

**TKB: AN OPEN PLATFORM AS  
"ARCHIVE" OF COMPOSITIONAL  
PROCESSES IN PERFORMING ARTS**

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## Introduction

TKB (Transmedia Knowledge-Base for the Performing Arts (TKB)<sup>1</sup> is an open-ended resource, operating indeed much more as a Knowledge-Base allowing living artists to share their works (either past or in progress) than as a common “archive” in its conventional sense. Some have called it a “platform”, others a “site” or even a “database”, while most users simply use the acronym TKB, albeit not necessarily always aware of the underlying concept of a multimodal knowledge base. Its intent has been to foster conceptual connections (made visual by means of a dynamic graph) among registered artists, through self-curated content tags, which link the artists’ respective working fields to the work of those using the same tags.

The platform opens up with an initial dynamic graph connecting several artists and groups from the Portuguese dance scene at random and without creating any type of hierarchy. This graph is the result of the individual registration of each artist represented in the platform. When browsing and selecting an artist, visitors can visualize the materials uploaded by that very artist, but also by other artists or organizations, whom he or she has chosen to be connected with. By clicking on the name of each artist you reach a page where you access all the materials chosen by that respective artist to be shared in the platform. For instance, if you are looking for the piece *I Am Here*, by choreographer João Fiadeiro (2003), you click: João Fiadeiro, Works, Dance, Solo Works, *I Am Here* (2003), and you will reach the video of this piece in the artists’ Vimeo page collection. Several search categories help the user quickly find what they are looking for: users’ names (artists and others), type of content or location, with a series of content tags that each artist is encouraged to choose at the moment of uploading their materials, in order to allow their work to be shared with other artists with whom they share working fields, specific interests or themes<sup>2</sup>.

## Usability of the platform

Developing the TKB concept a bit further, it is a dynamic and democratic platform conceived as an open ‘archive of processes’ allowing the upload and customizable tagging of diverse multimodal materials, from text to videos and its annotations, therefore facilitating the creation of a net of affinities among the content providers through the chosen tags. According to

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<sup>1</sup> “The Knowledge-Base for performing arts was conceived as a dynamic and open-ended resource launched online on the 5th of June of 2016, as part of the 14th edition of Alcantara Festival. It works as a digital relational platform for all creators, performers and researchers interested in sharing their creative processes, working methods or finished pieces in the performing arts field” (in <https://tkb.fcsh.unl.pt/content/introduction-knowledge-base>, accessed in March 2020.)

<sup>2</sup> Parts of this article have been previously submitted to a Special Issue of the *Dance Research Journal*.

Fernandes & Jurgens (2016), "The rationale behind this platform is the radical absence of hierarchical relations in the displayed graph for browsing, where the connections among the artists are created solely on the basis of their own choices, be those unidirectional, bidirectional or multidirectional. The fact that any artist can upload their selected materials and tag them with their own idiosyncratic taxonomies to describe their work allows for the emergence of links among the artists present in the Knowledge-Base. Indeed, links will be automatically created when a user chooses a tag that has been previously introduced by another user, and so on and so forth, thus naturally enlarging the net of connections between them. Those connections will be displayed in the Knowledge-Base home's dynamic graph through a colour code. When clicking on a name, the associations that may exist among it and other names will be highlighted with red lines connecting the nodes that share the same tag. We believe TKB is also a means for the expression of choreographic knowledge: choreography implies the multiple meanings of the body and is intrinsically multimodal as well. And this is also the enormous potential of open digital archives: the more the choreographic knowledge is amplified in networks, the more creative those archives can become.

The "transmedia" adjective used before Knowledge-Base in our title refers to the fact that we are dealing there with narratives that extend beyond multiple media forms, since they themselves contribute to the strength of those very diversified forms and contents.

The main differentiating intention of the team of researchers developing TKB has been to allow relevant conceptual connections (made visible by using the dynamic graph mentioned above) amongst the registered artists through the use of self-curatorial content tags, which associate the artists' respective working fields to the work of those sharing the same tags.

Since TKB strongly intends to be a self-curatorial platform of relations and interactions for all artists and researchers interested in sharing their creative processes, methods or staged pieces in the field of performing arts, it was highly important for us that each user can keep their autonomy in managing the contents they curate in order to be displayed online for public access.

Registration at TKB can be made by artists under individual or collective names with professional work in the performing arts, theatre, dance, circus or multidisciplinary domains. Any interested artist simply needs to access the TKB website and register before being able to log in. Most of the site's general information is in English, since the platform is open to all interested artists worldwide, even though it has been developed in Portugal. However, each user is free to publish their content in Portuguese as well, if that's their preference.

In order to place a registration users only need to access the site <https://tkb.fcsh.unl.pt><sup>3</sup> and follow the steps indicated at “Register TKB”. Afterwards the registered user will receive a confirmation message from the content’s manager and from then on they are free to login and upload their materials.



Picture 1 – Main interface of the graph with activated content tags.

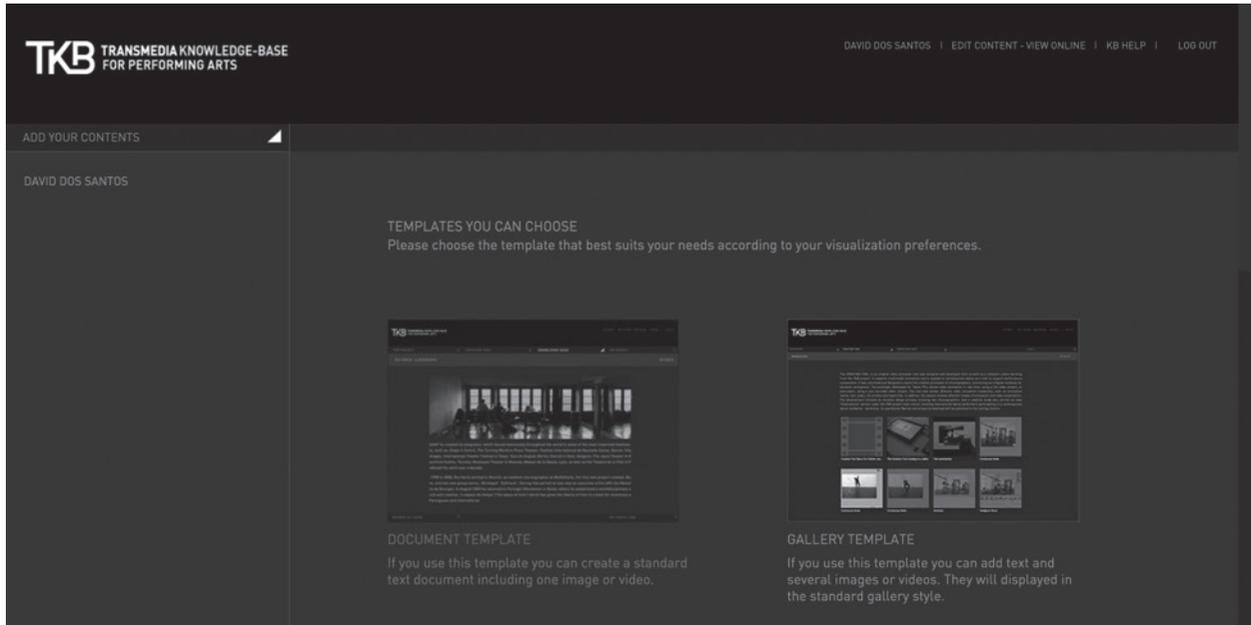
Each user can start using the platform and register at any time. The design of the platform has intended to be very accessible, simple to understand and to encourage usability. Until today we have been able to provide easy and democratic access, free of charge for all users.

To access the personal page in order to manage their content, users simply need to log in in the upper right corner of the page. In line with its self-curatorial policy, each user is responsible to prepare the contents they would like to upload and publish in the Knowledge-Base. The TKB administrative team

<sup>3</sup> Accessed in March 2020.

takes no liability for intellectual property rights or copyrights. These shall be dealt with by each artist, prior to uploading any materials. All users are allowed to upload content in different modalities, such as written texts, still images, sounds or videos. Every time a user logs in to their account and selects “Add your contents”, they will be provided with a list of seven possible content templates to use and will be asked to select one at a time, according to the type of content in question.

Each one of the seven Content Templates represents a different narrative modality or combination of modalities. In detail: the Document Template should be chosen when wishing to create a standard text document that may include only one image or video. The Gallery Template allows the user to add a text with several images or videos, displaying them in the standard gallery-style. The Slideshow template should be used to create a standard photo slideshow display. The Video Template enables users to import videos directly to the TKB website or to embed Youtube or Vimeo video links. The Creation-Tool template is to be used in case the user is using the Creation-Tool software for video annotation (currently designated as “MotionNotes”<sup>4</sup>) and wishes to import the respective annotations directly to the Knowledge-Base. The PDF Template is dedicated to the upload of text and PDF Files. Finally, the Elan Template has been added for users who work with the ELAN software and wish to import their videos and respective annotations directly to the TKB platform.



Picture 2 – Examples of template layouts to be used in the back-office.

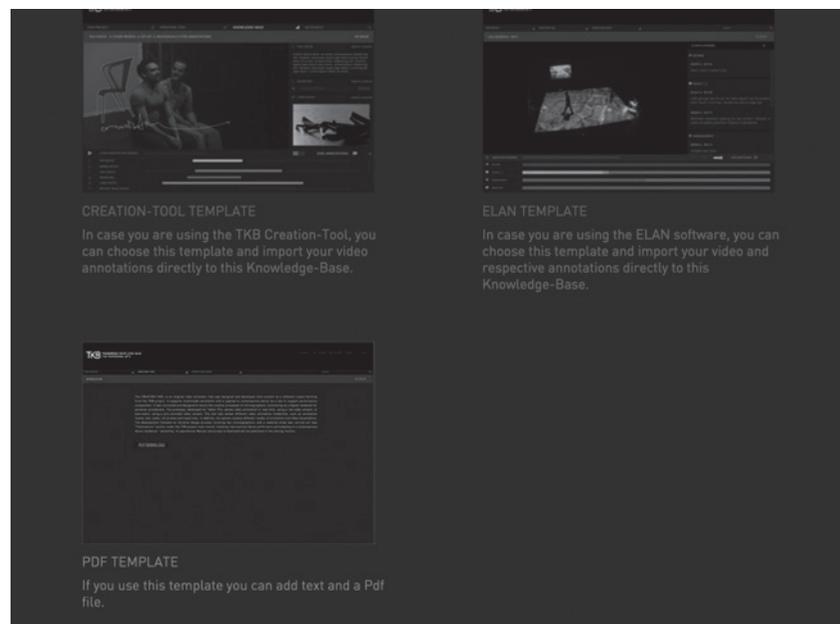
<sup>4</sup> The initial version of the Creation-Tool video annotator has recently been converted into a web-based version, “MotionNotes”, in the framework of the EU-funded CultureMoves project: <https://portal.culturemoves.eu/> (accessed in March 2020).

After choosing the adequate template, and in order to optimize the search functionalities inside the Knowledge-Base, users are asked to choose the **type of content** concerning their uploads. The options for the type of content are mandatory and cover as many options as these: Artistic Methodologies, Biographies, Credits, Pieces, Installations, Methodologies, Publications, Research Materials, Videos, Artistic References, Clipping, Critiques, Interviews, Photos, Projects, References, Scores, Exhibitions, Master Classes, Piece Research, Promotion Materials, Research, Texts, Author Texts, Conferences, CV, Labs, Promotion Materials, Rehearsals, Technical Riders, Workshops, Awards and Contacts.

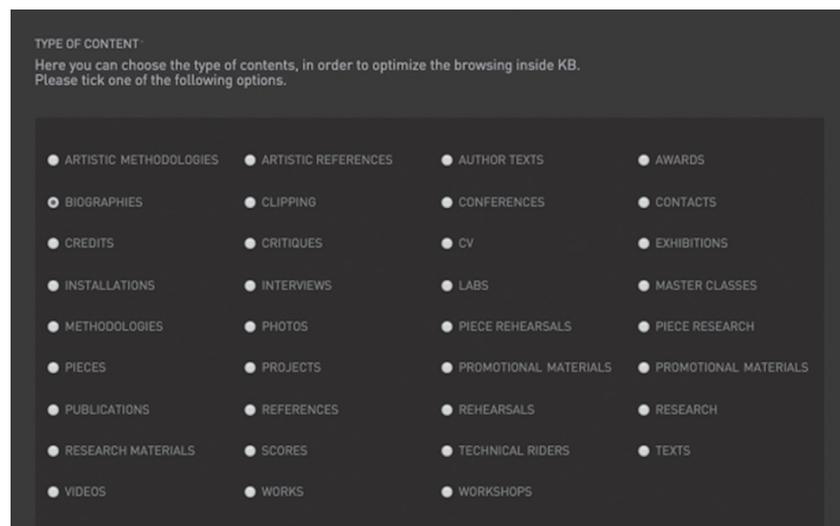
Since one of the main aims of this Knowledge-Base is to allow multi-directional relations, when submitting new content the user will be asked to associate one or more **free tags** to it. Tags work as “keywords” that will establish diverse meta-relationships between the content of the artists’ work. It is only through them that interactive relationships can be established amongst the contents of the various creators. A new user can always choose one of the pre-existing tags or create a new one of their own. In this way, original knowledge can surprisingly emerge from unexpected connections between different artists. At the time of writing this article, the number of tags created by artists amounts to 129<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Examples of the 129 tags created by the TKB users are: Action and Perception, Body-Sound Relationships, Choreography, Collective Body, Community, Cultural Management, Dance, Documentation, Drummer, Exhibition, Gender, Image, Live Music, Movement Studies, Multiplicity, Music, New Media Design, Nomadism, Performance, Personal History, Philosophy, Poetry, Politics, Possibility, Scene Music, Sound Art, Theatre, Video Art, Video Dance, Visual Arts.



Picture 3 – Examples of template layouts to be used in the back-office.



Picture 4 – List of predefined content tags to help artists organizing content in the back-office.

In order to create an interesting experience and interaction in the platform, we recommend that each artist contributes at least with the upload of the following:

#### **Minimum contents**

Biographical note;  
Photos of the artists and/or of their creations;  
Video of at least one piece (we recommend that it's on Vimeo or Youtube);  
Synopsis and technical rider of the chosen piece.

#### **Other contents**

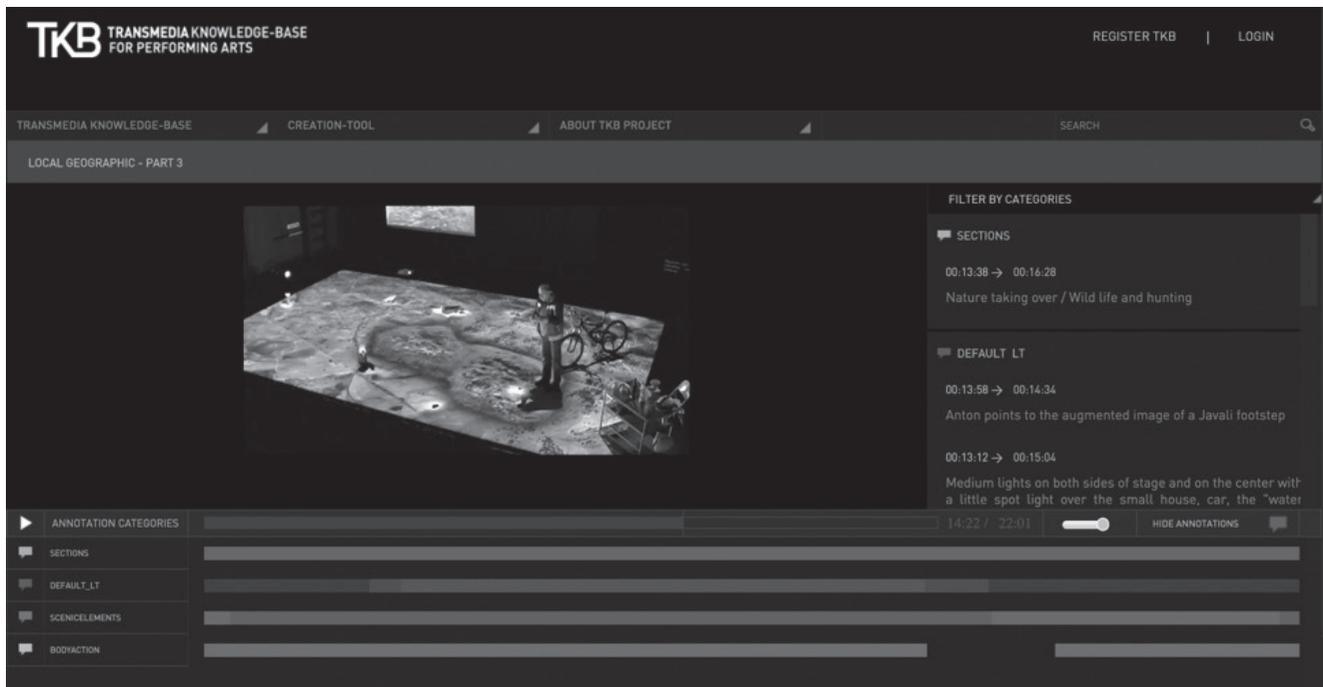
List of performed shows and plays;  
Documents about the rehearsals, compositional processes and/or shows;  
Press clipping or promotional material.

Via the access to this personal back-office, each user can create their own "website", therefore portraying their work and becoming connected with the TKB community. The platform even offers new functionalities which allow them to **share the content** already published in TKB through the social networks Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Pinterest and Google+.

### **Connection between TKB and the artists**

The first artist involved in the platform, and who has shared most of his life-long work with us, was the Portuguese choreographer Rui Horta. He has been a close partner of the project from its very beginning and was willing to upload a large number of videos, photos and texts of his work into the platform. You will notice that one of the nodes of his materials is titled "Linguistic annotation", and this refers to video annotations that have been imported from ELAN into TKB. Indeed, in the beginning of our project, Rui Horta has had three of his contemporary dance pieces analysed in extreme detail with verbal annotations by a multidisciplinary team of researchers on Cognitive Linguistics, New Media and Performance Studies. The results of those studies have been imported into the ELAN template in order to allow a user-friendly visualization of the annotations aligned with the video timeline.

After Horta, we have invited several other artists to register in the platform. In 2016 the project was associated with the event "Reencontro", promoted by the Teatro Viriato in Viseu, Portugal. This reunited four names from the generation of the Portuguese New Dance Movement (Clara Andermatt, João Fiadeiro, Paulo Ribeiro, Vera Mantero) directed by a young choreographer (João dos Santos Martins) to celebrate the World Day of Dance. On this occasion, those artists



Picture 5 – Visualization of the annotations imported from ELAN into TKB

uploaded a large amount of materials to TKB, portraying their work through selected videos, images, texts and documents that are now shared virtually with a broader audience at the international level.

On the 5th of June 2016, we officially launched the TKB platform during the Alkantara International Festival of Performing Arts. The event was open to the public and presented by Carla Fernandes and David dos Santos. It started with a keynote about the TKB project history, its usability and future developments, and was followed by a real-time demonstration on the main functionalities of the online Knowledge-Base. The session counted with the participation of choreographer Rui Horta, who has shared his experience as a registered user of the platform and his reasons to endorse the project. After this event several invitations have been addressed to artists and arts-related structures in order to promote and feed this open archival resource, and we have received a high number of user registrations, which now amount to over a hundred artists, both as individual users or institutional ones.



Picture 6 – Interface of the graph after selection of an artist (in this case, Rui Horta's materials).

### Brief quantitative analysis

In February 2020 we have **103 users registered** in the platform. From these, 62,5% have uploaded considerable amounts of videos, photos and texts about their artistic portfolio, whereas 39,5% of them have uploaded just some brief content such as their biographies, lists of staged shows, or pages with a single photo or video representing a glimpse of their work. When analysing the types of materials users upload to their personal nodes, we can conclude that the modality of **text** is present in 87,5% of them, followed by the modality **image**, with 64,5%, and **video** with 62,5%.

Over the recent years we understood that some users have registered in the Knowledge-Base mostly to be part of the community, but they keep postponing the upload of content for very different external reasons. When inquired by us about this fact it became clear that it is not at all the case that they are not sufficiently motivated, but mainly because they lack the conditions to organize

and digitally convert their own personal archives beforehand. Some of them do mention the lack of funds and precarious conditions in which they usually work, often without any extra financial support that would allow them to build a quality archive of their own work. Although they do value the principle of self-curating their own work, they miss some institutional and production support that would help them organize, transcribe and digitize printed texts and images, as well as to convert different video formats, often still in DVDs or even in old video tapes. An adequate preservation of the more intangible cultural heritage, such as the contemporary performing arts in Portugal, urgently requires a novel and adequate economic and political framework that can accommodate the emerging trends and needs of this artistic community.

### **Is a performing-arts “open archive” a utopia worth pursuing?**

The number of our registered users has gradually increased over the years. Since the very beginning we notice a great curiosity about what this platform could offer, and most of the involved artists have mentioned that it made sense for them. One of the reasons has probably been that the internet has turned to work as an open archive itself, and therefore can be an alternative to the museum, as far as art production and distribution are concerned. The museum used to be a place of authority that chose which artists to present, and how and where to portray their work to the world. As philosopher Boris Groys reminds us of in his article “Art Workers: Between Utopia and the Archive”:

Something that always troubled artists in relation to the museum concerned the criteria of choice. Modern artists revolted against the identities imposed on them by others and so they desire for the right of sovereign self-identification, essentially because the question of identity is not in itself a question about the truth but a question of who has the power over the artists identity (Groys, 2013).

So, to the artists this platform could represent a way to regain their power and to co-exist with the social mechanisms of identification apart from the state institutions.

Over time we could see the emergence of a parallel narrative, pointing to the desire for self-identification and the possibility to self-curate their own art work. The internet exposes the artistic work outside of the usual here and now of the performing arts, therefore creating in the artist a subtle tension between the desire for global recognition and promotion on one hand, and a feeling of necessary precaution in front of such a wide (and at times wild) arena on the other. The web is indeed like a stage that presents their art to an uncontrollable and unknown eye. Artists need to manage their own subjectivity with care. This can be associated to Sartre’s argument, underlined by Groys (2013) as well, in that the gaze of others “objectifies” us and, by doing so, it negates the possibility of change that defines our subjectivity.

At the same time, we could witness that most of our registered artists are conceptually and ideally drawn to the idea of being part of the multiplicity of connections offered by the Knowledge-Base. An online archival resource based on content tags can be an opportunity to allow the works' intrinsic identity to perhaps overcome the individual identity, by creating a flow of reproductions and unpredictable connections which may emerge out of serendipity. And we can gain interesting insights not only from what the artists decide to share but also from what they decide to keep private and erase from the digital memory of the archive. They may actually be preventing revolutionary works of art to become historicized, as well as subjectivities to be objectified ahead of time...

### **Conclusions**

As seen, TKB has a post-custodial approach and works as a participatory archive, allowing the storage by the artists themselves of their own choreographic resources, deciding when and what should be archived and published. However, the fact that artists can both upload material or remove it, prevents the TKB collection from being more "stable" and thus from it actually working as an archive in a more conventional sense.

On the one hand, the decision of not having a custodial approach, or any interference in the contents uploaded, works as an obstacle for the quality control of the possible collection; but on the other hand the TKB functioning mode, as a network, allows different kinds of unsuspected relations to appear, as it functions generatively.

This resonates with Groys' (2013) idea that we are becoming more interested in the decontextualization and re-enactment of individual phenomena from the past than in their historical recontextualization. The utopian aspirations that lead artists out of their historical contexts interest us more than the contexts themselves. Looking at the TKB graph from the point of view of the archive, its subjects would not be so much the isolated artists in themselves, but rather the relations amongst them, made visible by the tagging possibilities. This being said, would there be other and more accurate ways of visualizing those relations? How can a platform such as TKB keep a "stable" collection of documents and simultaneously allow for a dynamic cartography of relations at various levels?

Having started as a national project, concerning a specific assembly of choreographers related to the field of the so-called contemporary dance, TKB's mode of functioning allows the cartography of a transnational dance scene at a specific moment, which, alongside with dance students and experts, works as a community of users. TKB has hopefully found a balanced interaction between reliability and interaction with the artists. Like most of its partner projects, it has a problem of

maintenance: the initial team is no longer fully available to feed, curate, and to actively liaise with the artists. A closer interaction with the latter, at least in Portugal, is certainly a crucial point for which we would like to see more room and funding allocated to, if we do wish to consolidate fruitful relations rising around these archival issues in the near future.

## Reference

Groys, Boris (2013). "Art Workers: Between Utopia and the Archive", *E-Flux*, no. 45, May 2013. Accessed in March 2020: <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/45/60134/art-workers-between-utopia-and-the-archive/>