

Dance and the (Digital) Archive: A Survey of the Field¹

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*This paper offers a conspectus of several online dance archives made in the context of the Portuguese research project TKB. The online searches we conducted from 2018 to the end of 2019 suggested four broad categories of resources for what one may call ‘online dance archives’. Aiming to observe how dance resources are available on the internet, we made each category correspond to a different operation – to **collect** (to 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). And we posed the same set of questions: for each of these categories: what is the mission of the archive, who are its subjects and objects, and which community of users does it bring together? The outcome is both a general overview, and the possibility of a comparative approach. Our original motivation has been to survey and to analyse a sample of available online resources for dance documentation and/or archiving, in order to feed TKB future projects and experiences.*

Starting from the TKB project perspective, and aiming at categorizing the different approaches to storage, curation, ownership and availability reflected by those archival platforms, we finally identified three major challenges in the relation between dance and the digital archive: the question of access, the ontology of dance and archive – what it is, what it has been, and what ‘dance and archiving’ can become in the future –, and the ‘Will to archive’ (cf. Lepecki 2010). Each one of these challenges will eventually provoke new questions as to the future of the TKB project and of its team of researchers, and the nature of the work they may undertake.

Keywords: Dance, Digital Archives, Knowledge-Bases, Archival Platforms, Dance Websites, Participatory and Post Custodial Archives, TKB project

INTRODUCTION

While working in the context of the FCT-funded research project ‘TKB—A Transmedia Knowledge Base for performing arts’—in 2018, we compiled a list of websites related to archiving dance in diversified ways.² 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 in order to put the TKB in perspective. Hence, our list includes websites focused on artist-driven creative processes, as well as websites featuring recordings of entire dance pieces. Some websites seem to have been crafted almost as ‘annotation tools’ aiming at assisting choreographers, while other 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, and sometimes as an ongoing series of events/posts.

In this paper, we propose a sort of survey of the field of Dance and the online (Digital) Archive by suggesting four tendencies, or categories, to understand how dances are available on the internet, each corresponding to a different operation—to **collect** (to build up a collection assiduously), to **accumulate** (to gather almost random material), to **store** (to organize according to a set of rules), to **assemble** (to compose and curate material).

By ‘survey’ we do not intend to be making a quantitative evaluation, but rather a close overview of a broad field as disparate as ‘online dance archives’, and by ‘online dance archive’, we mean 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 as educators, we were interested in the pedagogical potential of these images in the realm of 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, and taking the (alleged) democratization of internet access as our starting point—thus acknowledging the potential impossibility of such a ‘survey of the field’—we nonetheless insisted, at first, on a supposedly ‘natural’ search in internet browsers, typing words such as ‘dance’, or ‘archive’, alongside the names of more or less canonical techniques, choreographers or styles. In a second stage, and since our point of departure was the TKB project, we focused on dance-related research projects. Afterwards, trying to broaden our overview, and informed by the two previous (re)searches—which showed us that digital dance archives are often related to, or depend upon, national institutions—we targeted national dance archives.³ This led us to attempt some categorization, starting by the ways in which the

online dances are gathered and made available online or, in archival terms, how the collection was formed and maintained: by collecting (dance collections.), by accumulation (social media), by storage (personal websites), or by assemblage (research projects.) – all examples are indicative.

Taking this provisional division into four categories as our starting point, we therefore aligned each one of the four categories with the same three historiographical questions: the archive's main 'mission' or 'goals' (to document a specific body of work or a particular moment in the history of dance), the 'subject', and the 'objects' of the archive (random dancers, or a well-known choreographer's body of work; dance processes as opposed to dance pieces, as well as the *media* employed and the source of the documentation). Finally, we looked at the composition of the community of users congregated around the websites, and how it evolves in time. By inquiring into these features it is possible to interrogate what is included and what is excluded, and which notions of dance are in play. It is also possible to understand better 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) 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).

The TKB is an open-ended resource operating much more as a transmedia knowledge base – allowing living artists to share their works (either extant or in progress) – than acting as a common 'archive' in its conventional sense. Its main mission, therefore, has to do with allowing a network of relations to emerge. 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 in awareness 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 its subjects (registered artists) through self-curated content tags) which link the artists' respective working fields (its object) to the work of those using the same tags, allowing a community of users to be made visible.

1. TO COLLECT: IN CATALOGUES AND INSTITUTIONAL COLLECTIONS

Well-known online dance 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*, in France; the recently-created Digital Pina Bausch Archive; or even the Siobhan Davies Replay, can be regarded as 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.

Table 1. The four suggested categories.

Collect To assiduously build up a collection		Accumulate To gather almost random material	
Institutional Collections	Collection: stable central <i>corpus</i> of treated documents.	Youtube, Vimeo	Collection: not stable, contents can be deleted at any moment.
	Subjects: well-defined and considered influential in dance history and tradition.		Subjects: random contents uploaded by the internet users.
	Objects: anything that relates to the influential subjects of the archive: filmed dance pieces, pictures, excerpts, scores, notebooks, rehearsal screenings, biographical notes.		Objects: there is a coexistence of recordings with great technical and aesthetic quality — originally made in film, alongside with amateur recordings.
	Mission: securing the accessibility of these influential works to broader audiences and future generations.		Mission: not so much interested in the “archived” materials <i>per se</i> as in the interactions among the platform users.
	Community of users: the “universal” citizen of the institutional archives, for instance.		Community of users: the particular kind of subject that is meant to be the “internet user”.
Questions: 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 reasonably stable collections?		Questions: 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?	
Store To organize according to a set of rules		Assemble To compose and curate material	
Artist's websites and blogs	Collection: created by the artist themselves, this type of archive often displays or makes reference to an earlier body of work.	Online choreographic resources	Collection: Research projects often assemble a series of material considered representative — or symptomatic — of actual and future tendencies.
	Subjects: the artist's body of work, which, in some cases, opens up to a constellation of references.		Subjects: the work of the choreographers analyzed in a laboratorial manner.
	Objects: this type of archive often displays or makes reference to earlier, finished dance or performance pieces.		Objects: choreographic resources digitally scrutinized and trimmed to the point of becoming something other.
	Mission: sharing their work with a wider community of colleagues, researchers, students and audiences.		Mission: working in the relation between dance and technology, these projects envisage dance as a “particular form of knowledge”, trying to translate it, and extract possibilities, for other areas.
	Community of users: the user community of artists' websites.		Community of users: As extremely specialized works, combining both high-tech digital technology and extremely virtuous professional dancers, the community of users these archives congregate is rather limited.
Questions: What can we learn from the many versatile forms in which artists use internet platforms as a way of displaying their work?		Questions: How could then the scope of these experiments be expanded without losing their experimental characteristics and scientific quality?	

Table 2. Online dance resources organized in the four suggested categories.

Additional online dance resources organized in the 4 suggested categories We do not propose (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.	
<p>Collect* To assiduously build up a collection</p>	<p>Cinémathèque de La Danse / Centre National de Danse: www.cnd.fr/en/section/92-nouvelle-cinematheque-de-la-danse</p> <p>Danse museet: www.dansmuseet.se/en/about-dansmuseet/</p> <p>Dance Heritage Coalition, Collections in Dance and the Performing Arts: www.danceheritage.org/</p> <p>Deutsches Tanzfilm Institut: www.deutsches-tanzfilminstitut.de</p> <p>Digital Atlas Dance (DAT): www.tanzarchive.de/en/projects/digital-atlas-dance/</p> <p>TanzForum Berlin: www.tanzforumberlin.de/en/</p> <p>Mediakunst.net: mediakunst.net</p> <p>The Digital Pina Bausch Archive: www.pinabausch.org/en/projects/you-and-pina/laboratory-of-memory</p> <p>Asia Art Archives: aaa.org.hk/en Archivo Virtual Artes Escénicas: www.caac.uclm.es/ Dance Archive Network (Japan: Kazuo Ohno): dance-archive.net/en/index.html Siobhan Davis Dance Archive: www.siobhandavies.com/archive/</p> <p>Oral Site: oralsite.be/pages/Index</p> <p>UBUWeb: www.ubu.com/dance/index.html Numeridance: www.numeridance.tv/en/home</p> <p>Arquivo Dançante: www.nec.co.pt/arquivodancante/ Prata da Casa: pratadacasa.pt/ Weebox: weebox: weebox.fmh.ulisboa.pt/community/#front</p>
<p>Accumulate To gather almost random material</p>	<p>YouTube Vimeo Instagram and other platforms alike.</p>
<p>Store** To organize according to a set of rules</p>	<p>Jerôme Bel: www.jeromebel.fr/index.php Jonathan Burrows: www.jonathanburrows.info La Ribot: www.laribot.com/home Merce Cunningham: www.mercecunningham.org/the-work/archives-and-selected-readings/ Babette Mangolte: www.babettemangolte.org/</p>
<p>Assemble To compose and curate material***</p>	<p>BlackBox: blackbox.fcsh.unl.pt/home.html Motion Bank: motionbank.org Transmedia Knowledge Base for the Performing Arts (TKB): tkb.fcsh.unl.pt Dance Tech TV: dance-tech.tv Inside Movement Knowledge: insidemovementknowledge.net Wholodance: www.wholodance.eu/</p>

* This category includes both institutional archives and para-institutional archives, created by the civil society in order to preserve a specific choreographer/ technique/ body of work: digital archives such as ubu.com belong to this category in that perspective, and so does OralSite or Numéridance, although we are aware of their different aims, especially the fact that Numéridance dance videos are usually excerpts used for promotional ends.

** Several other examples of artists' websites could be added to this category.

*** Other research projects could be added.

In that sense, for the sake of this overview, they can provisionally be put together under the heading ‘to Collect’; this category includes thoroughly-organized dance digital archives, often supported by a stable institution with the financial and human resources to take on the digitizing, indexing, and cataloguing of material and, last but not least, to manage and maintain the website once it is online (for a shorter or longer period of time, often the latter).

Even in cases where documents may be added to the collection – which is therefore not said to be complete or ‘closed’ – this category includes a stable central *corpus* of documents, assuring the continuity of the core of the archive and of its main functions. Those functions are frequently (although not always) extended or continued, in the World Wide Web. 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 for broader audiences and future generations; and nurturing a sense of community in the field of dance and the arts in general, by displaying shared images of a common dance past and opening them up to future uses and appropriations. While these kinds of archives are to be found, more often than not, within 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 is not always translated directly into a collection of recognizably canonical works, emblematic – let alone celebratory – of their time: 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 – due to its constitutive tendency to itinerancy – transnational, and substantially made of ‘travelling’ ideas, movements, styles and practices) these are still Western narratives. These archives are often organized around – or bring together the 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 closely tied to the policy decisions of dance and dance institutions (and to perceptions of dance) at 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,⁴ or the initiative of France in the creation of a *Cinémathèque de la Danse*, reclaiming France’s responsibility for 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 archival architecture and a standard cataloguing system – these institutions often serve as custodians, ensuring that information will survive, and frequently preserving the original documents. Recently, due to the way

in which digital technologies have 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.

According to Sofia Becerra,

Digital archiving (...) 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. (Becerra 2017:: online publication)

Post-Custodial forms of the archive, which often, if not always, include and depend upon digital forms of internet archival architectures, therefore represent a major challenge to the institutions whose primary mission has to do with what we 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 dance serve as a privileged platform from which to rethink archiving in post-custodial times?

2. TO ACCUMULATE: THE CASES OF *YOUTUBE* AND *VIMEO*

To **accumulate** – to gather almost random material – seems to be the most relevant operation in the case of YouTube and Vimeo interfaces. Different types of recorded materials, with different functions and histories, can be called ‘the objects in the archive’ – moving images of dancing people in a disparate variety of situations. The subjects of these kinds of dance archive would be spontaneous dances and dancers these platforms accumulate. The community of users congregated around YouTube and Vimeo is composed of almost anyone that is looking for ‘dance’ online, or intends to share dance online.

The arrival of the internet contributed to an expanded concept of ‘archive’. YouTube (invented in 2005, bought by Google in 2006), 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).

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’. Such platforms, although they seem to work as the largest ‘archives’ of our times in terms of distribution, usability and

access, lack the main feature of the traditional archive – which is preserving and safeguarding the collected documents.

Documentation proliferates and becomes accessible online – we have, as an example of this change in accessibility, the moving images that dance history was always seeking. Before the advent of YouTube and Vimeo, dance history and theory classes had to rely on the few videos available in precarious documentation centres, those obtained by teachers and curators, or broadcast on television. Certainly, the generations before YouTube had limited access to filmed versions of those influential works by choreographers and dancers that brought about new styles and shifts of aesthetic paradigm in the area of dance. Given the scarcity of images and moving images, direct transmission prevailed – through live performances, technique classes, experimental rehearsals and putting together dance performances, or, later, through television.

Television had a significant part to play in instilling a will to dance in the 1980s by producing series such as *Fame* 1982–87, as did the shows and video-ed dances that were shown on national television networks around the world, and later via the ARTE and Muzzic channels. Video clips also had a role in launching dance movement trends, on MTV, for instance. The fact that many people watched the same TV shows at the same time, as it happened in the 1970s, the 1980s, and the 1990s, was an important consideration in facilitating cultural encounters and creating a shared choreographic background. Also, the range of different body types and manners on display among the dancers was 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 not only established dance trends but also highly contested body cultures thereafter, for instance in the Portuguese context.

It is curious to note nowadays, the co-existence, in online platforms such as YouTube, of film and video recordings with great technical and aesthetic quality – made for screening in cinemas or broadcast 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, for example. Nowadays, very informal dance groups can launch a ‘trend’ overnight, by simply sharing their videos online, on *YouTube*, or stories on Instagram, *Facebook*, and other social media. 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 folk 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.

How does this accumulation of dance-related materials, put side-by-side, challenge the way dance is conceived as a discipline, as a medium and as a human practice? What would it be like for *YouTube*, *Vimeo* and similar platforms to work as institutional archives, safeguarding and preserving documents, without reducing their accessibility? Are platforms such as *YouTube*, *Vimeo*, *Dailymotion*, and *Instagram* connected to the recent wave of re-enactments? How do they currently influence dance processes?

3. TO STORE: ARTIST'S WEBSITES AND BLOGS

To store and display material that can be viewed on a site is the basis for most traditional internet websites, including artists' websites.

Sometimes artists organize their products and processes in order to have their work available online in extracts or at full-length: this can be driven by commercial aims—like selling and showing their work online to curators and programmers or providing an up-to-date portfolio; at other times it may be driven by a sense of responsibility in sharing their work with a wider community of colleagues, researchers, students and audiences. This could be said to constitute the usual 'mission' of artists' 'classical' websites.

Often regular websites made with readily-available internet platforms such as *Blogspot*, *Wordpress*, *Cargocollective*, *Tumblr*, and the like, are created by the artist him/herself; at other times, with the help of professional developers, these types of platforms usually have no team working to update their contents regularly. 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 items related to their choreography, such as video recordings of their working processes, photos, reviews, and reflective texts. The subject of the archive is usually very well defined: the artist's body of work, which, in some cases, opens out to a constellation of references (linking to websites, images, videos, pdfs) and to materials considered central to the understanding of the artist's aesthetics and poetics.

Often artists combine online platforms such as *Vimeo*, *Tumblr*, and *YouTube* or, in the French case, the platform *Dailymotion* (2005), which includes online dance material from 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 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 purposes.⁵ The user community of artists' websites is then composed of a particular audience comprising the artist's fans, curators, critics, programmers and producers, students, researchers, as well as curious visitors.

An artist's website in the dance field also works as a personal website with wider applications for the public display of the availability of both workers and work; for the performance artist (and dancers in particular) can be seen as the typical freelance entrepreneur, at best, or a practitioner of one of the most precarious of professions, at worst.⁶

By contrast to the relevance and importance of the artist's website, another trend has emerged amongst contemporary artists, namely those working in experimental choreography, who have simply chosen to stop filming their works and to privilege live sharing instead (as is the case with Tino Sehgal). There are also those who have invested in more concrete formats of sharing and translation, such as lectures, text, books, boxes with objects, 'signed' classes, seminars, or scores (such as *Tuning Scores* by Lisa Nelson, *Underscores* by Nancy Stark Smith, and *Scorescapes* by Lília Mestre).

4. TO ASSEMBLE: RESEARCH PROJECTS AND 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 with a focus on dance and its relation to digital online technology. Using deLahunta and Shaw's terminological suggestion, these become 'choreographic resources', as choreographers⁷ create: 'a rich body of unique materials related to choreographic creation and production'. (deLahunta and Shaw 2006: 54). For some, these materials may be seen as a sort of 'Expanded Choreography' – a potential hub for trans-individuated choreographic relations (*Cf.* Oliveira 2015).

Research projects, while focusing on case studies, often assemble a series of materials 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, possibly, 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 an opportunity to review 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 endure and become influential over the years.

Working precisely in the relation between dance and technology, the inscription of these projects continues to live online as an archived testimony of the work of a critical, thinking community which looked at dance as a 'particular form of knowledge', trying to translate it, and to apply the possibilities of this very particular form of knowledge, to other areas. Or, again as deLahunta and Shaw (2006: 62) 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.

Following deLahunta and Shaw's 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 software,⁸ and the BlackBox Arts & Cognition project.⁹

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 upon 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 converge within a square screen. For the objects of the archive, those would be what we have referred to above as 'tools' – or, as deLahunta and Shaw have expressed it, these choreographic resources are digitally scrutinized and trimmed to the point of becoming 'something other'. As specialized works combining both high-tech digital technology and highly-skilled professional dancers, – art and science in their most sophisticated forms – we think the community of users united by these archives, when compared with institutional archives, or online platforms, is rather limited. On one hand, this could allow for further experimentation – if projects are not strangled by bureaucratic and funding academic procedures – but, on the other hand, would seem to reduce the scope of their immediate outreach.

We can therefore ask ourselves how the involvement of research communities with artists could be achieved on a larger scale. And how choreographic resources could be applied in areas other than choreography.

Since the three authors of this paper are based in Portugal, and the TKB project has been the first attempt there openly to collect and assemble multimodal materials from the contemporary performing arts scene, we will start

by analysing the Transmedia Knowledge-Base for the Performing Arts (TKB). Although most of the artists involved in the project are Portuguese, this is not at all a national platform, and it is intended to serve any artists throughout the world who are interested in participating.

In terms of the four proposed organizational categories, TKB is located somewhere between the attempt to Collect (to build up a collection on a regular basis)—albeit in a non-custodial manner—and to Assemble (to compose and curate material) because this platform allows both for the building up of personal collections by the artists themselves, and for the curation of diverse materials that together create a web of relationships amongst the participating artists.

Below we set out the intentions and most significant possibilities offered by TKB. In the first place the platform provides a dynamic matrix connecting several artists and groups from the Portuguese dance scene at random and without creating any type of hierarchy. This matrix (or 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 artist, but also by other artists or organizations with whom he or she has chosen to be connected. By clicking on the name of each artist you reach a page where you access all the materials chosen by that artist for sharing on the platform. For instance, if you are looking for the piece ‘I Am Here’, by the choreographer João Fiadeiro (2003), you click: João Fiadeiro, Works, Dance, Solo Works, *I Am Here* (2003), and you are taken to 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 when they upload their materials; this allows their work to be made available to other artists with whom they share working fields, thematic or other specific interests.

TKB is an open-ended resource, designed as a Transmedia Knowledge Base for living artists to share their works—past or in progress—among each other, rather than as a conventional ‘archive’. The concept of the knowledge base has been developed since the 1970s when Marvin Minsky wrote about it as part of the framework of Artificial Intelligence and the theory of frames. 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 type of hierarchical database. The first knowledge-based systems had data needs that were the opposite of those of 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 underlying concept of a Knowledge Base is an ‘object model’, often called an ontology, with instances and multi-directional relations to connect it 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. This is what indeed happens at TKB when users add and share tags that serve as pointers to create internal connections amongst the artists. The ‘transmedia’ adjective used in our designation 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. These include written texts, still images, sounds or videos, in analogy with the multimodal character of human communication and language (Müller & Cienki 2009), in which 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 is clearly the case with dance.

Developing the TKB concept further, it is a dynamic and democratic platform conceived as an open ‘archive of processes’ facilitating the uploading and customizable tagging of diverse multimodal materials, from text to videos and respective annotations. According to Fernandes & Jürgens (2016: 75), ‘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 accessing the Knowledge Base. Links are 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 home dynamic graph of the Knowledge Base 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 TKB has been to facilitate 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 noted, 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 and remove it, prevents the TKB collection from being more ‘static’ and from working as an archive in a more conventional sense.

On the one hand, the decision not to have a custodial approach, or to interfere in the contents uploaded, works as an obstacle to the quality control of the possible collection, but on the other hand the TKB network functioning



 **Figure 3.** TKB: features and open questions.

TKB: a Transmedia Knowledge-Base for performing arts	
	Collection: not stable. Participatory and self-curatorial archival platform, allowing the storage and removal of contents by the artists themselves.
	Subjects: looking at the TKB dynamic 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.
	Objects: all kinds of contents uploaded by the artists.
	Mission: to cater for the tangible visualization of the relations amongst the contents updated by the artists themselves via idiosyncratic tags.
Questions: 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? How could we visualize more accurately the tagged categories? Regarding the archived materials (videos, programmes, brochures, rehearsal materials, etc), could they be tagged as well, allowing for other relations to show up?	

mode allows different kinds of unpredictable relations to appear, as it functions generatively.

Looking at the 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.

It is possible that the archived materials (such as video, programmes, brochures, and rehearsal material), could be tagged as well, allowing for other relationships to show up; but how could the TKB platform simultaneously maintain a ‘stable’ collection of documents and allow for a dynamic cartography of relationships at various levels?

Having set out as a national project, involving a specific group of choreographers related to the field of ‘contemporary’ dance, TKB’s mode of operation has the potential to facilitate a cartography of the transnational dance scene at a specific moment, functioning as a community of users and including both dance students and experts.  How then could this cartography be set up to present a series of snapshots,  depicting different moments in time, tags and categories? These are open questions for further research work.

CONCLUSION

By proposing a survey of the field of dance and the (digital) archive within four major categories – to collect, to accumulate, to store and to assemble – we hope



to be able to improve our understanding of the distinctive features of the varied operations through which dance is made available on the internet. These criteria are not strict, some sites could be included within several groups simultaneously.

Choreographers, performers, video makers, institutions, and the general public, share and access videos and photos online, disseminating images of a hundred years of performances and visual productions one has never watched before. This goes way beyond the kind of specialized documentation centres upon which we relied before the internet was available, which involved lengthy searches for printed documents. 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 to a much broader audience than just the specialized researchers and curators who previously had access to film museums and performing arts media centres. But concepts of dance and choreography have changed tremendously in the last twenty years. Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, post-media theory and an expanded sense of the arts and the media, have had a major impact upon artists and upon the theoretical and practical underpinnings of their art.

Returning to our previous questions: What can we learn from the many versatile forms in which artists use internet platforms as a means of displaying their work? And how do institutional archives reinvent themselves by learning from the ways in which artists themselves make use of the digital archiving technologies?

While allowing practitioners to upload and curate their own material, TKB has sought a balanced interaction between reliability and interaction with the artists. Like most of its partner projects, and unlike institutional archives, it has a problem in sustaining the enterprise; the initial team is no longer fully available to feed, to curate, and to liaise actively with artists. In Portugal, a priority is to find time and financial support for liaison with artists to ensure fruitful future progress for all these archival developments.

Likewise, a certain degree of institutionalization (or, at least, the maintenance of a core team working regularly on the project, perhaps through partnerships with existing archiving institutions) would enable the 'collection' to be looked after; at the same time, safeguarding protocols might be developed for uploaded materials, possibly in the form of digital licenses between the artists and the platform. Such experiments, would represent a major challenge in terms of copyright and could force institutions to broaden their scope in order to become more democratic and representative without losing sight of their mission to preserve and to display dance collections.

If dance archives are to be the place for rethinking what archiving should be in post-custodial times, it is essential to acknowledge initially how the very notion of dance has changed throughout the last century and up to the present day.

Concerning the embodied transmission of the canonical 'occidental' dance repertoire, we can start by identifying a path that is deeply connected to how dance history is taught.¹⁰



By analysing a selection of websites that we believe are relevant for questioning the present ‘state-of-the-art’ in digitally archiving and displaying dance, we have arrived at the above four categories and have also identified three major challenges concerning digitally archiving dance, from a performance studies and dance studies perspective:

1. Access to images of dance and performance that were not seen before. How will access to images of live performances change performative repertoires?



2. What dance can be and what archiving can be: the concepts of dance and choreography have changed tremendously in the last twenty years, as have concepts of ‘archive’ and archiving. What challenges do these changes bring to archiving dance?

3. Will to archive: According to André Lepecki, in contemporary dance, as performed by re-enactments, there is a ‘will to archive’ consisting of a ‘capacity to identify in a past work still non-exhausted creative fields of ‘impalpable possibilities’.² This has nothing to do with nostalgia or a longing for a lost golden period in dance or in society at large, nor has it to do with simply claiming the inscription of their own work in a certain genealogy of dramaturgical affiliations. On the contrary, it often has to do with ‘unlock, release, and actualize a work’s many (virtual) com- and impossibilities, which the originating instantiation of the work kept in reserve, virtually’ (2010: 31). This is not a minor contribution to dance and art history and tradition!

Online Digital archives, by providing access to a multiplicity of dances across space and time, participate in and contribute to a redefinition of notions of both dance and the archive.

The digital archives discussed above vary greatly, but are all focused on taking a critical look at the motivations, methods, and outcomes of preserving and documenting dance and upon extending dance beyond its conventional and immediate live existence. The rationale and methods of archiving have to be closely related to the wide-ranging conclusions we have reached. It is essential, therefore, to consider the reasons for and approaches to archiving, and to make a careful analysis of the constitution of the archive: its subjects, its objects, the kind of narrative it manifests, what it lacks, the accessibility of its materials, and the choreographies of access it entails. At the same time we should be aware that the mode of discourse would not be the same if internet technology did not exist. The World Wide Web alters the ways in which time and space are perceived, requiring that a series of simultaneous events be noticed as such. It questions, too, the need for centres and opens the possibility of new geographical and political peripheries to be acknowledged in their own right, in turn creating new potential subjects and objects for/of the archive – and for all dance, future, past and present.

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NOTES

1. This paper takes its subtitle from André Lepecki's Seminar 'Dance Studies: Survey of The Field', at Tisch School of the Arts, New York University, in 2009.
2. See Table 2.
3. Finally, in January 2020, while finishing the draft of this paper, we decided to undertake another, 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, a worldwide list of dance archives (<https://tanzfonds.de/en/magazin/overview-dance-archives-around-the-world/>, accessed on 10 January 2020). This site is divided into 'Archives with online material' and 'Archives with no online material'. Although we did not follow the same categorization—we have placed 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 the listed archives coincide with those included in Tanzfonds.de, and we could therefore easily make a second systematization combining both options.
4. A large proportion of the latest European revivals in dance history may owe their 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 traumatic post-war years.
5. 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 curation of a series of well-known dance institutions.
6. For the notion of the performer in contemporary capitalism see Virno (2004: p.52–71).
7. deLahunta is referring here specifically to Siobhan Davies, Emio Greco, Wayne McGregor and William Forsythe. CFR.
8. <https://tkb.fesh.unl.pt/content/introduction>. This video annotator in real-time has just been renamed as 'MotionNotes' after having been converted into a web-based tool, in the framework of the EU-funded CultureMoves Project: <https://culturemoves.eu/#resources>.
9. 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 Alkantara 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.fesh.unl.pt/content/introduction-knowledge-base>. <http://blackbox.fesh.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.
10. 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, Thoinot Arbeau's first book *Orchésographie* (1589), Raoul Auger Feuillet's *Chorégraphie* (1700), Jean-Georges Noverre's *Lettres sur la Danse* (1760), the dancing images in visual arts, and the technical revolutions of photography and cinema (Étienne-Jules Marey and Eadweard Muybridge), movement studies (François Delsarte's methods, Émile-Jacques Dalcroze's theories), Rudolf von Laban's movement analysis and notation, Joan and Rudolf Benesh's choreology and notation system, pioneer dancers, and the use of new technologies of lighting, stage design, dance techniques, classical ballet, Isadora Duncan's organization of choreographic thought, more formal schools, and so on. Following this line, which includes Merce Cunningham's technique and the first digital dance tools, such as *Lifeforms* in 1989, attention should be paid to experimental and 'performative' traditions in which the very notion of dance, movement and body are brought to question and complexified.

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