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Participatory sense-making in physical play and dance improvisation: drawing meaningful connections between self, others and world

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Chapter 5. Living archive of my children's physical play

Since 2013, I have started to collect photographic material of children's physical play events. Together these pictures form the basis of the living archive. In this chapter I take a closer look at - what I refer to as a living, personal archive of children's physical play. First, I dive conceptually in what an archive is, what kind of archives there are and if and in what way a living archive can be defined. Second, I relate the archive to the arts, specifically to dance/play. The Dancing Museum of Boris Charmatz, and two other examples of dance archives are discussed - Shioban Dance Replay and Double Skin/Double Mind (DS/DM) interactive installation - followed by an analysis of the Playing the Archive Project. Third, I discuss the complex relationship between photography and documentation. Auslander's valuable work on the performativity of documentation (2006) is used to understand how the photographs co-construct and co-create the original play event. Finally, I describe different ways of ordering and organising the photographic material, in singular as well as sequential way - very much in line with Muybridge's work. I close the chapter with some final thoughts on the archive as an open-ended, transformative system that does not only have evidential value but is a creative artwork in and of itself.

The Archive

What is an archive? Archives are the "documentary by-product of human activity retained for their long-term value; [...] the contemporary records created by individuals and organisations" (International Council on Archives, n.d.). In the traditional sense, archives are seen as windows to the past, as a place or a site that contains traces of a collective or individual history. An archive has two functions, it is at once a source and storage of information. In other words, retrieval is just as important as storing, and as a result, archiving is never a passive act.

There are all sorts of archives, ranging from historical archives (such as libraries and museum archives), corporate archives, amateur archives, private collector's archives, artist's archives, etc. We associate archives with rows and rows of boxes on shelves where documentation is stored and that can only be accessed through a codex or accession number. Archives are "repertories of knowledge as well as physical spaces" (Yiakoumaki, 2009, pp. 29-30). They often are stored in a concrete physical space (a museum or library for example) while at the same time they are conceptual – containing loads of concentrated information. There is something secret and mysterious about archives as if history can be found under layers of dust, carefully hidden, only retrievable for someone who is willing to get to the bottom of the matter. This, however, is a rather romantic view of archives, since archives nowadays are often digitized and the main building in which they are stored, is virtual.

Since the arrival of the personal computer, the world wide web, and the smartphone, everyone has turned into an archivist (Ketelaar, 2006). As a case in point, never have there been so many pictures in our personal lives and online platforms for photography and videos are increasingly popular. Smartphones with their in-built cameras help us to capture any moment of our life. More than one trillion photos were taken in 2018, and more than three billion images were shared across social media every day (Lavoie, 2018). Even more, through the web, we have access to an infinite amount of information, and new technology makes it possible to archive information in unforeseen ways. Whereas traditional archives often contain physical records (such as texts, microfiches, photographs, or audio) that are stored in real buildings, archives nowadays are mostly digitized and therefore have a more virtual than physical status (Dekker, 2017). As a result, the archive has changed in character too. "Digital tools have increased the fragmentary and instable nature of archives." (Breakell, 2008)

Technology transforms not only the archive as such (content, structure, access) but also its meaning. An analogue document has a physical arrangement in terms of form, structure, and content. Digital documents however do not have such a physical representation, and therefore “digital documents are *potential* documents, coming into existence only by virtue of software that understands how to access and display them” (Ketelaar, 2007, p.179). Digital documents are thus more flexible, fluid, and instable. Even more, there is no longer an ‘original’ document since each digital document is already a digital reconstruction.

According to the French historian Arlette Farge, “the archive is a participatory field; an open field of activity” (as cited in Yiakoumaki, 2009, p.28). This means that anyone who accesses the archive is entering into a process of exchange since each person brings his/he own context, history and interpretation along. Even more, (digital) archives nowadays are more and more networked and decentralized. As a result, the archive is no longer a static/passive phenomenon but active and alive.

This is where the living archive comes in. Living archives refer to the fragmentary, instable nature of archives nowadays. Archives are not inert, hidden in a state of stasis, dead and passive. A living archive is a participatory archive that changes, evolves, and transforms over time. In other words, the archive is always in a state of becoming, and therefore never complete. Any archive has gaps, missing items, and inconsistencies. Nor is the archive ever finished. Eric Ketelaar (2008, p.12) writes:

The openness of the archive outweighs the closure of a trial. The file may have been closed, but it will be reactivated again and again. Every interaction, intervention, interrogation, and interpretation by creator, user, and archivist is an activation of the record. Each activation leaves fingerprints which are attributes to the archive’s infinite meaning [...]. That is why the archive is never closed. It is open into and ‘back to the future’.

According to Stuart Hall (2001), a living archive is “on-going, continuing, unfinished, open-ended” (p.89). New work is added to the archive, and each time the archive is accessed the archive changes. Archiving consists of a sequence of events: recording, putting the records in an archive, ordering and systemising the storage, sharing, and often re-archiving. Archiving also implies making choices: what is and what is not archived.

Hall argues that a living archive is not a prison of the past, it is not something static that is always pointing to the same. A living archive connects, is relational, is an interplay of differences, and although an archive is always constituted in the past, it points to the present and the future as well. Arike Oke (2017) states that archives are traditionally seen as untouchable (and often also invisible), living archives however have the potential to be the compost, the fertilizing soil for new ideas and new insights.

An archive is a territory, it encloses a plurality of virtual meanings that becomes actual once someone interacts with the archive. Meaning only arises through connection and interaction. There is not one author, nor one interpretation. The archive is a discursive terrain: in the encounter archives become meaningful. “Archives are traces to which we respond; they are a reflection of ourselves, and our response to them says more about us than the archive itself. Any use of archives is a unique and unrepeatable journey”, writes Sue Breakall (2007). Living archives can thus be seen as territories or assemblages that are open, collaborative, and creative (Dekker, 2017). Their form, structure and content are not fixed but in a constant process of becoming. In other words, archives exist in a state of potentiality³⁶ (Kozel, 2017).

³⁶ Anarchive is nowadays used as a term that refers to archiving as an activity that considers traces/records not as inert but as carriers of potential. In contrast to the traditional notion of an archive as the documentation of a past event, the anarchive is a

The Archival Turn in the Arts

The archival turn in the arts refers to the increased appearance of archival material in art and exhibition practice from the 1990s on. It involves the use of historical and archival materials from non-artistic institutional settings in artworks (Simon, 2002). The archival turn in the arts is not so much concerned with the artistic creation of archives, but in the re-activation of existing, institutional archives to reveal and critique the way knowledge is produced and archived in these institutions.

Hal Foster introduces the term archival impulse (2004), as he identifies an emergence of art that focuses on archives. He describes four characteristics of archival art. First of all, archival artists seek to retrieve historical information that is neglected or marginalized, to provide a counter-memory and to give physical presence to the lost or the overlooked. Second, archival artists push the notion of originality and authorship, for example by re-using an image over and over - so that individual authorship turns into a collective or communal authorship. Third, although it seems likely that the internet is the perfect medium for archival art, most archival artists use a more tactile and physical approach. Human interaction, and not machinic processing, is put at the forefront in archival art. Fourth, materials are collected from all kinds of sources (such as objects, images and text) and arranged in a quasi-logic order. This often results in three-dimensional artworks that can take the shape of a kiosk (*Ingeborg Bachmann Kiosk*, Thomas Hirschhorn, 2000), a film-and-text piece (*Girl Stowaway*, Tacita Dean, 1994), or a theatrical space (*Upside Down and Backwards*, *Completely Unburied*, Sam Durant, 1999).

In the contemporary dance scene in the United States and Europe, a similar kind of archival interest can be observed. From the beginning of the 21st century on, choreographers and performance artists have become increasingly interested in re-enactment as a strategy to open up new potentialities of past works. André Lepecki refers to this as, *the will to archive*, a concept that resonates with Foster's archival impulse, yet also differs from it. Foster perceives the archival impulse as "a will to connect what cannot be connected" (2004, p.21), in other words, the desire within the art scene to reveal and overcome the gaps and failures in the cultural memory of a society. Lepecki takes a slightly different approach. According to him, the will to archive within the arts (and specifically in dance and the performing arts) is not so much driven by failures in cultural memory or the desire to connect to the historically overlooked. Instead, "the will to archive refers to a capacity to identify in a past work still non-exhausted creative fields of impalpable possibilities" (Lepecki, 2010, p.31).³⁷

The time-based nature of dance provides challenges for dance archivists (Oke, 2017). The first question that arises when it comes to archiving dance, is how to capture the kinaesthetic nature of dance: How can the qualities and the liveness of dance be translated into archival material? And what should be captured: the creative process or the result? To archive a dance work, requires not only video documentation of the performance (preferably shot from different angles) but also a light plan, a description of the costumes and set and a piece of music or sound score. It also should include the movement repertoire, rehearsals and the creative process. Oke (2017) states that in an archival record

feed-forward mechanism where traces are reactivatable and carriers of creative potential. Through reactivation, new creative potential is actualized. The anarchive is process-based, it is not contained in one single object but is considered a cross-platform phenomenon. Even more, the event plays an important role in the anarchive: through live, collaborative encounters the creative potential of traces/archival material is explored (see <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/659630/659631> for an example). The term anarchive resonates with my concept of the living archive in several ways: both focus on the reactivation of past traces and the actualization of new potential. However, there are also differences: the anarchive is event-based and it does not contain documentation. The living archive, in contrast, has a specific locus and documentation plays an important role.

³⁷ Lepecki's ideas on archiving and re-enactment will be discussed in depth in the next chapter.

of a dance work, the following elements should be available: the choreographer's idea of the dance work, the performers' idea of the dance work, the additional contributors' idea of the dance work, the audience, theorists, and critics' idea of the dance work. Even if all these aspects are archived, the question remains if it is enough.

The need to archive dance has led to the development of two main notation systems in the 20th century: Labanotation (1928) and Benesh Movement Notation (1955). Both notation systems however can only be written down and read by choreologists. Notations thus heavily depend on specialist training and the interpretation of the choreologist (Oke, 2017; Bermúdez Pascual, 2016). In practice, these notation systems are hardly ever used since they are time-consuming and cumbersome to use. According to Anna Heyward "dance notation is arcane, and mostly inessential to the art of dance" (2015, para.13). Notation systems, therefore, are hardly used to archive dance works in the contemporary dance scene.

According to choreographer and dance artist Boris Charmatz it is not only "the performed work that forms dance but the other contributing people, physical and meta-physical spaces that are present in the moment of the performance" (as cited in Oke, 2017, p. 204). He has developed the concept of the Dancing Museum (2009-2018) an experimental space that pushes forward the boundaries of what dance is. The dancing museum is not only a physical place (in Rennes) but also a nomadic idea. In the Dancing Museum the living and the reflective come together: it is art, it is an archive, it is a creation and a transformation. When archiving a dance, one should move outside the strictly choreographic field, and it could therefore also possibly contain a bar, a dance studio, a library, a school or an exhibition.

Two dance companies have experimented with new ways of archiving dance: Siobhan Davies Dance (2009) and ICK Amsterdam (2007). The aim of Siobhan Davies RePlay³⁸ is to bring together all of the materials and documentation of the company in one single collection. Siobhan Davies is interested in the history of her dance works, not in solely archiving it, but to "test the living potential of an archive. Through a process of reconstructing and reimagining past choreographies, she is re-inscribing the archival traces through her dancers' bodies; archival content is re-embodied, performed by finding its way back into the new work and, in turn, questioning her own choreographic choices." (Whatley, 2015, p. 121-122)

Siobhan Davies RePlay (2009) is an online digital archive, free to access and user-friendly. It encompasses audio-visual material such as films of performances and rehearsal tapes as well as texts, academic writings and experimental visualizations of the creative process (Whatley, 2014). The archive covers the work of Siobhan Davies Dance and is meant to give a creative impulse to future work. Instead of archiving the dance works in a fixed, static manner the dance works are documented in an unfinished way, as "dances in formation" (Whatley, 2014, p. 123). To do so not only rehearsal tapes are included, but also 'scratch tapes' that document the thinking, doing and making within the creative process. Another element of the Siobhan Davies RePlay is the 'kitchen' which gives visitors access to the different layers/ingredients of a choreography. Even more, dance vocabulary is used to frame the archive: the archive *breathes*, it highlights the *connective tissues* in-between the dance works and gives access to *the anatomy* of each dance work (Whatley, 2014). In an interview with Scott deLahunta, Siobhan Davies describes the relation between dance and the archive as follows:

If we make an archive of dance, what does our art form bring to the idea of an archive? What can be distinctive rather than borrowed? In dance, we are constantly in process, in movement,

³⁸ Siobhan Davies RePlay is Europe's first digital archive of dance that was launched in 2009. See also <https://archive.siobhandavies.com>

so should we not try to get the idea of movement, or even movement of thought to be somehow present within the archival architecture? (Ellis, Blades & Waelde, 2018, p. 9)

The challenge for Siobhan Davies RePlay was to develop a digital archive of dance that is dynamic and that takes movement and the living body as guiding principles for the archival architecture. Davies herself finds that RePlay was not successful in this sense, since the archive is technically arranged in such a way that it cannot organically adapt to the practice, nor can it incorporate all the layers that make up a dance. Davies also finds the fragmentary bits and pieces of the creative process more informative and fertile (she uses the word compost) than the video recordings of the finished works.

ICK in Amsterdam has faced similar challenges in building up an archive around the work of Emio Greco and Pieter C. Scholten. Together with an interdisciplinary team - with experts in dance, new technology, motion capture systems, and gesture analysis - they built a multimodal archive hosted on DVD and in an interactive installation— accompanied by the publication of a text and a film documentary³⁹ (Bermúdez Pascual, 2011). In the process, most attention was paid to the lived experience of dance, the idiosyncratic dance vocabulary of the ICK and the translation of dance material into a different medium than the body. Although the first aim of the interactive installation DS/DM (Double Skin/Double Mind) project was to develop tools to teach ICK's method and their idiosyncratic dance language to a broader field, and only after years of research, they eventually came up with the idea of a multimodal archive. Not without a reason, the project is also referred to as 'Capturing Intention', since ICK was foremost interested in how underlying intentions (such as motivations, internal driving forces, and internal imagery) give birth to a specific movement dynamics and dance language.

DS/DM is a way of preparing the body for dance that is inherent to your thinking and your imagination. It needs a connection with your own choices, also during the improvisation with other elements and choreographic materials. The experience creates a condition and an opening, it is not something fixed by rules that say: this is how you should dance. It is rather the opposite, you use it, and then you contrast it in an open field of intervention and manipulation. (ICK, 2007, para. 1)

The DS/DM aims to increase the sensitivity of the body and is based on four principles: breathing, jumping, expanding and reducing. The interactive installation offers the participant (professional and non-professional) the possibility to engage in a virtual workshop, and to play, experiment and discover new interpretations of ICK's work.

As it already becomes clear, ICK is not interested in traditionally archiving their repertoire. Films and registrations of final work only play a minor role, since most attention goes out to the method that Emio Greco and Pieter C. Scholten have developed throughout the years. DS/DM is a tool to playfully engage with the underlying movement principles, increase the sensitivity of the body and explore new movement potential. ICK has developed a living archive in the true sense of the word: an archive that is open-ended, explorative, flexible and creative.

The two examples above, Siobhan Davies RePlay and the Double Skin/Double Mind interactive installation are both inspiring initiatives. What I take from both of them is their ongoing search for an archive that can capture the liveness of movement. In both cases, the creative process is acknowledged as the vital ingredient of the dance work, and this creativity is captured in different

³⁹ <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/8247/8248>

ways (the scratch tapes in the case of Siobhan Davies RePlay and the multimodal approach in the case of DS/DM). This has led to personal archives that invite the visitor/participant to actively engage with the dance material.

However, it must be noted that there is a big gap between these two archival dance projects and my own undertaking. Siobhan Davies Dance and ICK are both contemporary dance companies that produce dance performances for the stage. In contrast, my artistic work lies strictly within the exploration of physical movement structures – movement structures that come into being through play and dance improvisation. I don't make dance performances and I don't set up artistic play events. The goal of my artistic undertaking is to render visible the kinetic/kinaesthetic dimensions of both children's physical play and dance improvisation. In the case of Siobhan Davies Dance and ICK, the dance works form the starting point of their archival journey. In my case, however, the journey starts with capturing the physical play events of my children in such a way that affects, forces and intensities that are at work in play can be captured in another medium (in my case photography) - and when captured, the material is handed over to professional dancers. It is for this reason that I will discuss here a third project, *Playing the Archive*, that is entirely dedicated to the exploration of play.

Playing the Archive (2017-2019)

Playing the Archive explores memories and practices of play by bringing together archives, spaces, and technologies of play. The initial starting point of the project is the play archive of folklorists Iona and Peter Opie (n.d.), which is stored in Oxford, in the Bodleian Libraries. Iona Opie (1923-2017) and Peter Opie (1918-1982) were a husband-and-wife team researching children's culture. Over more than four decades they collected children's books (it is the largest collection of children's books in the world). From the 1950s until the 1980s Iona and Peter Opie undertook three national surveys of schoolchildren aged 8-14 years into the culture of play. The Opies placed an advert in the *Sunday Times* where they called upon the help of teachers to spread the survey around. The survey consisted of a set of questions about the games children play, as well as hobbies, playground activities, songs, rhymes, sayings and jokes. The Opies received thousands of replies of children and teachers that are now archived in the Bodleian Libraries.

Playing the Archive (2017-2019) is dedicated to passing play on from generation to generation. The project follows three strands. The first is to digitize and transform the Opies Archive. The aim is to build a virtual, immersive environment where young and old can engage interactively and playfully. Even more, the 3d virtual reality experience also includes games that are played by children nowadays. The second strand is studying memories and practices of play, in the past as well as the present. This involves interviews with the original contributors of the Opies Archive, as well as researching the play culture of children nowadays. Children have an active part in this research since they interview the older contributors and other children, and film their own play. The aim is to understand what play is, what the function of play is in society, how play is passed on from one generation to the other, and to understand why some games persevere in time, while others fade away. The third and final strand is the building of two experimental playgrounds that combine physical aspects of playgrounds with virtual reality. The aim is to build a playspace with mixed reality elements that links the physical playground with the digitized Opie archive (*Playing the Archive*, 2017-2019).

As becomes already clear, *Playing the Archive* is more than just an archive. The program seeks to make active connections between the play cultures of different generations, building further on Opies Archive by creating mixed reality playgrounds. This includes, amongst others a Time Telephone installation: by dialing an original rotary telephone in a red telephone kiosk, users can access a selection of the archival materials from the Opie collection through audio recordings (voiced by children). Another output of the research project is the 'Sense of Play' playing cards, a set of

playing cards with descriptions of games from the Opie archive on the one side, and on the other side an augmented reality experience that can be accessed by scanning a QR-code (Playing the Archive, 2017-2019).

Playing the Archive actively strives to make connections between the play culture of the past (as collected by the Opies) and the play culture of children nowadays with the use of new technology. If I compare this project with my own artistic research, at first glance more differences than similarities can be found between Playing the Archive and my personal archive of children's physical play. First of all, the size and scope of Playing the Archive exceed my own archive in every way. The Opies Archive includes thousands of play testimonials of children between 1947-1989. The archive gives access to the play experiences of a whole (British) generation of children and together they form the cultural memory of (British) children's lives in the second half of the twentieth century. Second, the project is highly interdisciplinary (just as Davies RePlay and DM/DS by the way). Several organisations and institutions are collaborating (the Bodleian Libraries, V&A Museum of Childhood, Site Gallery/Sheffield, and several universities), each providing experts in the field of archiving, conservation, new media digitization, virtual reality, etc. Artists, researchers, and archivists work together, whereas in my own case, I am the artist, the researcher, and the archivist at once. This does not only influence the size and scope of the living archive, but also makes it more subjective. The living archive that I am setting up, is a personal journey. It is intimate and immediate, and it only covers the physical play events of my immediate family (including friends and playmates). It is far from complete, it is unfinished, as it only leaves fragmentary traces of play events that took place in and around my own home.

Despite the differences, I find Playing the Archive an intriguing project – specifically how the project elaborates further on the Opie Archive. The project is connected to events in the past but it also (and foremost) reaches forward: it gives the testimonials of thousands of children a new life through the use of innovative technological tools. The project re-invents the past, as it opens up and throws us back to the future (in the words of Ketelaar, 2008). Even more, the project is cut up into different phases: from the digitizing of the Opie Archive to an inventory of children's play nowadays to the development of creative tools that not only provide access to the archive but also transform it radically. Playing the Archive is a place of creation (Foster, 2004). It provides fertile ground for new investigations and new interactions with the young and old (Oke, 2017). Through the creative re-use of the archive, new potentialities arise and layers of infinite meanings start to emerge.

In my own artistic work three stages can be distinguished as well: the living archive itself, the re-enactment of play events by professional dancers, and the development of creative movement workshops (Replay/Remove) for educational use. Photography is used as the main tool to capture the play events of my own children (whereas Playing the Archive merely consists of written texts, letters, and other documentation). This raises a few questions. First of all, how do the photographs relate to the original event? Are they to be seen as *documents of the original event* or as artifacts that move *beyond documentation*? In other words, do the photographs merely serve as traces or records and as such only have evidential value, or do they co-create the event? In the next two paragraphs, I take a further look at these questions.

The relation between performance and documentation

To understand the relation between the photograph and the original event (or performance), Philip Auslander's (2008) distinction between two types of performance documentation, the documentary and the theatrical, is useful. The documentary entails the traditional way in which performance documentation is perceived: the event precedes the documentation and the documentation serves as a record and actual proof that the event took place. An example of the documentary category is Chris

Burden's *Shoot* (1971)⁴⁰, an artwork in which the artist arranged to have himself shot at close range by a friend wielding a 22long rifle. The photograph of the shooting proves that the event took place.

The other category, the theatrical, consists of performances that are solely staged to be photographed or filmed. An example of this category is Yves Klein's *Leap into the Void* (1960)⁴¹ where we see Klein jumping from a second-floor window. The photograph is manipulated and consists in fact of two events: the leap from a second-floor window and the leap from a rooftop in the Paris suburbs, while friends hold a protective net to catch him as he falls. The two negatives - one with the leap and the other with the surroundings (without the protective net) - are printed together. There is no audience, except for the photographers and the friends who assist him. The image is a record of "an event that never took place except in the photograph itself" (Auslander, 2008, p.84). The self-portraits of Cindy Sherman⁴², in which she captures herself in a range of guises and personas, also belong to the second category. In Sherman's case, there is also no original event: the photograph is the only place where the performance occurs. Only the camera is the witness.

Although Auslander (2008) draws a clear line between the two categories, he states that in both categories the event is staged for the camera. The photographer is part of the action space. Even more, documentation seems just as important as the event itself – even to the point "that the photograph replaces the reality it documents" (p. 3). For Auslander, the difference between the two categories ultimately comes down to whether the documentation is a primary (in the case of the 'theatrical') or secondary (in the case of the 'documentary') record of the event. There is thus a tight connection between performance and documentation. Auslander (2008) even speaks of the "performativity of documentation, i.e. the act of documenting an event as a performance is what constitutes it as such" (p.5). The documentation not only serves as an archival trace of the autonomous performance, but it creates and materializes the performance.

I would place my own living archive under Auslander's documentary category since the photographs of the play events (as well as the re-enactments) provide a record through which the events can be re-accessed and re-constructed. Even more, the photographs provide evidence that the events took place, they point to the reality of the events. However, just as in Klein's *Leap into the Void*, the play events (and re-enactments) were not performed before an audience. The play events mostly took place close to home while the re-enactments were performed in the studio.

In line with Auslander (2008), I would say that the photographs produce and constitute the events (the original play events as well as the re-enactments). In other words, the physical events become available to the audience solely through documentation. They are framed as a performance "through the performative act of documenting" (p.7)⁴³.

The archive and the photograph

Photography, archive, and memory are closely linked. Taking a picture of something is making a record of something. Okwui Enzewor (2008) states that a camera is an archiving machine and its products are archival objects. "The capacity for mechanical inscription and the order of direct reference that links the photograph with the indisputable fact of its subject's existence are the bedrock of photography and film." (Enzewor, 2008, p. 11) A photograph is an archival record of an event that took place somewhere in history.

⁴⁰ See <http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/shoot/>

⁴¹ See <https://artlead.net/content/journal/modern-classics-yves-klein-leap-into-the-void-1960/>

⁴² See <https://www.moma.org/artists/5392>

⁴³ See note 34, page 57.

Our relationship with photography is very intimate. Since the invention of the medium of photography in 1839, the camera has rapidly evolved into a consumer product. Photography has turned into a commodity. The border between professional and amateur, between private and public, has faded. With the arrival of the smartphone with its built-in cameras we have become obsessed with recording and archiving our lives (Lavoie, 2018). The photo album (nowadays foremost digital) is perhaps the best example of our desire to make visual testimonies of our lives. We photograph birthdays, holidays, and other life events, to create visual narratives of our lives.

Every photograph is unique since it points to a singular event, that took place at a specific time and moment. However, this uniqueness disappears when the photograph becomes part of an archive. Uniqueness and singularity are annihilated in the process of archiving. This is also referred to as the “paradoxical effect of archiving, because at a certain point the individual components are deemed to be only another expression of those objects that surround it” (Van Alphen, 2008, p.66). In the archive, the individual photographs are no longer an expression in and of themselves, but they only gain meaning in relation to other photographs and archival materials. The individual photograph takes its place in a temporal order and as a result, its singularity perishes.

In my living archive, I deliberately play with the singularity and plurality of the photographs. Most often, the photographic material is organised in chronological sequences (see Figure 11), but in some cases, I have decided to keep the singularity of a photograph (I refer to them as stand-alones, see later on).



Figure 11. Gliding with mattresses from stairs © Carolien Hermans

The working method is similar to Eadweard Muybridge’s (1830-1904) stop-action photography. Muybridge was a British photographer (based in the United States) and a pioneer in stop motion techniques. He shortened exposure times (through the use of special shutters) so that isolated moments in movement could be photographed. This is also referred to as bullet time images, i.e. images that “focus on the spectacular nature of the single frozen moment that only the camera can capture – that instant in which the laws of gravity no longer seem to prevail” (Braun, 2013, p. 48).

A more contemporary example of instantaneous photography is the work of Denis Darzacq, *La Chute* (2007). In urban environments, he creates images of bodies that float in-between heaven and earth. Many of his photographs are taken in the Paris *banlieues*. The juxtaposition of the bodies in mid-air, shot against a background of urban, concrete buildings, underscores the marginalized and vulnerable position of urban youth (Cooper Albright, 2013). Darzacq freezes the movement of the youngsters “in order to expose their subjectivity” (Cooper Albright, 2013, p. 39).

Besides the sequential series, my archive also contains frozen images of physical movement (see Figures 1, 12, 13, and 14). I refer to them as stand-alones, as photographs that should not be placed inside an order/sequence because of their singularity, and because they can only be fully understood in isolation. This is especially true for the movements that are captured in mid-air. It is only because the chain of movements is interrupted, that the narrative of the action is suspended. The body in mid-air shows us the in-between, “the body of the almost, the body of the between, when the movement is on the verge, actual but almost virtual, hanging, pulsing, spiraling” (Manning, as cited in Cooper Albright, 2013, p.40).



Figure 12. Sea Dance © Carolien Hermans



Figure 13. Living Room Dance © Carolien Hermans



Figure 14. Jumping © Carolien Hermans

However, in my archive, the stand-alones form the exception rather than the rule. Almost all physical play events are captured within a sequential structure. Where in Muybridge's work the hierarchical order is heavily manipulated in the editing process - he made post hoc arrangements to hide gaps and inconsistencies caused by technical problems in the shooting process (Braun, 2013) - I have kept the original order of shooting intact. I don't mind if there are gaps or holes in the sequence. The missing photographs are just as important as the existing ones. Absence constitutes presence. The photographic sequences are constituted around perceptual breaks in linear time. The original play event has been frayed and dissected until only isolated fragments (images) remain, frozen in time. Then the bits and pieces (the fragments) are put back together - in such a way that a new intrinsic logic and order start to emerge. As a result, the series of photographs are not complete, they are fragmentary and unfinished. My interest lies in the re-construction of the physical event, in a visual restructuring that is not identical to the original event but that transforms the event and opens up new creative potential.

In his earlier work on human and animal locomotion, Muybridge uses a strict hierarchical order. In his later work, however, he abandons the logic of the sequence almost completely. Muybridge starts to organise "images from unrelated series into dynamic layouts, each picture affecting the reading of the one next to it or above or below it" (Braun, 2013, p. 51)⁴⁴. A similar mechanism is at work in my own work. When it comes to simple movement actions (such as jumping, turning, falling, etc.), I use temporal ordering structures. In more complex physical events (such as gliding from the stairs with mattresses), the photographs are loosely ordered, still put into a timeline but with many more gaps and inconsistencies between them (see Figures 15 and 16).



Figure 15. Gliding with mattresses from stairs © Carolien Hermans

These photographic series are probably best described as collages since together they hold the original event. The bits and pieces (the fragment of the original event) are stitched back together, linking the series of photographs to the original event, yet at the same, breaking its linear, narrative construction.

The photographic sequences only partly have evidential value. They point to the original event but their significance lies foremost in the creative re-construction and re-structuring of the play events. There is a suggestion of temporal order—specifically in the chosen format (i.e. the photographic sequences). Through the chain of images, a collective meaning comes about. The photographic sequences echo the original play events, yet at the same time they differentiate and separate themselves from the original – as they become artistic products in and of themselves.

⁴⁴ See <https://penntoday.upenn.edu/news/new-way-thinking-about-motion-movement-eadweard-muybridge> for more information on the work of Muybridge.



Figure 16. Gliding with mattresses from stairs © Carolien Hermans

Living archive of my children's play events

The living archive in my artistic research consists of photographic material of my children's physical play events. The photographs are taken over a period of roughly speaking, five years (2013-2018). At the start of the archive, my children are respectively 7 (Lisa) and 9 years (Luuk) old. At the end, they are youngsters in high school. The photographs are taken with a simple camera, the Canon EOS 6D, with a 20.2 megapixel CMOS sensor for high resolution. No tripod is used. All photos are taken by hand and captured in a raw image file so that all the original data are preserved and no information is compressed. The camera is always close-by. At home, I can grasp it immediately from the closet that is situated behind my working desk. When I go out with the children, I bring the camera along.

It is difficult to tell how much the presence of the camera affects the play behaviour of the children. There are a few things that I do to reduce the impact to a minimum. First of all, I make use of a handheld camera. In the cases that I use a tripod, the children are more aware of the camera and they also start to perform for the camera. Even more, I try not to intervene in the play event. I draw attention away from the camera by being silent and adapting to the situation. Duration also plays a role. At the start, children look at the camera but after a while, they simply continue with their play. However, the camera and my presence do play a role. Some children, at the end of the play event, say that they did their best. I also notice that some movements are exaggerated, more daring, or provocative. Research (Jansen et al., 2018) shows that the presence of a camera makes participants more self-aware, which in turn leads to more pro-social and normative behaviour. It is therefore likely that some behaviour (like cheating, disagreement, being mean to each other, boredom, etc.) is not being shown as a result of my presence and the presence of a camera.

Most physical play events that I have captured are improvised moments that just spontaneously happened. However, some play events (especially in the category 'movement ecology') are choreographed, that is to say, the physical play still happens on the spot but I interfere as I give my children instructions or I ask them to repeat an action. The photographs are mainly taken in and around our home in Amsterdam, and supplemented with photographs taken during holidays, especially at our watermill in Lisseuil/France.

This way, I have collected thousands of images since with each event I took around 200-300 pictures. After I have taken the images, I import them from the camera to my laptop, and from here a long and labor-intensive work starts: opening the images, looking at them, and selecting the images that I want to keep. This is not only a rational but also an intuitive act since the choice-making is based on aesthetic aspects, content and degree of expressiveness – so affective values play a huge role in the selection process as well. This also means that images are left out in this stage: they are erased, forgotten, neglected or stored somewhere else. Three criteria are used in this selection process: aesthetic (e.g. no clear composition, too messy, sexual connotation, pictures where children are posing for the camera), technical (e.g. over-exposed, blurry, oblique, too far away/too close) or content-wise (action is unclear/ambivalent, there is no physical expressivity). Selection is necessary for building up the archive since it is impossible to keep everything (Breakall, 2008). The archive becomes an archive because choices have been made and information has been ordered and systematized (even if the latter is done in a rather intuitive and playful way).

The images are slightly edited and manipulated. Editing actions include the adjustment of brightness, saturation, and contrast. All images are shot in full colour, however, in the editing process, I decide that some physical events/movements should be framed in black-and-white while others remain in colour. It is not easy to explain why I sometimes decide on framing in black and white, and why at other times I decide to use full colour. I guess it has partly to do with aesthetics: I most often decide for black-and-white when the original photographs are rather flat and when the action itself does not come to the fore. There is however another reason. Black-and-white photography provides different access to the physical event/movement as colour photography does. Erickson (1999)

suggests that colour photographs point more to themselves (as objects in their own right) while black-and-white photographs are more obedient as they draw less attention to themselves. Black-and-white photographs display a sense of utility, and therefore they are very useful in documenting events. “Moving into colour photography [...] becomes less a record of a conceptually interesting event than a visual work to be appreciated for itself.” (Erickson, 1999, p.98) This is also the reason why I use a mix of black-and-white and colour photograph – and why some events are rendered in colour. The yellow shirt in the living room dance, the red shirt in the hotel room dance, and the ominous blue sky in the sea dance: the colours reveal affects, intensities, and forces that were once present in the initial event but that are exaggerated and amplified in the colour photography. With the use of both black-and-white and coloured photographs, I show the friction between the archive and the photograph. The photograph points to the original event (as evidence/as a record), while at the same time it becomes a visual in and of itself. In some ways the photograph also detaches itself from the original event, and in the coloured photographs, this becomes most clear.

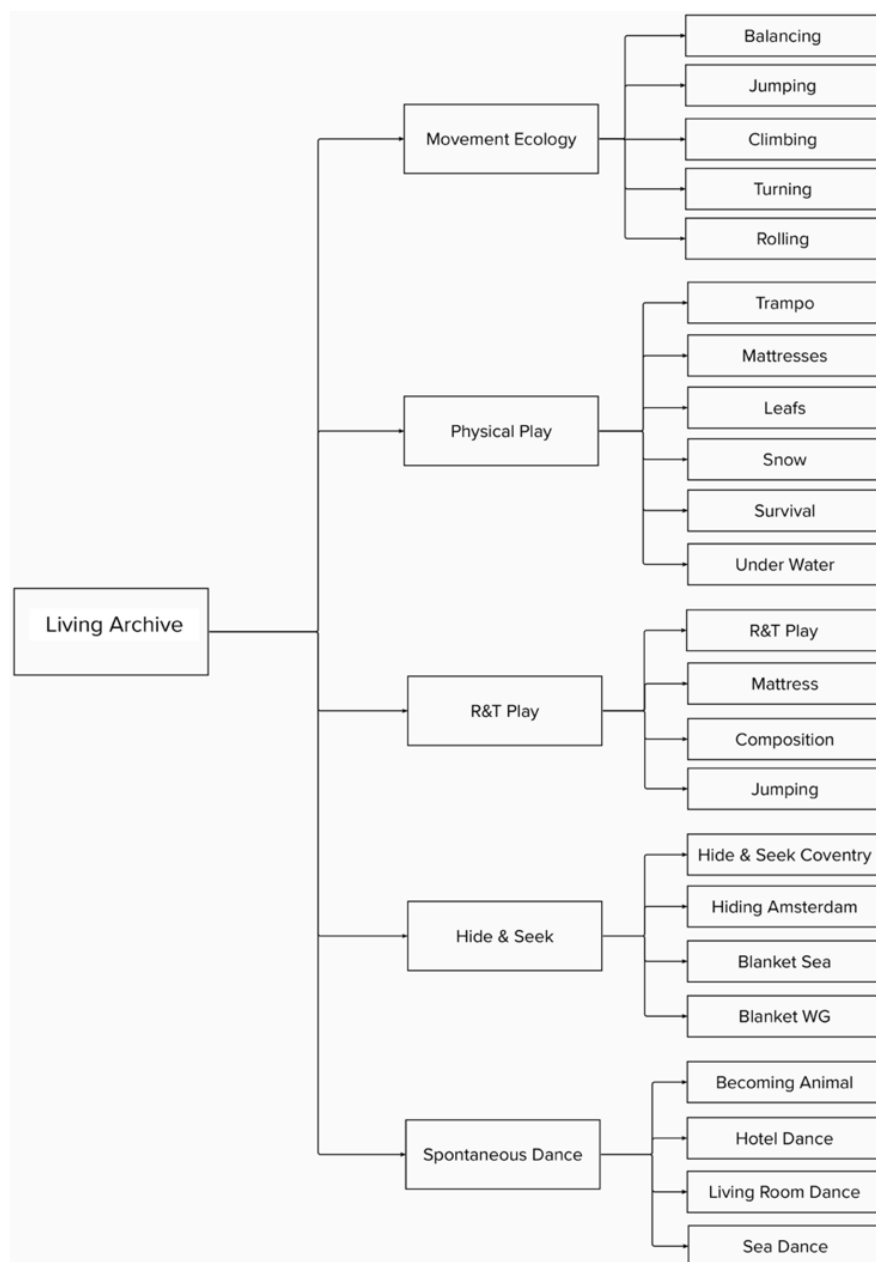


Figure 17. Tree Structure Living Archive

From the selected images I now start to re-construct the physical play event again. In general, the images are put in chronological order. However, sometimes I decide to put images together that resonate with each other or I categorize them in terms of the theme ('shelter' is a good example of such a category). All images are put in a sequential structure, except for a few images that are so 'singular' that they can only be grasped in isolation. I refer to them as stand-alones: they outlift a specific moment or movement and in sequential order this would get lost (the photograph of the upside-down legs in the category Hide-and-Seek is an example of a stand-alone).

In the final stage, I order and organise the archive. I make categories and give names to the physical events. The categories refer to the type of physical play. This leads to the following main categories: movement ecology, physical play, R & T play, hide & seek, and spontaneous dance. Each category contains subcategories. I have chosen specifically for categorization into themes so that images can be easily retrieved through the use of a tree structure. See Figure 17.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the how and what of the archive, with a specific focus on the living archive. I hope to have shown that archives are more than sites of the past that contain historical traces (Dekker, 2017). Archives are flexible systems: they are open, creative, and collaborative. An archive is not merely a window to the past: it is an open-ended transformative system that is fluid and constantly changing "through mutations of connections and disconnections" (Foster, 2004, p.6). Even more, the archive contains non-exhausted creative fields (Lepecki, 2010), virtual forces that can be actualized every time the archive is accessed. An archive, therefore, does not only store, it also acts (see next chapter for further elaboration on this).

Two archival projects in dance have been reviewed: Shioban Dance Replay and the Double Skin/Double Mind interactive installation developed by ICK. Archiving dance works provides extra challenges because of the ephemeral nature of dance. The creative process forms an undeniable part of the dance work, and it is the creative process that is so difficult to capture tangibly. Both projects have experimented with new ways of archiving, that can capture the liveness of movement. This has led to personal archives that invite the visitor/participant to actively engage with the dance material.

Besides the two archival dance projects, I have discussed Playing the Archive, an interdisciplinary project that is dedicated to passing play on from generation to generation. Playing the Archive is more than just an archive. The program seeks to make active connections between the play cultures of different generations, building further on Opies Archive by creating mixed reality playgrounds. The Time Telephone installation and the 'Sense of Play' playing cards are two examples of how new technology is used to infuse the Opies Archive with new meaning and new potential. Even more, three stages can be distinguished in the project: digitizing the Opie Archive, connecting the archive to play nowadays, and developing new play tools through the use of new technology.

My own artistic project can also be divided into three stages: the living archive of physical play events of my children, re-enactment of physical play through dance improvisation, and the development of creative movement workshops (Replay/Remove). Photography is used as the main tool for capturing the physical play events of my children. Sequential series of photographs, collages and stand-alones, are used as ordering principles of the living archive. Finally, the archive is categorized into different types of physical play: ranging from R & T play (Rough and Tumble play) to theater, to spontaneous dance.

Oke (2017) states that dance and movement archives should not stay still if they want to reflect the art form. The archive "must be dynamic and performative, [...] it must move" (p.208). In the next chapter, I will discuss the dynamic and performativity of my living archive. Through the re-enactment of the physical play events, I try to access the non-exhausted creative fields that are still

present in the photographic series. Dance improvisation practice is used here to get a grip on the forces, affects, and energetic impulses that are at work in children's physical play and that together shape the participatory sense-making process. In the next chapter, I will take a closer look at re-enactment as an artistic research strategy to uncover and unravel the creative potential of the living archive.