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Reflections on the Poetics of Fieldwork in a Living Archive

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The Cork Folklore Project (CFP), an urban ethnographic research centre and community archive, was initiated by UCC Folklore scholars and established in a tripartite structure with local and governmental agencies. The philosophy and rationale of CFP has its basis in the politics of applied ethnology. It endeavours to expand academic boundaries to include the perspectives of members of the community it represents. This was achieved by a dynamic of teaching/learning exchanges in which 'academic' and 'community' researchers swapped ideas, knowledge and terminologies relating to folklore and popular culture. This article explores the possibility of considering the driving forces of fieldwork and archive management in their relationship with the poetical dimension of the semantics and taxonomies employed to describe and define essential concepts and methodologies of field ethnography. Fieldwork terminology is examined in various contexts, primarily that of CFP as a living archive practising an ethnology of the proximate. The author advocates a 'poet(h)ical' approach to the politics of ethnography, which considers the creative and metaphoric discourse reflexive of the ethnographer's approach to fieldwork, to identify, understand and represent elements and processes inherent in the dynamics of traditional and popular culture.

Introduction

Recollecting and reflecting on fifteen years of directing research at the Cork Folklore Project (CFP),[1] a city-based ethnographic and community research archive established in a tripartite academic, local community and governmental structure,[2] I here explore, from that initial context, aspects of the poetical and political dimensions of fieldwork and archive management as integrated dynamic concepts. I indulge in the academic luxury of reflecting on the aesthetic meanings of the jargons we use, in their relationship to the practice of governance relating to areas and interests of folklore and ethnology. Previous discussions with colleagues suggested that I write a chapter on 'fieldwork' for a collection of essays in Irish. The essay would be translated (Desplanques 2012). My limited knowledge of Irish sufficed to comprehend the working title, 'Obair sa Ghort' – 'Work in the Field'. The poetic, bucolic and romantic

dimension of the conveyed metaphor struck a chord, one I wanted to explore, while contributing to the ongoing reflection on the terminology widely used in the discipline of folklore and ethnology.

Several issues demand the consideration of students, observers, writers, bearers and 'practitioners' of culture whether traditional or popular. All aforementioned actors contribute to its production and regulation, whether in an active or conscious manner or not. The balance residing in and operating as what Hannerz (1992) initially called 'flow', to indicate continuity and change as determining factors in the essence of culture, is of great importance. The terms and methods used to describe and record the object, the movement and the direction of that flow, however, are equally important. I use inverted commas, below, to highlight the poetical dimension of these terms, as they all carry governing and regulatory attributes subject to various interpretations; thus they are intrinsically political and related to dynamics of power.

The semantics and taxonomies employed to describe and define essential concepts and methodologies of ethnography as 'description of culture' benefit from being revisited and evaluated to prevent stagnation (Sansot 1996). With this in mind, the concept of 'fieldwork', and its related terminology, is here examined in various contexts, although pre-eminently in that of the initial incarnation of the Cork Folklore Project as a living archive practising an ethnology of the proximate (Augé 1986; Frykman 1996; Hannerz 1980; Urbain 2003; Zmegac et al 2006), elucidating issues relevant to a 'poet(h)ical' approach to ethnography.[3] Such an approach considers the creative and metaphoric discourse reflective of the ethnographer's conception of how to conduct fieldwork from a folklore perspective, to identify and understand the elements and processes inherent in the concepts and dynamics of traditional and popular culture in society. Questions relating to choice, in the naming, the writing and the actual consideration of our research interests and endeavours, come to the fore. What tools do we use to record and represent them? What meanings do we infer and derive from these activities and, ultimately, what do we learn from them and leave to others? How do we forego authority, yet keep a sense of authorship? Which communities do we archive? (Markovitz 2013)

These questions stayed with me for a while after leaving the direction of the Project's research activities to my colleague, Dr. Clíona O'Carroll, in 2013 – a younger scholar in a position to bring new dynamics and practices to CFP, thanks to her intellectual energy, in a context of rapid technological advances and social, economic and political change in Ireland.[4] The economic boom affected value systems and modes of thinking. The need for active and visible productivity became a palpable reality (Katos 2012; Titley 2013). The Project, like many socio-cultural organisations in Ireland, came under increasing pressure to account for its activities. It became sometimes necessary to consider research direction and archival practice more on the basis of financial survival, hanged on perceived 'popularity', rather than on the quality of the re-presentations of contemporary local popular culture that could be realised. I wondered whether institutional communication and informed action of any social, cultural and collective kind, was not now dictated by the structures of virtual platforms and social networks, contributing to the political spread of populism – yet another debate, although one worth mentioning here (Horst and Milller 2013). In spite of a difficult economic climate, the fundamental tripartite structure embedding the Project held together, even though governmental agencies were constantly being restructured.

In leaving the Project, my position moved from that of having a direct involvement to that of an observer. It took a while to accept that I was no longer the 'fearless leader'. This auto-ethnographical anecdotal detail allows one to refer to a proposition by Maurice Godelier, an eminent Marxist and structural anthropologist, that emotions be explored in anthropology.[5] Beyond its immediate intended message to systematically investigate cultural expressions of emotion (le Guen 2009) from a structural perspective, it also inferred expanding on post-modernist reflexivity. An initial extrapolation implies taking the 'affective' into consideration without however going into a systematic psychological interpretation of the dynamics of culture and politics of ethnography, in this case those that framed the establishment of the Project.[6] The process of detachment nevertheless remains within a dynamic of engagement with the discipline and discourse of ethnography. Hence, I posit

questions associated with such issues as acquired jargons to explore the ‘poetic’ side of the words used to differentiate our work from that of others in cognate ‘fields’ of inquiry. Advances in technology have impacted on the practice, the recording, the descriptions and uses of folklorists’ and popular culture ethnographers’ works. A real sense of democratisation is operating with its own dynamics and politics. Therefore, such projects as the Cork Folklore Project highlight the essence of applied ethnology. One of its initial and ongoing mandates is the provision of training in the methodologies and technologies of ethnography and archiving.

We may then ask to what extent our work contributes to defining and deciding how we conceptualise ‘traditional’ and ‘popular’ culture or indeed ethnography. In bringing partial answers to these questions, I wish to consider the language we use and pose precepts within similar frameworks as Foucault and Derrida in their complementary understanding of archives as dynamic and living conceptual entities which ultimately produce meaning. In this, they consider the relationship between the roles of archives and the semantics of power in the organisation and classification of knowledge, which in the present case become significant to the actors, the preservers of popular culture (Manoff 2004). It is therefore important to revisit these semantics regularly and reconsider analytical categories from contemporary perspectives and contexts. I will examine some of the essential terms in our analytical pool of categories, starting with ‘fieldwork’ as the activity providing material to be accessioned into, and therefore somehow defining, ethnographic archives.

Fieldwork

The term ‘fieldwork’ (Barley 1983; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Goldstein 1964; Ó Súilleabháin 1942; Tedlock 1991; Wolf 1996) does not exist, one may argue. Rather, it is a composite carrying much of a poetical dimension when used in reference to the activity of the folklorist as ethnographer. The combination of the two ‘concepts’ – fieldwork and folklore – may be perceived as initially emerging from romantic ideologies using agricultural taxonomies, potentially with a hegemonic visualisation and a virtual

comprehension and categorisation of the social ordering of knowledge and its modes of acquisition. *Ask the Fellows Who Cut the Hay* wrote G.E. Evans (1956), not metaphorically, yet suggesting that the folklore fieldworker's activity is semantically and implicitly yet effectively congruous with that of working with people bearing specific knowledge. This perspective and approach, at a time when the focus was indeed on the study of rural based traditional repertoires and worldviews, would to an extent qualify various ethnographic methods as 'collecting' or 'harvesting', implying the desire of manifesting a figurative identification with the men, women and children who literally work the 'fields'.[7] Although widely employed, the term 'field', when used to refer to a non-rural environment, may lead to a humouring of the academic use of the romantic metaphor, as I discovered once when I announced I was taking students on a 'fieldtrip across town'. Someone grinned at me, and quipped: 'don't forget your wellies!' The term 'reckoning', despite its nautical intonations and associations, might have been more appropriate. The term 'mission' common in France, would of course have very different connotations in an Irish context.

From Informant to Contributor

The poetic element resides within the potential choices available to the folklore fieldworker to identify boundaries, with regard to the environment and *vis à vis* the people and the material engaged with, in terms of linguistic referents conveying the spirit and attitude inherent to what is expressed (Hall 1959; Agar 1980). Thus, a poet(h)ical approach also means the reassessment of early terminology describing the persons who share their knowledge. The word 'informant' for instance has been widely used, regardless of the feelings it may invoke or induce in the individual or the community represented. Countless individuals have expressed resentment towards the use of the term, given its resemblance to 'informer', which has dubious socio-political connotations.[8] Yet it is still widely used by many folklorists and ethnographers, although contested by others (Mortensen 2005; Richardson 1975; Metcalf 2002). The need for a re-evaluation of the term goes beyond mere political correctness; it addresses the poetical dimension in its appeal

to the figurative, the metaphorical or the *imaginaire*. 'Informant' confines the boundaries of a hegemonic relationship among those engaged in the production and sharing of conceptualised cultural knowledge, which may metaphorically, yet significantly, prioritise accuracy over quality. Because of this, the 'collector-informant' relationship is limiting. This is most relevant, as ethnography is qualitative in essence.

The CFP advocates the use of the term 'contributor', implying that the individual is imparting knowledge and contributing to a common corpus. CFP functions as a 'living archive'. The emphasis on contemporary popular culture implies immediacy in the documentation and dissemination of the material. This is possible thanks to digital technology. It is therefore important to consider carefully the quality of the relationships that the Project establishes within the community, in terms of the processes of negotiation of a sense of ownership and authorship that speaks to the collective while acknowledging and valuing each individual in a communal and representative archive.[9]

Field Station

The term 'field station' is sometimes used in 'dry' documents, in grant applications for example. It relates to fieldwork, yet figuratively deadens the process, whereas 'living archive' implies continuity between the recording and cataloguing of popular culture. It gives immediate pertinence to the question of naming and representation of a process reflected in the organising of contents (Koriyzin 2002). The question arose in an early version of the Project's online archive database.[10] In keeping with ethical principles in fieldwork (Alver 1992; Desplanques 2000) and with a view to reconciling several registers of discourse, categorisation and classification systems in an integrated manner, we opted for a combination of methodologies and technologies offering a free text search of the entire contents, and/or of pre-established geographic and topic categories. Devising a system organising and naming these categories necessitated a multi-perspective evaluation to obtain a balanced position. The same documents could be accessed by both the local pupil doing a project on scores and drag-hunting, and the

foreign academic considering identity through the prism of local sports and pastimes. Accessing archival content through the vernacular and/or analytical democratises it. Digital technology, allowing for instant reference to either discourse, enables the broadening of perspectives.

Archival Descriptors

Whether in fieldwork or cataloguing, the figurative or metaphorical element qualifying the synergic relationship between actors, re-creators, or descriptors of traditional knowledge, 'know-hows' and practices and their transmission process is, relevant beyond the initial frames of reference. It is worth digressing slightly to point to archival description terminology. 'Creator' is used in guidelines such as the International Standards of Archival Descriptions to refer to the origin of a collection.[11] In ethnographic archives the term may refer to the 'collector' or to the person from whom the material was collected. This becomes complex in terms of the ownership of the final 'text' which may be the result of a process involving at least two persons. Who does the final 'product' represent? Whose vision or worldview is recorded and categorised? Ultimately, what is the impact on its use or non-use? (Laszlo 2006) I ask, to what extent do ethnographers, semantically and semiotically identify with those relied on to co-create literary, audio-visual or virtual interpretations impacting on wider audiences, and ultimately carrying political significance in establishing public platforms where several world-views are represented through expressions of cultural repertoires and analytical categories (Geertz 1988; El Guindi 1986).

Renewing Perspectives

Such considerations and perspectives are intrinsic to feminist and 'new ethnographic' theoretical premises where one understands and conceives of the personal as political (Farrer 1975; Greenhill 1997; Jordan and Kalčik 1985). One may consider an analysis of the Project's agenda comprehending a high level of 'familiarity' and, as such, operating within a 'modal' existentialist (Glassie 1982) vision

of ethnography. The Northside Folklore Project, as CFP was first named, initially referred to a location in terms of research focus (Ó Crualaoich et al 1993) and the geographical base of its premises. While 'Northside' refers to and implies a strongly expressed local sense of identity within a particular part of Cork city, an area noted for its distinctive repertoire of jokes, repartees, nicknames etc., it also refers to a 'state of mind'.[12] One could be a Northsider by birth, location, marriage, adoption, or simply at heart. In earlier interviews people were asked where did the Northside start and end. We soon realised that there were several Northsides: the real one, the true one and the new one. These locations varied depending on who was talking. We also found that one does not need to live on the Northside to be a Northsider, while to live there was not necessarily enough to qualify one as such. Some neighbourhoods, while geographically situated on the north side of the city, were not considered Northside, being perceived as areas of a higher social class. The Project's early collection of life stories, *Life Journeys: Living Folklore in Ireland Today* (1999) highlights these complexities. A dialectical, yet tangential relationship operates between the various actors, circumstances and poetics of the Northside, as field and experience, to ultimately colour and influence the moods and choices the ethnographer has to make. In such a situation, the ethnographer takes on a role, yet has an individual understanding and interpretation, which may transcend the objective tone in the experiential account (Stacey 1988; Clifford 1986; Briggs 1970). This is apparent in the variety of voices and opinions expressed in the Project's ethnographic documentary films, where accounts oscillate between the nostalgic and the political without ever being outwardly or openly overcritical in the immediate. Public screenings of the Project's films often led to further expression of 'knowledge' and, to an extent, of political awareness of past and present religious or socio-economical hegemonies. As individuals engaged in ethnographic research, our personal, affective, emotional relationships with situations emerge in the creative dimension of our descriptions of 'others', as we occasionally contribute to the silencing of critical voices, under the false protection of 'ethics' or 'duty of care' (Scheper-Hughes 1995; Badiou 2002; Nussbaum 2001).[13]

Folkloristic discourse operates within the metaphorical dimension of analytical categories. It is informed by and informs collections and ethnographic outputs and, as such, carries its own significant political dimension. This is apparent in the various writing styles in *The Archive*, the Project's annual journal. Marc Augé (1986, 11) points to the schizophrenic character of participant observation as a method in which the ethnographer is expected to both resist ethnocentrism, on the one hand, and 'going native' (or, indeed, being native) on the other, yet write from an insider's perspective, all of which somehow implies that one be, and write from, two places at the same time. This is reflected in the variety of topics and viewpoints expressed in CFP productions, particularly in the radio series *How's It Goin', Boy?* which documented the multi-ethnic make up of Cork city in 2005 (O'Carroll 2006). One may suggest that it is through the acknowledgment of the personal negotiation of a relationship with a culturally significant and collectively meaningful situation that the ethnographer authors, creates and, to an extent, performs descriptions to which audiences, viewers, readers react and respond. The implicit dialogue established may generate an analytical approach to further the forms of representations ethnography as discipline or discourse may choose to use (Clifford 1986). Thus, while the radio programmes do not include interviewers' voices, the content and editing of the material may be said to reflect ethnographers' perspectives, and serve to 're-present' the Project's vision and understanding of Folklore at a particular time.

CFP: A Living Archive

At the Project, the conceptualisation of a living archive using digital technology (Desplanques and O'Carroll 2006) enables the preservation and the editing, hence the creative representation of sampled popular culture. Multiple formats may transform 'original' or rather 'personal' versions of knowledge obtained through fieldwork, to re-present them as artistic performances.[14] This enables the broadening of audiences and reactions, signifying increased awareness of the impacts of popular culture on community (Honko 1991; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992). The platforms used for internet

publication offer a 'window' of excerpts of ethnographic material, which may acquire a life of their own outside their 'original' contexts. New uses contribute to new forms of public discourse. This steers traditional and popular culture in new directions. When does the ethnographic video become a scene in a horror movie, perpetuating its content and object? When do we let the material take a life of its own and release control and ownership?

The Dynamics of fieldwork practice in a living archive context operate on several layered yet intertwined levels. Each of those levels carries its own momentum and is defined and dependent on the ethnographer's intellectual, philosophical, affective and political perspective in relation to and *vis-à-vis* the choices of topic and contributor. The choices made in the recording and representation processes add an extra dimension to the dynamics of the acquisition and organisation of knowledge. In its academic dimension the approach and account of fieldwork become topical, as ethnology acknowledges an allegiance to the social sciences, although the essential aesthetic quality of much of its verbally or artistically expressed performances also situates it within the humanities (Georges and Owen Jones 1995; Ó Giolláin 2000; Ó Cadhla 2007). Such debate implies a threaded positioning (Hevern 2004) when negotiating the intellectual and pragmatic premises of ethnographic fieldwork. Ethnography is intrinsically creative. The degree and quality of involvement of the fieldworker with content (as participant in a situation) and process (as observer of that situation) reveals a negotiated perspective and emerges through the 'poetic licences' and potentials of the account (Pratt 1986). I experienced threaded multi-positioning, initially as Research Director and member of the founding team of the Project. While some of us came with academic concepts of what folklore and ethnography might be and do, there was an essential dynamic in the shared transfer of knowledge and perspectives, and the negotiation of meaning, between all members of the team who in time and in turn became 'fieldworkers', researchers, editors, writers, cataloguers, contributors etc. The ways in which we referred to people, in all of their capacities, tended to reflect a dynamic, political (almost 'militant') perspective on how the Project was perceived and became active in the communities it represented. It was important to actively

demonstrate that as an eclectic Project team we valued the community's ownership and control of the production of knowledge. Thus, it was clear from the beginning that the teaching/learning relationship would develop on a sharing rather than an hegemonic basis. The lines and boundaries between insider and outsider softened to create a dynamic of 'belonging' to a pilot-project's community of ethnographers. To extrapolate on Cohen's (1982) premise, there would be a shared experience of culture. Thus, the Project's productions emphasised the collective team dimension. It strived as much as possible to be egalitarian in the representation of individual contributions to its productions.[15]

An Ethnology of the Proximate

To further understand these issues, it may be useful to step back into the contexts from which these considerations arose. Utilising a descriptive and analytic narrative of various discourses referring to stages and processes of the conceptualisation and continuing management of the Project in its ethnographic purpose, we learn fieldwork poetics in an ethnology of the proximate, focusing on popular culture repertoires and processes. This positions the ethnographer in an endotic perspective (Urbain 2003), combining and favouring insiders' viewpoints, inclusive of the ethnographer's own. The folklorist ethnographer then focuses on repertoires and their expressions as essential elements contributing to the definitions, delineation and descriptions of systemic cultural groups. This approach is not foolproof and does not preclude exclusion, exclusivity or even the exhaustiveness of thick description *à la* Geertz, which might be at odds with cultural anthropology, oral history or sociology (Curtin et al 1993). On the contrary, a specific folklore focus on the repertoire and processes of the proximate allows an understanding of contexts supplying further meanings to broadened horizons in ethnographic science. Then, the term 'folklore' written or uttered and applied during the initial meetings between academics and community groups in the preliminary stages of the Northside Folklore Project rang different bells, illustrating the extent and the variety of its poetical dimension and indeed political spectra (O'Carroll 2013).[16] The documents which were drawn up in

order to secure funding for the establishment of the Project, used the term 'folklore' in its broadest sense. They explicitly prioritised an insider's perspective in the definition and interpretation of 'folklore' as content and transmission process.

An ethnology of the proximate, then, implied an inclusive and common agreement among all involved on what constituted folklore and on the reasons for having a legitimate interest in a fluid and versatile range of ideas and expressions which, for all intents and purposes, use communicative artistry to refer to and define the ever changing boundaries and parameters of cultural identity. The following is an excerpt of the initial document submitted to UCC by Professor Gearóid Ó Crualaoich in 1994 on behalf of staff and associated researchers in the Department of Folklore and Ethnology:

> Within a general ethnographic-anthropological horizon this project emphasises the process of popular cultural production, transformation and transmission, the study of which characterises contemporary Folklore and Ethnology. At its heart is the notion of a local cultural identity that is the creation – not of some static 'tradition' – but of a group's continually changing self-representation in symbolic, behavioural and material forms. The project seeks to investigate the ways in which Northside identity and collective self-image are constructed, contested, defended, renewed and transmitted within a cultural process that itself dynamically reflects people's actual experience of social and cultural life.
>
> The state and the academic world too often relate to disadvantaged areas through their problems – through their divergence from a putative national norm. […] Disadvantaged urban working-class districts are furthest removed from the dominant culture of the state, having provided neither the symbolic national language, the romantic landscape, or the bucolic values which at least helped to integrate equivalent rural areas. Being mostly of recent origin these urban districts moreover have a less sure sense of identity, and even if they develop definite territorial configurations the basic paradigm of identity is class. We argue that communities like the Northside cannot be understood and appreciated only by investigating them on the interface with mainstream (bourgeois) society, the preserve of social workers and the police, where dysfunction becomes a criterion of their culture. Instead one must investigate the cultural process within the community, one must

> understand how it represents itself to itself and to outsiders, how members of the community interact with each other and with the wider society.
>
> Here the insider's perspective is all-important, even if it is engaged in an implicit dialogue with the outsider's perspective. We do not see this in terms of the individual's attempt to objectify his or her experience, but rather how he or she lives culture. Hence we propose to document the community's verbal folklore (its stories, songs, jokes), its rituals (birth, marriage, death, 'women's night out'), its sporting life (drag-hunting, hurling, soccer) and other recreations (bingo, visiting public houses), as well as music (bands, musical nights in pubs), its material culture (styles of dress and home decoration), its religious life, and so forth. This information will be the testimony of the community through which we expect to unravel its priorities, its expectations, its disappointments, its pride in itself, its sense of inferiority, its identity. The community will speak for itself (Ó Crualaoich 1994).

Here the ethnological is political (Mills 1993). The 'action' of doing folklore is intrinsic in fieldwork (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Folklore, in its many interpretations, tells of the ways, the sayings and makings of the people; the processes by, and the purposes for which these are expressed and communicated; and also the meanings they infer within the communities they represent. The implications for fieldwork reside in establishing relationships, where a participative position is attained which would allow for the recording of a sampled variety of cultural expressions and their interpretations, to reflect a complex heterogeneity of perspectives, which bear significance as an articulate combination of representations of collective identity.

The Project practises an ethnology where the fieldwork situation is endotic and privileges several inclusive insiders' perspectives. CFP, since its inception, has expanded its 'field' to reflect the moving boundaries of Cork, both real and virtual. It involves and represents the people of Cork in their diversity, all either living in or experiencing the city, as well as reflecting a multifaceted sense of traditional and popular aesthetics.[17] This ethos has intellectually driven it to its present status as a living community archive of ethnographic resources for many in-house and external multi-focus

and multimedia productions.[18] Thus the Project's ethnographic production expresses the live, active dynamics generated by the fieldworkers' perspectives, worldviews, and the relationships they engage in with the community. Its objectives, through the nature, organisation and representations of its archival fonds, are realised in a public forum where the creative intellectual and artistic dimensions of popular culture are seen to be significant. In this, the living archive engages with the content, yet also with the mechanisms and transmission channels of popular culture, with which both the local and the global may identify (McLuhan 1964; Bauman 1986).

Film as Fieldwork

Two of the Project's early films illustrate this point. *A Night at Bingo* (2003), filmed in Cork city, documents practices and beliefs which are familiar to those from other countries: when shared with non-Irish audiences, this film stirred similar emotions and reactions to those awakened in local viewers. The oral history and occupational folklore documentary, *Sunbeam* (2005), co-produced by the Project and Frameworks, a local audio-visual company, attests the collective and communal heritage of the Northside textile factory. When screened at the Cherbourg *Travelling* Film Festival in 2007, to an audience mainly composed of former factory workers in France, the reaction was one of empathy with the performances of repertoires expressive of shared occupational concerns, strategies and values. The radio production *How's It Goin', Boy?* comprises a total of 42 audio interviews with people from 'all walks of life'. All tell of their relationship with Cork city through their own personal experiences (Desplanques and O'Carroll 2006). The 'I' often became 'we' (Pamuk 2006). The editing of the ethnographic interviews into a series of radio programmes highlighted the continuous thread weaving through an emerging dialogue between contributors, performers and audiences in their sometimes inter-changing roles as researchers, interviewers, interviewees, editors, archivists, producers, sound technicians, transcribers etc. Similar integrated processes, reflecting the web of combinations of perspectives, characterised the endotic fieldwork approaches to *A Night at Bingo*, where eight hours of editing time in a studio was the

'carrot' which directed a strategy leading to hours of ethnographic recordings. In this particular case, the main contributor, also the main fieldworker, negotiated her expertise as an avid bingo player with her position as a fieldworker to contribute her knowledge of the game in ethnographic interviews and fulfil a major role in the film production. She practically managed ubiquity!

Considering our exploration of the concepts of fieldwork and the case of the Project as a living archive we infer that working from the core of ethnology, folklorists use ethnographic fieldwork to understand, elucidate and record the complex processes and relationships that produce the performance of culturally significant 'texts', expressed either verbally, semiotically or behaviourally in ritual or habitual fashion. We consider 'text' as tangible and intangible production, expression and reflection of ideas, symbolically represented in ways aesthetically conveying the cognitive and affective through experience of, and identification with, shared, if not communal, knowledge. As such, and considering it objectal rather than objective (Sansot 1996), the 'text' also concerns and refers to the integral spectrum of activities and states of the ethnographic fieldworker, then accounting for an involvement and relationship with a situation and its people (Scheper-Hughes 2001). The resulting 'text' then includes and represents the entire paradigm of the sometimes elusive boundaries of the field. In an endotic fieldwork situation, as that in which CFP operates, to be receptively meaningful to all it seeks to account for in ethnographic action – that is, the combined performances of contributors, participants, and observers or discourse production – the text encompasses the discourse and becomes the performance repertoire of the ethnographer. Thus the position of insider-ethnographer suggests personally negotiated perspectives and relationships with culturally significant situations and people within them. These creatively emerge as the poetics of fieldwork, whose expressed interpretations are transformed into ethnographies, where all aspects of the negotiation and communication processes, generating and moderating their production, possess artistic and creative dimensions.

Conclusion

The conceptualisation of an ethnology of the proximate at CFP implies a commitment to a reflection on issues exploring the role and meaning of 'fieldwork' in a 'living archive' context, where the various positions of ethnographers, contributors and audiences, are potentially interchangeable. Ethnographers are active in community settings. Their fieldwork leads to applications with immediate tangible impacts on people's everyday life. They engage in a reflexive exercise which produces taxonomies enabling a flexible delineation of boundaries around forms and expressions of cultural knowledge. These boundaries, and the combination of their emic and etic definitions (Dundes 1962), tied to their symbolic, cultural representations, are intrinsically linked to the perspectives from which ethnographic observers angle their views. To consider the qualitative dimension of fieldwork means exploring the dynamics of transitions and exchanges; paying attention to choices and agencies of language; and to the moods and modes bringing the ethnographer in and out of different roles. To account for the multidimensional field in and about which popular culture (inclusive of the ethnographer's own lived and perceived experience) is encountered, is relevant to what I have tentatively referred to as the 'poet(h)ics of fieldwork', as a complex combination of conditions, processes and choices where responsibility and creativity combine to result in ethnographic production.

There are implications in terms of the initial recognition and valuing of predominantly intangible ethnographic material. This material must be considered as documented knowledge reflecting greatly varying perspectives and interpretations. Drawing from the essential role folklore fieldworkers and archives have played in the development of ethnology as an academic discipline, while focussing specifically on the contemporary experience, the Cork Folklore Project has functioned as a living archive, integrating the academic and pragmatic practice of the discipline in an endotic long-term field experience.

Notes

[1] Originally the Northside Folklore Project (NFP), it is now called the Cork Folklore Project (CFP); it was the Cork Northside Folklore Project for a short intermediate period of time. I will mostly refer to it as 'the Project' in this article to avoid any confusion.
[2] University College Cork, Northside Community Enterprises and now the Department of Social Protection form the basis of this structure. The latter governmental agency replaces a former structure named FÁS, a state agency which was officially dissolved in 2013 in a conjuncture of corruption.
[3] The expression 'living archive' is used by several repositories, with reference to the interactive processes that characterise the nature of their collections and their modes of dissemination. The internet is one of the most important and effective gateways through which to explore the diversity of applications. 'The Living archive of Milton Keynes', for example, is one of the pioneers of this concept. See http://www.livingarchive.org.uk. Accessed 15 September 2014.
[4] I left the Project essentially due to a personal bereavement.
[5] This was mentioned by Maurice Godelier at a lecture he gave concerning his work on Lévi-Strauss, in the Sorbonne, Paris, 10 April 2014.
[6] The term 'emotion' in the context of ethnography deserves to be explored on several levels, including that inferring a hegemonic context in the choice of 'field', in our case, a bourgeois-occupational group 'investigating' or 'documenting' the culture of a lower economic class.
[7] It is interesting to note the connotation of ethnographic collection as a stage in the process of the transformation of knowledge expression.
[8] Similar concerns are also valid elsewhere. In French, for example, the term *informateur* is often employed, with similar implications.
[9] CFP Archive contracts and database use the terms 'contributor', or 'interviewee' where appropriate. The term 'informant' is not used in any of CFP's documentation.
[10] Conceived, under the acronym BREAK (Backlog Reduction and Enhancement of Archival Knowledge), by Marie-Annick Desplanques, Margaret Lantry and Jenny Butler, with the assistance of Emma Lang, supported by funding from the UCC Presidential Fund, 2005.
[11] See: ISAD (G) – General International Standard of Archival Description.
[12] A similar concept was employed by journalist Con Houlihan from Castleisland, in referring to Sliabh Luachra, a rural area of Ireland on the Cork-Kerry-Limerick border with no specific boundaries, yet famous for its music, storytelling, etc.

[13] It is interesting to note, for instance, the number of archives which view themselves as 'breaking the silence', and which contain ethnographic accounts of hitherto unspoken or silenced experiences and histories.
[14] Professional writers, playwrights, film makers, producers, storytellers, singers, composers, etc. regularly visit CFP in search of material. The following are examples of such applications: 'Soundscapes', produced by Mark Graham of Waterford Spraoi, for 'Awakenings', Cork 2005 opening ceremonies (public performance); 'Moment', Intergenerational Multimedia Performance Project, produced by Molly Sturges for Cork 2005 programme (public performance); Conal Creedon, *The Burning of Cork*, RTÉ 2005 (television programme).
[15] This was a somewhat utopian ideal, as outside requirements in the increasing culture of evaluation and performance measurements in academia, and other institutions, slowly but surely started to emphasise the importance of individual positions in hierarchies of power, so that, for instance, it became important (in a university, government or other institution context) to justify one's efforts, to 'be seen', and to have one's name and title printed in as many places as possible. For more on this, see Debord 1967.
[16] Interpretations of the term 'folkore' are many and varied: it may connote an association with the traditional past; it may refer to collecting work, such as that carried out by the Irish Folklore Commision; it may refer to the object of study; or denote various expressions of disbelief.
[17] *The Archive: The Journal of the Cork Folklore Project* stipulates that individual opinions expressed in journal articles are not necessarily those of the Project.
[18] See http://www.ucc.ie/en/cfp/. Accessed 15 September 2014.

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