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Accidental Archives of Performance Making

Sarah Whatley
Coventry University, s.whatley@coventry.ac.uk

This paper introduces the online toolkit that was created during the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)–funded *Resilience and Inclusion: Dancers as Agents of Change* project (Figure 1). The project was a follow-up of an earlier three-year AHRC-funded project: *InVisible Difference, Dance, Disability and Law*. The aim of the toolkit was <u>to provide a series of learning materials</u>, introducing themes that are pertinent to disabled dance artists and professional performance programmers, curators, and other arts organizations. <u>A single film</u> (just over 13 minutes in length) lies at the core of the toolkit, providing an entry point for the various themes that can be followed and out of which many of the learning materials emerge. The film, made collaboratively by the dancers and film directors (Kate Marsh, David Toole, Welly O'Brien, Charlotte Darbyshire and Tony Wadham) is intended to provide a valuable insight to the dancers' creative process. Although the primary aim of the toolkit is the transmission of information for training purposes, the toolkit has simultaneously created a carefully curated repository of performance documents and related materials. I propose that this curated library of valuable performance documents creates what I am terming an "accidental archive." Notwithstanding the challenges of making materials "open," often connected to institutional gatekeeping, this short paper focuses on the documenting of process (in various forms and formats) to consider what value these process documents hold, for the artist and audience, and for those who are responsible for their safe keeping.
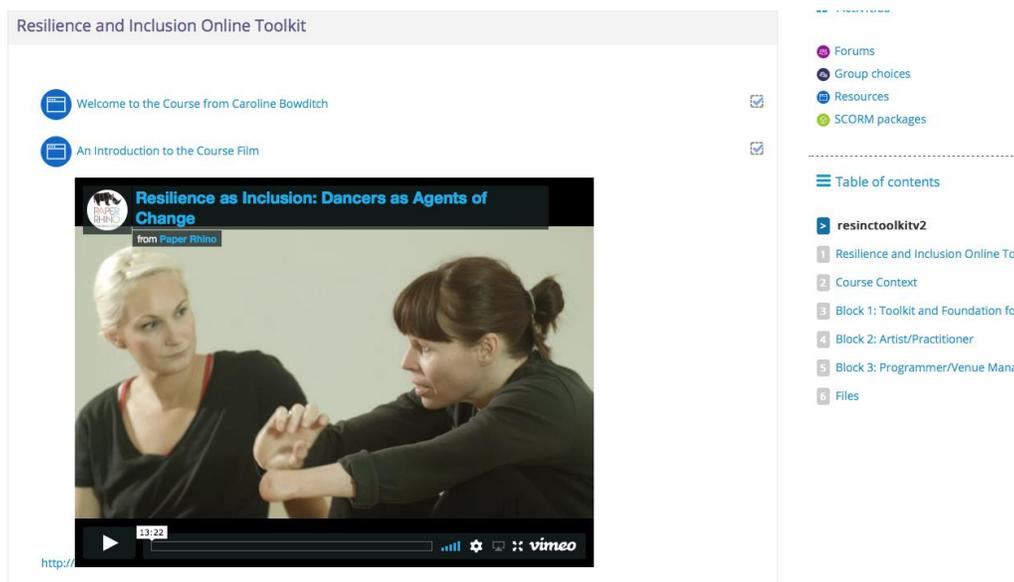

Figure 1. Screengrab from Resilience and Inclusion online toolkit

The project that forms the starting point for this paper, *Resilience and Inclusion: Dancers as Agents of Change* project, brought together experts in dance and law to extend thinking about the making, status, ownership, and value of work by dance artists with disabilities. The research that fed into the goals for the project revealed how artists wanted more practical support and information, and that professional arts organizations were also keen to have more tools for increasing their knowledge about human rights and the legal frameworks that impact on their work in promoting inclusion and diversity in dance. The creation of the toolkit was designed to respond to this need. The "accidental archive" has thus emerged as a by-product of this toolkit. Having created a digital archive in 2009 (*Siobhan Davies RePlay*), which I discuss later, I have been directly involved in a number of projects in recent years that share similar properties. These projects seek to record, document and preserve aspects of live performance, whilst not archives in the real sense. The reference to "accidental" in relation to "archive" has thus emerged through reflecting on these projects, which together draw attention to the archival process, and the status and affordances of "archives" in the wider context of performance documentation.

Accidental Archives

By referring to "accidental archives," it is not my intention to undermine the role and purpose of the traditional archive, which depends upon expert knowledge, care and considerable labor. However, in the field of performance, digital technologies are prompting artists and researchers to consider the full range of documentation methods for their work. The capture of performance materials, as well as the documenting of the process of capture and collection for purposes other than for creating archives, produces libraries or repositories of content that are nonetheless archival in nature. This digital content adds to the general move towards expanding the notion of the archive and hierarchical structures of documentation, not only in material forms but more recently in non-material forms, such as the growing momentum in dance and body-based movement practices that claim or at least wrestle with the proposition that the body is its own archive (Lepecki, 2010; Baxmann, 2007; Griffiths, 2013; Whatley, 2014). This drive is challenging the authority of the "document" as previously constituted within the context of museum collections and is the subject of many debates taking place within the domain of Information Science and Digital Humanities, informing how documents of dance are constituted in multiple forms, both analogue and digital. For example, Michael Buckland's much cited essay on "What is a 'Document'?" (1997) that references Suzanne Briet's (1951) seminal and somewhat radical critique of the document, argues for the document extending beyond "text" but raises questions about fixity, which in relation to dance and live performance could mean resorting to records of

the performance (film, image, score, notation, etc.) but not the immaterial (embodied) form itself. Buckland also considers the digital document, which normally exists only through interaction with the user/viewer. This invokes the discussion between Lund, Gorichanaz and Latham (2016) that focuses on the human involvement in documentation, and the place of the process of production in document creation. They propose the notion of "documental becoming" as a core concept, and which poses "questions about how the document came to be as it is now, i.e. how it was made, who made it, where it came from, etc." (p. 3). These are questions that have occupied many researchers who are involved in developing documentation strategies in dance and performance (Sant, 2017; Bleeker & deLahunta, 2016; Roux & Courbieres, 2017, Whatley, 2017).

Indeed, Dekker, Giannachi and van Saaze (2017) explore the role of artistic practices in reconfiguring the relationship between the artwork and the document and call for museums to revisit their documentation practices. With reference to artworks by Lynn Hershman Leeson and Tino Sehgal, Dekker et al. propose the concept of "inter-documents" (p. 63): environments that comprise primary, secondary, and auxiliary materials, and constitute "artworks in their own right" (p. 63). The notion of the inter-document again recalls Briet (1951) and her example of the antelope as a primary document and other documents as secondary, derived ones. In the same way that Briet's antelope example challenges conventional notions of the document, recent experimental live art practices that purposefully challenge and cross the boundaries between objects and documents, and similarly question the place in which the document is encountered (museum, gallery, theatre, website, outdoors, etc.), point to the multiplicity of documents whilst questioning the status and value of all these documents (Roux & Courbieres, 2017, p. 11).

The notion of the inter-document is also useful for considering the extent to the which the various records of the dance making process held within the *Resilience and Inclusion* toolkit could be considered an expanded artwork. However, as it resides entirely within an online environment it is unlikely to be part of any traditional museum collection (although it should be noted that the core film is likely to be shown in film festivals and other events where film is presented as an "artwork" in its own right).

The projects I refer to here were not intended to be "archives" but create what I am terming "accidental archives" because of the rich collection of dance content, searchable and accessible through various data management structures. I have not found reference to "accidental archives" in the context of performance but I acknowledge those in other fields who have used the term, either to acknowledge a play between fact and fiction (Sauer, 2012), or to move from chaos to coherence (Georgopoulos, 2012). In the broader context of the arts, New York photographer Sarah Cwyner created a personal project in 2012 named *Accidental Archives* in which, influenced by archiving within visual culture, she created accumulations of

junk and souvenirs collected over the previous decade and sorted them by color to create a series of still life photographs. Elsewhere, the term tends to refer to the discovery of unexpected records within more conventional archives of documents. For example, a recent blog post (Vickers 2017) from the York city archives acknowledges that the phrase "accidental archive" is not a recognized term in the archival profession, noting that "ephemera" is the more technical term.

The blog continues by describing the accidental archive as "the chance survival of the scraps of notes, letters and other records found between the pages of the official Poor Law Union records," so in this case materials that contain significant details not recorded elsewhere and were never intended to be kept but survived by chance. This is where I see my own thoughts about "accidental archives" both connecting and diverging. On one hand the accidental archive emerges "by accident" because of the range of materials that produce an environment that sheds new light on the artwork/practice/phenomena, without which "significant details" would be missed. On the other hand, the range of materials in the collection is gathered as a process of monitoring for the information, a form of "hunting and gathering" (O'Connor, Copeland and Kearns, 2003) and considered from the start, so the records are not surviving "by chance."

Documenting Process

Running in parallel with my interest in archival processes is my interest in what it means to document performance (and particularly dance) as the necessary stage prior to archiving, and the extent to which the performance *is* the document. In the case of the film that is the primary focus of the toolkit, the film of the performing, or more accurately the *making* of the performing, is the document that then circulates online. This interest is grounded in my prior experience of archive development. Between 2006 and 2009, I worked closely with British choreographer Siobhan Davies to create a digital archive of her work, *Siobhan Davies RePlay*. *RePlay* is a fully searchable and openly accessible archive, built using an expanded version of Dublin Core metadata standards and providing clear information about copyright for reuse of content (Figures 2 and 3). During its development, those of us working on it became fascinated by the documenting of the dance making process and how "process" could generate its own documents, could be recorded, shared, and how those process documents are artefacts in their own right. These documents are a rich source of information, whilst also prompting the question "what is information?" (Frohmann, 2004) in the context of a dance resource. *RePlay* led to other archive-related projects, some more successful than others.

One such project is the *Digital Dance Archives* portal, which continues to provide access to dance archives spanning the last century held at the National Resource Centre for Dance at the University of Surrey. The portal was built to

feature visual dance content and some novel search and discovery methods including an interactive scrapbook and visual search tools to aid searching through color, shape, and gesture, although these have not survived due to the lack of resources to upgrade the software. A later project set out to build a "library of processes" with Siobhan Davies again, this time to provide an archive of the multiple resources and reference points that the dancers and collaborating artists were collecting along the way to making a new dance work. This did not materialize as intended but has fed other projects since, such as Davies' gallery installation archival performance work *Table of Contents* (2014) and her collaborative gallery
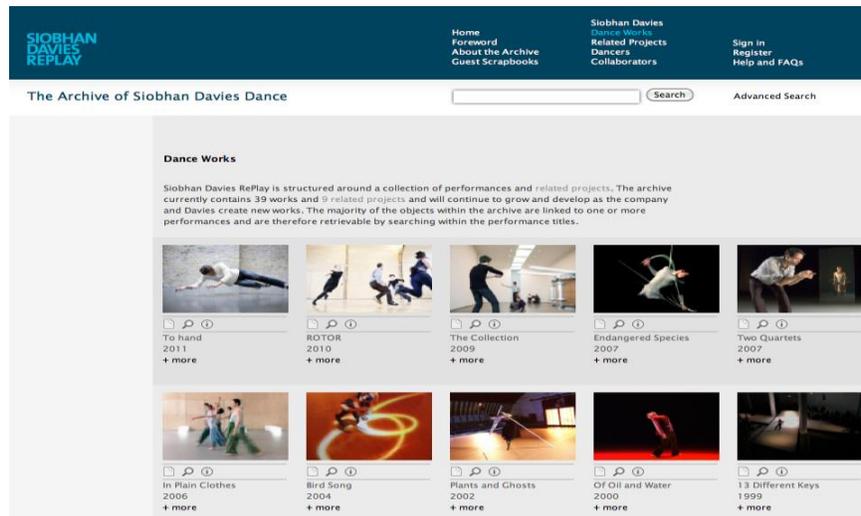

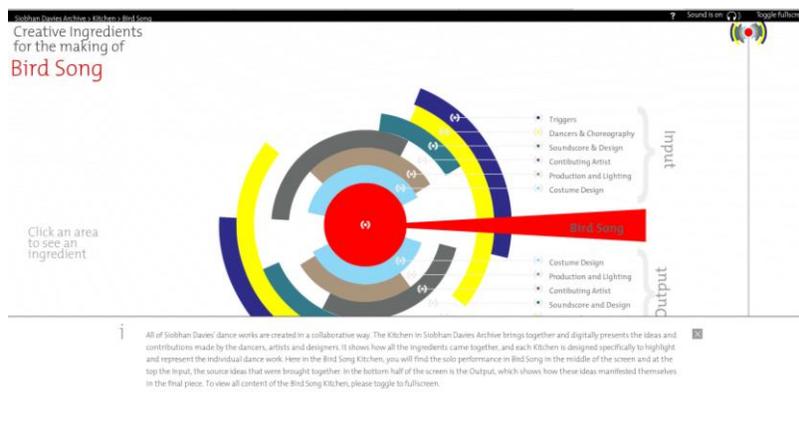*Figure 2.* Screengrab from Siobhan Davies RePlay—original web page

Figure 3. Screengrab from Siobhan Davies RePlay—original web page for Bird Song kitchen interactive visualization

work *material/rearranged/to/be* (2016) in which choreographies combine with video, projections, moving sculptures, and the visiting public to explore how movement is archived or remembered. These later projects foreground the body as repository of knowledge, thus providing examples of the body as a "living" archive of dance.

Returning to *RePlay*, as is the condition with many digital resources, the only way in which the archive could be sustained long-term was to migrate the original archive to a new platform, which has been completed in the last few months (Figure 4). The archive now looks, feels and behaves very differently. Hence the archive as *was* is now replaced by what might be seen as 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. The naming of the "original" is testing in any context and is not confined to the impact of digitization, although this is often the subject of consideration in relation to documentation (see, for example, Skare, 2017). Witnessing this migration, I thus now question its original aims and purpose. In its new form, it "performs" its original aims differently. The first aim was to contextualize dance, linking its history with memories of those who made, performed, and viewed the dance. The second was to explore how to foreground the material properties of dance whilst finding structures that transmit the tactile sensibility and sensuous presence of those materials alongside the complex structures that mobilize dancing bodies in performance.
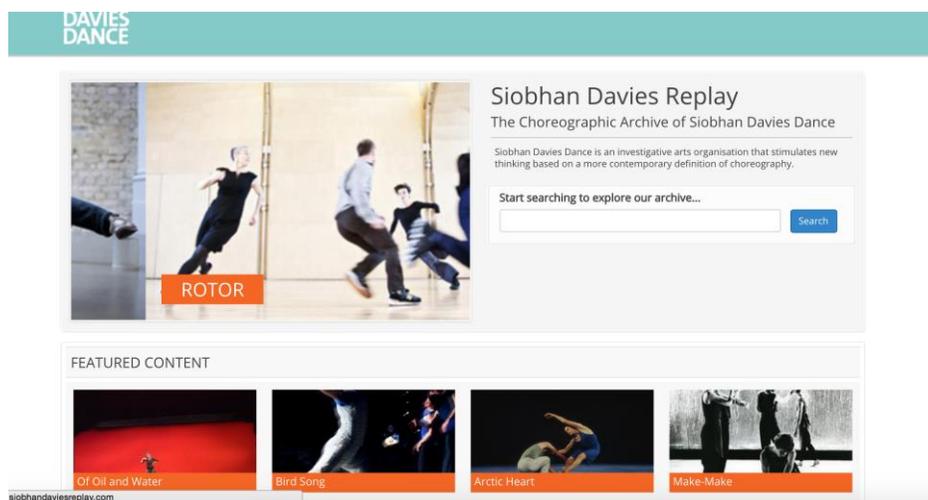

Figure 4. Screengrab from Siobhan Davies RePlay—new (migrated) site

This last aim has fed into later projects, such as _Europeana Space_, a European Commission–funded project that I led between 2013 and 2016 and was primarily focused on the reuse of digital cultural content, mostly held within but not limited to content accessed via Europe's primary portal to culture: _Europeana_. Whilst there are very diverse records of dance held within _Europeana,_ there is relatively little reusable dance content, particularly video content. Through _Europeana Space_, the consortium partners built some digital tools for using and reusing dance content such as a storytelling tool, an annotation tool, and finally a "pop-up museum" tool that integrated live performance with a series of projected dance documents that were curated through the audience on their mobile phones. It was an interesting experiment in bringing archival documents and performance into an interactive "live" environment and opened up more questions about the potential for historical archival content to be reanimated through live performance.

Another project that is closer to the idea of creating "accidental archives" is _WhoLoDancE: Whole-body interaction learning for dance education (WhoLo)._ _WhoLo_ is an H2020-funded three-year project (2016–2018) and is developing a number of digital tools to support the teaching and making of dance. Tools include a blending engine for creating new movement sequences, an annotation tool for analyzing movement and a holographic device for dancers to dance "with" their own or another avatar (Figure 5). Motion capture is underpinning the development of the tools and, in order to develop them, we have first videoed, then motion

Figure 5. Screengrab from WhoLoDancE—Rosa Cisneros Flamenco dancer in motion capture studio using Hololens

captured, and thereby created, a very large repository of dance content in the form of videos and captures (about 18 hours in total—in approximately 4000 usable data blocks) covering four different dance genres: ballet, contemporary, Flamenco, and Greek folk dance. Whilst these records are fundamental to the tool development, they are not themselves the point of the project, yet what we have created by chance is a valuable library of movement, constituting a searchable "accidental archive."

Dance: Transmission and Preservation

All these cases are part of a phenomenon that has emerged through the interface between dance and digital technologies, that of the interaction between excavation, transmission, and preservation of dance. Some projects specifically focus on the processes 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. According to Nora Zuniga Shaw who led the *Synchronous Objects* (2009) project with choreographer William Forsythe, which was one of the first digital dance scores to emerge, these projects act as choreographic resources, not to pin down but to flesh out the dance, to explore its contours (2014, p. 99). These digital dance documents thus operate sometimes on a continuum with practice and, as Dekker et al. propose (2017), become artworks in their own right, particularly when artists are directly involved in their creation, rather than as what remains as a left-over of the dance "as was."

The aim of the *Resilience and Inclusion* project was rather different in that it features dance artists at work, but the artwork lies in the film rather than the dance that is being created. More particularly, the project was designed to draw attention to the working lives of dance artists with disabilities and offers information about legal frameworks and how they can be used to support artists and those who program or commission their work. As noted earlier, at the heart of the toolkit is a film that is the entry point to the learning materials. The aim of the film is to document dancers with disabilities in the dance making process, thus to document the messy and mostly private process of the dance rehearsal, and specifically the collaborative practice of professional disabled dancers who are frequently absent from archival records of performance. More particularly, the film specifically documents the processes towards performance, and not the performance (the product) itself. The product *is* the film. The film *is* the performance. The document is the process towards performance; it is the film. We intentionally do not call the film a "documentary" in order to avoid suggesting that it was an informational film that referred to other pre-existing documents. The film should be "the work."

Whilst much of the working process is common to all dancers, and which is normally a private process and not regularly shared within a public context

(although the ease at which recording techniques can be utilized and film content can be shared since YouTube and Vimeo has changed this to some extent) there are some parts of this process that are particular to each individual dancer with a different physicality. These include the time it takes to arrive, prepare, and be physically ready to work, reflecting what disability scholars including Petra Kuppers (2014) and Alison Kafer (2013) describe as "crip time"; the traces of temporal shifting in their lives that mark a difference with normate time (Garland Thomson, 1997) and yet which refuse to see disability as defining a pre-determined limit: adaptations needed because of floor surface and the different levels of stamina and cognitive effort dancers with disabilities have to deal with in the rehearsal environment. In other words, whilst dancers with disabilities frequently perform in similar environments as those without disabilities, and often alongside non-disabled performers, the production rarely exposes the particular nature of the process of dance making, that can require differences in how rehearsals are scheduled, timed, supported and sited.

What was also important for us to capture were the conversations that take place between the dancers in the making process that are partly about the working process itself, partly about factors that impact their experience as performers working within the professional sector, and partly in response to questions that we posed to them to prompt thought about some of the wider issues in the project. The film thus highlights themes of ownership and difference, and the range of challenges facing disabled dancers in their daily lives. It is also a resource for questioning virtuosity in dance and the debates around "other" bodies in disabled dance as well as for examining the interaction between the legal and policy frameworks and the work of the disabled dancers.

In addition to the film as a single document, the toolkit includes many excerpts from the film to draw attention to specific segments that focus on different aspects of the artists' work. Taken as a whole, the toolkit is organized as a learning program and is modular in design so that it can be used flexibly, as a source of information, a professional development tool, or an educational resource. Users can take a more structured and guided way through the toolkit or simply browse and view videos, stills, access texts (all open access), blogs, and other materials. If users wish, they can complete tasks along the way and check their learning. In short, the aim was not to archive a dance work that had been performed but rather to document a dance work as it was being made (and perhaps unusually, which would not result in a live performance). This data was then transferred to a data management environment (in this case the Open Moodle platform). Data was transcribed for subtitling (to meet accessibility requirements), and access and usage rights were assigned. Users also have information about how to cite individual content items. Clearly this is not built on an archive structure, but in gathering so many documents relating to the work of disabled dance artists, what emerges is an

"accidental archive"—and similar to that of the repository in *WhoLo*, these are documents of materials that otherwise tend to escape the archives that are the responsibility of major cultural and memory institutions—that of vernacular dance practices or the practices of disabled dance artists. With any online resource of this nature, user testing has been carried out to gain insights to what users would want from a toolkit and what kinds of navigation routes would be most valuable. Now in the public domain, interest will turn to finding out how these documents of process accrue value, or not, and what contribution they may make to the wider context of performance documents.

All Kinds of Archives

In conclusion, the range of online dance documents and resources referred to above range from full digital archives that are organized on metadata standards and are fully searchable (*Siobhan Davies RePlay, Digital Dance Archives*) to libraries of dance content and curated collections of content that are searchable (*Europeana Space, WhoLo*) and produce "accidental archives" as a byproduct of their primary purpose. The *Resilience and Inclusion* online toolkit (Blades et al., 2017) is not an archive but holds some of the properties of an accidental archive. It brings together diverse records of dance that together produce an environment that gives value to the multiple documents that constitute an arts practice. In some small way, it may also stimulate new thinking about documentation strategies in performance more widely to broaden the way in which documents of performance can be accessed, reused and preserved.

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