

Dance and the (Digital) Archive: a survey of the field¹

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Introduction

While working in the context of the FCT-funded research project “TKB – A Transmedia Knowledge Base for performing arts”, we have compiled a list of websites related to archiving dance in very diversified ways. Typologies vary immensely. From official websites of either academic projects or well-established institutions, to artist websites and pedagogical dance-related resources, our aim was to assemble a multiform sample of available online resources for dance documentation and/or archiving. Hence, one can find in this list websites focused on artist-driven creative processes, as well as websites featuring recordings of entire dance pieces. Some websites were crafted almost as “annotation tools” aimed at assisting choreographers, while blog-like sites function as an ever-growing informal archive. While some accept and instigate participatory action by authorized users, others require professional assistance. In both cases, the range and reach of the website is directly related to the (more or less constant) work of their content managers, sometimes as part of a well-defined project, at others as an ongoing series of events/posts.

In this paper, we discuss the TKB experience by proposing a sort of survey of the field of Dance and the online (Digital) Archive by suggesting four tendencies or categories to understand this relation.

In the TKB case, it is an open-ended resource, operating indeed much more as a transmedia 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.

Taking the (alleged) democratization of internet access as our starting point, and acknowledging the potential impossibility of such a “survey of the field”, we

nonetheless insist on an exercise of categorization, as we believe that inquiring into key historiographical issues such as the “subject” and/or the “object” of the archive (eg. dance processes vs. dance pieces), its main “aims” or “goals” (eg. to document a specific body of work or a particular moment in the history of dance), the *media* employed and the source of the documentation (from private collections to brand-new rehearsal materials), the website testimonies, the “stories” included and the ones that are lacking, the composition of the community of users congregated around the website, and how it evolves in time, can allow us to better understand how these concrete types of dance digital archives may participate in, and be challenged by, an embodied transmission of knowledge. This embodied transmission of knowledge is what Lepecki (2010) has foreshadowed in his approach to “the body as archive”, and it can guide us in the face of this decade’s tidal quest for an idealized “total archive” (Jardine & Kelti 2015).

Dance and the Digital Archive: What can be considered as an “online archive”?

In 2018, while working in TKB, we compiled a list of websites² related to archiving dance in very diversified ways. By ‘online dance archive’, as we understood it at the time, we meant a website in which one can have direct access to more or less “canonical” dance-related materials, moving image and photography in particular. As researchers and educators we were interested in the pedagogical potential of these images as dance-related resources for the embodied transmission of pre-existing dances as well as for the creation of new choreographies (Cf. Lepecki 2010). Aware of how - in the context of theatrical dance, and of experimental performing arts -, the concept of “movement”, the idea of “body”, and of “ephemeral arts” has changed dramatically in the last twenty to forty years, we nonetheless insisted, at first, on a supposedly “natural” search in internet browsers, typing words such as “dance”, “archive”, alongside the names of more or less canonical techniques, choreographers or styles. In a second moment, and since our point of departure was the TKB project, we focused on dance-related research internet projects. Afterwards, trying to

² See sitography.

broaden our overview, and informed by the two previous (re)searches - which have shown us that digital dance archives are often related to, or depend upon, national institutions -, we targeted national dance archives.

Finally, in January 2020, while finishing this paper, we decided to make, once again, a simple Google search for “dance digital archive” and in only 0.42 seconds we obtained 420,000,000 results. The first result was Tanzfonds.de Overview: Dance archives around the world,³ a worldwide list of dance archives, divided into “Archives with online material” and “Archives with no online material”.⁴

Although we did not follow the same categorization – we have gathered archives with online material alongside archives without online material, according to the ways in which, in our view, their dance-related documents were collected – the great majority of our listed archives coincide with those of Tanzfonds.de, and we could therefore easily make a second systematization combining both options.

We have divided our compiled list of websites into four categories, each corresponding to a different operation – to **collect** (to assiduously build up a collection), to **accumulate** (to gather almost random material), to **store** (to organize according to a set of rules), to **assemble** (to compose and curate material) – which we will now explain in further detail.

1. TO COLLECT: IN CATALOGUES AND INSTITUTIONAL COLLECTIONS

Archives such as Lincoln Center’s Digital Collections in the Jerome Robbins Dance Division of Moving Image Archive in the US, Cinémathèque de La Danse / Centre National de Danse in France, the National Resource Centre for Dance

³ <https://tanzfonds.de/en/magazin/overview-dance-archives-around-the-world/>

⁴ List of websites compiled in <https://tanzfonds.de/en/magazin/overview-dance-archives-around-the-world/>: Ubuweb Dance, Deutsches Tanzfilminstitut Bremen, Dansearkiv.dk, National Library of Australia Dance Collection, Goethe Institute – Dance Videos, Digitaler Atlas Tanz, Europeana.eu, European Collected Library of Artistic Performance, Numeridanse.tv, Digital Dance Archive, Archivo Virtual Artes Escenicas, The Library of Congress / Performing Arts Encyclopedia, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts / Jerome Robbins Dance Division, Vlaams Theater Instituut / Performing Arts database, Scenarkivet.se, gallica.fr (Bibliothèque nationale de France).

in the UK, Tanz Archive: Association of German Dance Archives and Digital Atlas Dance, Deutsches-Tanzfilminstitute, Deutsches Tanzfilm Institut Bremen in Germany, or Mediakunst.net in the Netherlands, Terpsicore or OP SIS in Portugal, but also the recently created The Digital Pina Bausch Archive or even the Siobhan Davies Replay can be classified as, somehow, having a direct relation to a more or less stable *corpus* of pre-existing documents, across different media – a collection, or, in the larger and more complex cases, a collection of collections – belonging to a well-recognized and often well-established institution.⁵ In that sense, for the sake of this overview, they can provisionally be gathered under the motto “To Collect”, where we included thoroughly organized dance digital archives, often in direct relation to a stable institution with financial and human means to – for a shorter or longer period of time, often the latter– take on the endeavour of digitizing, indexing, cataloguing material and, last but not least, manage and maintain the website once it is online. Even in the cases where documents can be added to the collection – which is therefore not said to be complete or “closed” –, it includes a stable central *corpus* of treated documents, assuring the continuity of the core of the archive and of its main functions, which frequently (although not always) extend or continue, in the world wide web realm, those of the archived institution, be it a choreographer’s body of work, a venue, or a style, for instance. The subjects of these archives are often well-defined and considered influential. Also, their objects can be anything that relates to these subjects: filmed dance pieces, excerpts, scores, notebooks, rehearsal screenings. As reference points in dance digital archives, their main mission has to do with securing the accessibility of these influential works to broader audiences and future generations (universally understood), nurturing a sense of community in the field of dance and the arts in general by displaying shared images of a

⁵ Although aware of its importance in dance divulgation, we did not include Numéridanse in this list, nor in any of our proposed categories, due to the fact that the Numéridanse dance videos are usually excerpts used for promotional ends. An analysis of the extreme importance of this dance promotion platform lies outside the scope of this publication, and we do not propose either (nor would it be possible) to draw up an exhaustive list of digital dance archives. Instead, we would rather call attention to some major trends in this field, discussing the compiled websites according to the ways in which their documents are collected.

presumably common dance past and opening them up to future uses and appropriations. While these kinds of archives coincide, more often than not, with financial, political and academic centres, such as the US, Germany, France or the UK, where the biggest and most important archival institutions are located, this does not always translate directly into a collection of recognizably canonical works, emblematic – let alone celebratory– of their time, since dancers and choreographers often belonged to marginal sectors of society, and just as often assumed a critical stance towards it. Nonetheless, and although dance history is – more than others, perhaps, due to its constitutive tendency to itinerancy – transnational, and substantially made of traveling ideas, movements, styles and practices, these are still Western narratives, and these archives are often organized around – or congregate work of – canonical, well-known Western choreographers and dancers, labelling a specific kind of dance tradition under the general designation of “dance” and placing non-Western dance under the plural “dances”.

The very existence of dance archives (and thereby of dance digital archives) is deeply bound to the implementation of dance and dance institutions (and to how dance is perceived) at a national or regional level. For instance, one cannot help but notice, in the European context, the heavy German investment in the preservation and celebration of the German legacy in dance and choreographic cultures and histories,⁶ or the French effort in the creation of a *Cinémathèque de la Danse*, reclaiming France’s responsibility in the preservation of cinema and dance traditions within a “universal” framework.

Nonetheless, institutions of this magnitude are able to build up multiple collections, from different contexts (periods, geographies, choreographers, dance styles), thus enabling a plurality of points of view. In fact, as their collections are meant to last, with stable metadata, clear archive architecture and a regular cataloguing system, these institutions often work as custodians, ensuring that information will survive, and frequently preserving the original documents. Recently, due to the way in which digital technologies have

⁶ A great portion of the latest European revivals in dance history may owe its funding to this significant investment in memory and in the re-enactment of paradigmatic characters in German dance history, which, while supporting the paths and careers of the artists, also arguably brings along with it a kind of nationalistic, identitarian, drive that had been suppressed during the most severe post-war trauma years.

changed our relation with archival and access practices - calling for a rethinking of the traditional copy versus original dichotomy -, professional archivists have been discussing the notion of the post-custodial archive, a kind of archive more directly engaged with the community.

Digital archiving, moreover, invites archivists to revisit core assumptions about authorship and authority, about context and hierarchy, and about advocacy versus agency. In short, "we occupy a moment in history in which the largest percentage of the world's population ever possesses the power and potential to author and create documentation about their lived experiences." While power and potential do not equate to effortless or automatically all-encompassing archiving, various types of digital archiving initiatives are harnessing the power of technology to expand the reach of participatory archiving, develop increasingly sophisticated and sensitive post-custodial approaches, broaden the cultural record to represent more diverse voices, and respond to current events. Participatory archives in a digital context can include crowdsourcing description, such as enlisting community members for describing images, transcribing handwritten script, translating from or into other languages, tagging items, or otherwise contributing to making sense of what is preserved.⁷

Post-Custodial forms of the archive, which often, if not always, include and depend upon digital forms of internet archival architectures, represent, thus, a major challenge to the institutions whose primary mission has to do with what we here call "to collect". How can these institutions broaden their scope in order to become more democratic and representative without losing sight of their mission to preserve and to display more or less stable collections?

In what sense does archiving dance⁸ serve as a privileged site for rethinking archiving in post-custodial times?

⁷ Sofia Becerra in EDUCASE Review 52, n°6 (Novembre/Décembre 2017), available at <https://er.educause.edu/articles/2017/10/participatory-and-post-custodial-archives-as-community-practice> accessed in November 2019.

⁸ DeLaHunta and Shaw 2008.

2. TO ACCUMULATE: the cases of *YouTube* and *Vimeo*

The arrival of the internet contributed to the expanded concept of archive. YouTube, Vimeo and similar platforms are considered here as random accumulators, and YouTubers as emergent curators and expert archivists for the particular kind of subject that is meant to be the “internet user” (different from the “universal” citizen of the institutional archives, for instance). Documentation proliferates and becomes accessible online - we have, as an example of this change in accessibility, the moving images that dance history was looking for: before the advent of YouTube and Vimeo, dance history and theory classes relied on the few videos available in precarious documentation centres, but readily facilitated by teachers and curators, or broadcasted on television, for example. Therefore, the generation before YouTube did not have as much access to the filming of pieces and the dance of choreographers that contributed to the establishment of lines, styles and changes of aesthetic paradigms in the area of dance. Given the scarcity of images and moving images, direct transmission has prevailed, either by watching live performances, or by teaching the techniques “incorporated” by teachers and fellow dancers, in experimentation rehearsals and in the construction of a dance performance, or by socially (or ritually) shared dances, or later via television. Here we underline the role of television series such as *Fame* 1982-87, in instigating a will to dance in the 1980s, but also (with due differences) the shows and video-dances that were shown on national televisions, and later on ARTE and Muzzic channels, without forgetting the role of the video clips as launchers of dance movement trends, i.e. on MTV. Many people watching the same TV shows at the same time, as it happened in the 1970s, the 1980s, and the 1990s, was an important condition for cultural encounters and a shared choreographic background. Also, the very possibility of embodying different body styles and manners was surely broader than ever before. A certain nostalgia for a “lost community” built around the influence of American musicals like *Grease* (1978), *Fame* (1982), *Flashdance* (1983), *A Chorus Line* (1985), *Footloose* (1984), or *Dirty Dancing* (1987), goes beyond the selling of its products, sub-products and the subliminal desire for a progressive and virtuous young U.S.A. moving forward. These

movies have not only established dance trends but also highly contested body cultures thereafter.

It is curious to note, nowadays, the co-existence, on online platforms such as YouTube, of recordings with great technical and aesthetic quality —originally made in film, or video, and aiming to be screened in cinema theatres or broadcasted on television, as autonomous film objects -, alongside, and in stark contrast with, amateur recordings of a wide array of events: performances filmed on the sly, classes, tutorials, recordings of dances in family contexts, people dancing alone in their bedrooms, or at a party anywhere the world, at weddings, on the street, etc. To these different types of recorded materials, with different functions and histories, we can provisionally call "the objects in the archive", in this case, moving images of dancing people in a wide and disparate variety of situations. The subjects of these kinds of dance archive would then be the spontaneous dances and dancers these platforms accumulate.

Nowadays, very informal dance groups can launch a "trend" overnight, by simply sharing their videos online, on Youtube, or stories on Instagram, Facebook, etc. Think, for example, of street dances like the Kuduru in Angola, Break Dance battles anywhere and everywhere, various types of Hip Hop movements from the outskirts or suburbs, and how fast and easily they spread. But in these very same platforms one may well come across other styles and generations, namely various types of local Folklore dances. Or experimental dance from the 1960s, perhaps, in full length or in segments, such as Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A* (1966), Trisha Brown *Accumulation* ([1971] 1996), or trailers for recent dance pieces by Vera Mantero, Mathilde Monnier and Maria La Ribot.

Still, as users can delete their contributions as easily as they can upload them, all this abundance can be considered as nothing but temporary: what is online one day might not be available on the very next. Also, as YouTube data is owned and managed by private companies, not so much interested in the actual "archived" materials as in the interactions among the platform users, these contents cannot be considered "safe" and such platforms, although working as the largest "archives" of our times in terms of distribution, usability and access, seem to be lacking the traditional archives' main feature: preserving and safeguarding the collected documents.

How does this accumulation of dance-related materials side-by-side challenge the way dance as a discipline, a medium and a human practice is conceived?

What would it be like for YouTube, Vimeo and like platforms to work as institutional archives, safeguarding and preserving documents, without reducing their accessibility?

How are platforms such as YouTube and Vimeo linked with the recent wave of re-enactments of pivotal work from the 1960s and 1970s? How do they currently influence dance processes? Can our current dance practices, at least in the field of so-called “contemporary dance”, be considered as a sub-product of the digital internet technologies, in particular moving-image digital online platforms?

3. TO STORE: ARTISTS' WEBSITES AND BLOGS

To store and display material that remains well visible at a site can be said to be the basis for most internet websites in the traditional sense of the word, artists' websites included.

Sometimes driven by more commercial purposes – like selling and showing their work online to curators and programmers or serving as an up-to-date portfolio – at other times more focused on holding to a sense of responsibility by sharing their work with a wider community of colleagues, researchers, students and audiences, some artists organize their products and processes in order to have their work (in full-length or in segments) available online.

Often regular websites made with readily-available internet platforms such as Blogspot, Wordpress, Cargocollective, Tumblr, and the like, at times created by the artist him/herself, at other times with the help of professional developers, these types of platforms usually (with due exceptions) do not have a team working to regularly update its contents. In terms of the objects of the archive, this type of archive often displays or makes reference to earlier, finished, dance or performance pieces no longer on tour, although they may also present other choreographic objects such as video recordings of their working processes,

photos, reviews, reflective texts. The subject of the archive is usually very well defined: the artist's body of work, which, in some cases, opens up to a constellation of references (linking to websites, images, videos, pdf) to materials considered paramount to the understanding of the artist's aesthetics and poetics.

Often artists combine online platforms such as Vimeo, Tumblr, YouTube or, in the French case, the French platform Dailymotion (2005), which also includes some online dance material, with social networks such as Facebook, Vimeo and Instagram. Contemporary artists can be very imaginative in the ways they use and reinvent internet platforms, adapting them to their own body of work (which sometimes operates almost as a new internet subject) and frequently integrating them into the performativity of the work itself.

This kind of strategy, combining the use of various internet platforms such as Wordpress, Vimeo and YouTube, is used by several choreographers, as it allows them to promote their work (displaying of trailers on YouTube and Facebook, for instance) while, at the same time, using private Vimeo accounts to limit full length visualisation to producers, curators, and teachers.

Usually when an institution commissions an artist's work, they have an online communication strategy, which includes producing a trailer of the artist's piece. This trailer is then often uploaded to platforms such as YouTube, Vimeo and Facebook and used for promotional means⁹. The user community of artists' websites is then composed by a particular audience comprising the artist's fans, curators, critics, programmers and producers, students, researchers, as well as regular, curious, people.

An artist's website in the dance field works as a personal website in several other fields – for the public display of the availability of both workers and work – as the performance artist (and dancers in particular) can be seen as the typical

⁹ One of the largest sources of material in innovative platforms such as Numéridanse comes precisely from these institutional trailers. In this sense, Numéridanse showcases the sum of the programming of a series of well-known dance institutions.

self-entrepreneur figure, at best, or one of the most precarious kinds of professions, at worst.¹⁰

In contrast to this extreme relevance and importance of the artist's website, another trend has emerged among contemporary artists, namely those working in experimental choreography, who have simply chosen to stop filming their works and to privilege live sharing instead. There are also those who have invested in more concrete formats of sharing and translation, such as text, books, boxes with objects, "signed" classes, or Scores, such as: *Tuning Scores* by Lisa Nelson, *Underscores* by Nancy Stark Smith, *Scorescapes* by Lília Mestre, among others.

What can we learn from the many versatile forms in which artists use internet platforms as a way of displaying their work?

Should we listen to their experiences regarding the dissemination of their dances on the internet? How have digital dance archives changed their careers?

Are artists still really concerned with their professional websites or are they rather looking for peers via social networks?

4. TO ASSEMBLE: RESEARCH PROJECTS: DANCE DIGITAL ARCHIVES AS CHOREOGRAPHIC RESOURCES

Assembling can be related to the gathering of people, but "assemblage" is also a composition technique (Cf. Jean Dubuffet 1953). Here we propose to connect the idea of "assembling" to research projects, which have shown interest in dance and its relation to digital online technology. And which, using DeLaHunta and Shaw's terminological suggestion, become "choreographic resources", as choreographers¹¹ create:

a rich body of unique materials related to choreographic creation and production. (...) These materials and the artists responsible for them

¹⁰ For the notion of the performer in contemporary capitalism see Virno, P. (2004) *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*. New York: Semiotext(e).

¹¹ DeLaHunta is referring here specifically to Siobhan Davies, Emio Greco, Wayne McGregor and William Forsythe. CFR

have achieved the status of “resource” for researchers not only from the needs of their own creative practice. The choreographic resources get absorbed back into the practice; making it possible for the artist to either “move on” categorizing and setting aside certain approaches or “go deeper” taking on fresh perspectives on existing ideas. (...)

For some, these remains may be seen as a sort of “Expanded Choreography” – the excess they are is a potential hub for transindividuated choreographic relations (i.e. Oliveira 2015).

Research projects, while focusing on case studies, often assemble a series of material considered representative – or symptomatic– of actual and future tendencies. They have the procedural ambition of instigating new relations, be it of an artistic, social, philosophical, or scientific nature. Generally, they have a well-defined beginning and end, and hopefully an extended lifespan. Their end is closely connected to the funding of the research project and the availability of the researchers to work on it. The end corresponds to a temporary zone, or a temporary community of thought. Often it is the culmination of a series of milestones, and a final conference operates as a kind of review of the whole project that is then re-examined and critically discussed in specialized papers. Sometimes, only several years after the end of the project are the researchers able to acknowledge the implications and consequences of their experiments and reflections, and these will then last and become influential over the years.

Working precisely in the relation between dance and technology, these projects’ inscription persist online, archived, as a testimony to the work of a critical thinking community which looked at dance as a “particular form of knowledge”, trying to translate it, and extract possibilities of this very particular form of knowledge, to other areas. Or, again as DeLaHunta and Shaw propose:

Whether using technology to transfer the dynamic action of drawing into pliable data; inventing impermanent names for individual capacities and unique movements; generating creative agents informed by the thinking in movement; or asking experts from different fields to describe the information contained in choreographic work, the projects (...) emphasize dance as a particular form of knowledge. Not as an unknowable ephemera, but as a meaningful resource for understanding human perception, complex systems of interaction, and moving ideas.

But performing arts, but also from other disciplines including architecture, music, philosophy and the cognitive sciences.

Following the authors' suggestion, we have included in this category the research projects involving the choreographers Siobhan Davies, Emio Greco|PC, Wayne McGregor, William Forsythe and Rui Horta; MotionBank and its sub-products (Choreographic Coding Labs, Dance TechTV, Choreographic Objects), Emio Greco Salons, Wayne McGregor's Choreography and Cognition, Rui Horta's hands_on labs with the Creation-Tool software¹², as well as the BlackBox Arts&Cognition project.¹³

These are complex projects composed of several layers of research work gathered in online platforms that showcase events, meetings, discussions and collections, but which aim, mainly, at crafting future tools, by drawing from choreographic thinking and combining it with digital technology.

When looked at from the point of view of the archive, its subjects might often be said to be the work of the choreographers analysed in a laboratorial manner, with minimum interference from the outside world, making the studio or the stage coincide with a square on the screen. For the objects of the archive, those would be what we above called "tools" – or, as DeLaHunta and Shaw have put it, these choreographic resources are digitally scrutinized and trimmed to the point of becoming something other. As extremely specialized works combining both high-tech digital technology and extremely virtuous professional dancers, i.e., arts and science in its most sophisticated forms, the community of users these archives congregate is extraordinarily limited, which, on the one hand, can allow for further experimentation (if projects are not strangled by bureaucratic and funding academic procedures) but, on the other hand, immensely reduces the scope of their immediate reach.

¹² <https://tkb.fcsh.unl.pt/content/introduction>

This vídeo annotator in real-time is now being re-programmed for a web-based version, in the framework of the EU-funded CultureMoves Project: <https://culturemoves.eu/#resources>

¹³ <http://blackbox.fcsh.unl.pt/home.html>

This is an ERC-funded project covering three long-breath case-studies with choreographers João Fiadeiro, Rui Lopes Graça and Sylvia Rijmer.

How could then the scope of these experiments be expanded without losing their experimental characteristics and scientific quality? How could one ally the involvement of research communities and artists in a larger scale? How could choreographic resources be concretely used in areas other than choreography? What can choreographers and researchers learn from each other? What is common and what is not in the ways in which both participate in knowledge production? How can larger audiences perceive this knowledge production?

Starting with the Transmedia Knowledge-Base for the Performing Arts (TKB)¹⁴: 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 arrive at the video of this piece in his Vimeo page collection. Several search categories help the user find what they are looking for more easily: users’ names (artists and others), type of content or location, together 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.

As stated in the introduction of this paper, TKB is an open-ended resource, working as a transmedia Knowledge-Base amongst living artists to share their works (either past or in progress) rather than as a common “archive” in its

¹⁴ “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”. <https://tkb.fcsh.unl.pt/content/introduction-knowledge-base>

conventional assumptions. While some have called it a “platform”, a “site” or even a “database”, most of its users simply use the acronym TKB, not necessarily always aware of the underlying concept of a multimodal or transmedia Knowledge-Base, though.

The concept of Knowledge-Base has been developed since the 1970s when Marvin Minsky wrote about it in the framework of Artificial Intelligence and the theory of frames in his article "A Framework for Representing Knowledge. The term "knowledge-base" was coined to distinguish this form of knowledge store from the more common and widely used term “database”. At that time most of the large management information systems still stored their data in some types of hierarchical database. The first knowledge-based or expert systems already had data needs that were the opposite of those databases, as they required structured data. Not just tables with numbers and strings, but pointers to other objects that in turn have additional pointers. The ideal representation for a Knowledge-Base is an “object model”, often called an ontology, with instances and multi-directional relations to connect them inside the global system. In general, we could say that Knowledge-Bases are attempts to represent knowledge explicitly by a reasoning system that allows it to derive new knowledge.

The “transmedia” adjective used in our Knowledge-Base 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. Indeed, the regular use we also make of the adjective “multimodal” concerns the different modalities involved in the platform, such as written texts, still images, sounds or videos, in analogy with the multimodal character of human communication and language (Forceville 2009; Müller & Cienki 2009), where gestures, postures and other non-verbal features coincide in time with the articulation of speech, its privileged channel, but often not the most important one, as obviously happens in dance.

Developing the TKB concept a bit further, it is a dynamic and democratic platform conceived as an open ‘archive of process’ allowing the upload and

customizable tagging of diverse multimodal materials, from text to videos and respective annotations, therefore facilitating the creation of a net of affinities among the content providers through the chosen tags. According to 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 uni-directional, bi-directional or multi-directional. 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 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.

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 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 network functioning mode allows different kinds of unsuspected relations to appear, as it functions generatively.

Looking at TKB graph from the point of view of the archive, its subjects would not so much be 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 could we visualize more accurately the tagged categories? And how could the tagging procedure work in a more scientific way? Or what to say of the archived materials (video, programs, brochures, rehearsal material, etc), could they be tagged as well, allowing for other relations to show up? How could a platform like TKB simultaneously keep a “stable” collection of documents and 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. How then could this cartography be snapshotted, depicting different maps according to different tags and categories? Would it be possible to open it up to various types of dance genres?

By proposing a survey of the field of dance and the (digital) archive in four major tendencies - to collect, to accumulate, to store and to assemble – we hope to be able to better look at the different features of the various operations via which dance becomes available on the internet.

Choreographers, performers, video makers, institutions, and the general public, are sharing videos and photos online, therefore spreading the access to images of performances within a century of visual productions. This goes way beyond the old studies in specialized documentation centres where we had to search for hours before the internet advent. It goes beyond settled festival and

institutional curations. Some of the dance filmed after the birth of cinema has suddenly reappeared, and it is sometimes available for a much broader audience than just the specialized researchers and curators who used to have access to film museums and performing arts media centres beforehand.

But the very concepts of dance and choreography have changed tremendously in the last 20 years. Throughout the XX century and the XXI century, post media theories and the expanded sense of the arts and the media brought a lot to artists and to art theories and studies.

Concerning the online accessible digital archive and the embodied transmission of Knowledge, we can start by identifying a path that is deeply connected to how we learn dance history, a pattern that fits well in the common sense of dance ontology - “what dance is” for someone who never thought about it. We can even forge a genealogy departing from the first register of the movement from chorus dances (literally: Choreo-graphies), social dances in court contexts, Thoineau Arbeau’s first book *Orchesography* (1588), Raoul Feuillet’s *Chorégraphie* (1700), Jean Jaques Noverre’s *Lettres sur la Danse* (1760), the dancing images in visual arts, and the technical revolutions of photography and cinema, Étienne-Jules de Marey and Edward Muybridge movement studies, François Delsarte’s methods, Émile-Jacques Dalcroze’s theories, Rudolf von Laban’s movement analysis and notation, Joan and Rudolf Benesh choreology and notation system, pioneer dancers and the use of new technologies of lighting, stage apparatus, dance techniques: like classical ballet, Isadora Duncan’s organization of choreographic thought and more formal Denishaw schools, Humphrey/Limón technique, Martha Graham technique, Alwin Nikolais technique, Merce Cunningham technique and the first digital programs (such as *Lifeforms* 1989). This line is easily organized into new propositions from choreographers that base their study in movement, rhythm, music, cinema, or timelines, like: William Forsythe, Anne-Teresa de Keersmaecker, Rui Orta, Olga Roriz, Akram Khan, Ohad Naharin, Marie Chouinard, Sasha Waltz, and other repertoire companies.

To conclude, although not taken in its strict sense, a “survey of the field” intended here to give an overview of some of the major questions arising from the dance archives found online. Observing the field, we have chosen to divide

a compiled list of websites into four categories corresponding to different operations – to **collect** (to assiduously build up a collection), to **accumulate** (to gather almost random material), to **store** (to organize according to a set of rules), to **assemble** (to compose and curate material). These criteria are not strict, some sites meet several groups simultaneously, but we see it as a beginning for reflecting about a future “ideal archive”. An archive that would be meeting the needs and wishes of a broad audience worldwide.

We see two main reasons to choose documenting dance processes and sharing them online: one, when it is interesting for artists to share something online (Youtube, Vimeo, Dailymotion, Instagram, Flickr, blogs, second life, and websites are full of information that people want, and need to share); two, when it is interesting for researchers, scholars, teachers, students and curious people to grasp the vitality and the potentiality of what is being made in the performing arts fields, but also of what was made in the past.

By analysing websites that we believe are relevant for questioning the present “state-of-the-art”, we have arrived to the above categories and started to gather some ideas for a new future project. That is why in each site we visited we have focused on its “about”, or on its “mission” statements.

By doing so, and in order to approach this broader field, we have also formulated three questions that are intimately connected to dance studies and performance studies nowadays.

Concerning Access, Concept and the Will to Archive

Access: The first one had to do with the access to images of dance and performance that we hadn't seen before. Choreographers, performers, video makers, institutions, and people in general are sharing videos and photos online, and spreading the general audience access images of performances within a century of image productions. After the invention of Youtube (2005, bought by google in 2006) and the fast proliferation of videos online, copyright problems slowly arose. UBUweb is an interesting case study on this matter.

Concept: Secondly, the concepts of dance and choreography have changed tremendously in the last 20 years. Throughout the XX century and the XXI

century, post media theories and the expanded sense of the arts and the media brought a lot to artists, and to art theories and studies.

Will to archive: The third question we have considered had to do with the will to archive, but also with the “vanishing point” and the fallacy of “ephemeral arts”. Concerning the online accessible digital archives and the embodied transmission of knowledge, we have started by identifying a path that is deeply connected to how we learn dance history, a pattern that fits well in the common sense of dance ontology

What we can take home from this state of the art of dance archives online is that stable platforms depend a lot on the respective financial investment, which is a political matter; and although the mere interaction with platforms online obviously offers enormous freedom to their users, they can be rather unreliable in terms of searching capabilities, duration in time, changing of algorithms, etc. Youtube has been accused of the worst disregards in terms of protection of data and reliability, for instance.

In this sense, TKB has hopefully found a balanced interaction between reliability an 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, to 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.

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Asia Art Archives: <https://aaa.org.hk/en>

Choreographic Objects: traces and artifacts of physical intelligence.

Choreographiccoding Labs

Cinémathèque de La Danse / Centre National de Danse.

Dance Archive Network (Japan: Kazuo Ohno). <http://dance-archive.net/en/index.html>

Danse museet: <http://www.dansmuseet.se/en/about-dansmuseet/>

Dance Heritage Coalition, Collections in Dance and the Performing Arts.

Dance Tech TV: Supported by Motion Bank and featuring videos on vimeo.

Deutsches tanzfilm institut: http://www.deutsches-tanzfilminstitut.de/?page_id=83

Deutsches Tanzfilm Institut Bremen

Inside Movement Knowledge.

Mediakunst.net

Motion Bank

Numeridanse: Numeridanse est la plateforme multimédia de la danse.

Oral Site Oral Site is a platform that exists as a project space to support digital artist publications.

Pro Helvetia: <https://prohelvetia.in/en/?s=dance+archive>

SAPA Swiss: <https://www.sapa.swiss/wp/>

Swiss Dance Archives

Tanz Archive: Association of German Dance Archives and Digital Atlas Dance: Digital Atlas Dance (DAT).

Tanzfonds: Dance archives around the world

TanzForum Berlin

THAI Art Archives: <http://thaiartarchives.mono.net/>

The Digital Pina Bausch Archive.

Transmedia Knowledge Base for the Performing Arts (TKB)

UBUWeb <http://www.ubu.com/dance/index.html>

Wholodance <http://www.wholodance.eu/>

To Complete:

<https://cs.nyu.edu/ArtistArchives/Initiative/>

MERCE CUNNINGHAM: <https://www.mercecunningham.org/the-work/archives-and-selected-readings/>

Siobhan Davis Dance Archive: Siobhan Davies Dance is an artist-led organization that advances the art forms of dance and choreography. (See The Guardian article: "[Can Dance Be Archived?](#)")

Babette Mangolte site/archive: <http://www.babettemangolte.org/>

Thomas Hauert: <https://zoo-thomashauert.be/projects/130/sweet-bitter>

Jonathan Burrows:

La Ribot: <http://www.laribot.com/home>

Jerôme Bel: <http://www.jeromebel.fr/index.php>

Wayne Mc Gregor: <https://waynemcgregor.com/>

In portuguese:

Desarquivo (Brasil)

Rumos Dança (Brasil)

PerformingArts.PT is an independent platform for dance, theatre and music.

n.e.c: <http://www.nec.co.pt/arquivodancante/>.

TERPSICORE: <http://weebox.fmh.ulisboa.pt/community/#front>: arquivo de documentos sobre dança e artes performativas

Prata da Casa: <http://pratadacasa.pt/> - acervo de história oral da dança contemporânea portuguesa