

2012

Rodney's Archive: An Ethnographic Encounter with a Private Music Collection and its Collector

Eve Olney
Technological University Dublin

Follow this and additional works at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/dmcthes>



Part of the [Film and Media Studies Commons](#), and the [Music Performance Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Olney, E. : Rodney's Archive: An Ethnographic Encounter with a Private Music Collection and its Collector, Doctoral Thesis. Technological University Dublin, 2012.

This Theses, Ph.D is brought to you for free and open access by the Digital Media Centre at ARROW@TU Dublin. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses by an authorized administrator of ARROW@TU Dublin. For more information, please contact yvonne.desmond@tudublin.ie, arrow.admin@tudublin.ie, brian.widdis@tudublin.ie.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 License](#)

Rodney's Archive: An Ethnographic Encounter
with a Private Music Collection and its Collector

Eve Olney BA(Hons)

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Dublin Institute of Technology

2012

Rodney's Archive:
An Ethnographic Encounter with a Private Music
Collection and its Collector

Eve Olney BA(Hons)

This Thesis is submitted to the Dublin Institute
of Technology in Candidature for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Supervisor: Dr Áine O'Brien

School of Media

April 2012

Abstract

Located in the fields of cultural studies and media studies, this thesis frames an ethnography of the private collector, Rodney McElrea, (from Omagh, Co. Tyrone) and his music collection, simultaneously presenting an analysis of socio-cultural issues relating to collecting and archival practices. Focusing on the relationship between Rodney and his collected artefacts, this study is guided by several interrelated research questions: how is cultural meaning revealed in the private archive; to what degree are the taxonomic structures imposed on private archives directing interpretations of it; how might the cultural value of this particular private collection be determined in the absence of an institutional system of cultural evaluation. In addition the thesis explores how cultural memory and (Rodney's) private memory are interrelated within the collected object in his archive and furthermore to what degree can the research questions guiding this thesis be explored through Rodney's performance of the archive? The research is, therefore, framed within an overall narrative concerning the uncertain fate of Rodney's collection, beyond the lifespan of its collector and how the collection might be preserved in the future.

The thesis comprises an introduction, conclusion and five chapters. An accompanying DVD features some of my documentation of the field site within an eighteen-minute film. This film provides an ethnographic representation of my experience with Rodney and his archive. Chapter one discusses my first encounters with Rodney and attempts to identify the taxonomic systems at play within the collection. Drawing on a number of scholars from cultural studies, whose primary focus is the ontological status of archives, I explore the meaning of Rodney's engagement with his artefacts and his motivations as a private collector. The role of practice is introduced in this chapter, as a means of navigating Rodney's collection, and is supported by critical arguments from within the fields of visual anthropology and media studies. Chapter two focuses on how recorded sound functions within the collection as both an archival tool (of exploration) and an object of analysis, whilst referring to scholars from within auditory studies. Recorded sounds situate Rodney within the archival space, and are offered as one method of retaining the memory of the collector within future representations. Chapter three refers to Rodney's past collecting practices when discussing the cultural significance of his collection through the metrics of various frameworks of value. Chapter four details the methodological approach to representing such an idiosyncratic collection and foregrounds the practice elements and curatorial process of interpreting and mediating Rodney and his archive. Here emphasis is placed on how the photographic image works in conjunction with recorded sound and how the film sequence performs within concepts of being both 'archival' and 'ethnographic' in nature. The fifth and final chapter discusses the film in relation to both Rodney's engagement with it and its success in communicating ethnographic experience to the observer. The future survival of the collection is then revisited in view of Rodney's deeply personal investment alongside external interests from individual and institutional sources, with complimentary yet different agendas surrounding the preserving of this private music collection.

I certify that this thesis which I now submit for examination for the award of PhD, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

This thesis was prepared according to the regulations for postgraduate study by research of the Dublin Institute of Technology and has not been submitted in whole or in part for another award in any other third level institution. The work reported on in this thesis conforms to the principles and requirements of the DIT's guidelines for ethics in research.

DIT has permission to keep, lend or copy this thesis in whole or in part, on condition that any such use of the material of the thesis be duly acknowledged.

Signature _____

Date _____

Candidate: Eve Olney

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank Mr. Rodney McElrea for his continuous cooperation and help in making this project possible. His contagious enthusiasm, immense knowledge and skills as a storyteller made this endeavour an incredibly enjoyable one to pursue and I will always be grateful for the amount of time and emotion he invested into this piece of work. Mrs. Ruth McElrea made my visits to Omagh incredibly welcoming and pleasurable and I sincerely thank her for all her hospitality over the past seven years.

I would like to acknowledge and thank those at the Centre for Transcultural Research and Media Practice and the Graduate Office at the Dublin Institute of Technology for the helpful advice and guidance throughout the years of researching this project. I particularly thank my doctoral supervisor, Dr Áine O'Brien whose knowledge, support and patience has been consistent throughout each element of my research right up to the end. I also extend my sincerest gratitude to Mick Muldoon for his invaluable help and direction with the DVD. Mick's sudden passing this year was a great shock and is deeply felt by all who knew him. Peter Crimmings for his technological support and to my friend Dr Ailsa Russell for her useful feedback, advice and proofing of parts of the thesis.

I could never have persisted with and completed this project without the support of my parents, Catherine and Jim Olney, whose faith and encouragement helped me right to the end and I thank my siblings Ian, Kim, Joy and Lee for numerous favours, child-minding, and everything else I depended on them for over the past seven years.

Last, but in no way least, I would like to thank my partner, Tony, whose part in this project cannot be adequately measured or commended, suffice to say it would not have happened without his input, support and love and I will always be grateful for that. I thank my beautiful daughter Martha for her patience with me and my work and for sharing the computer without grumbling. Finally, my son James's arrival, just at the right moment, spurred me on to complete my research and made this achievement all the more poignant.

Table of Contents

Abstract		
Declaration Page		
Acknowledgements		
Table of Contents		1
Table of Figures		2
Introduction		7
Chapter One	Understanding the Private Music Collection	15
Chapter Two	How Cultural Memory and Private Memory are Interrelated within the Sound Artefact	59
Chapter Three	The Cultural Significance of the Private Music Archive	97
Chapter Four	Representing the Private Collection	145
Chapter Five	The Reclassification of the Private Music Collection through Ethnographic Practice	192
Conclusion		228
Bibliography		234

Table of Figures

- Figure 1:01: Rodney McElrea in his music archive, 1 March 2008. (Eve Olney)
- Figure 1:02: Rodney's archive is housed in the downstairs room to the right of the front door. (Eve Olney)
- Figure 1:03: Rodney McElrea (seated) and Prof Jack Bernhardt during the McAuley Lectures, 2005. (Eve Olney)
- Figure 1:04: Detail from Rodney's archive. (Eve Olney)
- Figure 1:05: Images of Rodney's music archive, 2 March 2008. (Eve Olney)
- Figure 1:06: Detail of Rodney's archive. (Eve Olney)
- Figure 1:07: Rodney in his archive. (Eve Olney)
- Figure 1:08: Images of the Ulster American Folk Park. (Eve Olney)
- Figure 1:09: Images of Centre for Migration Studies Library. (Eve Olney)
- Figure 1:10: Chair in Rodney's archive. (Eve Olney)
- Figure 1:11: Rodney's listening area. (Eve Olney)
- Figure 1:12: Detail of Rodney's archive. (Eve Olney)
- Figure 1:13: Video stills of Rodney listening to music in his archive 15 May 2006. (Eve Olney)
- Figure 1:14: Images of Rodney's music archive, 31 October 2007. (Eve Olney)
- Figure 2: 01 Dorsey Dixon reel-to-reel tape. (Scanned item from Rodney McElrea's archive)
- Figure 2:02: Front and back of photograph of Dorsey Dixon at his home, sent to Rodney in 1962. (Scanned items taken from Rodney McElrea's archive)
- Figure 2:03: A collection of correspondence sent from Dorsey Dixon to Rodney. (Eve Olney)
- Figure 2:04: First issue of *Country News and Views*, dated July 1962. (Scanned items taken from Rodney McElrea's archive)
- Figure 2:05: Reel-to-reel tapes from Rodney's archive. (Eve Olney)
- Figure 2:06: Dorsey (left) and Howard Dixon (right). (Scanned items taken from Rodney McElrea's archive)
- Figure 2:07: Extract from letter, dated 10 May 1962, where Dorsey explains to Rodney what happened regarding the copyright to his music. (Scanned items taken from Rodney McElrea's archive).

Figure 2: 08: Extract from Dorsey's letter to Rodney, dated 15 March 1961. (Scanned items taken from Rodney McElrea's archive)

Figure 2:09: Rodney holds an old photograph of John Edwards. (Eve Olney)

Figure 2:10: Extract from the poem Dorsey wrote for Edwards. (Scanned item taken from Rodney McElrea's archive)

Figure 2:11: Extract from first letter Dorsey sent to Rodney, 1961. (Scanned item taken from Rodney McElrea's archive)

Figure 2:12: Extract of letter Dorsey sent to Rodney; dated 12 April 1962. (Scanned item taken from Rodney McElrea's archive)

Figure 2:13: Front page of article from Country Record Exchange Vol 4; No. 33, March, 1970. (Scanned item taken from Rodney McElrea's archive)

Figure 2:14: Dorsey Tape on reel-to-reel tape recorder (top); Dorsey Tape on CD (bottom). (Eve Olney)

Figure 2:15: Details of markings on the box that holds the Dorsey Tape. (Eve Olney)

Figure 2:16: Detail of the *Silvertone* packaging design. (Scanned item taken from Rodney McElrea's archive)

Figure 2:17: Example of worn tape (top); magnetic dust gathers in the corner (bottom). (Eve Olney)

Figure 2:18: Detail of Dorsey's note on box of the tape. (Scanned item taken from Rodney McElrea's archive)

Figure 2:19: Rodney's presence disrupting the order of the archive (top) and the archive returned to a state of atemporality (bottom). (Eve Olney)

Figure 2:20: Rodney's listening area in the archive. (Eve Olney)

Figure: 3:01: Top of mantelpiece in Rodney's and Ruth's living room. (Eve Olney)

Figure: 3:02: Figurines in Rodney's and Ruth's cabinet. (Eve Olney)

Figure: 3:03: Assortment of objects on mantelpiece in Rodney's archive. (Eve Olney)

Figure 3:04: Mantelpiece in Rodney's and Ruth's living room. (Eve Olney)

Figure 3:05: A list (made by Rodney) of other collectors whom he traded/corresponded with. (Scanned item taken from Rodney McElrea's archive)

Figure 3:06: Letter from old time collector, Harvey Fink, who corresponded with Rodney from the US, November 1968. (Scanned item taken from Rodney McElrea's archive)

Figure 3:07: Rodney and Charlie Newman's opening editorial letter featured in the first issue of *Country News and Views*, July 1962. (Scanned item taken from Rodney McElrea's archive)

Figure 3:08: Extract from editorial page of *Country News and Views*, July 1962. (Scanned item taken from Rodney McElrea's archive)

Figure 3:09: Rodney in his flat in Newtownstewart with American singer/songwriter Bill Clifton and his wife, 1964. (Scanned item taken from Rodney McElrea's archive).

Figure 3:10: Dave Freeman with his collection of 78s. Available at <<http://www.oldhatrecords.com/ResearchFreeman.html>> (first published in *The Old-Time Herald*, Vol. 7, No. 2, Winter 1999/2000) [Accessed 18 November 2010].

Figure 3:11: Image of Joe Bussard in the 1950s as available on his website: www.myspace.com/joebussard [Accessed 17 November 2011].

Figure 3:12: Dave Freeman sourcing 78s from a house, 1964. Available at <<http://www.oldhatrecords.com/ResearchFreeman.html>> (first published in *The Old-Time Herald*, Vol. 7, No. 2, Winter 1999/2000) [Accessed 18 November 2010].

Figure 3:13: Freeman loads boxes of 78s into Joe Bussard's car, 1964. Available at <<http://www.oldhatrecords.com/ResearchFreeman.html>> (first published in *The Old-Time Herald*, Vol. 7, No. 2, Winter 1999/2000) [Accessed 18 November 2010].

Figure 3.14 Extract from *Country News and Views* Vol.1 No. 2, October 1962, p.16. (Scanned item taken from Rodney McElrea's archive)

Figure 3:15: A record review from *Country News and Views* criticising the Osborne Brothers' record, January 1963. (Scanned item taken from Rodney McElrea's archive)

Figure 3:16: An advertisement that Rodney placed in *Country News and Views*, January 1964. (Scanned item taken from Rodney McElrea's archive)

Figure 3:17: Rodney with Sara Carter and Dave Freeman in Sara's mobile home, Virginia, 1964. (Scanned item taken from Rodney McElrea's archive)

Figure 3:18: Label from County Records (left); County Records shop, Virginia (right). Available at <<http://www.oldhatrecords.com/ResearchFreeman.html>> (first published in *The Old-Time Herald*, Vol. 7, No. 2, Winter 1999/2000) [Accessed 18 November 2010].

Figure 3:19: Label from Joe Bussard's company Fonotone (left); Joe Bussard (right). Available on his website: www.myspace.com/joebussard [Accessed 17 November 2011].

Figure 3:20: Collectors/academics who cared for the John Edwards collection published a quarterly magazine entitled the *JEMF Quarterly*; extract pictured above. (Scanned item taken from Rodney McElrea's archive)

Figure 3: 21: Rodney holds a compilation CD produced by Dave Barnes featuring music from his collection. (Eve Olney)

Figure 3:22: Programme advertising the lecture series in which Rodney takes part. (Scanned item taken from Rodney McElrea's archive)

Figure 3:23: Two collectors featured in 'The People's Show' exhibition. Available at www.thenewartgallerywalsall.org.uk [Accessed 17 November 2011].

Figure 3:24: Excerpt from University of North Carolina website featuring inventory of JEMF records (University of North Carolina, 2001, John Edwards Memorial Foundation Inventory records. Southern Folklife Collection). Available at http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/j/John_Edwards_Memorial_Foundation [Accessed 1 January 2007].

Figure 4:01: Kinney Rorrer image (left). Available at http://www.wvtf.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=124&Itemid=139; Cover of Rorrer's book (right). (Scanned item taken from Rodney McElrea's archive)

Figure 4:02: Rodney (with pink folder) at lecture, 2005. (Eve Olney)

Figure 4:03: Pink folder and list containing details of Charlie Poole Monument Fund, 1965–6. (Eve Olney)

Figure 4:04: Letter from Cliff Rorrer to Rodney, dated 9 May 1966. (Eve Olney)

Figure 4:05: Photograph sent to Rodney by Cliff Rorrer, 1966. (Eve Olney)

Figure 4:06: Page of the *Greensboro Daily News*, dated 15 June 1969. (Eve Olney)

Figure 4:07: Press photograph of Rodney at the monument he had erected to Charlie Poole, 1967. (Eve Olney)

Figure 4:08: Mixed tape made by Rodney for researcher, 30 October 2007. (Eve Olney)

Figure 4:09: Rodney in archive 30 October 2007. (Eve Olney)

Figure 4:10: Rodney at lecture, 2005. (Eve Olney)

Figure 4:11: Detail of letter dated 09 May 1966. (Scanned item taken from Rodney McElrea's archive)

Figure 4:12: Detail of letter dated 09 May 1966. (Scanned item taken from Rodney McElrea's archive)

Figure 4:13: Detail of headstone taken from *Maverick* magazine, Issue 97, August 2010. (Scanned item taken from Rodney McElrea's archive)

Figure 4:14: Image from Kinney Rorrer's book, *Rambling Blues: The Life and Songs of Charlie Poole*. (Scanned item taken from Rodney McElrea's archive)

Figure 4:15: Detail from Cliff Rorrer letter, dated February 1968. (Scanned item taken from Rodney McElrea's archive)

Figure 4:16: Detail of *Greensboro Daily News*, dated 15 May 1969. (Scanned item taken from Rodney McElrea's archive)

Figure 4:17: Image of the *Franklin County Times* taken in Rodney's kitchen, 30 October 2007. (Eve Olney)

Figure 4:18: Image of the *Leakesville News* taken in Rodney's kitchen, 30 October 2007. (Eve Olney)

Figure 4:19: Image of the *Eden News* taken in Rodney's kitchen, 30 October 2007. (Eve Olney)

Figure 4:20: Detail of researcher's field notes, dated 30 October 2007.

Figure 4:21: Cropped images of artefacts from Rodney's archive. (Scanned item taken from Rodney McElrea's archive)

Figure 5:01: Rodney in his kitchen in Omagh, November 2011. (Eve Olney)

Figure 5:02: Jimmie Rogers 78 from Rodney's archive. (Eve Olney)

Figure 5:03: Rodney with the bottle of Hadacol, November 2011. (Eve Olney)

Figure 5:04: Still taken from the Charlie Poole Story.

Figure 5:05: Still taken from the Charlie Poole Story.

Figure 5:06: Still taken from the Charlie Poole Story.

Figure 5:07: Still taken from the Charlie Poole Story.

Figure 5:08: Still taken from The Charlie Poole Story.

Figure 5:09: Still taken from The Charlie Poole Story.

Figure 5:10: The second room that houses Rodney's archive. (Eve Olney)

Figure 5:11: Rodney's archive in 2011. (Eve Olney)

Figure 5:12: Rodney and I in archive November 2011. (Tony Crimmings)

Figure 6:01: Cover (left) and Editorial (right) of Charlie Poole article. (Scanned item taken from Rodney McElrea's archive)

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis and the accompanying DVD, I present a cultural analysis of the significance of private collecting practices determined by my successive encounters with the private collector, Rodney McElrea. Rodney's exhaustive pursuit of old-time music and memorabilia spans almost sixty years of his life and has culminated in a unique collection of personal and cultural artefacts which sits in a room at his home in Omagh, County Tyrone. 'Old-time' music (previously known as 'mountain music' or 'hillbilly music') is the marketing label associated with folk music originating from the North American Appalachian area; the main recording lifespan of this music can be generally framed between 1923 and the late 1930s. Whereas the term 'race records'¹ was used to describe the folk music of African Americans, 'old-time' music came largely from the white (Anglo-Celtic Southern American) communities of small mining/mill towns in parts of Virginia, North and South Carolina and Tennessee.² The music has survived (somewhat peripherally) in the marketplace through subsequent cultural revivals from the 1950s onwards.

Rodney began collecting this music in the late 1950s and early 1960s, a time when there was only a marginal interest in this genre of music. In addition to collecting records he sought out any marketing materials that accompanied the music, such as displays found in record shops or related magazine articles. Rodney included personal items even in his early collection, retaining the receipt of his first record player and the letters and envelopes of the first correspondence he received from other collectors. His confidence as a collector grew when, in his

twenties, he became acquainted, through old-time publications, with a group of international old-time collectors with whom he exchanged music and information and he subsequently embarked on collecting trips with some of these men during the 1960s. Rodney researched and sought out living old-time artists in the southern states of North America and where the musician had passed on he acquainted himself with surviving family members. Even in the 1960s, he introduced himself (by letter) to a record executive at RCA, Brad McEwan, and several letters later was given access to the archives of RCA in New York, where he spent months painstakingly copying by hand the recording notes kept of every old-time artist listed there. Every record, letter, note, photograph, tape, book, magazine, record note and (later) CD that Rodney acquired over the years is now part of his collection. According to Rodney, some old-time collectors are very specific in the music they collect and do not extend their collections to include variations of country music which are heavily influenced by the old-time sound. Rodney does not hold such prejudices and collects all types of country and bluegrass variants. However, his main interest remains within the genre of old-time music and artists.

Although Rodney's love for this music lies at the heart of his collection, my research looks beyond the musicological elements of the records and CDs and instead searches for a deeper understanding of his motivations as a private collector and the broader cultural knowledge that can be gleaned from exploring his relationship with his collected artefacts. Meeting Rodney at this particular time in the life of his collection presented a distinctive opportunity of gaining knowledge of a culturally rich archive at a pivotal point where the collector is still

present to explain the meaning behind its existence. Through meetings and discussions with Rodney, a lifetime of narratives was slowly revealed to me as I observed the intimate relationship he shares with the collected objects in his possession. I present my account of this experience within a framework of critical debates currently surrounding the ontological status of archives within the fields of cultural studies and media studies, primarily drawing on the arguments of Susan Stewart (1993), Susan Pearce (2006) and Jean Baudrillard (1994) relating to meaning within private collections. Jonathon Sterne (2003), David MacDougall (1994; 2006), Elizabeth Edwards (2001) and Catherine Russell (1999) are the principal texts referred to when discussing the media aspects of my research. Although supported by critical theory, it is the ethnographic component that drives my inquiry as I gradually cultivate my own system of making sense of this collection through my direct engagement with Rodney.

My story of Rodney and his collection begins with an initial concern relating to the future survival of his archive beyond his lifetime. This issue led me to consider the cultural role of Rodney, as a private collector, and the consequences of losing the intimate knowledge he holds of his collection. Throughout my ethnographic account I deliberate upon how this tension plays out in Rodney's behaviour and attitude towards his archive as well as towards others who recognise its cultural value and wish to invest in its future. Whilst considering the role of others in this narrative, I reflect on my own involvement in and contribution to the question of how Rodney's collection may survive the transition into a possible public arena, and I digitally document my meetings with Rodney, through sound and photographic recordings. I work within the mediums of written

text, digital sound and digital images, firstly in my observation of the field site and later in formulating and translating my interpretation of Rodney's collection for the reader/observer in an eighteen-minute film, presented here, as my own representation of Rodney and his archive.

My project spans a time period of almost seven years, from the first time I met Rodney in September 2005 until the completion of my thesis in 2012. However, my story presents a much broader ethnographic time-frame which, intermittently, oscillates between Rodney as a young man on the first scavenger hunts for 78 records in rural North America during his early days of collecting, and as an older man living quietly in Omagh amongst a lifetime of acquisition. Although Rodney and I now maintain a warm and amicable friendship, my account of our meetings reveals a tentative beginning between two strangers which progressively matured into a respectful relationship that has proven mutually beneficial. During my visits to Rodney's home in Omagh, my preconceived notions about his character were challenged as I gradually became familiar with his practices and motivations as a private collector. What felt, at first, an awkward and contrived performance (on both our parts) became more comfortable over time as differences and obstacles pertaining to our characters became easier to put aside.

Chapter one documents the ill ease during my first visit to Rodney's house as I attempt to find my way around his collection. This initial encounter raises questions and issues relating to how I, as an outsider, can access meaning within Rodney's archive and I draw on Stewart's (1993) and Baudrillard's (1994)

conceptualisation to determine how taxonomic systems might be identified in relation to Rodney's interaction with his collected objects. The role of practice is also introduced in this chapter and as I begin recording and photographing the collection I consider how photography and sound recording can be employed as archival tools in the digital replication of Rodney's archive, referring to Sterne (2003), Steven Feld (2004) and R. Murray Schafer (1994) when discussing sound in the archive and to MacDougall (1994; 2006) and Edwards (2001) when contemplating employing the photographic image within my work. I go on to discuss how documenting Rodney's collection serves as a method of identifying the potential multiple relations between the collected artefacts and then examine how the various sources of sounds captured within the archival space might divulge a more complex internal relationship between him and his collection.

I continue my focus on sound in chapter two when considering how recorded sound functions in the collection in relation to concepts of private and cultural memory. I shift my attention towards the kind of recorded sounds found in the artefacts within Rodney's archive and choose an old tape-recording of old-time musician Dorsey Dixon performing music and spoken messages directly to Rodney. Whilst referring to Arjun Appadurai (2003) and Igor Kopytoff (2003), I consider this recording in relation to both Rodney's biography and other broader cultural narratives. Then, using Sterne's (2003) hypothesis relating to how time can be framed within an audio recording, I identify multiple, over-lapping temporalities at play within the Dorsey tape and reflect on how each evokes different responses from the listener, in relation to Rodney's past relationship with Dorsey as well as the actual material artefact that contains the technology. This

insight further informs how I interpret the aural landscape of the collection as I go on to discuss how Rodney's presence within the archive creates continuous disruptions to the landscape and sounds of the archival space and how Andrew Moutu's (2009) argument relating to this subject can find meaning within these interruptions.

Having situated Rodney's archive within broader cultural narratives, I draw in chapter three on arguments presented by Baudrillard (2005) and Pearce (2006) in contemplating how Rodney's role as a collector can be considered to have a wider cultural significance beyond the confines of his collection. I proceed to contextualise the type of past cultural practices in which Rodney participated during his years of collecting in the 1960s within past and current concepts of cultural value and knowledge. As our conversations continue, Rodney revisits his views about the pending fate of his collection by offering a comparison with other private collectors who have been faced with a similar problem. His attitude during this discussion reveals an ambiguous position as to how he measures the value of his own collection as well as a strong distrust of the agencies of institutional archives and I consider under which frameworks of value his private collection should be considered. Here, I refer mainly to the arguments of Appadurai (2003) and John Frow (1996) as I develop my discussion by examining how the value of objects can fluctuate at different stages within their biographies, becoming relevant through different 'regimes of value' (Appadurai 2003: 14) depending on the particular cultural and social systems within which they are considered.

In chapter four I foreground the practice elements of my project and consider how the documentation of my field work has informed my reading of Rodney's archive. I then contemplate how that experience is effectively represented within the eighteen-minute film I have produced for this thesis. In navigating a path through the multiple narratives that exist in Rodney's collection, I focus on a specific series of events I find documented in his archive involving his relationship with the career of an old-time musician, Charlie Poole. Referring back to arguments presented by Stewart (1993), Pearce (2006), MacDougall (2006) and Sterne (2003), I reflect on the curatorial process of gathering the various components of this anecdote from the archive, rearranging it within a montage of images and audio clips and then presenting this film sequence as my own interpretation of the story. I relate to the critical arguments of Edwards (2001) and Russell (1999) in relation to using photographic images in archival work and discuss how different types of images perform within the structure of the film, further developing an argument about how this media artefact can be considered to be both archival and ethnographic in nature.

In the final chapter I revisit Rodney in Omagh in order to show him the film and discuss our future involvement with each other. I consider the success of the sequence in capturing a sense of the interplay between Rodney and his collection and comment on specific techniques intended to reflect the manner in which cultural meaning is revealed in his archive. Rodney's engagement with the film causes me to reconsider how beneficial his involvement in my project has been to him as he and I, again, return to the topic of imagining a future for the collection and I reflect upon how my role within that narrative may possibly continue.

The Artefact

The DVD is an integral part of my project as it demonstrates an indexical link between the media I produced as part of this project and the written ethnographic account of my experience with Rodney and his collection. In addition to the film sequence and other audio and visual clips found on the DVD there are also photographic images interspersed throughout the written document which I have included as a means of granting the reader a deeper sense of Rodney and the archival space he occupies, in addition to providing a visual reference for the various artefacts which are referred to throughout my argument.

¹ Okeh Records was the first label to begin marketing folk music from the rural parts of North America, from 1918, and coined the terms, 'race records' and 'old time' music. It was bought by Columbia Records in 1926.

² I found the following description of this music on www.oldtimemusic.com which offers a general conceptualisation of the genre: 'Most of the 'old time' musicians were white rural agrarian Southerners. Their singing, by European art music standards, was unschooled (though not necessarily 'artless'). The same might be said of their musicianship, expressed primarily via strings. Their song repertoire could be broadly divided between secular and sacred and further subdivided into categories of traditional, commercial (often of sufficient vintage to have entered oral tradition), and original (often topical and tragic) songs. These general elements are found equally in the commercial 'old time music' recordings of the 1920s and in the performances captured decades later.' Mark Humphrey. Available at <<http://www.oldtimemusic.com/otdef.html>> [Accessed 2 March 2012].

CHAPTER ONE: UNDERSTANDING THE PRIVATE MUSIC COLLECTION

Introduction

In this opening chapter I introduce Rodney, whose music collection (or archive) is the central focus of my research project, before presenting a brief summary of this practice-led ethnographic study. I outline the key research questions that have shaped my analysis of Rodney's private collection, presenting and framing them in the context of a set of critical and scholarly debates within the fields of visual, auditory and cultural studies. The role of practice is then introduced in relation to how photography and sound recording can be used throughout the critical exploration of Rodney's archive as both investigative tools and archival mediums. The function of these mediums within ethnographic description is also discussed in relation to critical debates from the fields of photographic/film and sound studies. Finally, the central role of Rodney, the private music collector, is outlined in relation to understanding and representing his collection.

The Private Music Collector

Rodney (Figure 1:01) began collecting old-time/country music in 1952 in County Tyrone. He remembers hearing Hank Williams for the first time on a neighbour's radio when he was fourteen and becoming 'hooked' on the music (McElrea, 2006: 15 May)¹. He still has the first Hank Williams record he ever bought as well as the receipt for the first record player he purchased to play the record. Almost sixty years later Rodney is still collecting the music and has amassed an inconceivable number of records, tapes, CDs, books, journals, letters and photographs, all

relating to his passion for old-time country music. The collection has followed him through four changes of address in and around Omagh over the years and is now situated in a modest-sized front room of his family home in a quiet cul-de-sac, twenty minutes outside Omagh town centre (Figure 1:02). Rodney outgrew a



Figure 1:01: Rodney McElrea in his music archive, 1 March 2008.

number of childhood collections before he began to seriously collect country music. The music collection is his most enduring archive and its lifespan runs parallel to Rodney's. He collected throughout his teenage years which, due to an ailing father, he mainly spent supporting his family. Having finished school he became an accountant and moved with the collection into a flat in Newtownstewart. There, he set up and ran an old-time music fanzine and organised collecting trips to the States around his job. In his thirties he settled in a Gentleman's Lodge which could not adequately house his growing archive; he



Figure 1:02: Rodney's archive is housed in the downstairs room to the right of the front door.

was then forced to sell some of his vast collection of 78 records. He met and married his wife Ruth in his late thirties and moved, for the final time, into their family home; they subsequently had three children who are all now living abroad. Yet the music collection has remained a constant factor throughout Rodney's life; he succeeded in fitting it around his career and family and it has become a full-time occupation since his retirement seven years ago.

Now in his early seventies, Rodney spends a good part of each day in this archive, listening to music, pottering around the stacks of objects and keeping up with the correspondence that the collection generates. Rodney has been in communication with various country musicians and fellow collectors and enthusiasts since the 1960s and keeps each letter or taped conversation within the collection. He maintains a regular exchange of music and information with collectors in England, the US and Australia. The music archive also plays a role outside the confines of Rodney's room and he has, until recently, shared music from his

collection with local DJs for a weekly radio show. Since 2005, Rodney has also been a guest speaker at a series of lectures held by the Ulster American Folk Park's annual Bluegrass Festival;² the lecture is held at the Centre of Migration Studies, situated in the grounds of the park. Each year Rodney brings a selection of objects from his archive to show the audience and relays stories about the collecting trips he undertook in the States in the 1960s.

My first encounter with Rodney was as a member of the audience during the first of these lectures in 2005. Having a passing interest in the old-time and bluegrass sound, I accompanied a musician friend, who was hoping to get into some sessions with other musicians playing there, to the Bluegrass Festival. On arrival,



Figure 1:03: Rodney McElrea (seated) and Professor Jack Bernhardt during the McAuley Lectures 2005. Centre for Migration Studies, Omagh, 5 September 2005.

we learned of Rodney's talk in the programme and went along, curious as to the type of old records he might have brought along. I happened to have my camera

and minidisc recorder and ended up recording the lecture and taking photographs of Rodney (Figure 1:03) and some of the artefacts he had with him. Over the course of the talk, I listened to Rodney demonstrate an in-depth knowledge of both the industries that produced old-time and country music and the personal histories of the people involved in making and collecting the music. He communicated this information during a succession of anecdotes based upon his own personal experiences as a collector. The lecture series³ is hosted yearly by Jack Bernhardt, a professor of anthropology at Wake Community College in North Carolina and during the talk Bernhardt described Rodney as a ‘remarkable collector’ and a ‘scholar of American country music of all forms, in all genres ...’ (Bernhardt, 2005: 5 September). He declares the collection to be ‘one of the most important in Great Britain and probably the least known – until now’ (ibid.).

What interested me about this particular private archive is that it is granted a brief public platform during the Bluegrass Festival whilst retaining the status of being a private collection. These annual performances by Rodney provide a rare insight into a private collection that is usually only known to its collector. By including Rodney’s collection within the programme of the annual Bluegrass Festival, the Folk Museum is attaching some degree of cultural significance to it. Professor Bernhardt’s views regarding the cultural importance of the collection also support this endorsement. Yet despite the fact that Rodney’s archive holds a cultural value that may transcend its status as a private collection, Rodney pointed out that it (at the time of writing) lacks a permanent future position within a public cultural institute. This question regarding the fate of the collection beyond the lifespan of

the collector was raised by an audience member during the lecture and Rodney's response was vague:

It's what to do with it; because I don't know of anyone [suitable] besides a guy who lives in the south of England who has got the same passion and the same collection. But he's older than me so there is no point giving it to him . . . it's a big problem what to do. (McElrea, 2005: 5 September)

Since that day of the lecture, talks have been held between Rodney and the Folk Park's director, Richard Hurst, regarding the possibility of the archive being donated to the Ulster American Folk Museum but neither party is committed to a definite decision regarding its future.⁴

One of the main obstacles to a possible solution with the Folk Park, I have learned, is that Rodney feels strongly his collection should remain intact.⁵ In accepting the collection, the Folk Park would have the dual task of complying with Rodney's wishes and negotiating the difficult transition of the collection from its current position as an annual public lecture slot to becoming a permanent feature of the museum's existing archive.⁶ Also, as demonstrated by this lecture, understanding the collection is currently reliant on Rodney's knowledge of it. My initial curiosity about Rodney and his archive led me to meet with him after the lecture and subsequently sparked the beginning of a five-year critical analysis of this private music collection and its collector.

The Ethnographic Study of the Private Music Archive

I lacked a clear objective when I first approached Rodney after the lecture and instead engaged in a general discussion with him about old-time music. I held a particular interest in old-time murder ballads and he was immediately able to identify a number of titles of that genre in his collection. When I tentatively

expressed a desire to see the collection he was very forthcoming and peeled off a label detailing his name, address and phone number and told me to contact him to arrange a visit. He was to tell me later that he had given out a number of labels to interested parties that day and I was the only one who followed up on viewing his archive. I gradually became more involved with Rodney and his music collection and my general interest in him as a collector changed focus as I became more concerned with the problem of the archive's future and how that might be explored and resolved.

The uncertain fate of Rodney's private music collection is, therefore, situated as a central theme within my enquiry as I embark on an ethnographic analysis of the archive. How can this music collection be preserved in the future? While it is beyond the scope and ambition of my project to find or create a public space for it within an existing cultural institution, it is my intention to offer one option for the preservation of the collection whilst addressing some of the problems which may arise during the future transition of Rodney's private music archive into the public realm. My attempt involves outlining a set of questions which explore the multidisciplinary ethos of collecting practices and archives, followed by a methodological approach which endeavours to answer these queries through media practice, in anticipation of a resulting mixed-media artefact offering an ethnographic representation of Rodney's archive.

In order to gain an understanding of Rodney and his collection, I spent time with him at his home in Omagh over a number of visits between 2005 and 2011; the analysis that follows is therefore shaped by an ethnographic account of how these

encounters helped me develop a concept of the means by which the archive might succeed in the absence of its collector. The observation of the field site and the subsequent translation of my experience of the collection are guided by several research questions: how is cultural meaning revealed in Rodney's archive; to what degree are the taxonomic structures imposed on his archive directing interpretations of it and will these cease in his absence; how might the cultural value of Rodney's private collection be determined in the absence of an institutional system of cultural evaluation; how are cultural memory and (Rodney's) private memory interrelated within the collected object in his archive; to what degree can the issues above be explored through Rodney's performance of the archive? These questions are framed and developed within the fields of cultural studies and media studies in order to map out discursive pathways relating to Rodney's archive and broader socio-cultural issues relating to collecting and archival practices.

A primary concern when approaching Rodney's archive is determining how meaning can be explored and understood in his private music collection. Stewart (1993) argues in 'Objects of Desire' that meaning in any collection is determined by the taxonomic systems governing it and that the indexical structures and methods of classification found in archives direct the researcher in the reading and interpretation of collections. Stewart presents this process as twofold; firstly, the ordering of objects in a collection 'erases [the object's] context of origin' (ibid.: 152) and secondly, this context is replaced by the meaning of the collection 'as a whole' (ibid.: 153). For example, when a CD is acquired by Rodney it may well



Figure 1:04: Detail from Rodney's Archive

be formally indexed in the record shop according to genre/era, but when it becomes part of his old-time/country music collection, the CD is primarily understood through its status as a collected object, as opposed to being understood in terms of its history of production (ibid.: 156). Stewart observes that 'the spatial whole of the collection supersedes the individual narratives that lie behind it' (ibid.). Figure 1:04 illustrates this process as individual CDs in Rodney's collection are submerged within anonymous, unified blocks. Baudrillard (1994: 7) refers to this cultural process as 'the system of collecting'⁷ in his similarly entitled essay and relates it to how all possessed objects are 'divested of [their] function and made relative to a subject', and therefore 'submit to the same abstractive operation and participate in a mutual relationship in so far as they each refer back to the subject', thereby being absorbed into the acting taxonomic system of the collection. Following this argument, the objects in Rodney's archive can be interpreted within the indexical orders of meaning present in his collection. In order to gain an understanding of Rodney's music collection these taxonomic

structures must first be determined, but identifying the systems proved challenging during my first visit to Rodney in May 2006.

Encountering the Collection

On my previous trip to Omagh for the Bluegrass Festival I had bypassed the town centre and as I took a taxi from the bus station to Rodney's house, for the first time, I had a brief opportunity of acquiring a sense of the place. Before hearing of the Bluegrass Festival, my only other reference to this small town related to the bombing of Omagh town centre by the Real IRA on 15 August 1998. Images of collapsed buildings amidst clouds of dust were at the forefront of my mind and I attempted to superimpose these impressions over the neat row of high street and local shop fronts that passed by my window. The small scale of the locality struck me and I appreciated the extent to which that atrocity must have affected the whole community, including Rodney's family. These thoughts led me back to an earlier anxiety I harboured concerning the way in which I was presenting myself to Rodney. Whereas the event of the bombing was now part of the everyday reality of Omagh's inhabitants I was very much a tourist visiting the scene of this infamous occurrence and ignorant as to how such a violent disruption of people's lives might inform their personal political viewpoint. I included Rodney within this concern. Our brief meeting at the festival and subsequent phone calls never veered beyond the boundaries of the logistics of my visit. This next encounter would be the first of a more causal nature, driven by the objective of becoming better acquainted with Rodney. The age gap (I in my thirties, he in his seventies) might present some obstacles to gaining trust but my larger worry related to the possibility that, as a native of Omagh, he might harbour prejudices against

someone from the Republic of Ireland. Ironically, these anxieties revealed my own bias with regard to a Protestant of his generation and did not accord with the friendly disposition of the man I met at the lecture. Rodney represented an ‘otherness’ beyond which I needed to reach in order to engage with it and progressively get to know the man and the collector. As the taxi approached Rodney’s house, I had to put these concerns momentarily aside and address the common topic we shared, old-time music. I began eagerly to anticipate the collection at which Rodney’s lecture had only hinted.

Arriving at Rodney’s home in Omagh, I held an expectation as to what might be found in the archive. Rodney’s meticulous detailing of events at the Folk Park lecture, along with his immaculately kept artefacts, presented an impression of a highly organised individual, whose archive would reflect a similar level of order and control. During the few preliminary phone calls leading up to my visit I attempted to reveal my agenda to him. I explained that there was an academic element to my interest in his collection and tried to explain the media component of my project. Although I was at that point still unclear regarding the specifics of my inquiry, I wanted to document my visit (on video and photographic images) and was unsure how he might respond. Despite agreeing to see me, he did not seem overly interested in my objective but appeared eager about the visit. He welcomed me into his home with the same degree of enthusiasm and seemed well prepared for the visit, leading me into a comfortable living room where he said we could have a talk before I was shown his collection. I was introduced to his wife, Ruth, who briefly appeared, produced tea and sandwiches, then politely excused herself saying she would ‘leave us to it’ and disappeared back into the quiet of the

house. Rodney and I chatted for about thirty minutes, breaking the ice with small talk about the Folk Park and country music. My video equipment lay by my feet and I waited for an opportunity to ask whether I could start filming. I felt a palpable awkwardness between Rodney and myself during that first encounter which I ascribed to my earlier anxieties and to the fact that neither of us knew the real purpose of the other's participation in this endeavour. Eventually I again broached the subject of documenting my visit, and Rodney agreed that I could begin filming but, as before, did not appear interested in why I was doing so.

Rodney's demeanour visibly stiffened as I filmed him leading me across the hall to his archive. He waited for me to catch up with him before turning the key in the door. The smell of freshly polished wood in the hallway complimented its neat appearance and left me unprepared for the stark contrast of the room that houses the collection. Rodney pushed the door open without saying a word and gestured silently for me to cross the threshold. Entering the archive was, at first, an assault on the senses and I attempted to register the mass of objects within the small room, lining each wall from top to bottom. Rodney noticed my surprise and admitted that over time the collection had got out of control, surpassing the capacity of the available shelving on each wall and allowing a deluge of artefacts to pile up around the room (Figure 1:05). The only clear space was a narrow pathway leading from the door towards Rodney's listening area, which was itself encumbered by pillars of CDs. An old armchair, positioned against the back wall, was camouflaged by an assortment of books and magazines as things were placed literally anywhere there was a space for them.



Figure 1:05: Images of Rodney's music archive, 2 March 2008.

Different classes of objects were entangled and stockpiles merged into each other. Any preconceived notion that I had held of exploring indexical systems of classification was discarded, since the CDs, LPs, letters, reel-to-reel tapes, manuscripts, books, magazines, journals and photographs stacked on top of one another appeared both to defy the laws of gravity and balance and to be opposed to a strict taxonomic system. On first inspection the physical arrangement of

Rodney's collection revealed no apparent systems of classification with which to engage.

Rodney stood awkwardly by the door of the archive as I took in the surroundings. I had assumed he would lead me around the collection but he seemed self-conscious, camera-shy and unsure what to do. Curiously, the camera initially afforded me a degree of control during that first time in Rodney's room but I was equally unsure how to proceed. I was aware that I wasn't the typical visitor to Rodney's archive and that he was more used to discussing his collection within his own generation of men who shared his passion for the sound and culture of old-time music, such as Jack Bernhardt and other private collectors. Despite the attraction that the music had for me, it was apparent to both of us that I did not have that level of expertise with regard to old-time music that characterised Rodney and others like him. Rodney and I had yet to find common ground on which to engage comfortably. Our introductory chat in the living room had not left either of us any the wiser as to the other's character and, as I had anticipated, the conversation had not once veered to such topics as our backgrounds, personal politics or other subjects which would call for the expression of personal opinion. Rodney appeared tentative about appropriate topics and kept the conversation quite formal and businesslike. Regardless of the fact that Rodney and I might not hold political opinions likely to cause problems between us, or that there might be no reason to engage in any such discussions, there remained a mutual and deliberate lack of knowledge between us regarding our respective socio-political backgrounds. The prevailing sense I had of this tension was periodically justified when, for example, I overheard Rodney describe me to an acquaintance on the

phone as ‘the wee girl from the Republic’; other than that any difference between us was largely ignored. This rigidity is very apparent during my first visit and so, lacking direction in the archive, I broke the ice by asking him about the murder ballads we had previously discussed after the lecture. Gradually Rodney began moving around his collection selecting random CDs and books to show me, presenting small anecdotes regarding their acquisition or the background story of the featured artist and we eased into a more relaxed conversational mode of engagement.

In my first attempt to make sense of Rodney’s private collection, there was no straightforward way of determining either what his collection was actually about or what it was that was being collected. Looking around the room, it seemed there was no uniformity as to what had been included; no single type of object. It was difficult to identify exactly which objects held greater significance for Rodney,



Figure 1:06: Detail of Rodney’s Archive

since records and CDs were placed alongside letters and mementos of the past, granting them equal status (Figure 1:06). In 'The Urge to Collect', Pearce (2006: 158) argues that 'essentially a collection is what [the collector] believes it to be'.⁸ I questioned Rodney that first day regarding his enthusiasm for the subject he collects and he related his interest in the music to 'an immense love' for American culture instilled in him by his late father:

Actually my father was an American citizen. He emigrated from Derry and . . . was one of the people in on that in the early days. But he spoke about the railroads . . . He had a large slice of life, he saw the American hobos that Jimmy Rogers sang about – he was a railroad man . . . And he came home from the United States with a nervous breakdown, and was in very bad health when he was in his late forties...He died quite young. He talked, talked non-stop about the United States and the wonderful country – the wide open spaces – he met the cowboys, he met the outlaws, he met the gangsters – he knew them all . . . But he just talked so much about American culture and life he instilled a love for the United States, when I was a boy. (McElrea, 2006: 15 May)

Rodney seemed absorbed within this narrative and continued talking without being prompted at any stage during the telling of it:

And I never lost it, and when I've gone to the United States in a number of instances I've tried to follow in his footsteps, I went to the places that he went, I went to the sites, the cities that he talked about so much . . . he gave me an immense love for the country, and the music I listen to is the music of rural America . . . It's America in song – is the music that I listen to . . . and I've had a love for it since I was fourteen . . . in fact beyond that, but fourteen I took it serious. I was still at school. And I use to carry the old 78s home on the school bus, and couldn't wait to get home to get them on the record player. My first record player cost me fourteen pounds. And that was my humble start. (ibid.)

I contemplated Rodney's explanation and realised I had made a few assumptions regarding his interest in the subject of old-time music, which in turn was based upon a cultural association between the Protestant community in Northern Ireland and country music. My personal interest in old-time murder ballads had previously led me to research this connection, which dates back to the first migrations of Ulster Scots to the Southern central states of America in the

seventeenth century. I realised my view of Rodney as being a part of this cultural vocabulary verges on stereotype, since he passionately discussed the more personal roots of his infatuation with the music and credited a strong admiration for his late father's adventures in America with his beginnings as an old-time music collector.

When he finished speaking I wanted to press him further on this subject but he quickly moved on to a topic related to one of the artists featured in his collection. Another opportunity arose later in the day when our interview had moved back across the hall to the living room. Rodney had intermittently, throughout the course of the day, painted a rather isolated portrait of his childhood in County Tyrone. It appeared to me that the music that he first discovered on a neighbour's radio in his youth created a much needed diversion from the everyday tedium of his teenage life. In stark contrast to his description of his father's adventures, Rodney remained living in County Tyrone for his entire life. Sometime after this particular discussion, I came across an essay entitled 'Folk Song Style' by the folk music collector and scholar Alan Lomax (2005), in which he offers an analysis of how early communal music (including old-time) gave 'the listener a feeling of security, for it symbolizes the place where he was born, his earliest childhood satisfactions, his religious experience, his pleasure in community doings, his courtship and his work – any or all of these personality-shaping experiences' (ibid.: 142). I adapted this hypothesis to Rodney's relationship with old-time music and considered how he might apply the everyday life experiences played out in old-time music – what he referred to as 'America in song' – to his own social background, growing up in County Tyrone. Rodney was not part of the type

of social/cultural experience that Lomax describes and it therefore represents an ‘otherness’ for him. This is not to say that the music does not provide Rodney with the personal satisfaction that Lomax maps out. Rodney’s perception of his father’s adventures in North America suggests an avenue of escape from a quiet and modest childhood in Northern Ireland and collecting perhaps offered a tangible means of engaging with the kind of ‘imagined’ culture described to him by his late father.

Back in the living room, I asked Rodney whether he was ever tempted to move to the States. He responded quickly:

I was . . . but . . . My father was an American citizen, but his children had to take up, before the age of twenty-one, an American passport. I only learned about that when I was twenty-four or twenty-five and I was too late. And I was the oldest of the family. Had I known at the time, I’d have taken up an American passport. And possibly would have moved. (McElrea, 2006: 15 May)

There are notes of regret in Rodney’s answer and in the light of these fresh insights, the collection could be viewed as a testament to Rodney’s love for the music, which is fuelled by a fictionalised perception he holds of southern (central) American culture. Although I had acquired a degree of knowledge of what the collection might signify to Rodney, this interpretation is mostly conjecture and over-simplified and does not offer a context within which to gain a deeper understanding of this lifetime of accumulation. Rodney’s motivations as a collector and the cultural meanings of the objects he collects remain obscured behind the clutter that surrounds me in his archive. The impenetrable state of this medley is supported by Stewart’s (1993: 152) description of the private collection presenting ‘a hermetic world’, not functioning ‘in relation to the world of everyday life’. The everyday objects on display in this archive are familiar yet

their meanings are sealed within the confines of the enclosed world of the collection. Baudrillard (1994: 7) argues that objects possessed by the collector 'participate in a mutual relationship in so far as they each refer back to the subject', in this case Rodney the collector, and 'thereby constitute themselves as a system, on the basis of which the subject seeks to piece together his world, his personal microcosm'. As Rodney acquires and arranges the items within his collection he projects personal meaning on to them through an internal system of classification and interpretation (ibid.). Meaning in this assembly is internal and therefore reliant on the collector. Therefore, it would appear that no one other than Rodney can establish a context from which to read his collection.

Walter Benjamin (1999) and Baudrillard (2005) provide further insight into the personal exchange between objects and collector. Benjamin (ibid.: 62) argues in 'Unpacking my Library' that once the collector has acquired an object 'Everything remembered and thought, everything conscious, becomes the pedestal, the frame, the base, the lock of his property'. Relating this to Rodney's relationship with his collection I would argue that through the practice of collecting Rodney forges a connection between his own identity and that of the collected artefact. He endows each collected object with his own personal meaning and following the point of acquisition the object exists only for him.⁹ Benjamin (ibid.) states that it is not the objects that come alive in the collector but rather that 'it is he who lives in them'; they reflect his own personal memory as he encounters them. In this sense the music archive can be understood as an 'illusory' (Baudrillard 2005: 97) environment that Rodney has purposefully built

in which each object in the collection is invested with his identity as a collector.

The sum of the collection produces what Baudrillard describes as,

the creation of a total environment, to that totalization of images of the self that is the basis of the miracle of collecting. For what you really collect is always yourself.¹⁰ (ibid.)

Arguably, then, Rodney can be understood to be collecting his own biography as each collected artefact is infused with his personal memory, and the common link between the eclectic groups of objects held in his music collection is an imaginary one that he himself projects on to them. Therefore a thorough and informed reading of this collection can come only from Rodney, since its systems of meaning lie in the interrelationship between the collected objects and Rodney's biography. I contextualise this collection then, through my engagement *with* Rodney.

Understanding the Collection through the Collector

During my first visit to his private music archive, Rodney became more relaxed



Figure 1:07: Rodney in his Archive

with the presence of the camera and began to select random objects from the stockpiles of CDs and records (Figure 1:07), offering explanations as to their acquisition or supplying a biography of the artist and relaying an anecdote about his own encounter with that artist. As in the lecture at the Bluegrass Festival, Rodney's storytelling imbued the objects with meaning by attaching them to narratives of experience to which his audience could relate. In *The Politics of Storytelling* Michael Jackson (2006: 14–15) argues that storytelling can function as a 'strategy for transforming private into public meanings'¹¹ which, I would argue, is what occurs during Rodney's narrations. Rodney describes a collected object through personal memory, and as he situates an artefact within one of his stories he is granted an opportunity of defining the meaning of that object in his own terms. Although nothing physically alters within the object it is recontextualised within the observer's understanding and reading of it.

Storytelling grants Rodney the opportunity of presenting a reading of his collection, in an act of collaboration with his audience as he transfers his private experience into a shared cultural one (ibid.: 16). I would argue that this practice is a form of classification – a taxonomic system of meaning. As Rodney arranges the artefacts within his stories he endows me with an understanding of the item in relation to its status as a collected object and to the biography of the collector. In, *The Senses Still* (1994), C. Nadia Seremetakis sheds light on possible sets of relations between people and the material world:

the surround of material culture is neither stable nor fixed, but inherently transitive, demanding connection and completion by the perceiver [and] the sensory landscape and its meaning-endowed objects bear within them emotional and historical sedimentation that can provoke and ignite gestures, discourses and acts ...which open up these objects' stratigraphy. (ibid.: 7)

I can handle one of Rodney's records and forge my own understanding of it in terms of its socio/cultural history owing to its fading aesthetic and other recognisable cultural markings, as one might do in an institutional archive. However, if Rodney places that same artefact within one of his narrative performances I gain a previously unknown perspective of both the record and Rodney as a social actor. Seremetakis (ibid.) further argues that what is learnt in this process 'is not determined [by Rodney] in advance', and therefore

This *performance* is not '*performative*' – the instantiation of a pre-existing code. It is a *poesis*, the making of something out of that which was previously experientially and culturally unmarked or even null and void. (ibid.)

Therefore Rodney's 'sensory memory' (ibid.) mediates an understanding of his objects both to the listener and to himself, since he brings his past experience 'into the present as a natal event' (ibid.). Although the collection displays no transparent classification system, one is created through the practice of Rodney performing the archive. I, therefore, focus on Rodney's storytelling as a method of navigating and gaining an understanding of cultural meaning in his archive.

Presenting the interrelationship between collector and artefacts as the basis of understanding Rodney's archive poses obvious problems with regard to determining its future survival, beyond Rodney's lifespan. Should his collection be integrated into the archive at the Ulster American Folk Museum, how might it be understood? Arguably, the embodied knowledge of Rodney, the collector, will be lost during the transition from private to public realm. What, then, replaces the hermetic world of the private collection once it has been reinstated within a public context? Archives are always governed by some type of agency which directs how

they are interpreted,¹² and since the ‘context of origin’ (Stewart 1993: 162) of the objects in Rodney’s collection is currently suppressed in favour of the identity of the collector, so too would this context be suppressed in favour of the agency of the museum. How, for example, would Rodney’s music collection fit into the museum’s agenda for archival displays?



Figure 1:08: Images of the Ulster American Folk Park

The Ulster American Folk Museum represents a socio-historical relationship between Irish and American cultures. With the aid of replica buildings and actors in historical costumes this relationship is performed within the confines of the open-air museum. Smaller collections of artefacts are displayed within the buildings, which are geographically divided between the ‘Old World’ and ‘New World’ (Figure 1:08), whilst other related transcripts and documents are kept in the Centre for Migration Studies/Library¹³ (Figure 1:09). Rodney’s private music



Figure 1:09: Images of Centre for Migration Studies/Library

collection would have to be placed within the context of this fictionalised world. Some preconditions for accepting artefacts or collections into this museum stipulate that new editions should ‘enhance themes and concepts in the permanent Emigrants exhibition’, or fulfil the purpose of ‘study and display’.¹⁴ Should Rodney’s archive end up here, these prerequisites would involve the refashioning or recontextualization of his music collection in order for it to correspond to the agency of the museum. It could be split up and classified according to type/genre/era and Rodney’s correspondence from the States could be viewed as being demonstrative of an intercultural exchange between American and Irish populations and indexed as such.

Even if Rodney’s collection entered the museum in its entirety and in association with him as its collector, the meaning of the archive would still be governed by the folk museum. The voice of the collector would be lost as the collection is removed from its environment. Benjamin (1999: 68) argues that the ‘phenomenon of collecting loses its meaning as it loses its personal owner’. He follows this point by stating:

Even though public collections may be less objectionable socially and more useful academically than private collections, the objects get their due only in the latter. (ibid.)

I believe what Benjamin is calling for here is a deeper cultural understanding and appreciation of the type of knowledge generated through the collector’s personal experience and exchange with the collected artefacts. I wish to pursue this point in terms of considering the significance of the pending loss of the interrelationship between the music collection and Rodney. I am interested in how this relationship, manifest in the *embodied* knowledge of the collector, might be acknowledged and

represented within the transition of the collection from a private to public arena.

In *Sensuous Scholarship* (1997), Paul Stoller argues for a critical approach to ethnographic work that acknowledges:

An embodied implication in our representations through (1) a critical awareness of the sense; (2) an attentiveness to voice; and (3) a recognition of the increasingly political implications of our works – a sensuous scholarship . . . to create a dynamic tension between the poetic and the political, the past and the present. (ibid.: 34)

Stoller’s approach offers insights and a possible methodology as to how the relationship between Rodney and his artefacts might be both theoretically and practically translated. In what follows, I address the role of media practice within this project and outline how the practices employed create an effective working methodology in understanding and representing the private music collection.

The Role of Media Practice in the Music Archive

Sitting in the music archive with Rodney, on that first visit, prompts a continuous series of simultaneous sensory experiences. The enclosed space emits a cocktail of



Figure 1:10: Chair in Rodney’s Archive



Figure 1:11: Rodney's listening area.

smells, including old vinyl, yellowing paper and faded fabrics, according to where I am situated within it. Rodney has ushered me to an old comfortable armchair (Figure 1:10) and he sits upon a stool in an area dedicated to listening to music (Figure 1:11). Rodney and I chat as he selects some records. He plays them at a high volume which interrupts our exchange and browses through the sleeve notes of the CD he is playing. At times, my focus wanders from Rodney and scans the surface of records and CDs and a brightly coloured book or album cover jumps out of the crowded shelf and grabs my attention. The beige carpet takes on a yellow cast under the harsh tungsten light and as the air in the room becomes old, the archival space begins to feel quite oppressive.

In between records and conversation the quiet of the house seeps into the space and the faint ticking of the hall clock brings my attention back to Rodney's wife as I try to discern whether she is still at home. I hear the gurgling of water pipes and other dull automated sounds but cannot detect any other movement from within the house. This infiltration of audio from the rest of the house into the archive connects the spaces sonically, linking the private space of the collection to

the external domestic setting. I am reminded of Schafer's (1994) description of sound being all-inclusive in nature as he quotes from anthropologist Edmund Carpenter:

Auditory space has no favoured focus . . . It has no fixed boundaries; it is indifferent to background. The eye focuses, pinpoints abstracts, locating each object in physical space, against a background; the ear, however, favours sound from any direction.'¹⁵ (Schafer 1994: 157–8)

The 'auditory space' of Rodney's archive cannot be distinguished from that of the rest of the house and therefore creates an interexchange between his collection and the rest of the household.

Since the field site is a music archive, it is imperative that sound be foregrounded within my inquiry as both an investigative tool and a means of representing the archival space, and music features as a prominent component within this exercise. In 'The Grain of the Voice', Roland Barthes (1977) points to the limitations of language in its interpretation of music when he states:

It can readily be seen that a work (or its performance) is only ever translated into the poorest of linguistic categories: the adjective. (ibid.: 179)

Therefore, it makes practical sense to include music mediated as *sound* within my ethnographic description (in the film) as opposed to literally describing it to the reader. However, it is not just the obvious 'significant' sounds of the music archive that I am including but, as noted above, those which may at first seem unimportant or incidental but which are as much a part of the auditory experience of Rodney's collection as any other. The all-encompassing properties of sound are employed in exploring and capturing both internal and external sources inhabiting Rodney's archive.

In his highly influential study on sound environments *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, Schafer (1994) coins the phrase ‘soundscape’ to describe the orchestra of sounds found in any one defined space and the term is now used freely by cultural theorists in describing different auditory landscapes. I borrow this expression when characterizing my reconfiguration of the sounds I collect from the archival space but I first identify each sound in relation to how it contributes to the overall ‘soundscape’ of Rodney’s music collection. I also continue to draw from work by Sterne (2003) and Feld (2004), as well as Douglas Kahn (2001), Michael Bull and Les Back (2004) and others when determining the significance of the different types of sounds found in his room and in exploring the potential use of sound as an archival medium.

Rodney’s archive also offers a visually rich landscape. A consideration of the aesthetic elements of his collection in conjunction with the auditory will therefore reflect a more thorough sensory reading of my ethnographic encounter. Whereas sound is used for its all-inclusive properties, the photographic lens is employed in instilling some focus to the deluge of possible meanings and stories that are generated by Rodney’s collection. The intention is to use the frame of the camera as a means of selecting and isolating groups of objects which are explored with regard to their relationship with each other as well as with Rodney, the collector. In *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography, and the Senses*, MacDougall (2006: 3) argues that framing ‘is a way of pointing out, of describing, of judging. It domesticates and organizes vision’. As sound succeeds in illustrating the interchange and fluidity of the soundscape, the photographic practice helps pin

down and literally frame both personal and cultural relationships extant within the collection.

The photograph offers a more direct and continual engagement with individual objects and areas of Rodney's collection. An analysis of photography's role within my examination of the archival site is supported by critical interventions directly relating to photographic studies such as *Image Music Text* (Barthes, 1977) and *Camera Lucida* (Barthes, 2000) and Susan Sontag's *On Photography* (2002). I also draw on debates which directly consider photography's role in archival practices such as *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums* (Edwards, 2001) and refer to work which discusses or incorporates lens-based practice within ethnographic description, such as MacDougall (2006) and Russell's *Experimental Ethnography* (1999). Inevitably, there will at times be a crossover between photographic/visual culture studies and auditory culture studies as I consider both mediums separately before discussing how they function in relation to each other within the context of the music collection.

Sound as Meaning

Since I am documenting Rodney's music archive through audio recording the coexisting sounds in the archive are becoming more familiar. In 'A Rainforest Acoustemology', Feld (2004: 225) refers to creating an 'ethnography of sound'¹⁶ with regard to the exploration of an environment in relation to the people who inhabit the space. In a similar vein, I intend to explore and capture the soundscape of the archival space in relation to Rodney, since the majority of the sounds in his collection are provoked by his presence. The soundscape shifts according to his

interaction with his artefacts whether he is browsing through its contents, listening to music or talking about it. Feld goes on to argue that:

Soundscapes are perceived and interpreted by human actors who attend to them as a way of making their place in and through the world. Soundscapes are invested with significance by those whose bodies and lives resonate with them in social time and space. (ibid.)

Exploring the soundscape of this collection is an effective method of situating Rodney at the centre of my critical analysis, since it offers a means of understanding the music archive through the presence of the collector. For the purpose of this study, I have identified three primary sources of sound: music, the voice of the collector and ambient noise. These categories are first considered separately in relation to how each functions within the soundscape of the collection.

Since this archive is understood within the category of being a music collection, music might be considered as the most significant of the sounds in the archive. However, its role in the archival space can only be measured in terms of its relationship with coexisting audio. When discussing ‘aural perception’, Schafer (1994: 152) borrows terms from visual culture to explain how individuals may perceive sounds within their environments. He divides the listening arena into three distinct categories. The first is the ‘figure’, alluding to the sound that the listener focuses upon at any one time, the second is the ‘ground’, which corresponds to the surrounding sounds and the third, ‘field’, relates to ‘the place where all sounds occur, the soundscape’ (ibid).¹⁷ All these terms relate to my experience of listening to Rodney’s archive.¹⁸

During my first visit Rodney plays me a version of an old murder ballad *The Wexford Girl*, sung by a recently deceased American fiddle player called Benny Martin. It is an old traditional tale of murder and betrayal, told over again in numerous recordings of different versions of the song over the past hundred years. In Martin's version, the protagonist sounds as if he's bragging about the murder. It begins 'It was in the town of Waterford, Where I was bred and born' and goes on to tell how he met, fell in love with and murdered a local young girl. Rodney plays the music at a high volume and the sound of the track fills the room. The dominance of this sound over all others places it in the position of being a figure within the soundscape of the collection. The track blocks out all ground sounds and changes my perception of the archival space.

The old-time musical style that the record channels, along with the content and style of language used, evoke images of the backwoods of an old American era. These types of images have been ingrained in the Western psyche through their depiction in Hollywood frontier films and other cultural media related to country and old-time music. Such images are ubiquitous within Rodney's collection, adorning album covers, books and magazines (see Figure 1:12). Listening to Martin's track seems to suspend the archival space within the cultural memory of this imagined American period. MacDougall (1994: 263) argues that the cultural and temporal specificity of particular musical styles directs or alters the listener's perception of his/her environment; 'because musical styles "date" and are culturally specific they make ideal aural icons' (ibid.).



Figure 1:12: Detail of Rodney's Archive

The cultural memory that Martin's song may inspire can also be understood in terms of the way that people listen to music. In 'Auditory Perception and Sound as Event', psychologist Michael A. Forrester (2000: 6) identifies two different types of listening practice by distinguishing between 'everyday' and 'musical listening'. The first relates to how people experience everyday sounds such as traffic or rainfall or background noise. Forrester argues that these types of sound are typically perceived as events as they are related to everyday happenings.¹⁹ For example, the sound of rain is related to rain falling as opposed to the sound itself.

Our understandings of these everyday sounds are based upon being able to connect them to tangible objects and events (ibid.). Forrester also points out that these sounds are generally experienced in a passive sense, in that we hear them as opposed to listen to them (ibid.: 4).²⁰

In contrast to this is the practice of listening to music, which, Forrester argues involves a more active engagement with the sound and the imaginary (ibid.). As the source of the sound/music is not accessible in the respect that an everyday sound is, the absent information (the lack of event) ‘must be supplemented by memory, unconscious processes and problem solving’ (Gaver in Forrester 2000: 6).²¹ What is evoked, as outlined in my experience of listening to Benny Martin’s murder ballad, is a mixture of cultural and personal memory. In their introduction to *The Auditory Culture Reader*, Bull and Back (2004: 14) make a similar point in the following statement regarding the listener’s relationship with the music:

Listening to music offers new opportunities to address issues of . . . place, identity, belonging, history and memory. Think about the way in which hearing a particular piece of music can invoke a vivid memory, or how a record collection can act as a kind of jukebox of remembrance, each piece of music associated with a particular time and place.

I relate this argument to Rodney’s listening practices within his archive, with regard to how he experiences the music from his collection. Rodney listens to music every day (Figure 1:13) and claims to take this practice seriously. In the following he situates the practice as the central purpose of the collection:

I love talking about [music], absolutely love talkin’ about it, and I love meetin’ people who love it, and all the rest. But you know, when you get down to the nitty gritty, you got to lock the door, and shut the world out, and just play and listen . . . and I listen to every guitar run in the background, the different instruments as they’re played . . . We can talk as much as you like, we can read as much as you like, but you’ve got to get down and listen to the music, and that for me is the important part. And I would be a recluse in that point of view, I just close the door, and spend an

hour every day, maybe two hours, and listen and listen and drink it in; drink it in (McElrea, 2006: 15 May).



Figure 1:13: Video Stills of Rodney listening to music in his archive 15 May 2006

Rodney's description of his listening practices corresponds to Forrester's notion of active listening, since he 'shuts the world out' and focuses his attention solely on the music; he becomes fully absorbed in this practice,²² tuning his body to particular times and places.²³ Whatever memories or feelings are evoked during the listening to the track furnish Rodney's experience of his archive. Therefore the practice of listening to music is one of the ways Rodney generates a personal

connection with the collection and identifies with the archival space he has constructed around himself.

This type of listening also marks a point of separation between Rodney and the rest of the household. Rodney closes the door of the archive before listening to music, cutting himself off from the rest of the house. He often wears headphones during these sessions, distancing himself further from the outside environment. In *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*, Sterne (2003: 158) argues that the ‘auditory field produced through technicized listening (whether by convention or prosthesis) becomes a kind of personal space’ and says that ‘the individual with headphones is perhaps the most obvious example of this phenomenon’. He observes that ‘through technology and technique, listeners . . . transcend the “immediate” acoustic environment to participate in another, “mediated” linkage’ (ibid.).²⁴ Sterne’s hypothesis alludes to a blurring between internal and external experience. Through the engrossing sensory experience of listening to music Rodney creates his own personal vantage point from which to gauge his collection. Forrester (2000: 5–6) observes:

Although we know the source of the music is external to our bodies, our phenomenal experience is of music playing in our heads, sounds and images intermeshed with thoughts, reflections and associated responses to the music. What is inside and what is outside becomes unclear’ (ibid.) . . . And one quickly realises the borders between the ‘external’ and ‘internal’ are as much determined by language and discourse as they are by phenomenal experience. (ibid.: 8)

Listening to music allows Rodney to personalise his environment whilst making himself sonically inaccessible²⁵ to the rest of the house. This double act of personalising space and excluding anything beyond the boundaries of the archive personifies Stewart’s conception of the hermetic world of the collector.

As Rodney listens to his records alone, music (as a sound source) could be considered to be the 'figure' of the soundscape. When he and I listen to music together this status becomes interchangeable with other sound sources. Occasionally, Rodney speaks over the music in order to introduce a context to the record being played. As he relays information about the track, he guides this listener's experience by creating a cultural background for the song. His voice is not just a source of knowledge but is regarded here in its capacity as a sound within the archive. Rodney's voice commands my attention and music is pushed into the background, reducing its status to a 'ground' source of audio. Therefore, within Schafer's framework of aural perception, I would argue that Rodney's voice is the most dominant sound source in his music archive.²⁶ It is also the component of the soundscape that forcefully situates Rodney's presence in the archive.

Throughout my time in his archive, I gain most of my knowledge of the archival space through listening to Rodney. This exchange of absorption and reflection between collector and researcher largely informs my ethnographic experience of the music collection. However, as Feld (2004: 226) argues, the voice should not only be regarded as a means of the body communicating to others but also as a method of constructing or reaffirming one's own identity to oneself. As Rodney speaks for the collection, he is also relating to the sound of his own voice. Feld (*ibid.*) argues that 'listening and voicing are in a deep reciprocity, an embodied dialogue of inner and outer sounding and resounding built from the historicization of experience'. Rodney admits that due to his isolation in Omagh, he does not get

an opportunity to discuss his collection and so welcomes any occasion to talk about it with interested parties. In this sense, by voicing his experiences Rodney also justifies his identity as a collector to himself. By speaking about the collection, for example, he not only grants it a broader cultural platform (regardless of size of audience) but places himself within the social role of being a 'private collector'. Feld argues:

Voice then authorizes identities as identities authorize voice. Voice is evidence, embodied as experiential authority, performed to the exterior or interior as a subjectivity made public, mirrored in hearing as public made subjective. (ibid.: 226–7)

Rodney's voice is deeply embedded in the meaning of the collection and serves throughout as a useful tool in both understanding and creating meaning within his archive (ibid.).

Although Rodney's voice is regarded as the dominant sound source in the archive (within the context of this study), the ambient or background sounds also feature as 'focus of interest' (Schafer 1994: 152) to the listener, as has been demonstrated above. How the soundscape of Rodney's archive is perceived may depend upon one source of sound overpowering another but it is equally dependent upon the body of the listener. As Forrester (2000: 8) observes 'we are always at the centre of the perceptual experience' of sound. Regardless of where or how each sound source features within the space 'we are as sensitive to sounds behind us as in front' (ibid.). The 'multi-directionality' (Bull and Back 2004: 5) of sound means that the noises from the house, the surrounding neighbourhood and natural ambience²⁷ all seep in from the outside and inhabit this archive at one time or another. The inclusion of these sounds in a representation of Rodney's collection can effect an acknowledgment of the dual status of his archive as being an

enclosed private space whilst also occupying a place in his family home and wider neighbourhood. It might also be argued that the everyday domestic sounds have a shared commonality with the origins of the music-makers in his collection, as much of the music Rodney listens to was composed and originally performed by old-time musicians within their respective households in rural North America.

Three main sources of sound are explored in relation to how each constructs meaning. Music overwhelms the archival space, Rodney's voice creates a context for the collection and the ambient sounds add detail to my interpretation of this field site. The inclusion of composite sounds opens the question of the coexistence of private and public cultural memory. Bull and Back observe that:

By listening we may be able to perceive the relationship between subject and object, inside and outside, and the public and private altogether differently . . . sound blurs the above distinctions and enables us to re-think our relationship to them (2004: 5).

I discuss later how sound – as an archival medium – works in relation to cultural memory and how it can be employed in acknowledging Rodney's presence within future readings of his collection.

Framing the Collection

I first began photographing Rodney's archive as a means of instilling some order and focus into my engagement with the collected objects. The collection was simply too vast to take in all at once, so I methodically moved around the surface of the objects, isolating areas within the frame of the viewfinder and documenting 'snapshots' of the artefacts. This practice quickly developed into a method of looking at and engaging directly with the collection. MacDougall (2006: 3) argues that 'image-making' encourages the observer to 'look purposefully, and when we

think [therefore] we complicate the process of seeing enormously'. A few hours towards the end of each visit would be spent alone with Rodney's collection, taking photographs of the juxtaposition of the artefacts in relation to each other.



Figure 1:14: Images of Rodney's music archive, 31 October 2007.

The seemingly random placement of items around his archive offered an infinite interpretation of possible interrelationships between objects. After some time I was no longer just seeing the collection but began looking for visual clues which might illustrate relationships between these objects and Rodney as well as interrelationships between the artefacts themselves. Through this process, randomly placed objects became significant within the frame of the photograph.

It would be difficult to describe the juxtaposition of the artefacts in Figure 1:14 without the aid of the photographic image. MacDougall (*ibid.*: 5) argues that the photograph offers a different kind of knowledge to that gained through literary discourse; 'as writers, we articulate thoughts and experiences, but as photographers . . . we articulate images of looking and being' (*ibid.*). When

textually describing the archive, the information must always be presented and absorbed in a sequential manner. Even the simple act of listing the different types of objects featured in Figure 1:14 organises the artefacts within a linear narrative that offers a false perception of how groups of objects exist in relation to other groups. An infinite number of possible juxtapositions and interrelationships present in this image could never be adequately illustrated through words alone. The visual knowledge (ibid.) that the photograph imparts can, arguably, compensate for this gap in knowledge. MacDougall suggests that what is ‘cumulative in writing becomes, in the [image],²⁸ composite’ (ibid.: 37). Written text can lead the reader directly to the writer’s point, whereas the photograph presents a fusion of information within its frame. The viewer navigates him/herself around a photograph, such as Figure 1:14, in turn constructing their own interrelationships between the objects portrayed. The photograph can therefore present alternative interpretations regarding the arrangement of artefacts within the archive. MacDougall (ibid.: 5) concurs; ‘showing becomes a way of saying the unsayable’.

The complexities of the photographic image are well documented²⁹ and obviously go beyond the simple method of showing or imparting visual knowledge. As Barthes (1977: 17) argues, ‘the photographic message is continuous.’³⁰ Despite controlling the frame and other technical properties within the photograph, the photographer can never claim complete control over the image that s/he has taken or dictate how that image is perceived. As MacDougall (2006: 3) points out, there is ‘an irreducible part of the photograph that escapes from us’. Although the photograph reflects my presence as the ethnographer in the field site it also carries

potential meanings beyond my intentions as the photographer. For example, when taking the photograph I was unaware of much of the detail in Figure 1:14. This image invariably reflects more meanings than were projected on to the subject by me in the role of photographer. In ethnographic practice this lack of control offers me a level of detachment from the content of the image and in this way the photograph can be regarded as a useful tool through which to explore possible meanings in the collection that might otherwise have gone unnoticed. I am also interested in how the fluidity of meaning extant in any image of Rodney's archive can be used in reflecting the variable and subjective nature of his collection. This is discussed in greater detail in chapter four.

Conclusion

Practice is used throughout my argument as a method of exploring and understanding relationships within Rodney's music collection. The lack of conventional indexical systems of meaning presents a need to explore the possibility of moving beyond standardised methods of classification and interpretation into a more conceptual system befitting the type of archival experience Rodney's music archive is offering. Throughout, I develop an argument as to why sound and image practices can successfully fulfil this role. In order to take this discussion further, chapter two focuses on how sound functions as an archival artefact. Whereas sound has been discussed in relation to the different sources present in this private music collection and as a possible method of describing the archive, I wish to consider how the sound artefact relates directly to the collector's presence in the archive. In what follows I explore how the properties of recorded sound in the music artefact can present a deeper

understanding of the inter-relationship between the biography/private memory of the collector and the cultural memory of the sound artefact. I then examine in further chapters the role of biographic narrative and cultural memory in the context of crafting an ethnographic description of the archival space.

¹ This brief biography of Rodney is based upon transcripts of conversations I have held with him over a four year period, from 2005 to 2009. Transcripts available for review.

² The Folk Park is 'a living history museum' which tells the story of Irish emigration to North America during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. See *The Ulster American Folk Park 2005 Special Events Leaflet* (2005). MAGNI.

³ The purpose of this lecture series, the McAuley Lectures, is to provide 'insight into the musical traditions of American Folk Music.' See *The Sixteenth Annual Appalachian & Bluegrass Music Festival Programme* (2006: 22). Ulster American Folk Park.

⁴ At the time of writing Richard Hurst and Rodney McElrea are still meeting periodically for further discussions about the future of the collection.

⁵ This opinion of Rodney's wishes is based upon a number of discussions I have held with him, regarding the future of the music collection. Transcripts available for review.

⁶ The Folk Park's current collections are catalogued on their website under the following headings: Agriculture; Buildings; Crafts & Trades; Domestic Life; Emigration; Textiles & Costumes and Transport. Available at <<http://www.nmni.com/uafp/Collections>> [Accessed 27 October 2009].

⁷ This reference to Baudrillard's work is based upon Roger Cardinal's translation of *Les Systèmes de Objets* (1968). I am relating this observation to Stewart's hypothesis of the collected object losing its original context and taking on the context of the collection, thereby being absorbed into the acting taxonomic system of the collection.

⁸ Pearce (2006: 158) is referring here to Alsop's simple explanation of collecting in J. Alsop (1982), *The Rare Art Traditions: A History of Collecting and Its Linked Phenomena*, New York, Harper & Row, p.70. I would relate this description to both Stewart's (1993) and Baudrillard's (1994/2005) hypotheses of the collector creating an enclosed world with which only s/he identifies.

⁹ See also Baudrillard (2005: 97) for a similar hypothesis on the object's relationship with the identity of the collector.

¹⁰ Stewart's (1993: 156) argument accords with this description when stating that 'the narrative of history' of the collected object is replaced with 'the narrative of ... the collector himself'.

¹¹ Jackson's (2006: 11) view is based upon Hannah Arendt's observations regarding the role of storytelling within 'the power relations between private and public realms' in H. Arendt (1958), *The Human Condition*, Chicago University Press.

¹² This has already been discussed within the text of the thesis pp.22-24.

¹³ The Centre for Migration Studies also facilitates the Irish Emigration Database Project and the Irish Migration Studies Masters degree taught at Queen's University Belfast.

¹⁴ These preconditions are listed on the Folk Park's website at the following address: <http://www.folkpark.com/collections/How_to_Donate/> [Accessed 15 March 2008].

¹⁵ This description of sound is based upon Carpenter's analysis of 'Eskimo's space awareness', (Schafer 1994: 157).

¹⁶ Feld (2004: 225) discusses an 'ethnography of sound' in relation to ethnographic work he was involved with in 1970 in Papua New Guinea. He states: 'I developed the idea of an ethnography of sound, or study of sound as a symbolic system, an acultural system, in

order to relate the importance of acoustic ecology, particularly the avian rainforest soundscape, to the musicality and poetics of Bosavi laments and vocal song.’ Although the kind of environment described here by Feld could not be in starker contrast to the music archive, the intention of this project is to adopt the same principles as Feld with regard to the exploration of the soundscape of Rodney’s archival space.

¹⁷ This explanation of aural perception is interesting in relation to the music collection as my experience of what constitutes the ‘figure’ or ‘soundmark’ at any one time may not relate to how Rodney is listening within the same space. Therefore I can only discuss sounds in relation to how the collector provokes them and not to how he experiences them within the soundscape of his collection.

¹⁸ As Schafer points out, these terms provide a useful method of ‘organizing experience’.

¹⁹ Forrester’s hypothesis is based upon W. W. Gaver (1993), ‘How do we hear in the world: Explorations in ecological acoustics’, *Ecological Psychology* 5, 285–313).

²⁰ Forrester’s hypothesis here is based upon P. Rodaway (1994), *Sensuous Geography: Body Sense and Place*, London, Routledge.

²¹ For an in-depth analysis of the relationship between recorded music and perceptions of place and space, refer to P. Doyle (2005), *Echo & Reverb: Fabricating Space in Popular Music Recording 1900–1960*, Wesleyan University Press, Connecticut.

²² Don Ihde (2004: 62) discusses how ‘A second variation of the “disruptive” quality of sound on the occurrences of auditory imagination and the continuities of “thinking” comes more pleasantly in the enchantment of music, which can also overwhelm inner self-presence. In its sometimes orgiastic auditory presence the body-auditory motion enticed in the midst of music may lead to a temporary sense of the “dissolution” of self-presence. Music takes me “out of myself” in such occurrences.’

²³ Also refer to Don Ihde (2004) for a more in-depth analysis of how the ‘auditory imagination’ functions in relation to music.

²⁴ Sterne (2003: 158) discusses techniques of listening in relation to the introduction of the headphones in telephony. What is of interest to the researcher here is his argument that the listener transcends his/her immediate auditory environment.

²⁵ For a similar argument, see Thibaud 2004: 333.

²⁶ I have, no doubt, based my observations on the fact that Rodney speaks to himself when pottering around his collection but my focus here is on the projected voice which is responding to my enquiry and therefore also has the purpose of speaking for the collection. I am also aware that, in this project, it is my presence that is provoking this voice to speak.

²⁷ Natural sounds are based upon Schafer’s (1994: 15) detailing of sounds found in nature, including weather.

²⁸ MacDougall is basing this particular point on the cinema, although the same can be said for any image-based medium.

²⁹ See for example the Barthes hypothesis (1977: 18–19) on the coexisting ‘connotative’ and ‘denotative’ status of the photographic image, which he refers to as ‘the photographic paradox’.

³⁰ This thesis offers a deeper analysis of the photographic image in relation to creating meaning in the archive further on in the text.

CHAPTER TWO: HOW CULTURAL MEMORY AND PRIVATE MEMORY ARE INTERRELATED WITHIN THE SOUND ARTEFACT

Introduction

In chapter one I discuss how cultural meaning can be determined and interpreted through Rodney's interaction with the artefacts in his collection. In order to understand this relationship further, I now consider how cultural memory and private memory are interrelated within these collected objects. Since sound has been identified as a method of establishing Rodney's presence and interaction with his collection, chapter two introduces a methodological approach that begins by focusing on one of the many sound artefacts populating this music archive – an old reel-to-reel tape recording. Drawing on a range of scholars – Sterne (2003) and Feld (2004) from the field of auditory studies and Appadurai (2003), Kopytoff (2003), Stewart (1993), Baudrillard (1994) and Moutu (2009) from the fields of social anthropology and cultural studies – my argument is developed by exploring how different temporalities at play within the tape recording can inform an analysis of the relationship between the cultural biography of the sound artefact (the tape reel) and Rodney's own biography.¹ During the ongoing process of recording and studying sounds from Rodney's collection, I aim to develop an ethnography of sound (Feld 2004: 225) by creating a soundscape of recorded audio collected from his archive. The purpose of the soundscape is to situate Rodney's presence within the resulting representation of his collection.

The Dorsey Dixon Tape



Figure 2:01: Dorsey Dixon reel-to-reel tape.

The archival object chosen for my analysis is a reel-to-tape (Figure 2:01), which contains a musical performance as well as personal messages to Rodney from an old-time musician, Dorsey Dixon. Dorsey made the recording, for Rodney, from his house (Figure 2:02) and the local church in his hometown of East Rockingham, North Carolina in 1962. I am focusing on a reel-to-reel tape for a number of reasons. Firstly, Rodney's collection holds a large quantity of taped correspondence which makes this tape suitably representative of the type of object found in his archive. Secondly, unlike a lot of the other sound artefacts that contain commercial recordings, the reel-to-reel tapes are unique to his collection with regard to their content, specifically made for Rodney and containing direct references to him. They, therefore, serve as a useful means of exploring the

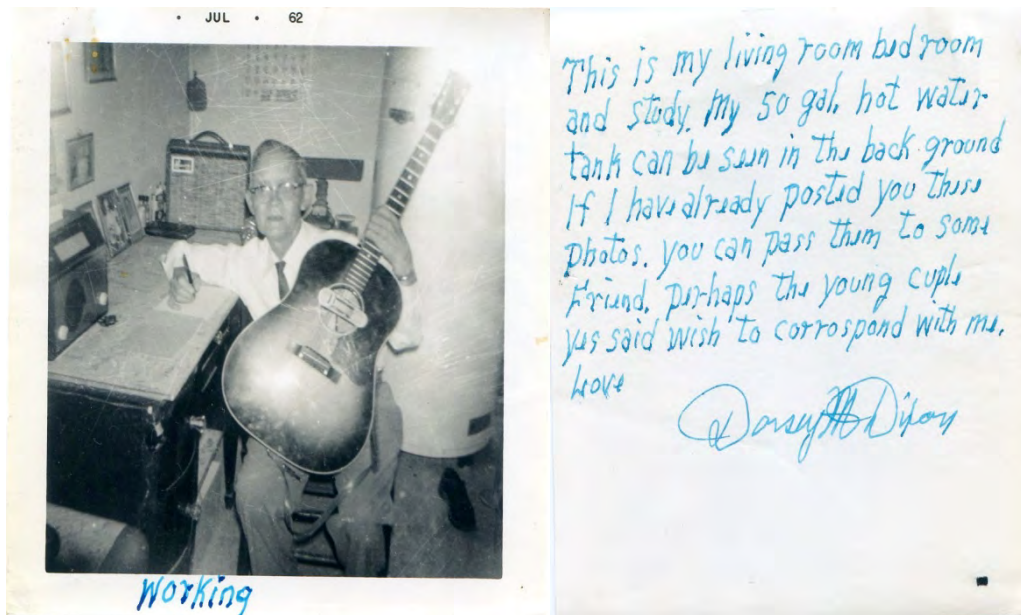


Figure 2:02: Front and back of photograph of Dorsey Dixon at his home, sent to Rodney in 1962.

overlap between the cultural biography of the tape as an archival object and the private memory of the collector, since the tape is considered as Rodney's private correspondence yet holds a broader cultural interest due to Dorsey Dixon's live performance on the recording. Thirdly, the variable status of the Dorsey reel-to-reel tape as an archival object – a mode of correspondence and a sound medium – makes it difficult to ascribe a definitive cultural context. It can, therefore, be explored in terms of how overlapping meanings are evident within the objects comprising Rodney's archive.

The tape is part of a series of correspondence received by Rodney from Dorsey beginning in 1961 (Figure 2:03). I first heard of this correspondence at the Bluegrass Festival lecture in September 2005. Rodney described a particular type of exchange which was spawned by the community of international old-time music collectors who subscribed to his magazine *Country News and Views*



Figure 2:03: A collection of correspondence sent from Dorsey Dixon to Rodney.

(Figure 2:04) in the 1960s². Rodney's associates already had a system in place through which they would share music with each other by copying it on to reel-to-reel tape, selling or swapping it through the magazine. The old-time collectors then began using the relatively new technology of the home-recording reel-to-reel tape recorder to include recorded messages to each other along with the music on the tape.³ They referred to this practice as 'tapesponding'. Rodney also corresponded in this way with old-time country musicians, something which he mentioned during the lecture:

On top of [letters] I have reel-to-reel recordings of tapes – we corresponded by tape. Now that was my favourite means of corresponding, in those days. I corresponded by cassette. But I used to record 300 tapes every year, to people, country music fans all over the world. And artists as well, where possible . . . And Dorsey and I had a marvellous correspondence. (McElrea, September 2005)

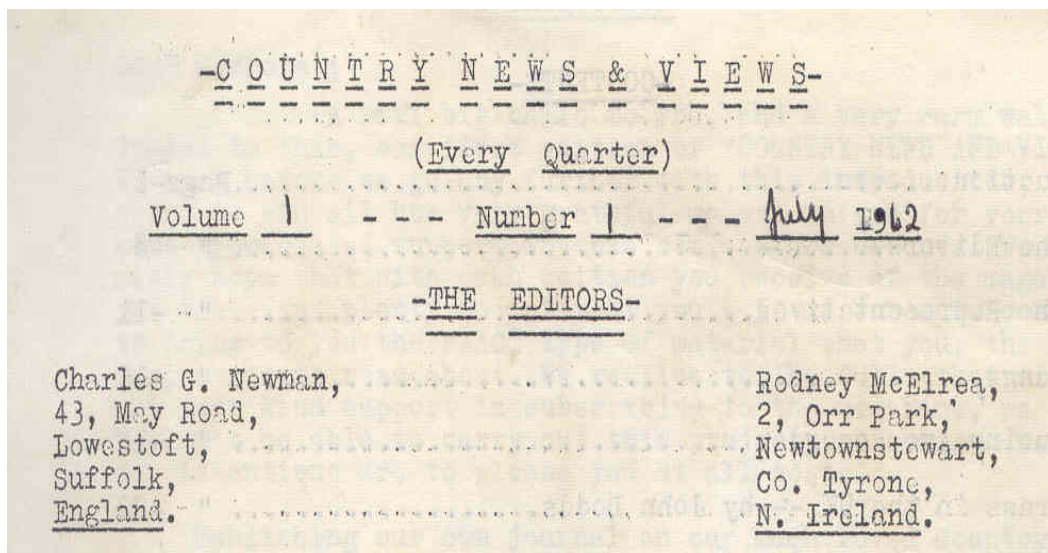


Figure 2:04: First issue of *Country News and Views*, dated July 1962.

Rodney accumulated a substantial collection of taped responses, mainly from the 1960s and 1970s, now dispersed amongst his collection in his home in Omagh (Figure 2:05) and standing as testament to the many relationships Rodney has nurtured over his years of collecting.



Figure 2:05: Reel-to-reel tapes from Rodney's archive.

I asked Rodney about his relationship with Dorsey Dixon during a visit to his archive in February 2007. Since the awkwardness of my first visit to Rodney's home, I came prepared on further trips, always deciding beforehand – albeit loosely – on an agenda of the topics I was interested in discussing with him. I found that adding structure to my time there gave Rodney and me more purpose and helped ease some of the tension that had previously built up. We had kept in touch by phone between visits and had discussed Rodney's collection of reel-to-reel tapes on a number of occasions. Although I had familiarised myself with the general scope of the collection, I was still overwhelmed by the endless choice of objects and so it proved useful to focus on one element. I also stopped using the video camera, as I felt it prompted a formal performance from Rodney and hoped that an audio recording device might be less intrusive, encouraging a more relaxed atmosphere. Subsequent visits proved more comfortable as Rodney and I were no longer strangers to each other, and he asked after my family and after my general welfare. We discussed his children, where they lived and what they were doing.

He mentioned a time he had visited Dublin 'in the Republic' and had found people incredibly friendly and welcoming, which led us to discuss my hometown of Cork. On this particular trip I introduced my young daughter and my partner to Rodney and Ruth, as they had accompanied me on the journey. Ruth made us all tea and we had a chat before my partner and my child left and Ruth went out.

Once left alone, Rodney and I automatically began to talk about his collection. I informed him of my interest in the reel-to-reel tapes he had, particularly his correspondence with Dorsey Dixon. Although we began by discussing this topic, Rodney would often deviate from the subject and one anecdote would lead him to another person or event from the past; he very much directed the conversation as I settled into the role of listener. Every now and then he would request that the recorder be turned off if he did not want to be on record regarding a particular subject, demonstrating that he was very much in control of our encounters. Having spent the morning talking in the room which held the collection, we moved into the kitchen to enjoy the lunch that Ruth had prepared and left out for us in the kitchen. The kitchen is spacious but homely, lit up, that morning, by an early summer sun. The dining end of the room fits a small sofa and armchair, which presented an alternative area to the archive for our continued discussions after lunch. Rodney made coffee as he offered some background information on Dorsey Dixon. Raising his voice over the boiling kettle, he explained how Dorsey and his brother Howard Dixon (Figure 2:06) enjoyed a short but successful recording career with their band the Dixon Brothers between 1936 and 1939. Despite having approximately fifty recordings released by RCA-Victor studios,



Figure 2:06: Dorsey (left) and Howard Dixon.

they disbanded towards the end of the 1930s because of Dorsey's disgust on discovering that he had been cheated of the copyright to all the music he had written and recorded (Figure 2:07).

the ones I can. A man living in New York City by name Eli Oberstien was recording Mammox for RCA Victor Recording Co. at the time Howard and I started recording Feb. 12 1936. Our first songs that cold winter night were

- 1 "Not Turning Backward"
- 2 "White Flower For you"
- 3 "Intoxicated Rat"
- 4 "Two Little Rosebuds"
- 5 "Sales Tax On Women."
- 6 "Weave Room Blues"

The paper I signed that night. What I read that night was all right. But when I saw

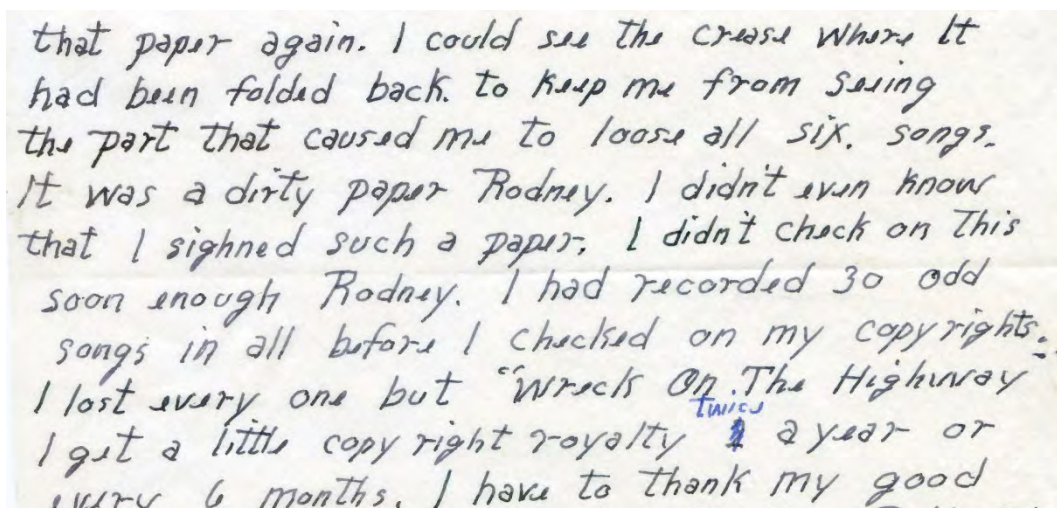
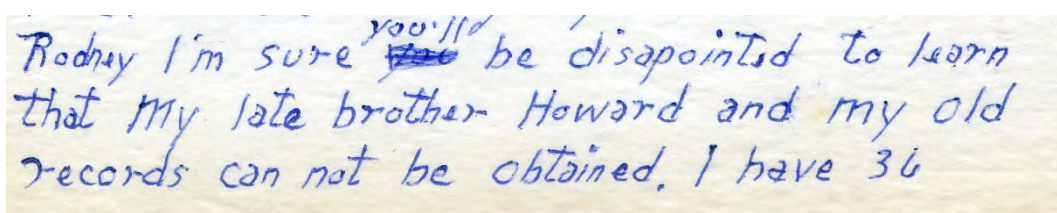
A photograph of a handwritten letter on lined paper. The text is written in cursive and explains a copyright issue. It mentions a 'dirty paper' and '30 odd songs'. The word 'twice' is written in blue ink above 'a year'.

Figure 2:07: Extract from letter dated 10 May 1962, where Dorsey explains to Rodney what happened regarding the copyright to his music.

Both Dorsey and Howard returned to their earlier occupation of weaving in North Carolina, where they lived in obscurity until Dorsey was rediscovered in the 1950s by an Australian old-time collector, John Edwards.⁴ Rodney had also struck up a relationship with Edwards through written correspondence and had previously explained how Edwards helped many old-time performers before his death in 1960:

[Edwards] brought them out of obscurity, that they were living in. They were all working in normal jobs, in spinning mills – that was a big occupation in North Carolina was the spinning mills. And they were grateful to John (Figure 2:08). Dorsey Dixon . . . was so grateful, when John Edwards died, he wrote a song about him, *John Edwards of Sidney Australia* (Figure 2:10), he wrote because John had brought him out of obscurity. And I corresponded with him and other collectors corresponded with him too. Here's a man who recorded way back in the thirties, thought he was long forgotten, and because of record collectors like myself, they suddenly get a new lease of life. (McElrea, 15 May 2006)

A photograph of a handwritten letter snippet in blue ink on lined paper. The text expresses disappointment about the loss of records.

of them on tape. I have to thank my late
and great friend John Edwards, and his
great friend Eugene W. Earle of New Jersey
for them. John Tape recorded his collection
of our old records and got it ready to mail.
His tragic death occurred, and his buddy
Gene forward the Tape on to me. Gene tape

Figure 2:08: Extract from Dorsey's letter to Rodney, dated 15 March 1961



Figure 2:09: Rodney holds an old photograph of John Edwards.

The poem about Johnny, which he entitled "Our Johnny of Sydney Australia" appears below.

It happened in Sydney Australia
A dear loving boy has gone
To a land where there is no sorrow
And nothing will ever go wrong
No car wrecks to mar Johnny's blessings
As he listens to songs up above
Our Johnny will always be listening
To the music and songs that he loved
Our hearts would never be troubled
No tears would fall from our eyes
Because our Johnny has entered
That wonderful land in the sky
Our life here is only a vapour
And many things often go wrong
But nothing can go wrong with Johnny
In that wonderful City of Song.

[29]

Figure 2:10: Extract from the poem Dorsey wrote for Edwards.

Rodney described how Edwards had built up a reputation in the United States as a reputable collector through his relentless efforts in tracking down retired musicians and old recordings. He then made these forgotten musicians known to record executives, fellow collectors and academics, resulting in the renewal of some performers' careers.⁵ Dorsey Dixon was one of the artists who benefited from his association with Edwards.

Rodney explained that his and Dorsey's relationship began with letter-writing in March 1961. They were introduced via letter by Edwards' mother, Irene, who became a regular correspondent of both men after her son's death (Figure 2:11). Mrs Edwards also encouraged Dorsey to tapespond with Rodney, even sending him five dollars toward payment for the first tape.⁶ Although Dorsey was left with very little income from his main body of music, he received one royalty cheque

215 N. School St.
Mr Rodney McElrea March 15 1961
Tyrone N. Ireland

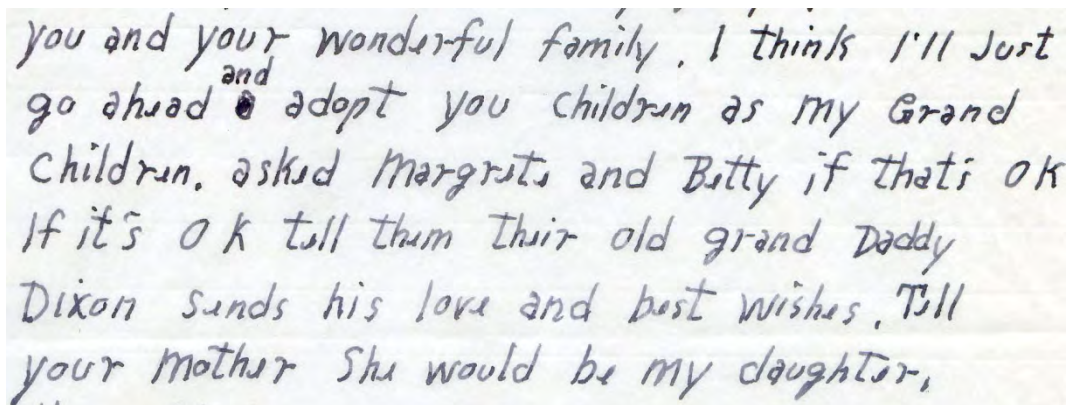
Dear Rodney

It was real nice to get you letter. I do count it a great honor. Rodney to have a new young correspondant from Northern Ireland. No your very nice letter was not a surprise to me. Mrs Irene Edwards in her last letter told me she had sent you my address and I've been expecting your letter I recieved to day. I'm an uneducated man, and I hope you will parden my poor English and misspellings. I'm 64 and in my childhood days schools were for rich people only I got what little education I have the hard way, and I hope that you wont have too much trouble reading my letter.

Figure 2:11: Extract from first letter Dorsey sent to Rodney, 1961.

every six months from a song that Roy Acuff⁷ recorded which, Dorsey claims, paid for a 'high fidelity 3 speed one track reel-to-reel tape recorder' (Letter: 15 March 1962).⁸ The two men continued to write and send recorded messages to each other right up to Dorsey's death in 1968, by which time Dorsey had moved to Florida to live with his son, though with failing health the correspondence with Rodney became more infrequent. The content of the letters and tapes that remain reveals a very close bond between the two men, who shared a strong religious faith as well as their love for old-time music. Their closeness is reflected in a letter marked 12 April 1962, where Dorsey jokes that he would like to adopt

Rodney's family as his own and declare himself 'their old Grand daddy' (Figure 2:12).



you and your wonderful family, I think I'll just go ahead ^{and} adopt you children as my Grand children. asked Margrets and Betty if that's OK If it's OK tell them their old grand Daddy Dixon sends his love and best wishes. Tell your mother she would be my daughter,

Figure 2:12: Extract of letter Dorsey sent to Rodney; dated 12 April 1962.

After Dorsey's death Rodney wrote a moving tribute to his friend (Figure 2:13) detailing events in the old-time singer's life, which was published in *Country Record Exchange* magazine in March 1970.

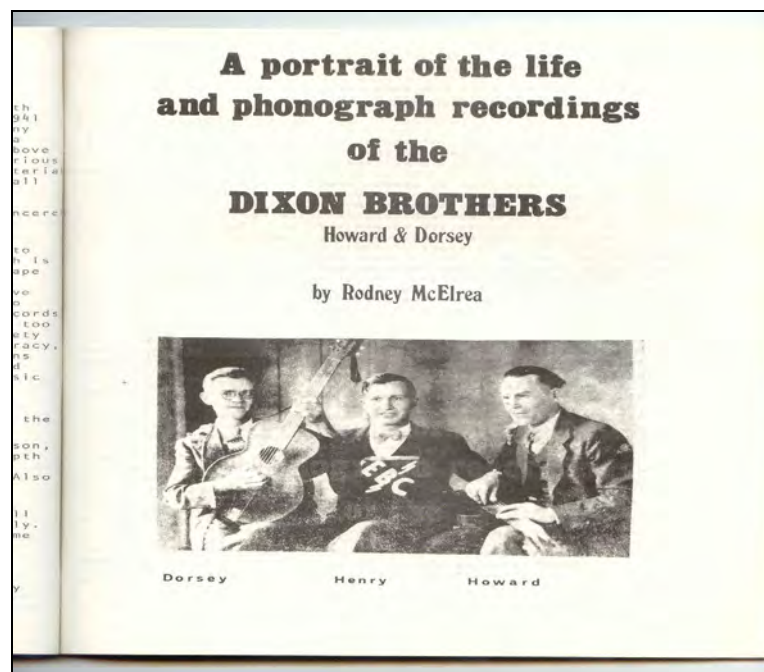


Figure 2:13: Front page of article from *Country Record Exchange*, Vol. 4, No. 33, March 1970.

When I expressed an interest in writing about Dorsey in my thesis, Rodney gathered his letters from Dorsey and other memorabilia, including the reel-to-reel tape, and sent them to me. Although he still did not seem particularly interested in the main objective of my visits, Rodney seemed to trust me enough, at this point, to furnish my work with materials from his collection and I got the impression that he appreciated my curiosity about his collecting life. The first of the series of tapes recorded by Dorsey for Rodney is dated 'week ending January 22–26, 1962'. Like others in the collection, the tape is a mix of musical performance and spoken messages. It begins with a brief musical introduction and is preceded by a warm personal greeting from Dorsey to Rodney (DVD references in thesis, chapter 2, audio track 1), recorded in his kitchen in East Rockingham, North Carolina:

Well a great big hallo to my good friend Rodney McElrea over there in Northern Ireland. And of course this is your good friend Dorsey Dixon over here in the United States. And I'm doing my best to play Howard's type of playing the steel guitar. I've given you a combination there of one of your old favourites, 'Maple on the Hill', combined with 'Careless Love'. And I just bet you won't want me to do that no more. I wish that I could play like Brother Howard but I can't, I bring my old guitar up here for a how are ya, because you asked me to do it. (Dixon, January 1962: 00:02)

Throughout the tape Dorsey performs his correspondence as if speaking to Rodney directly. It is not difficult to imagine why tapesponding was Rodney's favoured type of correspondence. Receiving this tape brought Rodney into contact with Dorsey's voice and humble, self-deprecating demeanour. The immediacy of hearing Dorsey might have compensated somewhat for the distance between the two men. Despite belonging to an increasing network of international collectors in the 1960s, Rodney has often mentioned feeling quite confined, in a personal sense, in Omagh town. He credits tapesponding with granting him a closer connection to his associates, as he could experience people's voices and other

idiosyncrasies, picked up by the audio, which are absent in written correspondence. The extrasensory dimension of hearing emphasised, for Rodney, the possibility of a shared experience.

Sterne (2003) argues that there are existing systems in place within sound mediums, accommodating and supporting feelings of connection to a person or place far removed from the listener's immediate social and cultural environment.⁹ He suggests that our understanding of the experience of listening to sound recordings has been carefully constructed and conditioned by the early marketing techniques of both telephony and phonography. Rodney, when listening to the recording of Dorsey's voice on the tape, can imagine Dorsey sitting in his kitchen talking into the microphone of the recorder. He links what he is hearing to an imagined happening, which accords with Forrester's (2000) perception of sounds being processed and culturally understood as events. Sterne argues that this ability to connect a disembodied voice with an imagined or lived experience stems directly from the fact that the technological aspects of phonography were deliberately overlooked or bypassed in marketing campaigns in order to sell the technology as a 'medium' (Sterne 2003: 204). As he (*ibid.*: 213) explains, whereas the term technology involves theories of scientific development, the term medium, 'speaks of a whole set of relations, interconnections, practices, institutions, and people'. According to Sterne's argument, therefore, by the time tape was being used by Rodney for correspondence, his experience of hearing Dorsey's voice on tape was equated with the experience of hearing him on the other end of a telephone. In other words, Rodney could perceive this practice as a direct, personal, social exchange (*ibid.*).¹⁰

I would argue that, at the time of corresponding, this taped exchange served two purposes. The social exchange described by Sterne enabled Rodney to form a close personal relationship with Dorsey over their years of correspondence. But for Rodney, the tapes were also a means of extracting and collecting information from musicians for his collection. Rodney garnered much knowledge from Dorsey through the tapes. He, like other collectors such as Edwards, was obviously aware of a potentially broader cultural interest in Dorsey and the history of the Dixon Brothers that went beyond their own personal passion for the music.¹¹ Rodney used the information he acquired in articles he wrote (Figure 2:13). The Dorsey tape recording shows that he had previously sent Dorsey a set of specific enquiries regarding the singer's social and cultural background, to which Dorsey responds. For example, early in the recorded message Dorsey appears to be answering questions posed by Rodney regarding his hometown, giving a detailed description of East Rockingham as a place and community and talking Rodney through the streets, briefly visiting the industrial history of the mills and other landmarks (DVD references in thesis, chapter 2, audio track 2). Rodney also seems to have directed the selection of songs performed by Dorsey, with Dorsey referring to specific songs requested by Rodney. Therefore tapesponding helped nurture Rodney's relationship with the musician whilst also embellishing his collection.

The Sound Artefact and the Biography of the Collector

Listening to the recording as it is (momentarily) removed from Rodney's collection, I consider the Dorsey tape in terms of both its current and future status. How might Dorsey's recorded performance be understood, in its current state, in

relation to Rodney's biography? How does the tape's original status as a form of correspondence and knowledge source for Rodney manifest itself within the object as it now exists within Rodney's archive? If this status has been relegated to the past, does the Dorsey tape now preserve the social exchange between collector and musician and how might this be explored in terms of the anticipated future separation of Rodney and the collection? For Side Two of the tape, Dorsey has moved the reel-to-reel tape recorder into the church which his late brother Howard used to attend, and performs tracks requested by Rodney with Howard's old band, the Reaping Harvesters. Throughout the tape Dorsey displays a tendency to make little of his own talent in order to emphasise his late brother Howard's skills as a musician and a person. Dorsey also offers the symbolic gesture of playing from Howard's former seat in the church. In between songs, each member of Howard's old band takes a turn in approaching the microphone and paying tribute to Rodney. However, Rodney is no longer the intended listener to the recording and the tape both evokes Rodney's presence and marks his absence.

The tape presents a similar dichotomy with regard to how I, as the listener, experience Dorsey's presence on the recording. The tape recording offers the possibility of 'repeatability' (Sterne 2003: 288), allowing me to repeatedly replay Dorsey's greetings. I can interrupt his performance, rewind back or fast forward to a certain point in the tape or turn it off at any stage. I would argue that this mechanical process distances the audio experience of listening to Dorsey's greeting from the immediacy of the telephonic social experience that the tape first offered Rodney as a form of correspondence, and the possibility of playback

presents Dorsey's voice as a recording rather than an actual embodied expression (ibid.). Unlike Feld's (2004: 226) conceptualisation of the intersubjective exchange of the exterior and interior during 'listening and voicing', Dorsey's voice in the recording is abstracted from the body, 'offering the exteriority of the voice with none of its interior self-awareness' (Sterne 2003: 290).¹² The recorded voice is 'discontinuous with the "live" events that it is . . . said to represent' (ibid.: 332). Therefore the recording also alludes simultaneously to both the presence and the absence of Dorsey Dixon. I would argue that the implied absence of the original listener and speaker disables the interexchange of absorption and reflection (Feld 2004: 226) that occurs during a live social exchange between people. This, in turn, disrupts the illusion of the tape representing a direct social exchange between Rodney and Dorsey. However, the recording evokes, for me, an impression of the relationship between them. What remains of this relationship, in terms of the recording representing the memory of this dialogue between the two men? I have chosen a particular point in the recording to demonstrate how I engage with Dorsey's performance on the tape.

Towards the end of Side Two Dorsey introduces the last song in the following manner (DVD 1 references in thesis, chapter 2, audio track 3):

Well Rodney we are glad we had the pleasure of doing this tape for you. It's just a great pleasure for us to do it. I do hope it will bless your heart real good and maybe bless the hearts of all your friends over there. And as I said a while ago I sent you so many songs – well not too many songs – but I'm just afraid that I'm gonna pick up one that I've already sent you ... But I don't know if I gave you 'The River of Jordan' on that other tape or not but it's a quick song and maybe I'll have room for it – I'm gonna give you 'The River of Jordan'. (Dixon, January 1962)

Listening to this section of the tape evokes images of Dorsey standing in the church, looking at the diminishing spool of tape in the recorder as he addresses Rodney. I visualise the individual members of the Reaping Harvesters arranged around Dorsey taking up their instruments, preparing to play. Each time this part of the recording is played I associate it with this (imagined) unfolding action as it is being captured on tape, thereby directly relating the recording to a past event. However, although it may be perceived as such, the recording itself does not, according to Sterne (2003), relate to an actual event. The tape does not capture a situation as it happens because the procedure itself (Dorsey's performance) is determined by the process of audio recording.

Sterne (*ibid.*: 323) argues that the tape recording should be regarded 'as a document' of Dorsey's greeting rather than the greeting itself. He claims that it is false to assume that the recording on the tape actually presents the performance of the singer to the future listener. Sterne suggests:

The medium does not mediate the relation between singer and listener, original and copy. It is the nature of their connection. Without the medium, there would be no connection, no copy, but also no original, or at least no original in the same form. The performance is for the medium itself. The singer sings into the microphone. (*ibid.*: 226)

I may perceive Dorsey's performance to be intended for Rodney, but he actually performs for the sake of the recorder; any social connection beyond that is illusory and created in the mind of the listener. The recording does not present a memory of the men's interaction with each other but is rather the means and purpose of that interaction.

Although what is being heard on the tape is not actually related to a personal experience, I attribute memory to the recording through imagining the events surrounding the recording. Sterne (ibid.) refers to the cultural perception of time as ‘historical-linear time’, where a recorded event is consigned to a historical past and the content of the tape always refers to the time of recording. He explains this conceptualisation of time by arguing that, from its inception, the phonographic recording was created within a ‘bourgeois modern’ sense of measuring time. He explains:

‘Bourgeois modern’ recording is articulated to a linear-progressive sense of time, where the present inevitably disappears into the future, modernity being assumed to assure the perpetuity of changes, the constancy of upheaval and transformation. (ibid.: 310)

Within this hypothesis a past event, such as the recording of Dorsey’s message to Rodney, is regarded as being historical. It belongs to another dimension of time which is culturally identified as ‘the past’, rather than ‘the present’ or ‘the future’. Sterne (ibid.: 323) goes on to argue that the ‘artifice of recording’ shapes our interpretation of the performance being captured on tape as somehow a performance of memory. He (ibid.: 310) attributes the apportioning of memory to the ‘fragmentary time’ of a recording, which he describes as being ‘a little piece of repeatable time within a carefully bounded frame’. Fragmentary time refers to the time frame during which the recording took place, now replayed in real time. Repeatability in a sound recording can diminish the perception of witnessing a lived experience but allows the past event of Dorsey vocalising his relationship with Rodney to ‘be made manifest in the present’ (ibid.: 288).

I would argue that there are similarities between Rodney's storytelling and recorded sound in the function of externalising memory within this music archive. Despite the sound recording being discontinuous with real experience or internal processes such as private memory (as with the practice of storytelling), it creates a context for understanding the collection through the biography of the collector. Rodney's stories offer insight into the 'personal microcosm' (Baudrillard 1994: 7) of the collector's world and the sound recording on the Dorsey tape endows the listener with an insight into Rodney's past relationships and social exchanges. I, therefore, apprehend Rodney's stories in a manner similar to the way I engage with and interpret his archive through Dorsey's recorded message.¹³

The obvious difference between these two types of experience is that the tape succeeds in maintaining an impression of the collector in Rodney's absence. Sterne (2003: 331) argues that sound recordings can be used in 'filling up a missing history', as the past can be imagined or realised in the exteriority of recorded sound (ibid.: 331).¹⁴ Sound recordings, such as the Dorsey tape, also offer future opportunities to maintain a memory of Rodney within his collected artefact, as the tape can function beyond his lifespan. As the sound recording on the Dorsey tape currently evokes the memory of the relationship between Dorsey and Rodney, despite being removed from the context of the collection, this would also be the case should the tape be absorbed into the Folk Park archive and presented within the governing agency of the museum. The sound artefact therefore offers the possibility of maintaining a relationship with Rodney's biography within the broader system of classification of a future institutional archive.¹⁵

Time and Multiple Meanings within the Sound Artefact

Sterne's (2003) conceptualisation of the fragmentary time of the recording provides insight into different temporalities at play within the sound artefact, leading to a better understanding of how time is organised within this music archive. Stewart (1993: 151) describes the archival space as being 'ahistorical'.

She argues that:

The collection replaces history with classification, with order beyond the realm of temporality . . . all time is made simultaneous or synchronous within the collection's world. (Stewart 1993: 151)

The internal systems of classification projected by Rodney on to his collection override the historical narratives of the individual objects (*ibid.*), organising each object within the time frame of the collection. However the audio recording will always contain the possibility of repeatability where fragmentary time runs parallel to the temporality of any archive that contains it. Therefore the time of the Dorsey recording exists simultaneously to the atemporality of Rodney's music collection. In order to explore the further implications of this phenomenon, I consider how the different time frames present within the sound artefact connect the tape to a broader set of cultural biographies and how this, in turn, can be related to Rodney's interrelationship with his archive.

Other (multiple) temporal frames at play within the sound artefact create extra layers of meaning within the construction of this music archive. As discussed, the fragmentary time of the recording (identified by Sterne) is related to the biography of the collector. The practice of replaying the recording, however, releases another

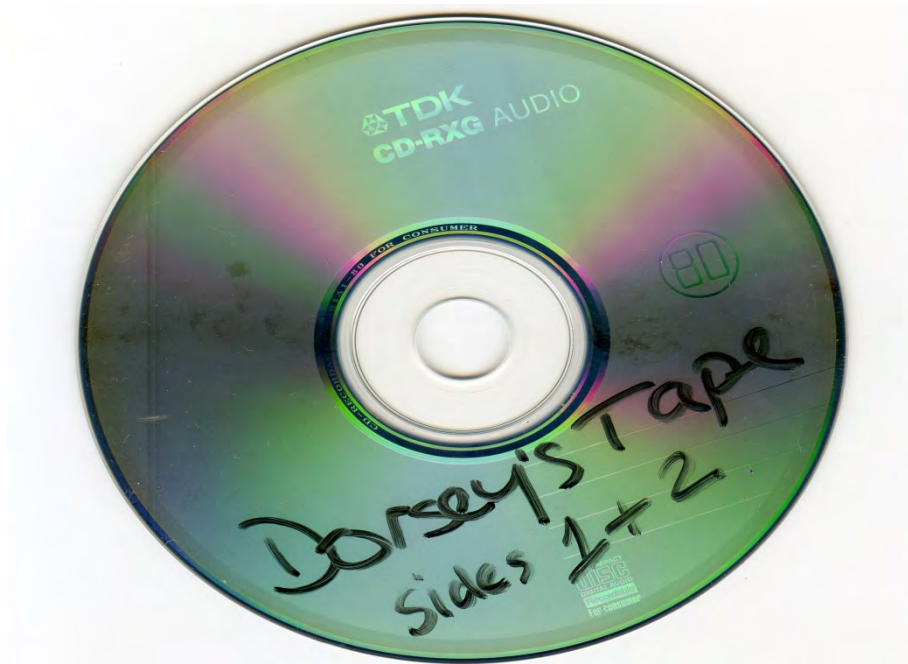


Figure 2:14: Dorsey Tape on reel-to-reel tape recorder (top); Dorsey Tape on CD (bottom)

sense of temporality through the technological process that enables such an event. This sense of temporality relates to the social history of the reel-to-reel tape. For example, for the purpose of listening to the recording on the tape, I first had to transfer the audio on to a digital format because of the age and fragility of the cassette (Figure 2:14). The tape is gradually decaying in the archive but the

technology within the artefact ensures the future preservation of the audio recording (Sterne 2003: 288). According to Sterne (ibid.: 310–11), the physical demise of the sound format is always in direct conflict with its cultural status as a method of preserving sound events for ‘an unseen future’. He goes on to explain how this description of sound technology relates to an early ideology surrounding phonography and its ability to preserve ‘voices of the dead’ (ibid.). As people and events were recorded, during the nineteenth century, for a yet unknown future, the lifetime of the recording itself was limitless since it had yet to be realised. This faith in the technological object was, according to Sterne (ibid.: 289), ‘more imagined than real’, and ‘was less a description of the power of the medium than a program for its development’.¹⁶ This cultural interpretation of recording formats has continued throughout the development of sound technologies and precedes the reel-to-reel tape.

The separation of the audio from the tape source involves consideration of the artefact in two ways, as a material object and as a process. When discussing sound recording technologies in ‘Vinyl is Dead, Long Live Vinyl: The Work of Recording and Mourning in the Age of Digital Reproduction’, Greg Hainge (2007: 3) explains that the term ‘recording’ can be understood as both a noun and an ‘active process’. This process is situated within a social history of sound reproduction technology which, Sterne (2003) argues, is manifest within all sound mediums. Although the Dorsey tape (as a material object) is disintegrating, the sound is preserved by the technology contained within it, thus situating the tape within a social history that precedes the artefact itself (ibid.).

Appadurai (2003: 34) presents the difference between the social history and cultural biography of objects in 'Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value', explaining that they refer to 'two different kinds of temporality'. The latter refers to 'specific things as they move through different hands, contests, and uses, thus accumulating a specific biography or set of biographies' (ibid.), whereas the former transcends individual cultural biographies of the object and includes a broader scale (and time frame) of the various histories of production within and beyond the individual lifespan of that object. Appadurai (ibid.) argues that the social history of objects should be understood as 'a larger historical ebb and flow, in the course of which [the object's] meaning may shift significantly' and should be considered separately from the cultural biographies of the object. For example, although the Dorsey recording may relate to Rodney's biography, the act of listening to the recording also contextualises it within the history of sound, of media and of the body,¹⁷ as well as 'a history of "regimes" of listening practices' (Sterne 2003: 91).¹⁸

Kopytoff (2003: 66) develops Appadurai's hypothesis on the social and cultural life of objects, in 'The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process', by calling for a 'more theoretically aware biographical model' when determining the meaning of an object. He argues that this should ideally be 'based on a reasonable number of actual life histories', including 'the biographical possibilities inherent in its "status" and in [its] period and culture' (ibid.). Here, Kopytoff is suggesting moving beyond the biography of ownership under which the Dorsey tape is currently being considered and exploring other cultural

biographies that may be ascribed to the tape. Kopytoff defines a framework for understanding objects in the following terms:

A culturally informed . . . biography of an object would look at it as a culturally constructed entity, endowed with culturally specific meanings, and classified and reclassified into culturally constituted categories. (ibid.: 68)

I would argue that the coexisting temporalities of the sound artefact create the possibility of other cultural biographies being revealed in Rodney's collection. It is interesting to ask within what other cultural classificatory systems the Dorsey tape might be organised, whilst still remaining part of the collection. Moving on from a reading of the tape in the context of Rodney's biography, in what follows I consider how the possible coexistence of other cultural narratives within the Dorsey tape function as material objects in their own right.

Sterne (2003: 310–30) assigns a different sense of temporality to the physiognomic properties of the audio format, referring to 'geologic time'. This sense of temporal order relates to the physical properties of the tape and concerns the decay and preservation of the material object. Sterne (ibid.) argues that this 'physical temporality' bears testimony to 'the ephemerality of moments' within the lifespan of the medium.¹⁹ These past moments in the life of the tape sometimes leave a physical residue of evidence inscribed in the object itself. I would argue that such physical markings found on the Dorsey tape reveal overlapping cultural narratives. For example, the box that holds the reel-to-reel tape is battered and worn, expressing a history of human handling by the people it came into contact with during its use as a form of copying and correspondence (Figure 2:15). These marks of handling can be contextualised within the



Figure 2:15: Details of markings on the box that holds the Dorsey Tape.

cultural practice of tapesponding during the ‘commodity phase’ of the tape, as it passed through the hands of retailers, consumers and collectors.²⁰ The red, black and white *Silvertone* package design enveloping the box (Figure 2:16) displays a retrograde style of graphics synonymous with the 1960s, culturally situating the Dorsey tape within a specific era when the reel-to-reel tape was a popular home



Figure 2:16: Detail of the *Silvertone* packaging design.

recording device. Inside the cardboard container traces of magnetic dust have fallen loose from the tape and gathered in corners (Figure 2:17), reflecting the redundancy of the technology of the tape. The obsolescence of the mechanics

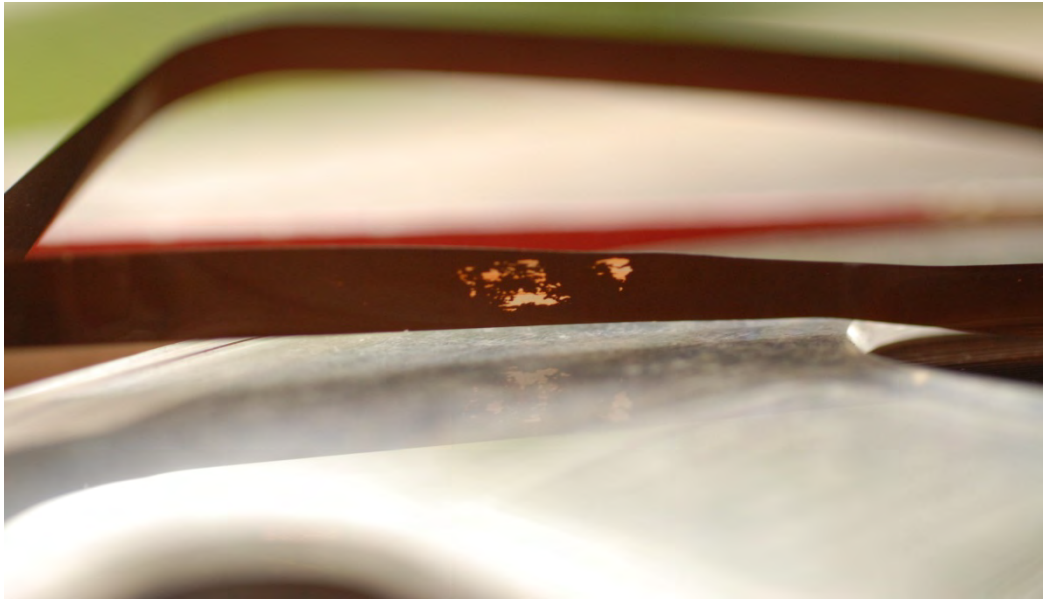


Figure 2:17: Example of worn tape (top); Magnetic dust gathers in the corner (bottom).

can be understood in cultural terms as its diminishing value as a technology in the market place is replaced by a cultural sense of nostalgia. In ‘The Hallucinatory Life of Tape’, Paul Hegarty (2007: 1) discusses cultural perceptions with regard to tape as relating to a collective cultural memory rather than the individual object itself and talks about a sense of ‘nostalgia and melancholy [that] imbue formats in general’. He argues that the tape is already culturally encoded by technological and imaginary narratives and that its distressed appearance works in conjunction

with these cultural narratives in enforcing a sense of cultural memory within the object.

I would argue that these different cultural biographies, framed within the geologic time of this tape, coexist with the object's relationship to Rodney as a collector. The physical traces on the object relate as much to the life of the tape as to the individual biography of the collector. The markings that draw the handler's attention back to Rodney are the handwritten notes from Dorsey to Rodney at the back of the box, (Figure 2:18). The tape is also logged and dated on this side,

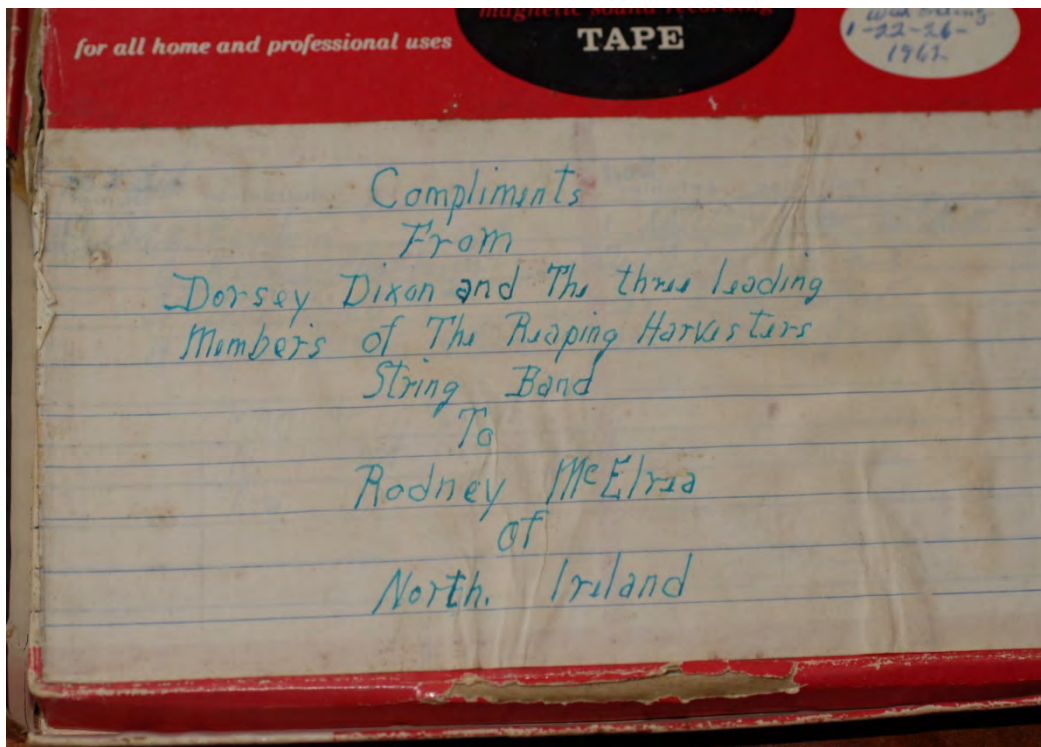


Figure 2:18: Detail of Dorsey's note on box of the tape.

communicating the social exchange between the collector and the singer. During the time that the Dorsey tape is understood within the context of the music collection, this inscription, should it be made significant through Rodney's storytelling, can potentially override all other cultural markings on the tape. It

contextualises the cultural event preserved on the recording. Should the tape be placed in the context of a larger institutional archive – such as that held at the Folk Park – the handwritten personal message from Dorsey to Rodney may still allude to the biography of the private collector but could equally be regarded as being symbolic of one of many ‘diversions’ in the life story of the tape (Appadurai 2003: 20).²¹

The properties ascribed above to the Dorsey tape could also be attributed to other reel-to-reel correspondence and hundreds of other musical artefacts within Rodney’s archive. Meaning within the sound artefacts held in his collection is multi-layered and has the potential to reach beyond the immediate context of the music archive. However, I would argue that these extra layers of meaning do not necessarily override the collector’s internal system of meaning but can offer further insight into Rodney’s interrelationship with his collection. I wish, therefore, to delve further into how the different time frames within the sound artefact can be understood in terms of the way meaning is constructed in his collection.

The coexisting frames of temporality within the sound object cause momentary disruptions to the sense of atemporality within the collection and it is Rodney’s daily interaction with the collection that triggers these phenomena. Overlapping layers of meaning are revealed as Rodney listens to music, potters around his archive or tells stories of his collecting trips. For example, when Rodney plays a track from a CD the sound of the music fills the room. As with the Dorsey tape, the recording is the ‘figure’ or dominant sound (Schafer 1994: 152) and the

archival space is suspended within the fragmentary time of the recording. Since Rodney also personally engages with the music during this time the temporal difference signifies a shift in meaning as the music/recording changes the collector's or listener's perspective of the collection. This passage in time/meaning is both internal (related to collector) and cultural



Figure 2:19: Rodney's presence disrupting the order of the archive (top) and the archive returned to a state of atemporality (bottom).

(related to other cultural biographies). Once the music stops and Rodney leaves the room, the collection returns to a previous state, the time before the disruption by the collector (Figure 2:19). This everyday encounter between Rodney and the music collection can be made evident within the soundscape of the archival space. The soundscape of the collection reflects this movement of interruption and reordering as the sounds of the archive return to the ambience of household noises and the intermittent passing of cars outside. This notion of the collection returning to a previous state assumes a state of continuum in the archive which relates to Stewart's (1993) model of the atemporal state of the enclosed space of the collection.²²

This type of disruption to the order of the collection also occurs when Rodney's voice dominates the soundscape of his archive. As I apprehend Rodney's stories, within the confines of his collection, the cultural biographies of the objects are subject to change, since each anecdote creates alternating contexts of meaning for the featured artefacts and events. Objects move in and out of different narratives within the stories; meanings 'are made cultural' (ibid.: 156) by the way in which they are classified within his sequence of events. For example, Rodney has discussed the Dorsey tape, with me, within the context of his tapesponding correspondence in addition to his personal relationship with Dorsey Dixon. In the first instance the tape is culturally situated as a type of correspondence facilitating the practice of tapesponding, while the latter example presents the artefact as a testimony to Rodney's personal relationship with the old-time singer. The different contexts attributed to the object signify different 'temporal moments'

within the cultural biography of the tape and are momentarily placed within the narrative of the story.

In 'Collection as a Way of Being', Moutu (2009) refers to these temporal shifts in collections as 'the moment of displacement and re-conceptualisation . . . where time becomes constitutive of collections' (ibid.: 103). Moutu (ibid.) considers that it is the 'momentary displacements' that occur within collections – such as the shift in meaning of the objects within Rodney's stories – that create 'a temporal experience'. He argues:

From the initial point of shattering to a reply or the re-gathering of 'pieces' is a temporal experience. In this process, collection becomes a synthetic behaviour of piecing together temporal moments, and in so doing it contrives a sense of continuity that is predicated upon a condition of loss. (ibid.: 109)

Here Moutu describes a form of resettlement within archives whereby meaning can be altered by the presence of the collector and yet return to the context of the collection, creating a 'sense of continuity' (ibid.). I have experienced this type of event during my observations of Rodney pottering around the stacks of objects looking for particular things to show me or an appropriate record to play. On one such occasion Rodney clears a space on the visitor's chair and tells me to take a seat. I take my place as Rodney moves towards the small corridor created by stacked CDs which leads to the stereo. The large window behind this area is mostly obscured by walls of CDs which have grown around the stereo and encase Rodney's main listening area (Figure 2:20). He sits on his stool and fiddles with a small pile of discs which he has now lined up so that we can listen to them. I had previously expressed an interest in old-time murder ballads, so Rodney has selected these particular CDs from this category. The discs themselves are not themed by this subject but each contains one ballad that could be classified under

that heading. He has also organised the CDs in the order in which he would like me to experience them, beginning with a modern version of an old ballad entitled *Pearl Bryant* and progressing to older recordings of the same song. This specific



Figure 2:20: Rodney's listening area in the Archive.

system of classification as understood by myself and Rodney at that time is temporary and never recurs during subsequent visits to the archive.

The small pile of discs is later put aside by Rodney in favour of other assortments of music chosen over the next few days or weeks and the 'murder ballad' stack gradually blends into the larger columns of CDs, becoming anonymous among the reflective façade of clear plastic spines. This process presents a method of reclassification over a specific length of time, offering an opportunity to step beyond the system of the collection 'as a whole' (Stewart 1993: 153) and experience different meanings within the submerged cultural narratives of the

objects. Although, as Moutu (2009) argues, these moments signify change in the collection, the new indexical systems are eventually reabsorbed by the collection. In this way the multiple temporal frames within the sound artefact and Rodney's stories can coexist with the atemporal state of the collection without either overriding the other; despite momentary temporal shifts, the collection will always be restored to the atemporal state of the archive (Stewart 1993). This movement - what Moutu (2009: 104) refers to as 'loss and projection' – is at the centre of the way in which cultural knowledge is constructed and experienced within this archive.²³

Conclusion

Although meaning in Rodney's archive is fragmentary and transitory, it is grounded through his presence as he interacts with his collection. Whether through the actuation of recorded sound, telling stories or the physical disruption to the landscape of the collection, each diversion occurs in relation to him. The layers of meaning I have identified in this archive continue to be contextualised within the biography of Rodney, the private collector. Rodney's collection is what Stuart Hall (2001: 89) refers to as a 'living archive'; it is 'present, on-going, continuing, unfinished', and it is the living archive that can provide an analysis of the archival object through its relationship with the performance of the collector. This relationship between Rodney and his artefacts also links these archival objects to processes and meanings beyond the confines of his collection. Arguably, my reading of this private music archive also succeeds in relating the internal system of the private collection to broader cultural narratives through which it may be culturally understood and evaluated.

Of the cultural practices I have described in relation to Rodney's collection, it is the possibilities of recorded sound that can both maintain the memory of its collector and refer to other cultural and social contexts. It is through the discursive (and mediated) pathways between concepts of private biography and cultural memory that I am seeking, through sound and image media, to present an ethnographic description of this collection and its collector. Recorded sound can capture the performative aspects of how meaning is constructed in this archive and possibly provide a broader understanding of how private archival practices can be deemed culturally significant. I now wish to consider the possible cultural significance of such an undertaking.

As I grow more familiar with Rodney and his collection I examine, in the following chapter, how his collecting practices can be regarded as having a wider cultural significance, outside the confines of his music archive. If his collection is to survive beyond his lifespan, how might it be culturally evaluated in relation to the practices and processes I have already outlined? I begin this analysis by first seeking a cultural position from which to address concepts relating to private collecting practices and then develop my discussion by questioning how the idiosyncratic properties of Rodney's music collection can be contextualised within broader cultural and social settings (Appadurai 2003). I also consider what type of value systems can frame this inquiry and explore the significance of his archive in terms of how it can be evaluated in the absence of an institutional agency. Finally, my argument leads to a consideration and explanation of what exact elements of Rodney's collection I am seeking to represent.

¹ The term ‘cultural biography’ is used by both Appadurai (2003: 17) and Kopytoff (2003) in relation to how objects ‘can be regarded as having life histories’. Their understanding of this term is discussed further in this chapter.

² Rodney co-edited and published this old-time music magazine with an English collector, Charlie Newman, in 1962. Together they produced the bimonthly, entitled *Country News and Views*, (CNAV), which ran until 1969. This experience placed Rodney at the centre of a growing group of international collectors. The magazine features reports from collectors in the UK, North America, Europe and Australia and spawned lifelong friendships for Rodney.

³ The reel-to-reel tape recorder was relatively new in terms of being used as a domestic recording device in the early sixties. According to Marybeth Hamilton (2007) in *In Search of the Blues*, the domestication of the tape recorder, a wartime innovation, in 1963 made the trading of recorded material possible. Collectors and fieldworkers alike were using tape and the tape machine either to capture music in its natural habitat or to preserve copies of rare recordings (ibid.: 57). CNAV became an avenue for such enterprises.

⁴ John Edwards was a prolific collector of old-time music who, despite never leaving his native Australia, traced and befriended a lot of old-time American artists. Rodney's correspondence with Edwards began in the late 1950s and lasted until Edwards' sudden death in 1960. Rodney continued to correspond with Edwards' mother, Irene. The Edwards Collection is now held at the Southern Folk Life Collection in the University of North Carolina.

⁵ Bill Malone, a writer on country music, explains Edwards' contribution to the development of an academic interest in the subject of old-time music: ‘The independent research carried on by men like Edwards, oblivious of whether their work was academically respectable or not, laid the groundwork for full-scale scholarly treatment in the future’ (cited in Porterfield 2004: xi).

⁶ There are many references to Irene Edwards in the letters sent by Dorsey to Rodney. I am basing my analysis on letters dated from 12 March 1961 to 10 May 1962.

⁷ Dorsey writes: ‘I get a little copy right royalty twice a year or every 6 months. I have to thank my good friend Roy Acuff of Acuff-Rose Publications of Nashville Tenn: Roy picked the song up in 1940 or 41 and we settled it out of court in 1946. The little royalties I received on the song since 1946 has pulled me out of many dark spots Rodney’ (Letter to Rodney dated 10 May 1962).

⁸ Although the letter is marked by Dorsey as being 15 March 1961, I feel this is a typo as the postage is dated 16 March 1962. Also Dorsey's brother Howard died in March 1961, and Dorsey refers to him in the past tense in this letter.

⁹ Sterne (2003) discusses sound mediums in relation to telephony and sound recording technologies.

¹⁰ As with telephony, the practice of listening to recorded sound is ideologically constructed (and marketed) as a means of overcoming physical boundaries and connecting the individual to places and people beyond her/his lived experience. As Sterne (2003) concludes: ‘Sound technologies became sound media as these imagined, planned, and real modalities of interconnection and articulation emerged’ (ibid.: 213).

¹¹ I discuss the cultural value of such information further in chapter three when considering how Rodney's private collection might be evaluated in cultural terms.

¹² Sterne (2003: 290) claims ‘we can date this emergent construct of sound as exteriority to the early nineteenth century and probably earlier. It most certainly predates the phonograph. As exteriority, sound was primarily understood as an effect or force in the world rather than as a manifestation of an internal and enveloping bodily force (such as the human voice).’

¹³ I discuss this point further in chapter four while examining how sound and image can represent Rodney's archive.

¹⁴ Sterne (2003: 331) cites a specific example of how anthropologists first began using sound recorded during field work to represent what anthropology defined as lost cultures. However, he is quick to point out that ‘it is clear that the recordings in existence are the result of one particular moment in a much larger and unequal sphere of cultural interchange’.

¹⁵ This classificatory structure of archives is mainly based upon Stewart (1993) and Elsner and Cardinal’s (1994) theorisation of how archives can be culturally understood.

¹⁶ Sterne (2003: 287-334) relates this perceived notion of sound recordings to Victorian attitudes towards death and embalming.

¹⁷ I would add here that the reel-to-reel tape also speaks of the era of analogue sound recording.

¹⁸ I would argue that these histories of recording and listening practices can be evoked by the listener when experiencing the imperfections in the quality of the audio which underlines the fact that they are listening to an old analogue recording. There is a remaining sense of engagement with the old reel-to-reel tape during the playback of the digitised recording of Dorsey Dixon. Despite being separate from the object, the digitised version still refers directly to the original recording format. The material object seems in some way to exist within the audio. Hegarty (2007: 1) explains this phenomenon by referring to a ‘residue’ that remains of the original recording as the audio ‘leaves one media for another’. This ‘residue’ might be explained in terms of the ‘historical moment’ (Kahn in Hainge 2007: 4) of the original technology which is ingrained within the recording itself. This can be relayed through the sound quality or the mechanics of the equipment that was used at the time of recording. An obvious example, on the Dorsey tape, is the blunt style of editing which is consistent with taped home-recordings.

¹⁹ Sterne (2003: 310) discusses ‘geologic time’ in relation to how it ‘is set into play’ with two other temporalities extant within the sound object: linear-historical time and fragmentary time.

²⁰ Appadurai (2003: 15) argues that objects can shift in and out of commodity phases during their lifespan and this status is determined by a number of governing factors. He argues, ‘thus commoditization lies at the complex intersection of temporal, cultural, and social factors. To the degree that some things in a society are frequently to be found in the commodity phase, to fit the requirements of commodity candidacy, and to appear in a commodity context, they are its quintessential commodities.’

²¹ Appadurai (2003: 20) discusses the term ‘diversion’ in relation to the way in which objects/commodities can stray from the governing social paths that determine their cultural value and how in turn the ‘relations between paths and diversions [become] critical to the politics of value in [that particular cultural] system’. I borrow the term in order to illustrate how the many overlapping cultural narratives of the tape can direct an understanding of the object.

²² Stewart’s (1993: 152) argument with regard to the ‘hermetic world’ of the private collection situates the archive within an ahistorical state. It is implied in her description that the archive remains in a state of temporal suspension. It is, I would argue, this notion of the archive to which Rodney’s collection returns after the initial disruption caused by his interaction with the archive.

²³ Moutu (2009: 104) argues: ‘In collections we encounter momentary loss, a returning and a projection towards the future. It is not continuity but loss that reveals the ontological work of collections.’

CHAPTER THREE: THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PRIVATE MUSIC ARCHIVE

Introduction

In chapter three I discuss how the discursive pathways between concepts of private and public can be employed, in relation to the collected artefact, to explore the cultural significance of Rodney's music archive. My inquiry begins by analyzing the way in which some of the cultural practices that relate to his collection can be considered with regard to notions of cultural value and knowledge. I provide a framework within which Rodney and his archive can be contextualised; a reference that supports the collection's current private status as well as imagining its future preservation within a public museum. I also draw from different disciplines and fields of study that have the common objective of investigating concepts of cultural value in material culture; my argument, for example, follows Frow's (1996) analysis of cultural value in *Cultural Studies & Cultural Value* when identifying and mapping the different kinds of value systems that might inform the cultural significance of private collections, as well as Appadurai (2003), James Clifford (2006) and Pearce (2006)¹, whose arguments explore the kind of assumptions being made about the knowledge and value that both private and public collections embody (ibid.: 194). I address some of the leading questions presented in these debates, such as: what sets of criteria determine how value is revealed in an object/collection? who decides what is of value and why? (Frow 1996; Clifford 2006; Pearce 2006); what is my subject

position, in my role of researcher, when determining so-called ‘systems of value’? (Frow 1996). My argument also offers the reader further insight into the collection and the private collecting practices of Rodney, and I discuss his collection in relation to similar types of private and public music archives and consider how particular collecting and archival practices can influence the way in which a collection might be deemed culturally significant.²

Establishing a System of Evaluation for Rodney’s Private Music Collection

On one occasion Rodney and I conversed in his front living room, situated directly across the hall from his archive. Having already spent hours talking amongst his collection, Rodney suggested moving here, as the oppressive space of the archive



Figure 3:01: Top of mantelpiece in Rodney’s and Ruth’s living room.

caused me to feel ill and this airy neat room was a more comfortable place to continue our conversations. The contrast between the two rooms is significant. Within the living room, generously decorated with patterned upholstery and carpet,

sit a tidy cabinet and shelving. A long mantelpiece is adorned with decorative objects including some figurines, a Russian doll and a vase, each object given an individual



Figure: 3:02: Figurines in Rodney's and Ruth's cabinet.

spot and space from which to be viewed (Figure 3:01). I admired a small arrangement



Figure 3:03: Assortment of objects on mantelpiece in Rodney's Archive.

of childlike figurines on the cabinet sitting opposite, which Rodney informs me belong to Ruth (Figure 3:02). There is a compulsion on my part to compare the careful placement of these ornaments with the absent-minded ordering of Rodney's collection of treasured items (Figure: 3:03) across the hallway. Although I do not comment to Rodney on the different handling of the two sets of objects, their juxtaposition within his household raises interesting questions as to how they relate to Rodney, the (co-)owner of these items, and how they can both be considered to be valued within his home.

In exploring comparisons between the two I would like to consider both types of objects in relation to Baudrillard's (2005) description of 'possessed objects':³

What is possessed is always an object *abstracted from its function and thus brought into relationship with the subject*. In this context all owned objects partake of the same *abstractness*, and refer to one another only inasmuch as they refer solely to the subject. Such objects together make up the system through which the subject strives to construct a world, a private totality. (ibid.: 91–2)

Both the ornamental and the collected objects can be considered with regard to this description. The ornaments and souvenirs in the living room have been acquired over the years by both Rodney and Ruth and, like Rodney's collection, are mass-produced objects which reflect lifestyle choices and the tastes of their possessor(s). They hold specific historical, symbolic meanings for Rodney's family,⁴ which is reflected in the manner in which they are carefully displayed around the main living area of the house. They also create systems of meaning in relation to each other but are not yet regarded as a collection of objects in the same sense as Rodney's music collection.⁵

The difference between these two different sets of objects lies within Baudrillard's wider argument that:

Every object has two functions – to be put to use and to be possessed. The first involves the field of the world's practical totalization by the subject, the second an abstract totalization of the subject undertaken by the subject himself outside the world. (ibid.: 92)

The ornamental objects on display in the living room are still understood within their function of being 'knick-knacks' or indeed ornaments. As I have argued in chapter two, some of the collected objects in Rodney's archive do maintain a functional use but are always understood in their current context as being part of the whole music collection.

Pearce (2006) sheds further light on the differentiation between collected objects and everyday objects in the domestic home. She refers to the Saussurian semiotic scheme when defining the social role of material culture. Both types of object can be classified within what Pearce identifies as the *langue* of society, which is 'the body of objects, material culture . . . we have available to us in the social structure . . . with which to produce our social lives' (ibid.: 2–21).⁶ Within this framework of material culture the ornamental objects in the living room could be regarded as being part of the same *langue* as the collected objects. Pearce continues:

In order to create social sense, these are structured according to generally understood categories, and give rise to the *parole*, the actual objects in daily circulation doing their social jobs. Because objects (like everything else) are only meaningful in relation to each other, these social objects work in groups or sets. (ibid.)

It is within the *parole* that Baudrillard's hypothesis regarding the social role/function of the object can be recognised. For example, the vase, the Russian doll and the figurines work together within their social role of being household ornaments (Figure 3:04), whereas Rodney's music collection appears to have a different system of meaning that moves beyond a defined domestic social role. Pearce (ibid.) suggests that 'there seems to be a qualitative difference between objects in circulation and objects in collection'. She concludes that the difference between these two types of objects lies within the motivations behind the gathering/accumulation of the objects, which in turn creates different systems of evaluation. However, she further argues that distinctions between the collected object and other objects depend upon 'the



Figure 3:04: Mantelpiece in Rodney's and Ruth's Living Room

cultural value it is given' and that it is in the 'act of selection' (ibid.: 10) that the value or significance of an object is determined. Therefore the ornaments in the living room were chosen and are regarded within their specific role of decorating the living

room (Figure 3:04), whereas the collected objects are ‘structured a second time against the cross-references of the individual collector, his (or her) history, psychological quirks and imaginative notions of value’ (ibid.: 3). The collected objects are specifically selected by Rodney in relation to the rest of the collection and therefore go through another process of evaluation directly related to the collector, when ‘some kind of specific value is set upon the group by its possessor’ (ibid.: 159). Taking this into consideration, how then might the value systems that inform the cultural significance of Rodney’s collection be identified and critically explored?

In, ‘Collecting Ourselves’, Clifford (2006: 261) argues that ‘the critical history of collecting is concerned with what from the material world specific groups and individuals choose to preserve’. Although Rodney has personally chosen particular items to collect over the years, I would argue that this personal value system is itself informed by a wider cultural system of evaluation relating to a broader social history of record collecting, as well as (more narrowly) relating to Rodney’s involvement

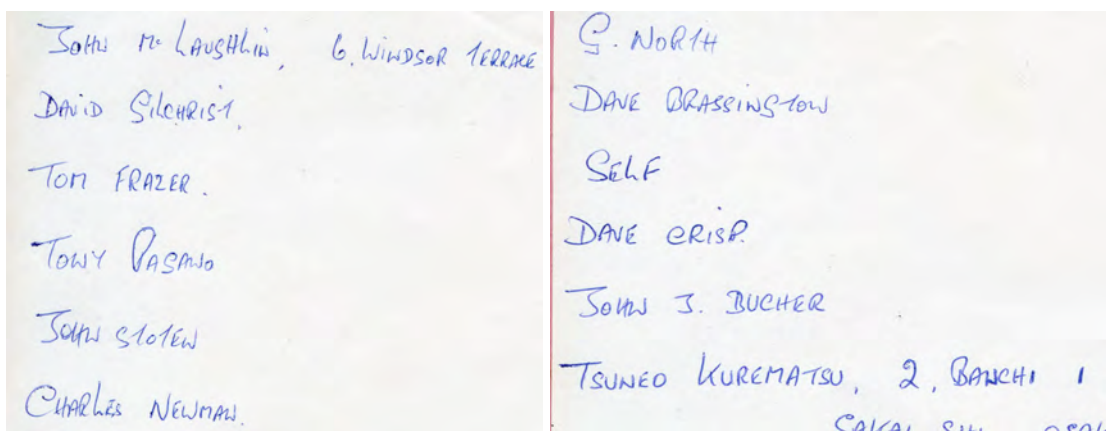


Figure 3:05: A list (made by Rodney) of other collectors that he traded/corresponded with.

with a group of old-time music collectors (Figure 3:05). Therefore determining the cultural value of this collection begins in the 1960s when, in Rodney's own estimation, he became a 'serious collector'. Once Rodney identified himself as an old-time collector he associated with others of a similar identity and began cultivating tastes and practices that were themselves already ingrained within an existing field of collectors with their own system of validating their choices and appraising their cultural practices. The origins of this system were revealed during our conversation in the living room, when Rodney discussed some of the people he became acquainted with during the 1960s.

Rodney informed me that he found the market quite limited in Northern Ireland, when he first started looking for records. Apart from one record store in Strabane, he had to try and find information about the artists he was interested in through the few publications which featured articles on old-time music. The lack of resources



Figure 3:06: Letter from old-time collector Harvey Fink, who corresponded with Rodney from the US in November 1968.

inspired him to set up a correspondence, through magazines, with other old-time country fans from America (Figure 3:06), Europe and Australia, in order to access a broader market. He told me that it was through his correspondence with other collectors that he discovered a wider market of old-time music:

I discovered in the UK, that [record companies] only issued the best of the material – what they considered the best – so you have a lot of material from America unissued in the United Kingdom but available in the States. And that was one of the reasons I had correspondences in America. (McElrea, 15 May 2006)

The main opportunity for meeting other collectors came through the bimonthly that he coedited and published with an English collector, Charlie Newman, between 1962

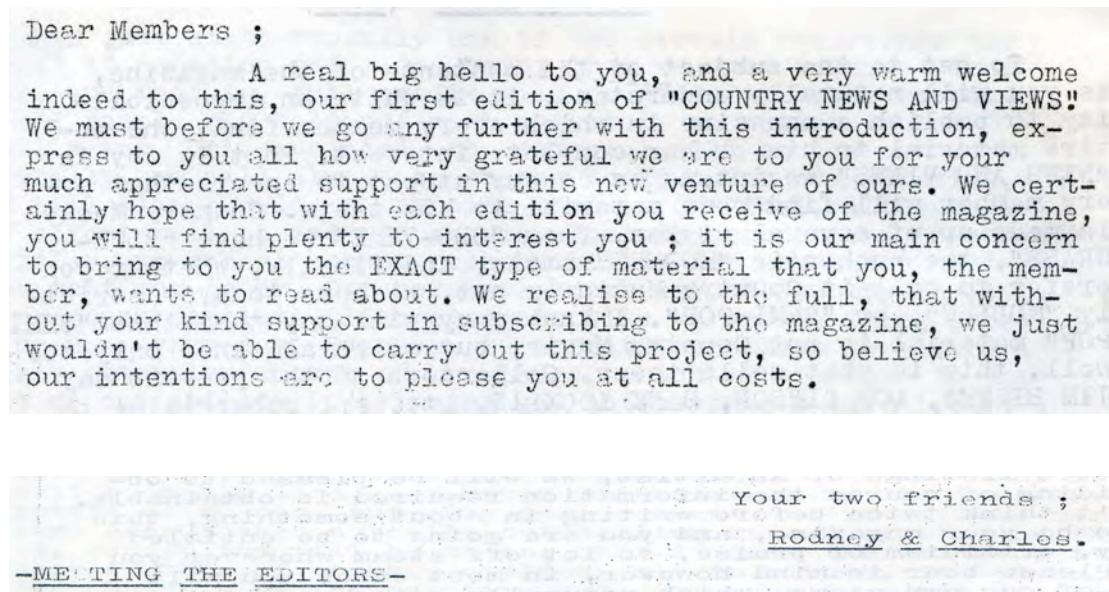


Figure 3:07: Rodney and Charlie Newman's opening editorial letter featured in the first issue of *Country News and Views*, July 1962.

and 1969: *Country News and Views* (CNAV) (Figure 3:07). This experience placed Rodney at the centre of a growing group of international collectors. The magazine

features reports from collectors in the UK, North America, Europe and Australia (Figure 3:08) and spawned lifelong friendships for Rodney (Figure 3:09).

REPRESENTATIVES
U.S.A.- - Raymond Wilde, Prior Lake, Minnesota.
CANADA- - Mr. & Mrs. Joe Caswell, 446 Palmtree Ave. London, Ont.
AUSTRALIA- Hedley Charles, 49 Spencer St. Brooklyn, Burnie, Tas.
COUNTRY NEWS REPORTERS
U.S.A.- - Bill Vernon, 173 Columbia Hghts. Brooklyn 1, New York.
CANADA- - Bill Legere, 22 Gordon Street, Toronto, Ont.
SUBSCRIPTION RATES
U.K.-. Australia - New Zealand. - - - - - - - - - - 10/-.
U.S.A. - Canada - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - \$1-50¢.
Other Countries - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - Equivalent Currency.

Figure 3:08: Extract from editorial page of *Country News and Views*, July 1962.

Figure 3:09 portrays a photograph I found buried in a pile of correspondence belonging to Rodney, featuring him as a young man with the musician Bill



Figure 3:09: Rodney in his flat in Newtownstewart with American singer/songwriter Bill Clifton and his wife, 1964.

Clifton and his wife. Rodney had an opportunity to record an interview with Clifton during his visit to Northern Ireland and the two remained in contact for some time, but they no longer correspond. The photograph was taken in Rodney's flat in Newtownstewart and the beginnings of his collection can be seen in the background. Since I have only known Rodney as an older man, I find the image evocative of the time that has passed, illustrating his ageing alongside the continual growth of his collection. As he acquired and lost relationships over the years, these types of mementos build up, each affiliated to specific stages of the personal journey he undertook as a collector.

Rodney became acquainted with the American old-time collector Dave Freeman (Figure 3:10) when Freeman became a contributor of articles to *Country News and Views* and used the magazine in sourcing and advertising music for his own collection. Freeman had been making collecting trips from his native New York to the southern central states of America since 1960 and had amassed a large collection of old-time and bluegrass 78s. Rodney explained that most of his collecting trips to the States were undertaken with Freeman. According to Rodney, Freeman took the younger collector under his wing for his first trip to North America, when the two men travelled through Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky and North Carolina. During this trip Freeman introduced Rodney to collecting practices that had become common amongst American record collectors during the 1950s and 1960s as old-time music became increasingly scarce in city retail outlets. According to Hamilton (2007) old



Figure 3:10: Dave Freeman with his collection of 78s.

music recordings became rare during the Second World War, when surplus records were melted down and shellac was used for the arms industry. In addition, sound recording technologies were being developed and old musical formats were replaced by new ones. By the 1950s, the original mass-produced recording format of old-time country music, the 78, had already become obsolete (*ibid.*: 190). The unavailability of this format on the public market created a strong demand for this type of recording on the private collecting circuit.

During the mid 1920s, old-time music from the southern states of North America had become part of the recording industry's lucrative commercial market and enjoyed commercial success up until the 1930s. Companies such as Victor Talking Machine

Company (later RCA Victor) discovered that there was a market for Southern music and began issuing 78 RPMs of artists that they had discovered down south and brought to New York for recording sessions (Bernhardt, September 2005). In the 1930s, the Great Depression in America created a substantial slump in record sales and many recording artists were released from their contracts. Southern artists such as Dorsey Dixon and Charlie Poole returned, as mentioned previously, to their earlier occupations as mill or mine workers in North Carolina. No longer available on the market, their surviving recordings lay scattered amongst private household possessions, sometimes handed down to the next generation or hidden in a forgotten box of objects in the attic. Hamilton (2007: 135) describes how private record collectors seem to have emerged out of this slump, since old-time country music records were sought out for personal collections by enthusiasts looking for back issues of their favourite artists. The main sites for finding old recordings, at that time, were libraries⁷ and second-hand stores. (ibid.)⁸

Having exhausted the (mostly urban) junk store circuit, the more serious record collector travelled to often remote rural areas where the artists had lived or still had family, in order to source rare recordings (Freeman, January 2008). Freeman introduced Rodney to the practice of door-to-door canvassing in rural southern states, which had become a popular method of acquiring records for American collectors since the 1940s. During these trips Rodney and Freeman would knock on doors in backwoods locations hoping to find that unwanted box of records in the attic. Both collectors were mainly in pursuit of the 78 format during these endeavours. Another

objective of the trips was to meet and converse with the artists themselves or their relatives, in order to gain more background information on the music and recordings.

Rodney explained to me how Freeman helped him canvass for records:

I was very young in my first trip to the States . . . While I knew the artists' names I didn't know where they lived. Dave would take me away to houses in the wilds of Virginia or East Tennessee or Kentucky, or wherever; to people's homes. I knew the groups but didn't know the individual members' names – at least with some of them. And so when I went to their houses with Dave I wouldn't know who he was talking about or talking to. (McElrea, 26 February 2007)

Rodney became part of a group of collectors who passed on the knowledge and resources of their collecting practices to each other. He likened learning collecting techniques to 'learning a language, as you go along you learn more and more. You just don't gain it overnight' (McElrea, 15 May 2006).

Rodney maintained that Freeman himself had been inducted into the practice by one of the earliest and most prolific old-time collectors, Joe Bussard from Frederick, Maryland (Figure 3:11). Bussard began collecting door-to-door in 1947 and accumulated a large collection of original 78s. There was a certain protocol amongst record collectors regarding who got what during these excursions, generally resulting in the less experienced collector deferring to his/her senior. Freeman had an agreement with Bussard that he (Freeman) could only take records that Bussard already had in his collection (Freeman, August 1999). I came across the images in



Figure 3:11: Image of Joe Bussard in the 1950s as featured on his website,
www.myspace.com/joebussard.

Figures 3:12 and 3:13, taken during one of Freeman's trips to the South with Bussard, on a website (www.oldhatrecords.com) accompanying an article about Freeman's collection. It may well be Bussard casting the shadow behind the camera;



Figure 3:12: Dave Freeman sourcing 78s from a house, 1964.



Figure 3:13: Freeman loads boxes of 78s into Joe Bussard's car, 1964.

there is no direct reference to the photographer. Freeman is seen in the background rifling through records whilst some African-American children sit with other boxes of records in the foreground. The other picture – I presume taken during the same trip – shows Freeman loading a box of vinyl into Bussard's car. I include these images here since there is very little photographic documentation of Rodney's and Freeman's trips, and they represent the same practice/method used by the latter during their collecting. Viewed in hindsight, Figure 3:12 raises a number of issues about the practice of collecting door-to-door, which was arguably problematic with regard to how the records were obtained. I was also extremely interested to see the African American kids on the front lawn of the house in Figure 3:12, given that the old-time music that Rodney and Freeman collected was/is a predominantly white American genre of music, specifically in relation to the social background of the musicians and those collecting the music. Although Rodney's colleagues come from different parts of the world they are all Caucasian. Therefore this photograph, together with the fact

that Rodney's collecting stories only ever mentioned meeting white Americans in relation to old-time music, puts an interesting slant on my presumptions regarding the households from which the records were sourced. Yet Bussard also collected jazz records from that era and so would have sourced records from a wider demographic of households.

The image could be viewed as Freeman simply pilfering records, which he deemed to be of value, from people who (at that time) were ignorant of their potential worth, giving an exploitative element to the practice. Rodney had informed me that much of the time they acquired records for free since people had no use for them, and even when payment was involved, it was never too costly. Rodney did comment that it gradually got harder to acquire 78s, once a 'value' was put on the records, and he mentions a particular instance of being outwitted by another collector when that collector informed the owner of the value of the 78. This story illustrated a latent underhand element to the practice of canvassing for rare 78s and a disregard for those supplying the records. On the other hand it could be argued that at that time many of the records sourced by Rodney and Freeman were not valuable in a marketable sense and were only significant within the context of the collector's own value system, and indeed only became valuable through the collector's own endeavours.

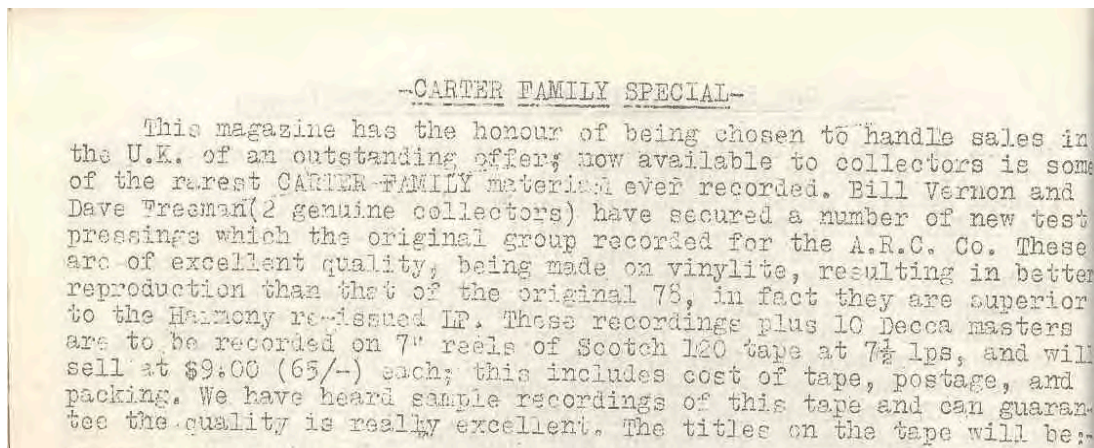
During their trips together between 1965 and 1968, Freeman struck an agreement with Rodney which differed from that with Bussard; according to this new

agreement, 'if you went in a house and you found something, you had first crack at it. We would take turns going into houses' (McElrea, 30 October 2007). Often Rodney's nationality played a part in his acquiring the sought-after records. He confided to me:

they wouldn't give stuff to the Americans; the radio stations gave me records. They wouldn't give to anybody just from their own country, but if somebody from Ireland came in: 'Who are you? You love country music?' I was telling you about getting that book of Hank Williams the fella gave me. He said, 'How could you have ever heard of Hank Williams and you living in Ireland? Impossible.' And I found out I knew more about Hank than he did. He gave me the book. He said you deserve it (ibid).

This example again portrays the competitive element between collectors and Rodney admitted that this type of experience sometimes caused friction between the two men. Freeman had been used to a system where the best records were offered to the senior collector, but in some instances Rodney was given material simply because of the novelty factor of being from Northern Ireland. What Rodney could not obtain for himself he copied on to tape from Freeman's growing collection so he could at least listen to the recordings, but there was no substitute for having the original record in his collection. This method of collecting records from private homes became obsolete by the late 1970s as new musical formats were produced by the recording industry, presenting alternative methods of acquiring and listening to music. Freeman (January 2008) explains: 'It got to the point where almost nothing could be found in houses anymore, as most of the people who owned the records from the 1920s and 30s had passed on and younger people did not really know what you were talking about in describing old 78s.' By the 1970s Freeman had a substantial collection of old-time records on the 78 format.

As Rodney reflected on this period of his life he revealed a genealogy of collecting practices passed on from one generation of record collectors to the next. Having recovered and collected the old-time music during such trips, the collectors would then share or trade the music with other collectors through magazines like *Country News and Views*. They used these publications to advertise the contents of their collection and set up an exchange system of copying recorded music for each other on tape.⁹ *Country News and Views* became an avenue for such enterprises, as the advertisement in Figure 3:14 demonstrates:



This magazine has the honour of being chosen to handle sales in the U.K. of an outstanding offer; now available to collectors is some of the rarest CARTER FAMILY material ever recorded. Bill Vernon and Dave Freeman (2 genuine collectors) have secured a number of new test pressings which the original group recorded for the A.R.C. Co. These are of excellent quality, being made on vinylite, resulting in better reproduction than that of the original 78, in fact they are superior to the Harmony re-issued LP. These recordings plus 10 Decca masters are to be recorded on 7" reels of Scotch 120 tape at 7 ½ lps, and will sell at \$9.00 (65/-) each; this includes cost of tape, postage, and packing . . . These titles should be of special interest to U.K. collectors, as none were released here (*Country News and Views*, 1962, Vol 1 No.2: 16)

Figure 3:14: Extract from *Country News and Views*, Vol.1. Number 2, October 1962, 16.

Hegarty (2007: 3) discusses the possibilities that tape-recording techniques offered music fans and regards such 'DIY' recording practices as a means of finding 'a way around the culture industry', as it leads to, 'a re-appropriation of the means of production'.¹⁰ Rodney and other collectors of his generation used tape as a way of overcoming the obstacles of finding and possessing rare recordings and themselves became producers of the culture they were collecting (ibid.).

Through a collective mutual appreciation of old-time music and artists, the collectors who subscribed to *Country News and Views* created a new cultural platform for this music by putting it back into circulation and in so doing defined their own subculture of old-time collectors. Frow (1996: 11) discusses 'the notion of the subculture' as 'a term that designates the tightly knit identity of a social group bonded above all by a restricted and highly loaded choice of stylistic markers'. Rodney became a part of this community of men with whom he would not, in his own opinion, otherwise have had much in common. As Frow (ibid.) explains, 'the principle of bonding and exclusion is not so much the familiar demographic variables of class, region, or even ethnicity . . . as it is cultural choice itself'. Through the process of selecting and classifying certain recordings (whilst excluding others), the subscribers to *Country News and Views* were also securing levels of taste and value with regard to particular artists and music (Figure 3:15). By creating an interest in music which was not at that time commercially viable and then cultivating a cultural space for it, they constructed a shared system of value which was articulated through publications, like the example shown above. This change in the status of the music accords with Pearce's (2006)

"BLUEGRASS MUSIC" - The Osborne Brothers - MGM-C-914.
Black Sheep Returned To The Fold/Lonely Lonely Me/You'll Never Know/
1st.Fall Of Snow/It's Just The Idea/There's A Woman Behind Every Man/
Each Season Changes You/Blame Me/Give This Message To Your Heart/Fair
& Tender Ladies/I Love You Only/Sweethearts Again.
There's nothing we can add to what Bill Vernon has already said about
this LP - he is so right! A bitter disappointment to all who enjoyed
their first album, "COUNTRY SINGIN' & HILLSIDE PICKIN'", so Bluegrass
fans, don't be deceived. As far as modern country music goes, doubtless
many will enjoy their presentation of such titles as "Fair & Tender La-
dies"- "1st.Fall Of Snow"- "Black Sheep---", but again, what an insult to
the term "Bluegrass Music".

Figure 3:15: A record review from Country News and Views criticising the Osborne Brothers' record,
January 1963.

description of the process of evaluation that collected objects can undergo. She argues:

Objects can be subject to great fluctuations in value, when despised rubbish becomes first collectable and finally major acquisition; in fact, the capacity of objects to stimulate social changes of this kind is one of their most fascinating characteristics, and one in which the process of collecting plays a major part. (ibid.: 2)

Forgotten old-time music became accessible and was made significant through its '[re]integration into the cultural system' (Sahlins cited in Frow 1996: 9)¹¹ by the subculture of old-time collectors in the 1960 and 1970s.

As Rodney and his fellow collectors constructed a cultural system of international exchange between themselves, they produced new cultural biographies for some old-time music that would otherwise have remained dormant. This system of exchange endowed the music with value by creating a demand for the music where there had

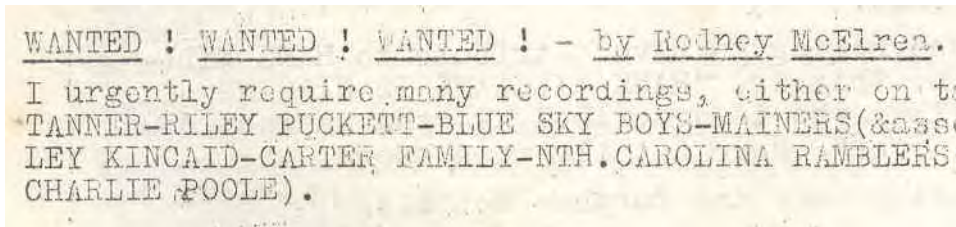


Figure 3:16: An advertisement that Rodney placed in *Country News and Views*, January 1964.

been none (Figure 3:16). Appadurai (2003) argues:

Thus, the economic object does not have an absolute value as a result of the demand for it, but the demand, as the basis of a real or imagined exchange, endows the object with value. It is exchange that sets the parameters of utility and scarcity, rather than the other way around . . . and exchange that is the source of value. (ibid.: 4)¹²

The practices of such systems of exchange are always in turn governed by structures and standards of taste which are mutually accepted by the parties involved in the exchange (ibid.). Appadurai (ibid.: 15) and Frow (1996: 144) refer to such cultural frameworks as value systems or ‘regimes of value’. Regimes of value are the set of social, political¹³ and cultural criteria which determine the cultural candidacy¹⁴ of any object at any one time in its social life (Appadurai 2003). Appadurai explains the term further:

The term *regime of value*,... does not imply that every act of commodity exchange presupposes a complete cultural sharing of assumptions, but rather that the degree of value coherence may be highly variable from situation to situation, and from commodity to commodity. (ibid.: 14)

This definition explains fluctuations in the value of an object and allows for the specific sets of conditions that can determine the cultural value of any object/s at any one time.¹⁵

How might regimes of value be explored in terms of Rodney's collection? As I have argued, the value system under which Rodney and other collectors operated during door-to-door canvassing and other shared collecting practices precedes Rodney's entrance into the field of collecting. As he became a contributor to this culture, he perpetuated these value systems. The advertisement from *Country News and Views* (Figure 3:14) illustrates that collectors were interested in obtaining the 'rarest' of recordings and their value system was often based upon concepts of authenticity and originality.¹⁶ These standards are also upheld through their identifying themselves as 'serious' collectors,¹⁷ which immediately places them in their own subcategory within the field of collecting. Rodney offered me an impression of how standards were measured and developed through *Country News and Views*:

We sought perfection in our record reviews and in our articles. And my experiences in the United States, among the country music fraternity, gave me a tremendous lead – I could write first-hand; about the Grand Ole Opry; and first-hand about the recording artists that I visited and stayed with and all the rest – searching for the records in the South – travelling around the South an' all. And I could bring a wee bit of realism because of my experiences. And em, it was happy days . . . happy days. And there's nothing like finding a rare record, Eve, no nothing like finding a rare record (McElrea, 26 February 2007).

Rodney smiled wistfully at the last remark. As he remembered his past collecting practices he emphasised his 'first-hand' knowledge of the music which, I would argue, also serves as a form of currency within the interexchange between the collectors. The exchange of specialised knowledge between this community of

collectors helps constitute a framework of value of which Rodney's collection is a part.

But as Frow (1996: 13) points out, there is a danger in accepting standards of taste and value, derived from the type of subculture outlined above, as 'the explanatory basis for accounts of cultural texts'. Frow argues that such cultures should be regarded as 'being processes that divide as much as they bring together'. Despite the pages of *Country News and Views* portraying a unanimous standard of tastes and choices during that particular era, (1960s), this judgment of cultural value can only be regarded within the specific context of the collectors who contributed and subscribed to the magazine during its publication. The cultural framework of value that I have outlined with regard to Rodney and his fellow collectors is not necessarily the only identifiable regime of value for the same objects during the same temporal frame.

Appadurai argues:

Politics (in the broad sense of relations, assumptions, and contests pertaining to power) is what links value and exchange in the social life of commodities [and] not all parties [involved in the exchange] share the same interests in any specific regime of value, nor are the interests of any two parties in a given exchange identical. (2003: 57)¹⁸

Rodney presented an example of the conflict between different regimes of value during one of our earlier conversations as he recalled receiving an unfavorable response from Sara Carter (Figure 3:15) of the Carter Family with regard to old recordings which her group had disregarded but which were later discovered and released by Rodney and Freeman. As Rodney was carrying out research at the filing



Figure 3:17: Rodney with Sara Carter and Dave Freeman in Sara's mobile home, Virginia, 1964.

department of the record company RCA in New York in 1965 he came across twenty-three titles that the Carter Family had recorded but not released. Rodney explains:

Now I was instrumental in having eleven or twelve of these titles actually reissued . . . there was a system where they reissued them privately for any person . . . as long as it was limited to one hundred copies. Dave Freeman and I arranged for six plastic 78s to be issued of Carter Family tracks the world had never heard . . . Later on when I met Sara Carter . . . in Virginia and we were discussing these particular reissues, and Sara was very annoyed that these recordings had come out. They were originally held back for a certain reason. Maybe a little slip of the tongue or a little word that shouldn't have been there, some little mistake in a guitar note or something. We don't know what. And she said, "Those were reissued without our permission. We would love to know who done it so we could scold them." And there she was sitting with the two culprits! And we kept our heads down and changed the subject immediately. And of course those six 78s today are absolute treasures. There was only one hundred ever produced worldwide, so there were, and they are complete treasures. (McElrea, September 5 2005)

In Rodney's story, Sara Carter's reaction reveals the contrast between how she regarded the recordings compared with the eager collectors who released the records

as found 'treasures'. This again emphasises the specificity of the value system through which reissues like the Carter Family's were produced and circulated. Although particular systems of cultural value can be identified – and presented within this text - it should be with the understanding that this is merely one means of contextualising the cultural value of an object and it reveals as much about the classifier as the object in circulation itself. As Pierre Bourdieu (in Frow 1996) argues:

Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make . . . in which their position in the objective classification is expressed or betrayed. (Bourdieu cited in Frow 1996: 27)

The tastes and particular choices made concerning the artists featured and the music recommended in *Country News and Views* relates more to the producers of and subscribers to the magazine than to the actual individual artists and music they were advocating.

It is important to emphasise the restricted framework within which the cultural significance of Rodney's collection might begin to be contextualised as it becomes clear, through my discussions with him, how firmly he situates himself and his practices within this specific canon of collectors. He often introduces one collector into the conversation as being the equivalent of another. For example, he describes George Tie, who 'was number one collector in England' (McElrea, 1 November 2007) as being the English counterpart of Edwards (the Australian collector) before adding, 'I would be the Irish counterpart of John Edwards' (ibid.). He often refers to

Edwards during our discussions, and has himself amassed a substantial number of memorabilia based around Edwards and his collection. Rodney also describes a common goal in regard to the role of the collectors he mentions, including Edwards, in popularising old-time music and bringing surviving old-time musicians out of obscurity:

John Edwards actually wrote to every big record company in America, Columbia, RCA and Decca, were the three main ones, and he said you had this recording artist in the twenties and thirties, do you have a present address? And these record companies answered him and said, our last address is . . . so and so. And he wrote to all those addresses. Now in many cases he never got an answer because the artist was dead or had moved away. But in many cases he did. And he followed them up. And he brought some of them back to prominence. In fact some of them started rerecording again – so they did – he brought them out of obscurity, that they were living in. Artists you would never heard of but all have done their wee bit, they've done their contribution and you look back today and it's all history. (McElrea 26 February, 2007)

Through the practice of reissuing records, collectors like Edwards, Freeman, Bussard and Rodney created a broader cultural platform, not just for the artists but for their own private collections, which might gain public recognition.

Therefore although the original redistribution of the collected old-time music had a rather limited framework of value within the context of the subculture of old-time collectors, some of the collections with which Rodney exchanged material have moved beyond the confines of this community into a more public arena. Despite Freeman's humble beginnings as a backwoods collector, with the encouragement of collectors like Rodney he gave up his job as a postal worker in 1965 and established

County Records, which was the first record label to reissue old-time 78 recordings (Figure 3:18). Most of these recordings were sourced from Freeman's own or other private collections. The company has since become Rebel Records and is still one of



Figure 3:18: Label from County Records (left; County Records Shop, Virginia (right).

the major companies issuing old-time and bluegrass music. According to Rodney, Freeman also has 'the largest shop in the world for bluegrass music and old-time in Floyd County in Virginia' (McElrea, 26 February 2007). Freeman transformed his collection into a successful business venture and broadened the market that was created by old-time collectors. Within this context, Freeman's position in the photographs featured in Figures 3:12 and 3:13 appears more dubious, raising questions about the extent to which his scavenging for records played a part in his successful enterprise. Although he (and collectors like him) succeeded in creating and retaining a cultural interest in old-time music, he did so at a cost to others. However, it can be equally argued that much of the music that remains available and is reissued on digital formats today would have been permanently lost were it not for his endeavours.

Joe Bussard now possesses one of the rarest and most valuable collections of old 78s (Figure 3: 19).¹⁹ Rodney has mentioned him to me a number of times and he is one of the people Rodney sought out and visited during his collecting trips in the 1960s.



Figure 3:19: Label from Joe Bussard's company Fonotone (left); Joe Bussard (right)

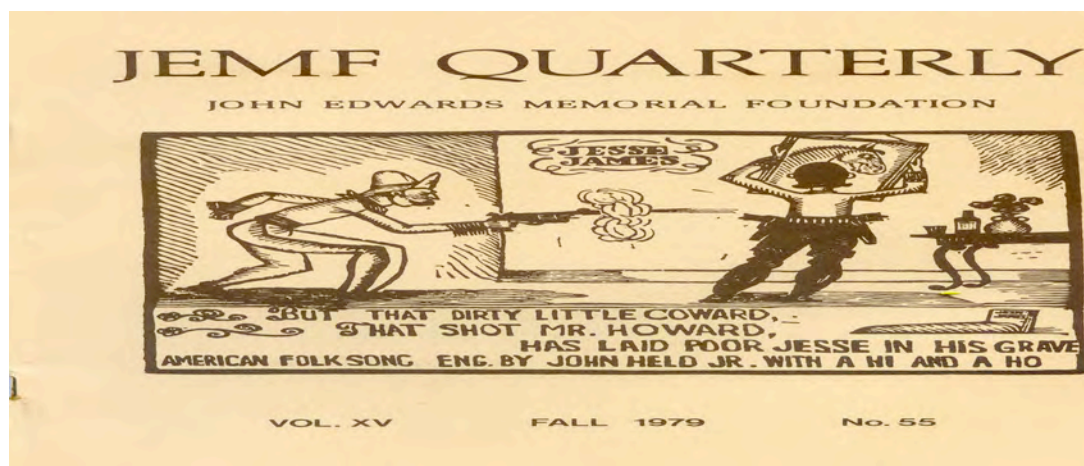
There are quite a few CDs from Bussard's label 'Fonotone' evident in Rodney's collection. Rodney tells me:

Now Joe has countless thousands of old 78s – all original records. And what he's doing now is he's actually putting them on tape because the 78s can get broken. He's putting them all on tape or CD or whatever, and he's selling them the titles to record companies, and individuals and they are reissuing them. And you'll find in a lot of the old-time recordings that you buy now they are reissues, you'll see the name Joe Bussard mentioned (Figure 3:19). He is now making his collection available to others who wish to reissue it. (McElrea, 26 February 2007)

Bussard has turned down a request by the Library of Congress²⁰ to house and preserve his collection and instead makes it available to small independent record companies and other collectors. The cultural interest in Bussard's collection is based

upon the rarity of the records and is of sociohistorical interest to the museum. However, as with Freeman's collection, there is also a monetary value involved; should Bussard put any of his rare collection on the market, there is no doubt they would fetch high prices. Although Bussard (like Freeman) has made a living from what essentially came to him free, he presents a position which foregrounds an agency characteristic of private collectors, in that he is not interested in selling his collection but wants it to remain intact.

Nolan Porterfield,²¹ in his introduction to *Exploring Roots Music: Twenty Years of the JEMF Quarterly*, states that at the time of John Edwards's death in 1960, 'there was no serious program for the study of regional vernacular culture – certainly none that could have accommodated the Edwards collection – in any major southern university' (2004: xiii). The collection was therefore kept in storage by other American collectors²² until such time as scholarship caught up with the collectors' passion for old-time music and it is now part of the Southern Folk Life Collection at



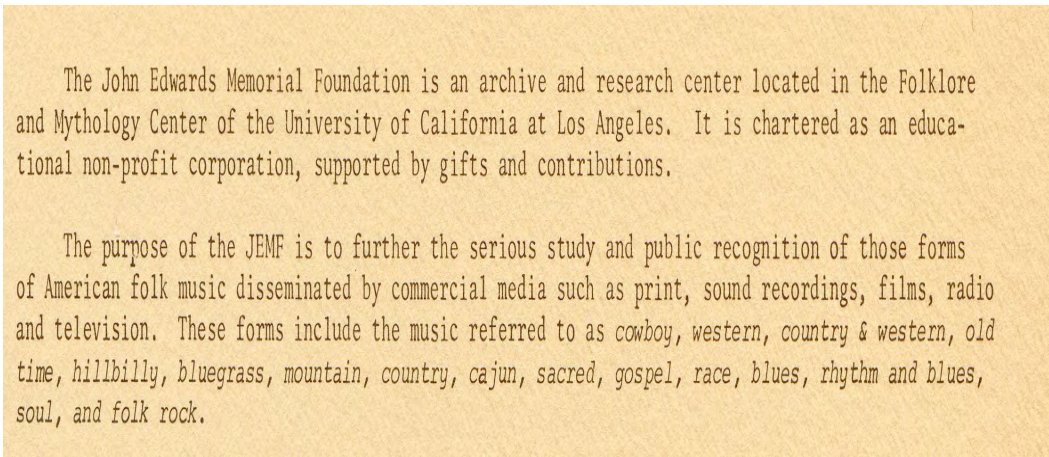


Figure 3:20: Collectors/academics who cared for the John Edwards collection published a quarterly magazine entitled the JEMF Quarterly; extract pictured above.

University of North Carolina.

Despite the institutional/academic/economic interest in old-time collections outlined above, Rodney does not predict a similar fate for his collection. He aligns his own situation with that of other less well-known collectors who were also part of that community of collectors in the 1960s. Although Rodney spent a good deal of time in correspondence with American collectors, some of his most enduring relationships are with people from England and Australia. He maintains a mutual exchange of material and correspondence (Figure 3:21) with an English collector, Dave Barnes from Dover, England who - like Rodney - is still collecting in his seventies. As he explained to me, he uses Barnes's collection as an example of the dilemma he himself is facing:

Dave Barnes has established a country music archive for his own collection. As other collectors in England have died, some very prominent ones –

including the most prominent old-time collector – he got their collections. Now he has something like half a million items; whether they be song sheets or song books or LPs or 45s or old 78s. He doesn't even know what he has anymore, I mean he has to press buttons or go and search. But it seems to me if I gave him my collection – he'd have most of it. (McElrea, 30 October 2007)



Figure 3: 21: Rodney holds a compilation CD produced by Dave Barnes featuring music from his collection.

I have since discovered that the fate of the Barnes archive also remains uncertain, since Barnes has so far failed to attract any institution interested in preserving his collection. When I asked Rodney if his own collection might have success in America, his response was similar to that given in relation to Barnes's archive; he admitted that 'there is nothing they wouldn't have already' (ibid.). When discussing the survival of his collection, Rodney tends to return to an evaluative system based upon concepts of authenticity and originality and then only in regard to the musical format as opposed to the authenticity of, for example, his taped correspondence with artists and other collectors. This raises an interesting dilemma with regard to how I approach an exploration of the potential cultural significance of Rodney's archive, given the different levels/systems of evaluation at play. The regime of value framing

my argument so far – as identified within the community of old-time collectors in the 1960s – has since dissolved or at least been contested. I now consider under which systems of value it might credibly be considered.

Identifying Variable Regimes of Value in Rodney's Private Music Collection


Although Rodney personally values his collection, he tends to use a different set of criteria when considering the possibility of a broader interest in his archive. He explains the lack of institutional interest in his artefacts by declaring that there is nothing unique about the type of object being collected, thus projecting a 'judgment of value' (Frow 1996: 9) that is based upon concepts of authenticity within cultural forms.²³ Despite holding this view, during the lectures (and in our conversations) he relays information and anecdotes to his audience which are based upon a preconceived notion of the significance of the archive and his experiences. He goes further in lamenting the lack of a cultural field in which his collection may continue to survive intact. Rodney is therefore speaking from variable cultural positions with regard to issues of cultural significance and value. This paradoxical positioning can be situated within Frow's argument that regimes of value constantly transcend cultural boundaries, as the concept of the regime is based upon the fact 'that meaning, value, and function are always the effect of specific (and changing, changeable) social relations and mechanisms of signification' (ibid.: 144). Drawing on Frow's conceptualisation, I would like to present and discuss three identifiable regimes of

value which are apparent in the present judgments being made regarding Rodney's collection.

The first of these judgments of value (ibid.) concerns the private fixation of the collector and how s/he values the collection internally. Benjamin (1999) offers interesting insight into such a relationship, where the value that a private collector has for his/her collection could be said to be largely based upon the principles of personal pleasure garnered through the internal relationship between collector and collection (see also Stewart 1993 and Baudrillard 2005). Similarly, Rodney tends not to emphasise the status of his collection in relation to how it might surpass other collections but instead often justifies his archive by the pleasure it has afforded him over the years and continues to do so. Frow (1996: 5) acknowledges the need for cultural texts to include the possible consideration of 'other textual functions [such as pleasure] in social terms' when 'determining conceptions of value'. The concept of pleasure is particularly poignant with regard to this collection and this collector as it grounds the notion of value systems firmly within the biographical elements of the archive. Operating in parallel to this private value system is a public interest in Rodney's music collection, which varies from a casual interest, as demonstrated by the audience present at the lecture series, to a more academic interest, as evident in Professor Bernhardt's personal investment in the collection (Figure 3: 22), in addition to the cultural field in which I would situate my own interest in this archive and

The McAuley Lectures 2006 - In memory of our good friend, Tony McAuley

Jack Bernhardt is a Professor of Anthropology at Wake Community College, Raleigh, North Carolina. Jack will once again enthral our visitors with his informative and entertaining insight into the musical traditions of American folk music. In January 1980, he moved to Chapel Hill, North Carolina and developed a strong interest in country music and playing guitar. He began making trips to Galax, Virginia, and Mount Airy, North Carolina interviewing musicians and recording musical performances. In 1987, he was hired by the *Raleigh News and Observer* as their correspondent covering country and traditional music.



**Saturday 1st September at 1.00pm — Centre for Migration Studies
'More Travels and Tales' with Rodney McElrae**

Throughout the 1960s, Omagh's Rodney McElrae travelled the dusty back roads of the American South, visiting early country music and bluegrass musicians and collecting their recordings. His personal library of music, books, newsletters and correspondence is among the most extensive and important of such collections in Europe. At the past two festivals, Rodney has enthralled the McAuley Lecture audience with insightful tales of his travels and visits with such pioneers as Dorsey Dixon, while in the company of County Records founder, Dave Freeman. Please join us as Rodney and Jack dig further into Rodney's archive for tunes, tales, and untold surprises.

Figure 3:22: Programme advertising the lecture series in which Rodney takes part.

collector. Through my observations of this mixed range of cultural positioning, I would argue that this second judgment of value is primarily focused upon the knowledge of the collector. The third regime of value explains the current institutional interest (or lack of it) in this collection, which is based upon value systems embedded within socially constructed qualitative differences between notions of high and low culture (ibid.).²⁴

There is also an inevitable 'overlap' (ibid.: 151) between each of the regimes of value identified above. For example, Rodney's personal pleasure in his collection is

relational to the systems of value that were generated by the subculture of old-time collectors in the 1960s (of which he was a part). The value judgments made by this community were also derived in opposition to a dominant cultural system which had (at the time) consigned old-time music to a historical past. Frow argues that:

Aesthetic choices are not made in a vacuum: they are made in negative relation to other kinds of objects which could have been chosen . . . To assert a preference means using an unequally distributed cultural competence to evaluate a text in relation to these interlocking systems of relations. (ibid.: 35)

In this way the biographical and the cultural factors determining the significance of this private music collection could be regarded as being simultaneously conflicting and co-dependent, since one status can only be understood in direct relation to the other. It is within this context that the biographical elements unique to private collecting practices might find a broader field of cultural expression. However, although conflicting value systems may be recognised in relation to each other, they nevertheless remain incompatible and, as Frow argues, ‘are not reducible to a single scale’ (ibid.: 132) ‘in terms of [being viewed within] a general economy of value’ (ibid.: 131). How then might the value systems pertaining to the biographical within Rodney’s music collection be understood within an institutional context?

In order to explore this question further I consider an attempt to reconcile the two different systems of valuation. In May and June 1990, the Walsall Museum and Art Gallery curated an exhibition entitled ‘The People’s Show’, which was regarded as an effort to give ‘serious attention’ to the ‘social significance’ (Pearce 2006: 198) of

private collection and collecting practices. The exhibition displayed a number of private collections belonging to the local people of Walsall, including model trains and a collection of autographs. Each collection was accompanied by a photograph of the collector (Figure 3:23) with his/her written comments on reasons or thoughts on collecting. In her analysis of the exhibition, also entitled ‘The People’s Show’, Cathy



Figure 3:23: Two collectors featured in The People’s Show exhibition.

Mullen argues that, ‘these comments communicate knowledge experienced as meaning grounded in the concrete particulars of these people’s lives’ (2006: 288). As when Rodney expresses his pleasure in collecting, the personal comments reprinted as part of this exhibition gave insight into how and why the collectors chose their particular subject and how they personally benefited from such a collection. When discussing the input of the collectors within the context of the exhibition, Mullen (ibid.) argues that this inclusion raises issues concerning ‘the distinctions [being made] between ‘popular culture’ and ‘high culture’, as this type of idiosyncratic private collecting would not normally be presented within the formal context of a museum.²⁵

Mullen argues that by foregrounding personal experience as cultural knowledge within the context of a museum, 'The People's Show' exhibition attempts to equate the biographical (in terms of cultural significance) with the type of specialised knowledge usually cultivated in such an institutional setting. Mullen maintains that the personal knowledge shared within this exhibition 'has [not] been depersonalised by generalization or abstraction' but 'maintains an intimate connection to the people by whom and for whom it exists' (ibid.). She regards the celebration of populist practices such as personal collections as a 'source of cultural empowerment' (ibid.: 290) for those subjects that are not otherwise thought of as being significant within 'official' cultural fields. But does the presence of an idiosyncratic private collection such as the kind found in this exhibition – or indeed Rodney's – really succeed in validating popular culture by being presented within the context of an institutionally constructed framework of value? How is the biographical knowledge (presented here as popular culture) being judged within this context?

In the first instance such a judgment can only be made if, as Frow argues, 'the field of value is conceived as an objectified space' (1996: 6). I would argue that the Walsall Museum cannot be regarded as such, since it has its own particular agenda and criteria within which the private collections are organised and exhibited. Frow cautions that without an acknowledgment of the different regimes of value that are at play there is a danger of such judgments being reduced to 'a sort of pluralist

formalism according to which all domains are taken to be of equal value', which obscures 'the positional framework of [the institutional] knowledge' (ibid.). When reviewing the exhibition in 'The People's Show: A Critical Analysis', Robin Francis asks 'should all forms of collecting be validated in the same way, without distinction, in the context of a museum environment?' (1996: 4). For example, although the collections on display were shown in their entirety, Francis argues that 'the curators did not entirely relinquish their own prerogative to make decisions. Curators made the final decisions; very few lenders were allowed to arrange their own collections' (ibid.: 3); for each collection that was chosen, another was rejected. By presenting a number of personal collections as a celebration of popular culture, the exhibition set a limited cultural context for understanding each private collection and collector on display. I would argue that there is more scope with regard to exploring biographical and cultural knowledge within private collecting practices and would suggest that in its validation of popular culture the exhibition bypassed an opportunity to reflect on the complexities of such a categorisation. Other questions remain to be asked, even in the light of the success of 'The People's Show' in raising issues relating to concepts of popular culture and 'the exercise of power within the museum community' (ibid.: 2).

It is useful to consider this argument with regard to determining a framework of cultural value for Rodney's music archive. There are two issues to be addressed: firstly the categorisation and valuation of private collections like Rodney's within the context of popular culture and secondly (as with the private collections in the Walsall

exhibition) the terms under which Rodney's collection is being evaluated; who is making this judgment? As has been discussed within this text, Rodney's collection is subject to variable regimes of value and therefore resists being considered in terms of a blanket or universal economy of value.²⁶ As Frow argues, working within such limits 'plays down the part of learning and discrimination in all cultural formation' (Frow 1996: 68). For example, Rodney and his community of collectors demonstrate a specialised knowledge of their subject which in turn relays selective and discriminatory systems of knowledge, of the kind that makes distinctions between 'record collectors and *serious* collectors' (McElrea, 15 May 2006).

It is interesting to note that both systems of value involved in the concepts of 'official' or 'high' culture and 'popular' or 'low' culture (as discussed in relation to the Walsall exhibition) are constructed upon the notion of knowledge as cultural capital, whether it is the specialised knowledge needed to engage with a museum piece or the type of personal knowledge needed to engage with the everyday experience of collecting.²⁷ The determining factor as to which type of knowledge belongs in which category at any one time depends on who is controlling/imparting that knowledge; in the Walsall exhibition, for example, the curators maintained control of the way in which this knowledge was represented to the public. Clifford (2006: 261) argues, 'It is important to analyze how powerful discriminations made at particular moments constitute the general system of objects within which valued artefacts circulate and make sense'. This raises the question of what criteria determine the current understanding of Rodney's collection. In addition to Rodney's own

personal investment in it, there are other parties with a vested interest in the collection and the collector which, I would argue, affects the way in which this archive may be considered culturally significant – and I include my own position within this problematic.²⁸ One of my main tasks, therefore, is to try and avoid forming what Frow (1996: 6) refers to as ‘implicit assumptions’ in presenting a ‘field of value’ within my analysis of Rodney’s collection and my accompanying film, particularly when attempting an evaluation based upon overlapping regimes of value.

It is, therefore, important to acknowledge the different criteria within the main judgments of value being identified within this chapter. As discussed in chapter one, Jack Bernhardt’s interest in Rodney’s collection is based upon the cultural knowledge contained within its vast material content as well as within Rodney’s own personal experience. He supplies a public platform for that knowledge annually at the Bluegrass Festival, where it can be shared and appreciated. He also has a personal engagement with the collection during his stay in Omagh each September and has expressed an interest in this research project and how it might foreground the relevance of the experience of the private music collector within an academic field (DVD1 references in thesis, chapter 3, lecture 2007). Bernhardt’s value to the collection can be said to be based upon his position as an academic at Wake Community College, North Carolina²⁹ and a personal interest in the music. Also discussed in chapter one was Richard Hurst’s interest in the collection eventually becoming part of the permanent archive in the Ulster American Folk Museum, of which he is director. Hurst, who also declares a personal interest, is in the unique

position of being able to offer Rodney's collection a permanent home in the museum. He holds that institutions such as his are charged 'with a responsibility to care for the collection [but] where it goes in the future we just don't know at the moment' (Hurst, 15 August 2007). It would, however, be too simplistic to base an evaluation of Rodney's collection solely within the academic/institutional field that both these opinions represent as, I would argue, his position as the collector is central in understanding the 'multiplicity of formations of value' (Frow 1996: 135) that are involved in considering his private collection as a cultural formation.

I have found over the course of my conversations with Rodney that his personal feelings for the future of the collection seem wholly incompatible with the idea of establishing it within an institutional agency. For example, the Edwards collection could be considered as having been successfully transferred from its private context into a public institutional field.³⁰ Rodney's attitude, however, shows that he feels differently about its fate:

I don't know of any example in the past where someone like myself left a large collection, where their wishes were carried out in the way that they wanted them to be. And John Edwards is a good example. He left his collection with a strong stipulation, that is was for Gene Earl, and Fred Hoepfner, and a couple of other collectors, in America. They had it for a while, tried their best to work something with it . . . didn't work out and now it is part of a larger collection. Now it was supposed to be kept separate, according to his wishes . . . But in John Edward's case it didn't work out, it's amalgamated with another large collection [the Southern Folklife Collection; Figure 3:24]. Now that was not his wishes. In my case there have been suggestions as to what should happen to [my collection], but I haven't given them serious consideration, just yet – John Edward's name has now faded.

One time it was the biggest name in country music collections. It has now faded, and my name will fade too. (McElrea, 15 August 2006)

Manuscripts Department: Library of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

SOUTHERN FOLKLIFE COLLECTION #20001 JOHN EDWARDS MEMORIAL FOUNDATION RECORDS

Inventory

Abstract: Correspondence files; files relating to the reprinting of articles, reissuing of records, and administration of grants; and miscellaneous material, all from the John Edwards Memorial

Foundation (Forum), 1962-1982, located at the University of California at Los Angeles. The foundation's goal was to promote the study of twentieth-century American folk music.

Size: About 2900 items (5.00 linear feet)

Provenance: Purchased from the John Edwards Memorial Foundation, along with the John Edwards Memorial Collection, in March 1978.

Letter from Irene Edwards received from Daniel Patterson in May, 1989.

Access: No restrictions.

Related Collections: JOHN EDWARDS PAPERS (#20000)

Added Entries: 1. COUNTRY MUSIC

2. Edwards, John, 1932-1960

3. FOLK MUSIC

4. FOLK-SONGS

5. John Edwards Memorial Foundation

6. SOUND RECORDINGS

Figure 3:24: Excerpt from UNC website featuring inventory of JEMF records (UNC 2001).

During our conversations, Rodney projects strong feelings against the institutionalisation of his collection and has tended to seek a solution in the continuation of the music archive in its current status as a personal endeavour. Despite an acknowledgment that collectors of his generation 'are [gradually] fading away', he yet insists 'but we're hoping to pass it on, you know, pass the crown on to someone else's head, to carry it on' (McElrea, 15 August 2006). This admission

appears to favor a continuation of the collection, rather than a desire for recognition by a broader cultural institution; although this attitude may itself be informed by what Rodney regards as a lack of support from such organisations.

Conclusion

The significance of Rodney's archive not only lies in its material content but also concerns Rodney's knowledge of a history of collecting practices began by private record collectors in the 1940s. Rodney collects the memorabilia of other collectors' lives that he has come across over the years. He gathers and documents their stories and provides a unique perspective on how these collections have been nurtured and how they have found their fate. Through this practice he is also documenting his involvement with that group of collectors and his role in the history of collecting old-time music. It is this biographical element that makes this collection distinctive and the personal investment of Rodney as the collector needs to be recognised alongside other more formal judgments of value.

It is not the focus of this thesis to determine a particular system of value under which this private collection can be deemed culturally significant but rather to explore the different systems and criteria involved in such judgments. As Frow argues:

Rather than engaging in a discourse of value, calculating the relative worth of this text against that text according to some impossibly universal criterion of value, the job of the critic is rather to analyze the social relations of value themselves (1996: 135).

In this way, conflicting value systems as presented above can be identified and explored with an acknowledgement of my own subject position – in the role of researcher - within this framework of value. Therefore it is not my intention to replace one regime of value with another but rather to present an awareness of how assumptions about cultural evaluation might be created in relation to Rodney’s music archive, particularly in the task of constructing a representation of this collection and this collector. As Clifford (2006: 266) argues, ‘The system classifies objects and assigns them relative value’. I would argue further that cultural significance is assigned to this collection according to the way in which knowledge/meaning is organised and presented, regardless of what archival practice governs the process, whether it is within the context of the Folk Museum’s archive, at the annual lectures held during the Bluegrass Festival or within the pages of this thesis. The following chapter draws on my argument when discussing how my ethnographic description of Rodney and his archive are constructed through media practice. Chapter four explores how meaning and cultural significance can be assigned to this private music archive through the employment of particular archival practices and taxonomic systems. During the process of re-archiving Rodney’s collection, I also acknowledge the overlap between concepts of the biographical and the cultural found within his archive.

¹ Pearce (2006: 2) identifies collection studies as ‘a new field, which has found a place in the broader scope of cultural studies only in the course of the last decade or so, although of course individual collections and collectors have been the subjects of a huge range of publications, mostly directed either at discipline or at biographical perspectives’.

² Pearce (2006: 1) argues: ‘It is incumbent upon the investigator to try to find ways in which, first, the social meanings of individual objects can be unraveled; second, the significance of

the museum as a cultural institution can be understood; and third the processes through which objects become component parts of collections, and collections themselves acquire collective significance, can be appreciated.’ This chapter is particularly concerned with the latter part of Pearce’s argument in determining how Rodney’s collection might possess or ‘acquire significance’ (ibid.).

³ Baudrillard (2005) also makes a distinction between household goods such as refrigerators, which he regards as being utensils, and other household objects such as ornaments, which he would classify as possessed objects (see pp. 91–2).

⁴ Pearce sums up Ian Hodder’s view that ‘meaning in an object is threefold. Objects have a use value [a] symbolic meaning [and a] historical meaning. All objects, are, always, working in all three of their ways’ (Pearce 2006: 12).

⁵ Pearce (2006: 157) presents a definition of what constitutes a collection offered in 1932 by Durost, one of the earliest students of collecting: ‘A collection is basically determined by the nature of the *value* assigned to the objects, or ideas possessed. If the *predominant* value of an object or idea for the person possessing it is intrinsic, i.e., if it is valued primarily for use, or purpose, or aesthetically pleasing quality, or other values inherent in the object or accruing to it by whatever circumstances of custom, training, or habit, it is not a collection. If the predominant value is representative or representational, i.e., if said object or idea is valued chiefly for the relation it bears to some other object or idea, or objects, or ideas, such as being one of a series, part of a whole, a specimen of a class, then it is the subject of a collection’ (Durost 1932: 10).

⁶ Pearce (2006: 21) also refers to Barthes (1977), who identifies ‘the langue, broadly, as the signified, that is to say, the body of social understanding which must operate through a social action of some kind’.

⁷ According to Hamilton (2007), libraries only stocked the mainstream recordings and so collectors had to source rarer recordings elsewhere. Freeman (January 2008) also claims that access to rare recordings was generally restricted in libraries. Rodney (McElrea 2007) complained that, in his experience of sourcing records, libraries were never well equipped or well stocked.

⁸ Boxes of records that had been thrown out by record companies often ended up in junk stores across America. Hamilton (2007: 162) claims that, ‘Ever since the radio had replaced the phonograph as the main source of music in most people’s homes, junk shops, general stores and furniture retailers had been inundated with discs, some of them used, some still in their packing crates, for sale for as little as one dollar per box’.

⁹ The domestication of the tape recorder in 1963 made the trading of recorded material possible (Hamilton 2007).

¹⁰ Hegarty’s (2007: 2–3) bases his opinion on William Borroughs and Brion Gysin’s experimental sound artworks using cut-up tape, as well as on *Mix Tape: The Art of Cassette Culture* (Moore 2005).

¹¹ Frow (1996: 9) quotes from anthropologist Marshall Sahlins’s *Culture and Practical Reason* (1976: 206) to illustrate the point that: ‘The very form of social existence of material force is determined by its integration in the cultural system. The force may then be significant.’

¹² Appadurai (2003: 3) argues: ‘Economic exchange creates value. Value is embodied in commodities that are exchanged. Focusing on the things that are exchanged rather than simply on the forms or functions of exchange makes it possible to argue that what creates the link between exchange and value is politics, construed broadly.’

¹³ Appadurai (2003: 57) argues: ‘Politics (in the broad sense of relations, assumptions, and contests pertaining to power) is what links value and exchange in the social life of commodities . . . What is political about this process is not just the fact that it signifies and

constitutes relations of privilege and social control. What is political about it is the constant tension between the existing frameworks (of price, bargaining, and so forth) and the tendency of commodities to breach these frameworks. This tension itself has its source in the fact that not all parties share the same interests in any specific regime of value, nor are the interests of any two parties in a given exchange identical.'

¹⁴ This use of this term is based upon Appadurai (2003: 13–14): 'The commodity candidacy of things is less a temporal than a conceptual feature, and it refers to the standards and criteria (symbolic, classificatory, and moral) that defines the exchangeability of things in any particular social and historical context. At first glance this feature would appear best glossed as the cultural framework within which things are classified.'

¹⁵ Kopytoff (2003) follows up this point in his description of the commodity phase of objects.

¹⁶ Appadurai (2003: 46) offers his perspective on concepts of authenticity in the following manner: 'Though there is a small body of technical procedures and clerical prerogatives involved in authentication, it is by and large a matter in which popular understandings about ritual efficacy and folk criteria of authenticity play a central role. Authenticity here is not the province of experts and esoteric criteria, but of popular and public kinds of verification and confirmation.'

¹⁷ Rodney explains to me his view on what defines a serious collector: 'There is a difference, Eve, by the way, between a collector and a record buyer. A very big difference. The record buyer goes in, buys a present, songs that are on the hit waves or whatever, has no interest in the artist, just in listening to the song. Has no interest in the background, has no interest in who wrote the song. Has no interest in the instrumentation. The record collector is the exact opposite. And that's the category I would class myself. Because I want to know everything about the artist. I want to have a complete collection of their recordings if I like them. I want to know who wrote the songs. I want to know the origins of them. I want to know all about their life. And I want to know about their recording history. And so on and so forth. And that's the difference. And when you look at my collection there, Eve, you can see the difference. It can be seen' (McElrea, 15 August 2006, reel 002).

¹⁸ The full quotation is as follows: 'What is political about this process is not just the fact that it signifies and constitutes relations of privilege and social control. What is political about it is the constant tension between the existing frameworks (of price, bargaining, and so forth) and the tendency of commodities to breach these frameworks. This tension itself has its source in the fact that not all parties [involved in the exchange] share the same interests in any specific regime of value, nor are the interests of any two parties in a given exchange identical' Appadurai (2003: 57).

¹⁹ The Bussard collection is considered valuable in terms of the rarity of the music he has in his collection, which again complies with a value system based upon concepts of authenticity and originality. Joe Bussard is known for his jazz record collection as well as for old-time country. More information on this collector is available at <<http://www.fonotone.com>> [Accessed 6 February 2008].

²⁰ Bussard remains undecided as to what will become of his collection upon his demise. He definitely will not give it to the Library of Congress or any other public institution. Library officials say that Bussard's hoard has a reputation that precedes it. 'We would love to have such a collection', says Sam Brylawski, head of the library's Recorded Sound Section. 'It would fill a lot of gaps here, especially because of its emphasis on country music. It would fit in very well.' Bussard has heard horror stories about how entire collections given to institutions remain in boxes for years, unopened, forgotten, doomed to oblivion. That can't happen to Joe Bussard's records. Never. 'I'm not giving it to any of those places', he says. 'If you give it to them, they shove it back in some hole, and there it sits.' (Taken from interview By Eddie Dean, 12-18 February 1998. Available at

<<http://www.bluesworld.com/Bussard.html>> [Accessed 6 February 2008]).

²¹ Nolan Porterfield has written widely about American music and culture. He won the Center for American History's Achievement Award in 1997 . . . and is the author of five books on American folk/blues/country music (cover notes, Porterfield 2004).

²² The collection was cared for by collectors Gene Earl, an engineer (Porterfield 2004: xi); Fred Hoepfner, a Los Angeles engineer (ibid.: xiii); Ed Kahn, then a graduate at UCLA (ibid.); D. K. Wilgus, a folklorist at Western Kentucky University (ibid.); and Archie Green, who at that time was librarian at the University of Illinois (ibid.).

²³ See Clifford (2006: 262): 'Cultural or artistic "authenticity" has as much to do with an inventive present as with a past, its objectification, preservation or revival.'

²⁴ This is not to say that the other two judgments of value are immune to the cultural and social constructs which determine how 'we' inform our agencies but, for the sake of the specific argument presented here, I would argue that such constructs are more obviously contained and governed within institutional agencies.

²⁵ According to Iain Chambers, 'Official culture preserved in art galleries, museums' is judged upon the need for 'cultivated tastes and a formally imparted knowledge' whereas popular culture does not involve an abstract, aesthetic research amongst privileged objects of attention, but invokes mobile orders of sense, taste and desire' (Chambers in Frow 1996: 67).

²⁶ See Frow (1996: 60-9), 'The Concept of the Popular'.

²⁷ Frow (1996: 90) describes cultural capital in the following terms: 'To speak of cultural capital is to invoke the history of the integration of knowledge into commodity production – the establishment of knowledge as a central productive force. Appadurai (2003: 54) offers the following argument: 'In complex capitalistic societies, it is not only the case that knowledge is segmented (even fragmented) as between producers, distributors, speculators, and consumers (and different sub-categories of each). The fact is that knowledge about commodities is itself increasingly commoditized. Such commoditization of knowledge regarding commodities is of course part of a larger problem of the political economy of culture itself in which expertise, credentialism, and highbrow aestheticism all play different roles. Thus, though even in the simplest economies there is a complex traffic in things, it is only with increased social, technical, and conceptual differentiation that what we may call a traffic in criteria concerning things develops.'

²⁸ For example, this project focuses only on those aspects of the collection and the collector which directly further the critical inquiry into private collecting practices.

²⁹ Prof Bernhardt is professor of anthropology as well as being affiliated to the Southern Folklife Collection in the University of North Carolina.

³⁰ The collection's eventual inclusion in The Southern Folklife Collection is presented in a positive light in Porterfield (2004).

CHAPTER FOUR: REPRESENTING THE PRIVATE COLLECTION

Introduction

Having considered how Rodney's collection might be deemed culturally significant, I now consider in what way the knowledge gained from my encounters with him and his music archive might be best represented through media practice. In this chapter, I continue an argument introduced in chapter one, as to how a practical approach – using recorded sound and the photographic image – can effectively relay my experience within this field site. I reflect upon how the practice of documenting Rodney's collection developed within the field after our first encounter and subsequently led to decisions regarding the construction of an eighteen-minute, multi-media film sequence, presented as an ethnographic description of the time I spent with Rodney in his archive. At first, the scope of Rodney's music archive, and the vast numbers of artefacts open to consideration made it difficult to focus on any one particular group of objects. However, my ongoing conversations with Rodney led me to towards a particular story about his involvement in the posthumous career of old-time artist Charlie Poole. I discuss how I find this story in the archive, document it and then retell it by integrating the story and related collected objects with other media that I have produced for the purpose of this project. Drawing on Rodney's knowledge of his collected objects, I describe my engagement with the material found in his archive and create alternative taxonomic systems of meaning when attempting to represent him and his collection. I present arguments based upon previous consideration of the work of Stewart (1993), Pearce (2006), MacDougall (2006), Sterne (2003) and

Jackson (2006), and I refer directly to Clifford Geertz's *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973) in my approach to ethnographic description. I rely predominantly on Edwards's hypothesis (2001) on the use of the photographic image within ethnographic work and Russell's arguments (1999) concerning experimental film techniques as a means of relaying and exhibiting ethnographic experience. I then relate my film sequence to some of the techniques and practices employed in the argument made by Russell in relation to 'archival film practice' (1999: 238).

An Ethnographic Description of the Private Music Collection

Although my methodological approach so far has been to explore Rodney's collection ethnographically, I now reconsider what is meant by this term and continue to pursue a practical solution to representing the music archive. In chapter one I discuss the way in which the main objective of presenting an ethnographic description through media serves as a means of understanding the collection, since the challenge at this point is to translate my interpretation of the field site successfully into a cultural form that can be 'read' (Geertz 1973: 18) and understood. This process draws on Geertz's description of how ethnographic work should be approached and produced. According to him, ethnographies should be regarded as cultural constructs in themselves, which 'are produced, perceived, and interpreted' (ibid.: 7). My encounters with Rodney and his collection did not result in an uncovering or discovery of meanings, which could be presented as 'findings' granting 'empirical access' (ibid.) to the concept of private collections, but should instead be regarded as an interpretation of this collection based on knowledge gained through ethnographic field work. Further on in the chapter I

explore how, in creating a reading of Rodney's archive, I am producing my own systems of meaning and arranging these structures in specific ways in order to represent my own (and not Rodney's) experience of the collection.

Furthermore, ethnographic description should not be considered a reflection on the reality of experiencing Rodney's music archive but a deliberate creative process of interpretation and representation. This, I would argue, is why sound recording and photography serve this project well. As has previously been suggested in relation to recorded audio (Sterne 2003)¹ but can equally well be applied to the photographic image (Edwards 2001: 28), neither medium captures the reality of an experience but creates instead a documentation of events. For example, in the context of documenting this collection the sound recordings and photographs I have produced can be understood as being archival materials with their own social biographies.² Edwards argues, with regard to the archive:

Photographs have ceased simply to be photographs 'of' things and become, rather, historically specific statements about them . . . in other words, cultural objects in their own right. (ibid.)

The social biographies of the archival materials I am using are considered further on in this chapter. For now, it is useful to note how the constructed image and the sound artefact can be employed in revealing both the process of documenting the field site and the 'interpretative activity' (Geertz 1973: 9) of the researcher at work. As previously identified with regard to sound recordings,³ meaning can be delegated by the ethnographer (in relation to the collection and the collector) through these mediums. When using sound recording and photography, I refer

both of these practices to their own function as recording/documenting devices, whilst also using them in their function of describing the subject they are documenting. Geertz argues that this admission does not render ethnographic description ‘false’ or ‘unfactual’ (ibid. 15) but instead acknowledges such representations as ‘fictions, in the sense that they are “something made”, “something fashioned”’ (ibid.).

One component of my experience with Rodney, which has not been recorded in sound or image and hence is absent from the film, is the gradual development of our personal relationship. Our friendship was built up through phone calls and chats in his home whilst I set up equipment and prepared for my interviews. Familiarity came with our regular contact and my sessions at Rodney’s house became a routine of morning coffee and casual conversation in the kitchen before moving into the archive and discussing the collection. We would then break for lunch and I would spend some time taking photographs before leaving in the late afternoon. As my work progressed, our talks revealed a more comfortable oscillation between the biographical in relation to Rodney’s life of collecting and personal details unconnected to the archive. For example, Rodney tells me about a trip to a particular library in Belfast and includes his personal opinion that small towns like Omagh are constantly overlooked by the government whilst all ‘the money goes to Belfast’. My original concerns about us harbouring conflicting political views remained unsubstantiated, as Rodney only ever expresses a political opinion in relation to how the eastern counties of Northern Ireland are – he felt – largely neglected due to a biased focus on investment in Belfast. I became comfortable enough to inquire about how the Omagh bombing affected

Rodney's family and he was very ready to discuss the topic and only spoke from the perspective of the tragic consequences for those involved. Once again, I realised that the awkwardness in approaching the subject was solely on my part. Rodney's son narrowly escaped being caught in the blast that killed his girlfriend, whom he was going into town to meet. He also lost work colleagues and other acquaintances. Rodney - willing to discuss most subjects with me - would simply ask that the audio recorder be put on pause when speaking about matters that he wished to remain private. This gentle build-up of trust, over time, sustained the steady advancement of my analysis of both the collection and Rodney's motivations as a collector.

Finding Focus in the Archive

Chapter two raises a question: what is it that I – in the role of researcher - am seeking to represent? Having considered the cultural significance of Rodney's collection, as well as other leading thematics that the field site offers for consideration, there can be no definitive or engineered, coherent answer to that question. Instead, what has resulted from this ongoing inquiry is a progression of interrelated and overlapping points and issues, which I intend to address within the final ethnographic media artefact. Geertz discusses successful ethnographies in the following manner:

A good interpretation of anything – a poem, a person, a history, a ritual, an institution, a society – takes us into the heart of that of which it is the interpretation. (ibid.: 18)

I have detailed throughout my writing that Rodney's collection provides no clear structures or systems of meaning. When faced with the task of getting to the heart of the archive, I was guided by the early realisation that meaning in this field site is determined by Rodney's interrelationship with his collection, which, in turn, is accessible through his performance. Geertz (ibid.: 10) further advises that 'the thing to ask about [human behavior] is what is . . . getting said'. Therefore I began this process by focusing on Rodney's vocal performance and the many hours of sound-recorded material produced during my encounters with him, as a means of accessing and 'figuring out' (ibid.) possible interpretations of his music collection.

Channeling meaning from the lengthy transcripts of my discussions with Rodney proved no easy task. Due to the conversational method of our interviews the tape recorder was left running for the duration of my visits to him, producing hours of field recordings and consisting of countless anecdotes and general everyday observations and discussions. Despite Rodney's supposed lack of interest in my project, he always seemed concerned that I had 'got all I needed' from any particular visit. I continued to allow him to lead the conversation but would interject if he veered too far from a subject in which I was interested. There is, therefore, much repetition on the tapes, as Rodney would recount the same anecdote to me a number of times over the years. There are stories relating to individual collectors or artists and encounters and experiences during collecting trips, as well as numerous conversations relating to the history of old-time music. Our talks are also peppered with references to both Rodney's family and my own. As a collection, these recordings are indicative of the sprawling and overlapping

structures of meaning found in the music collection. I spent a substantial amount of time listening to and transcribing these recordings, whilst not knowing how they might be situated within my ethnographic description of his archive or made relevant within the context of my inquiry. I relate the difficulty of this situation to Geertz's description (ibid.: 7) of facing 'the sort of piled up structures of inference and implication through which an ethnographer is continually trying to pick [his/her] way'. Geertz refers to ethnography as 'thick description' within which the ethnographer 'must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render' (ibid.: 9–10) the ethnographic experience. I am left with the task of finding a method of classifying these transcripts in the form that best suits my analysis.

During time spent 'listening' to the taped recordings, I begin to focus on the repetition in the content of the stories. Rodney repeats himself often; retelling particular events in his collecting career in both the lectures he performs for the Bluegrass Festival and the conversations we have together. Generally I welcome the repetition, as a subsequent version of a story might provide more detail than a previous one. My knowledge of old-time artists and their music grew substantially through my encounters with Rodney. I became more informed regarding the characters and places that featured in his collection and a particular story would take on greater significance on hearing it a second or third time. Geertz argues that 'analysis . . . is sorting out the structures of signification . . . and determining their social ground and import' (ibid.). The behavioural pattern of repetition throughout Rodney's performance of the collection imbues the events being recalled with significance (by granting them precedence over others) and

subsequently offers me a method of mapping out some form of structure amongst the vast quantity of recordings. I find that following the trail of a particular story helps in navigating a path through Rodney's personal history of collecting.

One such story relays Rodney's involvement in the posthumous career of old-time singer/musician Charlie Poole (1892–1931). I became very familiar with this story as Charlie Poole, being one of Rodney's favorite old-time artists, would come up regularly in conversation. Rodney became interested in the singer in the 1960s and visited his hometown in North Carolina in 1965. There he met surviving members of Poole's family and later struck up a correspondence with his nephew, Cliff Rorrer.⁴ Rodney became part of a conglomerate which was instrumental in reviving Poole's music career and re-establishing his reputation as having defined the old-time country music sound.⁵ The more familiar I became with Poole and his music, the more impressed I became with this story. It is also of interest because it demonstrates how Rodney established himself within the history of Poole's musical career, while from a critical point of view it relates his practices as a private collector to cultural narratives and social relationships beyond his music archive. Focusing on this story also foregrounds the process through which Rodney reveals to others his collection and the events he deems significant.⁶ Over the course of my time with him, Rodney approaches stories about Poole from different perspectives, each story embellishing or informing the others. In total I gather seven versions of this story as told to me by Rodney.

Finding Structure in the Archive; Sound Recording as Taxonomy of Meaning

The Charlie Poole story lies dispersed amongst the hours of taped conversations and must first be assembled and rearranged. As discussed previously, meaning in this archive is reliant on Rodney's classification of his collection (Stewart 1993) within his narratives. My objective, therefore, is to follow his example when creating an ethnographic description of the archival site by organising the Charlie Poole story within my own narrative of Rodney's archive. The fragmentary story is first collected on digital format and transcribed. The transcripts are then edited and re-edited into a more clearly defined narrative. I arrange the story into a possible progressive narrative of beginning, middle and end, imposing a 'linear' structure (Thorn 1996: 2) according to the order in which I imagined the events took place. The purpose of this arrangement is not to transfer the abstract into 'unified patterns' (Geertz 1973: 17) within which to understand the collection (this linear system is itself later disrupted within the structure of the film sequence), but to describe the main events of the story coherently for the reader/observer.

I arrange the story as follows: Rodney first discovers the music of Charlie Poole and the North Carolina Ramblers in King's Record Shop in Yarmouth, England in the early 1960s. In 1965 Rodney and Dave Freeman undertake a special trip to North Carolina to research Charlie Poole; there they meet and befriend his family, particularly Poole's nephew, Cliff Rorrer, who is at the time the deputy sheriff of Leaksville. When Rodney discovers that Poole's talents are not publicly acknowledged and that he does not have a marker on his grave, it inspires him to

raise money for one through his publication *Country News and Views*. Rodney's name is included on the headstone. He returns to North Carolina once the monument is erected and is photographed by the press and interviewed on radio in relation to these events. Around this time Freeman is the first to reissue Poole's backlog of recordings.⁷ Rodney continues a lengthy written correspondence with Cliff Rorrer. Rorrer's son Kinney Rorrer has since written a book⁸ about Poole and there is an annual Charlie Poole Music Festival held in North Carolina.⁹

Although this is not how the story is organised either within the collection or within the documentation of this field site, I impose some coherence to the structure of the story for the sake of demonstrating the first stage of interpreting meaning in Rodney's private collection. Geertz (1973: 17) argues that 'cultural systems must have a minimal degree of coherence, else we would not call them systems'. The purpose of this first arrangement is to illustrate the restructuring of the story and highlight its progression from how it exists in the archive to a linear structure within the text to (later) a more multilayered taxonomic system within the film sequence. It therefore serves as a means of comparison for the reader/observer. The audio that is selected in relaying this story within the film sequence is taken from a number of sources. Since Rodney has discussed the events many times, the excerpts of audio containing the telling of the story are taken from most of the interviews conducted over a three-year period. There are also audio clips from the lecture series, including a contribution from Professor Jack Bernhardt, who provides a back-story about Charlie Poole for Rodney's audience. Also included are recordings made by Kinney Rorrer specifically for

this project. I first heard of Kinney when Rodney mentioned him at the Lecture in 2005:

Kinney Rorrer . . . is a history professor at a community college in Danville, Virginia. And also a great Charlie Poole-style banjoist. And Kinney has written a book on his great uncle . . . which is available (McElrea, 5 September 2005).

Kinney (Figure 4: 01) wrote a book entitled *Rambling Blues: The Life and Songs of Charlie Poole*, which details the life of Poole and the legacy of his music



Figure 4:01: Kinney Rorrer (left; Cover of Rorrer's book (right).

I contacted Kinney, at his home in Virginia, regarding letters his father had sent to Rodney in the 1960s. He had also been present during Rodney's visits and remembers him fondly in an email he sent in response to my request for his cooperation:

Your note brought back such pleasant memories of Rodney coming to our house when I was a young man. My mother and dad thought so much of him. He was very kind to them (Rorrer, 12 June 2009).

Kinney recorded himself reading out his father's correspondence and sent the recordings to me. They are included within the media sequence in the telling of

the story. Finally, the ambient sounds captured from Rodney's archive and household are also integrated into the ethnographic soundscape of the collection.

Photography as an Archival Medium

In addition to the sound recordings there are many artefacts in the collection relating to this narrative. During the telling of this story, Rodney would often produce objects from the collection which serve as testament to his experience. Mindful of the fact that Rodney will not always be present to tell the Charlie Poole story, I am aware of how its material manifestation lies scattered amongst the collection of objects and is only held together by Rodney's narratives. Newspaper clippings, photographs, letters and other personal documents are instrumental and illustrate how the biography of the collector is deeply embedded within the cultural narratives of the objects he collects. Therefore the intention is to utilize these artefacts in a manner similar to how they are classified by Rodney within the narrative structure of his stories of collecting.¹⁰ I re-examined photographs I had taken of Rodney's collection when deciding which objects were most significant to the Charlie Poole story. The objects chosen include two press photographs given to Rodney by Cliff Rorrer; Cliff Rorrer's letters to Rodney; an edition of *Greensboro Daily News* dated Sunday, 15 June 1969; a pink A4 folder containing papers detailing the collection of money for the monument; and a mixed tape which contains a number of tracks of Poole's music that Rodney made for me during one of our listening sessions.

When working on the Charlie Poole story I informed Rodney (by phone) that I was interested in writing a chapter based upon his relationship with Poole's family and music. Rodney showed no striking interest in the details of my analysis but offered without question to gather the objects I needed for my work. Although I was willing to come up to Omagh to collect them, Rodney insisted that he was happy to post them and that I could hold on to them as long as I wanted. The collaborative nature of the research became more marked when Rodney continued, thereafter, to source the information/artefacts I needed to write this thesis. As the objectives of my research became clearer, I would try to engage Rodney in discussion of my thesis but it seemed enough for him (at that time) to have a regular and interested listener to his stories.

I classified the objects I received from Rodney according to the way in which I interpreted their role within the Poole story. As I did not have permanent access to the objects in question, I photographed them. The digital replication of these artefacts allowed them to be integrated with my own collection of photographs and sound recordings of Rodney's archive, which feature within the reconstruction of the story. As noted in chapter two¹¹ these objects, momentarily removed from the collection, can be considered within their own social or cultural biographies (Kopytoff 2003; Appadurai 2003) or equally related to Rodney's biography through their content. Separated from the system of his collection, they are open to broader interpretations. I can, therefore, delegate meaning through the method of photographing the artefacts, but only, as will be discussed further, up to

a point, since the meaning of the photographic image can never be fully contained or controlled (Edwards 2001).

In the following section I consider the series of photographs of the chosen artefacts, presented here in Figures 4:03 to 4:08, in order to understand how the photographic image works within the context of an archival medium. The first object photographed and presented in the series (Figure 4.03) is the pink folder and list that Rodney uses to keep records of the fund-raising for Charlie Poole's monument. Rodney sought donations from the subscribers of *Country News and Views* and collected the money before sending it to Cliff Rorrer in Leaksville, North Carolina. I came across this file during Rodney's lecture in 2005. It is one of the objects that Rodney brought along to show the audience (Figure 4:02). I noticed that there were two headings handwritten on the pink folder, the first of



Figure 4:02: Rodney, with pink folder, at lecture, 2005.

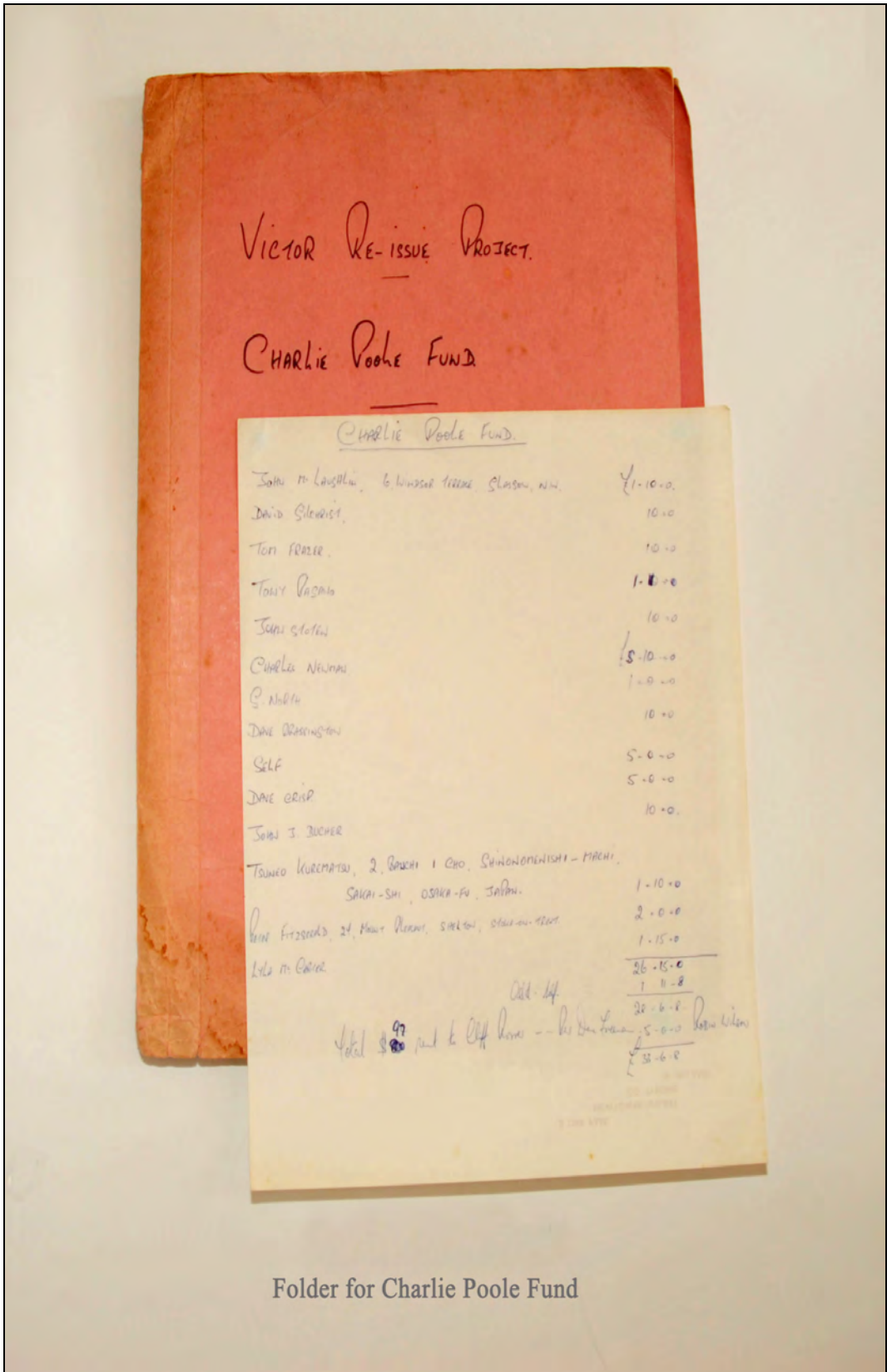
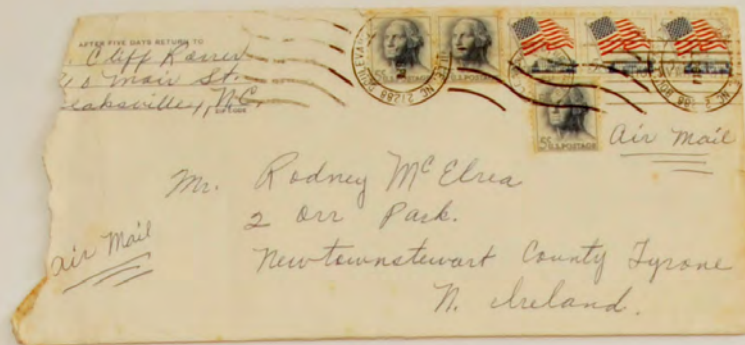


Figure 4:03: Pink folder and list containing details of Charlie Poole Monument Fund, 1965-6.



Leaksville, N.C.
May 9, 1966

Dear Rodney:

I received your nice letter, and magazine, and I want you to know that I was real pleased to get them.

I don't know exactly how to express myself I don't think that I can find the words, for what you have done. I think it is wonderful the money you have collected in such a short while. I am sure the people here, and Uncle Charlie's Widow will always have a love in their heart for you.

I think the words that you want put on the stone is fine, and they will be put there. I will send you a picture of it all. You mention about Uncle Pacey if the fund goes over we will put a small marker there.

We were real glad to have Dave Truman down the week-end of April 22nd we had a nice visit

Letter from Cliff Rorrer

Figure 4:04: Letter from Cliff Rorrer to Rodney, dated 9 May 1966.



Cliff Rorrer and Lou Emma Poole at Charlie Poole's Graveside

Figure 4:05: Photograph sent to Rodney by Cliff Rorrer, 1966.

Tracing Country Music Origins Back To N.C.



The North Carolina Ramblers
1927



Clifford, Doug And Kinsey Rorer Make Music
Patterns Of Carolina Ramblers Hang On To Fall

Young Rorer Insists On Role Of 'Ramblers'

BY JACK SCHEM
A young man who insists that the origins of country music are in North Carolina is Kinsey Rorer, 23, of Rockingham. Rorer, who is a member of the North Carolina Ramblers, a group of musicians who trace their roots to the 1920s, says that the music is a blend of English, Irish, and Scottish folk music. He says that the Ramblers are the only group in the state that still plays the music in its original form. Rorer says that he has been playing the music since he was a child and that he has been teaching it to other young people. He says that he has been playing the music for over 10 years and that he has been playing it in many different places. He says that he has been playing it in many different places and that he has been playing it in many different places. He says that he has been playing it in many different places and that he has been playing it in many different places.

Rockingham Edition GREENSBORO DAILY NEWS

SUNDAY MORNING, JUNE 15, 1969

No Water Shortage Seen In Reidsville, 'We're In Good Shape'

BY CAROL FERGUSON
Reidsville, N.C., (Special to The News) — The city of Reidsville is in good shape for the summer months, according to city officials. They say that the city has a good water supply and that there is no shortage of water. They say that the city has a good water supply and that there is no shortage of water. They say that the city has a good water supply and that there is no shortage of water. They say that the city has a good water supply and that there is no shortage of water.

Baker: Fire Station Is Key Budget Item

BY CAROL FERGUSON
Reidsville, N.C., (Special to The News) — The city of Reidsville is in good shape for the summer months, according to city officials. They say that the city has a good water supply and that there is no shortage of water. They say that the city has a good water supply and that there is no shortage of water. They say that the city has a good water supply and that there is no shortage of water.

Rotary Club Address

Smaller Schools Still Have Advantages, Says Carroll

BY JACK SCHEM
A young man who insists that the origins of country music are in North Carolina is Kinsey Rorer, 23, of Rockingham. Rorer, who is a member of the North Carolina Ramblers, a group of musicians who trace their roots to the 1920s, says that the music is a blend of English, Irish, and Scottish folk music. He says that the Ramblers are the only group in the state that still plays the music in its original form. Rorer says that he has been playing the music since he was a child and that he has been teaching it to other young people. He says that he has been playing the music for over 10 years and that he has been playing it in many different places. He says that he has been playing it in many different places and that he has been playing it in many different places.

DRIVE A BARGAIN ON YOUR VACATION!
DRIVE A '69 CHEVROLET!

UP TO \$900.00 DISCOUNT
"Before You Buy, Give Us A Try"
NESTOR CHEVROLET, Inc.
Reidsville, N.C.
123 Williams St. DR342-2931

Fine Furniture and Carpeting
You **PAY LESS** at
FLYNN Furniture Co.
MADISON, N.C.

ANNIVERSARY SALE
ALL SUMMER MERCHANDISE SPECIALLY PRICED DURING THIS FIRST ANNIVERSARY SALE. HERE ARE JUST A FEW!

SPORT COATS Reg. to \$29.95 Now Priced At Low At \$18.95	MEN'S UNDERWEAR Reg. to \$1.25 Now Only 88c	MEN'S BATHING SUITS By CALPINE Reg. \$1.95 Now Only \$2.95
SUMMER DRESSES, PAET DRESSES Now Priced At Low At \$4.95	LADIES' SWIM SUITS By Robby Lee At Low At \$9.95	LADIES' SLACKS Now Specially Priced At Low \$2.95

The Fashion Post
1313 S. Seales St.
Reidsville, N.C.

Greensboro Daily News Sunday, June 15 1969

Figure 4:06: Page of the Greensboro Daily News, dated 15 June 1969.



Photograph of Rodney at Charlie Poole's Graveside

Figure 4:07: Press photograph of Rodney at the monument he had erected to Charlie Poole, 1967.



Figure 4:08: Mixed tape made by Rodney for researcher, 30 October 2007.

which states ‘Victor Re-issue Project’. Rodney explains:

That’s the original file actually, that RCA gave me forty years ago, the Victor Reissue project, that was [for] the Carter Family stuff, and the Charlie Poole fund file [was also] used for that. (McElrea, 5 September 2005)

This file, therefore, had a previous life when it was used for holding the notes Rodney took during his two month stay at RCA Victor’s recording archive in 1966. Rodney has since described to me how he painstakingly copied by hand all the filed notes on the Carter Family recordings, amongst others. These notes were then moved elsewhere in the collection and replaced by the current list of names of those collectors who contributed to the costs of producing the Charlie Poole monument.

Rodney presented this folder again during one of my visits to his house. I had expressed an interest in the Charlie Poole story and on my arrival he had all the



Figure 4:09: Rodney in archive, 30 October 2007.

clippings and photographs referring to those events gathered within the pink folder ready for my inspection (Figure 4:09). As we sorted through the items on the table Rodney began the story again:

You see that time I had the magazine, me and that fella Charlie Newman. When I went out to the United States for the first time, I met the fiddle player's nephew [Cliff Rorrer],¹² who'd played with the North Carolina Ramblers. He said you know the grave was unmarked. I said for such a well-known singer as Charlie Poole? So I arranged to collect money through the magazine – subscriptions. And I sent out two or three hundred dollars. And they erected it and then put my name on it because I was the instigator of it. (McElrea, 31 October 2007)

The list in Figure 4:03 includes the amount each subscriber paid towards the monument, including Rodney's contribution, which is recorded as 'SELF' ninth from the top of the list. I recognise many of the names on this document from Rodney's stories about his fellow collectors. Towards the bottom of the page Rodney noted an amount of '\$97 sent to Cliff Rorrer'. There is also a reference to Rodney's fellow traveller, Dave Freeman, who was the first to reissue Poole's music on his label, County Records.

Since the significance of these objects (to the collection) lies within this type of detail, I photographed them in a manner that illustrates this information. For example, in Figures 4:03 to 4:08, the objects are centered within the frame and are evenly lit to offer a full visual description of the artefacts. They are also labeled within the frame of the image and numbered on the exterior frame for the purpose of identification within this thesis. I relate this type of photographic practice to the

traditional methods used for photographing ethnographic objects for both display and archiving in museums.¹³ Edwards argues:

Photographing objects was (and still is) integral and crucial to the apparatus through which ethnographic and museological knowledge was made, generating discourse around objects. (2001: 51)

I situated the selected objects within this visual setting in order to explore how this genre of photography might be used in negotiating meaning within the representation of Rodney's archive. According to Edwards, the simplistic evidential style of this genre of photographic practice is generally 'naturalised within museum curatorial practices' (ibid.) and has been 'overlooked' (ibid.) in the critical discourses surrounding the subject of photography, despite photography's continuing role in presenting ethnographic knowledge and 'creating certain ways of seeing' (ibid.: 56) within interpretations of cultures and societies. I address Edwards's point by considering how this photographic practice is contextualised alongside the other types of images I am using within my ethnographic description of the collection.

The second image (Figure 4:04) contains a letter and its envelope sent to Rodney from Cliff Rorrer and dated 9 May 1966. I chose this letter from the selection that Rodney sent on to me. Again, the visual emphasis is on the content of the image; in this case it is important that the writing and the detailing of the address and date appear legible. Edwards terms the 'visual directness' (ibid.: 53) of this type of image 'a photographic vocabulary' which is easily identifiable within 'ethnographic classification' (ibid.: 76). The emphasis on the informational or

evidential qualities of the image creates what Edwards refers to as an ‘invisible’ aesthetic (ibid.). I employ this technique in order to render the ‘photographic performance’ (ibid.: 51) of these images visible within their role of shaping the perception of the object being photographed, by identifying and destabilising the various ‘informational’, ‘disciplinary’ and ‘institutional rhetorics’ (ibid.) that are at play within this photographic practice.¹⁴

Rodney also presented the Cliff Rorrer letters to his audience (Figure 4:10) during



Figure 4:10: Rodney at lecture, 2005

his first lecture in 2005. He explained how the two men met during one of the collecting trips in North Carolina, when Rodney specifically sought out relatives of Poole’s. Rorrer was the sheriff of Leaksville at that time and Rodney recalls a tour around the local jail and other places associated with Charlie Poole and his band. Rodney holds the letters aloft and continues:

Now Cliff and I kept in touch – he’s now long deceased so he is and em, I want to let you see his letters. Cliff Rorrer, Leaksville, North Carolina. [Rodney flips through the bundle of letters in his hands] Cliff Rorrer; Cliff Rorrer; Cliff Rorrer; there are others – quite a few others - as well that I have on another file. But those are all to do with Charlie Poole and his family and so on. I helped and others as well, helped to raise the money, for the monument that was raised to Charlie Poole. (McElrea, 5 September 2005)

Whereas Figure 4:10 places the letters within the context of Rodney’s collecting practice, Figure 4:04 removes any visible cultural/social context and instead offers an opportunity to delve into the content of one page of the letters. The ‘visual space’ (Edwards 2001: 76) afforded this page and the legibility of the writing encodes this artefact with significance and classifies it as an ethnographic object in its own right.

The series of correspondence featured in Figure 4:10 – which lasted over a period between 1964 and 1969 – portrays the relationship between Rodney and Rorrer and details the construction of the monument to Poole, whilst also referring to subsequent visits made by Rodney over the course of the years. This particular letter (Figure 4:04) offers a momentary glimpse into some of those events which Figure 4:11 illustrates below:

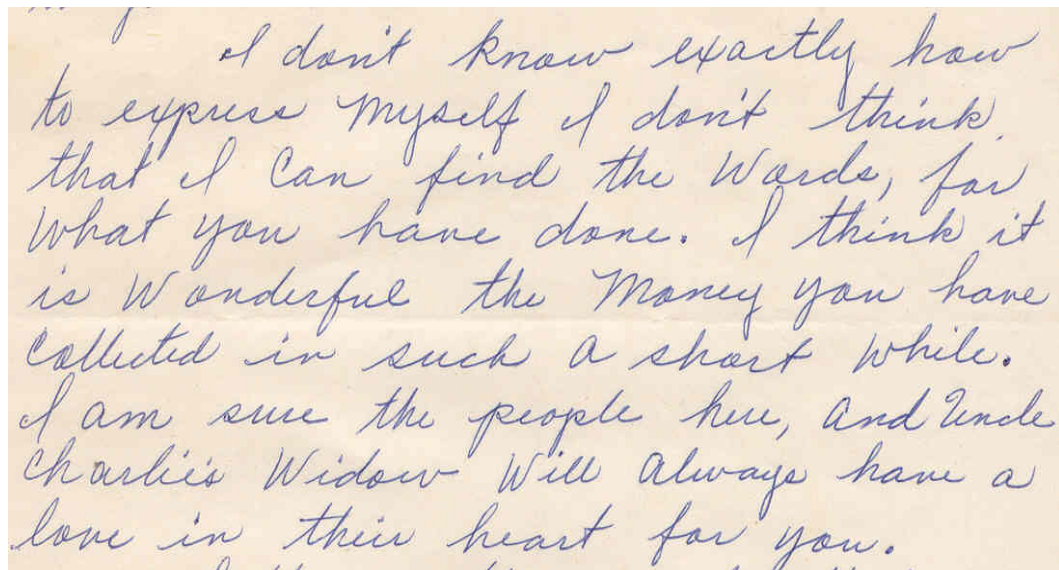
A photograph of a handwritten letter on aged, yellowish paper. The text is written in a cursive script. The visible text reads: "I don't know exactly how to express myself I don't think that I can find the words, for what you have done. I think it is wonderful the money you have collected in such a short while. I am sure the people here, and Uncle Charlie's Widow will always have a love in their heart for you."

Figure 4:11: Detail of letter dated 9 May 1966.

Reading through the entire correspondence between the two men, I discovered that Rorrer expresses his gratitude to Rodney over and over again. The content of the writing maintains the artefact's connection to Rodney and documents the two men's close relationship with each other. The letter also reveals (Figure 4:12) that

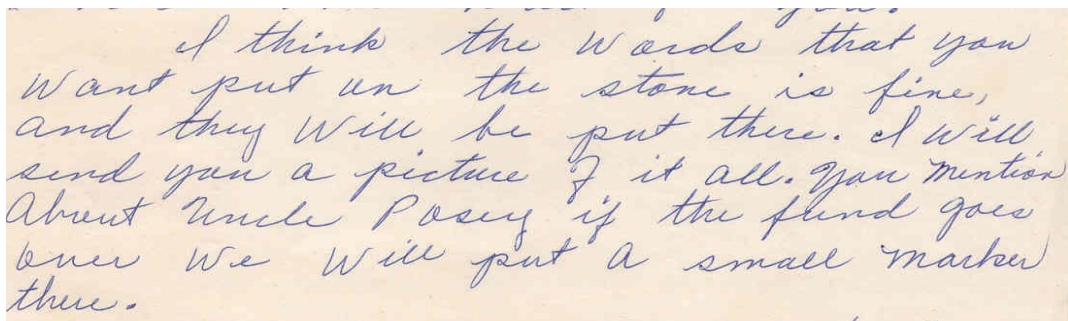
A photograph of a handwritten letter on aged, yellowish paper. The text is written in a cursive script. The visible text reads: "I think the words that you want put on the stone is fine, and they will be put there. I will send you a picture of it all. You mention about Uncle Posey if the fund goes over we will put a small marker there."

Figure 4:12: Detail of letter dated 9 May 1966.

Rodney authored the inscription on the tombstone: 'Erected and Dedicated by Rodney McElrea North Ireland, and Readers of Country News and Views' (Figure 4:13).

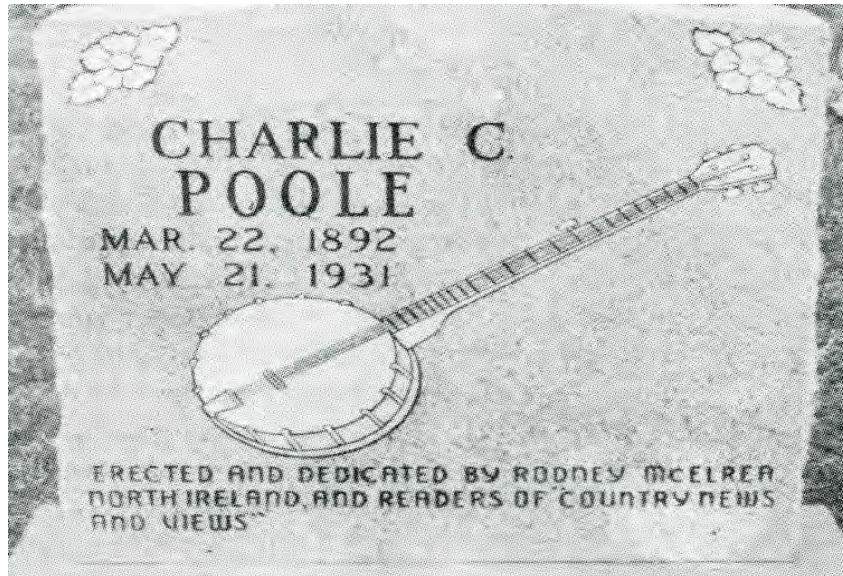


Figure 4:13: Detail of headstone taken from *Maverick* magazine, Issue 97, August 2010.

This line – which is literally carved in stone – exists as a permanent testament to the interrelationship between Rodney’s and Poole’s biographies.

During the lecture in 2005 Rodney mentioned the fact that Rorrer requested his help in erecting a similar monument to Rorrer’s other uncle, Posey Rorer, who was the fiddle player in the North Carolina Ramblers. Rodney expressed his regret at not being able to help with this second marker:

Cliff Rorrer actually wanted a similar monument raised to his uncle the fiddle player, and at that stage I was moving house, my Dad had died and so on, and I didn’t really want to get involved. There was too much work involved for it took quite a lengthy period. I’m sorry now I didn’t get involved looking back on it but it just didn’t work out at that time. (McElrea, 5 September 2005)

This subject is also referred to near the bottom of the page in the letter (Figure 4:04). Rorrer repeats his requests for help with the second monument in

subsequent letters but eventually manages to have one made with financial support from locals and Dave Freeman. A similar design was retained for both



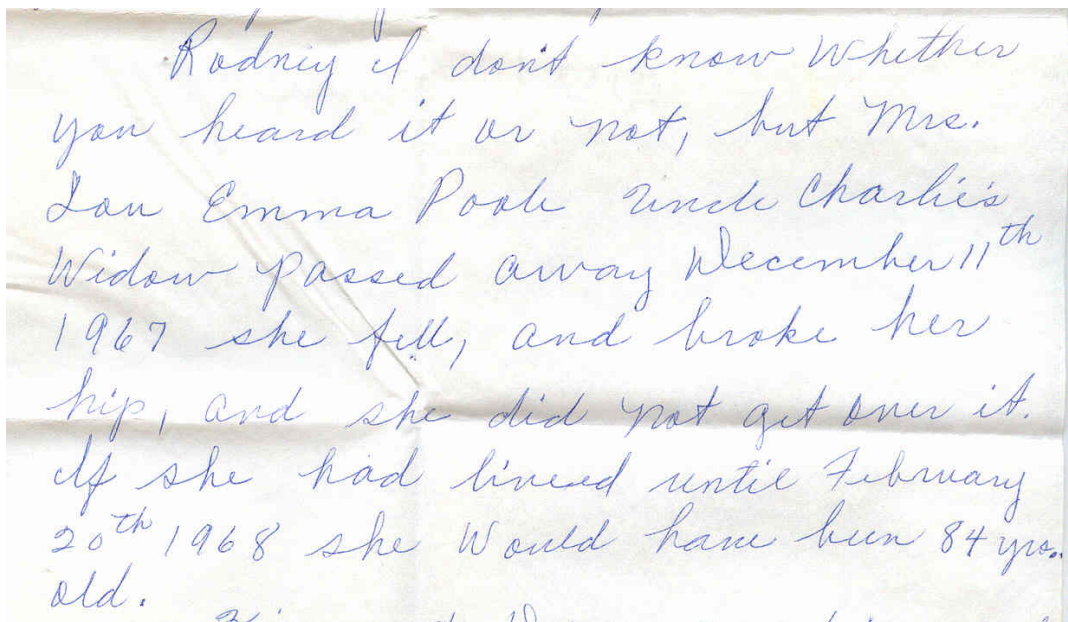
Figure 4:14: Image from Kinney Rorer’s book, *Rambling Blues: The Life and Songs of Charlie Poole*.

markers (Figure 4:14). In a following letter Rorer tells Rodney how Charlie Poole’s marker was erected during ‘a beautiful . . . memorial service’ and he wishes Rodney could have been there to see ‘Aunt Lou Emma Poole – Charlie’s widow – unveil the stone . . . to him’ (letter dated 5 June 1966).

Cliff Rorer sent Rodney the press photograph that was taken of him and Lou Emma Poole standing at either side of the monument, which is the third artefact included (Figure 4:05). Rodney shows the photograph to the audience of the Bluegrass Festival:

But there’s the monument there – you can see it there in the back – but that’s Cliff Rorer and [Charlie’s] wife – deceased now, standing besides that particular monument, in North Carolina, which I was involved in the erection of. (McElrea, 5 September 2005)

The two figures in the photograph appear awkwardly posed, arms resting uncomfortably on the headstone, both wearing solemn expressions. Lou Emma is Charlie Poole's second wife and Posey Rorer's sister, and therefore the connection between the Rorer family and the singer. Rodney never met Lou Emma Poole in person during his trips to Leaksville but she was made aware of him through her nephew, Cliff. Her death is recorded in a letter dated February 1968. Cliff Rorrer writes:



Rodney I don't know whether you heard it or not, but Mrs. Lou Emma Poole Uncle Charlie's Widow passed away December 11th 1967 she fell, and broke her hip, and she did not get over it. If she had lived until February 20th 1968 she would have been 84 yrs. old.

Figure 4:15: Detail from Cliff Rorrer letter, dated February 1968.

The photograph of Mrs Poole by the monument is one of the few images of her held in Rodney's files but she is frequently mentioned in Rorrer's letters.

The photograph (Figure 4:05), which is now a collected object within the context of Rodney's collection, represents the event of the unveiling of the marker

Rodney had erected in Poole's honour and it situates Lou Emma Poole within this story of the archive. However, I have removed it from this context and reclassified it within the pages of this thesis. Edwards (2001: 56) quotes Snyder¹⁵ in describing this type of photographic image as involving a 'rhetoric of substitution', where the photograph of the object is presented as a substitute for the absent object. Since the object in this case is also a photograph, there is a double transparency at play, currently presented as an image within an image. But, Edwards argues, there are points where a 'slippage [occurs] between the object and its image' (ibid.). For example, I would argue that details such as the title under the picture and the space afforded around the photographic object, along with the title printed on the exterior frame, disrupt the direct observation of the actual photograph and contextualise the picture within a 'taxonomic structure of viewing' (ibid.: 63)¹⁶. I would further argue that the refocus on the 'performance' (ibid.: 51) of the image orientates the attention of the observer to a reclassifying of Rodney's private music archive through ethnographic description.

The fourth artefact (Figure 4:06) chosen in the telling of this story and photographed in a similar manner to the others is an issue of the *Greensboro Daily News*, dated 15 June 1969. Rodney sent me this particular issue which gives some details of the posthumous interest in Charlie Poole's career three years after the erection of the monument. The newspaper page within Figure 4:06 is intended to represent the media interest in Rodney and to illustrate the broader scope of this story, which reaches beyond the confines of Rodney's archive and interrelates the biographical properties of the collection to other socio/cultural narratives. This

newspaper article centres the story around Kinney and his book about Charlie Poole; Kinney, according to the article, ‘inherited some of the musical talent so greatly possessed by Posey Rorer’. The article also mentions the reissues of Poole’s music, beginning the story with the discovery of an old Charlie Poole 78 recording an attic in Las Vegas. According to the article, this music was brought

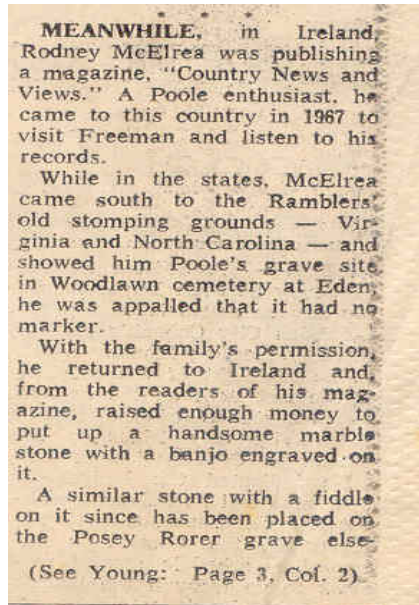


Figure 4:16: Detail of *Greensboro Daily News*, dated 15 June 1969.

to the attention of a radio disc jockey who ‘started a campaign to find out who and where Charlie Poole was’. The search led to Cliff Rorrer in Leaksville, who also had some records ‘made by his uncles’. The article then discusses Dave Freeman’s reissues of Poole’s music and finishes the story with Rodney’s involvement in having the monument erected in 1966 (Figure 4:16).

Offering a different perspective on the story, since it is not told in direct reference to Rodney, the article is incorrect in dating his first visit to North Carolina to 1967, as the monument, according to Cliff Rorrer’s letters, was erected in June

1966. Because of this error, Rodney's previous involvement in events and his role in promoting Poole's music before 1967 are omitted. Rodney offered his perspective on the involvement of the media at that time:

I want to mention about Charlie Poole, at that particular time, the media were very much into Charlie and his family and so on, and because I was involved in all of this – as I say the local press and all were very very active. And I have here – I didn't bring them all – but I have here a number of newspapers – there they are, the *Leaksville News*, 1966 that particular one is, and look the headline – all about Charlie Poole and the monument and so on. And I have a number of those, a number of cuttings as well, of the newspapers, all to do with Charlie Poole. There's to do with the origin of the North Carolina Ramblers. There's a group of Charlie Poole and part of his band. All of that was published. All of that (McElrea, 5 September 2005).

Rodney has subsequently shown me a number of other newspapers in the collection that contain clippings covering his involvement in Poole's posthumous career. The other newspaper accounts cover the story both at the time of the ceremony and later when Rodney revisits North Carolina to view the stone for himself.

Reading through the newspapers on Rodney's kitchen table I noticed numerous overlaps of detail and information between the articles referring to Poole. The same images are also used over and over in supporting these narratives. For example, in Figure 4:17 an issue of the *Franklin County Times* of 8 August 1968 features a story about Kinney Rorrer's book on Poole and reprints the image of Cliff Rorrer and Lou Emma Poole originally sent to Rodney (Figure 4:05). This image also appears in the *Leaksville News* of 15 June 1966 (Figure 4:18), accompanying the original story of the unveiling of the monument by



Figure 4:17: Image of the *Franklin County Times* taken in Rodney's kitchen, 30 October 2007.

Mrs Poole. This particular image – which is presented as an ethnographic artefact in Figure 4:05, and shown here in Figures 4:17 and 4:18 framed within the



Figure 4:18: Image of the *Leakesville News* taken in Rodney's kitchen, 30 October 2007.

newspapers and the photographic image – is recontextualised firstly within the newspapers and secondly as part of my own documentation of Rodney's music

collection. This example serves to illustrate how a photographic documentation of the field site explores the layering of meaning existing within the music archive.

There was a further example of this extension of meaning when Rodney handed me the original press print of the picture reprinted in Figure 4:19 below from the



Figure 4:19: Image of the *Eden News* taken in Rodney's kitchen, 30 October 2007.

Eden News.¹⁷ During Rodney's visit to Cliff Rorrer in 1967 the press photographs him, in a similar pose to that of Rorrer and Mrs. Poole, standing by the grave marker (Figure 4:07). Rodney stands proudly as a young collector in the picture. The article below places him, this time, at the centre of the story of Poole's revival. Rodney recalls that specific occasion at the first lecture:

On one occasion, when I was in Leaksville, there was a monument unveiled to Charlie Poole, and I was pictured standing beside it. I was swamped by the local press and the radio and so on. (McElrea, 5 September 2005)

I included this artefact within the series of archival images, since it foregrounds Rodney's direct role within the narrative. It also serves to highlight the circulation

of this particular cultural object, in so far as the original photograph was featured in a newspaper, then collected by Rodney and is now classified within this project's documentation of the collection (Figure 4:07). Edwards (2001: 52) argues that 'photographs extend . . . the effective circulation of cultural objects as photography enable[s] the study of objects over space and time.' By photographing these selected objects for the purpose of this project, I create new trajectories for the cultural and social biographies, which in turn extend the life of the artefact beyond the confines of Rodney's music collection.

The sixth object – a mixed tape (Figure 4:08) – differs from the others, since it is not a collected artefact but was specifically produced by Rodney for me, during

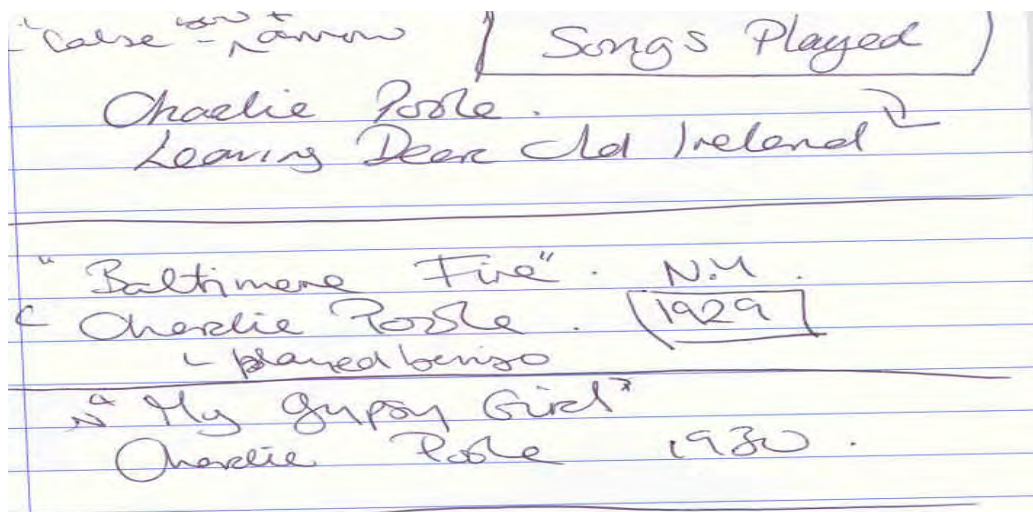


Figure 4:20: Detail of researcher's field notes, 30 October 2007.

one of my visits to his home. Having spent a morning discussing Poole, Rodney thinks it time that I heard the music. He plays me a song that Poole recorded, entitled 'Leaving Dear Old Ireland', and tells me to keep in mind that the song 'was recorded before 1930 so this recording is almost eighty years old'. When the

introduction to the music begins, Rodney stops it abruptly and instead offers to make a tape of Poole's music for me:

I'll start this again, Eve, do you know why? I'll record it for you as I'm playing it . . . Now write down your first track . . . Leaving Dear Old Ireland – Charlie Poole. (McElrea, 30 October 2007)

He sets up the blank tape (Figure 4:08) and makes the first of many old-time music mixed tapes for me. I quickly write down the titles (Figure 4:20) and finally hear the music of Charlie Poole. Although Poole was very young when he made the recording, his voice sounds aged and distant. When the song ends I ask Rodney about his involvement in the reissue of Poole's music on Freeman's label, County Records. Rodney explains:

Oh he's been reissued on a number of labels, but County was the first to reissue his material. [In the sixties?] Ya ya in the mid-sixties. [And didn't you have something to do with that?] Well I encouraged Dave. I went over just as he was starting. And when he met an Irishman who was so enthusiastic and I kept telling him that it was impossible to get the original 78s, the ordinary person had no access to this music. And I said eh make it available, and interesting thing is Eve, you couldn't have sold a Charlie Poole record in New York, where Dave lived at that time, but he moved down to Virginia. But I travelled with him through the backwoods, and tiny little stores, you know with the one petrol pump outside and the coca cola signs; they did a roaring trade. In fact they were still playing Charlie Poole on the radio when I was out there in Virginia. They used Dave's LPs that he'd reissued. And I saw record shops with County and all in it. County albums – away in the middle of nowhere! Dave, in all his trips, he used to bring a big bundle with him, in the boot and the shops bought them off him and they played them on the radio stations in the South. (McElrea, 30 October 2007)

As Rodney describes his journey through Virginia in the 1960s, I become more conscious of the fact that it is the same music that was first transferred from 78 to

LP and later to CD that we are now listening to eighty years later. Rodney continued to play me tracks until he had recorded enough music to fill one thirty-minute side of the cassette tape.

Although the tape has come from Rodney's archive (as both a musical and a material artefact), it is not part of his collection. The mixed tape (Figure 4:08) signifies the collaboration between myself and Rodney but, in the context of this image, relates more to my work than to his music collection. Because of this, the inclusion of this tape in particular within the sequence of photographs extends the meaning of this group of artefacts beyond the field of Rodney's collection, creating a direct link between the music archive and my current rearchiving of his collection. So far the interrelationships between the objects numbered 4:03 to 4:08 have been indicated through the other photographic documentation of the collection presented within this chapter. However, I would argue that presenting all six artefacts within this particular formal ethnographic photographic style also imposes relationships between the objects portrayed in the images. Edwards argues that presenting the six artefacts within a similar photographic aesthetic immediately transforms what is photographed,

Into equivalent, and hence comparable objects, both within the frame and between frames. The loss of the object's materiality through photographic reproduction [is] part of this rhetoric of equivalence. (2001: 58)¹⁸

The similar style and treatment of the objects within the frame grants them a uniformity through which they can be read, as they are framed photographically,

within a series. This last image of the mixed tape, therefore, both informs and is informed by the reading of the other five images.

The cultural meaning within the objects featured in Figures 4:03 to 4:08 undergoes a change, marking a transition from being part of a collection of material artefacts (sent on by Rodney) to becoming a series of photographs reflecting yet another context or agency through which the meaning of the objects is organised. In this case the indexical arrangement of the objects aligns with my interpretation and ordering of the Charlie Poole story found within Rodney's archive. The sequence imposes a narrative mode beginning with the collection of the money (Figure 4:03); it then continues with the production of the monument, recorded in Cliff Rorrer's letters (Figure 4:04); the erection of the monument, photographed by the press (Figure 4:05); the continued interest in Charlie Poole thanks to the endeavours of others, including Rodney, documented in the newspaper (Figure 4:06); Rodney's viewing of the marker (Figure 4:07); and finally my own role in the reordering of this story affirmed by the mixed tape (Figure 4:08). The photographs are thus featured in the film sequence and illustrate the reclassification of the artefacts in terms of representing both an archival system of taxonomy and a method of ethnographic description. I further illustrate the interrelationship between the archival and ethnographic within the film in the following section.

Archival and Ethnographic Meaning within the Film Sequence

There are a number of different photographic styles at play within the film; the



Figure 4:21: Cropped images of artefacts from Rodney's archive.

formal ethnographic images (Figure 4:03–Figure 4:08), the *in situ* documentary images of Rodney and his collection (Figure 4:09, Figure 4:10) and photographs of ‘found’ images and documents from the collection pertaining to the Charlie Poole story (Figure 4:14, 4:16, 4:20). These styles are presented in a collage of images within the film, with each serving its own purpose. For example, the use of *in situ* documentary images exemplifies the ethnographic element of my research, retaining a consistent association between the film, Rodney and the archival space. They are also intended to create a visual link and narrative overlap between different sections of the soundtrack. The set of formal ethnographic photographs are used primarily in punctuating the film's narrative, acting in a similar way to chapter headings, since each image is aligned with the transition from one section of audio to the next. The familiarity to the observer of this type of image, coming as it does from a formal style of ethnographic photographic practice, is intended to draw attention to the way in which visual knowledge is

mediated and how the ethnographic subject is approached by the researcher. As Edwards argues:

Departing from the didactic transparency of photographs in the museum context implies orchestrating different expectations about the visual translation of culture in museum display. (2001: 184)

Although intentionally mimicking the formal styling and presentation of ethnographic artefacts within a museum setting, these images are intended to present contrast and comparison with the other photographic genres.

The ‘found’ images also serve the film in a number of ways. Although evidential in their portrayal of the Charlie Poole story, the reuse of the newspaper images (Figure 4:21), for example, disrupts their original status in news stories in the print media of the 1960s. Russell argues that the reappropriation of such images within film practice can ‘interrogate the allegory of historiography’ (1999: 240), in that same mediated images can tell very different stories at different stages in history. This practice also counters the idea of the archive as being a site of ‘visual evidence of history’ (ibid.). Since the newspaper image of Cliff Rorrer and his sons playing music (Figure 4:21) is viewed in different historical contexts within the body of the film, it raises the question of which history the image belongs to, thereby casting aspersions on the photographic image as a reliable source of historical knowledge. Finally, reclassifying found images within the context of the ethnographic film, and under the agency of the researcher, foregrounds my own practice of collecting and recataloguing cultural knowledge within the film’s setting.

The different types of image are framed together within the film sequence, blurring distinctions¹⁹ between the different genres²⁰ from which they originate and granting them an 'equivalent' and 'hence, comparable' (Edwards 2001: 58) place within the structure of the film. The technique of dissociating all the images being used from any historical narrative other than the one being told, in addition to their removal from conventional generic categories, enables the emergence of an ethnographic text that is specific to my particular view/interpretation of Rodney's archive. Each image, regardless of whether it is original or found or altered, is also subject to an added process of mediation through its inclusion within the sequence, which imposes another layer of meaning upon the subject being represented. Russell argues:

All images become documentary images once their original contexts are stripped away; in being repositioned within another serial organization of images, they document an Other time and place. (1999: 271)

Within the context of the film, the transition of the images/artefacts to this 'Other time and place' (ibid.) offers a collective viewpoint from which all images included in the sequence can be understood. Presenting images in this way has the paradoxical effect of both masking and foregrounding the distinctions between different types of photographic practice within the ethnographic field. It also opens up a new critical space from which to consider archival work as ethnographic,²¹ since this technique accords with Russell's understanding and description of archival film practice. She argues:

Archival filmmaking promotes a schizophrenic²² dispersal of discourses of mastery, authenticity, and authority through fragmentation, cutting up, and interruption. The work of art is thus thoroughly bound up with a cultural schizophrenia that limits ‘vision’ to endless revision (ibid.: 243).

Here Russell is suggesting that archival filmmaking *is* ethnographic in the reworking, or ‘revision’, of existing cultural texts and in the creation and representation of alternative ‘cultural landscape[s]’, in this instance Rodney’s archive (ibid.). She continues:

It is this supplementary discourse of singularities [i.e., discontinuous fragments of image culture], of bodies dislocated in cultural histories that [can be developed] as a discourse of ethnography. (ibid.)

My film follows this technique. The images (and soundtrack) work both independently and in tandem in enforcing and challenging existing discourses, concerned with how historical and cultural knowledge function within the fields of ethnographic and archival practices. For example, the montage structure of the film illustrates the overlapping (multiple) historical narratives and temporalities at play in Rodney’s archive. Therefore, as opposed to presenting a ‘progressive’ (ibid.: 252) historical past, this representation of Rodney’s collection attempts to ‘resist ethnography’s implicit theory of history’ and reveals what Russell calls the ‘repressed memories of the archive’ (ibid.).²³ This type of ethnographic film presents ‘a different history, one in which reality is under perpetual construction and reconstruction’ (ibid.). The use of montage within the film sequence allows me to selectively reorder and reclassify part of Rodney’s diverse archive and present for public consumption an allegorical representation that speaks of the potential significance of this collection.

Russell goes on to argue that the historical effect that is produced ‘doesn’t hierarchize the present over a less-developed past’ – for example, the photograph of Cliff Rorrer and Lou Emma Poole presented in Figures 4:05, 4:17 and 4:18 and featured in the film coexists in its historical context as an image of the historical past, a current object within Rodney’s archive and a document of his archive – and can conceptualize a ‘history of the future where further contexts and interpretations are achievable’ (ibid.).²⁴ Portraying Rodney’s archive as a cultural site offers possibilities of revealing multiple cultural narratives that cannot be necessarily ‘salvaged but . . . allegorically recalled’ (ibid.: 253). Russell argues:

The collage nature of found-footage filmmaking creates a discontinuity that is not only spatial but temporal and produces a historical effect that might be described as, precisely, [the] time of the Other. (ibid.:252)

The ‘time of the Other’ to which Russell refers might be difficult to realise through the conventional indexical arrangements of archival objects but can be imagined in the film sequence under the auspice of what future possibilities Rodney’s collection has to offer.

Conclusion

The fragmentary nature of the images of artefacts that are featured throughout my film offer possibilities for the reassembly or reimagining of the ethnographic site through the ‘practice of storytelling’ (ibid.). Different genres of photography are integrated and juxtaposed in order to situate the same artefacts within different

cultural contexts, exposing the variable cultural trajectories of the objects and revealing multiple meanings that can be attached to the archive through varying frameworks. In addition, whilst the framed ‘didactic and functional’ (Edwards 2001: 191) images are intended to allude to systems of taxonomy, the images documenting the same objects, within the setting of the collection, are intended to emphasize a disruption to the notion of producing set systems of meaning. The purpose of this is to draw attention to the performance of the photographic images and how diversely they function as archival mediums. Since multiple photographic perspectives are repeated within the film, depicting the same artefacts, the observer is encouraged to create her/his own hypothesis regarding the historical/cultural meaning of the objects on display. Playing with expectations about genres is intended to encourage a deeper engagement between observer and film about the way in which ethnographic knowledge is being presented. As Edwards (*ibid.*) argues, different approaches to and styles of ethnographic photographic work shape the way in which that work is perceived.²⁵

In the final chapter I take a further look at how the film succeeds as a form of mediation between Rodney’s collection and a public audience. I also consider Rodney’s engagement with the film sequence and discuss how it might address issues relating to the future status of his collection, as well as how my work with his archive might continue in the future.

The reader/observer is advised to view the film sequence before continuing to the next chapter.

DVD 1, The Charlie Poole Story. Play All

¹ As discussed in chapter two (p.77), sound recordings do not reveal actual real events; the recording is the ‘nature’ of the connection between original and copy. Sterne is referring to sound recording in the following statement, but the same logic can be applied to the photographic image’s relationship with the experiencing it is framing: ‘The medium does not mediate the relation between . . . original and copy . . . Without the medium, there would be no connection, no copy, but also no original, or at least no original in the same form’ (Sterne 2003: 226).

² Material objects are discussed in relation to their social and cultural biographies in chapter two, (pp. 83-84).

³ The delegation of meaning to the sound artefact is discussed in chapter two, (p.78) in relation to the Dorsey Dixon tape.

⁴ Cliff Rorrer is related to Charlie Poole through his aunt, Lou Emma Rorer, who married Poole on 11 December 1920 at Reidsville, North Carolina. (Rorrer 2005:27).

⁵ Other people were also heavily involved in reviving Poole’s musical career, among them Cliff Rorrer, Dave Freeman, Kinney and Doug Rorrer. An article commemorating Charlie Poole in *Maverick* country magazine (97, August 2010) stated: ‘In the 1960s County Records . . . and their founder Dave Freeman led a great Charlie Poole revival by issuing the first ever Poole LPs’ (2010: 35).

⁶ In a discussion in chapter three (pp. 120-121) regarding the significance of the music collection it is noted that this evaluation system should also include the personal significance projected on to the collection by the collector.

⁷ There have been numerous reissues of the entire backlog of Charlie Poole material since then on record labels other than County Records.

⁸ Kinney Rorrer’s book, *Rambling Blues: The Life and Songs of Charlie Poole*, was first published in 1982.

⁹ ‘The Charlie Poole Music Festival, now [in 2008] in its 13th year, is a project of Piedmont Folk Legacies, Inc., a non-profit organization whose mission is to promote and preserve the musical and cultural legacy of the Piedmont region and to celebrate its influence on the development of American vernacular music, as exemplified by Charlie Poole. The festival is held each year on the second weekend of June in Eden, North Carolina, home and final resting place of Poole. Fans come from far and wide to celebrate the special contribution that Charlie Poole and the North Carolina Ramblers made to American music.’ Excerpt taken from <<http://www.charlie-poole.com>> [Accessed 20–26 November 2008].

¹⁰ Chapter one (p. 35) discusses how the collector creates his own taxonomic systems by classifying the objects within the narratives he tells relating to his collection.

¹¹ See chapter two (pp. 83-84).

¹² Cliff Rorrer is also the nephew of fiddle player Posey Rorer, who was Lou Emma Poole’s brother. Posey Rorer played fiddle in Charlie Poole’s band the North Carolina Ramblers.

¹³ Edwards (2001: 51) argues that the genre of photography relates to ‘the ways in which collected objects were represented photographically in the second half of the nineteenth century’. She goes on to describe the process in the following terms: ‘Objects were isolated in front of camera, either singly or in groups, arranged for maximum visibility. Photographed against a contrasting background in even light, as much of the object’s physical form as possible is projected to the viewer. Dramatic uses of light and shade were avoided; rather, light was used to give uniformity to a series, emphasizing certain significant features: form, texture, material or decoration, for instance. Sometimes the background, that is the context of the subject of the photograph and the conditions of its

own photographic representation, such as background shadow, was removed through manipulation of the negative in order to create the correct form for viewing the object as pure specimen, unencumbered by any form of cultural context, including institutional context. In the extreme form of this style ethnographic objects appear as floating objects, removed from both time and perspectival space' (ibid.: 58).

¹⁴ Edwards (2001: 51) refers to Wollen (1995: 10) when outlining her argument.

¹⁵ The full quote is as follows: 'In what Snyder (1998: 30) has described as "rhetoric of substitution", the photograph functioned as an imprint of object operating in a rhetoric of transparency and truth. This was a central concept in the production of photographs of ethnographic objects' (Edwards 2001: 56). As Rosen argues, museums 'relied upon the mimetic function of photography to replace actual specimens and a metonymic acceptance of the fragmented state of the object [or culture] as it was represented in the Museum' (1997: 386).

¹⁶ Edwards (2001:63) argues, 'Photographers used frame as an important semiotic indicator to construct a visual field and to give internal coherence to a diverse array (Rosen 1997:381). The slippage between photograph and display case actually reinforces the taxonomic structures of viewing collected objects, in creating a "correct" field of viewing.'

¹⁷ In 1967 the three towns of Leaksville, Spray and Draper were renamed as the city Eden.

¹⁸ Edwards (2001: 58) here refers to Poole's hypothesis (1997: 133–4): 'Poole has suggested the importance of a "system of equivalence" in relation to visual economy, grounded in photographic realism, standardising formats, sizes and, most importantly for our purposes, style, so as to create a system of representation in which the most dissimilar objects could be transformed into equivalent, and hence comparable, objects, both within the frame and between frames.' Edwards also makes reference to art theorist André Malraux's work *The Psychology of Art* (1949: 37, 50) regarding this quotation.

¹⁹ Russell makes a similar point with regard to Leslie Thornton's film *Peggy and Fred in Hell* (1994), when she states that 'combination of archival imagery with original footage tends to blur the edges between the two orders of representation' (1999: 244).

²⁰ I understand and discuss the term 'genre' within Edwards's explanation of the term in the following statement: 'While genre, in photography, is often used in the sense of formalist categories and approaches to subject-matter, it is more usefully conceptualised here as a social contract for expressing appropriate forms for different kinds of statement. These invite certain shapes of expectation. In every act of looking there is an expectation of meaning' (2001: 184).

²¹ I am echoing an argument previously made by Edwards (2001), whose hypothesis is based upon Clifford's as illustrated in the following statement: 'One might work towards decentring expectancy and thus open up a critical space "Between" places [given] a tactical centrality to undermine the very notion of a centre' (Clifford 1997: 213). In this register photographs can be used as a tool to reveal the epistemological base of museum discourse rather than merely to make authoritative statements.

²² I interpret Russell's use of the term 'schizophrenic', within this particular context, as meaning, 'archival filmmaking promotes a "split" dispersal of discourses of mastery', which is now a contested use of the term. For further information regarding the correct use of the term see, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17660932>. Accessed 24/09/2012.

²³ Russell's argument directly relates to what she terms found-footage filmmaking, and I am employing the techniques of this practice within my representation of Rodney's collection.

²⁴ Russell's hypothesis is based upon Johann Fabian's argument that 'a truly revised, postcolonial ethnography needs to imagine an invasion by "the time of the Other", a

historiography that does not hierarchize the present over a less-developed past, and . . . can conceptualise otherness within a history of the future,' (ibid.: 252).

²⁵ This hypothesis relates to Edwards's distinction between a formal style of ethnographic photographic practice and a documentary style which is articulated in the following statement: 'there is a sense in which the documentary images sit uncomfortably, both formally and technically, with the didactic and functional images that surround them, most of which are photographically naive, merely photographs "of" things, in a "no-style" style where mediation is suppressed. The latter suggest immediate observation and ethnographic authenticity translated into photograph, whereas documentary has long been premised on the mediating vision of the interpreter to reveal the truth. We are dealing with very different registers of images' (2001: 191).



CHAPTER FIVE: THE RECLASSIFICATION OF THE PRIVATE MUSIC COLLECTION THROUGH ETHNOGRAPIC DESCRIPTION

Introduction

In this final chapter I revisit Rodney in Omagh, to share the findings of my research project and discuss whether it has made any significant contribution towards finding a suitable solution for the future survival of his collection. I view the film with Rodney and consider how the archival/ethnographic sequence effectively mediates his performance of the archive and the relationship with the collected objects. I continue to reflect upon my role in the curatorial process of reorganising the music collection within this medium and attempt to translate for the reader how Rodney's engagement with the film grants further insight into how the archive functions through his interaction with it. This final chapter continues to refer to Edwards's (2001) discussion of the role of the photographic image within ethnographic work and to the reflections of Russell (1999) and MacDougall¹ (2006) on the broader subject of visual media. Towards the end of the chapter I return to the topic of the long-term preservation of Rodney's collection and consider whether this research project has changed his attitude about how the collection should progress into the future.

Revisiting the Archive

During the time it took to complete the film I had made a few failed attempts to get back up to Omagh to visit Rodney. I had also missed two of his lectures at the Bluegrass Festival. By the time I was ready to make the final trip to Rodney's

archive for the completion of this thesis I was apprehensive, conscious that time had passed since I had last spoken to him. It was early in the morning when I made the call and I remembered him as an early riser. When he answered I was taken aback by the frailty of his voice and immediately felt a pang of remorse because I had not contacted him for so long. Rodney's response to my getting in touch was overwhelming. He expressed delight at hearing my voice and said he had wanted to call me a number of times but had lost my phone number: 'I searched high and low for it, Eve, but couldn't find it.' I imagined him delving through the vast quantities of correspondence and post-it notes in his archive, in a futile search for a scribbled phone number. Rodney expressed pleasure at the news that I was returning for another visit and proceeded to tell me how his collection had expanded during my absence. He said he had found 'great contacts' in North America and had a few people regularly sending him boxes of memorabilia: 'I've got lots for you to see, Eve, lots for you to see.' I asked after his health; Rodney is diabetic and I wondered whether that was what was causing his voice to be so faint and faraway. I was somewhat relieved to hear that his current weakness was due to a temporary indisposition.

I was very careful to point out the specific agenda for my visit: The plan was to show Rodney the film and garner his reaction whilst also revisiting the subject of the future of his collection – whether there had been any developments with the Folk Park or whether his views had changed over time. I told him that I wanted to show him the film I had made of his archive and discuss the ending of my project and where we might go from there. He listened carefully and agreed: 'we have a lot to talk about'. He hinted at the further involvement of Richard Hurst from the

Folk Park in the possible preservation of his collection. As I tried to draw him out on this point, I sensed that further information would be withheld until my arrival in Omagh. I felt that this visit would be of greater mutual benefit to us both than any previous encounters. I sought some closure to my research project and he wanted to know what my next step would be, once I had submitted my thesis: would I still be involved with him and his collection?

In contrast to the earlier visits, I now felt that I was visiting Rodney, as opposed to his collection. There was a personal connection between us which was validated by his reaction to my phone call. On my arrival, I received a very warm welcome back and we embraced like old friends. I had my partner, Tony, and baby in tow, whom he also greeted kindly, insisting they stay for a chat over coffee. As we trudged through the hall into the kitchen Ben, the dog, was put outside for the duration of my stay. It was the first time I had registered Rodney's dog, obviously a much loved pet who, I realised, had been banished from the house during all previous visits. I now recalled a vague memory of his presence in the distance: barking, sounds of scratching and canine smells. Ruth was at work but had, as before, prepared coffee and cake for us on the kitchen table, as well as a lunch for later. Rodney, Tony and I chatted in the kitchen about various things and I was momentarily excluded from the conversation when Tony and Rodney discussed hi-fi. Then our chat naturally veered towards Rodney's collection and, on cue, Tony excused himself, taking the baby. Rodney registered slight surprise about their departure, since he had assumed I would keep the baby with me and told Tony to be sure to come back for the lunch Ruth had left out.

Having finished with coffee, Rodney told me to take the comfortable chair by the table as he settled into the sofa by the window (Figure 5:01). I had not brought



Figure 5:01: Rodney in his kitchen in Omagh, November 2011.

recording equipment with me, since I wanted a more casual chat with him, and I took notes throughout my visit. Every now and then he would say, ‘there’s no need to write this down now Eve but . . .’, when he didn’t want what he said to be on record. This was usually to do with comments about other collectors or subjects he felt were too ‘gossipy’. I tried to steer the conversation towards the fate of the collection but as Rodney mentioned one thing it would spark something off in his memory and he’d move into another area of conversation. I was conscious of guiding him back and, unlike previous occasions, I would let him know if he had told me a certain story before. Rodney spoke at length about a more recently acquired American contact, Ed Guy, from whom he has received



Figure 5:02: Jimmie Rogers 78 from Rodney's archive.

about fifty boxes of memorabilia in the past three years. Rodney sends him seven to eight hundred dollars every few months, and Guy uses the money to purchase music and other artefacts in which he knows Rodney would be interested. When I ask about a particular purchase of a very rare Jimmie Rogers 78 (Figure 5:02), I am surprised to learn that Rodney does not know how much he paid for it. He never asks Guy about the price of things but trusts him to keep account of his money. Guy is acquainted with Jimmie Rogers' daughter, Anita, and has obtained a large quantity of memorabilia from her for Rodney. Rodney makes the point to me, 'These should be in Jimmie Rogers's museum and I have them!' Other, somewhat obscure, objects include a bottle of the 1940s elixir Hadacol² (Figure 5:03), which was a medicine used for treating most ailments and was popular in

the American South due to its 12% alcohol content. The addition of this type of product to the collection reminded me of the inclusive and idiosyncratic nature of



Figure 5:03: Rodney with the bottle of Hadacol, November 2011.

Rodney's collecting practices with regard to (American) Southern culture. I was pleased to hear that he had reacquired many of the 78s he had once been forced to sell as a young man, and whose loss he had later regretted. Guy seemed to be able to source most of what Rodney requested.

We discussed the remaining collectors with whom Rodney is still in contact, such as the Australians Alan Steedman, David Hardy and David Crisp. He described Hardy as 'a serious old-time collector' and said that Crisp 'is reckoned to be the top music collector of old-time country – countless thousands'. Rodney told me that Crisp collaborates with Hardy on the CD label Cannonball, which 'has put

out 90 CDs of old-time music – one or two that I’d never heard of’; this music is shared ‘only among friends’. This last point highlights how these collectors began exchanging amongst themselves, in the 1950s and 1960s, due to a lack of interest elsewhere. Despite the recognition that old-time music and artists have received over the years with regard to their contribution to American music and culture, the level of commitment demonstrated by Rodney and his friends remains specialised. Rodney is unaware of any younger collectors of old-time country music exhibiting the same level of devotion to this music. Crisp is similar to Rodney in that ‘he has collected everything and keeps every piece of correspondence’, which includes letters sent from Rodney dating back forty years. Rodney begins, ‘If anything happened to David Crisp . . .’ but tails off, leaving us to contemplate the consequences.

I changed the subject by suggesting that we watch the film and set up my laptop on the arm of the sofa for Rodney to view comfortably. I was unsure how to



Figure 5:04: Still taken from the Charlie Poole Story, section 1.

introduce it, given that he had not previously displayed too much interest in what I have been writing and producing when away from Omagh and his archive. Before the film begins, I remind him that I have focused on his involvement with Charlie Poole. I am also aware that Rodney is not the intended viewer of this film but in fact the subject. The film has been constructed in a manner that communicates to a 'public' audience which may be unfamiliar with Rodney and his collection. There was always the possibility that the particular structure and techniques chosen for this media artefact might alienate him. My hope is that Rodney will regard my portrayal of him and his archive as a fair one. The film opens (visually) with a split-screen frame (see Figure 5:04) of Rodney in his archive (right-hand side of the screen) and the press photograph of Rodney by Charlie Poole's graveside in the 1960s (left-hand side of the screen); Rodney shifts slightly on the sofa, moving his head closer towards the screen (DVD *The Charlie Poole Story*, section 1). The image on the left establishes the context of the story that is about to unfold, while the image on the right situates Rodney within the field site and signifies the beginning of the ethnographic narrative. The images on both sides of the screen then present (through a dissolve) a series of perspectives in and around Rodney's collection.

This first section of the film attempts to establish Rodney within the setting of his private collection and the audio and images work in tandem in setting the scene of Rodney and myself interacting with the collection, the audio situating us acting within the archival area, whilst a montage of images attempts to portray the space in and around the archive. The observer is (in effect) being led around the archival space, gaining insight into the scale and volume of the archive and (from a broad

perspective) of the various types of objects found within it. The fragmentary way in which the archival space is presented within the montage of images in this opening sequence sets the tone for the film, establishing how narrative is constructed throughout the piece and creating an 'ethnographic statement' (Edwards 2001: 202). Separating out areas of the collection through this framing device creates an elliptical impression of the space. The manner in which these isolated images are arranged sequentially (and the use of dissolves) injects a coherence into a narrative that can be read, in turn, by the observer.³ The paradoxical nature of this technique is intended to allow the observer to engage with/follow the space being represented, in tandem with presenting enough transparency of method to create some distance between observer and ethnographic subject.

The purpose of this method is to isolate the observer within the fictional space of the archive and encourage an active participation in the creation of meaning within the sequence, as opposed to offering a didactic approach to the presentation of ethnographic description. MacDougall (2006: 233) argues that, 'seeing and looking with a camera are . . . matters of degree, for strictly speaking there is no image made without intention'. My objective is to frame the story of the collection through the montage method employed, offering 'a more selective, intentional activity, a search for or an investment of meaning', one which 'leave[s] a trace of that process in the resulting images' (ibid.: 242). While Rodney should be familiar with the content of the images, a few dissolves into the sequence he says, with a degree of surprise, 'Is that my collection?' In fact my framing of his archive renders it unfamiliar. I am reminded by this reaction that

Rodney was never present when I actually photographed the collection, since I would usually do so towards the end of my visits, when Rodney would go and attend to other business around his house, with the comment, 'I'll leave you to it'. Rodney's habitual in-depth knowledge of his archive is at odds with my fragmented portrayal of it, but I am reassured that his statement is a positive one when he declares that he is impressed by how 'good' it looks in the images.

As we listen to the first audio clip of the film, I become slightly self-conscious, since it features a recorded conversation between myself and Rodney, and I am not sure how he will greet the reality of us being on record. The soundtrack begins with a recording taken from the unoccupied archive; the only sound audible is the ticking of the hall clock, which is then followed by the sound of Rodney and me entering the space, shutting the door and discussing the Charlie Poole music to which we are about to listen. The nature of this opening refers to an earlier argument presented in chapter two⁴, concerning the disruption of the atemporality and equilibrium of the archive at regular intervals by the collector, while it returns to its former status once the space is again unoccupied; an attempt at representing what Moutu (2009: 104) refers to as 'loss and projection' within the archival soundscape. The remainder of this clip is also intended to give an indication of how Rodney uses his archive, to establish our relationship and to signify my documentation of the field site. Charlie Poole's presence in the narrative is also indicated by the musical clips included within this first piece of audio. Rodney listens intently and only comments, 'Oh, that's a great song' when the music comes in at the end of the clip. As we sat listening to our recorded conversations in the archive, I was made aware of a palpable disconnect between

the critical thought that went into the construction of this film and Rodney's almost mute response. Although the purpose of the film was to mediate – for the viewer – the relationship between Rodney and his archive, I had somehow hoped that it might ignite some deeper response to my representation of his collection in Rodney himself.

Towards the end of the first audio clip the perspective of the archive in the film sequence begins to change as the images of the letters dissolve into a larger, centred (formal) archival image of a letter and envelope sent to Rodney from Cliff Rorrer (see Figure 5:05); the audio moves on to the next clip, featuring Kinney

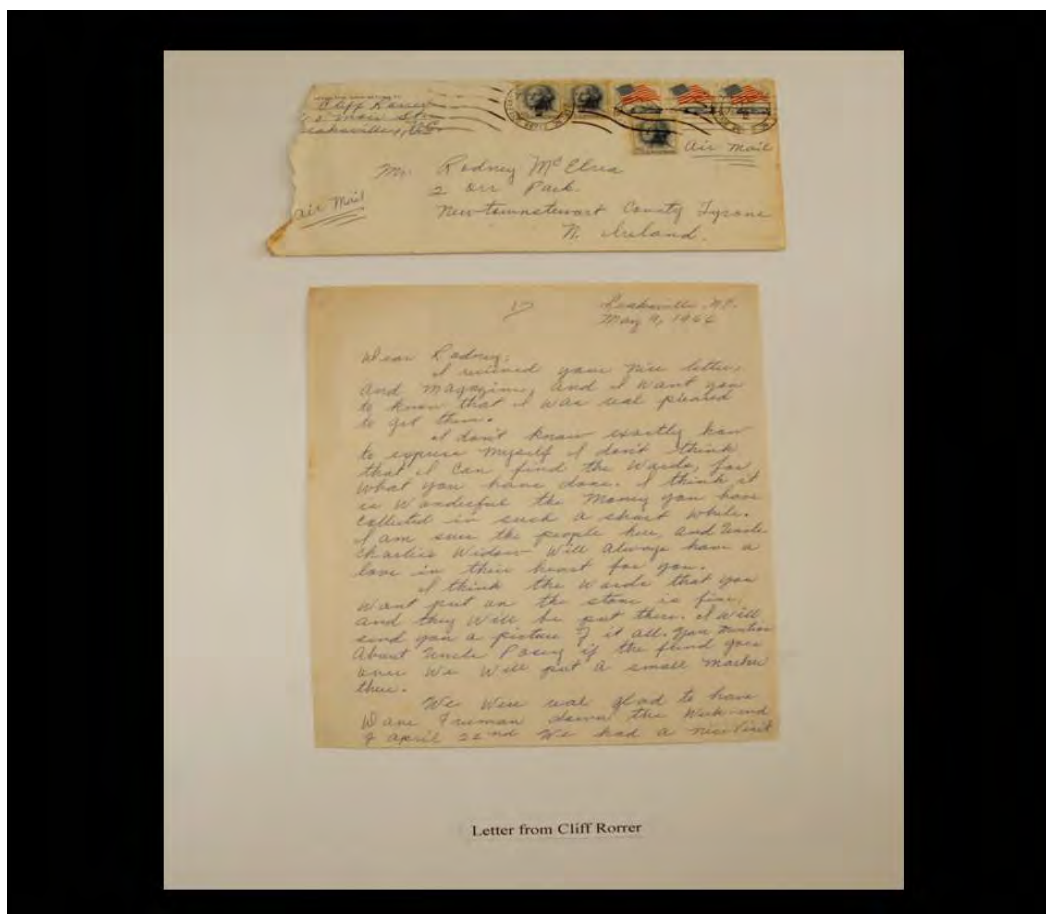


Figure 5:05: Still taken from the Charlie Poole Story, section 2.

Rorrer reading out a letter that his father sent Rodney, dated 15 September 1965, (DVD 1, The Charlie Poole Story, section 2). For the duration of this second audio clip the screen presents a series of images of some of the artefacts relating to the Poole story, offering the observer an opportunity to view the items – such as the letters - in detail. Included in this montage of images are press photographs of the North Carolina Ramblers and Cliff Rorrer playing music with his two sons, Kinney and Doug (Figure 5:06), who are also mentioned in the audio track. This section also features images of Rodney presenting Cliff Rorrer’s letters to his audience at the lecture in 2005. When this section begins Rodney appears startled at the sound of Kinney’s voice and exclaims ‘oh dear’. I quickly remind him that I contacted Kinney and he recorded the letters for me. This aroused a heightened degree of interest in Rodney, and he then recalled being in contact with Kinney some years ago. I asked Rodney if hearing the letters brought back any memories



Figure 5:06: Still taken from the Charlie Poole Story, section 2.

of his visits to the Rorrer household and he responded that he ‘can’t retain information any more’. However, the reading of the letter seems to prompt his memory and he begins to nod in response to particular information divulged in it. He then appears to search for information on Charlie Poole and suddenly says, ‘Charlie died at 39 in the bed with his eyes wide open. You know I once met a man who saw Charlie dead in the bed’, an addition to the narrative being told on film.

In this particular section both audio and images are deliberately arranged in order to develop the story of Rodney’s involvement with Poole’s music and biography. This is mainly illustrated through Rodney's association with Poole’s surviving



Figure 5:07: Still taken from the Charlie Poole Story, section 2.

relatives. Both the audio and the images establish the relationship between Rodney and Cliff Rorrer. Rorrer also mentions (in the letter) sending images on to Rodney, thus revealing an exchange of artefacts and their inclusion in Rodney's collection, right at the inception of this process. Finally, the two documentary images of Rodney seated at a desk during the lecture at the Bluegrass Festival in 2005 (see Figure 5:07) offers a view of the artefacts outside the archival space as well as illustrating Rodney's interaction with his collected objects.

Watching, with Rodney, the third section of the film (DVD 1, The Charlie Poole Story, section 3), which features Professor Jack Bernhardt providing background information on Poole for the audience at the lecture in 2005, I feel a strong sense of *déjà vu*. I remember when I first heard Bernhardt's contribution to the lecture as he situated Poole's life and career within the social setting of the mill towns of North Carolina between the 1920s and the 1940s; sitting in the audience, I paid

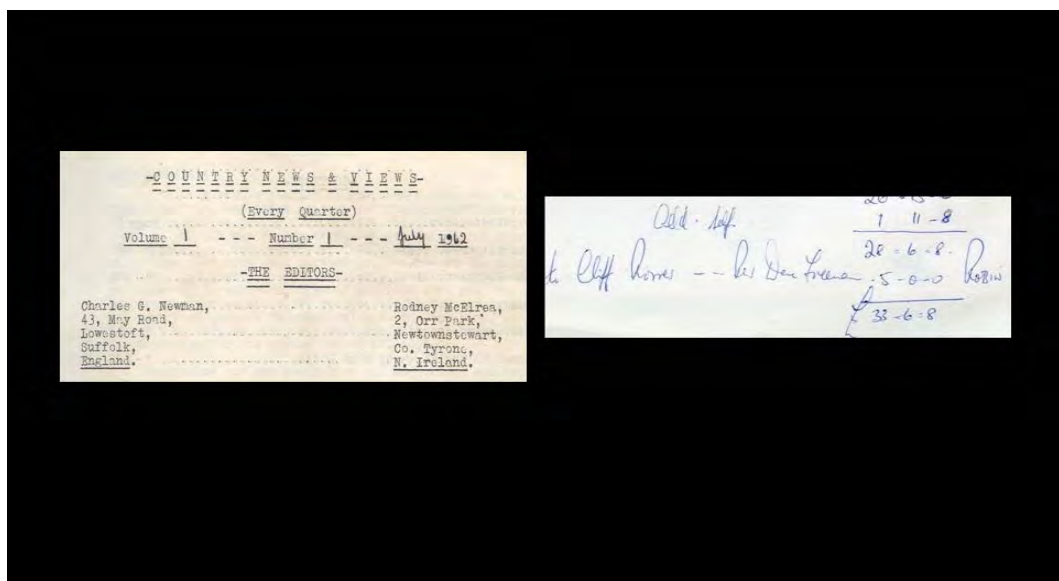


Figure 5:08: Still taken from the Charlie Poole Story.

particular attention to Rodney, who was listening carefully to his colleague and intermittingly nodding in approval of Bernhardt's depiction of Poole's life. Hearing it on the film, for a second time, Rodney mimics his previous position and again nods after each point made by Bernhardt, repeating, 'that's right, that's right' throughout the clip, as if waiting for his turn to continue the story. The accompanying images support what is being heard on the soundtrack, with pictures found within Rodney's collection relating to Poole's home and town arranged alongside documentary photographs of the lecture and with the audio clip adding a broader cultural/social context to the story for the viewer.

Since many of the illustrated 'found' artefacts have been cropped or enlarged, I needed to explain to Rodney that the images/items came from his collection, as he did not recognise them straight away. Figure 5:08 above illustrates how (some) previously seen images appear in close-up in order to present an alternative view of a particular artefact. The close-up images function in a number of ways within the film; they draw the observer's attention towards certain descriptive detail, which, in turn, develops the narrative plot and also focuses on the way the manipulative hand of the filmmaker directs the absorption of information. Figure 5:08 portrays Rodney's previously mentioned calculations regarding the money sent to Cliff Rorrer for the monument. It also contains both Rorrer's and Freeman's names, correlating the images with the accompanying soundtrack, since Freeman is mentioned in the letter written by Rorrer. The close-up on the left is paired with the one on the right and illustrates Rodney's involvement with *Country News and Views*, the vehicle used by Rodney to procure contributions from other collectors.

The close-up always refers the subject back to the archival space. In ‘Exhibition as Film’, Mieke Bal refers to close-up images as ‘abstractions, isolating the object from [natural] time-space coordinates’ (2007: 81). This suspension of the object through selective framing (Figure 5:08) thus speaks of the absence of that object yet, together with the descriptive elements of the image and its juxtaposition within the frame, against the audio track, this sequence actually evokes that archival artefact. When the frame changes from the close-up to the original documentary image of the letters and photographs that Rodney keeps in the pink folder (Figure 5:09), there is again a transition from the abstract object back to its position with the rest of the Poole artefacts, as contextualised within the



Figure 5:09: Still taken from the Charlie Poole Story.

displayed collection. Ironically, the technique of close-up, which is intended to divulge clearer detail to the viewer, clouds Rodney's view of his own collected artefacts.

Following a similar method,⁵ the repetition of information in the soundtrack adheres to a non-linear-historical chronology of the events relating to this story. A disjuncture with how the past is being presented is effected through repetitive and overlapping structures of narrative events unfolding within the 'real-time' running of sequences. For example, in section five (DVD *The Charlie Poole Story*, section 5), Rodney talks about the erection of the monument in the past tense, where as in section six (DVD *The Charlie Poole Story*, section 6), Kinney reads out a letter dated 9 May 1966, which refers to the preparations for the manufacture of the monument. This alludes to additional fragmentary timelines within the plot and contrasting temporal platforms from which to read and understand. Each audio clip offers a different temporal order from the previous and succeeding clip, rather than following a chronological timeline within the sequence. This technique of layering the narrative as the film sequence progresses embellishes the story by presenting alternative angles and perspectives on the events being told. The element of repetition is one of the main themes of the film and imitates the manner in which Rodney expresses himself whilst performing his archive.

Rodney becomes more vocal as the film continues and begins to reiterate what is

being said on the soundtrack. During the fifth section of the sequence (DVD 1 The Charlie Poole Story, section 5) the observer hears a recording of Rodney speaking about his travels with Freeman in ‘Charlie Poole country’ (McElrea, September 2005) to the audience at the lecture in 2005. He mentions how he first met Cliff Rorrer, who gave him a tour of the local gaol, and how later the family ‘leaned on [him] very heavily . . . to go back out on a number of occasions, to unveil monuments and plaques and things to Charlie’s memory’ (ibid.). Since information relating to the marker for Poole’s grave has been previously mentioned in the Cliff Rorrer letters, there is a degree of repetition in the narrative plot of the story. Rodney listens to the soundtrack and begins to fill in the missing pieces that this particular version of the story omits. At one point he nods in response to what he is saying on the recording and adds, ‘Posey died lying in a yard’. He then speaks to me about not being able to do anything about the Posey memorial and confesses that he felt awkward about asking the subscribers yet again for money, as they had already contributed to the Charlie Poole memorial fund – a fact which he had not mentioned before. However, in general, Rodney repeats what is being said on the soundtrack. I had to stop him from doing so a number of times, telling him to ‘wait’, since he was literally pre-empting the next piece of audio. This interaction between Rodney and the film sequence reveals direct parallels between the fragmented structure of the narrative plot within the film and the manner in which Rodney expresses himself in the telling of his stories. Rodney continues to mimic this layering of events, accompanying the film’s soundtrack with his own renditions, whilst watching the remainder of the film.

Chapter two discusses the complex relationship between personal and cultural memory within sound recordings.⁶ Although the memory of Rodney, the collector, is being replaced by my mediation of his relationship with his private collection, it is evoked or alluded to through audio clips, particularly the inclusion of the recordings of Rodney's first-hand accounts of past events. Furthermore, Kinney Rorrer was instructed to read out the letters as opposed to dramatising them, and although there is an obvious performative element to the reading, the fact that Kinney's delivery contains some mistakes and stumbling over of words is intended to emphasise that this is not a deliberate performance of memory, but indicates a transparency of method on the part of the filmmaker/researcher. Overall, the soundtrack should communicate a complex set of relations between private and cultural memory, speaking of the internal relationship between Rodney and his collection and yet attempting to observe that connection from a critical distance.

Although the film could be regarded as salvaging some part of that internal relationship, it should not be confused with the actual reality of what Rodney is dealing with in terms of the future of his collection. Russell asks:

What kind of history is it that is lost if found-footage filmmaking is also about a re-invention of memory as cultural representation and imagination? (1999: 241)

The recataloguing of the artefacts and the biography of the collector, as demonstrated within my project, must always be contextualised within the act of replacing the actual memory and autobiography of the collector. The closest my

ethnographic film can get to ‘the authenticity of experience’ (ibid.: 279) is through the recorded testimony of the collector. Watching Rodney interact with the film, I was in a unique position to observe both the division and the connection between film and subject. The film sequence also serves the unintended role of becoming a catalyst for Rodney’s memory, since it furnishes his recollections of Charlie Poole and the Rorrer family with more detail than previously.

Section fourteen (DVD 1 The Charlie Poole Story, section 14) closes the film with Rodney telling me (on the soundtrack) how much he would like to attend the Charlie Poole Annual Festival. I remember that this part of the original interview took place later in the day, when Rodney was not in the best of health and was showing signs of fatigue. I detect a note of regret in his voice when he speaks of all the places he has yet to visit and all the music and artefacts he has to collect. He had recently abandoned a further trip to the States due to bad health and has not made any other trips since. As I watch this section of the film – this time with Rodney – I again acknowledge that the reality of what is at stake about Rodney’s wishes for the future of his collection cannot be realised within the production of my research project. The film is predicated upon the expiration of this collection under its current owner and alludes to a time when the music archive will have changed hands and all that remains of its current status as a *private* collection will be what is represented *within* the film sequence.

When the film ends I am relieved to hear Rodney say, ‘You did an amazing job there, Eve, putting it together. You are certainly steeped in the collection.’ I took his approval of the film sequence as an acknowledgement that our acquaintance had been mutually beneficial. I was particularly pleased with his use of the term, ‘steeped’, since it indicated a deeper understanding of the collection which, in turn, might also translate to other ‘public’ viewers who are not familiar with his archive. The film also sparked a sudden panic in Rodney, in that it reminded him of the type of artefacts in his possession, such as the newspapers and notes relating to Charlie Poole. Worried, he shakes his head: ‘if anything happened to me . . . people would just see newspapers and throw them out. It really should be all put together . . . I have the best memorabilia’ – and then rather unexpectedly he turns to me and says, ‘you should come and live in Omagh for a year and sort out it all out!’ I allowed the last statement to hang in the air and asked him whether there had been further development regarding the Folk Park’s interest in the collection. He replies, ‘Richard Hurst has said that he would send two interns over to begin listing all items . . . It needs to be organised.’ This sounded like a significant step towards the migration of Rodney’s collection to the Folk Park’s archive, but he added, ‘I’ve not heard anything since’. He then tells me that Hurst approached him with the idea of the Folk Park creating a country music research centre for young people around Rodney’s archive, to be called the Rodney McElrea Centre. I am surprised when Rodney dismisses the title of the proposed centre: ‘But I told him I don’t want my name on it.’ When I ask why he simply says that he does not think it a good title, and when I ask him what he thinks would be a good title, he asks *me* to come up with something.

Rodney finally admits that he no longer can remember what he has in the collection. He mentions a few misplaced items during our conversation, and I remind him that they are in my possession. I tell him I will scan and document all the artefacts he has lent to me before their return. I wonder if he still spends as much time with the collection as before and he indicates that he does, adding that even Ruth has ventured in there recently, ‘her first time in fifteen years!’ There is just enough room in there now for Rodney and his dog. The more recent American acquisitions have spread the collection into an additional room off the kitchen, which normally houses his book collection (Figure 5:10). We go into that



Figure 5:10: The second room that houses Rodney's archive.

room first since it contains the Jimmie Rogers memorabilia I am keen to view. When I have photographed this room, we go into the original archive, and I am once again surprised to see the topographical shifts within the room. It feels familiar, yet the pillars of CDs have grown significantly and the space at the centre of the room has diminished in size (Figure 5:11). I make a comment on what an overwhelming task it would be for anyone to begin cataloguing the

collection, causing Rodney to reveal his continued distrust for institutional archives. He refers to the example of the Linen Hall Library (Belfast), which once housed the Fleming Stephenson book collection but subsequently discarded it when a change of management led to it being turned into an archive dealing with a history of ‘The Troubles’. Rodney is still appalled that ‘the books were sold for



Figure 5:11: Rodney’s archive in 2011.

10p each!’ and reckons that when Hurst eventually leaves the Folk Park, ‘the same fate will befall my collection – it will be chucked out to suit the needs of the next group’.

Worried as Rodney seems regarding the fate that is in store for his music collection, he tends to dismiss any concrete attempts (on my part) to address the practical steps he could take in ensuring that his wishes are met. For example, I had earlier met his eldest son, Richard, who was visiting at the same time. Rodney later mentioned that he has left the collection to Richard, who will be free to

decide what to do with it – ‘sell it or give it to the Folk Park.’ Rodney oscillates between this as a solution and just giving it to the Folk Park himself. I find it disconcerting that he has not discussed his wishes or his hopes for the collection’s future properly with either his son or Hurst. Rodney indicates over the course of the afternoon that he would like me to become more involved in the reorganisation of the collection. He speaks again about when I first approached him after the lecture in 2005, reminding me that ‘although a lot of people did then,’ I ‘was the only one who pursued it’. I get a strong sense during this visit that I am his first choice when it comes to finding a solution for the collection. Neither of us broaches the subject directly, since I am unsure of how much of a commitment I can make, because of the distance and other logistical factors. He does not ask me directly for (I assume) these reasons but circles around the subject on a few occasions.

I inform Rodney of my proposed date for finishing my project, which brings up the subject of how we will continue once this aspect of our acquaintance is closed. He lightheartedly tells me he will expect a further visit once I finish the work but does not go further and ask for any firm guarantee. I was, however, able to tell him that I am considering how I might extend my research on his collection into a possible post-doctorate study, which could perhaps document the migration of the collection into a public sphere. In the light of Rodney’s conversations with Hurst, I ask him whether I could approach Hurst to discuss this, to which he happily agrees. Beyond promising to keep in regular contact, we eventually leave the subject open-ended, with no definitive plan or solution as to what occurs next in relation to the preservation of his archive.

Conclusion

I leave Rodney's house somewhat relieved that he has been able to engage on some level with my film and, more significantly, that he approves of my representation of his collection – particularly since my approach to ethnographic filmmaking is mainly concerned with creating a reflexive mediation of my own personal agency as the field worker/practitioner and a consideration of how the 'observer', and not necessarily the collector, might engage with the finished artefact. The techniques I employ within the film also require an interpretative engagement from the viewer and do not present a conventional documentary narrative that might serve as a flattering 'keepsake' for Rodney. Edwards argues:⁷

[Presenting] experimental or reflexive styles [may] empower viewers, by allowing them space to negotiate meanings in a more dialogic and interactive way, generally resulting in more complex and engaged interpretations. (2001: 193)

The film attempts to create a subjective space for the observer's interaction with the work through the techniques of framing and the juxtaposition of cultural information; at times meaning in Rodney's collection is left open to the interpretation of the observer. This type of ambiguity with regard to cultural meaning features throughout the film, particularly during the instances when the visual narrative deviates from the sound narrative. Edwards suggests:

An inconclusive narrative might be used in the museum space to open up a closed authority and position the subject-viewer in the co-construction of knowledge.' (ibid.)

The film uses this type of open-ended technique in order both to present the possibility of multiple positions in relation to Rodney's collection and to illustrate *how* these judgements are being constructed⁸.

Presenting a reflexive reading of the archive also highlights the fact that my research project can only present a study of Rodney and his collection within a particular timeframe of its existence, while its future can only be imagined. Whether Rodney remains at the heart of future readings of the collection largely depends upon his intervention in determining how his collection should be reorganised and preserved and/or how successful my research is in persuading others towards the inclusion, in some form, of the embodied knowledge of Rodney in future incarnations of the collection. One problem with regard to this issue is Rodney's own denial of his central role within the meaning of his archive. I argue further with him over the inclusion of his name in the proposed title of the Folk Park's conceptualisation of the collection, and I get the impression that a sense of modesty prevents him from allowing it. When I try to stress to him his importance to any such conceptualisation, and the fact that my interest in the collection is solely based upon his participation with it, he merely shrugs it off. He has also turned down recent opportunities to speak on Northern Irish radio and television and gives the rather flippant excuse of not liking his accent.

During my visit an old friend of Rodney's, Andy Gordon, calls in on him and as I make coffee I reason with Andy about the importance of Rodney's role within his collection, using the example of the need to preserve items such as the receipt of

Rodney's first record player, purchased in the 1950s, as well as the musical artefacts contained there. Andy agrees with me but says, pointing to Rodney, 'he doesn't realise that'. In this respect I feel I have somehow failed to communicate to Rodney my actual purpose in embarking on this research project. It occurs to me that his (persistent) lack of response to my attempts at engaging him with the themes of my project might also be due to a reluctance on his part to indulge in a hypothesis of which he is the central component. He may be simply uncomfortable or unable to consider himself a worthy subject of the depth of cultural analysis it involves. What I am left pondering is whether he does not actually recognise the significance of his central role (as a collector) within the meaning of the collection, or whether he does, in fact, believe what I have been emphasising to him since our first meeting but is refusing to acknowledge it due to some ingrained shyness or other personal issues he chooses not to share with me. The residual feeling of dissatisfaction causes me to reflect upon my original intentions for this research project and ask what has been achieved during this exercise. One of the main objectives in becoming acquainted with Rodney was to attempt to understand his motivations as a private collector. Exploring this theme led me to reflect upon my own motivations as a researcher and also upon the embodied nature of archival research.

As previously discussed, the collection represents an 'Otherness' for Rodney – an imagined American existence he can escape to, which has served him well throughout his life. Michael Taussig explores our relationship with the 'Other' in, *Mimesis and Alterity*,⁹ citing Benjamin in his argument:

Without hesitation Benjamin affirms [in 'On the Mimetic Faculty' (1933)] that the mimetic faculty is the rudiment of a former compulsion for persons to 'become and behave like something else.' The ability to mime, and mime well, in other words, is the capacity to Other. (Taussig 1993: 19)

Therefore, we can learn to engage with the 'Other' through our mimicry of it.

Stoller continues Taussig's argument:

The power of the mimetic faculty devolves from its fundamental sensuality: miming something entails contact. Copying a thing . . . engenders a sense of comprehension, mastery. For Benjamin and Taussig, knowing is corporeal. One mimes to understand. We copy the world to comprehend it through our bodies. (1997: 66)

I would include collection as an act of mimicry, suggesting that Rodney's ownership of the artefacts he accumulated during collecting trips, his continued correspondence (and other objects he has kept around him) forge a relationship with the 'Other' – 'America in song' – since he has created a material manifestation of this imagined place. His narrative re-enactments of times spent in North America (and places or events he learned about from second-hand sources), allow him to retain a 'corporeal' connection to his conceptualisation of the rural American South. Music plays a major role in this perception, as noted in chapter two, where I discuss how listening to music can evoke a sensory memory of a past event. Taussig further argues:

To get hold of something by means of its likeness. Here is what is crucial in the resurgence of the mimetic faculty, namely the two-layered notion of mimesis that is involved – a copying or imitation, and a palpable, sensuous, connection between the very body of the perceiver and the perceived (1997: 21).

Therefore, I would argue, that music – along with the ‘smells, textures, sights, sounds, and tastes’ (Stoller 1997: 54) of the archive – provides Rodney with a ‘sensuous connection’ to the old-time era personified within the sound of old-time music.

Nostalgia also plays its part within Rodney’s realisation of the subject of old-time music but, I would argue, purely in the sense that Seremetakis applies the Greek translation of ‘nostalgia’ – ‘nostalghia’ (1994: 4) – to sensory experience. She relates the term to ‘the desire or longing . . . to journey’ (ibid.) that, in turn, ‘is linked to the personal consequences of historicizing sensory experience’, allowing the present ‘a dynamic perceptual relationship to its [unreconciled] history’ (ibid.). Rodney has aged with the archive and perhaps the embodied sense he holds of his collection endows him with a deeper sensibility regarding his own mortality. He acknowledges that his health no longer allows trips abroad, but the practice of listening to music and narrating his experiences can momentarily bring the past into the present in the manner described by Seremetakis. The collection supplies Rodney with a lifetime of sensory memories/experiences that are themselves related to broader cultural narratives. It is also possible that his level of interest, at this stage of his life, does not go beyond the personal – hence, perhaps, his ambivalence towards securing a future for his collection. The music archive sustained a life experience and perhaps that is enough for him.

The desire to preserve the collection within a public domain does not, in this instance, necessarily come from the private collector but possibly from external

subjects. Indeed, the first time I heard the question of the future of this music collection raised, it was by a member of the audience in the lecture in 2005. Rodney merely answered the woman's question. The subsequent investment of interest by me, Hurst and Bernhardt has sustained this quest for a solution, whilst Rodney has remained merely a spectator, listening with interest to possible outcomes but not actively participating in the endeavour. I am sure that Hurst, Bernhardt and I have our own reasons for deeming it important to have Rodney's collection viewed publicly, which suggests the complexity of the relationship between what we decide the public needs and which agencies/authorities will sanction these (personal) decisions. My ambition to have this collection continue in the future stems from both a curator's perspective and a personal desire to have the archive and, in particular, Rodney's embodied experiences as a collector, publicly recognised.

I have attempted to make my position transparent within the telling of a story about Rodney and his collection. Apart from my academic interest in the subject of private archives, I now also have a personal investment in this collection and this collector. I have, too, acquired an embodied sense of Rodney's archive, albeit a very different one from his. Through photographing the collection, I have nurtured an awareness of the different textures and the rich palette of colours in any one square foot of the room. I recall the strong smell of old paper and the dry feeling on my fingers from handling the dusty albums and reel-to-reel boxes. Listening to music with Rodney gave me a deeper appreciation of the music and the time and distance it has travelled. I felt a sense of the past as I delicately opened old letters and I found reading the years of correspondence between

Rodney and others deeply moving at times, particularly the letters from Dorsey Dixon. I also found the archival space quite oppressive and fell ill on a number of occasions when working within its confines.

The kind of experience I have gained from researching this collection cannot be found within the public domain – without Rodney, the collector – and I would hope that this is what my research can offer: a documentation and critical argument regarding the significance of such a ‘sensuous’ (Stoller 1997) encounter. When I think of what might potentially be lost to this collection when it loses its collector, I am reminded of a particular anecdote Rodney told me about his failed attempts to photograph the grave of A. P. Carter (of the Carter Family).

Rodney had twice travelled to Mount Vernon Cemetery in Hiltons, Virginia, where A. P. was buried, with a camera in hand. The first time he met an old man who was drinking whilst sitting on his wife’s grave. When Rodney engaged him in conversation, the man stamped his foot on the grave and informed Rodney that ‘it’s the best place for her’. Rodney moved on and took the photograph he had come for but unfortunately his camera was later stolen from his car. The second time he managed to take a picture, during a different trip, the negative was faulty and the image didn’t develop. For some reason this story stayed with me. I find Rodney’s inclusion of the bitter widower amusing and his repeated effort to having his photo taken at A. P.’s grave is interesting. Even as he tells the story to me he appears deeply disappointed with the unsuccessful outcome. Rodney harbours a strong admiration for A. P. Carter and has told me on a number of

occasions about his trip to the old homestead, where he met a close friend of the deceased musician and learned details about him that had never been published. This encounter seemed very significant to Rodney. Since what he got from that trip was an oral account of A. P.'s life, perhaps obtaining the photograph became more necessary as a part of the process of collecting that moment. This undeveloped image persists in Rodney's quest for its acquisition and he now knows he will never possess it.

In the absence of the image itself I imagine Rodney crouched by the grave, framed by the camera lens. I visualise the scene amongst the other Carter Family memorabilia in his archive, but in this instance there is no photograph to authenticate the memory and it is replaced by the narrative about the absence of the image. The conceptual replaces the material when Rodney includes this lost object within his collection by means of this particular story. Seremetakis (1994) frames the sense of absence within a tale about the loss of a particular peach, '*rodhakino*' (ibid.: 2), to her native Greece. Although the peach (the material object) is absent, it persists within the embodied memory of those who once experienced it. She argues, 'when something leaves it only goes externally, for its body persists within persons' (ibid.). I relate this experience to Rodney's absent photograph; like Seremetakis's peach, the photograph 'became narrative' (ibid.) and is a collected object that can only ever be known through Rodney's telling of it. It is this type of detail that I have attempted to capture within my documentation of Rodney's archive and I would lay a particular emphasis on stories which, like the one above, have no material artefact to arouse the curiosity of future researchers/music fans. This story and others are included in the hours of

recorded conversations between Rodney and myself, should anyone wish to listen in the future. It might be asked why this particular anecdote should be deemed significant. I can only respond by asking why any story matters. Surely it depends on who is listening?

Rodney has often told me that talking to me helps him remember the detail that normally remains buried deep within his memory. I would compare Rodney's storytelling (sometimes for hours at a time) to Benjamin's analogy of 'unpacking' his books from their cases in order 'to bring them into the light of day' (1999: 67). Benjamin exclaims, 'what memories crowd in upon you!' (ibid.). As Rodney continues to talk, he 'unpacks' more of his memories, revealing more components of his past experiences. It is fitting to return to Benjamin – 'a real collector . . . as he ought to be' (ibid.: 69) – in order to end this story, since the private collection is for Benjamin a place for the collector to dwell. He argues that the collected objects do not 'come alive in [the collector]; it is he who lives in them' (ibid.). Benjamin's answer to the ending of the intimate relationship between collector and cherished collected objects is for the collector to 'disappear inside, as is only fitting' (ibid.: 69). This analogy of the collector merging with his collection is perhaps indicative of the lack of a personal solution for Rodney with regard to the future of his collection, but it is fitting to end this story not (as yet) with a practical solution but with a poetic one.



Figure 5:12: Rodney and me in the archive, November 2011.

¹ MacDougall (2006) identifies a trend in anthropological ethnographic film work which strives to produce a more transparent methodology when constructing and publicly presenting ethnographic research as cultural knowledge. My arguments are mainly based upon chapter eight, 'The Visual in Anthropology' and chapter nine, 'Anthropology's Lost Vision', in MacDougall's book *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography, and the Senses*, where his argument centres on Robert Flaherty's film *Nanook of the North* (1922), the work of Jean Rouch and others.

² 'Hadacol was a patent medicine marketed as a vitamin supplement. Its principal attraction, however, was that it contained 12 percent alcohol (listed on the tonic bottle's label as a "preservative"), which made it quite popular in the dry counties of the southern United States. It was the product of four-term Louisiana state Senator Dudley J. LeBlanc (1894–1971), a Democrat from Abbeville in Vermilion Parish. He was not a medical doctor, nor a registered pharmacist, but had a strong talent for self-promotion. *Time* magazine once described him as "a stem-winding salesman who knows every razzle-dazzle switch in the pitchman's trade.'" Available at <<http://.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hadacol>> 'Medicine : The Mixture As Before', *Time*, 22 January 1951 > [Accessed 5 December 2011].

³ My argument here is also based upon Mieke Bal's critical analysis of an exhibition entitled *Partners* (curated by Ydessa Hendeles for the Haus der Kunst in Munich, 2003). Bal argues that, 'The key metaphor in my analysis was narrative, conceived as a meaning-producing sequentiality, emerging from the viewer's walk through an exhibition. Putting one thing next to another, in other words, produced a time-bound relationship between the two, one that moved from the first to the second' (2007: 71).

⁴ See chapter two, (pp. 91-3)

⁵ See chapter four (pp. 184-7) for a descriptive analysis of how images are being portrayed within a montage structure.

⁶ See chapter two (pp. 77-9) for an in-depth analysis of the relationship of sound recordings to memory.

⁷ Edwards's argument (2001: 193) is based upon a similar hypothesis offered by Martinez (1992:135–6).

⁸ This argument follows Alexa Farber's (2007) hypothesis as presented in the following statement: 'Since the 1980s "reflexive exhibits" have become an increasingly prevalent experimental form. They are characterized by the asking of questions rather than the presentation of facts, and typically achieve this characterization by means of setting up

multiple positions on a subject, or deconstructing historical and social processes, and seeking to produce debate (see Macdonald 1998, p. 234). Moreover, such reflexive exhibits usually reflect on the nature and processes of exhibiting itself' (2007: 219).

⁹ Stoller also refers to Taussig (1993) whilst discussing this subject. He states: 'In his book, *Mimesis and Alterity*, Taussig links sensuous perception to the power of mimesis, the capacity to copy perceived reality – and its relationship to alterity, the process of socially constructing otherness' (1997: 65–6).

CONCLUSION

When discussing emerging exhibitionary practices relating to the mediation of archives in 'From Capital to Enthusiasm: An Exhibitionary Practice', Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska observe as follows:

An archive designates a territory and not a particular narrative, but perhaps the archive, too, may be constituted as a creative space for engagement. The material connections contained are not already authored as someone's – for example, a curator's or artist's – interpretation, exhibition or property; rather, it is a discursive terrain where interpretations are invited. (2007: 149)

The notion of the archive as 'a designated territory' suits Rodney's collection. While it is a cultural space that he has constructed around himself and 'authored' over years of collecting, it is open to variable readings. As has been established within this research, the way in which this space is translated depends upon both who is providing the interpretation and who is later engaging with it. For the time being Rodney's presence protects the status of his collection as he continues to enjoy it. What began as a diversion which enlivened a quiet, unassuming childhood and as homage to his late father can now be understood as a material manifestation of his life as a collector. His biography can be mapped out amongst the thousands of artefacts within the confines of the archive. My ethnographic encounter with Rodney and his collection merely reveals the variety of cultural knowledge and narratives that accumulate throughout a lifetime of dedicated collecting.

The seven years I have been in contact with Rodney have seen significant development with regard to the public exposure and appreciation of his collection, beyond the context of my project. The first lecture that Rodney gave at the Bluegrass Festival in 2005 prompted a number of events and has seen an initial interest in his collection (by Hurst), develop into a possible cultural space within the Folk Park's museum. Rodney has also already secured his slot for what will be his seventh appearance at the Annual Bluegrass Festival this coming September. However, there is much to consider regarding Rodney's response to this external interest. Having gained as much insight into his character as, I sense, he would ever allow, I get the distinct impression that for him this outside contact serves its purpose purely as another means of enjoying and indulging in his private collection. The meetings with Hurst, the preparation for the lectures and indeed our conversations merely enable his performance within the role of private collector.

As a collector, Rodney's primary concern appears as a private agency, where the main function of his collection is based upon personal pleasure. Unlike such collectors as Barnes, who seek 'official' recognition for their collection within different cultural institutional agencies in Britain, Rodney's ideal solution to his own mortality is to 'pass [the collection] on', to pass on the private status, the personal pleasure that having such a collection affords the collector, and the intimate logic that only the private collector shares with the collected artefacts. Faced with the impossibility of achieving that, he does not seem (seriously) to seek an alternative solution and his role, as a private collector, does not appear to

extend to securing the future welfare of the archive. He does display momentary bouts of concern for the durability or survival of particular items, but in general his role seems to signify a point of departure for him and he appears overwhelmed by the reality of dealing with the organisation of his collection. He possibly regards its preservation as somebody else's concern; hence the conflicting opinions he offers me when he talks of leaving the collection both to his eldest son and to the Folk Park. It may also be the case that by voicing to me his concerns regarding the safekeeping of certain artefacts, he hopes to ensure their survival.

What happens to the collection next will develop in spite of Rodney's lack of involvement in finding a 'solution' to this problem. Although he initially responded to this issue (at the first lecture I attended in 2005), I have a strong sense, particularly since our last meeting, that he would like to pass the weight of the problem on to me. My contribution to the matter (so far) lies within this ethnographic account of my experience with him and the archival site, and in the production of the DVD, which should both be regarded as an attempt to curate my own reading of this collector and collection. The main achievement of this endeavour is, I believe, the evocation of Rodney's presence and voice within my representation of his old-time music collection, through the biographical detailing of his performance as a collector. Within both the written text and the film sequence, I have attempted to portray an archival experience that situates Rodney at the heart of his collection while simultaneously imagining a future where his presence can be retained within the soundscape and visual landscape of the

archive. I may well witness the future migration of the collection into the institutional archive of the Folk Museum. This ethnographic experience has made me aware of the type of idiosyncratic and capricious observation that is potentially lost through such a transition. My project presents Rodney's collection at a point when the 'hermetic' (Stewart: 1993: 152) world of the archive remains intact; offering an ethnography which still portrays the 'illusory' (Baudrillard 2005: 97) environment of the private collector, and my documentation of this site can offer glimpses of the 'personal microcosm' (Baudrillard 1994: 7) that Rodney has built around himself throughout his life.

This project has also resulted in a lasting relationship between Rodney and me. Since my last visit we are more frequently in contact on the phone and he now



Figure 6:01 Cover (left) and editorial (right) of the Charlie Poole article.

rings me, rather than relying on me to maintain contact. There is a tangible shift in the dynamics of our relationship and a more measured exchange taking place, based upon my continued interest in his collection (and in the completion of my project) and his need to talk about and perform his archive. I have told him I will keep him informed of my progress and of any developments that may occur regarding future contact with Hurst. He also continues to send me packages containing artefacts from his collection, some of which he has instructed me to keep. These consist mainly of music and articles pertaining to Charlie Poole, since I have cultivated my own interest in his music and career.

Just recently, Rodney sent me one particular magazine and rang to make sure that it had arrived safely. It contained an article about another biography of the old-time musician and included in the article was the photograph of Rodney standing next to Poole's gravestone (Figure 6:01), although there was no further mention of him in the text. When Rodney and I discuss the article I comment on the omission, which strikes me as strange. Rodney confesses to being equally surprised that over all the years of articles relating to Poole, as well as the documentary that was made of his life and the reissuing of his music, no one has ever tried to contact Rodney regarding his role in Poole's biography. He finds it puzzling that no one has been curious as to who this 'Rodney McElrea on the tombstone is' – 'no one has looked me up'. It is characteristic of Rodney that he is bewildered by this lack of curiosity on the part of those now chronicling Poole's life. For after all, Rodney's life was shaped by a deep inquisitiveness that compelled him to cross the continent to source the kind of information only to be

found in the backwoods of America, information that could only be gained through direct experience, and that, in turn, enhanced his experience of the collection he was building up at home. It has been my hope that in reading this thesis and viewing the accompanying DVD, the reader/observer may have obtained a real sense of that dynamic curiosity.

At the conclusion of my project I hope to have conveyed that it is Rodney who makes his collection significant and unique. It is the biographical detail held within this old-time music collection which offers a deeper insight into past collecting practices and related cultural narratives, uniquely woven together by Rodney as he relays his personal experiences for both private and public audiences. Should there one day be a Rodney McElrea Centre for Country Music within the museum of the Ulster American Folk Park, it is imperative that this embodied knowledge, which is currently the vital component of Rodney's private collection, be in some way secured. My project offers one possible solution towards that development.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alsop, J. (1982). *The Rare Art Traditions: A History of Collecting and its Linked Phenomena*, New York, Harper & Row.

Appadurai, A. (2003). 'Introduction: commodities and the politics of value', in A. Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things*, Cambridge University Press.

Arendt, H. (1958). *The Human Condition*, Chicago University Press.

Atkins, J. (2010). 'Charlie Poole: the legend that left a legacy', *Maverick*, 97, August.

Bal, Mieke (2007). 'Exhibition as film', in S. MacDonald and P. Basu (eds), *Exhibition Experiments*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Barthes, R. (1977). *Image Music Text*, London: Fontana Press.

Barthes, R. (2000). *Camera Lucida*, London: Vintage.

Baudrillard, J. (1994). 'The system of collecting', in J. Elsner and R. Cardinal (eds), *The Cultures of Collecting*. London: Reaktion Books.

Baudrillard, J. (2005). *The System of Objects*, H. Zorn (trans.), London, New York: Verso.

Benjamin, W. (1999). 'Unpacking my library', in H. Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations*, London: Pimlico.

Bull, M. and Back, L. (2004). 'Introduction: Into Sound', in M. Bull and L. Back (eds), *The Auditory Culture Reader*, Oxford and New York: Berg.

Clifford, J. (1997). *Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Harvard University Press.

Clifford, J. (2006). 'Collecting ourselves', in S. Pearce (ed.), *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, London and New York: Routledge.

Cummings, N. and Lewandowska, M. (2007). 'From capital to enthusiasm: an exhibitionary practice', in S. MacDonald and P. Basu (eds), *Exhibition Experiments*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Dean, E. (1999). 'Desperate man blues: record collector Joe Bussard parties like it's 1929', reprinted from *Washington City Paper*, 12–18 February 1998. Available at: <<http://www.bluesworld.com/Bussard.html>> [Accessed 6 February 2008].

- Derrida, J. (1998). *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Eric Prenowitz (trans.), Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Doyle, P. (2005). *Echo & Reverb: Fabricating Space in Popular Music Recording, 1900–1960*, Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press.
- Durost, W. (1932). *Children's Collecting Activity Related to Social Factors*, New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers' College, Columbia University.
- Edwards, E. (2001). *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums*, Oxford: Berg.
- Elsner, J. and Cardinal, R. (1994). 'Introduction', in J. Elsner and R. Cardinal (eds), *The Cultures of Collecting*, London: Reaktion Books.
- Farber, A. (2007). 'Exposing expo: exhibition entrepreneurship and experimental reflexivity in late modernity', in S. MacDonald and P. Basu (eds), *Exhibition Experiments*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Feld, S. (2004). 'A rainforest acoustemology', in M. Bull and L. Back (eds), *The Auditory Culture Reader*, Oxford and New York: Berg.
- Forrester, M. A. (2000). 'Auditory perception and sound as event', *Sound Journal*, 20 July 2007.
- Francis, R. (1996). 'The People's Show: a critical analysis', *Journal of Conservation & Museum Studies*, 1, May 1996. Available at <<http://cool-palimpsest.stanford.edu/jcmsissue1/francis.html>> [Accessed 20 July 2009].
- Frow, J. (1996). *Cultural Studies & Cultural Value*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Gaver, W. W. (1993). 'How do we hear in the world: explorations in ecological acoustics', *Ecological Psychology*, 5, 285–313.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books.
- Hainge, G. (2007). 'Vinyl is dead, long live vinyl: the work of recording and mourning in the age of digital reproduction', *Culture Machine Journal*, 2007. Available at <<http://www.culturemachine.net/>> [Accessed 6 September 2007].
- Hall, S. (2001). 'Constituting an archive', *Third Text: Critical Perspective on Contemporary Art & Culture*, 054, Spring.
- Hamilton, M. (2007). *In Search of the Blues: Black Voices, White Visions*, London: Jonathan Cape.
- Hegarty, P. (2007). 'The hallucinatory life of tape', *Culture Machine Journal*, 2007. Available at <<http://www.culturemachine.net/>> [Accessed 6 September 2007].

Ihde, D. (2004). 'Auditory imagination', in M. Bull and L. Back (eds), *The Auditory Culture Reader*, Oxford and New York: Berg.

Jackson, M. (2006). *The Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression and Intersubjectivity*, Museum Tusulanum Press: University of Copenhagen.

Kahn, D. (2001). *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: MIT Press.

Kopytoff, I. (2003). 'The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process', in A. Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things*, Cambridge University Press.

Lomax, A. (2005). 'Folk song style', in R. D. Cohen (ed.), *Alan Lomax: Selected writings 1934–1997*, New York and London: Routledge.

MacDougall, D. (1994). 'Films of memory', in L. Taylor (ed.), *Visualizing Theory*, London: Routledge.

MacDougall, D. (2006). *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography, and the Senses*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

McElrea, R. and Newman, C. (1962). 'Carter Family Special', *Country News and Views*, 1, (2), 16.

McGrath, R. (2007). 'History Read Backward: Memory and the Photographic Archive', in A. Grossman and A. O'Brien (ed.s), *Projecting Migration: Transcultural Documentary Practice*, London: Wallflower/Columbia University Press.

Martinez, W. (1992). 'Who constructs anthropological knowledge', in Peter I. Crawford and David Turton (eds), *Film as Ethnography*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Moore, T. (ed.) (2005). *Mix Tape: The Art of Cassette Culture*, New York: Universe.

Moutu, A. (2009). 'Collection as a way of being', in A. Henare, M. Holbraad and S. Wastell (eds), *Thinking Through Things: Theorising Artefacts Ethnographically*, London and New York: Routledge.

Mullen, C. (2006). 'The People's Show', in S. Pearce (ed.), *Interpreting Objects and Collections*. London and New York: Routledge.

Pearce, S. (2006). 'Museum objects', 'Objects as meaning: or narrating the past', 'Behavioural interaction with objects', 'Thinking about things', 'The urge to collect', 'Collecting reconsidered', in S. Pearce (ed.), *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, London and New York: Routledge.

Porterfield, N. (2004). 'Introduction', in N., Porterfield (ed.), *Exploring Roots Music: Twenty Years of the JEMF Quarterly*, Lanham, Maryland and Oxford: Scarecrow Press.

Porto, N. (2007). 'From exhibiting to installing ethnography: experiments at the Museum of Anthropology of the University of Coimbra, Portugal, 1999–2005', in S. MacDonald and P. Basu (eds), *Exhibition Experiments*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Rodaway, P. (1994). *Sensuous Geography: Body Sense and Place*, London, Routledge.

Rorrer, K. (2005). *Rambling Blues: The Life and Songs of Charlie Poole*, Danville, Virginia: McCain Printing Co.

Rosen, J. (1997). 'Naming and framing "Nature" in Photographie zoologique', *Word and Image*, 13 (4), 377–91.

Russell, C. (1999). *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video*, Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Sahlins, Marshall (1976). *Culture and Practical Reason*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Schafer, R. M. (1994). *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, Rochester, Vermont: Destiny Books.

Scism, J. (1969). 'Young Rorrer insists on role of "Ramblers"', *Greensboro Daily News*, Rockingham edn, 15 June.

Sekula, A. (2003). 'Reading an archive: photography between labour and capital', in L. Wells (ed.), *The Photography Reader*, London and New York: Routledge.

Seremetakis, C. N. (1994). 'The memory of the senses, part 1: marks of the transitory', in C. N. Seremetakis (ed.), *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Snyder, J. (1998). 'Nineteenth-century photography and the rhetoric of substitution', in G. Johnson (ed.), *Sculpture and Photography: Envisioning the Third Dimension*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sontag, S. (2002). *On Photography*, London: Penguin Books.

Sterne, J. (2003). *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*, Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Stewart, S. (1993). *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Stoller, P. (1997). *Sensuous Scholarship*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Taussig, M. (1993). *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*, New York, London: Routledge.

Thibaud, J. (2004). 'The sonic composition of the city', in M. Bull and L. Back (eds), *The Auditory Culture Reader*, Oxford and New York: Berg.

Thorn, R. (1996). 'Hearing is believing', *Sound Journal*, 1996. Available at <<http://www.ukc.ac.uk/sdfva/sound-journal/thorn981.html>> [Accessed 26 July 2007].

Wollen, P. (1995). 'Introduction', in L. Cooke and P. Wollen (eds), *Visual Display: Culture Beyond Appearance*, Seattle WA: Bay Press.

Wyatt, M.. (1999). 'Every county has its own personality', interview with David Freeman, *The Old-Time Herald*, 7, 2. Available at <http://www.oldtimeherald.org/archive/back_issues/volume-7/7-2/david_freeman.html> [Accessed 11 October 2007].

Lectures

Bernhardt, J. (2005). 'Travels and Tales with Rodney McElrea': the McAuley Lectures 2005, Centre for Migration Studies, Omagh, 5 September 2005.

Bernhardt, J. (2007). 'Travels and Tales with Rodney McElrea': the McAuley Lectures 2005, Centre for Migration Studies, Omagh, 1 September 2007.

McElrea, R. (2005). 'Travels and Tales with Rodney McElrea': the McAuley Lectures, Centre for Migration Studies, Omagh, 5 September 2005.

McElrea, R. (2007). 'Travels and Tales with Rodney McElrea': the McAuley Lectures, Centre for Migration Studies, Omagh, 1 September 2007.

Interviews

Freeman, D. (2008). Online interview, personal communication with Eve Olney, 30 January 2008.

Hurst, R. (2007). Discussions on the Folk Park and Rodney's archive, personal communication with Eve Olney, 15 August 2007.

McElrea, R. (2006–11). Discussions on the music collection, personal communication with Eve Olney: 15 May 2006; 15 August 2006; 26 February 2007; 30–1 October 2007; 1 November 2007; 22 November 2011.