

# Introduction - Dance and Archives special issue

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## Introduction

Sarah Whatley

This special edition of *Dance Research* focuses on the past, present and potential future for dance archives. In recent years, archives have been the subject of lively debate about what is recorded, stored and valued, and dance archives have been part of the broader discussions about the place of dance within our cultural heritage. Several themes recur in considerations of the archive, including power, authenticity, ephemerality, fixity, legacy and loss. Moreover, whilst archives are an essential resource for many dance researchers, there are challenges in sustaining and building collections, so some archives can be under threat. Nevertheless, as this issue makes clear, there are important initiatives that show how archives continue to play a core role in our dance research landscape. This is in the context of dance long being regarded as an art form that is challenging to archive because the “time-based phenomenology of dance is a challenge for dance archivists” (Oke 2017, 197); but this has not prevented the creation of numerous important archives of dance, worldwide. They have grown in recognition of the importance of collecting and conserving what are often vulnerable, partial, or rare traces. Archives may have grown to safeguard dance styles, histories, companies, organizations or people (choreographers, producers, dancers, and so on). Some archives reside in our major cultural institutions, curated by expert archivists, whilst other collections may have grown gradually to recognize a particular dance community, often through the efforts of a single committed aficionado. Whilst some are highly specialized archives, others may be home to an extensive collection including all kinds of media, material objects and ephemera.

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\*This issue of the journal has been produced by two guest editors, Sarah Whatley and Jane Pritchard, working with the Editor and Assistant Editor as specialist members of an editorial team

Dance archives are thus valuable resources that provide access to the past, to how dance legacies are created, and to uncover hidden stories and unmapped connections. Historically, dance has left many traces in iconography, drawings, and in various inscriptions depicting dancing bodies; in notations, descriptions in texts and in other material remains such as costumes, masks and scenography. But until the advent of photography and then film, the corporeal dancing body was mostly absent from these records, or required considerable detective work akin to an archaeological investigation to recover a sense of the dancing itself. The recent uncovering and sharing of some of these early films has renewed interest in the importance of historical artefacts and their influence on contemporary practices. This interest has also turned to addressing the absence of the body in the archives of dance, and how archives can be ‘performed’, ‘embodied’ or ‘re-embodied’. Conversations about ‘the body as archive’ (Lepecki, 2010) are now alive in the discourse on dance’s relationship to the archive and are influencing thinking about what is important to archive, generating considerable interest in collecting and making available the many stages of the dance-making process. The arrival of the internet has also gradually expanded the concept of ‘archive,’ and online collections have emerged over the last two decades that have added to the general corpus of dance archives whilst recognizing the inevitable paradox of online archives (that the physical documents that are digitized are likely to outlive the software and digital platforms on which they are stored). In this new environment, YouTube has become a valuable reference point and is beginning to provide an accessible store of dance films, whilst also emphasizing the importance of expertly curated dance archives. At the same time, dance practitioners are themselves getting more directly involved in building their own archival collections, or “artist-driven archival projects” (Candelario, 2018), in an effort to take more control over their representation and legacy, even if disregarding more traditional archive methods.

Previous issues of the Journal have featured articles that have focused on specific dance archives. The ‘Archives of the Dance’ series has run since 1983 with 25 articles to date that have provided a detailed examination of different archival collections<sup>1</sup>. It is this series, and a discussion about the current state of dance archives and archival practices, that prompted this special issue. The aim was to cast the net wide so that we could include articles that offer many different perspectives. We posed a number of questions to encourage contributors to think broadly about how archives participate in documenting, preserving and transmitting dance, asking, amongst other questions: Why archive dance? Who or what is missing from our archives? What does it mean to ‘perform the archive’? What new research enquiries might emerge from a critical focus on archival residue, or from rethinking the dance archive? What role do new technologies and online platforms have in the design and development of dance archives?

Our call for contributions led to a huge number of submissions, covering a wide range of themes. We were excited by the response, which seemed to endorse our belief that an issue on this theme is timely. Deciding what to include was challenging given the overwhelming interest so our selections were made on trying to ensure breadth, encompassing scholarly analyses of archives based in different locations, institutions and that house different dance styles and

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<sup>1</sup> The interest of the journal in dance archives was encouraged at an early stage by Peter Brinson, co-founder of the Society for Dance Research and of its journal. He had published a study of European dance archives in *Background to European Ballet: a Notebook from its Archives* (Leyden: A. W. Sijthoff, 1966) which was completed with the benefit of scholarships from the Council of Europe and the British Council. Peter’s account of this publication and the reasons behind it may be found in his tribute issue of the journal, (Peter Brinson with Richard Ralph, ‘Dance Memoirs’, *Dance Research*, 15.1, April 1997, p. 22). [Peter Brinson’s archival work built on two earlier studies: Rosamond Gilder and George Freedley, *Theatre Collections in Libraries and Museums: an International Handbook*, New York: Theater Arts Inc, 1936, 182pp., produced under the auspices of the New York Public Library and the National Theatre Conference with the cooperation of the American Library Association; and *Performing Arts Libraries and Museums of the World*, 1960, in French and English - the outcome of an exhaustive enquiry into international theatre libraries and collections by André Veinstein of Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal in Paris with the support of the section for Performing Arts Libraries and Museums within the International Federation of Library Associations.] The inclusion of an archival section in *Dance Research* also received significant encouragement from Selma Jeanne Cohen, a founder member of the Advisory Committee of the journal.

practices, and examinations of archives from a more critical and philosophical standpoint. We also include shorter articles that update readers on the current state of particular archives, to draw attention to achievements, developments and new initiatives that are valuable for the wider dance research community. Our selection also led us to include a contribution to this theme in the latest 'Archives of Dance' series; Jane Carr and Deborah Baddoo's conversation in issue 38 (1) that focused on the Black Dance Archives Project here in the UK, providing a valuable listing of the collections.

As dance archives reflect developments in dance on a global level, and evolve to respond to the impact of new technologies on how dance is made, documented and accessed, the articles that follow thus explore some of the themes that are most pressing for how dance archives impact on research in dance. The articles are international in scope and contributors include researchers, curators and practitioners, writing sometimes from their own experience of creating or engaging directly with archives, or from critically examining aspects of what it means to archive dance.

Major collections are the focus for Chris Jones and Margot Anderson. Jones discusses the conceptual frameworks and practical components of the performance databases created by British dance archives: Rambert, and Royal Opera House Collections. Anderson describes The Australian Performing Arts Collection and draws attention to the range of content, different methods of collecting content, the desire to work closely with content providers and the challenges of maintaining the archive to ensure it remains accessible. An archive of another significant dance company is discussed by Iris Lana from her perspective as leading the Batsheva Dance Company Archive Project. Her analysis points to the archive's significance in Israeli dance more generally.

The role of institutions is a theme picked up by Erica Charalambous who offers a detailed examination of the history and life of the The TanzArchiv Leipzig and how it has reflected and been subjected to the pressures brought about by the political context of the GDR, and the role played by the chief archivist in its development. Moving from Europe to South America, the situation of dance archives in Brazil is discussed in Rafael Guarato's article in which we learn about the historical context for the development of different dance archives.

Examining how dance archives should be expanded is discussed by several authors. Researcher Timmy de Laet reflects on his own experience of doing archival research to examine the archiving of dance, the shift to 'participatory archives' and to argue for methods to increase the accessibility and legibility of archive materials. The role of orality in archiving is the focus of Gaia Clotilde Chernetich's article that draws on the memories and recollections of the Italian members of Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch to question how dance knowledge is transmitted, and the role of the 'human archival device'. Renate Braeuninger also picks up the theme of the 'oral' and looks at the role of the oral descriptions in two contrasting examples; first the Balanchine Foundation's Interpreter's Archive, and in The Choreographer's Score publications by Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker and Bojana Cvejic. A different theme, popular dance, is the focus for Dara Milovanovic's article in which she examines how the screendance of Bob Fosse creates a "multivocal archive that blends choreographic and screen histories".

The impact of digitisation on dance archives is considered by Carla Fernandes, Sílvia Pinto Coelho and Ana Bigotte Vieira who write together to discuss a major dance project based in Portugal, the TKB project, which offers a valuable way of categorising the different operations involved in making dance resources available online. They survey a number of online resources

and archives to identify the major challenges in the relation between dance and the digital archive. Another digital project is the focus for Kate Elswit and Harmony Bench. They introduce their project on choreographer Katherine Dunham that is exploring how data analysis and visualization can be meaningful for dance history. Their project offers insight to their investigation into the archival records of Dunham, their own curatorial process in the project, and how bringing specific lenses to the research can open up new readings of historical material.

The role of archives in recovering 'lost' histories, or conversely in obscuring the reading of different historical narratives is the theme for Sarah Gutsche-Miller and Rosella Simonari. Gutsche-Miller's article focuses on the experiments and innovations of the ballet mistress Madame Mariquita and is important for recognising the limitations of archival records and what is lost when only consulting official archives when reconstructing the past. By contrast, the Italian dancer and painter Alberto Spadolini is the focus for Simonari, who focuses on how a hidden life can be rediscovered and reconstructed through a "precious archive" of boxed documents that were found by chance.

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