The Routledge Companion to Dance Studies

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Digital Preservation of Dance, Inclusion, and Absence

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**Introduction**

Digital technologies have introduced a multitude of opportunities for novel modes of recording, documenting, and preserving dance content. More particularly, digital tools have been developed that have offered dance scholars and artists opportunities to develop new modes of visualizing and transmitting dance, thus creating new ways to access dance content and, in turn, providing new insights to dance, and its compositional and relational properties. Interdisciplinary teams have created many of these tools and resources, thereby stimulating novel partnerships that have generated increased interest in dance—for its access to body knowledge and different kinds of intelligences (Leach 2014)—while also probing the embodied practice/document dichotomy. Consequently, dance is now distributed more widely and what was once an art form that struggled to persist beyond the live event, dance is now available through digital archives, scores, websites, and open data banks, and many of these modes are experimental in nature (Sant 2014). The increased availability of digital technologies also has revealed that the dance-making process is a process of distributed cognition and authorship, thereby unleashing the choreographer from the conventional role of single author, with the potential to make more visible the work of dancers who were hitherto on the margins of the dance community.

This chapter will examine three digital dance resources that have emerged in recent years that raise a number of questions about the digital preservation of dance. These questions revolve around what it is that is preserved and for whom, the nature of the documents or ‘objects’ that are created, the role of the spectator, viewer, or ‘user’ in the construction and preservation of dance, and how digital methods disrupt the temporal properties of the dance ‘event.’ I will claim that the opportunity provided by digital technologies to access the hidden processes of dance creation shows how these digital artifacts become new types of records of performance.

I will review recent initiatives and projects that seem to have been particularly influential in how dance and digital technologies have found a synergetic relationship. This review will inevitably be only a partial picture; the field is far too rich and diverse to cover the many activities, projects, and the artists who have contributed to innovation in this field. I will focus primarily on the sphere of activity that is concerned with strategies for documenting...
and preserving dance, but where artists are core to how these projects have developed. Hence, while my primary focus is not on digital dance in live performance—where dance artists have experimented with digital processes to innovate their own performance making, using tools such as motion tracking, motion capture, sensors, wearables and telematics—some of these processes have seeped into dance preservation processes and have influenced methods used. Indeed, new experiments that have emerged because of technological possibilities have influenced changes in archival practices and the relationship between the artist and archive.

Interesting in this context is that some of the early innovators in artistic practice are now rejecting digital processes in favor of returning to the body as a primary source for their arts practice. It may well be that the close examination of the workings of the dancing body provided by digital technologies, and the concomitant impossibility of digital technologies to fully capture the intricacies and idiosyncrasies of human bodies in motion, has drawn many back to wanting to work with the fleshy, corporeal dancing body. Some of those dance artists and researchers who have worked long-term with technologies shared their views during a series of interviews between 2014 and 2016 as part of the European-wide “RICHES” project that focused on how cultural practices are being recalibrated because of digital technologies.\(^1\) Comments drawn from those interviews are included in the sections that follow (and all are anonymized unless the interviewee specifically agreed to being named).\(^2\) For example, one respondent talked about wanting to use digital technologies not to distance her from her own body but as another way of encountering self, asking “rather than seeing technology as something that takes that away, how do we use technologies to bring that back?” (Respondent 1 interviewed by Amalia Sabiescu 2014).\(^3\)

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**Digital technologies and dance—A recent history**

In the 1990s, a seismic shift began in the way that dance was being made, performed, transmitted, and distributed. With the introduction of the World Wide Web, communication technologies brought about new kinds of collaborations and a growing interest in how digital tools could be disruptive to traditional creative processes. Consequently, dance as an art form expanded in new directions. Several landmark projects prompted artists and scholars to reflect on how dance as an art form could respond to digital technologies and the decades since have been marked by experimentation, often bringing artists and experts in dance together with practitioners and researchers in other disciplines to move the art form forward. The evolution of contemporary dance in particular has been influenced heavily by digital and networked media. The meeting between dancing bodies and computers provides the opportunity to consider how computers transform how we think about and conceive of motion. Whether through simple video recordings, motion capture, animation, sensors, or holograms, whenever dance is captured and rendered through technology, it is transformed into data. The growth in the generation and circulation of dance as data has fueled an emerging discourse that considers its impact on issues such as ethics, intellectual property, and copyright in dance.

Of the many significant projects that have revolutionized the progress of dance in the digital environment since the closing years of the twentieth century, I mention only a few here. One that was a catalyst for many artists who were exploring the potential of new technologies was Paul Sermon’s *Telematic Dreaming* (Sermon 1992). In this virtual reality performance installation, dancer Susan Kozel “performs” with her projected image, as her image is in relation with audience members, at the same time as being able to watch her own projection in duet with the audience member on a screen. The work opened up new
modes of encountering dance where the audience becomes more implicated in the action, moving away from the passive viewer, seated and removed from the action in the traditional theatre setting. Merce Cunningham and OpenEndedGroup’s 1999 motion tracking project BIPED, where projections of dancing avatars appear to interact with the live dancers on stage, brought together virtual and material bodies on stage. His later work with LifeForms, a computer choreographic software tool, was born out of his own desire to continue inventing choreographically when his own body became less able to explore and demonstrate new movement ideas to his dancers.

Such artist-led projects paved the way for other initiatives that transformed dance into digital data such as William Forsythe’s 2009 project Synchronous Objects, a substantial website that focuses on one single dance work—One Flat Thing, reproduced (Forsythe 2000). The project includes information about how the dance was made to help audiences understand how to view an abstract work that is highly complex in its structure. A number of digital scores show how the choreography is built up around several systems at play in the choreography. Scott deLahunta, one of the researchers involved in the project, explained in an interview as part of the RICHES project referred to earlier:

One is a cueing system, when [the dancers] look at each other and then they wait for one person to move, and then another person moves. And another is a system they call alignment, so it’s when one person moves this way in space, and some other person, maybe his head moves this way in space. The lines that are on top, these lines help the audiences see why the choreographer made those decisions. (deLahunta 2014)

**Digital dance objects**

*Synchronous Objects* was designed as a “choreographic object or a collection of twenty choreographic objects that function together to communicate the ideas in the dance into animations, interactive tools, and so on” (Zuniga Shaw 2014, 117). The project developed out of Forsythe’s earlier explorations that were informed by film and digital media, even though he did not use a computer in the studio. As deLahunta commented in an interview for the RICHES project in 2014, “early in the 80s [Forsythe] would choreograph dance and he would talk about bringing an algorithm into class, or an algorithm into the composition process, he would talk about cutting and pasting. So, his language, the composition ideas, were informed by media.” But in the same interview, deLahunta pointed out that “if you looked in a different direction, you could find a hundred experimentalists around the margins, working with technology” (deLahunta 2014). Although these projects on the edges are harder to track, they are likely to have played their role in influencing many other interdisciplin ary or transdisciplinary dance and media projects.

Since its launch, *Synchronous Objects* has spawned the emergence of other “choreographic objects” as a category of digital dance “things” or artifacts, often made by the artist in partnership with designers and researchers, that have had an impact on artists, scholars, and collaborators from beyond dance, including architects, engineers, software developers, and those working in human factors and ergonomics. According to one RICHES project intervie wee, the impact of this developing research was that “performing arts could draw upon the sciences and sciences could also invite artists [to collaborate] …. Dance or performance suddenly became a valued partner in the production of cultural knowledge or know-how” (Respondent 2 interviewed by author 2014). Collectively, this growing corpus of digital
choreographic objects has helped to assert dance as a knowledge-producing practice, or a “knowledge-making enterprise” (Leach 2017, 142), catalyzing thinking about the complexity of the ‘object’ when situated in the domain of dance, and acting as a supplement, extension or expanded iteration of the dance ‘work’ itself.

Of these ‘things’, digital scores emerge as a recurrent feature of digital dance preservation projects, either as a naming for a document that aims to record the structural, spatial, or temporal components of a dance work, or as a form of translation from the live to the digital. As artist Myriam Van Imschoot describes in relation to her Oral Site archive project, which began by dealing with scores:

The score is a perfect case for a platform that works with documents, questions their functioning and alters their status. Sometimes a score refers to a past creation, reveals its compositional matrix, but many times it has a pro-active dimension too when it calls for new instantiations. It breaks open temporalities (past, present and future) and possibly agencies too, because scores can be passed on to other executioners. This dynamic element and unstable status, of a document unhinging fixed authorship, underlines the active nature of documents and their performative possibilities for reuse. (Van Imschoot and Engels 2013, 37)

Imschoot points to the concerns that underpin many of the projects that provide a backdrop to the digital documentation projects that I focus on here, each of which is similarly initiated by a dance artist or has the artist at the core of the project. Each also disrupts the temporal nature of preservation by intervening at different stages, before, during, or after the dance event.

**Preservation and the legacy of the digital on dance**

Although digital technologies have led to a culture of greater openness in dance, whereby sharing work has been facilitated through the ease of online video platforms such as YouTube and a broader context in which social media is the norm, less attention has been paid to how digitalization can support the long-term preservation of dance works. This situation has not changed even as the recording of material has become more commonplace, affordable, and immediate (through streaming services, for example). To some extent, this situation reflects the experimental drive of many of these projects that seek to expand beyond creating an archive of dance with the principal aim of categorizing, stabilizing, and ‘fixing’ the dance for preservation purposes. Dance preservation has for some time generated debate about its purpose and impact on the dance field (Jordan 2000). However, the speed at which dance can be made immediately available, accessible, and consumable mirrors the speed at which technology and file formats advance and change, making digital preservation vulnerable.

For some artists and scholars, the disappearance of dance is less of a concern if the body is believed to be the primary holder of memory. In interview for the RICHES project, contemporary artist Isobelle Choinier describes how the evolution of technology presents her with a huge problem when the hardware doesn’t exist anymore or software stops working, yet believes that “we are just beginning to understand those very complex forms and relations because it changes the way you perform, it changes the way you have to deal with aesthetics, with communication. So it is really a very complex thing, but I think that it’s really part of the experience, but I’m not the one that will defend the disappearance of the body. I think it is part of what can be explored” (Choinier interviewed by Amalia Sabiescu 2014).
Disappearance might thus be experienced as an inevitable property of the dance/digital interface, whether desirable or not. Indeed, because digital archives of performance retain a condition of ephemerality, they may not be so distanced from the performance that they seek to document, “but which necessarily distance themselves from other foundational notions such as presence, embodiment, non-reproducibility, and liveness” (Bench 2017, 160). Diana Taylor, who has been highly influential in thinking about the relationship between live performance repertoire and the archive, argues that the question of disappearance in relation to the archive and the repertoire is one of kind as well as degree (2003, 20). In considering the analogue archive, she further claims that:

the “live” performance can never be captured or transmitted through the archive. A video of a performance is not a performance, though it often comes to replace the performance as a thing in itself (the video is part of the archive; what it represents is part of the repertoire). Embodied memory, because it is live, exceeds the archive’s ability to capture it. (Taylor 2003, 20, italics in original)

Despite Taylor’s assertion, for many there is a recognition that documenting dance is important for being able to study dance in depth because it is necessary for ensuring dance is fully present as part of our cultural heritage and digital technologies can be a valuable asset in preservation strategies. Taylor has since considered the impact of the digital on archival practices. She notes that “the objects in the digital archive require, rather than resist, the ‘change over time’ I associated with the traditional archive” (2010, 7), recognizing the flux that is inevitable with digital resources. Although she insists that “the embodied, the archival, and the digital overlap and work together and mutually construct each other” (3), she concerns herself mostly with examining what she names the “antiarchival practices” (14) that the digital environment has led to. She is referring to the ease at which content can be recorded but without the professional standards or institutional controls that typify archival practices. If not “antiarchival,” then another consequence of the digital is the ‘accidental’ archive that emerges when dance motion is tracked and captured for other purposes, such as for analyzing biomechanical, expressive, or other reasons and a valuable library of dance content is collected. These unintended archives accumulate value for their preservation of dance even if these corporeal data banks are ‘open’ and accessible for others to use and reuse varies from project to project.

Despite the increasing availability of digital technologies, the costs and labor involved in digitizing analogue content for archival purposes or for creating more expansive and multilayered digital web-based dance resources means that there are relatively few openly accessible dance resources. Many physical dance archives have online catalogues. Some have a limited range of content accessible online (predominantly text and static objects rather than video). The lack of video and dynamic content reflects the relative lack of this kind of dance content in historical collections as well as the cost of building the data bases and digitizing, conserving, storing, and backing up large files. Dance companies, organizations, and individual artists typically have websites that can offer access to rich content including some video extracts, but most are produced for the general audience and are designed primarily for promotional purposes. These digital artifacts are quite different from the archives created by artists and scholars concerned with the construction of memory and their affect. English and theatre scholars Giulia Palladini and Marco Pustianaz put forward the idea of the “affective archive,” describing it as wavering “between materiality and immateriality, between conservation and transformation” and which “is intended to acknowledge the impulse that both
creates and mobilizes the archive as an endless process” (Palladini and Pustianaz 2017, 12). Their project is concerned more with physical or material archives and its affect may be less palpable in the digital environment, but as with all archival materials, any dance collection provides a glimpse into the relationship between the subject of the archive and the act of collecting, and between all those involved in its creation. Moreover, the short shelf-life of digital technologies is as relevant to the digital resources that seek to preserve dance works as it is to dance artists who use these technologies and shape the discussion that follows. I now turn my focus to three contrasting digital dance resources that are designed primarily as experiments in dance documentation, transmission and preservation, and have had impact in dance practice, research, and teaching.

**Siobhan Davies RePlay**

My own direct involvement in the creation of *Siobhan Davies RePlay (RePlay)* (2009), the digital archive of the work of British choreographer Siobhan Davies (b. 1950), provides me with an insider perspective on its development, impact, and subsequent migration in an effort to extend the life of the archive in response to the inevitable short shelf-life of software noted earlier. I have written elsewhere on the process of building RePlay (Whatley 2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2014, 2017) so my focus here will be on its wider contribution to digital dance resources. RePlay was developed initially between 2006 and 2009, a dynamic time in which artists and scholars alike were contemplating questions about archive, repertoire, and dance documentation. YouTube and Vimeo were only just emerging and there was almost no dance available on open channels so many dancers were understandably wary of sharing their work in this new and untested environment. Similarly, custodians of other archival collections where there were some traces of Davies’s work were understandably protective about what could be accessed and for what purpose. But digital technologies were shifting efforts away from analogue tools for recording dance, such as dance notation and film, to methods that would not only document the dance as a ‘product,’ but which could provide access to other traces of dance making and performance, such as rehearsal material, choreographic notebooks, design prototypes, and so on.

Making use of the ability to store content in a digital repository in a way that is fully searchable provides the user with a new way to view dance. The viewer can search through multiple records provided by computing power that far exceeds what a human can achieve, and choose what to view, what order, for how long, juxtaposing video, audio, and text on the screen. By using simple tools (such as the digital scrapbook on RePlay), the user can organize material into personalized collections. Consequently, the conventional way of encountering dance through viewing a live performance, on a single video recording, or through photographic traces and various written accounts of the dance often distributed across multiple sites and in fragmented archival collections, extended into offering more choices to the viewer. Moreover, a process of dissection or segmentation of the content on RePlay, necessary for cataloguing and developing the metadata schema, begins to reveal new dimensions of the dance and specifically the many layers of the dance-making process. An ontological shift thus begins to happen in the digital environment in which the dance work no longer exists only as a singular event or product.

In RePlay, the uncovering of more records of the making process and the collection of such a diverse range of materials led to the creation of two playful interactive graphic scores that conveyed through data visualizations something of the structural features of the choreography. These were named ‘kitchens’ for offering insight to the ingredients of the choreography.
and how these are ‘cooked’ to become dance works. Each of two kitchens, created for two choreographies, *Bird Song* (2004) and *In Plain Clothes* (2006), drew on Davies’s wide collection of design sketches, rehearsal notes, films of rehearsals, and so on. These materials were available only because the archive was built close to the time of the choreographic process. For earlier dance works, these materials were either lost or scattered among Davies’s collaborators and so were less easy to recover.

Each kitchen was designed individually to draw the viewer into the choreographic compositional structures (through color, movement, and spatial organization on the screen), the source materials for the dances (journals and sketch books), the working processes of the dancers (through their reflective writing), and design concepts (through sketches of costumes, sound scores, and draft lighting designs). Much like the intention in *Synchronous Objects*, the kitchens had a similar educational purpose by being built to enhance the understanding of two abstract dance works. The kitchens are historical digital documents in their own terms, revealing the state of the art at that time in terms of digital data visualization.

In 2013, only four years after it went ‘live’, RePlay became unsupportable as a digital platform as the software exceeded its useful shelf life. In common with many other digital resources, the content was at risk without continual upkeep. Many digital resources once ‘completed’ can too quickly become ‘zombie’ projects, neither dying nor growing, so are left suspended. Unlike their physical counterpart such as a physical manuscript, the digital object, whether digitized material such as scans, videos, and so on or born-digital items such as digital photographs, are vulnerable without a commitment to translation and ongoing preservation. As an archive, such a temporary existence can threaten to undermine the purpose of the project to preserve work that was previously vulnerable. RePlay had become a historical artifact in its own right, reflecting technological changes over the last decade, revealing its own history of production, and participating in the tension between dance’s disappearance and permanence.

**Replaying the archive**

The decision to migrate RePlay to a new software platform to ensure its longer life revealed how new formats may sustain the content in the collection but pose a threat to the original design and interface. RePlay (dance “as was”) grew alongside Davies’s developing oeuvre, producing a living history of the work she was making. It performed a secondary role in revealing the evolution of digital archives and their affordances for dance in a wider sense, even though this defies the archive’s own ontological status as a collection of ‘the past.’

The new platform reflects the tensions that often operate in the building of digital resources. The original RePlay was built through a creative and dialogic process where decisions were made between the whole team about what to include and how to organize material. The aesthetic of Davies’s choreographic work informed the aesthetic of RePlay, including how the material was organized on the screen, the color palette, fonts, and so on.

Theatre historian Joseph Roach argues for reproduction and recreation of culture as “a process of surrogation” (Roach 1996, 2; italics in original). The reproduction of archival content could be viewed as a similar process of surrogation, which later Roach equates to “performance” (Roach 1996, 4). The ‘new’ RePlay has become a surrogate for the first, which was itself a form of substitution for the live ‘original’ dance thus continuing a chain of erasure even in its efforts to preserve. Roach’s writing focuses primarily on the social processes of memory and forgetting, examined through the way that memories are embodied in and through performances, extending the understanding of performance by making it coterminous with memory and history (26). The relationship between performance and digital
technologies is not his focus. However, just as performance participates in the transfer and continuity of knowledge, the digital surrogates that performances create do something similar. The aim of RePlay is to achieve two key aims. The first is to contextualize dance, linking its history with memories of those who made, performed, and viewed the dance. The second is to foreground somehow the material properties of dance while finding structures that transmit the tactile sensibility and sensuous presence of those materials alongside the complex structures that mobilize dancing bodies in performance.

**Digital dance archives; A collection of many archives**

RePlay is an example of a digital dance preservation project that focuses primarily on a single artist’s output. By contrast, the Digital Dance Archives (DDA) portal provides access to the visual content contained within multiple dance collections (videos, photographs, drawings, sketches, and so on). As an ‘archive’ it is thus not a full collection of textual materials and other records that would support an in-depth analysis of a particular choreographer or choreographic work, rather it is “primarily a visual storage and retrieval system for digital content whose analogue storage and organization is maintained elsewhere” (Fensham 2017, 72).

Developed between 2010 and 2011, the project brought together dance researchers, computer scientists, and the National Resource Centre for Dance (NRCD) in the UK to digitize a number of archives managed by NRCD, which is housed at the University of Surrey, create a linked data structure that would provide access to these archives, as well as RePlay, and design a tool that would allow users to search by visual similarity. Glitches in the background code led to some surprising results being returned. It was thus primarily effective in providing a compelling and serendipitous tool for discovering hitherto hidden connections between visual content. For example, by tracing the lineage of a particular dance step or body pose, links could be made between different dance genres and traditions. And the colors in a number of geometric forms drawn by dance theorist Rudolf von Laban, for example, could generate surprising links to contemporary theatre set designs. The tool helped users to build digital scrapbooks of visual material, enriched by user-generated textual annotations as ways to interpret and develop narratives through the content.

Unlike the focus on a single choreographer in RePlay, or the fragmented records stored by major museums and other memory institutions, DDA opens up “a new form of archival memory or social choreography of movement history” (Fensham 2017, 73). However, without additional resources the search tool could not be updated. Consequently, while the ‘About’ page on the portal describes how by using simple, icon-based instructions, the four different modes of visual search allow the user to search across the DDA collections to find similar instances of shape, gesture, sequences, and color—what actually appears is a frame without a function. As with ghost links or the ‘link rot’ of broken hyperlinks, the lost function underscores the fragility of digital code. However, the primary dance content is preserved and NRCD continues to add new digitized collections drawn from their hard copy archives to the portal, featuring the visual records of dance companies and traditions spanning the last century, predominantly UK-based, as diverse as Extemporary Dance Theatre, Ludmila Mlada, Revived Greek Dance, Kokuma Dance Theatre, and Yolande Snaith Theatredance.

**Motion Bank**

Taking a different approach to the digitalization of dance is Motion Bank, an initiative by choreographer William Forsythe that builds on the earlier Synchronous Objects website. Focusing on the production of a series of digital dance scores, the project brought together...
researchers, leading dance choreographers, designers, educators, and computer scientists. The aim was to “explore how digital technology can be uniquely applied to the challenge of documenting, analyzing, notating/annotating, and presenting dance” (Forsythe and deLahunta 2011, 12) by archiving a number of choreographers’ conceptual approaches along with video recordings and three-dimensional data documenting the performances and the depictions created by the designers.

Forsythe described Motion Bank as “the world’s first library of digital dance scores” (quoted in deLahunta 2017, 130). He did not want the site to become “exclusively focused” on his own work, but that it should become a “medium for knowledge transmission” rather than a “Personal Platform” (quoted in deLahunta 2017, 129). The international choreographers/dance artists featured in Motion Bank—Deborah Hay, Jonathan Burrows, Matteo Fargion, Bebe Miller, and Thomas Hauert—were invited “on the basis of their distinctive, articulate, and diverse approaches to creating dance works” (Forsythe and deLahunta 2011, 12). Each worked with a group of interaction designers, educators, programmers, and computer scientists working with different motion analysis tools including Kinect and Motionbuilder to visualize and animate different aspects of their work.

A series of digital scores emerged through this interdisciplinary design process that are as diverse as the artists themselves and that aim to reveal the specific aesthetic, conceptual approach, and devising methods particular to each artist. A core goal was the development of software that might be used by others to create their own online scores to add to the Motion Bank collection (deLahunta 2017, 133). Two tools were developed. The first is an annotation tool PM2 based on the Piecemaker annotation tool developed by David Kern. The other is MoSys, a publishing system developed for the publication of the online scores (134). Motion Bank underscores how many of these digital projects rely on a process of contagion whereby interdisciplinary teams configure new spaces of creative possibility in exploring ways to mediate between recording, translating, visualizing, and preserving dance content. Preservation of the dance works and the site became a by-product rather than a principal aim of the project. As deLahunta explained in interview for the RICHES project, in his discussion with the artists, “the word ‘preservation’ never comes up, but from my perspective it is of course preservation because as long as we take care of it and we keep updating the website so that it doesn’t disappear” (deLahunta 2014).

Forsythe’s work has been highly influential not only in dance practice and research, but also in other fields because of his interest in the thinking that underpins dance making, cognition, or corporeal knowledge, and his collaborations with experts in other fields, leading to a growing discourse around the notion of “choreographic thinking” (Forsythe 2009; deLahunta, Clarke, and Barnard 2012). This influence in turn has stimulated interest in how digitalization participates in the revealing and transmission of dance knowledge and choreographic systems that were previously concealed within the embodied exchange between choreographer and dancer, hidden behind the walls of the dance rehearsal studio and then made invisible, or at least harder to see once transformed through the multiple stages of choreographic development. What is documented on Motion Bank is therefore not only the dance works but also the activities and outputs of those who have worked closely with the choreographers, thereby recording a phenomenon that has emerged through the interface between dance and digital technologies, that of the interaction between excavation, transmission, and preservation of dance. Nonetheless, those without access to funding and expertise have to rely on their own resources to document their work. If the document is a form of evidence and proof that it happened, then without those documents being available, accessible, and preserved, many dance works and dance practices are under-represented or even entirely absent from the archives.
Dance is evolving in interesting ways in the twenty-first century due in part to the developments in digital and networked media. The projects discussed here are all concerned with how digital technologies can participate in the preservation of dance and the nature of dance and choreographic knowledge (Leach 2014). As Zuniga Shaw, who led the Synchronous Objects project argues, these projects act as choreographic resources, not to pin down but to flesh out the dance, to explore its contours (2014, 99). She asks, “can the original resources be repurposed in a subaltern move to simultaneously create a record and assert the ephemeral ground of live art-making, the fiction of all memory and the partiality of any score?” (99). In the projects mentioned here, the resources are designed to explore the connection between embodied artistic practice and digital visualization, and to generate exchange between the artists, technologists, and users.

RePlay has been a valuable touchstone for others building digital archives of performance and a key reference point for dancers, teachers, researchers, and general audiences. 11 It has helped to unsettle our normative historical records in which dance has tended to be absent. However, the aim of RePlay was to foreground regeneration rather than capture. In proving its own regenerating capability, the new site for the archive conveys a sense of renewal even if in its new form, it also reveals a certain loss of what was before, mirroring the continual and perhaps inevitable disappearance of the dance ‘as was.’

The Digital Dance Archives project brings together several collections and by prioritizing visual content enables the user to make links between dance content represented through photographic stills, video, drawings, posters, and other visual documents. Motion Bank extends the exploration with computing technology much further by layering information about the dance-making and -structuring process in the construction of several digital dance scores. As Bleeker and deLahunta note about digital dance projects that have emerged in recent years: Even though many of them work with ‘captured’ dance and provide the means to store this and make it accessible, many of them explicitly resist the idea of merely looking back to the past (Bleeker and deLahunta 2017, 12).

By focusing on three well-funded digital dance projects, I am bringing yet further attention to projects that cannot fully represent an environment that is rich with experimentation, but which are nonetheless influential in how this sector of activity has grown. The labor and costs involved in creating digital resources are an inevitable barrier for some in the dance sector, as is the lack of a robust infrastructure for linking data and for licensing digital content, so that more dance can be discovered, accessed, and reused. Dance theorist Harmony Bench discusses how the reconfiguration of the archive through digitalization as not only a store of documents but also as a new mode of knowledge production has “redirected the archive’s social, political, and historical purposes and achievements, prioritizing circulation over preservation” (Bench 2017, 156), marking a “shift from the archive as a state-sponsored repository for and producer of histories to the archive as a market-authorized site of circulation for cultural memories” (157). Projects that have emerged since the millennium have fueled this developing discourse, informed by memory studies, digital curation, digital humanities, and data management practices, and which centered on the practices of collecting, archiving, and safekeeping dance.

Much of the writing in recent years that has considered the impact of digital technologies on dance has focused on the way dance transforms (or not) through digitization, on the way dance changes its ontological nature (or not) through being created with or through digital technologies, and on the different ways in which dance is transmitted, shared, and preserved.
through digital means. The digital preservation of dance requires a systematic and standard-
ized approach. Done well, it stimulates the imagination so that viewers (or users) find new
ways to respond to and analyze dance. Unlike the analogue archive, which may well con-
tain stable objects, the digital archive requires mediation and can be as transformative and
transitory as the content it seeks to preserve. The digital dance document thus operates as a
continuum of practice, more than a static object, more than an inanimate left-over, and more
than merely the residue or “after” of the dance.

Notes

1 The Renewal, Innovation and Change: Heritage and European Society (RICHES) (2016) project
   was funded by the European Union FP7 program; grant no. 612789. Accessed 16 September 2017.
   http://www.riches-project.eu.
2 I received ethical approval from Coventry University Ethics Committee for conducting these
   interviews, which were carried out by the author and project research assistant, Amalia Sabiescu.
3 Respondents who did not wish to reveal their names are referred to as Respondent 1 and 2 (dates
   of these interviews are given in the reference list).
4 The term “choreographic objects” appears first in William Forsythe’s 2009 essay of the same title,
in which he reflects on projects he has initiated that have utilized digital technologies for inscrib-
ing, recording and transmitting his dance practice.
5 More single artist and company archives are in development, for example The Digital Pina Bausch
   Archive (2016): http://www.pinabausch.org/en/archive/the-digital-archive or are repositories col-
   lecting together several archives, for example Numeridanse.tv: http://numeridanse.tv/en/. Accessed
   July 25, 2017. In addition, a useful analysis of a number of American “Artist-Driven” dance archives
   is provided by Rosemary Candelario (2018).
   siobhandaviesreplay.com/.
7 The year that RePlay went live also marked the end of Davies making dance works for the theatre
   and proscenium arch stage. It was as if preserving her past work had released her to do something
   new.
8 “Born-digital” usually refers to those materials that originate in a digital form as opposed to ana-
   logue materials which are digitized and therefore become digital through digital reformatting.
9 The Digital Dance Archives project was funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council
   (AHRC) Digital Equipment and Database Enhancement for Impact scheme.
11 RePlay has been cited by teachers, researchers and archivists since its launch. It has been a core
   routledgeperformancearchive.com), Rambert Dance Company’s archive project and the Walker
   Art Center, Minneapolis, USA.

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