Digital Dance Archives Meeting
7 March 2012
3rd Dance Education Biennale
HfMDK, Frankfurt am Main

Attending: Franz Anton Cramer, Caroline Rehberg, Dietrich Krueger, Freya Vass-Rhee, Salomon Bausch, Marc Wagenbach, David Bennett, Norah Zuniga Shaw, Norbert Pape, Madeline Ritter, Ingo Diehl, Nancy Stark Smith, Dieter Heitkamp, Susanne Triebel, Martin Streit

Short presentation of current situation for each participating institution (audio documentation is available):

Motion Bank: (http://motionbank.org) runs through end of 2013, broad context for choreographic research with a focus on creation of on-line digital dance scores with guest choreographers, also involved in dance educational (curriculum development) and interdisciplinary (dance-science) research. Dance archives specifically are not included in MB stated aims and goals, but MB is part of the 'cultural heritage of dance' discussion. [see Brochure handed out]

Digital Dance Atlas (DAT): (http://www.digitaler-atlas-tanz.de/) initial development phase finished in February 2011; continued work since March 2011, updating of meta-data, reshaping the graphic layout, acquiring objects for digitization; currently facing problems in obtaining permission for use; the plan is to relaunch in August with about 500 objects online.

Siobhan Davies / Digital Dance Archive at Coventry University: Siohban Davies Replay (http://www.siobhandaviesreplay.com/) launched in 2009, it deals with both "living archive" (around SDDC's work). This was a "born digital" archive; funding ended in 2009, since then additional funding (ca. 50%) needs to be raised by SDDC; University continues to host the project but sustainability is a constant issue, e. g. through lowering costs by employing new technology, especially in software; The Digital Dance Archive (http://www.dance-archives.ac.uk) unites several collections (in fact five "physical archives") sharing metadata and implementing visual search technology

William Forsythe Archive (Ballet Frankfurt, Forsythe Company): (http://www.theforsythecompany.com/) locating and preserving the material owned by Frankfurt Opera, including videos of performances and rehearsals; Piecemaker (http://motionbank.org/en/piecemaker-2/) is an important tool to investigate communicative possibilities in working with archived material; current pilot project: "yes we can't" as one piece and documentation of all of its changes and transformations (all phases available in Piecemaker and digital media). Archive in this context is considered to be research resource rather than objectifying the repertoire. [see Freya's one-page proposal handed out/ not for distribution]

Pina Bausch Archive: (http://www.pinabausch.org/) task to build the physical and digital archives at the same time; current funding runs through 2013; cataloguing of material is the first step to build up a database for digital archive. The work can refer to a structure conceived of and determined by Pina Bausch herself. Peer review (e. g. BAM archive) and advice concerning organisational principles is sought with

various experts and institutions. The work-flow currently starts with setting up a prototypical scheme for each "group" of documents. Fundamental questions / issues of reflection are: the actual dance work is hard to render in archival contexts. Besides video, other sources need to be asked / consulted, e. g. the dancers' "lived experience". This involves Oral History and contributions by dancers asked by Pina Bausch to edit / select film documents of performances. Their knowledge reaches beyond the sheer "physical object". Including documents on rehearsal processes would make more obvious the 'way of working', the grounds on which a piece has been created. The archive owns a large selection of documents even from the very early phase of recording technology, so there also is an archaeological aspect to it. Other layers of comprehensive information around a dance piece are recollections of audience members. Archive building is considered as a collective work. In fact, what kind of history is at the centre of the archival process? Hence the problem of selection when it is impossible to present everything. [see Printed Report handed out]

Round Robin Project: (http://roundrobin.ecite.org/index.html) originally an attempt to bundle information around pedagogical and teaching methods used in the Contact Improvisation Community, using a wiki-structure to provide an "open source" tool. The project comprises both calender issues (i. e. practical information) and content material issues (what discourses, what reflections, what writings). The problem is how to document the "gentle state of anarchy" within the community. RRB is not structurally funded, and it is the same for the practice itself. Therefore, individualised projects result that do not necessarily wish to converge or centralise; this includes metadata, information flow and compilation. [see document and two page summary handed out]

Tanzfonds Erbe documentation: (http://www.tanzfonds.de/en/erbe-info) Runs through 2014 (end of); however, not an archival project in the fundamental sense. It is a project started from cultural politics: How to spread information on dance? How to federate efforts and create joint projects? How to obtain visibility? The project will focus on research in artistic practices within a historic paradigm. Results of this research and creativity should be documented in a pragmatic mode, but how much standardisation is needed? The provisional scheme consists of three parts: Content information, information on the work process, documentation of the final result. This material may become part of other archival / documentation initiatives and possibilities such as Digital Dance Atlas.

Group Discussion (audio documentation is available):

Discussion was prepared beforehand with the following topic list:

1) standard descriptions: how to relate existing standards (such as EAD, thesauri, Dublin Core a. o.) to the practical needs of dance objects ?
2) rights issues, particularly music
3) How to organise digital documents (search facilities and tools); DAT is using dSpace; are there „tailored systems? Which ones should be preferred?
4) man power / work force (DAT, e. g., is understaffed)
5) finances and sustainability (projects need perspectives which mere project subsidies cannot guarantee)

6)   communication: how to explain the „new" nature of digital platforms as opposed to classical forms of knowledge organisation (such as books) ? In DAT, we encounter the porblem that project partners tend to see it as an encyclopedia rather than a rhizomatic approach
7)   updating: considering retroactive change in metadata schemes and other general principles

Actual discussion did not follow these points precisely, but crossed and covered a lot of them as captured in the following notes. And additional points could be added to the seven above, for example. No. 8 curation of material; No. 9 how project teams face both big practical and philosophical/ political/ cultural (meaning) questions at the same time.

DESCRIPTION AND INTEROPERABILITY:
metadata / standard description versus individualised forms

- The core group of Dublin Core elements seems a good basis but needing adaptation (this was done for Siobhan Davies Replay). One of these is the possibility to add comments or explanatory text.
- However, such schemes often respond to the artist's wish to be as exhaustive as possible, whereas "the simple user" might ask much simpler questions.
- So can different levels of research and documentation be included in one and the same scheme?

David Bennett wrote this following the meeting:

So as not to mix up two similar issues I wanted to highlight the difference between users finding a digital resource (DISCOVERABILITY) and a user's ability to search (SEARCHABILITY) within a resource to find information without wishing to go into too much detail.
1)   When we talk about users finding a resource on the web, then use of meta tags in headers of web pages and other search-engine optimisation techniques come to the fore, and can be independent of what metadata standard is adopted (although harvesting & aggregation of metadata mentioned in (a) above also has a role in resource discovery).
2)   When we are talking about metadata standards, e.g. Dublin Core, we are primarily concerned with organising the data to enable users to find the information they are looking for within the digital resource itself. A structured database also enables the data to be displayed (published) in multiple & useful ways, more so in a digital platform than in a physical catalogue, therefore issues of granularity arise. These metadata standards also allow bringing together multiple digital resources (aggregation) through defined protocols (see: http://www.openarchives.org/).

"Open Archive Initiative Metadata Harvesting": is an ongoing process of homogenizing descriptive systems and include various collections into one search template, but always on a basis of distinct metadata-schemes.

Another issue is the type of VISUALISATION, which can be more or less free with regards to the actual information architecture of the underlying database. DAT tried

to offer two layers (one in Typo3, one in dSpace), the former with options for intuitive navigation, the latter more oriented to actual research patterns. For various reasons, this approach has been substantially altered.

Tags and keywords: SDDC does not use them. But if used, how far should or could one go? Can Gender, Social justice, postcolonialism and the like be useful categories? It needs to be kept in mind that future users will increasingly look for intuitive search options rather than "bibliographical" ones. And anyway search is always subjective and individual, lead by the questions and processes everyone brings. Information cannot be fragmented to "neutral units". Should digital projects maintain the idea of archive as a resource base? Or organise documents in a specific, "signifying" way set up by the respective artistic or intellectual paradigm of the archive builder?

On the other hand, tacit information or the absence of labels / thematic relations can be misleading. See the example of The Forsythe Company's "Yes we can't" which in the press and PR departments was commonly related to the Barack Obama presidential campaign even though the author never intended this linkage.

SDDC are experimenting with the use of the resource by practicing artists ("scrap book tool") so as to enable individual access to the archive.

FINANCES/ SUSTAINABILITY

- Three basic levels can be identified: 1) "keeping the server running"; 2) continuously and intelligently developing content; 3) seek participation and acceptance by users
- Projects by well-funded artists might lessen the possibilities of other artists and initiatives to obtain funding?
- Do archival projects eat up the money for artistic creation ?

GENERAL

- Coexistence of parallel projects, rather than unified umbrella-projects; however, the Europeana or the German Digital Library projects are aiming at just that. They might also heighten the possibilities for larger communities to actually spot the resources.
- Is access already a sharing of knowledge? Or should the knowledge first be "mastered" or "appropriated" before it can circulate? What would be a "true" or deeper connection between various initiatives?
- The creation of a directory, or an index of existing material and collections, both digital and physical, might be helpful to enhance individuality within a larger framework of net-based information.
- In view of future funding initiatives within the German context, federation is vital for obtaining continued support.
- Organising regular meetings or updating-sessions might for example be a first step.

Franz Anton Cramer / Scott deLahunta, March 2012