to embody a gendered, cultural risk as she engaged a socially unacceptable career in order to fulfill the desire to be independently employed and financially self-sufficient. I assume that her choice to be a dancer was a vehicle for her to also shape a strong, personal identity as an independent woman in the Victorian era.

Historian Eric Lott further provides a theoretical frame for understanding Minstrelsy that is useful to this dissertation's research. Like Hewitt and Roach, Lott assumes that Minstrels, and I assume Variety artists, performed inter-racial creations that demonstrated, at the level of the body, sociopolitical disruptions and ambiguities "in which partly shared, partly black cultural practices," were appropriated from black slaves and presented as "authentically black" with white performers profiting (39). For Lott, Minstrelsy remains an inter-racial, homo-social, multi-class cultural invention that allowed both white men and black men a means of "self-commodification, a way of getting along in the world" and working out all manner of sociopolitical issues (39). The cultural capital of Minstrelsy's songs/dances used "ridicule" to mark the difference between visibly inauthentic "black" performers (white men in black face) while simultaneously obscuring black practitioners/performance and disseminating performance content to audiences who believed it to be genuine (39). Throughout the historiography created of Kitty O'Neil in the following chapter, I will incorporate Lott's ideas to posit possibilities for how Minstrelsy may have influenced aspects of O'Neil's performance practice.

However, in my created historiography (see Chapter IV), I also incorporate ideas posited by performance studies specialist Gay Gibson Cima, who reveals that white women authored the two newspaper reviews key to Lott's archival sources (119). Cima claims women journalists, writing about abolition and Minstrelsy, published during the era using male pseudonyms. These women were also noted as being among the many elocutionists, orators, and writers who practiced *mental metempsychosis*, a term coined

by Margaret Chandler (1807-1834). Mental metempsychosis was a technique used by abolitionists, for example, to encourage audiences to imagine entering a slave's body in order to experience their daily lives in a highly personal and sentient manner (112). For Cima, writings about Minstrelsy are marked by "circularity and contradiction (119)" and such ambiguity makes these sources attractive for research because these circular and contradictory feelings seem real, human, and common. In my own historiographic practice, I incorporate Cima's rich use of the soma as a tool for performance in the 19th century, particularly the practice of metempsychosis, to render the lived experience of one class and race of people as "real" experience within another's body chiefly by way of imagined sentence delivered through oration.

Cima's findings suggested to me that evocative writing as performance not only has historical precedence, but also becomes a useful way in which to parse out ambiguities, circularities, biases, and contradictions embedded in cultural transmission as Hewitt, Roach, and Lott also suggest. Chandler's description of mental metempsychosis felt very much to me like the process of absorbing dance repertoire via oral and aural sensations. Both experiences include processes that feature a combination of imagination, sensation, and memory all at the level of the body. Were these sensations not what I was feeling when I read about Kitty O'Neil's repertoire, a repertoire that was considered to be extinct within the recorded archive?

Historical Underpinnings

Performance studies scholar Diana Taylor asserts that "[i]nsofar as it constitutes materials that seem to endure, the archive exceeds the live," but the archive also

successfully separates “the source of ‘knowledge’ from the knower” (19). For Taylor, the repertoire, in contrast to the enduring, supposedly incorruptible archive, remains ephemeral and embodied. The difference between the archive and repertoire is the myth that one is enduring (archive) and the other is not (repertoire).

In designing this ethnographic research, I realized that experience of an embodied practice within a culture, such as dancing, could be utilized as a primary source for historical research. Like Taylor, I assume that the source of knowledge about living traditions of dance exists within the practice of its knowers, and even the repertoire itself. The project design assumes that embodied knowing is transmitted through physical experience and that performance presents and represents culture (Hamera 5). Conversely, the culture of living tradition presents and represents knowledge about dancing, what is danced and how it is danced. Additionally, this research assumes that the past is always/already a part of the present because history and the past are both experienced from the present point of view of the person engaging them (Jenkins). Therefore, to know how the past is present in a culture or repertoire, knowledge of the past and how its knower comes to understand the past must be considered together with the knower’s contemporary habits and practices. For these reasons, transmission of knowledge via culture and repertoire is the focus of this dissertation.

The Archive and American Percussive Dance

And what is word knowledge but a shadow of wordless knowledge?

Khalil Gibran, *The Prophet*

The antecedent forms of contemporary, North American percussive dance practices and traditions include a variety of percussive dance enactments that represent a tangle of social, cultural, and historical moments. I say moments because an individual dancer's solo dance practice/performance can exist within multiple traditions of dance making and performing at the same time. The canon and lexicon that helped performers, presenters, and public identify the content of a performance is related directly to popular culture. Sometimes the lexicon reflected specific dance nomenclature (Clog – as in footwear) and other times musical nomenclature (Jig, Hornpipe – both terms mean a time signature – 6/8 or 2/4 as well as a kind of dancing). While performers of the past may have represented a variety of cultural expressions in their individual dancing, what they called their practice also tended to represent a mixed nomenclature. In the past, this led to choosing a name from the tradition to which they felt they belong. This is a habit discussed by contemporary practitioners and research participants for even today performers self-identify their practice. The mixing of labels that has historically resulted is due to the fact that percussive dancing traditions in the United States share similar antecedent materials evidenced in the exchange of movement and music between cultures socially, geographically, and chronologically.

When Kitty O'Neil vanished, she left behind a puzzle about dance nomenclature, one that the static archive cannot and does not attempt to answer. Historically each

tradition of dance, either distinctly performed or adroitly combined on variety stages, carried with it the specific nomenclature that each individual dancer used to name his/her dancing and establish a personal mark in the public business of performing. I assume this because the same variety of labels for the mixed dance forms as they were shared, stolen, and re-invented throughout the 19th century are the very same labels that exist for multiple practices of related forms of dancing today. In this research, I assume that then, as now, each dancer uses particular labels for his/her dancing in order to distinguish him/herself. Such self-made labels acknowledge, identify with or credit a tradition, an association with another dancer, or simply attempt to describe what it is the he/she did/does.

The recorded archive for O'Neil's era includes a mixed nomenclature for dance forms including jigging, clogging, stepping, doubling, and tapping (Odell, Rodger). The most recent addition to the lexicon of labels used to describe these various traditions is percussive dance. Since any one repertoire of contemporary forms includes elements of past jigging, clogging, stepping, doubling, and tapping, only a broad categorization such as percussive dance is useful. There is no convenient label that can be more specific since each dance form and its practices include processes for naming individual steps and rhythm patterns that are part of specific cultural transmissions and pedagogical practices continuing within each individual performer's sense of tradition (see Chapters V and VI). These cultural transmissions and pedagogical practices are then further qualified, similarly in some cases and differently in others, by the individual practitioner.

An Example of Problematic Nomenclature in Irish Dance

Research participant Kieran Jordan and I realized we had differing understandings about what exactly constitutes Irish *sean-nós* dancing despite the fact that we were each mentored by Joe O'Donovan in Cork, Ireland. The complex, personal processes used to label percussive dance practices resulted in our different understandings. Jordan had additional experiences with other dancers of O'Donovan's era who practiced different dancing even though using the same label, *sean-nós*. When Kieran discussed this with me, she shared her experience to help clarify how she understood the practice of *sean-nós* in comparison to O'Donovan's repertoire and use of the label. She qualified O'Donovan's repertoire as Old-style Irish step dancing. In my limited experience, what O'Donovan had given me were bits and pieces of rhythmic patterns with which I could create dance steps on my own. I understood that using these bits improvisationally was an old way of composing Irish dance on the spot and therefore I called his dancing *sean-nós* - "in the old way." What Jordan clarified is that O'Donovan's dancing represented a unique moment during a time of transition in Irish dancing itself where dancers in Munster specifically, like O'Donovan himself, had begun to codify stepping patterns toward unified and repeatable patterns that matched the musical phrase. This habit was more easily evaluated than improvised dancing and developed into competitive Irish dance. Jordan explained that what O'Donovan danced was an in-between phase in the tradition's transition from fully improvised *sean-nós* dancing to prescriptive competitive Irish dancing of the late 19th – early 20th century and

this is why the label Old-style Irish step dance as opposed to *sean-nós* is used to qualify O'Donovan's practice and repertoireⁱ.

The voices of the American percussive dancers in this research provide data and confirm, through anecdotes, memories, and experiences that past practitioners used mixed nomenclature when individually naming and describing what they did and how they did it.ⁱⁱ What is more, contemporary practitioners of living traditions of American percussive dance explain that the very nature of transmission and pedagogical practices among them continues to re-shape how the dance forms are understood, learned, and further labeled. Of particular interest to them, and evidence for me as researcher, are processes for learning and teaching the various forms which seems to be having an impact on current transmission in general and each forms cultural history in particular. These concerns are specifically addressed in Chapter IV.

Improvisation, Self-Identification, Mobile Labels

The reason percussive dance forms resist consistent nomenclature is because, by nature, they remain individually performed and socially exchanged. These genres are highly improvisational and are performed as visual enactments, or auditory enactments, or both simultaneously. Adding to the conundrum is practitioners, past and present, who self-identify as musicians, or dancers, or both simultaneously. Participants in this research continuously qualify their remarks by referencing their own practice while also mentioning the sometimes-anonymous genealogies of repertoire, or incomplete transmissions from the known practices of other dancers.

Further complicating scholarship is the fact that while these forms are often performed as solo enactments, all of these forms are also danced as ensemble performing from pre-1800's onward to today. Even more complicated is a comparison of repertoires across traditions since there exist more similarities than differences in movements and sounds, particularly in Irish, Clog, and Tap dance. The difference is discussed by participants in this research as the nebulous concept of "groove" which translates directly to how each form is attached to specific musical traditions. It is the companion musical traditions' rhythms and patterns that the dancer moves in the body and through the body. The distinct movements in correlation to music cause particular weight shifts, for example, and temporal shifts in the auditory result of the dancer's movementsⁱⁱⁱ. It is possible that the static record of historic dance can become more animated when its companion, historical musical records are listened to. However, in any attempt to compare percussive dance forms through their archival records at any given point in American dance history, it need be remembered that one can only "see" individual performers and their individual performances as statically labeled in this textual system or partially attached to a dance form within the cannon of Western concert dance.

Research participants reveal the existence of artificial labeling, or as I term them, *Art(official) facts*^{iv} that circulate outside of the form's culture regarding dance and music nomenclature. These labels represent an effort to pin down moments of repertoire as it moves across people, practices, traditions, and time. However, if one discusses how the performers themselves utilize percussive dance nomenclature as repertoire shifts and move through and across practices, one may have a clearer idea of how that nomenclature

is brought to life within a living tradition. Repertoire in its dynamism does not stick to boundaries of style or culture and resists any stilling of its constant cycles of change. Unfortunately, in this method of transmission, unless someone becomes interested in a moment of performance or person performing within that moment, it is possible that the repertoire slips through time unrecorded and not remembered. This dissertation demonstrates how some such moments do not always slip by unnoticed by those engaged in the repertoire and therefore those moments live beyond the archive, the canon, and the concert stage.

American percussive dance repertoire eludes conclusive comparisons between practitioners or even across traditions because it has always been and continues to be in motion. Additionally, it is individual people who share parts and pieces, experiences and memories, tunes and taps contemporaneously in a never-ending process of emulating and innovating, or as American studies theorist Eric Lott infers in his writing about Minstrelsy, loving and thieving.^v Again, the archive is static and can only describe a singular artist's performing record, a scenario, not a narrative in which dance can continually come to life. Moments of group performance may well indicate periods of successful codification within a tradition of percussive dance. Dancing in groups requires certain amounts of imitation to achieve unison, yet these moments too are indications of a lively tradition in flux as perhaps an individual within that group continues to "play with" the practices discovered in group performance in his/her solo practice.

This dissertation research is, in part, an attempt to shuffle (no pun intended) the canon of dance toward expanded boundaries to include these specific practices not as folk

or vernacular dance, but as contemporaneous art forms with complex techniques, histories, and transmission processes that prove as useful to scholars researching forms already existing in the canon. This shuffling of the canon is important precisely because each percussive dance form exists now as both concert practice and communal/recreational practice; each is presentational/participatory, visual/aural, solo/ensemble, often simultaneously. Each percussive form is entertaining, culturally and historically meaningful, and valuable for its own unique legacies and genealogies. Each is as relevant and vital in the present as it has been to those who practiced the form in the past. In fact, that past of each tradition becomes present within each dance enactment, a phenomenon participants discuss throughout the data. The term living tradition has been applied to these forms not only to make a category for the percussive dance forms discussed here, but to also show how they indirectly explain particular cultural habits, meanings, and processes inherent and evolving within the dancing itself.

Interestingly, over time new concert dance enactments related to living traditions have become part of, in some cases, the very same *soft archive* that transmits a living tradition's repertoire. Concert dance enactments might include, but are not limited to, various forms of tap dancing, for example, along a broad continuum from Zigfield Follies to Rockettes, Tap Dogs, or Stomp. For Irish dancing, staged enactments of dance experienced and transmitted in Harrigan and Hart's *Mulligan Guard* series (1878-1884), in which O'Neil danced, may have been enfolded into Irish dance practice in the U.S. and therefore into current dancing found within Riverdance, for example.

At the time of O'Neil's career, the percussive dance forms researched here were staged for public consumption. Dancing was a professional activity and financial livelihood for the dancer as well as the producer of the programs and tours. These forms became less popular over time and, therefore, less visible in the static archives created by critics, historians, promoters, and venues. However, this dissertation research infers that the emergence of professional concert dances, those dances that are clearly labeled and codified in the archives, owe their emergence to dance forms practiced as living traditions.

Dance historian June Layson posits that historical inquiry, while challenged to accept non-discursive sources as primary sources, is also challenged by dance to reconsider its concept of time as only unified or linear (12-13). As Layson suggests, time might best be understood as "a series of surges, with interruptions and dislocations" in which one is challenged to understand or imagine how fragments of past dance performances exist, merge, and transform practices in the present, particularly as they are disseminated through movement, or dance technique (Layson 12; Adshead-Landsdale 221). The study of a living tradition in which the tradition's repertoire becomes data means that the repertoire also can become an historical art-fact or as Layson says "useable past." Repertoire as individually experienced by participants in this research is the primary source for research in this dissertation. Participant voices and discourse about repertoire constitute an attempt to contribute an example of how concepts about moving are experiential data to be used in historical dance inquiry. A living tradition, in the context of this study, enfolds dance enactments of the past as fragments of memory and movements that surge into or away from, interrupt, and dislocate the present practice

of *sean-nós* dance, tap dance, clogging, and flatfooting. By collecting ethnographic data from contemporary dancers about how they experience a sense of past dance in the present, I resolve to bring fragments of the past into a historiography of American percussive dance and make this data a usable source for specifically imagining O'Neil's performing. This new data source highlights the complexities, fluctuations, and the dissonances within a living history, a living tradition, and a contiguous process of transmission for a dance form.

Presenting concert stage versions of living traditions of dance means engaging processes of codification of repertoire. This assumption is based in the further assumption that one goal of presentational dancing is to repeat dance enactments with consistency. Such repetition provides a consistent, unified, and easily observable representation of the form and culture. Such presentations for living traditions of dance generate a semi-static archive at best. Even if there is a moving record of a performance, the video clip or film, for example, provides only broad clues for how the tradition's dancing looks and sounds since it is enacted by solo artists individually whose styles and repertoires vary. Presentations of a living tradition of dance, even those containing historical repertoire, remain semi-static and incomplete. Likewise, the development of particular pedagogies via the establishment of curricula for dance schools and choreography represent a similar, semi-static archive, one that is partly fixed in moments of codified repertoire and partly living via the individual moving body that interprets and expresses the repertoire in performance.

Pedagogies and recorded moments of performance reveal a particular crisis of representation for dancing practiced as a living tradition. For the dancers who practice forms as active, living traditions and who learn, create, and perform without any tangible or static transmitted record, there remains only the living record of person-to-person transmission, emulation of others, and the experience of their own dancing. All of these social, emotional, and kinesthetic experiences have meanings, and meanings-in-the-making, that are understood, confirmed, affirmed and re-made while doing the dancing. However, the processes for perpetuating a form of dance within a living tradition move beyond transmission of dance movements alone.

Living traditions of dance function to preserve the past as always and forever part of the present via particular movement references and personal experiences associated with people, places, times, and context of performance in each dancer's personal past. Living traditions exist as valuing systems that transmit historical, geographic, chronological, cultural, and individual meaning, movement, and aesthetics. As a valuing system, transmissions simultaneously include knowledge about re-making, translating, and interpreting those same histories, geographies, meanings, movements, and aesthetics into individual expression. Living traditions of dance function paradoxically: they demonstrate movement knowing that is both/and of the past and the present, and that is both/and of a culture and an individual. Therefore, it is important to remember that those dance practices and individual dance enactments that have been adapted from living traditions of participatory dance for presentation on the stage represent only a moment of

a moving repertoire as it enters into the recorded archive alongside other Western dance practices.

Speculations on Perception and Marginalization of Percussive Dance as Low Art

Because of the complications of culture-on-the-move and repertoire-on-the-move within living traditions of dance, incomplete and inequitable archival records, various related yet distinct repertoires of individual practitioners, and overlapping and conflicting nomenclature within each, representation of percussive dance forms is located at the margin of Western dance academic records and research. This is also partly due to how dance production and entertainment itself developed in the United States. This includes how dance was, and is, ubiquitously perceived as either art or entertainment, and often both, and how popular presentation of dance forms can be consumed by the general population, if only as a novel, one-off experience.

In O’Neil’s era of machination and modernization mid-19th century, entertainment of the stage and saloon were divided from that of classical and European theatre arts, such as opera and ballet. According to social historian John F. Kasson, the Astor Place riot in 1849 signaled a clear division of high and low theater in America by way of the spaces, content, and constituency that produced and consumed the performances. One hundred and fifty wealthy investors of the “codfish aristocracy” funded the building of Astor Place Opera House, a posh venue that required patron wear white gloves and dress coats. This requirement was an affront to the theatre hungry, working class public who could not gain entrance. When the Opera House hosted England’s William Charles Macready, it offered the “militantly anti-aristocratic, working-class . . . an irresistible



Figure 4. Kitty O'Neil, 1877.

target,” and the public rioted, killing twenty-two (Kasson 227). The canon of dance and its enduring archive were disrupted and re-ordered because the event “shattered the once coherent theater ‘public’ along class lines” between upper and lower Manhattan (Kasson 228). This division of high and low entertainment, “high” meaning upper Manhattan and “low” signaling lower Manhattan; high theatre was legitimate theatrical art

productions and low theatre was non-

classical entertainment and therefore less respectable programming found in concert halls, saloons, and variety theatres. Low entertainment included all manner of percussive dance and the label “low” in association with these forms continues to play out in dance studies.

O’Neil’s contemporaries were “ballet” dancers, jiggers, and cloggers. These same soloists were multi-talented and appeared as ensemble singers, or as part of a chorus of actors, for example. These stock entertainers could be found performing different repertoire according to the season and the context, theatre in winter or circus tent in summer (Rodger 39-41). According to historian Gillian Rodger, women, in particular, were in high demand for their flexibility across genres, if not for the spectacle of the costumes that attracted popular attention to female bodies (39-41). The popular

dance of the day was percussive, Minstrelsy-rooted, American creations quite different from any European model (Kasson; Odell). Concurrently, pantomime, tableau, trapeze, and acrobatic work were available to women with ballet dance experience and these performers were costumed to accentuate the dancer-like flexibility and grace of the female artist's body. The image and technical knowledge of the dancer was blurred across many kinds of acts. Interestingly, few females are noted to be percussive dancers. It is Zeller who reminds us that a woman artist's presence in saloon, concert stage, and/or theatre was more about pulchritude than precision (582). Meade points out that O'Neil is an exception to Zeller's observation when he describes her 1877 *carte de visite*^{vi} in which she wears pantaloons and a blouse that buttons up to her chin and poses standing, arms crossed, gazing directly at the camera purposefully (12). Meade asserts that her image is key to her popular appeal as a percussive dancer. Perhaps her look makes her appear serious, capable, and as talented as any of her male contemporaries.

A cursory glance at contemporary performance reveals multiple names for the American dance forms that emerged in O'Neil's time. These same forms have been extended, re-shaped, or continue, uninterrupted, into the present. These same dance forms are collectively labeled vintage, traditional, world, or cultural dance now, but also carry such labels as folk dance, burlesque dance, circus or cabaret dance, show dance, ethnic dance, popular dance, and vernacular dance. Depending upon how a discussion of the form is framed, any of these labels might apply, but a discussion with practitioners in this research specifically reveals the paradoxical realities of doing percussive dance forms that makes each difficult to categorize within dance studies when using labels as

they exists in the field or as they exist in the recorded archive. However labeled, they often remain “low” art dance practices or at least middlebrow as they cater to multiple audiences and are practiced both on and off stage.

In a forward to a section about world dance in their text *Moving History/Dancing Culture*, scholars Ann Cooper-Albright and Ann Dils problematize these current labels, including folk dance and even world dance, confirming how existent nomenclature bifurcates practices into low/high art. The authors describe how Western concert dance history often juxtaposes its practices as contrasting any previously articulated technique, but cannot decide what to call these “othered” dance forms that are neither static as traditions, nor removed from their unique, often contested cultural legacies and histories (xiii-xviii, 92-96). The answer lies, in part, with how these forms are named and framed: all dance could be considered ethnic, and all dance could be considered entertaining in some way (Kealiinohomoku; Sklar; Cooper Albright). However, due to their deep attachment to culture, and a certain resistance to being framed and polished by art processes attendant in presentational Western concert dance, the forms researched in this dissertation are often excluded from the high art canon, or at least lack an appropriate and fitting label, one more nuanced than “folk dance,” for example.

Disrupting the High/Low Art Divide and Changing Tropes in the Field

Andriy Nahachewsky, a self-identified Ukrainian Canadian “folk” dancer, developed an effective way to avoid polarizing divergent forms within the canon of dance studies. Specifically, he contests the dyad of concert dance and folk dance where concert

dance demonstrates qualities of development that make it presentable as art while folk dancing demonstrates qualities that engender access, usability, and inclusion.

Nahachewsky further describes four flexible labels that can be applied additively to dance practices. His categories are conceived as a combination of dancer's intent and the context in which the intent emerges. His categories include: reflexive dance in which the dancer attends to his/her own kinesthetic experience; participatory dance in which the dancers' attention addresses their interaction with each other and to some degree the surround; presentational dance in which dancers not only attend to one another, but also perform for an external human audience; and sacred dance in which the dancing is intended for supernatural beings (4). Nahachewsky's labels are useful as "conceptual categories," for the terms reorganize the canon to include the cultural context in a much more meaningful way (6). These terms explain the relationship of when and how each form emerges and how the value of each shifts in accordance with the context for the dancing. Nahachewsky aptly asserts "the participatory-presentational axis can clarify important differences in activities often lumped together under the problematic category of "folk" dance" (6). It is Nahachewsky's categories that prove most useful in this discussion because many of the percussive forms are simultaneously presentational – executed by a solo dancer – and participatory – in relationship with live music, the tune in play, and audience; all together, these relationships literally shape the spectacle of the solo dance enactment. For the dancers in this dissertation, participation means relating to and establishing communion with music, musicians, and people in the surround, all of which are key to achieving a best practice in the form (see Chapter V).

Dance scholar Jane Desmond states that to focus on dance as text (as the archive and Western dance analysis are noted as doing) omits or dismisses the rigor of ongoing and continually changing ethnographic data that potentially adds clarity to understanding aesthetic value of the form. Desmond is referencing “how the dance is experienced by practitioners and audience” in the staged enactment, rather than the “what” of the recorded enactment. Western concert dance archivists are noted as analyzing “othered” dances or non-concert forms in relationship to those that exist in a predetermined and bounded; thereby, not including in their analysis “how” the dance happens or “why.” This, until recently, has created a divide where, as dance scholar Susan Manning has noted, ethnographic approaches cater to non-Eurocentric forms and aesthetic/ideological approaches cater to elite concert or Eurocentric forms (Manning quoted in Desmond 44). An attempt to analyze “othered” forms of dance brings the need for broader, more ethnographically oriented analyses to be applied. Desmond explains by stating that, “[c]ombining approaches [ethnographic and textual/cultural studies analyses] can be of signal importance in helping us understand how “dancing” happens, when and where, and what meanings and pleasures people attach to it under specific conditions” (46). Desmond further concludes in her article, “Terra Incognita: Mapping New territory in Dance and ‘Cultural Studies,’” that there exists neglected terrain of “middlebrow” dance, claiming it is under-researched.

Desmond advocated thirteen years ago for “increased attention to both ‘middlebrow’ and ‘amateur’ forms, practices, and communities,” but more specifically, Desmond cited the need to research the “complex category of ‘middlebrow’ dance” like

that of variety theatre which is neither elite, nor high brow, nor low brow dance (47).

Desmond asserted that in order to “understand how the cultural tastes and social identities of the vast ‘middle’ are constituted, we should take seriously those cultural appetites and practices by which many people define themselves” (48). Precisely at the point O’Neil lived her dance career, theatre split into high and low, a middle/working-class citizenship emerged, and consumerism and advertising began to develop. These cultural tastes from the past shape all “conceptions of artistic taste in ways that continue to inform our critical, personal, and pedagogical practices today” (Desmond 47). Could it be that the cultural appetites sated in the production of what is sold as new dance today may, in reality, be a perpetuation of previous practice from the past, un-archived, unnoticed? Does this possibility indicate that distinct practices within a tradition enter public consumption and the archive only when successfully promoted and popularized either by an individual practitioner or group?

Joann Kealiinohomoku, as early as 1968, insisted that all dancing is ethnic dancing and all dancing is rooted in a culture. According to dance scholar Theresa Buckland “Kealiinohomoku’s most significant intellectual contribution to dance is that she provides the first thorough and accessible critique of the evolutionist legacy which had so bedeviled the majority of texts written on dance” (8). Kealiinohomoku began a challenge to create sensitive, descriptive terms and “presented a route towards democratization of the study of dance” for all manner of dancing (Buckland 9).

Dance scholar Dierdre Sklar further asserts that the way people move is more than biology, art, or entertainment. In her *Five Premises for a Culturally Sensitive Approach*

to Dance (1991), she advocates that scholars look beyond just movement to find meaning since dance is beyond visual spectacle as it also includes kinesthetic response and kinesthetic knowing as embedded and learned behaviors resulting from how one experiences one's own cultural movement history (in Dils, Cooper Albright 30-32). To Sklar, context, emotion, memory, and time all play a crucial role in understanding meaning of any movement. Working within the theoretical framework established by Sklar, I assume that, for the dance forms in this study, cultural history exists as an emergent, moving, and changing experience. This necessitates questioning and qualifying whose experience is whose, when that experience is happening, exactly how it happens for each participant, and what relationship those experiences have to the meaning that is made about them.

Archival Problems with Nomenclature: Irish, Clog, and Tap Dance

In the documentary and ethnography "Talking Feet: Buck, Flatfoot, and Tap," Mike Seeger is careful to discuss how and why he chooses to use the personal nomenclature adopted by his participants to label the dance forms they practice. He explains that in the cultures of the Appalachian, Piedmont, and Blue Ridge mountain regions where his research was focused, he found that individual manner of speech, music making, singing, and dancing were highly valued (9). Because the emphasis on individual expression is valued, a dancer often devises terms to name and describe his/her own style of dancing. As a result, the same label is used to describe very different dance movements; conversely, different labels are used to describe very similar dance movements. Seeger admits that while it may be convenient to standardize the labels

Flatfoot, Buck, and Clog and clearly distinguish specific movements under each as a distinct category, he suggests that, instead, “we must accept each person’s names for their steps and style just as we accept their dance” since the forms remain multiply shared and expressed across divergent communities/cultures (Seeger 9). What is unanimously shared across traditions and cultures is the importance of individual expression.

As quickly as the many popular performers on 19th century American stages were cataloged and their dancing codified, dance practices collapsed and/or mixed into what is now a lexicon of names for more homogenized steps/practices representative of general traditions of dancing related, almost exclusively, to concert performances. What participants in Seeger’s ethnography made clear in the 1980’s, and participants in this dissertation confirm today, is that all dance styles, like those forms that emerged in tap dancing, are contemporaneously shared, emulated, and innovated equally among generations and cultures across traditions. In other words, each is practiced in some manner of cultural and social context.

If nomenclature is so mobile, how then do we use archival labels? Names for steps can indicate a period in a tradition’s history or demonstrate a migration of movement, style, or sequence from one tradition to another via individual practitioners at particular moments in a dance tradition’s chronology. To attempt to disentangle the shared nomenclature from the individuals whose unique performances perpetuated and changed the flux of these emergent forms is not possible because not all dancers survive in the archive. If a past dancer did end up in the archive, and the nomenclature they chose also survived, it must be emphasized that the names for steps are those assigned by

the individual dancer and do not necessarily represent a tradition as much as that particular dancer's experience within a tradition.

Examples of Omitted or Dubious Nomenclature from Tap Dancing's Archive

Of the percussive dance forms researched for this dissertation, tap dancing was found to dominate the existing literature, with connections to clogging, flatfooting, buck dancing, and Irish dancing enfolded into the discourse. Rusty Frank's "TAP! The Greatest Tap Dance Stars and Their Stories 1900-1955" was a significant contribution to dance scholarship in 1995 as it contained excerpted interviews from practitioners in their own words. Of particular interest to me, for example, are interviews in Frank's book from practitioners such as Ruby Keeler. Keeler (1910 – 1993) was born in Halifax, Nova Scotia, but grew up in New York City. Her interview reveals that she self-identified as a Buck and Wing dancer, danced in wooden soled shoes, and admitted that her first learned dances included the Highland Fling and the Sailor's Hornpipe. However, Keeler says, "the Irish Jig was actually the first tap dancing I did" (32). By publishing the stories of these dancers in their own words, Frank also published primary source material about cultural knowing, kinesthetic knowing, memory, and the past. This makes her work useful for researchers interested in living traditions of dance.

Tap dancing has been classified in the literature as exclusively "an African American art form born of experience," making its repertoire seem exclusively Africanist (Asante 2001). While, on the other hand, some scholars, like Constance Valis Hill (2010) in her book *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*, choose to complicate this standpoint by revising the history of the form and labeling it simply as an "American"

form. Hill, therefore, qualifies American culture to mean a diversity of sub-cultures, historically pinpointing British Isles and African cultures, noting that the relationship between these cultures is responsible for the development of tap dancing (148).

Historian Eric Lott, in his book *Love and Theft* about blackface Minstrelsy, also acknowledges the “occasionally interracial creations” of Minstrelsy were “cultural invention[s].” Lott emphasizes these relationships were often the “product of self-commodification” with whites profiting outright since they were given greater access to public performance (39). Lott discusses how this borrowing across races makes disentangling such cultural capital difficult. He concludes by stating: “I take as normative a long, conflicted history of racial exchange that significantly ‘blackened’ American culture as it creolized African cultural imports” (39). Yet this tangle of racial and cultural goods as they were commoditized on stage happened across many cultures and over more than 100 years.

What the following section concerning the overview of tap’s historical nomenclature indicates is that the field of dance studies has been in the process of revision with regard to many dance practices within living traditions. However, for the purpose of this dissertation, noting changes to scholarship regarding tap dancing is particularly potent as the forms I researched are named as antecedent to contemporary tap dancing. While outside of the purview of this research, the cultural history of American tap dance, and particularly Hill’s writing on the early cultures and dance practices that contributed to the form, allows for a moment of comparison in which I might position myself as researcher and take a particular standpoint regarding the value of contemporary

repertoire as primary source for historical research. Hill's text deals with the past by referencing the archive; whereas, this dissertation utilizes and privileges ethnographic data, as Jane Desmond suggests.

John Durang and Mis-Nomenclature. In her writing about the early history of tap dancing, Hill does in her research what Seeger was reluctant to do in his; she segregates periods of change in tap dance naming and labeling the particular dance styles and the culture to which each is connected. In particular, she segregates dance styles by the migration of cultures through time and geographical location as noted in the archive. These records include those dancers who either documented their own dancing, as in the case of John Durang, or eye witness accounts to performances. Durang, notes Hill, debuted in 1784 at age sixteen, performed in burnt cork make-up, and became "one of the earliest prototypes of tap dance on the American stage" (7). His dancing was a mix of clog dance, ballet, and "African American shuffle-and-winged" steps, but his most popular dance was his "Hornpipe" (7). According to Hill, Durang's son published, "Pas de Matelot, A Sailor's Hornpipe - Old-style" in 1855. The pamphlet details his father's performances demonstrating what Hill describes as a "mongrel mix" of French, Scots, English, and African-derived steps and traditions (7).

In her attempt to catalog what Durang danced, Hill unwittingly becomes snagged in fixing nomenclature and stilling the past in order to categorize according to the needs of a stable archive. This action perpetuates the kind of erasure necessary to produce a nominative descriptor. Her opening chapter contains misnomers that only contemporary practitioners of the same antecedent repertoire might recognize. Hill's archival narratives

represent what I have termed *Art(Official) facts*. While Hill holds to the argument that indeed tap dancing, as well as Appalachian Clogging, Buck dancing, and Flatfooting, is the direct result of musical, gestural, rhythmical, social, and aesthetic habits of African, “Scotch-Irish,” and some Native American cultures, she supports this argument based on the genealogy of individual practitioners who appear in the archive only. This is misleading because the individual dancer, as Seeger suggests, self-identifies and names his/her dancing in order to either popularize or promote a solo career, and/or continue a cultural habit of individuation, singularity, and uniqueness.

Inventive nomenclature, therefore, can be discussed as a cultural habit and process of individuation within each dance tradition, established in dance processes, and valued in that dancer’s culture. The *sean-nós* dancers interviewed here, for example, particularly emphasize the importance of individuation in the form as manifest via “signature steps” unique to and, most often, performed only by the step’s originator. This did/does not stop dancers from stealing or borrowing steps. Consider the 1869 advertisement for Howard Athenaeum Theatre in Boston in which Mademoiselle Bertha performs a “Greek Hornpipe” (see Figure 5). The musical term hornpipe is not historically linked to Greek culture in Greece, but has been appropriated for use in popular performance in early American dancing. Like Mademoiselle Bertha, therefore, Durang’s appearance in the archive may well tell more about the artful self-promotion of Durang as an individual than make discursive the experience of his dancing, the description of his steps, or the embodied know-how that its scenario-like entries indicate.

Nomenclature, Music and Migrations. In her writing about early tap dance in America, Hill further attempts to clearly distinguish how, when, and which performances from Irish, British, and African dancers influenced one another. Hill makes an association between early immigrants from countries that border the Irish Sea (called *Borderers* by historian David Hackett Fischer) to the terms “clog” and “hornpipe.” Hill claims that Irish, “Scotch-Irish” (Ulster Irish), and African dance styles “blended to form



Figure 5. Advertisement for Howard Athenaeum, Boston, 1869.

“hard-shoe clog dancing [that] used bluegrass ‘old-time’ music, based on Irish and Scotch-Irish fiddle tunes (7).” First, the terms “clog” and “hornpipe” are correctly associated with populations that emigrated from around the Irish Sea, namely Northumberland’s pitmen and Lancashire’s cotton mill workers who began dancing in

their wooden work shoes (clogs) as industries became mechanized in England during the mid-1800’s (Brennan 22; <http://www.thedemonbarbers.co.uk/about/english-clog-dance/>). Secondly, the dominant dance music of these Border cultures includes 2/4 time or hornpipe.

However, Hill does not then thoroughly discuss the cultural migration of musical traditions and how these migrations and the musical nomenclature accompanying them further complicate dance nomenclature. For example, it is important to note that in American musical traditions, and some times Scottish traditions, the term hornpipe is used to describe music in 4/4 time, and is alternatively labeled *Breakdown* in American music traditions. Even Durang's Hornpipe could have been performed in 4/4 time similar to "Kitty O'Neil's Champion Jig." Hill does not specify any details about Durang's music or include any specific attachments the dance may have had to cultural variations of terminology for musical time signatures as practiced at the time of Durang's performances. Based upon the nomenclature of hornpipe alone, Durang's "hornpipe" could have resembled any of these dance traditions or none of them at all.

Hill also generalizes, for example, that the term jigging was generally used by 1800 to designate a "black" style of dancing (6). However, the term jig, as viewed by Europeans, had already taken on an "American" identity for both black and white colonials regarding music and, I assume, dance traditions. Music historian Eileen Southern (1983) notes that the first American musical composition, "Negro Jig," was published in Scotland as early as 1782 (45). By the 1830's, music collections and sheet music designated the difference between Irish jigs (6/8) and straight jigs (2/4 or 4/4). Straight jigs were mostly American in origin (Meade 16). Historically, 6/8 dance music is credited primarily to Irish culture since Irish traditional music repertoire includes more 6/8 dance tunes than any other British Isle's culture (Breathnach 60; Brennan 22).

Almost as soon as British Isles and African emigration to the United States began, new forms of music and dancing emerged in the fledgling colonies.

It is likely that what emerged in a post-colonial entertainment world was equally invented and shared by blacks and whites together and the need to distinguish traditions, and perhaps each antecedent culture, did not become necessary until mid-19th century during massive emigration specifically from Ireland (Cockrell; Ignatiev). Meade's historical research about musical references specifically helps contain the mystery of O'Neil's dancing by detailing that the tune written in her honor, "Kitty O'Neil's Champion Jig," is in 4/4 as opposed to 6/8 time. Meade speculates that O'Neil's namesake tune was "certainly played to accompany Kitty's famous sand dance" (17). He goes on to qualify the tune as, "one of the most sophisticated minstrel jigs that survive from the nineteenth century," and confirms his speculation offering that "[i]t is not an easy piece to play" reasoning, indirectly, that activating the repertoire—that is, putting the tune in play—gives his opinion merit and rigor (17).

As noted earlier, dance in a living tradition cannot be fixed as just dancing. Rather, the repertoire gains greater animation when researched/experienced in tandem with musical traditions of the companion tradition. Here is where the dance archive suffers a certain dislocation from its musical counterpart and where Hill has also dislocates music from dance in her historical research. Again, Hill claims that "hard-shoe clog dancing used bluegrass 'old-time' music, based on Irish and Scotch-Irish fiddle tunes" (7). However, musical literature and cultural experience confirm, there is a marked difference in both Bluegrass and Old-time musical traditions that Hill does not

make clear when discussing clogging. While these musical styles have roots in British Isle traditions, contemporary practices are wildly different. Bluegrass and Old-time music are not, and likely have never been, synonymous as Hill suggests. This is also true of related forms of dance that emerged chronologically alongside the newer music Clogging, Competition Clogging, and Precision Clogging.

The term *Bluegrass* entered the lexicon in the 20th century and is solely attributed to the creative genius of Kentuckian Bill Monroe whose band name, The Bluegrass Boys, is responsible for the nomenclature's origin in 1938.^{vii} Bluegrass identifies a music tradition quite different from Appalachian Old-time music. Historically, Old-time music is closely associated with particular traditions from cultures of the Appalachian mountain regions, areas that remain cartographically debated. Bluegrass music, on the other hand, is associated with western expansion of that culture beyond the mountains and into KY, TN, TX, OH, MO, KS, and beyond. Each music and dance practice, however, reflects contemporary usage, adaptation, and influence of its antecedent form. As with dance nomenclature, distinct regions and groups of players individually provide names for their tunes, their dances, and manner of dancing and playing music.

When Hill continues to discuss *sean-nós* dancing, she uses a parenthetical to translate the term as *Old Style* (10). This is misleading and confusing for reasons discussed earlier; Old-style Irish dance emerges in the late 19th century and early 20th century in Ireland specifically. Hill names instrumentation for *sean-nós* dancing that would not have been used among players prior to the early 20th century. Accordion, tenor banjo, mandolin, piano, and bouzouki are not “traditionally” used, that is to say

historically used, to accompany *sean-nós* dancing. The participants in this study express a decided preference for solo concertina or melodeon (in play during the period Hill discusses, 1650-1900) or solo fiddle for best practice of *sean-nós* dancing. Banjo, mandolin, piano, accordion are all considered modern instruments for Irish traditional musicians^{viii}.

Hill further discusses fusions of verbal “repartee” evident in seemingly disparate cultures of Ireland and Africa as they play out in American tap dance challenges (13-19). Also, Hill’s discussion of Irish poets perpetuates a reification of the culture as supra-literate and magical in its bardic traditions. Brendan Brenacht in his 1973 classic *Folkmusic and Dances of Ireland*, however, gives a full description of the professional activities of dancing masters of the 18th and 19th centuries. The repertoire of these dancing masters included acts of boasting and toasting similar to *griots* in African traditions. The Irish version included dancing masters “wieing” for a parish (an area to teach within), the use of “jingles” or words, and antics such as dancing on soaped barrels (Breathnach 52). These public challenge matches are similar to those Hill discuss as Africanist in tap. Breathnach describes the enactments of Irish dancing masters in this way:

Casual meetings at fairs and sporting events would lead to challenges when both would dance it out in public to the joy and edification of the spectators and, frequently, without any eventual decision. (52)

Why Hill does not mention the regular use of public challenges by Irish dancing masters and chooses instead to emphasize African origins may be mitigated by her own experience with tap dance repertoire, not Irish dance repertoire.

Lastly, The nomenclature for Clogging, Flatfooting, Buck dancing, Jigging, and Tapping has shifted over time as the result of the changing cultural landscape, a point Hill clearly illustrates. In O’Neil’s era, shifts were due to the migration of people and their traditions from old world to new. However, dance literature makes little reference to a second large wave of Irish nationals to the U.S. as the result of famine in 1845 and the cultural habits of these Gaelic speaking immigrants of western Ireland. This is important to consider when discussing *sean-nós* dancing. Early migrations from around the Irish Sea (*Borders* as historian David Hackett Fischer calls these mixed communities) introduced percussive dancing from multiple cultures of which a northern (Scotch-Irish or Ulster Irish) style of Irish *sean-nós* dancing was only a small part. Much of the western tradition of Irish *sean-nós* dancing (most popular today) was introduced to North America during the Famine immigration post 1845. These immigrants moved into urban, northern populations along the Atlantic (See Brennan and Kirby). It is this later migration from western Ireland that filled the notorious Five Points district of New York City with Irish people from the west of Ireland. The Five Points district is where the famous “inventor” of tap, William Henry Lane (Master Juba), supposedly learned to “jig” or Irish dance. What is dislocated in this historical narrative is time and migration. Master Juba danced early in the 19th century which makes it difficult for historians to know which Irish *sean-nós* dance practice, northern or western, was most influential in his own practice. However, it stands to reason that Appalachian dance styles were likely more influenced by the Borderers, who practiced Irish *sean-nós* dancing, as well as Lancashire and Northumberland clogging styles.

Today the nomenclature for various percussive dance steps and styles reveals how the individual dancer was/is valued in these traditions by way of innovation and how dancers within traditions add to and change that tradition's genealogy by borrowing, stealing, and adapting movement from practitioners who practice forms other than his/her own. The archive is an artful, official, list of "facts" for the percussive dance forms discussed in this dissertation by way of individual dancers who found a way into a static record of popular performance. The repertoire, the specific processes for producing percussive dance, remain emergent, unfinished, and momentary interruptions to and dislocations within and across each tradition's diachronic, living, moving record.

To discuss a repertoire of American dance, as I am suggesting, requires bracketing time and place of the enactment in order to fix, discuss, and analyze one moment in an ever-changing, ever-developing, living dance tradition. The term living tradition implies the dialectic nature of practices within traditions given time and specific locations. The dialectic is evident when comparing diachronic transmission of what is recognized as the dance form chronologically with any one synchronic performance of an individual dancer. This also makes clear the need for a researcher to make known his/her relationship to the topic, participants, contexts, and past as related to the dancing under analysis. What I am identifying as dialectic is the relationship between individual dance practice, researcher, living tradition, and the past is explicated in the personal experiences of participants throughout this dissertation.

New Data: An Adventure in Creative Writing

The Giant rested back in his chair. “You’ve some stories left,” he said. “I can smell them on your skin.”

Brian Patten, *The Story Giant*

While this research is not about a particular social choreography, historiography of Kitty O’Neil, or critical cultural analysis toward activism, it is performative. I am imagining possibilities of Kitty O’Neil and then creating a text that relates those imaginings to the experiences of contemporary dancers; thus, identifying how repertoire might have happened. This imaginative process is meant to reveal what is significant to me as dancer, writer, and researcher and extend knowledge about the living traditions O’Neil may, or may not, have contributed to and/or influenced. These objectives combine to delimit the research. What follows is a chapter of new historical data with connections to O’Neil created by me as dancer/researcher. The chapter emerges from an attempt to choreograph a historiography of O’Neil via creative writing. The ethnographic data that inspired my writing includes specific experiences of practitioners whose lineages and genealogies within living traditions of dance animate the past and construct a possible epistemology for O’Neil’s repertoire and its cultural significance.

The theories and stories that emerge out of the collected data help to extend and re-define, through lived experience, how a living tradition works, when a living tradition of dance happens, how each individual is both connected and disconnected to/from the root tradition through individual practice, and when each is either located within or dislocated from the chronological/historical unfolding of the tradition. The archive and the repertoire are continually noted as significant for each participant, but it is the

repertoire, the doing of the dance, that is most informative and dynamic for each practitioner and a point of focus for this research and analysis.

Buoyed by the theories discussed in this chapter, particularly the notion of performance as ethnography and writing as performance, I tried to bring those historical highlights and ideas about this research topic to life and into the present by creating a new and imagined archive. In Chapter IV, I wrote freely and creatively. I combined all that I gleaned from the archive, discovered ethnographic data, my own experiences as dancer and performer, and my experiences researching dance history into a set of letters between myself as researcher and myself as Kitty O'Neil. Chapter IV brings the reader into my imagined world of Kitty O'Neil, a researched world of a dance ethnographer, dance performer, and a dance historian. It represents a creative data set generated by me as researcher. It is also a written performance of the existing literature about percussive dance of the past.

Notes

ⁱ For more details about this period and style of dancing see Chapter V.

ⁱⁱ Participant Rodney Sutton is featured in Mike Seeger's film Talking Feet along with other practitioners who directly comment on the mixed nomenclature for clogging, flatfooting, tapping, and buck dancing used interchangeably across dance forms.

ⁱⁱⁱ See participant Shannon Dunne's quotation in Chapter IV, page 35.

^{iv} I created this term as a pun on the terms *artificial*, *official*, and *artifact*. Much of the recorded archive is considered fact, while the archive is considered an official source for historical research. To perceive the use, meaning, and value of an artifact from the past is always done from the point of view of the present. I find the process of evaluating objects of the past to be an artful one, revealing more about the present interpreter and interpretation than the article itself. See Chapter III for use of this term in the context of this research.

^v This is the title of Eric Lott's 1995 book on the topic of Minstrelsy and the working class. The title represents the unsentimental reality of dancers and performers of the era who freely appropriated movement, song, music, dance, etc. from one another to create the next new show.

^{vi} A *carte de visite*, according to the American Museum of Photography, is a portrait of a person mounted on a small card measuring 2 ½" by 4". Popularized by its inexpensive and sturdy construction, the *carte de visite* became the new visiting card for the Victorian era beginning circa 1854. After its introduction to New York in 1859, the *carte de visite* became wildly popular in the United States. See <<<http://www.photographymuseum.com/histsw.htm>>>.

^{vii} For a history of Bluegrass music and Bill Monroe see (<http://www.billmonroe.com/history/>).

^{viii} See Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin's article "Dancing on the Hobs of Hell: Rural Communities in Clare and the Dance Halls Act of 1935" in *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua* Vol. 9, No. 4 (Winter, 2005), pp. 9-18, for a discussion 19th and 20th century changes to instrumentation for Irish traditional music and its impact on repertoire.

CHAPTER IV

ARTS, FACTS, AND HISTORIOGRAPHY: LETTERS BETWEEN DANCERS

Kitty O'Neil, on the other hand, has been almost entirely forgotten though she is well worth remembering, if not only because the tune that bears her name is an intriguing relic of a time when a fusion of Irish and African-American elements was helping to create a truly American style of popular music and dance.

Don Meade

The real question is: To whom does the meaning of the art of the past properly belong? To those who can apply it to their own lives, or to a cultural hierarchy of relic specialists?

John Berger

The first time I encountered a relic was in the top drawer of my mother's dresser. Encased in an intricately lacquered crucifix were several bone chips of saints. Each one was labeled and under glass, precious and tiny. Relics remain when the rest of all they were attached to—person, body, tradition, practice, moment—has transformed, decayed or been destroyed. Relics are keepsakes. Forsaken by their attachments, they keep our attention by virtue of their unfamiliarity, and they capture our imaginations. Historians sometimes refer to relics as artifacts, but they are perhaps more art than fact in our experience of them. It is our imaginings that animate artifacts and bring their unfamiliar, unknown experiences into that of our own realm. How do we create meaning and historiography when encountering artifacts, particularly when the art facts of the past were lived experiences of performances? What do we forsake in our imaginings, and what agency do performers from the past have in our re-membering their lives in our

bodily writing? What do we keep, and for whose sake, when the performance is gone and all that is left are fragments as they exist in the present?

My aim in this chapter is consistent with the insights of historian Keith Jenkins. Jenkins encourages the work of history to include a reflexive and positioned standpoint, one that reflects the reality that history is actually *histories* and that historical work is biased, singular, and assembled in the present moment from the researcher's unique point of view. In this dissertation, I re-think past Irish American and American percussive dance performance. In this chapter, I work to create a particular and local act of historiography that reflects my specific position relative to the dissertation project's content (Jenkins 25). By relating to Kitty O'Neil, an Irish American percussive dancer performing in late nineteenth-century America, imaginatively and creatively, I aim to develop "[my] own self-consciously held (reflexive) position on [this specific bit of] history," and, "to be in control of [my] own discourse," about it (Jenkins 1). This means that I will interrogate my relationship to the interpretations of other historians who, like myself, remain situated. According to Jenkins, all historians create particular constructions of past moments that exist as "contested" histories within the field of historical studies (23). This particular view of history-as-it-is-made rather than as it is or is not mandates that processes of creating a history are local, personal, and relative. As such, Jenkins' view of historiography-making is much like performance-making by way of subjective processes and operations.

I am a specialist of ephemeral dance *doings*, yet in this dissertation I am producing a historiography, a text, which may become a relic for future readers. I am

attempting to create and preserve a sense of Kitty O'Neil's integrity by transparently relating how my specific experiences as a living-cultural being *now* allow me to open a space in which I might re-live or imagine her dancing *then*. This is a privilege that only the present moment can offer me, an awareness of a present that acknowledges a personal connection to a past.

What follows is a rhetorical discourse that seems suited to reflexive and imaginative comparisons of my own cultural experience as Irish American dancer, my relationship with historiographies of the past, and interpretations of dance performance and performing of mid-nineteenth century America. My cultural and somatic (lived) experiences as a percussive dancer include practice of multiple American traditions of dance, namely competitive Irish step dancing, Appalachian Clogging and Flatfooting, Tap, Old-style Irish dancing, and Irish *sean-nós* dancing.

Recent interest in Kitty O'Neil, her life and her dancing, has been circulating within Irish American communities, particularly among musicians as Meade's article (see Chapter III) details, and include folklorist and singer/musician Mick Moloney. Moloney's recording, *McNally's Row of Flats* (2006), features Harrigan and Braham's early musical theatre work. The themes in their work include comic and sentimental songs about immigrants in New York City specifically from an Irish American point of view (Moloney 2006). O'Neil has been identified as Irish American by artists and researchers such as Moloney and Meade because of her long time association with Harrigan and his partners Hart, and later Braham. The careers and productions of these men may or may not have had an influence on O'Neil's dancing; however, to omit their

popular stage creations and content from the dialog that follows would leave out critical information about O'Neil's milieu.

The following letters represent an imagined dialog between two Irish American dancers, Kitty and me, each performers of Irish American culture. She is Kitty O'Neil (1852-1893). She never imagined me, and I can *only* imagine her. These letters explore various possibilities of O'Neil and most importantly contest the identification of O'Neil as exclusively Irish American. Instead I imagine O'Neil in her American uniqueness and relate her dancing to the living repertoire of those traditions of dance active in the present for practitioners like myself, and the participants I interviewed for this dissertation. I position O'Neil as both exposed to and accessing various and multiple repertoires of percussive dance contemporaneously in practice during her era.

In reviewing historiographic methodologies, I am particularly aware of how a post-structural, critical stance could make this project's multiple possibilities either overly narrow or overwhelmingly complex. I am also aware that my education and experience includes post-colonial omissions and hierarchical categorizations for dance. I am equally aware that my experience as Irish American includes simulacra and nostalgia, particularly with regard to Irish immigrants and a reification of their cardinal role in a developing American culture both before the Civil War and after. The dialog here, therefore, is limited to a small sampling of social, political, and cultural topics that may have been a part of Ms. O'Neil's quotidian existence. The choice and exploration of topics are more related to my own interests as I think about O'Neil, for she obviously cannot assert herself posthumously.

The following letters represent three frames in which I have chosen to imagine O'Neil: the context of a social world of women in 19th century America; a political world of class and personal agency related to the era; and a theatrical work world of variety, minstrelsy, and burlesque. The comments that follow each set of letters are organized first as *Art(official) Facts* which represent a sampling of other historians' statements and research and then re-organized by how I view these *Art(official) Facts* relative to my own cultural and artistic experiences. A second set of remarks under the subheading *Imaginings* represents how I came to shape the content of each letter creatively and further expresses how I imagine what it felt and looked like to be O'Neil from the point of view of each varied situation or local moment of particular social, political, or vocational experience. Listing 19th century histories as *Art(official) Facts* is one way to create a discourse between myself as historian/researcher and other positioned and contested histories in the extant literature.

Discussing the processes in my *Imaginings* becomes a way to establish how, as researcher, I allow my imagination to move me, quite literally, into a bodily realm of sensation. These discussions offer important insights into how I specifically relate these controlled moments of imagined sensation to my own corporeal history as Irish American, Irish dancer, Appalachian Clog and Buck dancer, and Tap dancer.

Social Worlds: Stage Celebrity, Private Obscurity

Dear Mrs. O'Neil Kernell Pettie,

I am a dance researcher from 2013. I am intrigued by your performances, particularly your clog dancing, jig dancing and sand dancing. I am an Irish step dancer

and practice Irish sean-nós dance, but I also clog, buck, and tap. I am hoping that you might be willing to tell me about yourself.

There is so little information about your life that is available to me. I have seen a carte de visite and read a few notes about your performances in New York, Boston, and San Francisco. There is the tune, "Kitty O'Neil's Champion Jig," which a fiddler has recently played for me. What was your life like? What did you wear, where did you go, who did you see, and how did others see you? Did you enjoy your career?

I invite you to become active in my imaginings through a correspondence. Imagining your dancing is important because it helps me understand myself, my time, and my unique experience of Irish American and American culture.

*Sincerely,
Jean Denney Grotewohl*

Dear Mrs. Denney Grotewohl,

I am sensible of the honour done to me by your letter of inquiry and pray that you are indeed no pretender of respectability. I would become nothing but that object of veneration mixt with humility in begging you to suspend your disbelief that I live on in spirit, for without you as reader, I am naught but dead dancer. Such sensible honour has called me into this mysterious communication and magical mode of letter making. I am guarded against such deception as only my fortunate station ever afforded me in good wit, fair looks and quick feet. As this new difficulty is pressed upon me, I render my comments freely and beg you not make mockery of them.

First I will endeavour to communicate my fortunate career having first been placed

upon the stage at age 10 (Meade 2). My family was a theatre family with us children doing Mother's bidding to keep the house in coin. Each in our turn worked and Mother, as her Irish Mother before her, poured forth more moral righteousness in money than in men. She was sorely bent upon our success and determined where each penny was spent and with whom. She educated us as to how we might best bring destiny to our advantage by playing to the working men and not working among the playing men. It was me that she favored and gave special instruction, God bless her. We were not to repeat the fate of others who found themselves in soaplocks and shindies (Curtis 59, 63). We used our connections favorably and favored our connections with familiar entertainment singing Irish songs and songs about work and playing parts on stage in the Olio to keep them in their seats between Opening and Afterpiece (Sweet 14-17).

It is to Mr. Antonio Pastor that I paid much allegiance and remain in gratitude for his tutelage and sensible business acumen. The Concert Saloon Bill of 1862 afforded me the occasion to sidestep public scrutiny and take an improved position in variety theatre, of which the Canterbury Music Hall was more of than saloon concert hall. I was never a saloon waiter girl. Far few of those hard working ladies were prostitutes than so many believed. Because of the Act, drink was ever after only available next door at Butler's Saloon and not allowed in the theatre. Quickly, my vital amusement of doing acting and singing was employed at Pastor's 444. In those few years, 1866-1869, I was regaled only by the newsboys in the balcony who called out to me as if I were most like Lize, Mose's paramour in Baker's "New York as It Is" (Bank 85-88). Eliza (Lize as the boys yelled) was a pretty thing, but disagreeable as there was little conventional harmony in

her dress or speech (Bank 91). Lize puts me to mind what Mother said, "it's for her own good that the cat purrs," and, "do not mistake a goat's beard for a fine stallion's tail," if you take my meaning plainly. I do not dress after such popular types and would n'er be mistaken as a goat's beard. My costume is clean and neat as is my dance.

I attended to many deportment manuals and ladies pamphlets on bodily management for I wished no undue attention or criticism to tarnish my reputation, however tawdry it may have seemed to those authors of civility and decorum. And so you have asked how I looked?

Before leaving on overland adventure in 1869 I lived in the lower wards of New York City, below Broadway, in the Bowery. The Canterbury and the 444 were my true homes away from the boardinghouse where I kept my address and where my neighbors were mostly women and children on the crowded upper floors. The swell and throng of the Bowery district was composed of those who made their daily wage by brawn. Commerce was brisk with so many singular working men and women. These were my patrons. When I walked forth in public, I was often forced to do so unaccompanied. This I disdained and felt uncouth.

By practice I was not overly involved with others, particularly in public. Every unladylike action would be marked, for where the bold free eye of jackanape and dandy which speaks what the lips would not dare utter, there cuts an indecent or vulgar glance upon one's modesty (Kasson 128). I dressed plainly in walking suit of muted tones, and kept my eyes ahead yet not overly downcast. I avoided the mud and tobacco spit with deftest agility and prayed to avoid such without jostling my gait to the extreme. Above

all, should an acquaintance of the other sex greet me publicly, I enjoined him to walk with me a while to escape rudeness and maintain respectable distance. For as the manuals admonished, familiarity leads to disrespect, disrespect to vulgarity, vulgarity or indecency to vice, and vice to misery (Kasson 128).

My epistle is loquacious therefore I shall conclude here. I do hope I have not forfeited any claims to consideration as a lady in writing with regard to your inquiry. And am, yours in friendliest affection,

*Kathleen O'Neil
Pastor's 444, 1865*

Art(official) Facts 1.1 to 1.8 and Imaginings 1

The following comments reflect the histories and imaginings about Kitty O'Neil's celebrity status yet her relatively obscure existence in the archive.

Art(official) Fact 1.1 O'Neil was married twice: first to Harry Kernell in 1870 and then to Pettie in 1890 (Meade).

Art(official) Fact 1.2 Between the years 1844-1856, there was a 950% increase in the U.S. Population due Irish immigration into the U.S. after the Great Famine in Ireland. Such an influx gave rise to nativist fears of erosion of wage values, and created a "masculine mechanic" culture which made up a new work force in the wards of lower Manhattan, or the Bowery (Bank 81). It was this new culture that organized amateur sports clubs, as well as those for dancing, and drama (Bank 81). Most Variety Saloons, and then newly formed Variety Theaters (after the 1862 Concert Saloon Bill was

enacted), were located inside the Bowery along Broadway (Meade, Kasson). Bowery vocabulary included terms such as *shindy*, a public brawl due to drinking involving *Bowery B'hoys* (Curtis 59). *Soaplocks*, *jackanapes*, and *dandy* are all names for Bowery B'hoys, or men, who let their sideburns grow long, greased them, and curled them under. They flaunted their earnings in garish clothing, yet folded their trousers over their work boots for effect (Kasson 117-128; Bank 81-91). Curtis details the Bowery B'hoy's image as the centerpiece in derogatory cartoons like those for *Harper's Weekly* by Thomas Nast, in which the Irish working class was lampooned and depicted as riotous apes. The female version of a Bowery B'hoy was the Bowery G'hal.

Art(official) Fact 1.3 At mid-nineteenth century there was an 87% literacy rate among white women who voraciously read pamphlets such as Catherine Beecher's *Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1841), which extolled the virtues of the familial matriarch as a font of moral education (Bank 103). Such literature was in response to the childcare practices of the new working class, practices decried as neglectful by middle-class critics (Bank 103). Nearly two-thirds of urban children roamed the streets as mothers worked for wages in addition to tending to daily domestic chores.

Art(official) Fact 1.4 In Ireland, land inheritance, and thus income, was scarce mid-1900's. First-born males stood to inherit property from family, while female children, therefore, turned away from family life towards urban work and independence.

However, Irish women, though without any public agency in Ireland, had full control of household finances (Diner 17-18). Children were assets for the matriarchal pre- and post-Famine Irish family plan of survival, a plan that continued through mass immigration to America.

American historian Hasia Diner tells us most Irish women in America, even those with children, migrated to urban centers where they became far more successful than their male counterparts. In the city, women easily took up handiwork and sewing, small projects which could be done at home. They also acclimated by becoming domestics, a career disdained by women of other European backgrounds. The trend of segregated sexes as well as female independence and feminine financial acumen evident in Ireland, continued in the U.S. Irish immigrant women then financed the emigration of other family members to America. Young Irish women immigrants were, therefore, more likely to stay single for the purpose of supporting family in Ireland. Period novelist Leila Hardin Bugg praises, “the sensible woman [who] realizes that any sort of work is a thousand times better than an unhappy marriage, and the unselfish one often chooses to earn a living” (Hardin (1900) quoted in Diner 53).

Art(official) Fact 1.5 Eliza and Mose were characters in Benjamin A. Baker’s *New York as It Is*, which opened at the Olympic Theatre in April 1848. Stock actor Frank Chanfrau played Mose, a muscular Christian and apprentice butcher who “ran with the

machine” of the local fire brigade (Bank 86). The images of Mose and his girlfriend Eliza, known as Lize, captured the street types of Bowery B’hoys and G’hals of the era. These created characters romanticized problems of urban life and labor through Mose’s dapper appearance, brawn, and magnetism and Lize’s fine clothes, as well as her single, working-class status, and her adoration of Mose. The characters were wildly popular within and without the boundaries of the Bowery. Banks quotes the *New York Herald* as reporting, “There never was such a theatrical hit as Mose has made; the lithographers are multiplying his likeness throughout the city” (Bank 88). Six more plays followed the debut portraying Lize as a shop girl who speaks using street slang, sings Minstrel songs, reads storybooks, and patiently holds Mose’s coat while he “musses” or fights (Bank 90). She is referred to as “the lady” by Mose’s friends, but is not married to Mose until plays that come later. Lize’s manner of dress is criticized as ill coordinated, yet she thinks her eclectic assortment to be “some pumpkins” in the vernacular of the day (Bank 91).

Art(official) Fact 1.6 There are three photos of Kitty O’Neil I have been able to see in print and online: an 1870 portrait of her in day dress and hat; an 1871 photo depicting her in stereotypical *Irish colleen* costume with full skirt and shawl; and an 1877 *carte de visite*ⁱ in which she is sporting a white blouse, pantaloons, and white stockings (Meade 15).

Art(official) Fact 1.7 Antonio Pastor (1837-1908) was an impresario of variety concerts designed for, and marketed specifically to, women and families. Pastor, along with Franklin Keith and Edward F. Albee, created what vaudeville performers knew as “the Sunday-school Circuit” (Kasson 249). They cleaned up Variety Concert performance, and began including backstage notices banning “double entendres, suggestive gestures, or indecent costumes” (250). Kasson’s source for this shift toward less crude content in variety is Edwin Milton Royle’s writing from an 1899 publication of *Scribner’s Magazine*. O’Neil was professionally involved with Pastor for a large portion of her career. Her association with Pastor may be the source of her choice of costume, one more suited for the Sunday-school circuit than burlesque.

Art(official) Fact 1.8 “According to many etiquette writers,” Kasson tells us, “a properly behaved woman would escape all rudeness. But this superficial assurance concealed a less pleasant implication: Any disrespect a woman *did* encounter she must have deserved” (Kasson 129). Feminine gentility was upheld to such a high degree that it was advised to practice good manners until they were habits like, “shoes and stockings” (Kasson 166). Kasson notes the increase in the use of mirrors in Victorian homes as material evidence that “individuals were encouraged to dress and groom themselves emotionally as well as physically while in private, so as to be fully prepared for public social performance (166). It was in public that women were most vulnerable to the

scrutiny of others.

Imaginings 1. While researching Kitty O'Neil, I was struck by the lack of information about her private life. Rather than simply assume that she was a Bowery G'hal (Bowery G'hal is defined in Art (official) Fact 1.2 above) and living against the mainstream of Victorian gentility, I began to imagine her as part of a slow dissolution of clear class distinction and gender-specified roles. The Bowery culture was neither low nor middle class. It was working class. Bowery dandies amused themselves in legitimate theaters on Broadway above the Bowery mixing with middle-class people. Their manner of dress and behavior served to separate them from unskilled laborers, slaves, and new immigrants, as well as from the established middle-class.

To that end, O'Neil was a contradiction; she was publicly displayed and vulnerable to middle-class criticism for being immodest on stage, and criticized by Bowery culture for being too modest in private. As a result, she became completely invisible. This is why I have imagined her as critical of Lize's dress and manner. My Kitty was such a model of Victorian modesty that we are left not so much as a single news article or critique about her person in the public record or archive. While visible and popular as a stage performer, (an immodest behavior for most Victorian women), Kitty O'Neil as a person is not visible; she is not mentioned in newspapers and tabloids of the day aside from where she would appear on stage. It is O'Neil's choice of costume in her *carte de*

visite and her neat appearance in other portraits that shape this impression for me.

I chose to make Kitty literate in accordance with literacy statistics of the day for women. I also chose to make her somewhat suspicious of my inquiry due to the great care a Victorian woman took to protect her reputation. As to O'Neil's manner of speaking, I looked at the writing of Charles Dickens and Harriet Beecher Stowe for language conventions of the time. I also depended on the summaries of etiquette manuals in Kasson's *Rudeness and Civility* for language and cues about what Kitty may have looked like doing everyday things, such as simply walking down the street.

It is puzzling that Kitty O'Neil should have had such a lengthy and successful career as a woman in theater when, according to Diner, most women were employed doing menial or domestic labor and, according to Zellers (1968), numerous women, particularly New York women of 1850-1890, were waiter girls in concert saloons. The concert saloon was an entertainment that preceded variety and vaudeville and began to gain popularity in New York in the 1850's. Saloon owner William Valentine dubbed entertainment in concert saloons as "variety" (Zellers 578). Concert saloons were resorts for men, mostly of the working class and the "atmosphere . . . was coarse and boisterous" (Zellers 580). While some women sang in these seedy public houses, they were most often employed as "lures and playmates" for the men who attended. Waitresses or waiter girls were always on hand and often appeared in the shows. Zellers quotes McCabe's

writing from 1872 in which he tells us that waiter girls “were considered a lost and wretched sorority by the world of respectability They are beastly, foul-mouthed brutal wretches” (582). It was the behavior and character of the waiter girls that cast suspicion on variety entertainment, both the performers and their work.

Borrowing ideas that Hasia Diner put forth in *Erin’s Daughters in America*, I imagine that O’Neil’s ideas about work, money, and independent living owed a great deal to a strong Irish, maternal influence. Her business and financial skills, combined with her conduct and modesty, seem to justify her choice of impresario Antonio Pastor as mentor and generator of “Sunday-school” variety programs. In my imagination I place her within a new and growing working class as opposed to middle class.

Lastly, O’Neil’s costume in the 1877 *carte de visite* seems to me very practical. As a percussive dancer, I avoid skirts (only once have I caught my heel in a hem and landed face-first on the stage). Again, while photos of other variety concert women show cleavage and bare shoulders, O’Neil’s choice was modest and neat. While her pantaloons are racy, her blouse completely covers her arms and torso, and serves to focus the audience towards the actions of her feet. I would likely do the same. I recall visiting a dancing master in Limerick who kept a photo of her grandmother on the sideboard in her dining room. The image, circa 1920, was of a slight woman in a long pleated skirt and long sleeved jacket who posed proudly, hand on hip, clearly showing off the Munster

belt, a coveted provincial prize for Irish dancing that resembles an ornate boxing belt.

When I asked if her grandmother danced with her hands on her hips, my hostess explained she did. She explained that it was common for female dancers of that era to have a loop sewn into the bottom hem of her skirt for the explicit purpose of keeping the hem out of the way of quickly moving feet.

Political World Of Suffrage: Entrepreneur Or Constrained Woman?

Dear Mrs. O'Neil,

Thank you so much for responding to my request. I was delighted to read your letter and learn so much about you. I am so very curious about the past in which you lived, that there seems no end to my questions. You mention traveling overland in 1869. I am assuming you traveled to San Francisco and performed at the Belle Union Theatre. Am I correct? However did you manage this as a single woman, and just 16 or 17 years old at that? I am anxious to read your response!

Many thanks for your stories,

Jean

Dearest Jean Denney Grotewohl,

I am glad y'a found mi letter beguillin'. I enjoyed writin' it as best I could, now. Yer askin' after the trip west, well, it was nearly disastrous jus gettin' to Omaha. We, miself and two other Bowery g'hals and a gent from the 444 company, assembled for Toni's sake to discover what was the fuss about in Caleefornia. Da train was cuttin' da air like

a tame dragon pantin' across the world. Diabolical and exhileratin' (Wosk 31). Me bussel could n'er be salvaged after ridin' overland an' we were nearly scuppered with da filt'y tobacco flying all over creation. An beggorah, we were all wishin' for our meagre slats after all da bedbugs were finished mussing wid us after the first boardin' house. And da red naygurs, spaniards, and dust! Pure hell. The further west we went, da more da dandies from New York looked like true gents. Such a conglomeration of vagabonds, pugilists, and rouges you have never seen but in sunny San Francisco. Sure we were used to da slanderous pronouncements from da blaggards in da balcony, but what a devil's stew gold and drink make for so many people crowded in the Belle Union. Da smoke alone would drive ya ta your death.

The best part of travlin' was meetin' our dear Nel. She owned the hotel off Kearny Street. Lost her man, per dear, on da journey west but da strong woman made business. She's a regular bewitchin' broker, she is a twin to our favorite agitator, Victoria Woodhull (Friskin 7). Ah d'er were rivers of tears leavin' Nel. Us Bowery g'hals will be beginnin' to hear Mrs. Woodhull give a speech. I can still hear Nel readin' from The Daily Morning Chronicle, ". . .for we must rise from our position as ministers to the passions of men to be their equals" (Friskin 39). I tried that with Toni and I still only made 50 dollars a week when Ned and Tony were makin' more 'en double the 'gals' wages (Bank 92-93). Hush, says he, 'tis double your take in New York. Go cryin' to the

*shop girls on the Ladies Mile. Still, Ned and Tony are swells and great for the craic. But
d'ats 'nuf fir now.*

*Slan agat (that's Good-bye),
Kitty O
Union Theatre, 1870*

Art(official) Facts 2.1 to 2.8 and Imaginings 2

The following comments reflect the histories and imaginings about Kitty O'Neil's political world and the recorded archive regarding women's experiences of the era.

Art(official) Fact 2.1 The Transcontinental Railroad was completed on May 10, 1869 and the first passenger train arrived in San Francisco on September 6, 1869. A Second Class ticket from Omaha to Sacramento cost \$80, or \$1,073 in today's money. The journey took six days (www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/goldenspike).

Art(official) Fact 2.2 Actress Fanny Kemble is quoted in Julie Wosk's *Breaking Frame* as having made comments similar to O'Neil's about her first train excursion. New modes of transportation such as rail travel gave rise to both anxiety and excitement for many 19th century people (Wosk 31).

Art(official) Fact 2.3 According to Kasson, the most despicable offense of the 19th century was the chewing and spitting of tobacco which “flew without restraint” in all places men could be found (125).

Art(official) Fact 2.4 Meade tells us that O’Neil worked with Antonio Pastor at his Opera House Theater after the 444, Butler’s American Music Hall, burned in 1866. She also toured to Boston. Because she is only mentioned once between late 1866 and early 1869 in Odell’s *Annals of the New York Stage* (1927), Meade’s source for O’Neil’s details, he believes she went on tour. Also, in April of 1869, Kitty O’Neil is mentioned as appearing at the Belle Union in San Francisco. Meade guesses that because the railroad was incomplete, the touring company she was with likely spent a good while out west. San Francisco is where Kitty met Ned Harrigan and Tony Hart, with whom she worked a great deal in the following decades.

Art(official) Fact 2.5 Victoria Claflin Woodhull and her sister Tennessee Claflin were raised as child clairvoyants promising cures for cancer as they traveled by covered wagon throughout the county. Victoria was married off at age fourteen, but left her alcoholic husband and supported herself in the family trade. Victoria and Tennessee, along with family relations, all moved to New York City, and with the help of Cornelius Vanderbilt, opened the first women’s brokerage business on Wall Street, in January 1870. Victoria would go on to be the Equal Rights Party candidate for President in 1872; present to Congress on suffrage; and give radical speeches about social activism, women’s rights, and free love. “[S]he struggled to shape the course of Reconstruction’s political culture,” says Frisken, “even as it scripted her actions and limited the arena in

which she could promote radical change” (9).

Woodhull’s involvement in publishing details of the adulterous affair of between renowned clergyman Henry Ward Beecher and the wife of Theodore Tilton, editor of *The Days Doings*, led to a demonization of Woodhull and the International Workingmen’s Association (IWA). Under the socialist agenda of the IWA, Woodhull championed women’s rights (Friskin 35). Tilton published a biography of Woodhull, meant to be a tribute to her achieving the establishment of Section Twelve of the IWA, the second English-language branch of the IWA, directly out of the publishing offices for *Woodhull and Claflin’s Weekly* in New York City, a profitable newspaper that championed labor reform, feminism, and abolition. However, Tilton also included a proviso making Woodhull keep her knowledge of the affair between Beecher and Tilton’s wife out of the press. When Woodhull did not abide by the proviso, Tilton wrote a biography mocking her life leading to further public scandal and lawsuits. This furor triggered Woodhull’s public speeches advocating free love, which then resulted in Beecher’s criticism of her speeches. Woodhull’s response to the criticism was to further expose Beecher for practicing free love in an adulterous affair with Tilton’s wife. The Beecher-Tilton scandal became national news.

Woodhull’s call for women’s rights and free love was a call to liberate women from their position within the tyrannical practices of marriage without love and marriages that

were arranged. Further, she criticized an economic system that made women dependent on men for daily needs. Historian Amanda Frisken interprets Woodhull's message to mean that "[t]he only way to achieve this goal [liberation] was to give women the educational benefits enjoyed by men, and train them for purposeful economic lives independent of marriage" (39). For Woodhull, education included sexual education that prepared women for understanding "the workings of their own bodies," and "safe and harmonious sexual" relationships (Frisken 40). Woodhull was arrested for speaking openly about sex. Her brazen public performances changed Victorian discourse towards a deeper scrutiny of sex, intimacy, marriage, equal rights, suffrage, and moral behavior.

Art(official) Fact 2.6 The research of historian Lillian Schlissel is shaped by the diaries of women on the westward journey from 1820 to 1870. Her text emerging from these diaries was titled *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey* (1982) and represents a first accounting from an exclusively feminine perspective of this era. The diaries, and Schlissel's commentary, form a testament to the strength of women who completed the journey and established businesses on the frontier. Most reluctantly made the journey, only following a husband's decision. Many women were pregnant during the journey and lost husbands, grown sons, and younger children along the way. The strong women who survived the journey staked land claims, and became the first entrepreneurs in the west

equal to their male counterparts in ways that urban New York women, for example, were not.

Art(official) Fact 2.7 Theatre historian Rosemarie Bank gives a range of statistics for women's wages mid-century. For theater work, the range could be \$30-\$50 a week for both men and women for mid-billing, and \$35-\$100 a week for stars (92-96). Traveling stars could earn as much as \$500 a week. These figures are very high, especially when compared to poverty wages for women doing needle work at \$1.00 to \$3.00 a week. The average male mechanic earned about \$6.00 a week. The cost of Variety Theatre tickets was 10 to 75 cents per seat (Bank; Meade).

Art(official) Fact 2.8 It is Kasson who relates that not only were variety theater and new vaudeville shows representative of the new urban entertainment for women and families, but also that women had become a new class of consumers. These new shifts in where and how women could live in the city also brought on shifts in etiquette manuals. In 1866, these manuals warned women to avoid pausing at shop windows while alone on the street; yet, by 1891 (just a quarter of century later) urban middle-class women in New York were being freely encouraged to shop between Fourteenth and Twenty-third streets. This section of Broadway was known as the *Ladies' Mile* and catered specifically to women's new sense of entitlement to certain public entertainment (Kasson 131).

Imaginings 2. Because so little is known about O'Neil's birth, family, and private life, and because what little is known about O'Neil has to do with her distinction as solo dance performer, she resists categorization as a stereotypical Bowery G'hal, a new suffragist or even a stock actress and dancer. I cannot decide which woman, or combination of women, from those described by historians, she most emulated. Therefore, in this letter, I chose to imagine Kitty as less refined, a raucous teenager similar to a Bowery G'hal. I used the lyrics to Harrigan and Hart songs as a template to create a pseudo Irish-American dialect, while also incorporating my own experiences listening to Irish-born speakers inflections and phrasing.

I am assuming that O'Neil was able to pay for the expensive overland journey to the west coast. Her higher-than-average theater wages allowed her a measure of independence, albeit constrained by public codes of moral behavior and modesty. O'Neil's position as a stock theater employee provided her with the kind of agency Woodhull was suggesting all women embrace.

Nel, Kitty's hotel proprietress, is a western woman of her own means and a survivor of westward expansion. She is an older woman who behaves as independently as O'Neil. I imagined that Woodhull's celebrity would have caught Nel's attention. Women secured the right to vote in Wyoming (the first state to allow suffrage) in 1869. I imagine that these western women did not wish to lose their newly acquired independent

life styles, particularly in light of the advancing population and influx of Victorian social decorum and civility, including the self-effacing attitudes of urban women.

Woodhull's quotation in the letter, "for we must rise from our position as ministers to the passions of men to be their equals," provides an opportunity to manipulate male/female roles and realities in an attempt to imagine the complexity of how they might have played out in O'Neil's daily life (Friskin 39). In this letter, O'Neil is aware that she plays to men in her work, is paid less than the men who work with her, and is denied equal salary; yet, she is also reminded that her high wages are enough to purchase expensive clothing. In her comments about Antonio (Tony) Pastor's response referencing the Ladies' Mile, O'Neil seems near to realizing, yet accepting, that she is, in fact, part of the consumerist abuse of one class toward another.

This awareness of Kitty's was also my own contemporaneous awareness sparked by writing as O'Neil. It gave me pause to realize that merchants as early as the 1890's employed what women desired, namely independence and choice, to sell them a middle-class identity, an identity made culturally apparent as they were encouraged to and began to shop as a means to entertain themselves.

I have four tins from the 1890's that were once used for cold cream and theatrical make-up. One has a photographic image of actress Lillie Langtry (1853-1929) on it. As I look at them now, I see little difference between O'Neil's time and my own. Then as

now, manufacturers use images of celebrity women to sell products to women. I fantasize about O'Neil using such products and imagining herself as both the beguiling entrepreneur and the free woman; within those imagining she was always still aware of the constrictions of her time.

The late 19th-century free American woman was mobile, unmarried and often gainfully employed, yet was without the right to vote and subject to moral scrutiny for unseemly behavior. More than most Victorian women, free woman risked being labeled as lacking gentility for their enjoyed independence. In this letter, O'Neil does not seem to mind either appellation of "free" or "independent." The right to vote, for O'Neil, is not the issue that brings agency. The right to earn money and choose independence from men supersedes her desire for the right to vote. Like Woodhull, Kitty is more interested in her economic status, and uses her status to exercise expanded free choice. One example of free choice she exercises is to travel un-chaperoned. This letter then imagines her travel adventure as both a result of Kitty as an independent income earner and free woman.

Working Under The Influence: Kitty's Cultural World Of Theater

Dear Kitty,

What an exciting letter! I enjoyed reading about your trip west. I am curious about your performances when you arrived back in New York City. Odell, who compiled annals of New York stage performances, notes that you were billed as a dancer and used

the name Kitty, instead of Kathleen (Meade) after 1870. What kind of dancing did you learn, and from whom? What did your dancing look like and sound like?

When you returned from San Francisco, you began singing and dancing with Ned Harrigan and Tony Hart. Did you do some sort of Minstrel dancing or Irish dance in their shows? In one of their songs, Such an Education has My Mary Ann (1878), they mention, “a reel or jig or shuffle in the sand” (Moloney 2006). Were they writing about you? Please, if you can, explain the difference between jig and clog dancing. Did you compete in dance contests against African dancers and against men? Are you really a Champion Jig dancer as the tune suggests?

Thank you, for answering my many questions. I cannot wait to read your next letter,

Jean

Dear Mrs. Denney Grotewohl,

It is good that I understand your query to be enthusiastic and with similar instances of notice to education for otherwise I may rebuke your impertinence. Such questions and all at once are beyond polite conversation. Alas, you cannot see what I have done upon the gaslight stages, and so I endeavour, once more, to impart such details of my terpsichorean inventions.

I met both Ned Harrigan and Tony Hart in San Francisco. They were each clever comics, very lively, and both good music makers and dancers. Both possessed that distinction of Irish humour that is self-effacing and satirical. They were keen observers of class as well as deportment and manner of speech and used such for their libretti.

They were Minstrel men, having learnt the art of blacking up and the naygur parlance, but it was the Irish they lampooned first, (as the saying goes, 'tis a bad hen that will not scratch herself,) then the negroes, then the Italians and German-Dutch. Ned was genius with words and Tony for making dreadful mouths and countenances, imitating people right down to the breath of them (Dormon 21).

Before and after the war between the states actors were blacking up, for it was making the people laugh. In truth, the war changed the stage for after there were more Zip Coons than Jim Crows, and you could scarce tell if the players were white or black, male or female. The ragged negroes laughed just as much as the newsboys during and after the war. The Mulligan Guards shows were brilliant, having the Skidmore blacks falling on the heads of all the Paddies and Brigids at their ball! Ned was making fun of us all, you see. It was no easy task to keep up with the working people's appetite for theatre. In every fortnight the features of each theatre company would reassemble into a new conglomeration of the same actors moving from comedy to comedy. Each visage black then white, then black again, no matter what, we all just kept working.

I did see negroe dancers in the Five Points and at the piers and markets. I had much admiration for negroe dancers but n'er learnt a step from them. It was my Mother who learnt me to dance and Ned Harrigan. It was Ned that insisted that I stay in my tracks and not go skating around the stage. He himself could dance on a plate. (Brennan 80). I used to wear wooden soled shoes to beat out rhythms on the stage and I was told by some newly landed Irish that in the old days such wooden shoes were made for ladies in Ireland (Brennan 81). Jigs and clogs are names for specialty dances. I was a

specialty dancer in the olio for Pastor and for Harrigan. I sang The Gallant Sixty-Ninth in pants and danced! My last olio with Ned and Tony was in The Mulligan Guard Ball.

After Tony left, Mr. Harrigan took up with Mr. Braham and moved to the Theatre Comique. I worked my specialty dances alongside my first husband, Mr. Harry Kernell, and his brothers at Miners and Pastor's. After Astor Place, we left Ned to chase the codfish aristocracy closer to Broadway. My dancing was of a certain precision. Mr. Miner insisted that all his ladies be of a particular pulchritude and constitution both; one that together could withstand the shower of vegetables. I set to being precise and neat. I borrowed from the negroes the use of the heels to change the patterns of the musical rhythm while also remaining submissive to the familiar timing of Irish jigs. I could dance on a coin.

I saw Jimmy Bradley dance in the sand and thereafter commenced with my own sand jig. The sand jig had to be done on the toes and use slides instead of shuffles to dig and cut sound from the floor. It was dreadfully difficult to make the batters double or triple quickly as tapping was impossible. I preferred the straight jigs to negroe jigs for sand jigs.

The tune you mention was written by a musician in Boston and, please forgive me, but his name escapes me. And Such an Education has My Mary Ann was also penned for me:

*My Mary Ann's a teacher in a great big public school,
She gets one thousand dollars every year,
She has charge of all the children, you'd never find a fool,
For Mary gives them all the proper steer.
Oh! she's studied Greek and Latin, real French and Timbuctoo,*

*German, Spanish, Turk and Hindoostan,
Portuguese, Irish and Jerusalem Hebrew,
Such an education has my Mary Ann.*

*Chorus:
She's a darling, she's a daisy,
She's a dumpling, she's a lamb;
You should hear her play the pi-an-a,
Such an education has my Mary Ann.*

*My Mary Ann's a lady, no contemptible coquette.
When I see her sure my heart goes in a drame;
She is thoroughly conversant with the art of etiquette,
And at cards she'd beat old Hoyle himself a game.
Oh, she'd play you whist or cribbage, forty-five or casino,
And she'd dale the cards like any gamblin' man,
Poker or peanuckle. or Sanky oh Pedro,
Such an education has my Mary Ann.*

-Chorus

*My Mary Ann's a dancer in the art of terpsichore,
You would see her forward four and alamandi;
She'd break up all the lumber you'd put down on the floor,
Such a heavy stepper is my Mary Ann.
Oh, she'd dance you the mazourka, a polka or quadrille.
Heel or jig, or shuffle in the sand, schottische or the German,
You couldn't keep her still,
Such an education had my Mary Ann.*

*-Chorus
(www.traditionalmusic.co.uk)*

*I like to think Ned was thanking me with that song, flattering me and the many other free
workingwomen in America. It is with deepest conveyance of affection that I measure my
life and my place upon the stages of New York City for I have been made a useful balm
for the toil-weary souls who provided my emolument for such a small defiance as jig.*

I wish to end this correspondence with lines from Walt Whitman, my favorite. I am

delighted you imagine me and remember me. Thank you. And am yours,

Kitty

Theatre Comique, New York, 1879

What do you think endures?

Do you think the great city endures?

Or a teeming manufacturing state? or a prepared constitution? or the best built steamships?

Or hotels of granite and iron? or any chef d'oeuvres of engineering, forts, armaments?

Away! These are not to be cherish'd for themselves;

They fill their hour, the dancers dance, the musicians play for them;

The show passes, all does well enough of course,

All does very well till one flash of defiance.

The great city is that which has the greatest man or woman;

If it be a few ragged huts, it is still the greatest city in the whole world. (Leaves of Grass 1867, 174)

Art(official) Facts 3.1 to 3.9 and Imaginings 3

The following comments reflect histories and imaginings about Kitty O'Neil's existence within the world of theatre during the 19th century in America.

Art(official) Fact 3.1 It was Irish men who competed, and often clashed, with free blacks in the north and with slaves in the south for menial labor and wages (Ignatiev 117). The depiction of Irish men and women as close to simian in their looks suggests Anglo-Americans regarded them as similar to Africans, a derogatory portrayal that helped to segregate them as a lower class or as unskilled laborers. Working-class Irish were so maligned that alternately African Americans were called "smoked Irish" and Irish were called "niggers turned inside out" in both the antebellum and reconstruction

periods (Ignatiev 41).

With both ethnic groups having coexisted in the lower class of society since colonial times, African and Irish relationships changed mid-19th century. Both were depicted in cartoons that brought forward growing nativist concerns about miscegenation, labor unrest, and abolition. Roiling trouble in the labor class increased as Irish immigration increased, particularly in urban areas. According to Ignatiev, new Irish immigrants of the 1840's and 1850's established themselves as white Americans by systematically using labor organization to secure white-only occupations, such as domestics and stevedores. This forced free blacks from trades in which they were already working to the lowest form of more menial wage-earning situations. The tensions that built up in trying to overcome what began as stereotyping African and Irish ethnicities as equally uncouth, unskilled, and unintelligent finally erupted in a series of labor riots throughout the 1830's and into the 1860's from Philadelphia to New York.

Ignatiev quotes African American abolitionist Frederick Douglass to explain:

Every hour sees us elbowed out of some employment to make room for some newly-arrived emigrant from the Emerald Isle, whose hunger and color entitle him to special favor. . . . For aught I see they adjust themselves to their stations with all proper humility. If they cannot rise to the dignity of white men, they show that they can fall to the degradation of black men. (Douglass, 1853, quoted in Ignatiev 111)

While Ignatiev claims that Irish pursued their "whiteness" intentionally and strategically using labor as a foothold to climb upward in the social order, other scholars believe that Ignatiev's evidence is not convincing (Nowatzki 164). Cultural studies scholar Robert Nowatzki makes clear that the social, cultural, and economic factors at

play in anti-black racism and violence during this time period were distributed throughout multiple classes and geographic locations, among ethnic immigrants and native, non-dark skinned and non-European Americans alike.

Art(official) Fact 3.2 Mick Moloney, a native of Limerick, Ireland researched and recorded Harrigan and Braham melodies and lyrics from popular productions mid- to late 19th-century. He believes one song, *Such an Education has my Mary Ann*, was written in tribute to O’Neil’s singing and dancing. In many songs the term *nigger*, spelled *naygur* by Harrigan and Hart to affect an Irish accent, was common in 19th century vernacular, and appears often in lyric sheets. Even in its day, the term was derogatory, but nonetheless ubiquitous. In his notes for the recording *McNally’s Row of Flats* (2006), Moloney states that he sings the songs as written, but has taken small liberties “making very slight changes to some of the lyrics” (28). He explains that this is a natural process of how “all songs in living traditions change over time” (Moloney 28-29). While Moloney defends himself by claiming to be less offensive to today’s listeners, he goes on to assume that “Harrigan was a man very sensitive to social norms and I have no doubt whatever that were he alive today he would not use or condone such language in public performance” (29). Moloney imagines Harrigan to be sensitive to disparaging language. What Moloney fails to acknowledge is that this imagining and choice are a privilege afforded him as practitioner of Irish American music and curator of his own sense of past performances to which he feels connected. As I evoke my own privilege by curating O’Neil’s past and its connection to my own experience, I feel she could have, like any performer in front of a live audience, varied her use of vernacular language in accordance

with the context, venue, and audience. In other words, I imagine her playing to the audience and playing up such ubiquitous terms as “naygar” in order to remain popular.

Art(official) Fact 3.3 Theatre historian James Dormon tells us that the team of Ed (Ned) Harrigan and Tony (Cannon) Hart “achieved a degree of popularity unmatched by any other individual performers or repertory companies of the day” (21). He goes on to report that it was “Hart, perhaps the most popular character actor working [who]. . . was a key element in the success of the company” (Dormon 21). Harrigan and Hart were known for “their walkarounds, their jigs and clogs . . . Harrigan’s trembling tenor and Hart’s tender falsetto and above all their joyous and extravagant clowning” (Moloney, 2006). It is important to emphasize that Harrigan and Hart each were singers, dancers, and banjo players.

Kitty’s artistic ecology, therefore, included three minstrel men: Harrigan, Hart, and Pastor. The performing of Tony Pastor, considered archivally as the father of vaudeville, included blackface minstrel routines in 1846, but he was chiefly a comic singer (Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, 2007, “Tony Pastor”, 2). Though Harrigan performed a great deal of Minstrelsy before the Civil War, the Harrigan and Hart team came together with O’Neil in the 1870’s, after the Civil War. It was at this time that the practice/performance of Minstrelsy showed less connection to its African-American source material than during the antebellum period. This lessening of African-American based source material began to deeply reflect a transformation of stage conventions for Irish-American practitioners. For example, Harrigan and Hart as performers, and later Harrigan and Braham as a musical team, signify a shift from Black-

face Minstrelsy toward Irish American Minstrelsy. According to American historian Noel Ignatiev, the songs of Harrigan and Braham represent a closing phase of assimilation for Irish immigrants from “white negroes” to members of the “White Republic.” After Harrigan and Braham’s time, a transformation of Minstrelsy towards American musical theatre performance began to take place with many of the historical forms weaving together into a new tapestry. For Ignatiev, shifting theatre performance and its Irish immigrant actors provides evidence for when the Irish become American and no longer minstrels or white negroes.

Art(official) Fact 3.4 O’Neil mentions two characters from early and later Minstrelsy to describe the context in which she works, Jim Crow and Zip Coon. The image of Jim Crow, the original minstrel character created by Daddy Rice in 1829, lampooned a black livery porter who was simple and harmless, albeit musical and creative (Winter 251). As minstrelsy shifted to reflect popular culture after the Civil War, Jim Crow remained as a stock character, but was joined and sometimes replaced by a new character, Zip Coon. Different from the bumbling simpleton Jim Crow, Zip Coon was a black, urban, northern dandy, cunning, and potentially dangerous. Zip Coons played a part in Harrigan and Hart’s *The Mulligan Guard Ball* (1879) at a time in which O’Neil was working in the ensemble. In this show, Zip Coons of the Skidmore neighborhood guard and the Mulligans, the Irish guard of the same neighborhood, each reserves the use of a hall for a party on the same date. The owner of the hall settles the dispute, and avoids a fight with razors, by reserving the upstairs for the Skidmores and the downstairs for the Mulligans. The raucous dancing of the African Americans during

the tandem events causes them to drop through the floor on top of the Irish. The physical comedy of this moment is easily imagined for a Victorian popular audience; however, from the viewpoint of this century the action contains potential double entendre with cultural, political, and/or racial meanings. Unlike performers such as Moloney, I question if we really can know whether the humor of the falling Skidmores was simply physical comedy alone or crafted by Harrigan and his cohorts to contain sophisticated, multiple meanings.

Art(official) Fact 3.5 Social historian Eric Lott uses the terms *love* and *theft* to describe a dialectic of expropriation and re-presentation of black culture for popular consumption in minstrelsy. White fascination with black culture, and attempts to both control and repress it, says Lott, were due to both an admiration for and fear of its potency. Performance of black dialect, dance, song, and music served to intensify real life conflicts among working Americans and their ideologies of democracy, industry, and social order. The longstanding practice of minstrelsy, from 1830 to 1920, and the longstanding mix of ethnic African and Irish people within the working classes who produced and consumed minstrelsy, make a succinct description of its processes of cultural practice and appropriation impossible. Both African and Irish cultures were at work *loving* and *thieving* from one another in the creation and perpetuation of minstrelsy as a form. Lott states:

We merely ought to be clear about the enormous complexity of this process in which partly shared, partly black cultural practices were circulated as authentically black, with whites profiting outright to the extent that they were in fact black, while obstructing the visibility of black performers in any case. (39)

In her letter, O'Neil first says that she learned to dance from her mother, then from Ned Harrigan, and later she both denies learning from "negroes" yet admits to "borrowing" how they use their heels to change her rhythm patterns while dancing. Her statements confirm what Lott asserts, that white performers had greater access to the consumer market and remuneration for performing "American" cultural forms of music and dance specifically as blackened, white Americans posing as African Americans. I agree with Lott, that much of Minstrelsy's materiality (steps, songs, tunes) was generated in both Irish American and African American communities while white, Irish Americans like Harrigan, Hart, Brahams, and O'Neil dominated the stage occluding greater participation by black performers.

O'Neil's response reflects an historic confluence of African and British Isles amateur music making and dancing which began in America as soon as settlement was established, a confluence that has historically put white performers in the archive more often than blacks. A few highlights of that history allow for Minstrelsy to be understood as emerging out of this confluence. However, it must be remembered that the fiddle, banjo, and social dance practices of Africans in the colonial era are pieced together through public documents of the dominant society. These primary sources which may or may not fully record slave culture, include town and court records and newspapers. African American musicologist Eileen Southern interprets such sources in her *Music of Black Americans* (1983) revealing both the special status of slave musicians and how burgeoning Colonial social culture depended upon them (27-30).

While skills were hardly encouraged among slaves beyond those needed for service, there is remarkable evidence that many slaves were valued for their music making, provided it was suitable to the dominant culture (Southern 25-62). According to Southern, musician slaves were reliable (available on demand), skilled and cheap. Southern offers the equivalent of colonial classified advertisements for the sale of slaves with special talents for fiddling.

Southern also notes three important ideas that are critical to Minstrelsy's retention of African performance: 1) Although there were varied West African nations that made up slave populations, they "shared enough features to constitute an identifiable heritage for Africans in the New World" (21); 2) The importance given to music and dance in Africa "was reflected among black men in the colonies" through their participation in every expression of music and dance in colonial culture (Southern 21); and 3) as a social diversion, dancing was the preferred activity among all classes, north and south, and these included country dances from the British Isles (Southern 44). Dancing schools were particularly popular in the south and itinerant dancing masters and musicians who supported them included "professional emigrants from Europe, native professionals, 'gentlemen amateurs,' as well as amateurs among the lower classes, and musician-domestics—both indentured servants and slaves, black and white" (Southern 27).

The dialectic of African-American and British Isles performance happened in both rural and urban centers. This reciprocal "exchange" between performances offered the opportunity for slave musicians to develop their skills more formally with increased exposure to European concert music. The reciprocal influence is evidenced as early as

1774 when traveling Englishman Nicholas Cresswell witnessed, “a special type of lively jig called by some the ‘Negro Jig’” danced by colonists in what was then urban Maryland cities (Southern 45-46). Southern uses this quotation from Cresswell to describe this type of music:

Betwixt the country dances they have what I call everlasting, Jigs. A couple gets up and begins to cut a jig (to some Negro tune). Others come and cut them out, and these dances always last as long as the Fiddler can play” (46).

Minstrelsy’s early performers claimed source material as coming from direct contact with the music and dance practices of plantation slaves. The slaves, however, were already in contact with lower class Irish immigrants and indentured servants who worked alongside them in the fields from the Colonial period onward (Nowatzki, 2006). Kitty O’Neil’s experience of Minstrelsy is typical of the latter half of the 19th-century when variety performers learned their craft from stock Minstrelsy performance not the “root” sources coming from the slaves. O’Neil likely learned her show vocabulary from established stage conventions that, while they continued to reference the form’s root sources, they did so unwittingly (Winans 418-419).

Of all the material evidence available for researching O’Neil’s experience of Minstrelsy, the banjo, along with Minstrel sheet music provide information that most completely infer what Minstrel dancing could have looked like. The banjo, an American instrument based on African instruments, similar to Gambia’s *akonting*, was created and played by slaves in the U.S. as early as 1737ⁱⁱ (<http://www.shlomomusic.com>).

Banjo player and researcher Robert Winans' 1976 history of Minstrel banjo technique leads to many clues concerning which American dance traditions could further inform us about O'Neil's repertoire. Winans conducted extensive fieldwork interviewing black banjo players in Virginia and West Virginia from the 1970's to the present. By also examining manuals and instruction books of the minstrel era that discuss, "old-time brushless frailing," Winans connects this Minstrelsy technique with African-American and African instrumental styles. The same frailing techniques were prevalent among slaves who exclusively played fretless banjo until the 1830's (Winans 416-418).

Frailing involves a percussive and syncopated manner of playing, both hallmarks of African music making. The style is rhythmic, involving no chords. Instead there is a "succession of single notes" with syncopated "rapping" or "knocking" of the instrument (Winans 416-418). Thomas or "Daddy" Rice, considered the father of Minstrelsy, describes in his manual of 1858 that the playing of prominent minstrels Joel Sweeney and Dan Emmett featured frailing (Winans 412). Sweeney learned to play banjo directly from the slaves on the family plantation (Arthur Woodward quoted in Winans 417). Dan Emmett traveled as a musician with a circus near West Virginia when, in 1840, he came into contact with a roustabout, "a very ignorant person, and 'nigger all over' except in color" who taught him how to play the banjo (Nathan quoted by Woodward in Winans 426). Could the musician Emmet encountered have been a backcountry Cracker, a transplanted Borderer from around the Irish Sea, known to have settled in Appalachia at the turn of the 18th century? If so, the confluence of racially and culturally mixed music making that emerged as minstrel banjo pre-dates the first minstrel shows of the 1820's.

Winans further makes a keen argument convincingly connecting authentic Minstrel banjo music and technique to the preferred playing techniques of *frailing* and *clawhammer* on the preferred instrument of the fretless style of banjo practiced by Appalachian players past and present. He shows how these techniques on this instrument could be found emerging in both white and black music traditions of the southeastern mountain regions. However, Winans discovered a problem regarding Emmet's claim that he learned to frail Minstrel-style banjo from a circus roustabout in 1840. For Winans, the dates for the music's introduction in white, mountain communities can only be substantiated as far back as 1870 and there is no concrete, documented evidence to support an earlier date as claimed by Emmet. Again, the historical archive leaves much to the imagination.

What does clearly remain as historical fact is a continued preference for single note succession and frailing technique among contemporary players of the unique traditional music associated with these earlier areas and musicians. What is also of importance is that transmission of these musical styles continues as oral tradition despite the availability of musical transcription and tablature. How music is transmitted among musicians and how oral transmission contributes to best practice of these musical traditions is taken up in subsequent Chapters and discussed by participants in this dissertation.

Practitioners of what can be considered the new American music emerging within the 1700s era plantations were both black and white, and the music itself was under the influence of both African and Irish/British Isle's traditions. Later, both black and white performers, therefore, practiced minstrelsy with the five-string banjo becoming an

emblem for the genre. While tenor, or four-string banjo, traveled to Ireland mid-19th century, with its missing string better adapted to Irish repertoire, the five-string banjo remained a part of American music, particularly in Old-time music traditions of the south and Appalachian region in particular. Interestingly, the contemporary stereotype of Southern Mountain musician is more likely an image of a white boy than a black African slave. So embedded in our cultural conscience is Minstrelsy's blacked-up white man that an image of a black banjoist is not part of popular culture today, and perhaps was not even 100 years ago. This does not mean that black players did/do not exist. Rather, as Lott explains, white players who accessed the stage and profited through the practice of minstrel music "obstructed" popular culture's view of black American music, black American banjo players, and the fretless banjo. Conversely, Winans reports that when he asked banjo players in black communities in the 1970's why there were few black banjo players at that time, the answer was:

"... that up to around fifty years before, there had been an active banjo/fiddle music scene in black communities to provide music for the local dances, and when the dances to which that music was appropriate themselves finally went out of fashion, there was no longer any call for the musicians to play. So it was the demise of the dances that led to the decline in the old-time music."
(<http://launch.dir.groups.yahoo.com/group/BlackBanjo/message/14272>)

Art(official) Fact 3.6 O'Neil worked and likely lived in the vicinity of the notorious Five Points district in New York City. This district claims to be the place where free, black man William Henry Lane, or Master Juba, is said to have learned to do an Irish jig. Juba was a rival of many white dancers who participated in contests for public entertainment. Juba toured England and Ireland in the 1840's and was popularized

by Charles Dickens (Lott 112-113). Historian Rosemarie Bank also mentions African Americans dancing in markets as part of Baker's popular 1848 play *New York as It Is* (89). One year after Baker's play began tensions between classes over theatre access confirm a division in the entertainment industry. However, these tensions also make clear just how important attending theatre performance was for the average New Yorker in 1849 and further points to the influence these activities might have had on O'Neill's performances, particularly her continued close contact with both African American neighbors and theatrical performers in lower Manhattan venues or perhaps her touring out of town to play in more "respectable" venues.

According to American social historian John Kasson, the Astor Place riot in 1849 signaled a division of high and low theater by way of the spaces, content, and constituency that produced and consumed the performances. The Astor Place riot cemented this division? of upper and lower theatre as well as high and low art (see Chapter III, page 18). In upper, or higher Manhattan, theatregoers wore their dress coats while in lower Manhattan the working-class could wear more informal attire as they watched Minstrelsy and Variety (Kasson 228). Given the divide of the Astor Place riots, I believe Kitty remained an opportunist: She toured to decent theatres in which Variety performers played when out of town, and kept to the most respectable theatres and ensembles possible while at home in lower Manhattan.

Art(official) Fact 3.7 O'Neil's phrases, "He could dance on a plate," and "I could dance on a coin," are gleaned from Irish historian Helen Brennan's work *The Story of Irish Dance*. Brennan's work is an invaluable reference as it is specifically full of the

voices of dance practitioners in their own words. Brennan has done extensive field interviews over a long period of time in all parts of Ireland, and she speaks Irish. The phrases O'Neil borrows to describe good and bad old-style Irish dancing are from Brennan's interviews, one of which confirmed the use of clogs by Irish women for dancing in 1880 (80-81).

Art(official) Fact 3.8 O'Neil references Jimmy Bradley in her letter, crediting him with the idea of sand dancing. Though Bradley was billed as "the champion jig and clog dancer of the world" Meade tells us that O'Neil was the first woman to perform the *sand jig* in 1876 (17). Unfortunately, even though Douglas Gilbert in his history of vaudeville (1940) describes the sand dance as performed by Jimmy Bradley in 1877, he does not describe O'Neil's dancing in any detail. While Meade calls O'Neil a jig and clog dancer, it is Gilbert who asserts that "[p]robably the greatest sand jigger of vaudeville was Kitty O'Neill [sic] who flourished in the beer halls during the seventies [1870's] and eighties [1880's]" (Gilbert quoted in Meade 17). Meade interprets Gilbert's assessment of Bradley to help the reader imagine how O'Neil too may have moved as sand dancer.

Bradley moved on the balls of his feet in shuffles and slides, shifting and digging in the sand with sharp, staccato sounds, doubled and tripled easily (Meade 17). Interestingly, dissertation research participant Niall O'Leary explains that when he dances to O'Neil's famous tune in Floridian sand, he finds it difficult to dance contemporary Irish dancing steps. He notes that it is particularly difficult to generate adequate sound from the movement in order to be heard over the music (O'Leary, Niall.

Telephone interview. 12 January 2011). If with conventional amplification it is hard for a contemporary dancer to be heard over acoustic music, I wonder how and what O'Neil danced and if the news boys in the audience or the band on stage, for that matter, could hear her with no amplification at all?

Art(official) Fact 3.9 I have read printed digital copies of original sheet music for *The Gallant Sixty-Ninth* (1875), *The Nerves* (1865), and *Sweet Mary Ann* (also known as, *Such and Education Has my Mary Ann* (1878), all sung by Kathleen (Kitty) O'Neil and written by Harrigan and Braham. I have heard them played on piano and sung by a colleague; in each case I noticed that big chords and rhythms are shockingly loud and simple. Again, I think this is due to the nature of non-amplified music being played in a rather raucous environment. The rhythm and volume of the piano accompaniment would serve to keep the ensemble in unison.

Imaginations 3. The O'Neil of this letter is in between cultures, races, and genders. She remains unknown, a pattern of probabilities for art practices and social facts. The voice of Kitty O'Neil in this letter is uneven. She is neither Bowery G'hal nor genteel lady, neither Irish nor American, neither disenfranchised nor privileged. She quotes Irish humor and enjoys Whitman's poetry. She works close to the codfish aristocracy, yet returns to the Bowery. She is ensemble player and solo specialist. She sings "naygur" and says "negro." She is singer and dancer. She is "a daisy," as Harrigan's song about her says, but wears pants like a soldier.

It is in this letter that I feel close to Kitty. In my dance improvisations, I feel my Irish and my American roots. I feel the long-standing influence of African culture in my

American roots. In the 119 years since O'Neil's death, minstrelsy's appropriation and expropriation of African culture has embedded itself deeply in the movement expressions of Americans. Like O'Neil, the expressions I have absorbed are indirect, and impossible to trace genealogically. What O'Neil and I share is a love for and thievery of the particulars that contribute to and constitute an ever emerging, ever changing definition of American culture(s). I do not assume that O'Neil would be sensitive to today's social norms. Conversely, my imaginings are likely not satisfactorily sensitive to the social norms of her time. Her norm seems to have been her work, and her work was in theater from 1862 to 1888, twenty-six years.

I have imagined O'Neil to be more concerned with earning an income than concerned with race or abolition or politics. Her return to solo work after working with Harrigan and Hart may have been motivated by many possible attitudes. She may have wished to separate herself from continued racial humor after emancipation. She may have been asserting control of her own dance inventions and their presentation. Historian Jillian Rodger points out that entertainers of the era had agency; they had more personal control over their own wages, bookings, and contract allegiances than perhaps contemporary performers do (29-35).

During this 1890's era, many managers doubled as entertainers and as entrepreneurial venue operators. It is precisely at this time in history that entertainment as an industry began to gain the attention and investment of business people (20). Rodger further notes that women held a unique status within this mix of players/owners (33, 35). Kitty O'Neil, as I imagine her, is an excellent example of the female player's versatility

as both singer and dancer, flexibility as both soloist and chorus member, and independent wage earner. The potential for O'Neil to direct and control her own life extended to few Victorian women outside of the theatre industry.

The chords for her song, *Sweet Mary Ann*, feel big and loud to me. When I heard the tune and song played live, I imagined, for the first time, how others may not have been able to ignore O'Neil's presence if she were framed by the *forte* dynamics of her sheet music. I also felt sheepish and more like a voyeur than researcher. Then I thought of her speech and cringed knowing she may have used the word "nigger," for example. The removal of the word *nigger* from the performance of period songs is particularly loaded, given that race was indeed a key ingredient of the theatrical workings, popularity, and success for Harrigan and Hart.

Harrigan and Hart lampooned Irish, African, and every other immigrant stereotype within the context of the daily grind. I believe that Moloney's erasure of the word "nigger" with the added assumption that Harrigan's sensibilities would agree with 21st century political correctness, perpetuates the reification of a racially tolerant Irish America culture mid-century when recorded actions of the past contest such a portrayal. Perhaps Moloney makes this choice because, as he explains, he has experienced such choice making within the tradition of Irish music/song-making where individual music makers do change tunes, songs, even dances, based upon preference or need. The ability to make these choices comes from what Moloney names Living Tradition, implying that content and materiality of performance within a tradition is justifiably shifted and manipulated according the aesthetic choice of the performer. Neither Moloney nor I

know the specific intentions of performers of the past, nor can we as researchers or performers avoid personal interpretation of a past. To interpret the past is to use the past. Using the past enlivens both the present and a past, particularly when we clarify whom, how, when, and what we are interpreting.

Why Write Letters To A Dead Dancer?

I performed my assumptions and imaginings about O'Neil as letters because I wish to understand O'Neil as a female, American percussive dancer like myself and I wish to experience and validate her non-discursive presence in, and contribution to, the dance repertoire I am privileged to practice. Writing letters becomes my vehicle for creating a local and personal historiography, as well as opening a space in which a rigorous merger of ideology and performance can move. I am not alone in my curiosities regarding dead dancers or musicians. The dancers and musicians I interviewed, and whose comments make up the next two chapters, also revealed a deep desire to know dancers and musicians from the past for very specific reasons.

In the following chapters, the reader will be introduced to the participants interviewed for this dissertation and will share their descriptions about whom from the past they each would like to visit and why. Some wished to visit with those they did know, but who had passed on. For example, Earl White describes wishing to re-visit Willard Watson to finally master Watson's step *Wring the Chicken's Neck* in which Watson's "legs would just look all twisted and mangled" (White, Earl. Telephone interview. 18 March 2011). Irish *sean-nós* dancers Maldon Meehan and Shannon Dunne both wish to meet Willie Keane (1927-1998). While Meehan muses about why

transmission of Keane's repertoire was unsuccessful for contemporary dancers working within competitive Irish step dance that tried to learn from him before he died, Dunne is intrigued by the complexity and the delight Keane's steps bring her. Others research participants mention being curious about dancers or musicians with whom they were familiar because of a tune or a step in their own repertoire that they inherited. Here, their curiosity was to extend personal knowledge about the repertoire, to see it performed by the originator, to meet them, converse with them, and move alongside them.

Research participant Alicia Guinn wishes to meet Máirtín Beag Ó Gríofa, a dancer from the past who is only marginally in the archive. Máirtín Beag Ó Gríofa was filmed dancing as part of *Atlantean* (1986), a four-part documentary about Western Ireland's maritime history and its links to North African culture by Irish filmmaker Bob Quinn. In Guinn's remarks about Ó Gríofa, she confirms that Irish *sean-nós* dancing and its transmission practices leave much to the living memories of people rather than the codified transcription processes used by institutionalized practices such as competitive Irish dance.

Still others sharing insights in the following dissertation chapters were curious about celebrities and legendary figures from the past, such as William Henry "Master Juba" Lane and the grandiloquent Dance Masters who wandered Ireland in the 18th and 19th centuries with blind harpers or fiddlers as they all danced atop barrels, walls, and rooftops, and made outlandish competitions and boasts. Flatfoot dancer Rodney Sutton wishes to see "what Juba was doing that so impressed so many people, that made him so

famous for his time.” Sutton further muses that “there must have been so many other people dancing similarly” (Sutton, Rodney. Telephone interview. 11 November 2010).

Kieran Jordan, however, is curious about “historical language that’s passed on through bodies” particularly for repertoire from Old-style Irish dance, a form she feels is now endangered. While she admits that individual styles of Irish *sean-nós* dancing may well end with the passing of the practitioner, steps that have been transmitted without interpretation from Old-style Irish dance into the practice of contemporary competitive Irish dance are missing styling from the bygone era. Jordan feels that the contemporary aesthetics emerging from new competitive dance forms no longer necessarily match the older repertoire. She wishes to visit older dancing masters to see and understand if her personal styling and interpretation, as the result of her study of many forms of Irish dance, is compatible with the approach of those who danced many generations before. Ultimately, she wishes to understand movements that could today be seen as “missing links” between eras, styles, regions, and even individual practitioners.

Irish fiddler Tes Slominski wishes to meet and play tunes with Julia Clifford whose repertoire remains Slominski’s favorite. There are phrases that Slominski cherishes from Clifford’s repertoire in which tradition and past practice live. To be with Clifford would confirm for Slominski whether or not she has interpreted Clifford’s remarks and tunes accurately. Further, spending time with Clifford would affirm Slominski’s own attraction to Clifford’s *Slibh Luhcra* repertoire and style of playing. When Slominski talks about this repertoire, she admits to remembering three distinct “pasts”: her past experience learning it from Donal O’Connor; his past experience learning it from Julia Clifford and

his stories about that; and the stories about Clifford's past experience learning it from "the old people" as she relates how, ". . . this is how they played it at home ever and always" (Slominski, Tes. Personal interview. 17 March 2011).

For Kevin Burke, returning to the past is as simple as fulfilling a desire to play with a particular musician, Paddy Killoran, who, in Burke's estimation enjoyed what he calls the "dance factor" and "would hit it pretty quick because . . . I get the impression anyway . . . that that's the way he wanted to play" (Burke, Kevin. Telephone interview. 11 January 2011). By dance factor, Burke means that the musician understands that the music is created as dance music and the musician enjoys playing it in such a way as to engage dancers. Burke's preference for repertoire and players that enjoy playing for dancers also explains his interest in Kitty O'Neil's tune. Burke's fascination with *Kitty O'Neil's Champion Jig* led him to conjecture that it was "written by someone in tin pan alley, and that it's probably a pastiche of an Irish tune; someone's impression of an Irish tune." Burke goes on to say that the tune as impression makes "sense because it is slightly odd, it doesn't follow the normal rules of Irish music" because there are, "too many parts and some of them repeat and some of them don't, and some of the phrases are things you wouldn't hear very often in an Irish tune." In the end, Burke admits that these oddities are what "make it interesting" (Burke, Kevin. Telephone interview. 11 January 2011).

Tap dancer Ann Kilkelly wishes to return to her time spent dancing with Cholly Atkins (1913-2003) because of his story telling, his joy, and his subtlety, all of which go unrecognized for many contemporary dancers, audiences, and scholars. For Kilkelly,

learning the form was inextricably merged with the social context of relating to, talking with, arguing with, and listening to an older generation of men in the form, specifically black men. Kilkelly feels that the living tradition of tap has been kept alive despite the fact that, “people have been trying to kill it for . . . a hundred years. It’s sort of the un-dead (35).” She goes on to explain that by un-dead she means the existence of covert erasure that exists in the non-presentation and non-documentation of the tap dance form. Further, Kilkelly describes how white women sought out the practices of tap by black men of a golden era of jazz or minstrelsy, who then disappeared into obscurity. These women included Brenda Bufalino, Katherine Kramer, and others in the 1960’s and 70’s. Kilkelly describes how both older black artists, and the white women who are responsible for perpetuating their genealogies of dance, are affected by residual sexism and racism, specifically in terms of who chooses what is permanently recorded in performance archives. These archives not only document O’Neil’s era without the inclusion of O’Neil, but also selectively mention only tap dancers deemed important by male historians. Kilkelly’s descriptions of lost artists within the archives gives credence to why discussing how the soft archive of repertoire and its transmission via living traditions is important to understanding past dance, specifically for American percussive dance forms. Kilkelly states:

People keep talking about the *tap revival* . . . like it has to be resuscitated every ten years. I think it’s an ongoing racist attempt to, not by anybody consciously but is sort of in the cultural normative stuff about dance that erases it constantly. So you have to keep quote-unquote *reviving* it. Meanwhile, it’s there anyway. People are still doing those things. It’s just that whoever sets [himself or herself] up as the guardian of public culture and virtue [does not] recognize it. Or it’s not taught in a certain way. So living tradition for me . . . is dancing *and*

understanding what I am a part of when I do it and communicating that. I just don't want to get up there and dazzle people with footwork. (Kilkelly, Ann. Telephone interview. 28 October 2010).

As Kilkelly narrates, dancing repertoire and understanding one's connection to a history of that repertoire is an important and vital part of transmission for all of the forms of percussive dance practiced by participants interviewed for this dissertation. Invariably, as each participant began to discuss who from the past each wished to meet and dance with, each practitioner also began to explain his/her experiences of transmission of repertoire, transmission of legacies of past practitioners, and definitions of what it means to live in a tradition and transmit a living tradition through practice. For this reason, I chose to focus my research on participant definitions of living tradition, how the dance happens for each, and when the dance happens. In these definitions, how the past lives in the present in meaningful ways for these participants is revealed.

While I may never know what Kitty O'Neil danced, in the following dissertation chapters I link how specific contemporary practitioners experience the transmission of past repertoire and how that repertoire is practiced in the present. In so doing, I also map out how O'Neil too may have learned, inherited, imitated, innovated, created, shared, expressed, and performed her own best expression of American percussive dancing. More importantly, the processes of transmission described by participants in this dissertation indicate that O'Neil, by nature of her participation in American percussive dancing, is one of many dancers responsible for contributing to and perpetuating a contiguous repertoire for one or more individual traditions of American percussive dance.

Notes

ⁱ A *carte de visite*, according to the American Museum of Photography, is a portrait of a person mounted on a small card measuring 2 ½” by 4”. Popularized by its inexpensive and sturdy construction, the *carte de visite* became the new visiting card for the Victorian era beginning circa 1854. After its introduction to New York in 1859, the *carte de visite* became wildly popular in the United States. See <<<http://www.photographymuseum.com/histsw.htm>>>.

ⁱⁱ While the banjo is undoubtedly of African origin, recently its ancestry has been documented as from West Africa in general to Gambia specifically due to the research of Laemouahuma Daniel Jatta in 2011. See <<<http://www.npr.org/2011/08/23/139880625/the-banjos-roots-reconsidered>>>.

CHAPTER V

DEFINING LIVING TRADITION AS CONTINUOUS YET CHANGING

[A] culture can never be reduced to its artifacts while it is being lived.

Raymond Williams

The life force of taonga [Maori culture] depends not on techniques of animation, but on the living transmission of cultural knowledge and values. What is at stake is not the vividness of a museum experience, but the vitality, the survival of those for whom these objects are taonga. And that depends on intangible cultural property, which lives in performance. It must be performed to be transmitted; this is the source of its life.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett

The epigraph to this chapter, from critical performance studies researcher Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's article "Theorizing Heritage," resonates with me for multiple reasons. While Kirshenblatt-Gimblett is discussing how museum exhibits often attempt to provide a lifelike interpretation of objects, in her example objects from *taonga* Maori culture, she is highlighting that what is at stake is "the restoration of living links to *taonga* that never died" (378). For me, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's comments can be compared to historical records about dance forms from living traditions. What is at stake is the negation of the dance form's contemporaneous existence when an interpretation of its past practices in the recorded archive obfuscate how the form achieved perpetuation through processes of *living* tradition. I find Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's interpretation consistent with my own definition of living tradition in which doing the dance means participating in the social construction of the dance's tradition within its immediate and

changing culture. Participation then means engaging repertoire through imitation and innovation.

The cultural tradition of dancing, therefore, transmits more than the material knowledge of how to do the steps. Doing the dancing communicates aesthetic markers for how to evaluate best practice of dancing as well as what value and meaning that best practice has for the culture as a whole and the specific performers who self-identify as practicing within that culture. However, since evaluative markers may be located exterior to, even while also deeply connected to, the dancing itself and apparent in other related and interrelated aspects of a culture's history, its people, and its values, and since no two practitioners of a living tradition share precisely the same experiences, histories, meanings, or values, it is important to note that practitioners of American percussive dance forms do not use what they experience in each form in the same way. This is particularly true for the American percussive dance forms discussed here since knowledge about what to dance, how to dance, and when to dance is transmitted socially and interpersonally.

This chapter, therefore, will explore the process of transmitting living tradition through anecdotal learning and teaching experiences described and shared by the participants in this dissertation. The dancers quoted in this dissertation self-identify as American percussive dancers, while musicians who were interviewed identify as either Irish traditional or American traditional musicians. Through the voices of both dance and music participants, living tradition is described as a paradoxical process in which practitioners transmit historical and consistent elements of dance and music repertoire

while simultaneously changing that repertoire through improvisation and innovation to suit his/her own individual style and interpretation of the culture, tradition, and expressed form with each performance and enactment. For a review of participant biographies and practices, please return to Chapter III, pages 20-27 where each is listed.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's epigraph opening this chapter also brings the point of view of the practitioner to the researcher's attention. That is to say, for the practitioner, the survival of any meaning inherent in the experience of dancing, both personal meaning and cultural meaning for example, rests entirely within how the performing happens in the present. Likewise, the performing processes that create possibilities for practicing in future also depend upon how meaningful the experience of performing remains for makers/doers as well as receivers/audiences. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's emphasis on the act of performing re-asserts the consequential position of the performer in the tradition's genealogy and its longevity: performing, therefore, becomes a vital location where processes of meaning-making and tradition-making are located. The processes by which the tradition remains both constant and open to change seem contradictory, but this is what is meant when the modifier "living" accompanies the term tradition.

Participants in this dissertation further describe living tradition as multiple processes that signify more than the coexistence of continuity and change as it is learned, taught, and practiced within each tradition. Anecdotes of personal experience represent attempts to describe these processes and what follows in this chapter and chapters V, VI, and VII, is data collected from all nine participants. This chapter focuses on their definitions of living tradition and begins to explicate how learning and teaching repertoire

performs the tradition's past through current practices of learning and teaching, as well as performing. Through learning by imitation and through the emulation of the previous generation's practitioners and/or imitation of their repertoire, current practitioners affirm a living tradition's past, validate a living tradition's present by using agency to choose what and who to imitate or emulation, and confirm and open up future possibilities for improvisation. Improvisation in the form leads current dancers to innovation and with innovation, new repertoire emerges in the tradition.

To help the reader understand how this chapter fits into the context of this dissertation's central thesis, I offer the following overview of the data. In general, there are four basic discussions about how transmission of repertoire performs the tradition's past, present, and future simultaneously. These discussions are reviewed in two chapters to include: how repertoire of a living tradition is constitutive of continuity in the tradition (Chapter V), and how repertoire is a container for creative contributions to the tradition by practitioners and further models best practice for practitioners (Chapter VI). Chapter VI explores how changes in context, where the performance happens and for whom, impact the performer's intent and therefore also shifts what is transmitted and how it is transmitted in the dancing, and, further, how performing repertoire affirms what meaning the tradition's past, as embedded in repertoire, has for each performer. In Chapter VII, participants reveal how dancing repertoire becomes a process by which a performer emulates not just steps, styles, and tunes, but people and moments, memories, stories, feelings, and imaginings about repertoire, social exchange, and human relating.

Continuum Of Experience: Defining The “Living” In Living Tradition

In the Introduction to this dissertation I described what a living tradition is and how it operates in its social context. I also detailed how a living tradition functions in ways that transmit expressive music and dance practices in specific non-public as well as public enactments. Since these enactments are often ephemeral, social exchanges, they are easily omitted from the archive and canon of dance in general. This omission from the canon often means that living tradition is a contested term and means differing things to different participants at differing times. The variations in the term’s meanings emerge from the unique experiences of each individual as he/she practices within the tradition.

Some participants admit not liking the term living tradition or not understanding what it is supposed to convey to those without experience in the tradition and its culture. Irish fiddler Kevin Burke in his interview says, “I assume it means traditional music among younger people who are acknowledging some of the traditional ways” (Burke, Kevin. Telephone interview. 11 January 2011). Yet Burke admits, “I don’t quite get it. You know, I was going to say if dead people do it [laughing] . . . they’re dead, so of course its living if they’re doing it now” (Burke, Kevin. Telephone interview 11 January 2011). Like Burke, American fiddler of Irish traditional music Tes Slominski expresses that living tradition is the best term currently used to describe the phenomenon of “continuous change” within the repertoire (Slominski, Tes. Personal interview. 17 March 2011).

From the descriptions of the research participants, I discovered that performers practicing Irish traditional forms (musicians, dancers, and singers) experience changes within each performance such as small differences in phrasing, styling, lyrics, rhythms, etc., when comparing repertoires of tunes, songs, and dance performances with other practitioners in the tradition. While the differences and changes taken up by practitioners exist when animating the same repertoire, there still remains constancy in shared repertoire, enough similarity across individual practices for changes or differences to remain attached to the tradition over time. Slominski qualifies further exactly why the term living tradition is used to describe change and difference, but how the term seems to fail to describe the phenomenon completely:

[I]t is a way to acknowledge that, yes, people are playing this music, people are eternally variable, what you do from one moment to the next is not going to be the same . . . and as the points of reference change, your points of reference change! What you do might sound the same but it might mean something totally different . . . Having to say living tradition suggests that tradition is dead otherwise . . . and it's not. (Slominski, Tes. Personal interview. 17 March 2011).

In the previous quotation, Slominski, therefore, suggests that the term living tradition is oxymoronic; it attempts to anthropomorphize the tradition so that it appears both dead, of the past, and resuscitated, of the present, when the tradition has neither died nor been fully resuscitated by its practitioners. The modifier living means that the value of a music or dance practice within a living tradition changes as an individual user shifts his/her value and meaning of repertoire with each new experience of that practice from one source, context, point of reference, to another. The repertoire lives with them (practitioners) yet remains attached, however tightly or loosely, to the tradition.

Since the repertoire is most lively as practiced among people who transform and animate it in the doing of it, there exists an inexhaustible variety of experiences given the slightest shift in who, what, where, and when a tradition's repertoire is practiced. Living, as Slominski suggests, means that the repertoire of the tradition is individually valued in unique and personal ways by each practitioner. Living also means that each practitioner exercises personal agency in his/her own valuing processes as each chooses and practices his/her own repertoire from the tradition's cumulative possibilities. The tradition then can be understood not as a stagnant collection of tunes or movements, but rather as a somewhat constant collection of individual interpretations of various tunes and movements accessed in the moment of performance. The tunes and movements give the appearance of constancy because they are shared among multiple practitioners and transmitted over multiple generations, who transform and interpret them in variable ways.

For dancer Shannon Dunne, living tradition means more than the fact that people are still doing a tradition today in ways similar to how it was done in the past. Dunne becomes more explicit when she speaks of her experience with Irish *sean-nós* dancing:

It's funny because I, until very, very recently – like a minute and a half ago [laugh] – thought that I would always say that the term *Living Tradition* [meant] that the people were still doing it. You know, that like, people were going out into the world and doing, and still doing these steps, and still doing *sean-nós* dancing, and they're still, you know, they're doing it. They've learned the steps and they're going to pass them on. But I don't actually think that's necessarily what it means or why it's alive. I think that it's alive because it's being practiced; it's alive because it's being shared and transformed and created by the relationship between people . . . constantly being reshaped and reworked just because of who happens to come together, just because . . . it relies on people interacting. That's where it lives, it actually lives in those spontaneous moments. It can't really be pinned down because the minute you pin it down it's not what it is anymore. (Dunne, Shannon. Telephone interview. 16 September 2010).

Dunne confirms that continuity and change together are activated when current practitioners transform, re-shape, and re-work the repertoire, but in this activation they can also create new repertoire. Importantly, she details that the creation of repertoire relies on spontaneous relating between people familiar with similar, constant repertoire, and she further locates the site of new repertoire creation as emerging within social, interpersonal, exchanges.

Dancer Kieran Jordan confirms Dunne's reflection when she explains that the tradition is living because it is reinvented, reinterpreted, and celebrated when its repertoire is practiced (as Dunne describes), as part of a social exchange between people. Jordan describes the term living tradition this way:

The living part means that these things are not in a museum and they're still being practiced and reinvented and reinterpreted and celebrated by living people here and now. And the tradition part means that they are rooted in something that's passed on in an oral kind of way. So dance teacher to students, or musician to musician. (Jordan, Kieran. Telephone Interview. 16 October 2010).

Jordan also expresses that, "it's important to . . . know your tradition and know your history . . . but to breathe life into it from each individual personality" (Jordan, Kieran. Telephone Interview. 16 October 2010). However, if the individual has agency and can change the materiality of the form as she or he uses it, how can the form in a living tradition remain constant enough to be recognized as a tradition?

With the previous question in mind, it seems a living tradition may be considered paradoxical. Practices within living traditions of dance and music result in improvisations, choreographies, or compositions that are as Jordan says, "of the now . . .

and of something passed on . . . of the today and the yesterday” (Jordan, Kieran. Telephone Interview. 16 October 2010). Practice and/or performance of the form also result in group experiences and, sometimes, common expressions of those experiences emerge to also concomitantly communicate the values and aesthetics of the individual dancer, musician, and performer.

The paradox of a living tradition, therefore, is that it exists as both constant and in flux. Such a paradox can cause conflict and tension among members of the form’s culture and across groups of practitioners who wish to qualify exactly which tunes, songs, and dances are authentic to the culture and/or the tradition, and which are not. This need for clear, authentic qualification is particularly evident for those practicing in the Irish Diaspora. As both research participants Meehan and Burke point out in interviews, those who live within the culture of origin geographically have no need for nomenclature to describe or differentiate a music or dance expression from other cultural practices.

Burke, who grew up in London within an immigrant Irish community, discusses the term living tradition as not a term he heard until emigrating to the U.S. (Burke, Kevin. Telephone interview. 11 January 2011). Meehan, who spent time both studying and living in Ireland, stated in her interview that the term living tradition was a phrase she heard used in the United States only, and not in Ireland (Meehan, Maldon. 28 October 2010). The term living tradition, therefore, seems more useful then for those practicing music and dance of a culture to which they are not native or from which they are geographically removed. Either way, the term attempts to help cultural insiders articulate and cultural outsiders distinguish the importance of informal, social transmission as well

as clarify how repertoire functions in order to transmit practical and aesthetic knowledge despite its simultaneous and paradoxical features of constancy and flux.

Instead of assessing what is or is not authentic or traditional, the nine dancers/musicians in this dissertation choose to discuss their experiences as more or less authentic, specifically as more or less “living traditional-ish” (Guinn, Alicia. Telephone interview. 22 September 2010). Contemporary practitioners interviewed for this dissertation further underscore that authentic practice and performance are relative to the experience of the practitioner/performer and that such processes of aesthetic evaluation are both temporal and personal: one’s repertoire depends on from whom one learns and when, as well as where and how the practitioner performs and creates. Continuity in the tradition, therefore, manifests in relationships throughout a network of social exchanges over time while continually providing shifting examples of practice available for imitation. Change to the tradition emerges from processes constitutive of innovation such as the valuation of improvisation and personal interpretations. Further, according to research participants, continuity and change both emerge from experiences of “personal relating” in which people, or stories about them, are sources for emulation to include an appreciation of the expertise of current dancers/musicians as well as a desire to bring to life the legacies/genealogies of past dancers.

How Repertoire is Constitutive of, and Challenged by, Continuity and Change:

Issues in Learning and Teaching

Clogging and Flatfooting dancers/musicians Rodney Sutton and Earl White continue to describe how doing a living tradition becomes authentic when the tradition

adapts to the current culture and the aesthetic preferences of contemporary practitioners. Additionally, they discuss how experiences become authentic as each practitioner absorbs and makes the tradition his/her own. The tradition gains meaning and viability when its repertoire is practiced, imitated, and adapted by individual practitioners.

According to Rodney Sutton, in order for a living tradition to stay relevant to the present, practitioners “have to be open to the most modern forms [and] . . . interpretations [of it]. It doesn’t mean you have to necessarily like it all that much, but you at least . . . [need to] acknowledge it . . . [as] a part of the tradition” (Sutton, Rodney. Telephone interview. 11 November 2010). Therefore, for Sutton, a modern interpretation of the form does not mean that the past is abandoned and current practitioners of the form do not need to “recreate a specific style or a specific type of dance that was done at a specific [point in] history” in order to be participants in the tradition (Sutton, Rodney. Telephone interview. 11 November 2010).

Sutton further describes his experience of living tradition via two situations. The first is when he observes his daughter Kelsey practice dancing with her generation in the living tradition of clogging; the second is his own dancing with dancers from previous generations. Sutton is keen to observe how perpetuation of the tradition rests in its ability to adapt to new generations of practitioners. He admits that older dancers in the tradition, like him, may not necessarily like contemporary interpretations, but that new ways of dancing are to be respected. This is the process by which the tradition survives. Sutton also discusses the value of older dancers practicing alongside younger dancers when he references Robert Dotson, his own mentor, teacher, and friend. Sutton discusses in his

interview how Dotson's continued practice helps create opportunities to observe the repertoire of a living tradition as a continuum: both older and newer interpretations of the form may be seen at seemingly opposite ends; yet, at the same time each may also be seen as equally valuable to the culture as well as the individual dancers. Sutton, however, is concerned that the simultaneous presence of older and younger dancers is not always visible to those in the community, especially to those who are not deeply involved in the culture. He explains:

But I do think living traditions, you know, have to be open to the fact that . . . people are going to adapt [them] to whatever's popular in their own likes or dislikes. Kelsey [Sutton's daughter] took workshops when she was really young. She was already dancing, though, for the Bailey Mountain Cloggers up at Marshall College and . . . my biggest problem with them is more and more and *more* they continually get farther and farther away from any kind of traditional music, even really fast electric Bluegrass. Now they're doing their clogging routines to the latest hip-hop and everything else. To me . . . I don't mind it and I actually can appreciate some of what they're doing. But when they never do even their most traditional routines to traditional music I think they're losing out on a great opportunity to show the contrast and comparison . . . [I]f you only do the same thing over and over to a particular style of music you lose that variety of contrast. . . . But I think . . . in one way Robert's part of that living tradition because he's old enough now to be keeping that one style that he's always danced still going. . . . [It's] really about can it adapt to [a] . . . modern bend . . . [while also keeping] enough of its traditions that's recognizable. (Sutton, Rodney. Telephone interview. 11 November 2010).

For Sutton, therefore, the paradox of living tradition emphasizes "variety of contrast" through the coexistence of binaries such as old/new, group/individual, or traditional/innovative. Each binary in their relationship of contrast represents possibilities for differing yet equally authentic experience and expression within a living tradition.

Research participant Earl White further discusses how deeply personal the practice of a living tradition can be while also identifying how it is that a collection of individual or singular practitioners within a culture helps to create a living tradition such as Appalachian music and dance in their everyday experiences of the culture. He says:

Yes, I feel I am a living tradition. The Green Grass Cloggers [are] on the brink of having our 40th anniversary, and are still dancing. [That group is] a living tradition. I think anybody who . . . lives a tradition is basically what it's all about. . . . I've played Old-time music, I've been playing for 35 years now, I became a part of a tradition, and when I said earlier I will be playing Old-time music until I die and might die playing Old-time music, that's because I am living the tradition. It's in [my] every day. It's an intricate part of my life. It's inseparable. You can't separate me from that tradition. I am in the tradition; I am part of the tradition. And I think . . . [the] length of time doing it has a contribution to that title. But yeah, for me it's a, as I said, it's inseparable, like it's an everyday part of your life. Like people who go to Appalachia to experience Appalachia versus the people who live there and they are Appalachia. (White, Earl. Telephone interview. 18 March 2010).

White seems to suggest that a living tradition can increase in its value for a practitioner provided the practitioner invests in it. When one “lives” the tradition he/she invests time. For White, an investment of time means duration and intensity, which together allow practice and practitioner to become inseparable. For White, a practitioner takes up a living tradition of music or dance, like he has for 35 years, and invests in it, practices daily; the practitioner literally lives with all of the values embedded in the repertoire as it has been, and as research participant Dunne earlier explained, “shared and transformed and created by the relationships between people” over time in the tradition (Dunne, Shannon. Telephone interview. 16 September 2010).

For the participant practitioners interviewed, the repertoire contains prescriptions for what can be played or danced. However, the repertoire also contains examples of

transcription, how others have transcribed meaning inherent in the repertoire onto one's own practice as he/she adapts and interprets the repertoire. When White says, "I am a living tradition," he is personalizing research participant Jordan's idea that "it's important to . . . know your tradition and know your history . . . but to breathe life into it from each individual personality" (Jordan, Kieran. Telephone interview. 16 October 2010). Both dance practitioners are expressing that there is value in imitating what exists in the repertoire as it has come before in order to know, understand, relate, and shift repertoire of the past into the present.

Transcription of past repertoire into one's current practice ensures that any creative contribution by a contemporary practitioner is informed and transformed in ways that are continuous and related to the tradition, or even as Sutton describes, contrast with tradition. In Jordan's words, transcription allows for repertoire to be "reinvented and reinterpreted and celebrated," in the present (Jordan, Kieran. Telephone interview. 16 October 2010). Practicing the repertoire over time means that the tune or step becomes fully transcribed on the life of and on to the body of the practitioner. For White, to transcribe repertoire onto one's body results in a deep sense of individual meaning for performing and creating repertoire within tradition as the dancer lives it, every day. Over time, personal practice and constant attention to the repertoire yield deep meaning and ultimately unique knowledge of one's personal preferences in practice.

Being conscious of one's personal preferences, and how they change over time, provides critical awareness from which one's personal style, innovation, and ability to create emerge. Since a living tradition's transmission processes advocate transcribing

repertoire onto one's body and into one's life, these artists feel that the repertoire itself is a "teacher" of the form and how to practice it. The process of transcribing repertoire onto one's body can take time and the transcription process moves back and forth between imitating the repertoire of others, discovering personal preferences of one's own, and eventually creating new repertoire.

When dancers imitate repertoire and practice that repertoire, they provide constancy in the form and tradition by doing as other dancers do and have done—in a sense, they are transcribing the history into their bodies. However, the data in this chapter reveal how transmission as imitation is also challenged. In the following three sections, I discuss what I call (1) the "breakdown conundrum" that occurs during learning and teaching, (2) how participant mentors have overcome the "breakdown conundrum," and (3) how practitioners have taught themselves and others to move learned repertoire toward improvisation. Each discussion is titled using phrases from the participants as they describe in their own words the phenomenon of continuity related to change in the repertoire.

Imitation, Learning/Teaching: The "breakdown conundrum"

But it's challenging to teach somebody flat footing. I mean, it takes a lot more time . . . the best way they can learn it is the same old . . . way that people have learned for years – that's going out and getting on the floor with . . . other people that are flat footing and just kind of feel it and watch what they're doing.

Rodney Sutton, research participant

I learned on my own a great deal of the time . . . I learned from watching people on TV, and then I had some formal instruction. . . . But, also, hanging around them and studying them and watching them perform and watching films. So, a lot of that is – I don't have any degrees in dance; I have three degrees in literature

and drama – and the great teachers that I’ve had are people without college educations, almost two to one.

Ann Kilkelly, research participant

I think it’s so interesting because *sean-nós* dancing doesn’t have . . . a certain way of teaching . . . lots of the dancers in . . . *sean-nós* are these older men who have decades and decades and decades and decades of dance experience . . . and so they dance these intricate steps, and they aren’t necessarily . . . the most friendly, welcoming steps for beginners.

Alicia Guinn, research participant

If a living tradition is a collection of personal and cultural practices, learners who wish to participate in the culture and practice of dance and music making are challenged if they do not already have a relationship with that culture and/or its native practitioners. For learners, the challenge includes imitation of the repertoire chiefly by way of watching and copying what they see and hear. I use a slash to combine the terms learning/teaching to emphasize that in these forms both learning and teaching happen as a result of sharing dancing by way of performing and/or doing the dancing. In the social context of this kind of learning, practitioners with experience invariably notice learners and encourage or assist them by dancing beside them or pulling them aside to chat or demonstrate. There is a point, however, in the imitation process, even during a one-on-one exchange, when what I call “the breakdown conundrum” occurs. The “breakdown conundrum” is the moment in the imitation process where learning becomes difficult because the “teacher” does not, as the participants say, “break down” the fully performed dancing into component parts for thorough understanding. The “breakdown conundrum” leaves the learner to identify, for example, weight shifts or transitions on his or her own. The

learner can literally become lost in the translation without help “breaking down” the whole step.

Despite what seems a hopeless learning situation, the participants interviewed here are quick to explain that while it is frustrating not having steps broken down, this lack of detailed explanation can have a positive effect on the dancer, dance form, and dance tradition. The expectation is that the learner will find “a” way to make the dancing make sense differently in comparison to the dancer she is watching. Therefore, the imitation process yields a variety of dance styles and variations within the form’s vocabulary.

Further complicating the “breakdown conundrum” is the fact that each discussion about living tradition presented in this dissertation assumes that individual practitioners will create a personal style and a unique repertoire. Participants point out that this assumption is problematic for beginning dancers and musicians because it is a characteristic, something assumed in each tradition and may not be immediately “visible” to those unfamiliar with the tradition’s culture. For example, Guinn states:

Well I think *sean-nós* in its most ideal, I don’t know . . . the platonic ideal of *sean-nós* dancing, you should be improvising; you shouldn’t be dancing a routine. But, I’ve seen people who are learning [be] really discouraged by that because it’s really hard to do. You’ve got to . . . develop this vocabulary of steps, and it takes years. So I have seen people who are, students who are really discouraged . . . because if they have learned dance before they’ve learned a routine, because that’s what you do. (Guinn, Alicia. Telephone interview. 22 September 2010).

By routine, Guinn is suggesting a formal learning strategy that either comes from or creates a codification of steps for the form. For some forms of tap dance, clogging, flatfooting, and Irish *sean-nós* dancing, there exists little codification of dance material

since learning the dancing historically occurred within social exchanges and celebrations, or by watching then doing, or simply improvising with learned dance rhythms or rhythms heard in the music. For example, experiences of learning the repertoire include learning by watching and listening to music and/or participating in dancing exchanged between practitioners within the culture of origin. This is historically the precedent for learning and teaching in living traditions. To learn in this way remains an essential experience to both learning and teaching both music and dance forms and these modes are labeled “traditional” due to their adherence to oral/experiential sharing and the non-codified nature of the form and its transmission.

For the dancers and musicians in this dissertation, the experiences of learning and teaching are evaluated as either more or less traditional with each evaluation qualified by an acknowledgement of how learning and teaching was achieved in the past as compared to learning/teaching in accordance with each dancer’s present experience. Participants in this dissertation do value learning experiences in one-on-one social exchanges, usually with older practitioners. Such an experience is considered a very “traditional” way to learn, but some dancers in this dissertation have also learned from and teach formal classes and workshops. To teach specific classes formally to groups is a departure from the historical norm for dancers in the traditions discussed in this dissertation.

Musicians in this dissertation have also learned by listening, watching, and playing alongside other practitioners in a traditional manner, but also access and create tablature as well as consult notated collections. For the musicians discussed here, the use of tablature and written collections represents a departure from the historical norm when

transmitting this repertoire for this living tradition of music making. Therefore, in summary, both musicians and dancers in this dissertation learn and teach in ways that represent both “traditional” and “less traditional” transmission processes that operate orally, aurally, visually, and kinesthetically in both social cultural settings and formal pedagogical contexts. This means that transmission processes, like the culture they transmit, are in flux and on-the-move in accordance with its practitioners’ needs and how much access each may or may not have to the culture’s social activities.

The dancers presented in this dissertation in particular feel that learning and teaching the form in more traditional ways, by watching and listening, have advantages and disadvantages for the learner. Research participant Meehan (see pages 20-27 for participant biographies) explains:

[I]t is harder for people to figure out what is happening in *sean-nós* dancing when you’re watching. But it’s also what makes all of these dancers have really unique [styles] . . . like they might even have the same rhythm but they have very different ways of dancing it. (Meehan, Maldon. Telephone interview. 28 October 2010).

In the above quotation, Meehan is referencing an historical absence of codification for movement materials as coupled with the expectation that each practitioner collect, translate, and create a personal repertoire. She feels, however, that this combination of expectations for practitioners has also had a positive impact on the tradition and forged numerous unique expressions within the same dance form. To Meehan, many experienced practitioners in the last generation were not necessarily teachers; yet, they were willing to share what they knew, and did so in the best way they know how. The dancers interviewed for this dissertation, coming from a current generation, also provide

examples of this earlier teaching and learning strategy within the “breakdown conundrum.” Therefore, the “breakdown conundrum” is really two questions:

- 1) How does a performer teach what it is that they improvise when they dance?
- 2) How does one transmit a lifelong collection of intimate experiences that have combined to create one’s personal repertoire, aesthetic, and style in the form?

The following descriptions and quotations are from four different dancers practicing within differing traditions; each expresses and addresses these questions within the “breakdown conundrum” regarding transmission of repertoire as a context for learning and teaching. Each discusses how the dancer experienced the “breakdown conundrum” in his/her history, and each speculates about how the dancer describes best learning and teaching the form in ways that simultaneously value social exchange and improvisation.

When discussing her own experiences learning from dancers native to the culture and/or from a previous generation, Ann Kilkelly (see Chapter III, pages 20-27 for biography) narrates her story of the “breakdown conundrum” in her tap dance experiences with older men such as Honi Coles, Ralph Brown, and Cholly Atkins. She describes:

[T]he guys never, ever, ever broke down stuff for you, they’d get mad. ‘It’s your job to do it, not mine to talk about it!’ . . . here’s the way they teach . . . they’d say . . . they’d put the brim of their hat down and then they’d show you a figure, you know [audible imitation of long, complex tap rhythm] “Now you do it!” *That* was their teaching method: *Now you do it*. And you would repeat it and repeat it and repeat it and repeat it until . . . and they’d show it and show it and show it [laughs] until you picked it up or not. (Kilkelly, Ann. Telephone interview. 28 October 2010).

Dancer Shannon Dunne continues to explain the “breakdown conundrum” by comparing her experience of learning *sean-nós* dance to her experience of learning tap:

[I]t was really close to like the rhythm tap classes or workshops I had done. It was kind of the same thing, somebody standing up in front of a class and [they’d] make a rhythm and then you’re supposed to copy it and know what they’re doing. And the emphasis wasn’t necessarily on even . . . it wasn’t on getting it right, it wasn’t on getting the movement right, it was basically, “Can you make a rhythm that sort of sounds like what I’m doing?” And so, rather than getting anything broken down you’re just immediately relating to it and responding. It’s like the Rosetta stone of, uh, percussive dance [laughter]. You know, like we’re going to take out the translation . . . ready, set, go! (Dunne, Shannon. Telephone interview. 16 September 2010).

Rodney Sutton also provides a provocative image of the “breakdown conundrum” when he describes how he and his fellow dancers in The Fiddle Puppets attempted to learn the Walking Step from dancer Robert Dotson. Here, the group is struggling to discover a movement they can hear, but cannot see when performed by Dotson:

. . . there was a bunch of us – were lying on the floor on our stomachs with our chins on our hands, folded up underneath our chins, and Robert was in the middle and we were like spokes of a wheel coming out and he was in the middle like the hub, or also, people have said and I can see the same image, like the petals of a flower coming out. And Robert in there dancing and we were trying to figure out where this other sound was coming from. And it’s from the Walking Step, and where he’s putting his foot down – and right before he puts his weight down to make the first step and changing his weight from side to side – he’s just dropping his toe like *step flat* on the floor. And um, it happens right before the weight shift. You can *hear* it really easily. (Sutton, Rodney. 11 November 2010).

Alicia Guinn also describes an experience similar to Sutton’s, but in *sean-nós* dancing. However, she has a nearly identical response to the challenge of hearing but not seeing movements:

I’ve had the experience with a Clare dancer of literally getting down on my stomach on the floor to see what it is they’re doing because the movement is so small, and it’s so close to the floor you can’t really see. (Guinn, Alicia. Telephone interview. 22 September 2010).

Irish *sean-nós* dancers Guinn, Jordan, and Dunne all have had exposure to the repertoire of County Clare dancer Aidan Vaughan. Guinn and Jordan discuss how the “breakdown conundrum” in *sean-nós* dancing is not always about the movements; rather, it is about doing the movements up to speed while maintaining the rhythmic integrity and tempo of the mentoring dancer. Guinn references her experience in workshops in Galway, while Jordan is speaking specifically about her one-on-one experience with dancer Aidan Vaughn, an older dancer currently in his 70’s. Guinn recalls:

So I’ve been in classes with dancers in Galway and they’ll dance a step up to speed, and they start to break it down and you’re like, “That is *not* what they’re doing . . . [laughter] when they’re up to speed at all!”
(Guinn, Alicia. Telephone interview. 22 September 2010)

. . . he would just dance [chuckle] and he did let me videotape but he didn’t really break anything down at all. So he let me videotape and I . . . I *listened* I guess. I listened a lot because I couldn’t, I couldn’t, um, decipher what his feet were doing at that speed. (Jordan, Kieran. Telephone interview. 16 October 2010).

And, it was just really simple, you know? It was like, “Here are my steps, now you do it.” [Laughter] And I just basically tried to copy his body you know, because his feet were going in different places, like there’s all those crazy weight shifts. So like, I was just trying to keep myself loose enough to copy his body and where his feet were going and then add in the sounds. (Dunne, Shannon. Telephone interview. 16 September 2010).

Dunne explains further how the previous generation currently confronted with popular demand for instruction, are also experiencing shifts in transmission. She specifically speaks about Aidan Vaughn’s attempt to meet his contemporary student’s needs when she reminisces:

[I]t’s funny because when I was there he was like, “oh the dancers told me that they needed more shapes so I made up this step that has a shape,” and *shape* was a toe behind, one toe at the end of the step. [Chuckles] Which is like, diddy, diddy,

dum . . . [long pause] *toe!* Like everything else was completely underneath him . . . contained except for this one toe. And he was clearly coming to terms with teaching a group class. He was saying this is like the first, the physically [first] *sean-nós* group class he had ever taught. And before that he just had like these battering steps and he'd just show you what he had and try to teach you his step with the variations. (Dunne, Shannon. Telephone interview. 16 September 2010).

Kieran Jordan's comments below illustrate the personal nature of sharing, learning, and creating repertoire in the *sean-nós* tradition as a one-on-one and group experience. Jordan's comments also illustrate the "breakdown conundrum" as both frustrating and constitutive of variation and creativity in transmission, however, with positive results. Here Jordan is reflecting on how being able to hear, but not see the dancing of Aidan Vaughan explicitly resulted in a translation of repertoire. Additionally, Jordan remarks on how she values the "breakdown conundrum" as a way to protect and retain individual creativity and personal experience in repertoire. She states:

. . . I definitely could hear the rhythms, and the rhythms seemed really intuitive to me, they seemed just to make sense . . . it wasn't some quirky, new kind of a rhythm. It seemed like an Irish dance rhythm that I was really familiar with. So I listened a lot and . . . did that in my clogs in the kitchen, like that was where I put that altogether . . . and some steps I . . . I think I did end up translating exactly as he did them And others, I translated the rhythm the same way, but the use of my feet was slightly different. I might make the same sound but achieving that in a different use of weight and placement of the feet . . . And that was his big thing was like, *that's perfect!* You know? He would just say, "That's correct. If you're on time with the music it's correct. You don't have to learn how to do it the way I did it." (Jordan, Kieran. Telephone interview. 16 October 2010).

Jordan confirms how practitioners transcribe repertoire in ways that translate it and transform it into very personal and meaningful movement material that is both of the individual and of the tradition, of the past and the now, of the teacher and the learner.

Unlike traditional or “older” teaching and learning processes in which students learned locally and from one or two mentors, Meehan, as a younger student and American practicing Irish dance, had different learning experiences. She simply states, “It’s new to teach *sean-nós* dancing” (Meehan, Maldon. Telephone interview. 28 October 2010). She describes herself as having a much larger and varied repertoire of steps and styles in comparison to older practitioners she has encountered or dancers met who are native to the culture of origin. She explains that her repertoire is the result of how she has learned *sean-nós* in various ways and from multiple dancers rather than learning locally from one or two. Meehan has learned by observation/absorption, by one-on-one exchanges, through music, and by participating in formal classes and workshops. She explains her learning in this excerpt from her interview:

I went around and got to work with a bunch of different dancers. So I think a lot of people who are learning now, we have an advantage now . . . I learned from Mick Mulkerrin, Mairéad Casey, Róisín Ní Mhainín, Pádraig Ó hOibicín – so I got to go around and taste what everyone was doing. And I think from there you just start to find the things that work for you. Like there’s a lot of the steps, a lot of repertoire that I don’t ever dance. I might teach it or I might dance it as just something that’s more of, you know, a tribute to *that* dancer and the person I learned it from. But it doesn’t feel right for my body. When I learn from someone I try and learn what they’re teaching and I can have that, you know, preserved so that I could teach that. But usually what I wind up doing for myself as a dancer is taking the little bits that work for me. . . . I feel . . . I had the advantage of taking [having] . . . more repertoire than them, even though they would be traditional dancers, because I was able to go to all of them as a student. And a lot of teachers don’t have that – it might be awkward for them to go and continue to take from someone once they start teaching or, I don’t know, its not something that they do, they just dance and teach. They don’t necessarily go around and learn from all the different people . . . and it’s happening in Ireland too, but definitely the dancers in America, we have that advantage that we’ve learned from all these different people. (Meehan, Maldon. Telephone interview. 28 October 2010).

As a result of her diverse experiences, Meehan divides her repertoire into four distinct caches of movements/rhythms: repertoire that she teaches including her own material and historical material of other dancers; repertoire that she learned but chooses not to dance; repertoire that she performs on stage and that is sometimes choreographed; and emergent, improvised repertoire that arises in the moment of intense collaboration with a musician (Meehan, Maldon. Telephone interview. 28 October 2010). Meehan further divides her repertoire into useable caches to suit her vocation as dancer, teacher, choreographer, and performing artist. She has also been exposed to how multiple practitioners, differing generationally and geographically, curate the repertoire extent. She is able to analyze how each consciously connects with specific movements, tunes, and musicians in order to translate the repertoire, and produce a practice that reveals intense personal preference.

Key to the phenomenon of varied learning is experiencing the individual practitioner in action dancing. Meehan, conscious about how she utilizes what she has learned in various contexts from various people, is keen to point out how this is useful for learning how to improvise. Variety modeled by various mentors, each demonstrating aesthetic and style in the forms, allows the practitioner to move from imitation toward improvisation and then toward further innovation. In her interviews, Meehan further explained how shared time in the tradition and then time alone with the repertoire (out of or away from social practice) allows for transcription of the repertoire onto one's body which is then manifested in the moment of performance. Meehan reflects:

[W]hen I'm actually dancing . . . I think it's . . . what comes out is what's most comfortable for me, what fits my body the best and what the music brings out. And sometimes that's based on . . . like if the music is really fast you don't have time to think; you just dance. So it's whatever comes out [laughs]. (Meehan, Maldon. Telephone interview. 28 October 2010).

For each of the practitioners in this dissertation, the learning process has included varied experiences of watching, listening, imitating, emulating, and creating. These occur within the social exchange, as formal instruction, and as individual processes of discovery by dancing or playing with repertoire in isolation, alone and on one's own in his/her kitchen, a studio or in performance. The "breakdown conundrum," therefore, is shared among these ten artists and further results in many variations of learning/teaching. These variations then serve to emphasize to the learning practitioner that finding one's own way through the repertoire and expressing one's discoveries is greatly, and traditionally, valued by those considered masters of American percussive dance forms. In summary, I suggest the reader consider two quotations that voice how research participants experience transmitting the paradox of continuity and change:

So I would break it down and break it into the basic step, and then from the basic step, the variations from that basic step. And then just encourage them to just feel it in their feet. In fact, to me the dancing was all about, um, instead of being robotic as if somebody stuck a punch key IBM card in your side and you follow the steps, you know. Instead you dance and your steps being the result of how the music moves you. (White, Earl. Telephone interview. 18 March 2011).

And sometimes people say to me . . . "There's only certain number of things you can do, really, with two feet." And I'm like, "What are you talking about? It's . . . an infinite number of possibilities." (Guinn, Alicia. Telephone interview. 22 September 2010).

What living tradition offers each dancer is a way to move toward individual expression in the moment (improvisation) while simultaneously referencing an imitated

repertoire of the past in order to bring forward what is valuable for each performer as she or he participates in the culture extant. The tradition's genealogy of movements, contained in repertoire, combine with music to help the practitioner understand the parameters of music/movement expressions that have come before, specifically as they form building blocks to individual knowledge about repertoire as it exists in the present.

There are two phrases that participants used to describe how as beginning dancers they came to recognize and understand constancy of movement material within the form. Alicia Guinn uses the term "the commons" to identify those movements and rhythms that she recognized as constant within *sean-nós* dancing. Guinn explains how the genealogy of the living tradition of *sean-nós* dancing can be recognized as a tradition of dance while also containing within it remarkable variations as it is practiced by individuals. She further discusses how repertoire contains a genealogy of common movements that are shared across and among those who practice the danced form. Guinn concludes:

. . . there are all these steps we share in common . . . the commons, right? [T]hey belong to all of us. Or, they don't belong to any of us; they just exist out in the world and we happen to get to dance them . . . they aren't possessions that belong to any of us . . . but then . . . you can watch someone dance and if you can pick it up you can dance it. Great. . . [O]n the other hand . . . there are steps that are kind of unique, that are associated with a particular dancer and it would have been considered bad form to say, take that step, teach it to other people and not credit that dancer with it. (Guinn, Alicia. Telephone interview. 22 September 2010).

Jordan continues Guinn's notion of "the commons" through her language of "rhythmic nuggets" or common, rhythmic dance expressions utilizing the feet (heels, toes, weight, flat of the foot, etc.). Jordan, a full-time teacher and performer of Irish dance, admits that she has systematized the form at the beginner level by naming and breaking down

nuggets of dance material. She justifies doing this because, like Alicia, “the steps that I first learned from sean-nós dancers, I actually don’t think were that easy . . . they’re not beginner” (Jordan, Kieran. Telephone interview. 16 October 2010). She explains that *sean-nós* dance steps are difficult because they are fast, dense, and inextricably connected to the music that incites the dancing. It is the existence of these “rhythmic nuggets” and “the commons” that set a condition for the unpredictable emergence of variation in the form as it is practiced.

Jordan came to understand her concept of rhythmic nuggets by learning from master dancers of the previous generation. As a researcher I realize that when I was talking to participants they were connecting their ideas and articulations about learning to very particular mentors. The idea that there exist a common repertoire and that learning is successful when understanding the usefulness of “rhythmic nuggets” is evident as each participant relates his/her relationships with other experienced dancers. In the following subsection, Jordan continues to discuss her discovery of “rhythmic nuggets” in the context of her relationship with Joe O’Donovan, while Ann Kilkelly discusses experiences with her mentor Brenda Bufalino. These two discussions in particular relate to how each dancer and mentor found ways to overcome “the breakdown conundrum.”

Mentors: Teaching with and through Continuity: Joe O’Donovan and Brenda Bufalino

Kieran Jordan credits dance master Joe O’Donovan (1919-2008) with providing her with a strategy for teaching that she feels explicates the continuous and changing rudiments of Irish dance while further offering students the building blocks for both improvisation and

the creation of new steps. O'Donovan taught traditional steps, or what is called Old-style Irish step dance, sometimes referred to as *sean-nós* dance of Munster. O'Donovan called his dancing *sean-nós* and he called it Old-style. He had names for the stripped down elements and segmented his genealogy of steps into small rhythmic phrases such as: half-shuffle, full-shuffle, ground cut, half-cut, full-cut, heels and rocks (Jordan, Kieran. Telephone interview. 16 October 2010). Jordan believes that his formula or pedagogy creates a “gray area where traditional Irish step [competitive and old-style] and *sean-nós* intersect. Because I think he kind of falls into both of those categories” (Jordan, Kieran. Telephone interview. 16 October 2010). She believes O'Donovan to be a missing link between the once parallel worlds of *sean-nós* and Old-style Irish dancing, the latter becoming competitive Irish dance sanctioned by the Commission and the dominant form of Irish dance. O'Donovan's repertoire included many Munster or southern *sean-nós* steps that were definitely of another era, some as old as 1750 to perhaps as new as 1950. In the following excerpt from her interview, Jordan explains O'Donovan's influence, how she has adapted his teaching methods, why, and for whom this learning/teaching strategy is valuable:

I have definitely systematized it a little bit . . . only at kind of the beginner level. . . the steps that I first learned from *sean-nós* dancers – I actually don't think were that easy. . . . They're hard . . . because they're fast and they're dense rhythmic nuggets. So, I've taken those and . . . stripped them down . . . to create . . . a progression that can go from very simple, like tapping of the toes, to adding in one more heel sound, adding in one more toe sound, adding a half-shuffle, adding a full shuffle, adding a hop or a heel-drop. . . . I've been actively working at [it] in order to be able to break it down for groups of people, and groups of beginners, and groups of people in America who might not have access to sitting around the village pub and absorbing it in the more traditional way. I was so influenced by Joe O'Donovan in my traditional step dancing – I think he [taught] that way, but

for traditional [Old-style] steps – you know, how he says you’ve got the half-shuffle and the full-shuffle and the ground cut and the half-cut and the full-cut and the heels and the rocks, so it’s like his steps are stripped down to elements and then he shows you how that can really be empowering into creating your own steps or even improvising. And I think that area right there, of like creating your own and improvising is the gray area of where traditional Irish step and *sean-nós* intersect. Because, I think he kind of falls into both of those categories, ya know? So I think, in like learning from him in person and then . . . continuing to learn from him from his video over the years, it’s just a brilliant way of teaching. And I personally didn’t experience anyone who was teaching *sean-nós* that way I’ve tried to strip it down so that we have just sounds, like notes; this is a note that your heel makes, this is a note that your toe makes, and put those two together and then it’s kind of a rhythm pattern. . . . [S]o for people who are not living in a center of Irish music and dance it seems like there is a need for clear instruction hopefully the spirit of it and the flow of it is not stripped out of that . . . the dummying down is really like learning your scales or something. . . . I always say in teaching that, “the point is not for them to dance like me, it’s for them to dance like themselves” . . . that freedom should be there right away to change it or find your own way through it as long as you’re still on-time with the music. (Jordan, Kieran. Telephone interview. 16 October 2010).

In the previous narrative, Jordan is concerned with students coming away with an understanding that the “freedom [to change the steps or patterns] should be there right away or [the freedom to] find your own way through it as long as you’re still on-time with the music,” and that “the flow” of the dance does not go missing (Jordan, Kieran. Telephone interview. 16 October 2010). Jordan is conscious and respectful of each individual she teaches explaining that, “the point is not for them to dance like me, it’s for them to dance like themselves” (Jordan, Kieran. Telephone interview. 16 October 2010) and this is why she teaches simple, slow elements for them to use with their own interpretation of the music. Jordan tries very hard not to confuse or frustrate students beyond their initial interest and ability, a pedagogical tactic that has motivated her to be as clear and generous as her mentor Joe O’Donovan. Jordan is also motivated by the

experience of learning in a social exchange and her efforts constitute an attempt to explicitly arrange material toward individual translation and preference. Dancers new to the form and the culture might not otherwise perceive the importance of personal preference and freedom of choice via an isolated observation or video instruction alone and without the experience of interpersonal participation in the moment. Her mentors have challenged Jordan to find methods for communicating the materiality of the form by teaching rhythmic nuggets while also encouraging translation of that material toward a kind of personal ownership. Trying to find her own teaching practice for meeting this challenge is Jordan's way of avoiding a "breakdown conundrum".

Like Jordan, Kilkelly also acknowledges and describes shifts in transmission as the result of contributions of others to the living tradition. For Kilkelly, influence of Brenda Bufalino had a particularly important impact on her ability to learn and teach tap dance:

[T]he key part of having Brenda Bufalino in this picture is that she is the one, there are many, but she's the one *for me* that figured out how to teach the materials that people like Honi Coles were doing . . . um . . . very complicated. So what Brenda did was figure out . . . what the body shape was underneath it, and because she'd been a jazz dancer and all kinds of [technique with] Dan Dunne, Sylvia Ford, and Katherine Dunham technique; you know, she really could analyze the body under it, so she did that and that was really important for me. Because I had . . . taken classes in other dance forms, too. (Kilkelly, Ann. Telephone interview. 28 October 2010).

Kilkelly takes Bufalino's ideas further emphasizing that learners also need to understand the processes of his/her own learning. She relates this influence in this regard:

Sometimes I say . . . what Brenda says, "It's important to learn how to learn." She said, "It isn't just learning, it's finding the condition in which you will understand." It's about . . . coordination, oh sure, but it's not primarily that. It's

primarily putting yourself in a place where you can duplicate this or look at it and pick it up or hear it and pick it up. . . . that's always assuming some experience you know. . . . That has been a huge, huge thing for me to think about what she means when she says that. (Kilkelly, Ann. Telephone interview. 28 October 2010).

As full-time teachers of dance, Jordan, Kilkelly, Dunne, and Meehan are keen to transmit repertoire in such a manner that learners understand and become familiar with what it means to imitate, to innovate, and to create. They each work to facilitate student improvisation alongside the development of personal meaning of the repertoire through imitation and translation. All admit to being somewhat challenged to formulate and execute learning and teaching strategies to achieve this and discuss how their teaching strategies are similar to and different from the earlier generation who simply danced and then admonished students to learn by watching, then saying, "It's your job to do it, not mine to talk about it!" as Kilkelly remarks (Kilkelly, Ann. Telephone interview. 28 October 2010). However, Kilkelly discusses how Bufalino helped her understand the importance of "learning how to learn."

Anne Kilkelly further details how she attempts to move beyond the "breakdown conundrum" in her teaching approach. She attends to the moment when she feels learners connect to and understand the form without having to "think" about what they are doing. Like the other dancers interviewed, Kilkelly acknowledges that dancing by sensing and without thinking, improvising instead of doing routines—a process she names "artificial" but useful for getting new information into the body—requires an investment of time in the practice and knowledge of one's own preferences in the form. She details her ideas in the following quotation:

[T]here's lots of different levels of learning but when I feel like it's sinking in is when they [learners] start to sense where they're going and understand where the breaks are, or how the shuffles fits into the rhythm pattern. When they start feeling *that* by trusting their ears and they're moving in terms of what they hear and not what they're thinking about; they're not, you know, desperately trying to remember what happens first and then tell themselves what it is in words. It's like getting out of words and into a different . . . language that they experience. . . . I don't differentiate body from mind. I really don't. But when they use a kind of artificial learning process, all of which we have to do I think to get some new information; but, when it locks down into a place where they sense it. And I don't mean it's the emotion or feeling as opposed to thinking, I just mean they [students] don't have to process it through a bunch of translations. You know, like, *okay first I do this and I do five of them and then . . .* And I work really hard to figure out *how* that moment occurs . . . what makes that moment occur? I drive myself crazy trying to think up exercises for it, but I'm sometimes successful. And that's when I feel like someone is really learning tap dancing. (Kilkelly, Ann. Telephone interview. 28 October 2010).

Employing both types of lessons from their mentors, Kilkelly and Jordan articulate not only how learners need to imitate and translate, but also how learners can use their knowledge of personal preference and personal learning. These personal preferences in connection to imitation of “the commons” and “rhythmic nuggets” prepare the students for improvising in the form. Improvisation leads to both innovation within repertoire and creation of new repertoire.

Becoming Improvisers: Learning how to Create Personal Continuity and Change in One's Practice

In all of the American percussive dance forms in this research, improvisation is a key characteristic. When Alicia Guinn talks about dancing *sean-nós*, she relates that it can be intimidating to beginners since performing can include both imitation (dancing “the commons”) and innovation (improvisation) since the form is ideally improvised dancing. However, having to improvise as one performs can create highly tense

situations for practitioners unused to performing with and in front of others. Tension can be present for beginners and experienced dancers alike. Guinn talks about how her own stress about “performing” has shifted over time in her practice. As a beginning dancer, Guinn would pre-design a string of steps that she could execute easily under pressure when she was asked to dance in public. Guinn still encourages her students to have at least one combination of steps that she calls “emergency steps” (Guinn, Alicia.

Telephone interview. 22 September 2010). She explains:

[I]n doing *sean-nós* dancing ten years now, it’s my ten year anniversary, a great majority of that time . . . I was just dancing other people’s steps that I had been given, and maybe trying to put some combinations together that were slightly different than what I had been given. Definitely, I know I used to . . . put together . . . an eight or sixteen bar thing to dance, um, when I started, because that’s when I would be the most nervous and so it was good to know . . . when I get up [laugh] I can at least dance this thing twice or three times if I need to and then I can kind of settle in. I talked to some of my students, they really have a lot of steps and they can dance, but it’s . . . getting to the next level of getting up to dance and feel[ing] confident enough to do it is pretty terrifying . . . It’s solo and people are looking at you [laugh], and you’re not getting up to dance a routine. Like, it’s pretty intimidating. (Guinn, Alicia. Telephone interview. 22 September 2010).

In the previous quotation, Guinn is discussing how when dancing and attempting improvisation, your emergency steps will “let your brain catch up . . . [and] give you some time . . . to gain some improvisation (Guinn, Alicia. Telephone interview. 22 September 2010).” Should your plan go awry, that is to say your ability to improvise in the moment of performing, Guinn suggests that emergency steps can keep the performer connected to the music. “Emergency steps” can include a series of inherited steps danced imitatively. By imitating and repeating inherited repertoire with others and in front of others, dancers unaccustomed to improvising while performing gain experience moving

“the commons” until they either gain or re-gain enough confidence to attempt improvisation without losing rhythm, timing, and connection to the live music in play. As suggested in earlier discussions, knowledge of the dance form’s repertoire and the form’s characteristics is transmitted within the social context. The form is best achieved by doing the dancing in that context; improvising to live music among other dancers, musicians, and people gathered for the purpose of social exchange. In order to practice achieving improvisation while performing, practice must also occur in the context of social exchange.

Dunne also has a strategy similar to Guinn; however, she refers to her strategy as her “go to” vocabulary. For Dunne, her “go to” vocabulary is a cache of steps that are comfortable and familiar. Dunne compares her “go to” for *sean-nós* dancing to her experiences in tap and clogging. For Dunne, it is the practice of *sean-nós* dancing to live music over time that has allowed her to understand her own personal style in the form. As she describes, it is her awareness of her personal style that allows her to comfortably improvise in this particular form of percussive dancing. She begins her comparison by describing a particular instance of *sean-nós* dancing:

I was like pulling from . . . certain elements that are my go to vocabulary and doing those things over and over again . . . I consider them building blocks. The pieces that [I use] the most, well there’s where I put my body [when] I’m dancing *sean-nós*. I’m way back, kind of almost a little bit on my heels, my body is way back and my knees are really bent but I’m trying to stay off the ground, like hover. If I’m doing tap I’m much more in the ground, everything is very grounded, and related to coming back to the ground or pushing off of the ground and coming back down. Clogging, well I don’t know, one of these days I’ll understand clogging. [Laughter] But, you know, it’s a whole different animal. Its similar to *sean-nós*, but not completely, like it’s also very different. It’s almost like I have building blocks or like I put my body in a certain space and use certain

things to . . . build off of that in the beginning. And only now is it starting to change to become my own style, as like a mishmash. I've worked very hard to keep them very separate, I think I've really [been] successful at that, but almost to a fault in that its been limiting for me in that . . . I have trouble breaking out and felt like that was part, in the beginning of learning the tradition, and how to relate to the music and what that groove is, just to kind of understand it on a deeper level, and start with the basics and then go from there. Know what . . . you "should" be doing and then deviate from that as time goes on. *Sean-nós* I feel I've done the most of and so I think that's also why I feel much more comfortable and feel like I have my own style in that particular style of dancing because I've done it so much and I have such a closer relationship with that [Irish traditional] music. (Dunne, Shannon. Telephone interview. 16 September 2010).

Like Guinn, Dunne admits that it can take years to develop one's "go to" vocabulary in *sean-nós* and even longer to gain the confidence necessary to improvise. Currently, Guinn admits to no longer needing her emergency steps: "I don't do that anymore," says Guinn, "I just get up and try not to think" (Guinn, Alicia. Telephone interview. 22 September 2010). Both Dunne and Guinn each express in their own manner how time in the tradition changes both how one dances and what one dances. They both conclude that it is practice over time within the context of social exchange that helps to embed or transcribe repertoire onto and into one's body. Research participant Meehan agrees with Dunne and Guinn when she states that, "what's most comfortable for me, what fits my body the best," eventually helps solidify a personal style within the living tradition of the form (Meehan, Maldon. Telephone interview. 28 October 2010).

Given that dancers discuss needing to have a set of "go to" or "emergency steps" that are repeatable when first learning and then performing these percussive forms, how do they then transform repeatable steps into an improvisational process? All of the dancers in this dissertation who teach formal classes are challenged by how exactly each

might accomplish “teaching” improvisation. Guinn reiterates the value of improvisational dance skills when she discusses how a *sean-nós* dancer needs to be ready to improvise to differing music. She states:

I am a *sean-nós* dancer, but people do distinguish between . . . people who dance *sean-nós* steps and people who are *sean-nós* dancers . . . part of being a *sean-nós* dancer is listening to the music and knowing the music. (Guinn, Alicia. Telephone interview. 22 September 2010).

Dunne picks up on Guinn’s differentiation between dancing the steps of *sean-nós* and being a *sean-nós* dancer. In Dunne’s description of how improvisation feels, she also discusses how the music, and the act of listening to it, is key to how dance improvisation emerges interdependently with music in the context of social exchange. For Dunne, *sean-nós* dancing happens as both improvisation and imitation, as non-conscious activity and conscious activity. She describes what she experiences as flux:

. . . it’s almost when I’m not thinking about dancing at all that it happens, when I’m just completely focused on, oh but that’s not completely true . . . but my focus is more on the music, that I feel, and it’s almost like I’m taken out of the equation, that I’m just sort of like this weird channel, but then there’s other times that I *know* when it’s happening, like I’ll be copying someone’s step but just because I can’t think of anything not because I’m doing their step, or I’ll bring something in, oh, I don’t even know how to describe it! (Dunne, Shannon. Telephone interview. 16 September 2010).

In light of her own personal experience, Dunne attempts to describe how she might devise exercises for learners new to improvisation. She admonishes students to be in flux so as to be *with* the music. She relates:

This is so funny. It’s changed a lot. It shifts, and I think that because teaching is such a part of what I’m doing with [*sean-nós*], it’s like every time I think I’ve landed a way of trying to get this across to somebody, it changes again, but my most basic way is . . . just getting them to walk and just step on the beat and then having them just relate to the music first with a flat foot to having them be

creative with how they . . . are making patterns that go with the music just with a flat foot at first. Then I'll introduce other elements that they can use like a shuffle or a little shuffle with a heel. . . . It's kind of weird . . . if I'm teaching I do [a] mix of giving them elements and having them improvise with just those elements relating directly to the music at any point, like a clear focus on the music and then one specific element that they are working on. (Dunne, Shannon. Telephone interview. 16 September 2010).

Summary

Through the voices of differing artist discussions in this chapter, it is clear that by imitating past repertoire *and* improvising, practitioners set flexible parameters for constancy in a living tradition. These parameters then come to life when a space to exercise autonomy and to change repertoire is opened in the moment of performance. However, it is also clear that how performers open that space is different for each, and different each time they perform. The forms of flatfooting, clogging, tap, improvised Irish step dancing and Irish *sean-nós* dancing are practiced in the present, yet with each performance and for each performer, the past is recognized, referenced, and revered through imitation of inherited repertoire danced as “the commons” and “rhythmic nuggets.” Dancing “the commons” as part of an inherited repertoire brings past enactments into the present. Improvisation allows practitioners to celebrate “rhythmic nuggets” and curate past repertoire by translating the look, sound, rhythm, weight shifts, or other technical aspect of repertoire. Agency allows individual dancers to translate what others perform within the tradition and “re-interpret, re-invent, and celebrate” what can be experienced within the repertoire of the performer her/himself. These are the aesthetic markers by which and through which a dancer establishes and develops a personal practice in the living dance tradition and the culture.

However, the methods for achieving this agency, and for identifying what brings one understanding about aesthetic choice within the differing living traditions of American percussive dance forms, are discussed by the research participants as an exciting challenge. This challenge, or paradox of living tradition, is defined when participants reveal that they both perpetuate inherited repertoire and continue to clarify their individual styles as well as their performing and teaching strategies as both imitators *and* improvisers.

In the following dissertation chapter, each dance form is discussed as moving continually between the processes of imitation and improvisation and that such coexistent companion processes are exercised in complimentary unions within individual practices, forms, and traditions. The following data reveal how research participants move from imitation specifically toward improvisation and how improvisation can yield innovations and creations within a form's repertoire. The data also reveal experiences of best practice for dancing in a living tradition while strategies for achieving best practice in each form are simultaneously discussed.

CHAPTER VI

ACHIEVING CHANGE IN A LIVING TRADITION

There is a sense in which we do not own our culture, we are only trustees. The treasure is only on loan and we must take it, refurbish it in the light of our experience and hand it on.

Fr. Pat Ahern, founder of *Siamsa Tíre*, Irelandⁱ

In the previous section, the data established that for those interviewed in this dissertation, the re-invention, re-interpretation, creation, and celebration of repertoire as a living tradition crystallizes most completely during the spontaneous relating between people who practice it. What I wish to emphasize in this chapter is a set of specific relationships. For dance in a living tradition, social exchanges best contain conditions that crystallize the dancer's ability to improvise and that dancer's active repertoire absorbs and contains the improvisation for future use. However, as previously improvised movement is repeated in performance it becomes available for use by others in the tradition. For those practitioners speaking in this dissertation, the concept of repertoire as container is sensed in much the same way that Fr. Ahern asserts; repertoire is a treasure trove of knowledge connecting the tradition's past, its constancy and its inherited repertoire, with its practitioners' use of improvisation in the moment of contemporary performance.

Repertoire as container is the location, or source, for both imitation and innovation that might then further, according to the research participants, occur as

improvisation (playing with the imitated source material) when practiced. It is the dance enactments of imitation that ground and attach practice consistently to tradition while the dance enactments of improvisation lead to innovation and creation, additions that move the tradition from constancy to change. This phenomenon is what makes a living tradition so lively. Beyond imitation or even the innovative translation of repertoire, American percussive dance (the practice of each form discussed in this dissertation) dictates that practitioners develop a personal style in their practice. Improvisation within the forms allows practitioners to express personal style as well as innovate and contribute new repertoire to the tradition.

In Chapter IV, I described the characteristic of continual change for each dance form as resulting from acts of individual agency by practitioners with the research data further revealing how individual agency exists and is exercised in each tradition. The data discussed in this chapter describe processes of agency each dancer/musician interviewed activates in order to develop a personal style and innovate with, or create new, repertoire. By achieving a personal style and innovating with existing repertoire or creating new repertoire, practitioners fulfill the characteristics of these dance forms while also achieving what they describe as best practice for dancing.

I use the two like terms, innovate and createⁱⁱ, to distinguish subtle differences in the emergence of change within the repertoire. The term “innovate” references how dancers perform in the moment (improvise) thereby resulting in new assemblages of material from inherited repertoire, which the practitioner imitates and translates. The term “create” references distinctly new and different responses to and uses of the form’s

materiality by the practitioner who dances with a singular and unique style beyond normative and inherited repertoire danced by the current culture. Often creation emerges within the practices of dancers who have experience with improvisation over a long period of time; they are able to develop methods for less imitation and greater innovation that eventually lead to the production of new repertoire in ways that perhaps a beginning practitioner in the form may not.

This chapter explores data regarding personal style, improvisation, innovation, and creation emerging from participants' interviews. The data are arranged into four sections that identify how best practice is described as being achieved. The dissertation participants' descriptive data provides for several discussions from the point of view of the performer and his/her personal experience as opposed to observations made by, and/or standards set by, members of the culture in which the dance or music practice happens. Therefore, what arise in the data are multiple experiences of best practice suggesting a progression of variations given the practitioner's situation and skill. These variations are described as a range of experiences from a most basic fulfillment of those characteristics determined as features of the form, to those experiences that emerge as the dancer's practice extends over years, across situations, and across communities. Participants share both personal experiences and observations providing examples that describe what best practice is, how it happens, and when it happens.

These highly personal processes include how the performer exercises agency, imitation, innovation, improvisation, emulation, creation, and communion. While each of these processes independently can shape a practitioner's experience of best practice, and

thus form a description of best practice, many of the processes occur interdependently and none are hierarchical. Unlike Western concert dance or other forms that are codified and critiqued by the standards that result, best practice for the American percussive dancers interviewed in this dissertation is determined by the practitioner and is, perhaps only subtly observable by viewers and critics.

The first discussion provides examples of how personal agency is activated through processes in which dancers use imitation *innovatively* in order to ground themselves and provide a starting place for improvisation, which over time can then lead to creation in the form. Improvisation was established as a fundamental characteristic within each form in Chapter IV. The second data set and discussion focuses on how imitation of repertoire also includes emulation of other dancers. The consequence of practicing emulation is the instantiation of both legacies of practitioners, and genealogies of their innovations and creations. This data details how examples of others who “hand repertoire on” provide living models for achieving personal style, a hallmark of best practice, also discussed in Chapter IV. This section particularly, and Chapter V in general, further details how individual practitioners achieve personal style by witnessing how other dancers or musicians practice: how they live in and with the tradition, the form, and the repertoire.

Through their shared insights, participants reveal that the process of emulation models how a practitioner might manifest his/her own unique practice and “refurbish the treasure in light of our own experience” as founder Ahern says in this chapter’s opening epigraph. Emulation also models how to achieve a best practice that contributes change

to the tradition through creation of new repertoire. The third data set, then, provides examples of who, what, and how research participants have emulated other practitioners and how these somatic experiences affect each practitioner's personal practice as well as perspective about best practice.

The fourth discussion of this chapter ties the first three data sets together by focusing on how the act of emulation models a path to achieving best practice for both innovation and creation. Such a path emerges out of a unique yet interdependent exchange I call communion. Communion results from of the social context in which music and dance practices occur and how each dancer and musician is not only situated within that context, but how each perceives it and what each intends as a result. Communion is activated between practitioners of the same genre (through emulation) as well as across genre, between music and dance practitioners, who combine their respective repertoires. Altogether these four sections demonstrate how each participant posits differing insights into the materiality of the form, exemplifying both constancy and change. However, in a manner connecting past with present, the four discussions also demonstrate how the practice of the form, a form including emulation as described by the research participants, transmits the tradition's histories through renewed experiences of best practice.

Using Personal Agency and Imitation to Achieve Best Practice

*I enjoy watching **everyone** do sean-nós [chuckles]. Everyone. Because every**body** does it so differently.*

Kieran Jordan, research participant (emphasis added)

Since best practice of these forms (Irish *sean-nós*, clogging, flatfooting, and tap) encourages improvisation, dance enactments may or may not be reproducible. The data reveals that a practitioner who activates agency in the moment of improvisation by innovatively imitating, re-ordering, and/or translating inherited repertoire achieves best practice in a living tradition of dance. Best practice is also achieved through improvisation in which creativity emerges rather than innovation; that is to say, the practitioner creates new movements different from that which the practitioner inherited. This explains Maldon Meehan's admonition to students. Meehan emphasizes that students "need to make this style of dance their own" because, "the style's very old but what they [are] creating is new" (Meehan, Maldon. Telephone interview. 28 October 2010). Meehan implies that by improvising new assemblages of inherited repertoire students contribute both to the repertoire and tradition. However, by conceiving of improvisation as a change and contribution to repertoire, Meehan also opens a space for her students to create new repertoire. It is the act of emulation that, in effect, "teaches" the practitioner how to achieve improvisation since emulation encourages an "imperfect" imitation or innovation rather than an exact repetition. Dancers in a living tradition constantly practice emulating other dancers and thereby change the living tradition as they hone an individual practice through agency via the examples they witness. As

imitators, they repeat what they like after they have experienced dancing and play with what has been viewed and inherited from others' performances.

As curators of repertoire inherited by way of imitation and emulation, dancers refine historical styles in light of contemporary practice. This also means that some repertoire is re-interpreted while other repertoire becomes lost when no contemporary dancers choose to imitate it. Either way, as improvisers, performers play whilst dancing, repeating some movements innovatively and then possibly creating new movements. However, because living traditions exist over time, contemporary dancers may well believe they have created new movement material only to discover that what they have “created” indeed has been danced before. Kieran Jordan explains “when you think you made up something new and then you see someone [laughs] in an old video . . . and you’re like, “wait, I made up that step! [laughter]” (Kieran, Jordan. Telephone interview. 16 October 2010).

Creations do not always emerge within each and every dance enactment and, according to the participants interviewed, need not be present to achieve best practice. Rather, creation is an extension of best practice achieved through innovation and improvisation as the performer performs with agency and knowledge of the form. To the research participants, therefore, the most basic process for achieving best practice includes personal agency, or choice about what to dance and how to dance it. This “agency of choice” assumes a certain knowledge and experience within the form and its genealogy.

Therefore, agency affords practitioners in living traditions of dance the ability to create and this knowledge is transmitted alongside the transmission of repertoire for most dancers. Dancers understand that the purpose of inheriting “rhythmic nuggets” or “the commons” is to help them build their own “emergency steps,” and a “go to repertoire” with which they achieve improvisation and therefore a best practice of the form. While participants define improvisation as best practice, I seek to differentiate, in the following examples, the difference between innovation and creation within forms.

During her interview, Alicia Guinn describes a family of Irish *sean-nós* dancers, the Devanes of *Aird Mhór, Cill Chiaráin*, Co. Galway who share similar steps, but demonstrate personal agency as innovation in their dancing. The following example illustrates how a group of dancers who have inherited the same repertoire achieve best practice by exercising agency and developing distinct personal styles of dancing. Guinn observes that:

[T]he Devanes are really fascinating to watch because they really do share a common vocabulary of steps and they all dance differently and the way they put them [steps] together is different, and that’s kind of fascinating on a whole other level [laugh]. So it’s not just [that] they have . . . their unique style of dancing but they’re taking their same components and putting them together in different ways which is really fascinating to watch. . . . [It] is kind of the same . . . Pádraig Ó hOibicín has at least two kids, they’re now in their twenties, and . . . the Devane’s, as far as I know, have learned most of their steps from their dad, and Pádraig Ó hOibicín’s kids have learned most of their steps from their dad, and they all have this unique way of dancing that’s really their own. And so it’s not just [that] they all learned these same steps and they all dance them the same way . . . they all have their . . . individual style. . . . And . . . I’m fascinated, even with my students just watching [and] . . . teaching . . . I think there’s a way that a personal style is this habit in how you put different things together. (Guinn, Alicia. Telephone interview 22 September 2010)

Agency, or according to Guinn is the habit that develops from choosing how to “put different things together,” which in turn constitutes a manner of expressing personal style. Achieving a personal style demonstrates innovation. Innovation, as recognized by others who view, respond to, and comment on a dancer’s performance, is what helps the dancer know that they have achieved best practice and created a personal style.

In the following quotation, Maldon Meehan clearly describes that her understanding of agency is guided by her role as either teacher or dancer and results in different choices. As she learns from dancers, she chooses to imitate some repertoire to pass on to students as their teacher in the form of ‘rhythmic nuggets’ or “the commons.” This repertoire is preserved directly for the purpose of sharing consistent material across practitioners and generations within the tradition. However, as a dancer/performer, Meehan reveals how her choices are far more personal and discrete:

When I learn from someone I try and learn what [he or she is] teaching and I can have that, you know, preserved so that I could teach that. But usually what I wind up doing for myself as a dancer is taking the little bits that work for me. So there might be one little move that seems to fit my style. (Meehan, Maldon. Telephone interview 28 October 2010)

Innovatively choosing how to put different bits of inherited repertoire together is best practice, however creation of new repertoire is, perhaps, *better* practice. Creating new repertoire, like innovation, requires that the dancer exercise agency and creativity in the moment of improvising. First, exercising agency is understood as an aesthetic process in a living tradition because individual practitioners curate portions of past repertoire. As curators, practitioners choose to imitate (repeat) and translate (innovate) bits of inherited repertoire for use in their own contemporary practice. In the case of the

Devanes, for example, family members each improvise with a shared repertoire innovatively.

Therefore, key to understanding the aesthetic processes of change in a living tradition is an exploration of how contemporary practitioners curate inherited repertoire and then incorporate choice moments into their unique practices. Each dancer's practice, the story of his/her living in the tradition, is that individual's legacy. The innovations and creations within a dancer's practice can then become contributions to a living tradition as others see the innovative way their personal style is expressed as unique creations. Then the process of emulation takes place as current practitioners move, imitate, and then innovate within the ongoing creations of the past practitioners. The cycle between past, present, and future continues to develop as a living tradition between the histories, the lives, and the environments of each practitioner.

Creative contributions include "signature steps," "flash steps," or "named steps," sometimes transmitted as linked to a dancer's legacy, sometimes lost from it. As research participant Ann Kilkelly suggests, the boundary between what is imitation, innovation, and creation within one's practice can be perceived consciously or not perceived at all. Kilkelly, therefore, advocates that exercising agency in a living tradition requires that performers demonstrate and/or articulate deliberate instances of emulation as imitation and/or innovation, for if the dancer does not acknowledge his/her process for receiving

this information they miss out on transmitting important cultural knowledge about the form's genealogy and unique practitioners' legacies. She states:

I'm not a historian; I am a dancer and a thinker. . . . I really respect the tradition and I want to acknowledge teachers and make that tradition [transmission] be alive [for] people and [have] them understand the richness of it. But I also know that when I'm dancing I'm really not in Honi Cole's shoes. I'm really not. And I have to give space to that because if I pretend that it's all coming from me then I have denied something that's really critically important. (Kilkelly, Ann. Telephone interview. 28 October 2010)

Other participants express ideas similar to those of Kilkelly and find it difficult to both articulate and demonstrate either legacies or genealogies inherited and emulated through performance. They have asked in differing ways: How do performers acknowledge from whom his/her inherited repertoire comes, and when processes of innovation are active?

Many of the interviewees further grappled with how the venue of the performance can also affect how the dance form is transmitted to the viewers. When performing happens in a social exchange, conversation is part of that experience and provides an opportunity to tell stories and acknowledge people. When the performing is in a theatre, concert, or on stage, challenges arise with communicating this kind of communal knowledge. This contextual challenge to creative ownership and legacy is discussed in detail in Chapter VI. However, for the purposes of this chapter, all participants agree that while acknowledgement of the tradition is necessary, preserving the form's genealogies *integritas* is neither possible nor in keeping with a contemporary dancer's agency within the tradition. To do so would limit possibilities for how best practice can continue to achieve change in each dancer's unique artistry.

In the two examples that follow, conversations between the dissertation researcher (Jean) and participants Kieran Jordan and Niall O’Leary provide insights into the issues faced by contemporary dancers performing for contemporary audiences. Each artist is dancing repertoire that is improvised and each is creating newness in the form by translating repertoire from an earlier historical period as his/her performance emerges. In the following exchange, Niall O’Leary discusses exercising agency by “contemporizing” a dance enactment from the Irish *sean-nós* tradition. He describes his Broom Dance as both “yes” part of that older historical practice, and “no” not of the past, but of the present including a reference to Riverdance and practitioner Michael Flatley.

Niall: You know, my latest thing is doing the Broom Dance.

Jean: Oh yeah? *Sean-nós* style?

N: Well . . . yes and no. Basically I do the traditional Broom Dance, which a lot of people do. But I’ve taken it to a different level of, say, by introducing other types of moves. And I even have a reference to Michael Flatley in it. And so I’m doing . . . basically, different things with the broom. I suppose, it’s all based around syncopated hard shoe dancing. There is a part where I do the very traditional things plus I suppose I looked at the whole idea of how can I make it more exciting. I do a bit of a move. I’ve contemporized the Broom Dance. I’ve paid respect, you could say, to my elders and past broom dancers, but I’m definitely doing something different. (O’Leary, Niall. Telephone interview 12 January 2011)

Kieran Jordan, in a separate yet similar conversation, details how improvisation in performance can lead to a mixture of percussive dance styles, but clarifies that if she is improvising using Irish *sean-nós* repertoire, even if the music is not Irish traditional music, she would qualify the performing as *sean-nós* dancing. Jordan emphasizes that improvisation is a fundamental characteristic of *sean-nós* dancing. It is the act of improvisation within known forms, in Jordan’s case the forms of Old-style Irish and Cape

Breton step dancing, that shape her practice of *sean-nós* dancing. Kieran Jordan

explains:

Kieran: I guess that's the big part of it – the fact that it's improvised – because in my performances these days I do a lot of traditional Cape Breton dancing and also traditional Old-style Irish dancing but some . . . pieces will be . . . let's say, Old-style hornpipes. I would have a sequence of steps in mind, and it's pretty set. So even if . . . the body posture, you know, I might bring some of that looseness [from *sean-nós*] in but I wouldn't think of that as *sean-nós*. I would think of it as traditional Old-style Irish dance but it's not improvised. So yeah . . . what was the question again? When does it qualify as *sean-nós*? . . . I think . . . for me that would be when I'm improvising.

Jean: I know you're exposed to a lot of kinds of music, so . . . what if it's some other kind of music?

K: If I were dancing *sean-nós* steps to blues, or something?

J: Would it still qualify as *sean-nós*?

K: Yes . . . yeah, I mean for me I would say . . . because I've done that, like I've been in situations with tap dancers where there's like jazz or blues [music] and I'll do what I know. So it's like the steps' vocabulary that I know and if I'm improvising and finding my way through then I would call it *sean-nós*. I certainly couldn't call it tap dancing.

J: Right. [Kieran laughs] But is it more *sean-nós* in one instance, or to one music than it is in another?

K: I think so. (Jordan, Kieran. Telephone interview 16 October 2010)

In the two examples cited above, each dancer qualifies his/her performance as more or less traditional by detailing how emulation has affected the enactment, how it is connected to consistency in the form, how it is representative of change to the tradition, or how the performance is deliberately not connected to the tradition. However, for all of the participants interviewed, it is clear that in general, by changing the repertoire or its attachments, both the form and tradition are refurbished in light of each practitioner's contemporary experience of that form in his/her sense of best practice.

Somatic Emulation of Legacy and Genealogy

Definitely the dancers in America . . . have [the] advantage that we've learned from all these different people.

Maldon Meehan, research participant

When a dancer performs inherited repertoire from a specific person or region, or choreography from a specific era in the tradition's history, the Broom Dance for example in *sean-nós* dancing, the performance of the repertoire is informed by stories that have been inherited alongside the steps. Applied to this discussion, I am using the term somatic to mean that a practitioner does more than witness repertoire when in the process of emulation, he/she lives both repertoire and culture in such a way as to be affected by the soma or living-ness of another dancer, person, story, experience, and/or repertoire -- all manner of physical sensing, reflexive feeling, evaluative thinking, imaginative translating, and critical analyzing attached to the experience of living and moving through the dancing culture created by another person. For example, when a dancer reflects upon and then performs an inherited repertoire from a specific person with whom he/she did not share a relationship, in the same time or space, the contemporary dancer imaginatively and somatically combines her own personal history and movement practice with that of the earlier dancer's cultural legacy and genealogy. Emulation allows dancers to interpret legacy imaginatively and experience genealogy somatically. The imaginative and somatic experience of a living tradition is what allows contemporary practitioners to manifest both continuity and change within his/her individual practice. The following examples illustrate how emulation is exercised as part of the somatic transmission of legacy and genealogy of people and dance steps.

Contemporary practitioners in this dissertation have both real and imagined relationships with the legacies of past practitioners and their various genealogies. The participants describe real relating as happening in the performance of an example of inherited repertoire in the same space/time with the repertoire's originator. It might also mean dancing the same or similar inherited repertoire with another practitioner side-by-side. Imagined relating is described as how an inherited movement from a dancer whom a practitioner does not know (or cannot know) might feel when dancing the inherited repertoire. In this instance, the contemporary dancer's cultural and historical knowledge of the inherited repertoire is informed by the repertoire's composition, rhythm, etc.

Imagined relating, therefore, includes how a practitioner reflects upon and expresses through his/her movement the stories of past dancers and/or their signature steps, or past choreography transmitted orally and kinesthetically. For the purposes of the dissertation, I discuss both real and imagined relating between percussive dance performers over space and time as "somatic emulation." The research participants discuss somatic emulation as something experienced individually which remains specific to each dance artist's practice and tradition. In many ways the term participants experience and call "emulation" and I call "somatic emulation" is similar to Chandler's mental metempsychosis. Participants use the term emulate to describe how they learn the dance from the manner in which other dancers live with and within a dance form, tradition, and culture. Both terms represent processes that feature a combination of imagination, sensation, and memory all at the level of the body. Somatic emulation is described, therefore, as deepening the contemporary practitioner's understanding of the

repertoire's meaning and the repertoire's value within the tradition as well as his/her own practice.

“Signature steps” as they are called in *sean-nós* dancing or “flash steps” as they are called in tap, or “named steps” in the clogging tradition are unique contributions to a living dance tradition by way of creation of new repertoire by a particular dancer.

Innovation, as it emerges through improvisation, manifests subtle yet constant change within each practice and each tradition. As discussed earlier in this chapter, creation of new repertoire constitutes a direct and immediate change to the form's constant genealogy. Often these new creations are absorbed into the genealogy of the tradition as other dancers, who choose to either acknowledge the source or to ignore it, imitate, emulate, and innovate using the “signatures” of others.

When a step itself acquires a name, becomes a “signature step,” it often carries with it the specifics of its creation – who, where, when, and how the step came to be. Since transmission is both kinesthetic and somatic, when best practice is active each step's story has the potential to inform new dancers about a culture's past as well as the individual practice of a past practitioner. The two examples that follow illustrate how best practice that includes creation of new repertoire can change a form's genealogy by adding to it while also transmitting individual practitioner's legacies somatically.

Rodney Sutton tells us that many of the basic steps associated with Clogging carry the names of the innovators, particularly in his experience, those dancers performing and touring with the Green Grass Cloggers. He uses these named and performed common steps as a means to compare the fundamental characteristic of

irregular rhythm and improvisation always present in Flatfooting, but only sometimes present in Clogging:

I pretty much think of clogging as being dancing with my taps doing specific steps . . . I can do clogging steps individually . . . when I think about what the Fiddle Puppets did, a lot of times the step sequences that we did were like a part of a whole routine and they weren't necessarily individually named. But with the Green Grass Cloggers, almost every step has a name, and a lot of times they were named after the person years ago that made them up – like the *Jerry* or the *Indian* or the *Earl*, or those steps. And if I'm demonstrating the difference between flat footing and clogging that's usually what I'll do; I'll show that there's a basic step and you're trying to dance in precision with, you know, the steps, the same foot with everybody else and everything is all synchronized and choreographed. And then flat footing is, you know, I can do flat footing rhythms and that style with my taps on but, . . . it's more about the style than it is the shoes. But it sounds different. And sometimes I'll wear my taps when I'm flatfooting just so people can hear better, depending on . . . whether there's microphones available or on how loud the band is, or something like that. (Sutton, Rodney. Telephone interview. 11 November 2010)

For Sutton, the named, consistent common steps of Clogging, often performed in shoes with taps, are decidedly different from the improvised, highly individualized steps of Flatfoot dancing that he prefers. According to Sutton, Clogging lends itself to both solo and ensemble (unison, precision) dancing, while Flatfooting remains an individual dance:

I knew that Green Grass [Cloggers] did nothing but basic steps and variations of that Green Grass shuffle, you know, step-toe-step basic, for all these years until we met Robert [Dotson]. And then we started combining the Walking Step with that basic step. And I used to think well, you know, new people to step dancing or to Appalachian clogging that have the ability [do not] . . . start on the Walking Step until they really perfected the basic step, but if you're trying to learn flat footing, which is more free form and more individual, you know, reacting to the music, then the sooner you can give people those different approaches the sooner they can start mixing it up and finding out their own path to . . . being their own percussionist. (Sutton, Rodney. Telephone interview. 11 November 2010)

In the passage above, Sutton admonishes the strict adherence to imitation of inherited repertoire (Green Grass shuffle or basic step) before experiencing more complicated patterns such as those encountered by Sutton personally when introduced to the “signature step” of Robert Dotson, the Walking Step. After years of practice, Sutton understands that best practice for Flatfooting is finding your own path and becoming your own percussionist and this requires exposure to and emulation of innovative practitioners who also create signature steps. Sutton states that emulation ought to start as early in one’s practice as possible. Achieving best practice means moving from imitation toward improvisation by “mixing it up” and experiencing “different approaches” to dancing the form specifically through emulation (Sutton, Rodney. Telephone interview. 11 November 2010).

Earl White, a Green Grass Clogger alumni like Sutton, uses very specific language to describe how he feels when dancing or playing fiddle and how he himself came to understand the terms imitation and emulation. Emulation is a term that White uses to describe how the tradition is transmitted as a social, interpersonal experience. For White, this term means more than the absorption of material knowledge of dance steps; rather, it includes behaviors, attitudes, memories, and the aesthetic choices of individual people who practice the form. It’s an art not about the material inasmuch as it is about how the artists live the material. In the following quotation, White uses the terms emulate and imitate to describe how aesthetic processes for dance and music practice happen. A careful reading of this passage reveals that experiences of emulation lead White to understand that while imitation is valuable, emulation as a process models how

to apply agency, individual expression, and best practice in one's creative expressions.

For White, witnessing and understanding emulation developed into what White describes as a compulsion to dance:

. . . the evolution of the dance itself, you know and even looking at the different styles of clogging. . . . People from east Tennessee have a different style of clogging. People from western North Carolina dance different from the way they danced in east Tennessee. But then, yeah, I ask, "Was it really different or is it still in the style of what people consider to be clogging? Because from one individual to the next, as I said earlier, that's the part I really like about it . . . that's what got me out of my, got my head out of the sand and felt more compelled to dance and to move my body, move my feet, in the way I was moved to make those motions, or to make those movements. . . again, that will differ from one individual to the next. While I have many people who will try to emulate my style of fiddle playing as I tried to emulate the styles of other fiddlers that I listened to when I was learning. And in a similar sense, you know, people of east TN, if there's a style, they are imitating a style of probably some individual who was infatuated with the dance in their area. (White, Earl. Telephone interview. 18 March 2011)

As a dancer, I inherited a named step called The Earl that I have danced in my own Clogging repertoire since 1982. As researcher, I asked White about the origins of this step and discovered that Earl White created The Earl just as the name suggests. This discovery illustrates how one dancer's personal agency (Earl White) achieves best practice as creation that is then transmitted through repertoire to other dancers (the researcher in this case) as "the commons," or what research participant Alicia Guinn calls shared, inherited repertoire. In the following quotation, White talks about the genesis of his "named step" that has contributed to the Clogging repertoire. He explains that while attempting to learn a different step from one of his favorite dancers he ended up with his step, The Earl:

. . . my all-time favorite, Dudley Culp, who we talked about earlier . . . you know

just his enthusiasm, and I don't know, he was like rubber legs. [Laughter] I don't know, I wish I could do some of the things he can do; which is how The Earl came about. I was trying, he had made up a step or he was teaching a step and . . . I couldn't do it and in the process came up with The Earl. (White, Earl. Telephone interview. 18 March 2011)

In the previous example, White witnessed and danced alongside Dudley Culp making his somatic emulation immediate and in the same time and space. The quotation is an example of how agency is exercised through bodily practice and how one body responds to another body's expression of repertoire. However, White's creation of "The Earl" reveals how his bodily movement was shaped by imitation, emulation, and imagination. It is emulation as a process that allows the practitioner's creativity and imagination to also shape the movement expression.

I also recall a step I learned from Joe O'Donovan in Cork, Ireland. O'Donovan called the step Fitzzy's after Fitzgerald, an Old-style Irish dancing master of the generation prior to that of O'Donovan's. O'Donovan passed Fitzzy's to me when I visited him and danced with him in his home. Both of these learning/teaching moments are examples of direct transmission from one body to another, where both genealogy and legacy remain attached to the specific repertoire and its performance by differing individuals. However, sometimes transmission about the movement's origins is indirect and messy particularly if the learning about repertoire legacy (the story) comes from the step's genealogy only.

For example, the misnamed Tennessee Walking Step is called so because dancers with The Fiddle Puppets learned it while visiting near the western border of North Carolina in east Tennessee and therefore named it with reference to where they learned it (Sutton, Rodney. Telephone interview. 11 November 2010). The Walking Step, as

Rodney Sutton clarifies and corrects in his interview, actually is Robert Dotson's signature step. Dotson looks like he is walking smoothly when he does it. I learned the Walking Step while a member of the Fiddle Puppets (1982-1988) and associate the step with both Rodney Sutton and Robert Dotson, and now know the step by two different names. As I perform the Walking Step, I do so reflexively marveling at the uniqueness of Dotson's signature step, remembering how difficult it was for me to learn, enjoying the complexity of its subtle weight shifts and variety of sounds, and delighting in the vision of my former colleagues on their bellies struggling to learn it from Dotson so long ago. These reflections are the soma of Robert Dotson's Walking Step as I have transcribed and continue to live it in my body as I practice. When I transmit this bit of repertoire, I consciously express the liveliness of my own history with the step as I move it, sharing both its genealogy and legacy through personal expression in the moment.

For the dancers interviewed for this dissertation research, it is as important to share the stories about how they learned, first saw, or met those dancers who contributed these signature step creations, as it is to actually dance them. The stories live within the creations and, when a current practitioner dances these earlier creations, the stories enliven practice thus inspiring innovation during improvisation and performance. Continued innovation establishes a personal style for the evolving practitioner. Continued performance of one's personal style in tandem with emulation and improvisation can lead to creation of new repertoire that becomes "signature steps." As other dancers emulate "signature steps," imitate them and innovate through them, the cycle begins again and the form and tradition continue living.

However, in some instances, creations remain part of the originator's repertoire only because they carry personal significance. The following examples demonstrate how Kieran Jordan understands what she experienced of dancer Aidan Vaughn's style, signature steps, and learning and teaching habits. She reflects on these experiences with Vaughn and compares them with moments of creativity and agency in her own practice, particularly when it comes to sharing her own creations and personal style with others:

I don't think he wanted to break it down and show me every little trick of his trade. Which is kind of a *sean-nós* thing. I mean, I find myself doing that – I don't always like it about myself – but I'm like, "wait, I figured that step out!" and for me . . . if I create a step it's usually really personal. It's connected to a place I went or a group of people or a specific tune or a special memory or moment. Yeah. So, sometimes I'll name a step and say "this is the *Catskill Step* from three years ago and I'm going to teach it to this group of people now." Or sometimes I'll just have those little references in my head and choose not to share them. (Jordan, Kieran. Telephone interview. 16 October 2010)

Just as the static archive remains incomplete, new creative repertoire or even "signature steps" can sometimes be obfuscated in transmission. Unique to the singular dancer who chooses to enjoy them in his/her own practice, creations can be witnessed and imitated without the originator breaking down the steps' intricacies for another dancer. Nonetheless, innovations and creations are performed and, as Alicia Guinn states, "you can watch someone dance and if you can pick it up you can dance it." Here Guinn is describing how creations observed by the experienced practitioner are readymade for imitation (Guinn, Alicia. Telephone interview. 22 September 2010).

The American percussive forms discussed in this dissertation (Flatfooting, Clogging, Tap, improvised Irish step dancing, and Irish Old-style and *sean-nós* dancing) are practiced in the present, yet with each performance and for each performer, other

practitioners are covertly and overtly recognized, referenced, and revered when dancers dance “signature steps,” named steps, and relate stories about inherited repertoire. Emulating another dancer means bringing those personal qualities, the *person*-ality so to speak, of another’s dancing into one’s own bodily practice. Sometimes dancers trade off, dancing one after the other for a short duration, witnessing one another in turn. This kind of exchange is common across percussive dance traditions when multiple dancers are gathered. In these enactments, dancers “riff off” of one another, or “trade steps” deliberately engaging in the free play of the other dancer’s performed movements and sounds as they imitate, translate, and emulate the other’s personal style and repertoire. At different times, dancers will deliberately dance another’s creative material and there are times when a dancer engages in emulation or imitation of another practitioner non-consciously.

Beyond imitation or innovation, emulation refers to reflexive processes whereby a dancer, in the moment of dancing, can consciously experience reactions, responses, or reflections and memories while dancing, thus re-living a previous moment, or a previous experience of dancing in general. These highly intangible and non-discursive experiences constitute a certain reverence for one’s own past within his/her personal practice, particularly for those experiences that were successful, joyful, and fun. Experiences of others’ dancing, including an array of emotional and aesthetic impressions that constitute memories connected to those performances, can incite expression at any time, present or future. Repeating lived dance experiences, particularly the materiality of them, such as “signature steps” for example, oftentimes serves learning or teaching

purposes; however, this repetition also provides a baseline of expressive possibilities for each practitioner to model while improvising. The ability to reflexively experience one's own past dance experience within the moment of improvisation, and then bodily express this as new movement material, opens the space for new creation in the form.

Somatic Emulation as Performance of Best Practice

The point I want to make about this . . . the core of the story is that my mom would practice in our living room and I would practice with her. And she taught me the Black Bottom, she taught me the Suzie Q, and she taught me the Charleston . . . that was her being wildly happy and totally engaged.

Ann Kilkelly, research participant.

While emulation is a vehicle for transmitting legacy and genealogy, emulation is also a process by which practitioners receive knowledge about best practice. In the following discussions, participants reveal what they find useful when witnessing and admiring other practitioners' dancing. The qualities, habits, attitudes, and techniques demonstrated by others when innovating within repertoire, creating new repertoire, and performing repertoire provide data about how and why emulation is critical to best practice. The following quotations shared by the research participants demonstrate differing ways in which emulation can work as a model for best practice. For the interviewees in this section, the potency of somatic emulation becomes evident in how the "soma" of one dancer's practice and repertoire directly and indirectly affects the meaning, value, and experience of the emulating dancer's practice.

Dancer Shannon Dunne recounts witnessing a pair of older men throughout the weekend of the *Ros Muc* Jig Festival in Connemara, Ireland in 2007 and again in 2008. Dunne describes the antics of how these two friends, Tom and Christy (from somewhere

in Galway), dance in different styles and she concludes that the example of their combined participation in the festival provided her with a vivid model for best practice in the *sean-nós* dance tradition. She sets the story up by explaining that being at the festival was important for the pair of elderly men, particularly Tom who had left his 95-year old mother alone on the farm to compete in the festival. She goes on to say:

. . . they were ridiculous . . . they tumbled around together, just constantly laughing, and just constantly causing trouble and hitting on girls inappropriately, but in that old man kind of way. They were ridiculous. They were totally ridiculous. And they had eight million jokes and I don't think they slept the entire time they were there and they stayed in the same shirt and tie that got ragged-ier and more like kind of wrinkled over the course of the weekend . . . Christy was only . . . doing the exhibition, he was going to dance on the half-door, because he didn't have any jigs steps, he only danced reels, and Tom wore . . . a hat at all times when he was dancing. He was the most beautiful graceful, just clearly [dancing was] a natural expression for him, but he would get so nervous that felt he needed an alter ego. And so he would wear this cowboy hat . . . very big, cowboy hat he told me that he wore to hide himself underneath so that people would look at the hat and not him. And then the next year when I went back he was wearing a 49'ers hat . . . he [was] just grabbing anything he could get his hands on to hide? [inflection like a question] And . . . they both were like completely lovely [dancers], Christy . . . would do these grand leaps from the barrel to the half-door and jump back on the barrel then kind of hop around and pretend to kick people in the audience, but then Tom had a really great groove and his steps really didn't vary a whole lot, he'd just vary a couple of little things in them, he just danced with this little subtle groove the whole time. And anytime I think about what [*sean-nós* dancing is] supposed to be about I think about them. They are almost two halves of a whole. You know? They just kind of wrapped it all up. There it is. Right there, all in their glory. (Dunne, Shannon. Telephone interview. 16 September 2010)

A relationship between what Dunne describes as enjoyable and remarkable about her experience of Tom and Christy is also reflected in Dunne's description of her own improvisation. In her interview, she provides an analysis of best practice by detailing when and how her own dancing feels best. Dunne valued the grand, physical humor of

Christy's performance and the subtle groove of Tom's performance. These examples, for Dunne, represent two ends of the spectrum of *sean-nós* dancing that then combine to model best practice in the form. Dunne literally uses the same adjectives "groovy" and "funny" to qualify when *sean-nós* dancing feels right and does not feel right for her and when best practice emerges in her practice. Further, the qualities she emulates from Christy and Tom are those in which she is neither too deliberate, like Christy, nor too serious, like Tom, rather someplace in between the two older dancers' opposite attitudes. Dunne's best practice means remaining available to the humor of the moment without taking herself too seriously. She describes her best practice this way:

[I]f I'm trying it doesn't feel right. But if I'm relaxed and it's just kind of, it's not even necessarily that I'm being funny or that I'm being groovy or if I'm hiding or whatever, but it's more of if I'm just kind of in the moment, just expressing, whatever is happening at that time, like whatever that means at that time? And it's weird because recently this thing has happened where it's become funny, like it's almost like I can't help myself, but some expression of that music in the way that if I'm really relaxed and feel very comfortable, naturally, there's this funny side to it, but that's not coming from a deliberate . . . I am not deliberately meaning to be funny? It's not like I'm starting to dance [and thinking], "let me make people laugh," but it has this kind of quality to it. I don't know . . . You know it's like I have the best time when I'm not taking myself too seriously! (Dunne, Shannon. Telephone interview. 16 September 2010)

For Dunne, the refinement of her personal style and her uniqueness as practitioner requires relaxation and the ability to be "in the moment," particularly when her self-expression is neither deliberate nor pre-meditated. Best practice means allowing attitudes and expressions to emerge comfortably, naturally, and as part of improvisation.

Therefore, for these research participants, part of the legacy dancers transmit when they dance is their personal attitude about what and how they dance. Somatic

emulation models how a dancer might find what he/she feels is right about moving or playing. For Clogger and Old-time fiddler Earl White, whose best practice in both dance and music making is achieved during moments of highly personalized union between sounding and moving, to transmit the attitude of joy is more important than transmitting repertoire precisely or exactly:

[Y]ou know you meet other dancers and in my eagerness I'd see somebody doing a step that I thought was really cool and I'd enquire about it. People would see me doing a step and they would enquire about it. And for me it was, that's how the dancing grows and that's how the dancing evolves. It is when you share it and you see the same kind of joy coming [to] the person that's receiving it. (White, Earl. Telephone interview. 18 March 2011)

White further equates best practice not with repertoire specifically, but with a unique sense of a rebellious self that the form engenders through improvisation and emulation.

He identifies some of his favorite dancers as “renegades” saying:

Some of my favorite dancers, people that I basically danced with over the years . . . Wynns Dinnsen, he and I were considered the renegades of the group. It was that free expression that basically came out of being a renegade. (White, Earl. Telephone interview. 18 March 2011)

White connects his identification of Dinnsen as renegade with his ability to freely express himself in the dance form through the rebellious nature of improvisation, a hallmark of best practice in clogging.

White further describes what it felt like to discover clogging for the first time and how he continues to know he is experiencing best practice in the form. His descriptions

qualify the experiences of dancing and music making as nearly synonymous, and, in the very least, interdependent one upon the other. He states:

Well for me it was a release! Somewhat of a sense of freedom . . . once I came upon clogging it like, oh my God, it just opened up this whole new world for me and a new aspect of self-expression. And, pretty much because of the fact that what I observed in other people that would clog, was you didn't have to look like anybody else! [Chuckles] You didn't have to do the Boogaloo or the Twist, you know? You didn't have to . . . it was a total expression of self. (White, Earl. Telephone interview. 18 March 2011)

[Clogging] takes me to a space that I only reach when I'm doing that. It's just like when I'm playing my fiddle, there's a place that I can go that um, there's no other way that I can get there. That when I'm in that space I am one with my fiddle, one with my instrument and it just flows, similar to my dance, when I hit that space . . . like when I look back over some of the video footage of the Green Grass Cloggers and I look, and I see myself and I try to imagine what I was thinking? Where was I in that point in my psyche while I was spinning around and doing that dance? And it's a place that's heavenly for me. It's great! (White, Earl. Telephone interview. 18 March 2011)

White is not the only dancer to describe strong feelings of freedom and a sense of becoming one with the music as evaluative markers for best practice. The following quotes from Meehan, Jordan, and O'Leary all note the combination of listening, sounding, and moving that are involved when best practice is achieved through improvised dance enactments:

[W]hen it's going well it just . . . you feel free. I just feel like I'm flying free. (Jordan, Kieran. Telephone interview. 16 October 2010)

I feel like I'm just in the moment so I'm not sure exactly how I feel. It feels sort of like I'm playing music. Like I'm part of a session. Fun [laughs] . . . it feels right, it feels natural. (Meehan, Maldon. Telephone interview. 28 October 2010)

Well, I suppose I'm paying attention to what I'm doing, but I'm also enjoying dancing hard and making varied rhythms. I'm enjoying performing and connecting to the music [while I'm performing], and when I'm dancing I think that I feel a stronger connection to the music as a dancer. A lot of dancers are

aware of when the music starts and stops but they wouldn't necessarily [connect with the music] . . . I suppose that's the great thing about improvisation is that you have to react to the music. (O'Leary, Niall. Telephone interview. 12 January 2011)

For Tap dancer Ann Kilkelly, mastering the skills of inherited repertoire and then improvising with them leads to best practice as innovate practice. In the following discussion, Kilkelly describes what arises for her in experiencing another's work. She identifies joy, a more choreographic sensibility, and an orchestral sense of the dancers within space as they push the boundaries of where the dance form might go. Kilkelly relates her appreciation of Brenda Bufalino, who she feels has mastered tap dance repertoire as both a soloist performer and craftsperson of orchestral choreography for ensembles. For Kilkelly, Bufalino's work not only creates vivid images, but also creates layers of sophisticated sound including spoken text. Kilkelly appreciates how Bufalino's skillful work combines concepts, images, and sounds in a manner beyond the traditional boundary of normative tap dance practice. She finds herself enchanted by Bufalino's innovations and creations. She describes:

I'm just completely enchanted by her performances and the combination of rhythms and choreography . . . she is really a choreographer; she doesn't just do time steps, she really has brilliant conceptual pieces that almost always have text in them or some other gorgeous stage imagery. And they're orchestrated, they're orchestral – I love orchestral tap that's really good where you have many layers of rhythm at play and that . . . follow a jazz line. I love ensemble work that's good. I'm not as crazy about solo work except by a few artists. I really . . . mean, just generally solo work isn't very good, even though there are fabulous dancers all soloing. It tends to be a whole bunch of noise to me, just a lot of rattling. And I really admire the dancers who stretch, you know, who can really do the traditional time step figures and all that, but stretch it in some way . . . So I love *that* when there's somebody with a skill at the form who's doing it in a way that really pushes the boundaries – I love that. (Kilkelly, Ann. Telephone interview. 28 October 2010)

What is interesting about Kilkelly's description is how she herself describes a personal concept of arranging space *auditorally* to achieve best practice in her own work which may also be beyond the scope of normative tap dance improvisation. This act of creating visual imagery by ear moves Kilkelly's a work beyond call and response of sounding improvisation in the tradition of tap dancing.

In summary, Kilkelly's admiration of Bufalino drives her to consider deep listening a skill essential when in the process of innovating or creating. In the next quotation, Kilkelly explains when best practice emerges in her own practice in relation to her emulation of Bufalino:

I'm thinking principally with rhythmic structures, not visual choreographic structures, but more the auditory aural structures of tap that sort of . . . well the music of it really is . . . differentiated for me from when I think visually. I have to very often think visual terms that are rhythmic. You know what I mean? Rather than visual terms that have to do with organizing space in a certain way. So it's like organizing space based on rhythms, or visual appearance in terms of rhythm; Motown choreography does that, it's like vocal choreography, it's like the rhythms of particular break in a tune would suggest a four-pattern to me, for example . . . That's when I know I'm in the realm of tap dancing [chuckles] when I'm working, even though I may be making visual images, I do it by ear. Through my ears rather than the visual look. . . . I mean I think that's what sustains me in it . . . that's when I know I'm tap dancing when I am focused on rhythm patterns in one way or another that's primarily located in my ears. Well, I'm inside music in a very physical way. I might or might not be moving . . . actually . . . probably moving but really thinking movement and hearing movement internally. And I think the hearing is deeply, emotionally connected more so than the visual. I think its from multiple layers of sound that, and smell actually, but the emotions connect up for me much more profoundly than with looking at things...which also does, but not to that extent. (Kilkelly, Ann. Telephone interview. 28 October 2010)

As my conversation with Ann Kilkelly continued, I questioned her more about when she knows she is tap dancing as opposed to performing some other form:

Jean: So like a deep listening?

Ann: Yeah, oh absolutely!

Jean: And it may be in response to environmental stimulus but maybe not?

Ann: Yup, that's right. Yeah, I like having said that because I haven't said it that way before. (Kilkelly, Ann. Telephone interview. 28 October 2010)

Kilkelly delves deeply into her practice as solo artist and emulates Bufalino's choreographic skill to which she compares her own best practice. Kilkelly's admiration of Bufalino's ability to orchestrate an ensemble of dancers is set in contrast to the spectacle of solo tap dance practitioner who can perform "just a lot of rattling" if there is no personal style or agency active. Kilkelly's emulation of Bufalino is evident when she describes her own creative agency as "organizing space based on rhythms" for this is something she has witnessed in Bufalino's work (Kilkelly, Ann. Telephone interview. 28 October 2010). Additionally, Kilkelly's best practice illustrates a very sense-oriented approach to improvisation, which requires deep engagement with listening, hearing, sounding (both internal and external), and a unique capability of arriving at a creation's visual appearance and spatial shape principally by all those senses other than sight. In her emulation of Bufalino, Kilkelly pushes the boundaries of how one can move beyond innovation and toward creation in tap dance.

For Irish traditional musician Tes Slominski, practicing emulation of another's personal style includes practicing repertoire. In her case, the repertoire includes those tunes and style(s) of music making associated with the region of Munster known as *Sliabh Luachra*. In the following passage, Slominski talks about what she enjoys about

Munster fiddler Connie O'Connell, his tunes, and his manner or style of playing them.

She explains her attraction to his playing:

I loved the *Sliabh Luachra* playing, but I loved Connie's playing. . .the melodies or the tunes, were really appealing to me . . .but he's got some really tasty jigs and reels and then some that he learned himself. . . . He just has this awesome tone that just, it's so unaffected . . . he just plays and it cuts through, like there's this certain gravity on the bow, it's digging in without digging in, it's effort without effort . . . and like a lot of things that I just delight in in life are like this . . . [a] sort of effort without effort thing . . . that I hear in Connie's playing, and I don't know if anybody else in the world would hear this in Connie's playing, but it's what I hear and what I feel when I play. (Slominski, Tes. Personal interview. 17 March 2011)

As Slominski continues to reflect on her experiences with O'Connell, she shares that the same qualities that attract her in O'Connell's playing can also be heard in her own best practice. Emulation, as Slominski details, requires an accumulation of experiences over time and in many contexts allowing for the observation and transcription of habits (style) from one practitioner to the other. Slominski made this level of transcription possible by literally "putting herself in the way" of O'Connell's music as well as that of fiddler Donal O'Connor:

[I]f you had asked me when I was really in the thick of this I might have said, "Oh, I love Connie's tone," or I love the way that Donal phrases slides or I might of said it in that way, but I would have mostly said that I just love these tunes. I'm not sure that at the time I would have likened it to finding my stride walking. I'm not sure . . . I rearranged my life to be at Connie's session at the Old Triangle in Macroom . . . for as much of the summer as I could manage . . . I just tried to be in Connie's presence as much as I could . . . I was getting Donal's tunes and realizing that my bowing was almost exactly, on some tunes, my bowing would be pretty close to what Donal does . . . I never had a lesson with Donal. *Yeah, I just put myself in the way of his music* . . . maybe certain people don't learn from lessons so much. I'm just thinking of the musicians I hang out with a lot and they also do this, they're just certain people who are just golden and they follow them. (Slominski, Tes. Personal interview. 17 March 2011. Emphasis added.)

The practice of emulating artists in order to create a sense of best practice yourself can also be seen as an intimate communion between practitioners. Habituated to absorption of nuance, deep listening, and personal style, practitioners engage one another, thereby opening the possibility for creating a shared change in the moment. This sense of best practice as shared communion is different than how many dance concert forms have been evaluated in terms of aesthetic elements (shape, dynamics, line, etc. as established by first and second generations of Modern dance practitioners and choreographers)ⁱⁱⁱ. In the next section, the research participants provide further insights into the nature of this communal aspect in American percussive dance and music forms.

Best Practice as Communion

Just as repertoire is the container for both constancy and change in a living tradition, what I call an act of communion is the locus for best practice of both innovation and creation for practitioners participating in this dissertation. Across the interviews of participants, best practice is detailed through anecdotes that describe experiencing a moment of meaningful connection with other practitioners, sometimes within the same genre (dancer to dancer) and sometimes across genres (dancer and musician). Specific expressions used to describe these moments come directly from interview transcripts and include phrases such as “deep listening,” as confirmed by dancer Ann Kilkelly in the preceding section; “that thing that happens,” used by Kieran Jordan in reference to a conversation and teaching moment she shared with musician Sean Gannon; “sharing a brain,” as described by Irish traditional fiddler Tes Slominski; and “lock on” or “lock step,” used by both Earl White and Slominski. In the context of emergent improvisation

for dancers and meaningful performing for musicians, each feels he/she fulfills best practice individually by joining together respective, and intimately related repertoires across genres.

For the dancers in particular, deep listening to the music in play – that is the live music they are moving with—is critical to understanding where and when in the tune innovation might occur. It is the personal style of playing developed by the music practitioner with his/her translations, imitations, and innovations that provides opportunity for unique responses from a dancer. Conversely, a dance practitioner, one who has developed a personal style and who improvises and innovates with repertoire, can provide opportunities in the moment of play for a musician to ornament, shift phrasing, or improvise with the melody, for example.

Meehan and Sutton share examples of how the music is important to the dancing. First, Meehan is defining the intimacy of solo dance with a solo musician as opposed to how it feels to be social dancing with many dancers and a band of musicians. Meehan makes clear that the music in play is itself a teacher from whom she learns by deep listening. On the other hand, Sutton is deep listening to learn how the musician interprets the repertoire in order to find new ways of responding. For Meehan, the solo experience is:

. . . more personal and it's individual and yet you're also connecting with the people playing the music, or the musician. But it's really about just honing in and *dancing*. You know? Whereas, the other styles of dance that I do are more social and interactive and you're dancing as a community with a lot of people . . . I mean, *sean-nós* dancing's nice because you can continue to learn stuff and build upon what you have. And you're learning that *while you're learning from the*

music. (Meehan, Maldon. Telephone interview. 28 October 2010. Emphasis added.)

Sutton then expresses how communion produces a subtle change that perhaps goes unnoticed by observers who may not be directly engaged in either music or dance practice. It is in this communion with the musician that Sutton finds his best practice:

I just love it . . . following my own response to what I'm hearing a particular musician [do] and how they interpret a particular tune. And I think I've gotten to be pretty good about, you know, really listening to what they're doing and I dance differently. A lot of people [are] probably . . . "Oh he just does the same thing every time", but . . . what they don't really know . . . you know, just like they'll say all of the old-time tunes sound the same and all the Irish tunes sound the same, and if they listen to nothing but what's on TV they don't have a clue [laughs]. (Sutton, Rodney. Telephone interview. 11 November 2010)

As Slominski urges in the quotation that follows, learning and listening are basics for beginners, yet these basics are confirmed behaviors for veteran musicians and dancers like each of the artists interviewed for this dissertation. Meehan's and Sutton's comments agree with musician Slominski's suggestion that:

Somebody who really isn't familiar with the music at all the first thing I do is to tell them that they have got to listen. Got to find recordings and kind of hone in on what they love to listen to and just really absorb it through listening. They have to, that is the thing that has to happen. (Slominski, Tes. Personal interview. 17 March 2011)

Communion for Earl White, whether playing music or dancing, manifests an act of transformation as the following set of quotes reveals. White expresses that his dancing can be:

. . . based on how I was moved by the music. You know, to me when I dance I pretty much, I try to become one, or feel like I'm one with the music. And because I play the fiddle, I feel more like a fiddle. (White, Earl. Telephone interview. 18 March 2011)

And when White plays an instrument, his music making is:

Similar to the dance, I try to become one with the instrument and basically because I was a dancer before I was a musician, I feel like I play my instrument the way that I dance. You know, so it's a total body, mesmerizing, hypnotic . . . it's a trance-like feeling that I get in terms of . . . just being one with the instrument and becoming the notes that the instrument produces. (White, Earl. Telephone interview. 18 March 2011)

For Kilkelly, communion can sometimes happen outside of the performance space; she senses it happening in her everyday environment. I asked her to describe when she knew she was tap dancing as opposed to some other percussive dance form or improvisational expression. Kilkelly answers that she listens deeply to her own thinking/feeling being as a matter of habit in life:

[T]hat's a pretty powerful question actually, but the simple answer is when I put my shoes on. [chuckles] You know, when I've got noisemakers on my feet. But I'm also tap dancing many, many, many . . . you know, when I don't have my shoes on I tap dance in my head . . . when I'm walking through the aisles of the grocery store I'm running rhythms in my head, and sometimes I'm even doing them with my feet behind the grocery cart. And um, so, when I'm engaged with rhythm, um, when I'm listening to rhythms . . . (I'm sure you know what this is, too) rhythms just play obsessively in my head, I can't get them out too, these little diddie figures. You know, not so much steps I'm trying to remember but just this patter that goes on. And um, so that it's sort of whenever I'm working with dancing in a focused way, with my shoes on and jazz and all that, but in the rest of life its when my brain sort of lands on a pattern, a rhythmic pattern of some kind, that I associate [with] the *when*. (Kilkelly, Ann. Telephone interview. 28 October 2010)

Since percussive dancing is an aural and visual experience, it is not surprising that percussive dancers approach communion more like musicians than dancers. Deep listening allows dancers to create communion primarily via how their bodies sound and how their bodies feel in relationship to the music. For musicians, deep listening to other

musicians is essential, but also listening to and watching dancers moving to their music is critical to achieving best practice.

The musicians and dancers interviewed for this dissertation share a mutual understanding about how dance and music making practices and repertoires function interdependently yet achieve best practice in terms of innovation more often as the result of communion together. Irish traditional musician Kevin Burke describes the repertoire of Irish traditional music in ways that explicitly connect it to dancing; however, he is also keen to point out in a subsequent quotation that this connection is tenuous and dependent on the experience and intent of those sharing the moment by dancing with the music. In the following quotation, Burke mentions the enigmatic term “lift” as it can be heard and felt in best practice of Irish traditional music and he references fellow musician Jackie Daly as collaborator in achieving “lift.” Here, Burke explains:

I always saw this music as essentially dance music. I was kind of taught that if it doesn't make you feel like dancing it's probably not much use because that was its main purpose. . . . but it's not the only point. I suppose that was an influence from my parents. My parents didn't play music but they did like to dance. So from their point of view the music that was best was the music that allowed them to dance and enjoy the dancing. If it didn't do that they weren't that interested in it. So I kind of inherited that. But then when I got older I started to think there's loads of music that's quaint, but it doesn't make you want to dance . . . But I've always seen it as an important part. And I found that with Jackie's playing, too – this enigmatic thing called lift or life or power or [laughing] whatever. You hear all these nebulous words describing someone's playing. But I like that kind of energy. It reminds you that basically it's dance music. (Burke, Kevin. Telephone interview. 11 January 2011)

Dancers, too, listen for “lift” or, as Burke remarks, music that “makes you want to dance.” Often the repertoire and individual style demonstrated by a musician become critical ingredients for the emergence of Irish *sean-nós* dancing, for example, but the

potency of communion between repertoires and practitioners comes from a mutual understanding that Irish traditional music is, for the most part, dance music. Guinn makes this distinction when she states:

[T]he most enjoyable times are really about the quality of the musicians I get to dance with . . . some people are good musicians but, their music isn't great for dancing . . . there are very few musicians here [in the United States] who I can get up and dance and it makes me feel how I dance when I'm in Galway -- which is like, I hear music [and] . . . I feel like I want to get up and dance or I'm going to die! [laugh] . . . there's something about the rhythm in certain people's playing or in certain regions, that seems particularly conducive to dancing. And it seems to be a super-high level of skill for musicians as well [laugh] . . . [a player] can be a really great musician but not really play dance music. (Guinn, Alicia. Telephone interview. 22 September 2010)

Just as some musicians do not play music in ways that incite best dance practice, some dancers do not dance in ways that incite best practice for musicians. Burke details what it is like to play for dancers and emphasizes that it may not be skill level or repertoire that makes the dancer or dancers easy or enjoyable to play with; rather it is their ability to work together or be in communion with the tune in play and the musician/s. Burke says that when he plays for a dancer:

. . . it can feel different. When it's going well I find it easier to get there with the dancers, you know? We help each other along. But if the dancers aren't good I find it a chore, it's even harder to get there. There's noise and distraction, and people struggling to move in time with the music -- it's a very depressing thing for me [laughing]. When the dancers are good I love it. But when it's not good I find it depressing. And again, I don't know what makes it good or not, you know? There are a lot of guys who I would consider great dancers because of that very thing -- they made it easier to play music. But they might not be considered great dancers; they definitely weren't athletic in the Michael Flatley sense! (Burke, Kevin. Telephone interview. 11 January 2011)

Burke also recounts instances of communion happening between his playing with band member John Carty, Sr. and a group of set dancers in London who are, as Burke

describes, great dancers and fans. In the following Burke connects this sense of communion to the social context:

. . . as soon as you'd see these people you knew, "*Wow, it was going to be a good night tonight.*" And they'd come up near the front of the stage and they'd dance near the band. It was almost . . . almost planned. You know, they'd be dancing with different people throughout the evening but then at a certain point these three or four guys and three or four women, or five or six men and five or six women, they'd assemble near the stage and they'd line up with their favorite dances, and it was like, *we've got the A-team together now*. [laughing] You know? And it was fantastic . . . exciting. (Burke, Kevin. Telephone interview. 11 January 2011)

Irish dancer Kieran Jordan relates a striking example of communion as she shares an experience she had while teaching with Connemara musician Sean Gannon. Jordan recounts that Gannon, like Burke, describes the connection, or lack thereof, between a musician and dancer. In her retelling, Jordan acknowledges that not all musicians are ideal for *sean-nós* dancing, but she also shares that from Gannon's perspective not all dancers are able to skillfully connect with the tune in play or musician to realize best practice for *sean-nós* dancing. In the following quotation, communion is described as "a thing that happens" and the context is Jordan's students experiencing *sean-nós* dancing with solo musicians, perhaps for the first time. She narrates:

I taught a *sean-nós* workshop yesterday and . . . the musician is from Connemara [Sean Gannon] . . . it just fit so well together. But that would even vary from musician to musician, like this guy really likes playing for dance and he really gets it so . . .

Jean: So ideally what would that relationship be like?

Kieran: . . . he [Gannon] spoke so brilliantly about it yesterday. And it was really, *really* valuable I think for the students to hear a musician's perspective, and he was wonderful . . . what he said was [laugh] . . . – he said, "when a competition dancer [who]. . . can be an excellent technician and [have] excellent rhythm but would expect the music to be consistent because they're used to dancing to a certain type of music that's recorded at metronome speeds *for* dance . . . they're used to dancing to a lot of recorded music and even the live music for

competition is supposed to sound like the recorded music.” And then he went on to say, “a *sean-nós* dancer listens to whatever music is playing and dances to that” . . . this was my advanced group – and my students were . . . there were only four of them so it was a nice opportunity to have them dance individually and try to really lock in with the music and make it intimate because that’s what . . . the best *sean-nós* dancing I think is . . . solo dance and solo music . . . So, anyway, they [students] danced one at a time, and some were more comfortable than others and some were just stronger and more experienced than others. So at the end of that, he pointed that out; he said, “Some of you have better rhythm than others.” [Laughter] But then he said that, for him, it’s hard to play with someone who’s not really listening. You know, or [who] doesn’t have good rhythm.” I think it’s hard for him to stay steady because it really is a dialogue. So in the same way we, the dancer, expect the musician to stay steady he was pointing out [laugh] that he expects the dancer to also stay steady. And that when that happens, these are his words again, he said, “There’s a thing, there’s a thing that happens.” [chuckles] And he just . . . kept gesturing back and forth from him to the dancer. So it’s a hard thing to define, but it’s a *thing*! [Laughter] And I think that it’s a connection, it’s a groove . . . it’s a connection really, like, you know when you know, you know? You’re playing the music together – one through the instrument, one through the feet. (Jordan, Kieran. Telephone interview. 16 October 2010)

While communion between music in play, musician, and dancer can be potent, there also exists communion between two musicians sharing repertoire. For Slominski, the repertoire (music) itself plays an equal part in the process of communion between musicians, and, therefore, helps both achieve best practice. Communion is not only about playing in unison or playing the same tune, but also includes certain experiential knowing and a level of intimacy with the tune in play. In the following quotation, Slominski describes the tune in play as a third force in the collaborative efforts musicians exercise to experience communion. Slominski remarks that best practice does not have to include innovation all the time by which she means melodic variation and/or ornamentation. Best practice can also be simply achieving communion. She begins by asking a question about whether or not players have an awareness of the repertoire’s power to “drive” the

player. If a player allows the repertoire to drive the moment he/she can experience yet another level of communion with the repertoire itself. She queries:

Do you drive the tune or does the tune drive you? But when I'm having a good time its because the music is just carrying me along, and I'm just going with the flow [mouth sound] and that phrase exists for a very good reason, "and the music just carries you along." And so when two musicians are riding the same wave and then its carrying you along and then you get into that playing off melodically, that's when that becomes fun . . . when you're riding the same wave. For me, if I were not in the same stream being carried along by the same wave at the same pace and all that, if we're not in the same groove together, then the melodic stuff just does not matter . . . It's only after we're just being carried along with the music, yeah, and at that point, if the groove is there, total unison playing or no ornamentation or variation, I don't care. I know everybody says that you don't play a tune the same way twice and I believe you don't even if you don't do any ornamentation or variation, of course you don't play the tune the same way twice, but that need to constantly vary and ornament, I don't necessarily feel that urge all the time. But if we're all going along together, like if we were playing that set of tunes known as, the *Sliabh Luachra* national anthem, which is The Galtee Rangers, Gleanntan, and Callaghan's . . . those three tunes are not particularly complicated and I think the reason that they've become so iconic in the *Sliabh Luachra* style is because you get in the groove and those tunes just carry you on, if you're playing them anywhere [near] decent, they just carry you on and lift you up. (Slominski, Tes. Personal interview. 17 March 2011)

In this quotation, Slominski asserts that communion itself is a form of best practice that serves to forge both personal and regional styles such as that of *Sliabh Luachra*, and that innovation as ornamenting the tune or improvising variations of it do not always result.

Slominski further recounts experiences with other musicians in which they were accompanying an Irish social dance. In the first part of the quotation, she describes how her best practice as a musician when dancers are involved includes a primary communion with the dancers and describes this communion as being in "lock-step" with them.

However, toward the end of the quotation she describes how her best practice as a musician with other musicians is like "sharing a brain." She expresses that communion is

precisely what makes playing music fun in both situations. In her interview, Slominski entered a sort of reverie and stream of consciousness when describing these experiences:

[T]he point at which it became fun . . . was being in sync with the dancers, I don't know if anyone up there [on stage] noticed, but I was staring at the dancers, I wasn't paying much attention to what was going on up here, but I was in lock-step with the dancers, but whenever I'm in lock-step with somebody whether it's a dancer or another musician, that is the most fun ever, it's like sharing a brain . . . [Y]ou'd think it'd mean somebody that you've played with all the time, that you have the same tunes and basically the same groove, and yeah, that is part of it. But sometimes it is almost like sharing a brain . . . It's like you reach your brain out and you open it up to whoever is playing with [you], however you are playing, and if they do the same and if you can keep that going it is like you start sharing a brain and there's extra communication. (Slominski, Tes. Personal interview. 17 March 2011)

Slominski goes on to qualify that “sharing a brain” and being in “lock-step” are experiences of communion that can happen with anyone who practices in similar living traditions. The requirement for communion is a willingness to “meet in the middle,” and for Slominski this willingness toward communion supersedes skills such as intonation, for example. In the following quotation, Slominski details conditions needed for her personally to achieve communion with others and therefore realize best practice. She explains that communion is:

. . . something that is like intimacy in that you are both open, but also reaching out and there's a level of trust there that's doesn't necessarily have to do with the person as a person, but as a musician . . . Because most of the time its with people that I really like and that I feel comfortable with in other ways but doesn't necessarily have to be, it could be with a stranger or an almost stranger, but if people do this thing it is like some weird . . . groove thing, I think that it's more, and I know for me anyway, and I know different people have different opinions about this, I can tune out somebody whose . . . intonation is not good, if the groove is there and they're willing to meet me half way . . . if you get two people who are playing in totally different grooves and they are not willing to meet in the middle, then it's excruciating. It's not fun to play, it's really frustrating to play. (Slominski, Tes. Personal interview. 17 March 2011)

Slominski's description of when communion is difficult with another musician sounds very similar to Burke's description of when communion is difficult for him with a dancer. Neither Slominski nor Burke is concerned with how innovative those they wish to commune with might be. Instead, each musician is clear that communion requires an ability to be with the other, "meet in the middle," and make it easy to share the repertoire and enliven it in the moment. Players, dancers, and repertoire are active concomitantly as equals in the collaboration of communion.

Practitioners evaluate communion in terms of the emotional impact and quality of relating such experiences produce. Previously in this discussion, Burke remarks that communion as best practice feels "fantastic" and is "exciting." Guinn qualifies communion as "enjoyable" and Kilkelly "obsessive," while White describes it as "mesmerizing," and "trance-like." Communion is "connecting" while "honing in" on the moment, as Meehan says and, a "dialogue" as Jordan relates. Communion involves a willingness to "lock on" or be in "lock step" with others that in turn feels like "sharing a brain" as Slominski intimates. For most practitioners, communion produces an appetite for more because, like Slominski and Sutton express, "that is the most fun ever," and practitioners "just love it."

Somatic Emulation and Perpetuation of Tradition

In summary, through the process of somatic emulation, practitioners inherit the legacy of past performers alongside the genealogy and stories of these artists' innovations and creations. This somatic emulation models how past dance enactments and past dance

practitioners achieved innovation and/or creation in their respective forms. By emulating the values, attitudes, and repertoire of past innovators /creators, contemporary practitioners experience how to achieve personal style, how to improvise, innovate, and then, possibly, create. This act of improvisation, particularly if an instance of communion between people and repertoire is achieved, opens the space for innovation to emerge.

Somatic emulation as a habit for practitioners can also model how practitioners best collaborate with others in their genre and across genres. This collaboration develops a sense of communion as individuals share experiences of practices, the moment, the repertoire, and the repertoire's legacy and genealogy. Communion, the willing, skillful, and interdependent engagement of repertoire by practitioners as each relates in and through the moment, provides for the most potent instances of innovation, the most fertile surround for creation, and the best practice for each practitioner involved. For the research participants in this study, characteristics of communion are deep listening to the tune in play, joy, improvisation, and meeting one another in the middle, for the sole purpose of sharing a brain, and being in lock step with the repertoires, tunes and steps, that drive the moment of performance as well as the tradition.

Additionally, it is the current practitioners' innovations and/or creations that become available for future dancer's to imitate and translate and which secures such innovations/creations as potentially both/and continued/*new* building blocks within a living tradition. The process is like, but not quite, a recycling of building block repertoire shared among dancers, both past and present. Emulation and innovation, when practiced

in tandem, create a space for past legacies to move into the present and for present genealogies to be part of future legacies within each tradition's repertoire. Emulation and innovation as habits of best practice also open a space for experienced dancers/musicians to establish communion regularly and thus increase the likelihood of creating new repertoire.

Notes

ⁱ This epigraph is from the webpage for *Siamsa Tire*, Ireland, (www.siamsatire.com).

ⁱⁱ I referred to the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* to distinguish meaning between these two terms. Accordingly, to create means to bring into existence whereas to innovate means to change something already established (11th ed. rev. 2008).

ⁱⁱⁱ Please see Doris Humphrey's *The Art of Making Dances* (1958), or *The Intimate Act of Choreography*, Lynne Anne Bloom and L. Tarin Chaplin (1982), for a detailed description of aesthetic markers for concert dance creation.

CHAPTER VII
TRANSMITTING LIVING TRADITIONS:
SELF, COMMUNITY, AND CULTURE MAKING

As a life-long participant in Irish and American percussive dance forms, my body tells me that Kitty O'Neil's dancing is within me. After conducting the interviews and mining the data for this dissertation, I have now discovered a way to describe how O'Neil's practice and performances living within me can be transmitted through time in a document that also opens numerous insights and imaginations. Embedded in her contributions to the repertoire, O'Neil passed on her experience of living tradition via other bodies, dancers that likely imitated her. O'Neil's dancing, fragments of repertoire, and bits of imitation moved through the tradition covertly; they were not part of the recorded archive coming down through historical writing. Instead, these fragments have likely been unconsciously absorbed and incompletely transmitted to me through my many relationships across dance traditions, genealogies of dance practices, and legacies of performers. Therefore, I question the complete extinction of her contributions in any living tradition of American percussive dance, yet know I cannot repeat her exact steps. I do, however, feel comfortable stating that the processes I use to engage the dance forms I practice are likely processes similar to those O'Neil engaged long ago. I am myself when I dance, yet I am simultaneously aware that some fragment of Kitty O'Neil is there with me as I perform.

This final chapter explores a model of relational cycles I designed to explain how I have come to understand O'Neil's presence in my current practice. The model is built upon data provided by participants regarding how and when the dance emerges as a best practice, offers a pathway for discovering how self-identity and cultural identity occur within the dance forms researched in this dissertation. The model suggests how a living tradition operates for the individual dancer, and functions within a continuing culture and contiguous dance tradition. By operate I specifically mean the dynamic processes used by individual dancers to achieve best practice. These processes exist internally for the dancer and manifest as a creative sense of personal style and a unique internal structure for that individual's expression of dancing. By function, I mean to indicate how each individual's internal structure is reflected in performance as he/she relates to change in, influence from, and interaction with the social environment through which the dancing emerges.

In this sense American percussive dancing operates aesthetically at the level of the practitioner's body and is determined by the dancers' whole somatic experiences. At the same time, the dancer's practice remains functionally open to influence and change given the experiences of others and with others in the culture extent. Such external information includes memories and stories about those dancers and musicians from the past as well as their inherited repertoire. Additionally, other external factors include observations, experiences with new creations in repertoire, exposure to differing repertoire, differing styles, and the many possibilities for communion given where, when, how, and with whom one dances.

Constructing A Model Using Pragmatist Philosophy

Somaesthetics is a disciplinary frame and field of study for analyzing and articulating how people make meaning from lived experience by using combined sensory-cognitive faculties to assess the value of that experience. Pragmatist philosopher Richard Shusterman's theory of somaesthetics and philosopher José Medina's pragmatist model for cultural capital exchange are used in this conclusion to shape a model for use by those unfamiliar with this dissertation's particular dance forms so they might better understand how the forms' unique goods are exchanged in transmission.

Shusterman positions sensory-aesthetic appreciation as a central process through which the goods (stocks of knowledge) inherent in experience, and a critique of them, are capable of leading people to improve somatic care of the self (Arnold 48). My definition of somatic emulation (Chapter VI, pages 13-14) aligns with Shusterman's definition of "sensory-aesthetic appreciation"; dancers emulate other dancers and other styles, activate awareness of their sensory experience of that emulation and dancing, then evaluate how that experience best suits their needs. Somatic emulation leads dancers to aesthetic choices for their own dancing. I understand Shusterman's definition of "sensory-aesthetic appreciation" to describe how people assess lived experience at the level of the body (sensory) and assign value to that experience (aesthetic evaluation). This process is repeated so that over time they accumulate knowledge (appreciation) about personal preferences, their identity, and a set of values that guide their living.

By somatic care Shusterman means that humans deliberately choose how to aesthetically and practically arrange the way they live their lives. This is what most

American percussive dancers learn to do through processes of transmission; dancers practice bodily discipline of dancing and exercise personal agency, choosing what to dance and how to dance. Aesthetic choice and sensory experience work in tandem to provide an increasing sense of personal style as these processes are repeated. This is the basis of Shusterman's theory/practice of somaesthetics (2008, 7-8). I have applied the process of sensory-aesthetic appreciation as a lens for defining the functionality of transmission and performance processes within the living traditions of dance researched in this dissertation. In Chapter VI, I assert that dancers utilize somatic emulation as a means to discover a best practice.

Sensory-aesthetic appreciation particularly accumulates as people experience living within a group, a community, and/or a culture. Similar values can be shared among differing people within a group. Such commonly held values, their worth, and their meaning are further defined when individuals move these values across cultures, groups, experiences, and time. People come to understand the worth of their valuing processes by comparing their experiences with others through social exchange. Values are used as capital, similar to the use of currency in the exchange of goods. In these exchanges, it is important to note that not all members of a culture exchange or transact these values equally (Medina 113). Sensory-aesthetic appreciation accumulates and inheres within a person's experience of the world moving him/her toward the formation of an identity that is both personal and cultural.

According to pragmatist philosopher Medina, commonly held experience for those from within a host culture, or *cultural capital*, is used to engage others outside of

that host culture. The exchange of cultural capital allows those exchanging it (host culture), and those receiving it (outside culture) the opportunity to identify with that cultural capital and “become mutually enriched or impoverished” depending on how cultural capital is used and who uses it (Medina 124). Dancing is a specific kind of cultural capital. Based on this research, the rich somatic knowledge that is transmitted through a living tradition of dance specifically constitutes experiences that demonstrate a transformative power inherent in a best practice because best practice is defined by the dancer him/herself.

As the data in Chapters V and VI reveals, dancing is transmitted through participation, along with information about how to dance; how to interpret the music and the form; and how to commune with music, musicians, and the surround. Transmission also includes knowledge about how to innovate with the inherited repertoire or “the commons,” how to emulate another’s dance practice or personality, and how to express one’s own personality. Finally, some dancers transmit how to create new movement entirely by repeating their “signature steps” or “flash steps.” These goods, or stocks of knowledge, are available for any participant in the culture to utilize and reflect upon so that a deeper, more meaningful, awareness of the experience, or how to extend it, can be achieved. Dancing within a living tradition is a personal, cultural, and historical experience that liberates the individual and clarifies his/her place in and meaning of the culture through which the dancing emergesⁱ.

The epistemological approach to this research, therefore, asks how and when American percussive dance happens in order to better understand each form’s distinct

knowledge as it emerges and is experienced by others. These questions also reveal the potential transformative power that practice holds for individual practitioners discussed in this research (Shusterman, 2008, 28). The intent of this model of relational cycles is to make clear that practitioners from each distinct form share similar cycles for relating. These similarities lead me to understand how each living tradition of dance (Irish step dancing and *sean-nós* dancing, Clogging, Flatfooting, Buck dancing, and tap dancing) might claim, contain, and transmit Kitty O’Neil’s soma from the past as part of the forms’ collective, current practice.

Shusterman organizes somaesthetics into three distinct modes: analytical, pragmatic, and practicalⁱⁱ. Performative somaesthetics is a subset of pragmatic somaesthetics and includes those “disciplines [that] aim either at external exhibition or at enhancing one’s inner feelings of power, skill, and health” (29). As a subset of pragmatic somaesthetics, performative somaesthetics also deals with changing or “remaking” the body and society via certain somatic improvements via comparison and critique (Shusterman 24). The bodily disciplines engaged in pragmatic and performative somaesthetics are aimed at “improving one’s behavior” toward self and others by increased awareness of one’s “somatic reactions” (Shusterman 25).

Performative somaesthetics, as defined by Shusterman, is, therefore, applicable to the research. I understand Shusterman’s use of the term performative to represent a dialectic exchange of thought and action with experience and critique of that experience simultaneously unfolding for the mover inside and outside of the body during an enactment of dancing. Externally, the dancer exhibits cultural expressions and skills

representatively via repertoire, while internally the dancer enhances one's pleasure and sense of self-expression experientially through aesthetic agency, improvisation, and creativity. For American percussive dancers, it is the act of communion with audience, musicians, and other dancers (both current and historical) that bridges the internal and external; communion is a dialectic exchange that allows the dancer to further critique both inside and outside perspectives of the dance experience and cultural experience.

As both representational and performative, transmissions within living traditions become useful to historical inquiry, while also providing perspective and insight into contemporary dance practiceⁱⁱⁱ. Examining how the dancer's experiences in varied, yet related repertoire illuminates both present and past of each dance form, brings new perspective to present culture, and localizes and relates present practices to traditions of dance in new ways.

This project assumes that dances and dancing are bodily practices that produce specific *goods* that are transacted as *cultural capital*^{iv}. New cultural capital emerges as both individuals and groups simultaneously activate their experiences both inside of and outside of their own culture. It is through interrelatedness and connectedness that individual agency, the act of self-making, is realized. "[C]ultural products and resources do not belong to all of us equally," Medina reminds us, for just as the groups themselves develop in social dimensions of interrelatedness, the cultural capital of varying cultures can be enjoyed by many other cultures/individuals though they may value and enjoy the goods in different ways (130-131). When applied to this study, the concepts of cultural capital exchange and of performative somaesthetics position somatic experience as

appropriate data for understanding self-expression and cultural knowledge as each emerges in practice. Living traditions are active repositories for the exchange of goods (experiences) and cultural capital (dance forms).

Additionally, Medina asserts that self-mastery comes from self-knowledge and that both require transactions of sensory-aesthetic experience outside of the domain of a person's home culture (131-132). To this I would add that the quest for self-mastery, and indeed dance mastery in this instance, includes critical reflection on the domains of shared experience from other times and other cultures including expressions such as dance forms and dance performing processes. American percussive dance then is both representational and experiential as a mode of performative somaesthetic practice.

The Need for a Somaticaesthetic Model to Illustrate Transmission

I have chosen the concepts of performative somaesthetics and cultural capital exchange specifically because the data from those interviewed place the evaluation of best practice within the personal experience of the practitioner. Practitioners describe an every changing understanding and expression of what is meaningful and pleasurable about dancing and playing music. Specifically, American percussive dance practice is not so much about preservation or perfection of a codified standard; instead, it is about inclusive participation. It is not about repetition; it is about extending the form's potential to suit each individual. It is not only about individual dance steps; it is also about a way to commune with the form and others who practice it. While repertoire is transmitted, there is no expectation that it be repeated. On the contrary, the expectation is that repertoire, dancer, form, tradition, and culture transform as the result of achieving a

best practice. The imaginative and somatic experience of a living tradition is what allows contemporary practitioners to manifest both continuity and change within his/her individual practice.

These very ideas make historical research problematic. Therefore, as researcher I came to see that I could not successfully look for “things” or steps, rather I found descriptions for ways of being with and examples of being in a living tradition. After analyzing the data I asked myself: “How do I explain this paradoxical frame of cultural ownership and individual practice, particularly through the experiences of the participants in this research?” and “How do I explain the process of transmission experienced by the practitioners I interviewed in order to make it useful for dance scholars and historians?”

While much scholarly interest has focused on the recorded archive for concert performances of these dance forms, little attention has been given to the aesthetic and somatic experiences of performers. Analysis of percussive dance forms, for example, has proceeded from foundationalist points of view (Hall, 1995, 1996) to more constructivist studies of culture (Hall 1997; Casey). The value of this form’s dance knowledge has been discussed semiotically rather than somatically^v.

Semiotic discussions of Irish dance, for example, stand in stark contrast to the somatic experiences discussed by participants in this study. In previous research, Kieran Jordan made these observations about competitive Irish step dance as she compared her experience in both competitive and *sean-nós* traditions:

I feel, and this may be controversial, but I’m going to say it, I feel like when you’re seeing traditional step dancing which has moved so heavily into the competitive realm, you are not seeing an individual person. . . .

[H]igh level competition . . . removes the personality of the dancer and makes it more about technique and virtuosity and it becomes quantifiable (Jordan, Kieran. Telephone interview. 14 February 2008)

For Jordan, “when you see *sean-nós* dance, you are seeing a person,” not a body as a symbol. Similar to Jordan’s description of experience, the somaesthetic data discussed in this dissertation’s research focuses on time, lived experience, and performance.

American percussive dance contextualized as history, improvisation, and performance situates the cultural habits of practitioners as both shaping and shaped by past dancing, personal experience, and other current dancers. So situated, these forms move through the binaries typically generated by a semiotic discussion, (*what* the form is, or what its habits mean), toward a discussion of *how* the forms operate and how meaning is transmitted. Attending to how the forms operate somatically in relation to the development of an aesthetic brings the people, and the dynamics of their relationships, into focus. It is through relationships that living traditions find liveliness. Examining how the somaesthetic habits of participant data are exchanged as cultural capital reveals particular values and experiences shared across forms. The examination also provides a future path to make conscious or visible latent historical performance practice by those past dancers whose contributions rest outside of the recorded archive.

Relational Cycles of Performance and Transmission

The circulation of musical and movement material within a living tradition begins within a person, specifically a dancer and/or musician, and his/her individual expression of the tradition’s repertoire, playing the tune or dancing a step. The cycle of transmission works, metaphorically, like the lungs in a cycle of respiration or like the bellows in a

melodeon^{vi}. There is an exertion and recuperation, inhale/exhale, each as important as the other, working in tandem to complete reciprocal and complementary actions toward a whole breath, notes within a phrase, or actions and rhythms in a step. There are three creative, social cycles that are systemically linked to this primary exertion and recuperation. The social cycles present in the performance of American percussive dance transmission are based on various relationships including: inside and outside, past and present, performer(s) and culture, performers and performers, performers and repertoire, performer and context/environment, performer(s) and observers, and performers and the moment of performance.

My analysis suggests: 1) an intra-personal cycle of performance as self-expression in which the initiator/performer focuses inwardly in order to outwardly express him/herself through imitation, innovation, or improvisation by dancing or music making in the moment; 2) an inter-personal cycle of performance as communion between performers and the cultural context that surrounds them and includes, more often than not, improvisation within expression; and 3) a supra-personal cycle of performance as culture whereby the transmission of knowledge from both individual and collective practices of dance and music move through time and across communities. All three cycles operate concomitantly for each and every performance: all three areas of relating contribute to the discovery and achievement of a best practice. All three cycles are representational, demonstrating cultural values, and performative, demonstrating characteristics of the culture and how these characteristics are utilized and expressed by that culture's members.

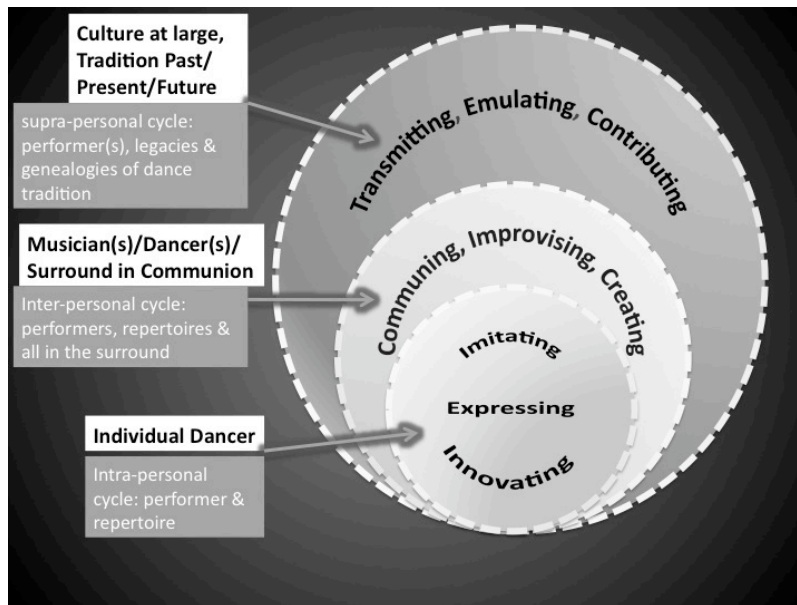


Figure 6. Relational Cycles of Performance and Transmission

Intra-personal Cycle of Performance and Transmission: Imitating, Innovating, and Expressing. In Chapter V, living tradition is described as a somewhat constant collection of individually interpreted tunes or movements. While most dance performances are non-reproducible, constancy in the form and tradition can be attributed to what research participants share as “the commons,” or inherited repertoire, and the “rhythmic nuggets.” Both commons and rhythm nuggets are then attached to the music that further incites the dancing. The “breakdown conundrum” that occurs in experiences of learning repertoire by watching, as opposed to formal instruction (see Chapter V, pages 15-27), sets personal agency in motion. Dancers and musicians imitate and curate repertoire that is easily accessed and shared as “the commons” (see page 27).

Practitioners also emulate “rhythmic nuggets” (pages 27- 28) or bits and pieces of what they like from their own and other practices to begin building their own personal cache of

“emergency steps” (34) and “go to repertoire” (35). By using “the commons,” “rhythmic nuggets,” and curated repertoire, practitioners begin to either innovate or improvise with their experience of materials. Even though best practice does not always lead to creation, imitation and innovation are enough to create dancing on the spot, in the moment, and therefore satisfy the most important characteristic of the forms discussed in this dissertation, improvisation.

Personal agency drives the intra-personal cycle of performance. In this cycle the relationship is focused inwardly with the dancer in primary relationship with his/her own bodily sensations and responses to inherited repertoire. In this cycle the dancer is focused on shaping and producing unique personal movements and sounds in ways that best suit his/her personal desires. The dancer or musician is focused on how he/she feels in the moment of performing. The research participants describe the result of best practice in the intra-personal cycle as the discovery of how to innovatively put “the commons” or “rhythmic nuggets” together. The sense of self, sense of uniqueness that accompanies this discovery is then described as bringing dancers great joy and personal freedom. Participants use phrases such as, “I feel like I’m flying free,” “I’m in the moment,” “it feels natural,” “it’s a release,” “I feel a sense of freedom,” and “it’s about me enjoying myself” are all used to describe the reflexive experience of the intra-personal cycle of relating to and transmitting percussive dance knowledge.

Inter-personal Cycle of Performance and Transmission: Communing, Improvising, and Creating. In Chapter VI, practitioners reveal that what begins as imitation and innovation during early experiences shifts for the dancer the longer the

dancer is invested in his/her practice. The shift alters a sense of best practice because the dancer experiences an increasing ability to improvise in ways that change the materiality of the form. In this cycle, the dancer or musician seeks out communion in order to achieve a higher level of improvisation, one that induces the creation of new repertoire. Participants describe communion as an experience of being “locked on,” or “in lock-step,” with others, “that thing that happens,” a “connection,” “groove,” or “dialog” between two or more dancers and/or musicians. Communion requires “meeting in the middle” and is described as a connection and collaboration that yields new, “fantastic,” and “exciting” experiences that are “mesmerizing” and “trance-like” and feel like participants are “sharing a brain.”

While the primary relating in this cycle is between people, context is also described as having a bearing on the practitioners’ ability to achieve communion. It is worth noting that most of those interviewed agreed that some contexts seem to be more conducive to communion than others. Informal, comfortable contexts like kitchens or pubs are more advantageous than being on stage or another kind of formal setting. For example, Kevin Burke comments that “the kind of artificial setting of a concert room isn’t where this music was originally designed for,” meaning that intimate settings are better suited for communion between musicians as well as the inclusion of others in the surround (Burke, Kevin. Telephone interview. 11 January 2011). In general, the more informal and comfortable the context is for the performer, the more likely communion emerges (see Chapter VI, page 11). The more informal the context for dance and music

making, the more inclusive the communion and the more likely that others in the surround have the opportunity to influence, engage in, and commune with the performers.

For example, Alicia Guinn recounts an experience in a pub in which she witnessed Seosamh Ó Neachtain dancing. She describes the surround as one in which “everyone [was] crowded around and whooping and hollering . . . and here I was perched on this chair trying to look over and see what was going on” (Guinn, Alicia. Telephone interview. 22 September 2010). Guinn then describes what it feels like for her when she performs on a more formal stage and the artificiality the stage creates:

. . . a whole other level of feeling self-conscious and feeling like I’m really performing, rather than say, being in a pub in Ireland where it feels more like enjoying the music and having fun. . . . [On stage] one is a lot more focused on knowing the audience is there and performing for them, and [in a pub] one is a lot more like . . . I’m doing it for myself and I’m enjoying it, and it’s not particularly for other people. It’s like the opposite of self-conscious; it’s like disappearing into the music and enjoying the music. (Guinn, Alicia. Telephone interview. 22 September 2010).

Guinn’s comments confirm that the evaluation of the experience, and the dancing, rest within the personal somaesthetic reflections of the performer. The performer determines if he/she has achieved best practice by how it feels internally, because the expectation, as Guinn states, is that best practice means she is “doing it for myself.” Dancers and musicians agreed that while best practice can be achieved on stage, communion is more dependent upon the willingness of the performers to engage one another than on the context. However, participants also agree that context remains important. When the relating between performers yields communion, the result is a mutually beneficial state of awareness and creativity. Some describe the experience as

“transcending” or as Guinn’s states, a “disappearing” into the music and the moment.

In the inter-personal cycle, musicians, dancers, and those in the surround during the emergence of a music and dance enactment, can become engaged in the act of communion. Communion is an ideal kind of relating that engenders a best practice predicated on the unknown, the improvised, the moment of emergence. An individual’s level of comfort with the context affects the extent to which he/she can engage in communion. At its most potent, communion can yield a sense of transcendence out of the ordinary and into completely new creations of dance. As stated in Chapter V, dancers often chose new contexts in order to challenge themselves and find new and exciting manifestations of the form and his/her practice through improvisation.

Supra-personal Cycle of Performance and Transmission: Emulating, Contributing, Transmitting. Communion, as Shannon Dunne explains, can be transcendental, an experience in which the individual and group merge. The supra-personal cycle describes how the individual practitioner relates with the tradition and the culture: they perform the historical and chronological experiences of the tradition when they practice, thus transmitting it to the host culture or other cultures. Within the host culture, the performance reflects the tradition to those who support it because the performer demonstrates how he/she has learned to “live” the tradition by performing music or dance, for example. Dunne relates how an individual’s performance can feel a part of a larger, group experience. She illustrates how the group can reflect back to the individual how his/her performing provides a sense of importance for the group and therefore the individual as well. Dunne explains how it felt for her the very first time she

performed *sean-nós* dancing on stage in Ireland at the Willie Clancy Week festival. Like Guinn's description of a whooping and hollering pub crowd, Dunne describes an enthusiastic crowd full of appreciation for those willing to perform. She says she experienced an "awareness of not . . . about it not being just me, it being sort of . . . I was an embodiment of the whole situation at that time" and she recalls that she felt as though she could have danced anything and the crowd would have been just as receptive (Dunne, Shannon. Telephone interview. 16 September 2010). In Dunne's experience, the individual transcends the boundaries of internal evaluation to become part of how the external group evaluates its collective experience through an individual's singular performance and what it represents, in that moment for person, group, and culture.

In a similar manner, the process of somatic emulation is also a process through which one dancer emulates, via real-time connection or imagination, the soma, the practice, the repertoire, and the style of another dancer or dancers. Somatic emulation therefore allows dancers to bodily connect with the genealogy and legacy of other practices within the tradition. Somatic emulation as described in Chapter VI (pages 13-23), is a relationship utilized by a dancer to deepen the contemporary practitioner's understanding of either inherited repertoire's meaning or the repertoire's value within the tradition as well as his/her own practice. It is a reflexive process whereby a dancer, in the moment of dancing, can consciously experience reactions, responses, or reflections and memories while dancing, thus re-living a previous moment, or a previous experience of dancing. Utilized in the creation of a best practice, somatic emulation and its array of emotional and aesthetic impressions, particularly of the past, can incite not only the re-

living of a previously enjoyable expression within a dancer's own practice at any time, present or future, but inspire the creation of new repertoire. Repeating lived dance experiences; particularly the materiality of them such as "signature steps" for example, oftentimes provides a baseline of expressive possibilities for each practitioner to model while improvising.

"Signature steps," "named steps," and "flash steps" are examples of contributions to repertoire. Such contributions can become "inherited" repertoire for others, but also function as models for how to achieve creativity in the form. These contributions also function as invitations: While a dancer's creativity operates internally to satisfy the requirement to develop and express a personal style in his/her practice of the form, contributions external to the practitioner, such as "signature steps," invite further interpretations, imitations, and emulations. When a dancer accepts such an invitation and dances another's "signature step," he/she is referencing a particular genealogy within the repertoire as well as a particular legacy within the tradition. As the dancer moves from imitation toward improvisation and finally creation as the result of finding inspiration in the performance of that same "signature step," (or use "the commons" or his/her own "go to" repertoire), he or she begins a new cycle of relating or a new cycle of life for inherited repertoire.

Those contributions that successfully function as invitations by inciting emulation of another dancer, transcendence from self to group, or creation of new repertoire allows others in the surround and the collective culture, optimal access to the tradition's dance knowledge. The experiential act of dancing becomes a representational action of the

culture, a culture that actively sustains and transmits the potential for the dancer to experience the form, its repertoire, and all of its meaningful attachments from the past as it moves into the present and the future.

Next Steps and Further Research

After reflecting on the words of those I interviewed, and the theories I explored, a next step for this research is to create a deliberate environment in which a collective of dancers and musicians might experience living traditions in action. Using the model for transmission and relational cycles described above, I would like to establish a performance project that provides an opportunity for communion and transmission between American music and dance traditions from contemporary genres. I would like to support a microcosm of cultures like those distinct cultures that influenced one another during the mid-18th century and out of which emerged unique American percussive dance traditions. As a project director, I would invite multiple, American female dancers who would each be deeply vested in one or more traditions of American percussive dance. I envision a contemporary, competitive Irish step dancer, an Irish *sean-nós* dancer, a clogger, flatfoot dancer or buck dancer, a rhythm tap dancer, a jazz tap dancer or vintage jazz dancer, a hip-hop dancer, and an Old-style Irish dancer.

However, instead of transmission happening by chance as it did during O'Neil's era, this next step would deliberately provide time and space for specifically skilled artists to experience ways in which each might exchange cultural capital through live music and dance performance. Participation toward performance would include communion, collaboration, observation, emulation, imitation, and creation. Since this

dissertation framed Kitty O’Neil’s dancing as American percussive dancing, and the best “artifact” that remains of her performing is an anonymous, American tune, it seems best to use the musical notation as a way to organize moments of exchange between practitioners. Therefore, I would also invite musicians and/or ensembles from HipHop, Irish, Old-time, early Jazz, historical musical theatre production, and Bluegrass cultures. To help the participants manage the process and its many possibilities, I would divide the tune, “Kitty O’Neil’s Champion Jig” into its seven separate sections. During the musical performance of each section, a different ensemble would be featured and each would invite a dancer to join them in live performance for the length of the section of the tune.

My assumption is that each artist would move through the relational cycles of performance beginning with his/her own intra-personal cycle. This first level of relating would include exchanging his/her personal repertoire and experiences in his/her tradition with others, possibly during rehearsals and sometimes in performance. This would include adapting his/her repertoire and experience to new repertoire (either music, dance, or both), a new environment, and with new co-agents in the act of live music and dance making.

The live communion of music and dance makes visible the emergence of innovation, improvisation, and possibly new repertoire for all involved. It is in these potential new moments of exchange that entirely new repertoire may come into being and in those moments we may “see” Kitty O’Neil. Since a living tradition “actually lives in those spontaneous moments,” as Dunne reminds us, it the inter-personal cycle of

performance that has the most potential for creativity by artists (Dunne, Shannon.

Telephone interview. 16 September 2010).

As the experiences of practitioners accumulate, from intra- and inter-personal cycles of performance, I imagine that a new supra-personal cycle of performance and exchange would begin to take shape. Here transmissions among the various different cultures, traditions, and practitioners would begin to shape a new culture, a deliberate micro-culture that “re-invents, re-interprets, and celebrates” the past in the present (Jordan, Kieran. Telephone interview. 16 October 2010).

Ultimately I envision this deliberate experiment of living tradition to build toward a public performance that has the potential to transmit many ideas about Kitty O’Neil, American music of the mid-18th century, and living traditions of American percussive dance. The organization of the performance around the seven parts of O’Neil’s tune is also intended to help the public understand the project’s intent; to bring a past tune and unknown dance practice into the present explicitly through the lived experiences of contemporary performers. The production might go so far as to vary combinations of dancers and music ensembles each performance so that as many possibilities for fragments, reflections, and inventions of O’Neil’s unknown style, repertoire, and personality might be gleaned from observing the shows’ entire run and the multiple in-the-moment choices of its skilled performers.

My vision assumes that the whole cast would collectively provide audience as well as performers with an experience of Kitty O’Neil by way of each individual practitioner’s experience with his/her own tradition, form of practice, unique communion,

and creativity during live performance. O'Neil's repertoire will be re-invented, re-interpreted, and celebrated through such a performance. However, it is just as important for the performers to receive audience comments about the performing, including a dialog of questions and answers about content. Ideally, the production would take place in less formal settings, where the audience is free to be social and interact with performers. Likewise, performers ideally would be free to change the structure of the performance. For example, start and stop at will and make transparent that those who are performing are doing so at random and by invitation in the moment.

The liveliness of O'Neil's participation in a living tradition of dance would live again as a posthumous contribution, a tribute from contemporary performers, meant to incite creativity in future artists. Most importantly, such a process would not only illustrate what contemporary artists imagine about the past, but also demonstrate how each exercises personal agency within the dynamics of a living tradition and how each contributes to the perpetuation of his/her form, tradition, and culture.

Notes

ⁱ John Dewey's basic tenants of pragmatist philosophy whereby "focusing on ordinary life experiences philosophy does to simply become the voice of common sense, for philosophical reflection is essentially *critical* and *transformative*" (Medina 113). It is Medina who reminds us that Dewey asserted that philosophy begins in experience and ought return to experience (113). Dewey's reason for this cyclic reflection is due to his belief that inherent in human experience are *goods* or knowledge sets that allow one "to clarify, liberate, and extend" the functionality of that experience and ultimately enrich it (Dewey qtd. in Medina 113).

ⁱⁱ Analytical somaesthetics describes and theorizes "the nature of our bodily perceptions" and how they function to create our worldview (Shusterman 20008, 23). Pragmatic improvements are either self-directed or other-directed and include methodologies such as Hatha yoga, the Feldenkrais Method, massage therapy, dieting, or bodybuilding. Practical somaesthetics is distinguished from pragmatic somaesthetics for it represents the actual practice of the bodily discipline (Shusterman 29).

ⁱⁱⁱ Pragmatist historian Kloppenberg quotes Curti (1951) to summarize how "(a)...historical knowledge is most useful when it gives us perspective, and insight into our present situation, (b) that history is always written [or danced] from a present point of view, and (c) that all knowledge is contextual (204-205).

^{iv} Medina extends the concept goods to mean common experiences among groups of people that become a kind of *cultural capital*. Groups *transact* their cultural capital through social interrelatedness (131-132).

^v For example, Hall (1995) talks about the Irish dancing body in the context of a nationalist typology that associates "Irish dancing" with modern competitive step dance. He states that his study "is an exploration of the ways in which movement conveys meaning," and specifically that "Irish dance" is defined and developed as a "tradition and symbol" through the step dancer's body (ix-xiv). For Hall, Irish dancing bodies are potential symbols for moral and cultural hegemony: "[T]he carriage in Irish dancing, regardless of its origins, is unique to Irish dancing. The contrast in the upper and lower halves of the body--the upper body immobile and still while the lower body leaps, twists, turns, and beats out rhythms on the floor--creates a powerful aesthetic which instantiates an Irish historical concern with control, authority and playful expression" (1996, 265).

^{vi} A melodeon is a diatonic button accordion used in Irish traditional music and favored by many older *sean-nós* dancers in the west of Ireland.

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APPENDIX A

Institutional Review Board Approval



Institutional Review Board
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
P.O. Box 425619, Denton, TX 76204-5619
940-898-3378 FAX 940-898-4416
e-mail: IRB@twu.edu

February 28, 2011

Ms. Jean Denney Grotewohl
9133 Old Statesville Rd.
Charlotte, NC 28269

Dear Ms. Grotewohl:

Re: *Imagining Kitty O'Neil: Linking Living Traditions of Dance and Living Inquiry (Protocol #: 16073)*

The request for an extension of your IRB approval for the above referenced study has been reviewed by the TWU Institutional Review Board (IRB) and appears to meet our requirements for the protection of individuals' rights.

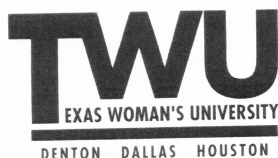
If applicable, agency approval letters must be submitted to the IRB upon receipt PRIOR to any data collection at that agency. A copy of all signed consent forms and an annual/final report must be filed with the Institutional Review Board at the completion of the study.

This extension is valid one year from March 18, 2011. Any modifications to this study must be submitted for review to the IRB using the Modification Request Form. Additionally, the IRB must be notified immediately of any unanticipated incidents. If you have any questions, please contact the TWU IRB.

Sincerely,

Dr. Kathy DeOrnellas, Chair
Institutional Review Board - Denton

cc. Dr. Penny Hanstein, Department of Dance
Dr. Linda Caldwell, Department of Dance
Graduate School



Institutional Review Board

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
P.O. Box 425619, Denton, TX 76204-5619
940-898-3378 FAX 940-898-4416
e-mail: IRB@twu.edu

February 12, 2013

Ms. Jean Denney Grotewohl
2208 Massachusetts Street
Lawrence, KS 66046

Dear Ms. Grotewohl:

Re: *Imagining Kitty O'Neil: Linking Living Traditions of Dance and Living Inquiry (Protocol #: 16073)*

The request for an extension of your IRB approval for the above referenced study has been reviewed by the TWU Institutional Review Board (IRB) and appears to meet our requirements for the protection of individuals' rights.

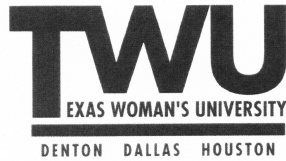
If applicable, agency approval letters must be submitted to the IRB upon receipt PRIOR to any data collection at that agency. A copy of the approved consent form with the IRB approval stamp is enclosed. Please use the consent form with the most recent approval date stamp when obtaining consent from your participants. A copy of the signed consent forms must be submitted with the request to close the study file at the completion of the study.

This extension is valid one year from March 18, 2013. Any modifications to this study must be submitted for review to the IRB using the Modification Request Form. Additionally, the IRB must be notified immediately of any unanticipated incidents. If you have any questions, please contact the TWU IRB.

Sincerely,

Dr. Vicki Zeigler, Co-Chair
Institutional Review Board - Denton

cc. Mary Williford-Shade, Department of Dance
Dr. Linda Caldwell, Department of Dance
Graduate School



Institutional Review Board

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
P.O. Box 425619, Denton, TX 76204-5619
940-898-3378 Fax 940-898-3416
e-mail: IRB@twu.edu

March 18, 2010

Ms. Jean Denney Grotewohl
9133 Old Statesville Rd.
Charlotte, NC 28269

Dear Ms. Grotewohl:

Re: Imagining Kitty O'Neil: Linking Living Traditions of Dance and Living Inquiry

The above referenced study has been reviewed by the TWU Institutional Review Board (IRB) and appears to meet our requirements for the protection of individuals' rights.

If applicable, agency approval letters must be submitted to the IRB upon receipt PRIOR to any data collection at that agency. A copy of the approved consent form with the IRB approval stamp and a copy of the annual/final report are enclosed. Please use the consent form with the most recent approval date stamp when obtaining consent from your participants. The signed consent forms and final report must be filed with the Institutional Review Board at the completion of the study.

This approval is valid one year from March 18, 2010. According to regulations from the Department of Health and Human Services, another review by the IRB is required if your project changes in any way, and the IRB must be notified immediately regarding any adverse events. If you have any questions, feel free to call the TWU Institutional Review Board.

Sincerely,

Dr. Kathy DeOrnellas, Chair
Institutional Review Board - Denton

enc.

cc. Dr. Penny Hanstein, Department of Dance
Dr. Linda Caldwell, Department of Dance
Graduate School

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title: Imagining Kitty O'Neil: Linking Living Traditions of Dance and Living Inquiry

Investigator: Jean Denney Grotewohl,denneydance@gmail.com
..... 704/687-2066
..... 704/921-9411

Advisor: Linda Caldwell, Ph.D.LCaldwell2@twu.edu
..... 940/898-2093

Explanation and Purpose of the Research

You are being asked to participate in a research study for Ms. Denney Grotewohl's dissertation at Texas Woman's University. Ms. Denney Grotewohl is a Ph.D. candidate at Texas Woman's University in the United States and is studying Irish *sean-nós* dance and its connection to the historical performances of Kitty O'Neil (1852-1893). The project is titled: Imagining Kitty O'Neil: Linking Living Traditions of Dance and Living Inquiry.

The study will analyze how dancers experience *sean-nós* dance, or other American dance, how they describe it, and how they learn and perform the form. Your participation will help the researcher imagine possible linkages between your experience today and the dancing of Kitty O'Neil, an Irish American jig and clog dancer of the 19th century. Your participation will also initiate links between Irish *sean-nós* dance and other American dance forms to which O'Neil may also have seen or performed in her time. This study is important because while few records of O'Neil's dancing exist, how you learn and perform your dancing may be similar to O'Neil's dance experiences as each of you is linked to her through your many Irish and American dance practices/traditions.

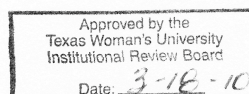
Description of Procedures

As a participant in this study you will be asked to spend no more than three (3.0) hours of your time in a combination of telephone and face-to-face interviews with the researcher and no more than two (2) minutes of recording your dancing. You will also spend no more than two (2.5) additional hours reading, reviewing, forms such as this one and the researcher's written findings, her dissertation. The researcher will ask you questions about your dance practice and dance tradition. You and the researcher will decide together on a private location where and when the interview will happen. The interview will be audio or audio and video recorded and then written down so that the researcher can be accurate when studying what you have said. In order to be a participant in this study, you must be at least 18 years of age or older and have (or have had) experience doing/performing *sean-nós* dance, or any other form of Irish step dance, Set dancing, Céilí dancing, Clogging, Flatfooting, Buck dancing, Square dancing or Contra dancing.

Potential Risks

The researcher will ask you questions about your dance experiences. The researcher will also ask you questions about how you learned to dance, how it feels when you dance, who influenced your dancing, how and who you teach, and how you perform. The researcher may also ask you questions about your relationships with musicians, other dancers, and various communities of people that are involved with the music and dance activities that you participate

Initials _____
Page 1 of 2



TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

in now, or have participated in throughout your lifetime. A possible risk in this study is discomfort with the questions you are asked. If you become tired or upset you may take breaks as needed. You may also stop answering questions at any time and end the interview.

Another risk in this study is loss of confidentiality. Confidentiality will be protected to the extent that is allowed by law. There is potential risk of loss of confidentiality in all email, downloading and internet communications or transactions that may be a part of this study. The interview will be held at a private location that you and the researcher have agreed upon. The tapes and the written interview will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office. Only the researcher, her advisor, will hear the tapes or read the written interviews. All audio, video, transcripts, and other project materials will be stored as CD/DVD format and removed from my personal computer hard drive. All printed materials and CD/DVD's will be stored in locked desk cabinets belonging to the researcher at 377 Robinson Hall, 9201 University City Boulevard, UNC-Charlotte, Charlotte, NC 28223-0001 for an indefinite period of time. The materials may be important to future investigations during the researcher's post-doctoral study, but will not be made accessible to the public. Participants will be mailed or emailed drafts of the dissertation for review, particularly those sections that feature the ideas and comments of the participant. Each participant will receive a copy of the completed dissertation as well as copies of any and all transcripts and video recordings. Participants will retain the right to review, censor, edit, delete and/or comment further on any and all drafts of the dissertation. Participants retain the right to edit or remove sections from the research video recordings or audio recorded interviews at any time. Participants retain the right to discontinue the project at any point.

The researcher will try to prevent any problem that could happen because of this research project. You should let the researcher know at once if there is a problem and they will help you. However, TWU does not provide medical services or financial assistance for injuries that might happen because you are taking part in this research.

Participation and Benefits

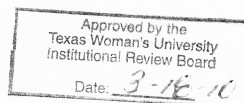
Your involvement in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you would like to know the results of this study we will mail them to you.*

Questions Regarding the Study

You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep. If you have any questions about the research study you should ask the researcher; her phone numbers are at the top of this form. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research or the way this study has been conducted, you may contact the Texas Woman's University Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 940-898-3378 or via e-mail at IRB@twu.edu.

Signature of Participant Date
*If you would like to know the results of this study tell us where you want them to be sent:

Email: _____
or
Address: _____



CURRICULUM VITAE

JEAN DENNEY GROTEWOHL
denneydance@gmail.com

Education

- Ph.D. 2014 Dance History, Culture, and Performance Practice
Texas Woman's University
Dissertation: Imagining Kitty O'Neil: Transmission, Somatic Memory,
and Communion in American Percussive Dance
- M.F.A. 1995 Dance, Performance & Choreography
Arizona State University
Thesis: "Chronic Anonymity": A Choreographic Analysis of an
Experiment in Process
- C.M.A. 1994 Certified Movement Analyst
Laban/Bartenieff Institute of Movement Studies (NYC)
- B.A. 1985 English, minor Art: Painting & Drawing, College of Notre Dame of
Maryland

Experience

Beloit College - Beloit, WI - March-April 2013

Ethnochoreology Residency in the Departments of Music and Dance
MUSI 200 Music in Cold Places
MUSI 075 North Atlantic Music Ensemble
TDMS 213 Modern Dance II
TDMS 315 Ballet III

University of North Carolina – Charlotte – July 2009 to July 2011

Full-time Lecturer in Liberal Studies and World Dance
LBST 1101 (one to three sections per term) Arts and Society: Dance
LBST 1101 Arts and Society: Dance - Honors
DANC 2124 World Dance – Irish Dance
DANC 2126 Tap Dance
DANC 2402 Performance Practicum

Faculty Advisor – Hindu YUVA (campus) and MOVE (dance) student organizations

Advising - 18 Dance Minors 2009-2010
16 Dance Minors 2010-2011

Program Assistant – Dance Study Abroad, *Arké*, Torino, Italy –July 3-25, 2010

Co-Presenter with Technology Consultant, Melanie Smith, University Center of Teaching and Learning (October 2009); Featured Faculty for University Center for Teaching and Learning Webinar – Best Practices for Moodle LMS (Spring 2010)

Master Thesis Committee Member:
Riann Adams, M.A. Architecture 2011
Michelle Hilliard, M.A. Architecture 2010

Bethel College - July 2007 to July 2009

Adjunct Faculty, Bethel College

COA 102 Independent Study in Dance

COA 107 Dance Technique

COA 307 Advanced Dance Technique

Sponsor/Advisor - Bethel College Social Dance Club

Artistic/Administrative Director of Dance, Bethel College Academy of Performing

Arts - Full artistic, fiscal, administrative responsibility for the dance department within a community arts and education setting for this not-for-profit affiliate organization to Bethel College. Duties included curriculum development, teacher training and supervision, volunteer training, marketing, production, student recruitment and retention, guest artist contracting, and outreach. Instruction provided to all ages and levels of learners and included classes in Creative Movement, Contemporary Modern, Classical Ballet, Jazz, Tap, Irish Dance, Choreography, and various World Dance offerings.

Sam Houston State University - Visiting Assistant Professor 2006-2007

DNCE 176.02 Improvisation

DNCE 276.01 Choreography I – Solo Performance

DNCE 373.01 Laban Movement Analysis: An Introduction

DNCE 373.02 Laban Movement Analysis: An Introduction

DNCE 334.02 Modern Technique III

DNCE 334.02 Modern Technique III/IV

DNCE 273.02 World Dance

DNCE 376.02 Choreography II – Group Work

Indian Peaks Charter School - Artist-in-Residence 2003-2005

Modern I

Irish I

Math and Movement: Kinesthetic Geometry

Stephens College - Artist-in-Residence 2004 and 1999

DAN 105 Movement for Musical Theatre

DAN 112 World Dance I

DAN 231 World Dance II

DAN 351 World Dance III

DAN 471 World Dance

Kansas Arts Commission - Program Consultant II 1999-2001

Fiscal and Operational Management of \$400,000+ of annual budget for four, state-wide programs including the development and adjudication of granting programs to include:
Kansas Touring Program – both artist roster and presenter funding

Grants to Non-Arts Organizations

Artists Fellowships – all genres

Artist Mini-fellowships – all genres

Presentations

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| Nov 2011 | “Tuning the Dancing: Irish <i>Sean-nós</i> Dancer as Musician” - Joint Conference Congress on Research in Dance and Society of Ethnomusicology, University of Pennsylvania. |
| July 2010 | “But it’s still just step dancing!”: The Genealogical Confluence of Spectacle and Spectacular in Irish Dance” Presenter, Society of Dance History Scholars, Annual Conference, University of Surrey, London, England. Published in proceedings. |
| March 2010 | “The Relational Cycles of <i>Sean-nós</i> Dance” Presenter, American Conference for Irish Studies – Southern Region, Winthrop University, Winthrop, SC. |
| June 2009 | “Mapping the Mobile Somatic Knowledge, Cultural Capital and Relational Cycles Of <i>Sean-nós</i> Dance” Presenter, Society of Dance History Scholars, Annual Conference, Stanford University, CA. |
| Feb 2008 | “Three Dimensional Experiential Movement Analysis for 2-D Media Animation: A Laban Tutorial” Guest Workshop, University of Kansas, |

Department of Visual Art – participants included 120 Game Art, Animation, Immersive Environment Design students

- Oct 2008 “Living Traditions and Movement Arts: A Survey” Guest Lecture, Tabor College (KS), Arts Appreciation
- Jan/Feb 2008 “LMA: A Helpful Tool for the Musical Theatre Audition Process” Guest Lecture Series for Musical Theatre Workshop, Heston College, KS
- Oct 2007 “Perceiving Dance, Dancing Perception” Guest Lecture, Tabor College, Arts Appreciation
- Oct 2007 “Semiotic, Somatic, and Semantic uses of Laban Movement Analysis as Method and Text in Ethnography” presented to Graduate Qualitative Research Colloquium, Texas Woman’s University
- Feb 2007 “Dancing with Kitty O’Neil: An Experiment in Ethnosomatic Historiography” presented to Graduate Current Issues in Historical Inquiry Colloquium, Texas Woman’s University
- Feb 2005 "The Geometry of Movement - Integrating LMA with Middle School Math" - First Annual Area C/LMA Meeting, CO/WY, Denver Performing Arts Center, Denver, CO
- Dec 2004 "Riverdance - a Dance Maker's Perspective" - Stephens College
- Sept 2004 "Under the Influence: Examples of the African/Irish Dialog in American Dance" - Center for International Studies, University of Missouri-St. Louis & St. Louis Irish Arts Center, St. Louis, MO

Select Choreography and Creative Work

No Rusty Dusties! (2011) - Premiere, Robinson Hall Theatre – UNC-Charlotte, April 13, 2011.

Aoibhneas na Bealtaine (2011) - Premiere, Robinson Hall Theatre – UNC-Charlotte, April 13, 2011. Re-staging of an Irish dance published in 1969.

Shadowland (2010) – Premiere, Robinson Hall Theatre -UNCC, March 24, 2010, Charlotte, NC.

Choreography, Jean Denney Grotewohl. Score, Stacey E. Fox.

Across the Prairie (2009) – dance for film featuring Bethel College Academy of Performing Arts students and Chase County fishing lake. Premiere, Bethel College, May 31, 2009.

Persephone's Sisters (2008) - Bethel College Academy of Performing Arts Dancers and the Newton Mid-Kansas Symphony Orchestra, live music collaboration, Memorial Hall, Bethel College

Foot Notes (2007) - Sam Houston State University

O'Zarkia (2000) - Stephens College Dance Company

Wish Bones (1992) - last performed by Christine Scott, University of Kansas, 2002

Select Performance Experience

2010 Sean-nós Northwest Festival – January 15-16, 2010, Guest performer, Evergreen State University, Olympia, WA

American Women of *Sean-nós* (2007) – ICONS Festival, Boston, MA with Kieran Jordan, Shannon Dunne, Maldon Meehan, and Alicia Guinn

Denney Dances (1990-Present) – mixed forms of original solo, traditional, and post-modern works

Grace/Denney Dance, KS/MO (1998-2000) -Jean Denney, Leela & Ellie Grace - Performers, Co-Artistic Directors/Choreographers.

Doug Hamby Dance, Washington, D.C. (1996-1998)

Phoenix Repertory Dance Theatre, University of Maryland Baltimore Campus, (1996-1998)

Rhythm in Shoes, Sharon Leahy and Rick Good, Dayton, OH (1992-1993)

The Project Company, Marta Renzi Dancers, New York, NY (1990-1992)

Toothmother Co., Chris Dohse, Washington, D.C. (1989-1992)

The Fiddle Puppets (currently Footworks) Annapolis, MD (1982-1988)

Scholarships and Honors

Nominee for Texas Woman's University Graduate Council Award for Exceptional, Original Scholarship Category - Qualitative Research, 2011

Fulbright Candidate for Texas Woman's University, 2009-2010, 2008-2009

Academic Scholarship for Ph.D., Texas Woman's University School of Graduate Studies, 2012-2013

Academic Scholarship for Ph.D., Texas Woman's University School of Graduate Studies, 2006-2008

Academic Scholarship for Ph.D., Texas Woman's University School for the Arts, 2006-2008

Academic Scholarship for Ph.D., Texas Woman's University Department of Dance, 2006

Academic Scholarship for M.F.A., Arizona State University 1994, 1995

Graduate Teaching Assistantship for M.F.A., Arizona State University 1993, 1994, 1995

Professional Grants and Awards

Graduate Residency in Choreography, Institute for Studies in the Arts, Arizona State University, Fall 1994

Research Associate, Institute for Studies in the Arts, Arizona State University (1994-1995) – Received an \$8,850 grant to direct research in multimedia technology and human performance

Maryland Dance Showcase for Choreographers 1993 - Selected to participate and present in this professional workshop for choreographers sponsored by the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Art and Culture. A six-day event including classes in technique and choreography with Robert Ellis Dunn and Martha Eddy.

BESSIE 1992 (New York Dance and Performance Award) - Original cast member of Marta Renzi's "Vital Signs"

1992 Individual Artist Award in Choreography, Maryland State Arts Council

1992 Baltimore City Arts Grant for excellence in performance

1992 Baltimore Folk Music Society Travel Grant - to study with Master Joe O'Donovan in Cork, Ireland

Maryland Dance Showcase for Choreographers 1990, -91, -92 - Selected to participate and present in this professional workshop for choreographers sponsored by the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Art and Culture. A six-day event including classes in technique and choreography with Robert Ellis Dunne, Martha Eddy, Bella Lewitsky and Nora Reynolds