

## Archives of Freedom

### The digital Pina Bausch Archive and the Egyptian ARC.HIVE of Contemporary Arab Performing Arts

By Helmut Ploebst

It is known that the archiving of ephemeral art forms such as dance, performance and theatre further a new understanding of collecting, storing, systematising and public accessibility. Based on two concrete examples that were presented at the Dance Congress 2013 under the thematic focus of 'Passing on/Taking over', a special aspect of these changes was revealed: Only practical work on specific tasks brings to light the contribution that coping with the challenges, which dance poses to securing and passing on, makes to the archives of the future.

In the first case, an entirely new archive model had to be developed for building up a digital Pina Bausch Archive. And in the second case, the establishment of the Cairo research centre ARC.HIVE of Contemporary Arab Performing Arts demands its anchoring in three institutions on three different continents.

Light was shed on the continuing work on the digital archive by Pina Bausch's son Salomon, founder of the 'Pina Bausch Foundation' (2009) and since 2010 director of the archive project, Barbara Kaufmann, dancer of the Tanztheater Wuppertal, Marc Wagenbach, the academic head of the Foundation, and the information designer Berhard Thull, professor at the Technische Universität Darmstadt, who developed the software for the archive. Wagenbach described its content: "Pina Bausch herself was an archivist. She collected many sorts of material from forty years of artistic work that were necessary to reconstruct her pieces on stage. These materials are compiled mostly in chronological order in the private flat and the offices of the Tanztheater Wuppertal."

### Jungle and Universe

The archive contains videos in different formats and genres from the early 1970s onwards, manuscripts and personal notes, as well as photos of performances and rehearsals, of the company's research periods in all parts of the world, of festivals and social events. In addition, work books from various phases of more than fifty productions, choreographic notes such as show bibles, technical cue sheets and stage management cue sheets, as well as newspaper clippings from the late 1950s onwards, also on her early career as a dancer, her work with Kurt Jooss and her time in New York at the Juilliard School. Furthermore, there are posters and programmes from the period with the Folkwang Ballett and later from her time as the artistic director of the Tanztheater Wuppertal. Finally, various libraries comprising books, magazines and music recordings, as well as physical objects such as awards, medals, certificates alongside personal correspondences, administration files and even documentations of sets, costumes and props.

"Without this archive, it would have been impossible to maintain the repertory," Salomon Bausch stated as regards the size and complexity of the collection. "We found extremely precise and well-organised material that was compiled by different persons from different perspectives and is therefore very heterogeneous." A broad range of, in part contradictory, information thus exists, and this is entirely in accordance with Pina Bausch whose pieces changed over the years. Salomon Bausch: "Since the pieces are difficult to comprehend anyway, we do not see this heterogeneity as a problem but as an advantage. However, it is a challenge for a database. As is

the fact that it was not possible for us to structurally describe this very systematic archive in advance. Conventional databases require precisely this predetermined structure. But my idea corresponded more with a jungle, where everything grows together organically and individual paths can be laid out. In our opinion, this creates more freedom for what we want to say, and everything functions a bit wilder and freer – but also more precise, for that is what we need: to be precise and not put things into compartments in which they do not belong.”

From the point of view of the company, Barbara Kaufmann stated: “You call the archive a jungle. I would call it a universe. Our question was: In this complex, highly dynamic and transitory matter there is so much to collect. How can that be done without distorting and interpreting things and without making inadequate judgements, but instead by simply showing what is there? Pina’s pieces draw from the very subjective inputs of the dancers and others involved stemming from the questions she raised. With her incredible artistic skills, Pina could bring all that together and then present it and open it up to the audience. A freedom of perception for all lies in this, and we do not want to limit that.” Salomon Bausch confirmed this: “The key to our archive is the knowledge of the members of the Tanztheater Wuppertal, who have been working with this material for years.”

In a conversation with members of the Forsythe Company on their experiences with the development of programmes to capture and process complex dance sequences, the University of Darmstadt was mentioned. Bernhard Thull faced the challenge: “When I joined the project, I was confronted with the quite complex situation that the company wanted to develop a digital archive based on an existing collection that comprises all different types of material. But there was no clear idea as to what was to be captured and in which way.” The usual “apriori” data models capitulated in face of this. Thull therefore proposed using “linked data”, a standard of the World Wide Web that requires no “apriori” modelling: “We combined local and distributed knowledge to a consistent view – or rather, the programme does that by independently adding links. We do not need perspective *aprioris* and can preserve contradictions, because we remain on the track of the authors of the data. And we preserve connection possibilities to other archives because we use a work-based standard.”

## **An Egyptian Archive**

Change of scene, to Egypt. The problems posed to the ARC.HIVE of Contemporary Arab Performing Arts in Cairo and its team – Neveen Allouba, Doa Aly, Ismail Fayed and Daniel Peslari – are entirely different. Together with Jacqueline Davies, the managing director of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, and Thomas Thoraus, the deputy director of the Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln, the choreographer and composer Adham Hafez, as the initiator of the first Egyptian dance research platform HaRaKa and of ARC.HIVE, worked out a three-location system for the archive that was presented at the Dance Congress together with the Dutch cultural scholar Maike Bleeker and the British dance historian Ramsay Burt.

The dramatic impact of the political situation in Egypt on the country’s cultural treasures was shown by Hafez with pictures of the arson committed on 17 December, 2011 against the building of the Cairo Institut d’Égypte which was founded in 1798 and housed Egypt’s most valuable collection of historical books. More than 200,000 volumes as well as tens of thousands of maps, objects and magazines from two centuries were destroyed. Only a small portion, partially badly damaged, could be saved. “That was not the only incident of that kind,” Hafez reported. “In 1971, for example, the Cairo Opera House built in 1869 was burnt down. The Egyptian National Theatre, also built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, went up in flames in 2008. And that happened even though both buildings stood in the direct vicinity of the fire brigade headquarters in Cairo.”

Hafez stated that this is the reason why ARC.HIVE is now being realised: “When regarding the arson against historical buildings and documents, you recognise how political memory is, and how things can disappear overnight.” Dance was having a hard time under President Mohamed Morsy: There was a parliamentary debate on whether to ban classical ballet, and the Cairo Contemporary Dance

Centre (CCDC), which just opened in January 2012 and was the only institute in Egypt where contemporary dance could be studied, was shut down at the beginning of June. It remains to be seen how things will continue under the new political conditions after the ousting of Morsy.

### **Partnership in Preserving**

“Contemporary artistic practices in the performing arts always take place outside the Ministry of Cultural Affairs or the state in general,” Hafez explained, “and that is the case not only in Egypt but in the entire Arabic-speaking region.” The task of ARC.HIVE consists in collecting material and establishing contexts: “The context of the Arabic-speaking region is very specific. Although one would say upon first sight that it is divided into contemporary and traditional art practices, one must instead differentiate between – so-called – independent art on the one side and government-controlled art on the other.”

The physical location in Cairo will include collections in dance, theatre and music from global contexts. Archive copies of other libraries are highly welcome, for the first information centre dedicated to performance and theatre studies in the Arabic-speaking region is to be established here. The three archive locations will be connected via an internet portal that enables each partner to access the material generated by ARC.HIVE. The collections in Cairo, Cologne and New York will also be accessible to the public.

“Currently, there is no collection of contemporary Arab performing arts in any institution, no matter how renowned. In this respect, ARC.HIVE can give answers to questions on voids in the performing arts,” Adham Hafez stated. The dance historian Ramsay Burt agreed: “Europe and North America are focused on their own modernism and tend to exclude developments in other places in the Mediterranean region from their discourse on modernism. I see the possibility here of finding out more on modernist dance practices that have been developed in Egypt and other Arab countries, in order to decentralise my Eurocentric views.” And Maïke Bleeker, the director of Performance Studies International (PSi), described her approach to cooperating with ARC.HIVE as follows: “In our project GPS, Global Performance Studies, thoughts on how to study performing arts are examined on a decentralised basis – not only their differences in various places, but also the ways in which they are influenced by these different places. In conjunction with the archive work of ARC.HIVE, we are developing different methods of working with this archive.”

“This partnership is a matter of political solidarity for the Tanzarchiv Köln and for me,” stated Thomas Thoraus. “ARC.HIVE is the concept of a network storage to keep the heritage alive for future generations as well: The vision of an exchange of ideas and methods regarding the archiving of and discussion on dance.” Both the digital Pina Bausch Archive and the ARC.HIVE of Contemporary Arab Performing Arts are therefore concerned not only with storing a cultural asset recognised as valuable but also with allowing it to have a continuing effect. This is what future-oriented work looks like, which in both cases quite evidently leads to exemplary, unconventional cooperation projects and solutions.