

香港舞蹈概述

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香港舞蹈概述2020

Hong Kong Dance Overview 2020

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An Unexpected Acceleration: How a Virus Inverted the Relationship Between Dance Production and Archives

Eugenia S. Kim

Since the mid-20th century, human society has generally been considered to be living in the Digital Age. Our lives are dominated by ever smaller and portable electronic devices capable of executing a wider range of tasks faster than we can imagine. With the addition of mixed reality technologies, some optimistic futurists may consider us to be on the brink of a virtual age where we are permanently submerged in an online world. Yet there are still certain disciplines and practices where aspects of physicality cannot be so easily translated into the digital and virtual realms. One such art form is dance, which is still heavily dependent on not only the human body itself but also the intangible attributes generally associated with any movement practice such as breathing, emotion, and energy.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced dance companies around the world to rapidly pivot from live performance to recorded or live streaming video and other digital media. During this time, some companies were able to simply release archival footage periodically throughout the year while others purposely created works that took advantage of features introduced by social media apps and videoconferencing software. As someone who moved to Hong Kong in

2015 from the United States (U.S.A.), it was interesting to compare which dance trends were global and which ones seemed to be unique to Hong Kong. By the time I was unexpectedly approached with the question of how archives and online dance production were connected in 2020, I was already intrigued by the potential answers that might emerge due to this comparison. To begin with, Hong Kong does not have its own set of archival standards, has a relatively small community of archivists for a city of its stature and most importantly, it does not have any longstanding dance archives located in any organisation. It would therefore be quite difficult to assess the impact of archives or archival content on digital presentation in Hong Kong given this lack of an established dance archives or archival practice. On the other hand, the dance community of Hong Kong is constantly making new work and does not allow the pandemic to stop all performance production. This creates a situation where digital production generates content that will be lost if archival repositories are not properly established to maintain them.

My perspective of the Hong Kong dance community is that of a relative outsider who is still slowly learning about and absorbing the unique traits that define this region. This is largely due to the majority of my education and professional experience as a dancer, choreographer, archivist, and researcher having taken place in the U.S.A., supplemented by time in Australia, United Kingdom (U.K.) and of course, Hong Kong. At any given time, I cannot help but look at Hong Kong within a global context and consider the advantages that it has over its peer cities as well as how it might be beneficial to adopt elements from elsewhere. In this essay, I take a holistic perspective to the initial question in order to

identify the potential future and specific solutions that might be useful to both the dance community and general public. I begin by revisiting the state of society and the dance field in 2020 and the trends that emerged for online dance. Following that, I present a brief overview of concepts and terminology from the archival profession, what defines and distinguishes dance archives from other types of archives, and how the current state of archives in Hong Kong impacts dance production. I then present several case studies of how online dance production and archival content intersected in Hong Kong during 2020 before concluding with observations and recommendations for future intersections.

Looking Back on 2020

At the time of writing, it seems that even though ‘2020’ was deemed the year of the pandemic, the roots of everything that happened can be found in 2019 and the effects continued to be felt throughout 2021. Likewise, when reviewing Hong Kong dance projects that were released or created in 2020, very few were initiated and completed within the year. Most larger scale projects were started one to three years earlier or completed in 2021. Of course, it must be acknowledged that there were some extremely inspired and productive artists in every part of the world who were able to generate works very quickly. It is worth remembering, however, that dance works are not normally choreographed and made performance-ready overnight. Thus, the general impact of the pandemic was that it tended to alter the course of plans made long in advance.

For Hong Kong, the pandemic truly caught attention starting with the Lunar New Year weekend. It was the first time that masks were

sold out and that festivities ended on a sombre note rather than with hope. Within a week, faraway countries such as the U.K. and the U.S.A. responded with panic by imposing travel restrictions and emergency procedures. By the end of a month, it was as if there was no industry or area of life that was unaffected by the mysterious COVID-19 virus. The policies changed everything from global travel and commerce to how people obtained food on a daily basis. Changes were also imposed on public gathering places and performance venues where the average citizen would be accustomed to watching dance. Though some might consider leisure activities to be non-essential, it became clear as time wore on that social contact and live interactions played an important role in maintaining a balanced, healthy life. As all aspects of life began to migrate online – work, school, dining, entertainment – it therefore seemed inevitable for the dance world to follow suit.

As the year wore on, a constant question that emerged was whether the ‘liveness’ of dance could be maintained in digital format. Interestingly, archives has long faced a similar question where some researchers insist that even just feeling the original paper of a document makes a big difference in their understanding of the document. Previously, there had been a polite division between live performance, documentation of live performance, and dance cinema or dance made for camera. Livestreams of events were still regarded as a kind of novelty that suffered from insufficient bandwidth and occasionally questionable camerawork. With the onset of the pandemic there was now a blurring across the divisions with the added element of social media culture and the habits that it has

instilled in viewers globally. In hindsight, this blurring was an inevitable progression, but 2020 accelerated the process in sudden, unanticipated ways.

Another strange side effect of the pandemic was a simultaneous halt to what had been an increasingly frenzied pace of life while racing to find a solution to resume that pace. In the frozen space of time, people began looking into the past again for all sorts of reasons – practicality, entertainment, innovation – while continuing to generate new content. This included attempting to document the sudden onslaught of bizarre events across the year for posterity. From a broader perspective, archival content of all kinds was emerging online, and new content was being created with its future in mind. Therefore, it makes sense to consider how this general trend played out in dance and Hong Kong as well.

Archival Science, Dance Archives and Their Impact on Online Dance Production

The word ‘archives’ (sometimes written as ‘archive’) can be an ambiguous term in that the original definition and its use in mainstream or other disciplines are not always aligned. This issue is recognised by the Society of American Archivists in its online dictionary where it identifies at least twelve meanings and the tendency for non-archivists to create more uses and definitions for the term.¹ For the purpose of this essay, I will be referencing the definition found in the archival and information sciences. Since this term has a very specific history and usage in those fields, I

¹ Society of American Archivists, ‘Archives,’ SAA Dictionary, accessed 3 September 2021, <https://dictionary.archivists.org/entry/archives.html>.

provide a broad overview of archives and archivists here for readers who are less familiar with their history and practices. Based on this overview, I then discuss some of the attributes specific to dance archives and how these attributes affect the online digital production of dance. It should be kept in mind that at the time of writing, online dance presentation is irrevocably tied to dance cinema, multimedia dance, and dance documentation due to a camera lens or other device capturing movement and translating it into digital data. In particular, film and video should not be considered as the only or most perfect method for capturing a dance work as it is challenging to capture all aspects of dance in a way that is completely accurate and encompasses all potential iterations of a dance performance.²

An archives can exist in a number of settings and is part of a larger information cycle that includes the creation, processing, maintenance, use, and accessibility of content generated on a daily basis. A traditional definition of archives is that it is a collection of records – ‘information or data created or received by an organisation in the course of its activities; organisational records’ – and may also act as supporting evidence to human memory.³ When the records are initially generated, they may be maintained as part of a records management programme before being stored and preserved as part of an archives. In other cases, a collection of documents and objects may be curated together as a special collection. Both archives and special collections may exist together as part of a library or museum. Sometimes they are housed together with rare

² Eugenia Kim, ‘An Artist’s Digital Preservation Toolkit: Dance as a Case Study for Capturing and Sharing the Creation Process,’ *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America*, 31, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 219-235.

³ Society of American Archivists, ‘Record,’ SAA Dictionary, accessed 3 September 2021, <https://dictionary.archivists.org/entry/record.html>.

books and other artefacts such as artworks. Where the different types of collections start to overlap is when the records go beyond textual business transactions to include photographs, other still images, films, videos, and other objects. It is therefore easy to sometimes confuse the different types of collections with each other.

With current computing systems, it is easy to assume that to ‘archive’ something means to simply put it into long term storage and retrieve it with a quick search. In reality, whether looking for physical or digital objects, human intervention may be necessary to actually identify and prepare the correct items for use. Furthermore, the actions required for managing physical archives as opposed to digital archives are not necessarily equivalent to each other even if both types of content co-exist within the same repository. Preparing a film for long term storage requires conservation of relatively fragile materials while preparing a digital video file may actually involve copying and retaining multiple formats of the same file. Both physical and digital archives have significant costs associated with maintaining collections which can range from renting physical space, air-conditioning bills, and running servers.

There are also differences between countries and cultures in their archival and information science practices as well as between industries and disciplines. North American standards currently combine elements of librarianship and European traditions. Meanwhile, China and Japan have developed their own standards over time which are customised to their legal systems and respective cultures. Although there is an International Council of Archives, each country may choose to

establish its own national standards which may or may not align with the Council's. In Hong Kong, there is no official archives law or set of standards to determine how archival repositories should function.⁴ This absence of a Hong Kong archives law therefore leads to a lack of clear professional standards and other regulations such as definition of records creation, management and transference of records, and access as well as destruction. To counter this ambiguity, the Hong Kong Archives Society does dedicate itself to educating the public while supporting local archivists in the region,⁵ and individual archivists may choose to be internationally active through professional organisations or other global initiatives.

It should be noted that an archivist position is considered to be a professional and sometimes administrative role that may or may not include technical duties. Depending on the size of the organisation, an archivist may work alone or have a team of supporting paraprofessional and professional staff including specialist archivists. The types of archives in Hong Kong include government, corporate (e.g., banks), academic (e.g., universities), private (e.g., families), cultural heritage (e.g., the arts), and community with each type of archives having their own unique requirements or adjacent similarities. For example, the 'Hong Kong Heritage Project' is a non-profit organisation that manages the records for both the Kadoorie family and several of their businesses.⁶ Meanwhile, university archives at institutions such as the Chinese

⁴ Patrick Lo, *Preserving Local Documentary Heritage: Conversations with Special Library Managers and Archivists in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong Press, 2015), 5-7.

⁵ Hong Kong Archives Society, 'Welcome,' Hong Kong Archives Society, accessed 18 August 2021, <http://www.archives.org.hk/en/page.php?pagename=welcome>.

⁶ The Hong Kong Heritage Project, 'The Kadoorie Family and Hong Kong,' accessed 29 August 2021, <https://www.hongkongheritage.org/Pages/About%20Us/The%20Kadoorie%20Family%20and%20Hong%20Kong.aspx>.

University of Hong Kong (CUHK), Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Lingnan University and the University of Hong Kong (HKU) have their own mission statements about aspects of a university's daily existence to document, collect and preserve. This process may include taking several years to develop an archives policy.⁷ Thus, archivists must develop specialised knowledge and in a number of cases, an archivist may still be an active expert or be a former professional in the discipline that they are maintaining records for.

One difficulty faced by archivists in Hong Kong – and to a degree, in any location – is that the general public does not really understand what an archives is, what archivists do and tend to confuse the profession with librarianship or museum curation.⁸ This lack of understanding can prevent the establishment of a proper archives with specialist staff as organisations might think that they can simply assign those duties to an existing untrained staff member. Fortunately, it is possible to learn on the job and become an effective archivist without going through formal training first.⁹ In the case of dance archives, sometimes dancers and choreographers can transition into the best managers of a specific repository due to their particular body of experiences and knowledge. Common uses of dance archives include learning actual choreography, reviving old works, analysing the context surrounding the work, comparing multiple performances and versions of the same work, and understanding a performer's and/or choreographer's intentions, amongst

⁷ Lo, 70-71.

⁸ Lo, 5.

⁹ Lo, 4, 66-69, 101-102, 244-245.

other possibilities. This is not to say that only individuals trained in dance can appreciate these kinds of scenarios, simply that a kind of empathy develops when the archivist has experienced the needs and concerns of content creators and users alike.

At the time of writing, dance archives can consist of physical, digital or both types of content. While most content is deposited after considerable time has passed since its creation, it is also possible to build a collection during the creative process. There are also multiple ways that archival footage and dance performance can intersect online. One way is to present a dance work as part of an online video repository, where it is released without altering the content apart from quality assurance, and usually placed within a historical context. A second use of archival content is to help inform the creation of new or derivative choreographic works. Online dance history projects where an interactive digital interface is created to showcase text, photos and videos within a specific narrative have also been increasingly common. In the social media realm, mash-ups or montages of archival dance footage are edited together to provide a new perspective on dance techniques or show unexpected connections between styles. In these cases, dance archives and online platforms help the general public increase their appreciation and understanding of dance.

Around the world, there are a number of physical and digital repositories currently setting the standard for dance archives. They may be situated in academic, government-funded or other research libraries, within a dance company or centre, a community effort, in a museum, or even in

private ownership. One particularly influential organisation is the Dance Heritage Coalition (DHC) which was formed in 1992 from a group of major dance archives (e.g., Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, Ohio State University) in the U.S.A.¹⁰ Together, the institutions collaborate on projects including the Artist's Legacy Toolkit for dance artists interested in archiving their own materials¹¹ and a federated digital video repository to make all of the member content available.¹² In 2016, the DHC became a 'Dance/USA' organisation (similar to Hong Kong Dance Alliance), which increased its reach across the dance community.¹³ Major dance companies such as the Paul Taylor, Alvin Ailey, and New York City Ballet all had or currently have an archivist managing their collections on-site. As companies evolve, close, or expand they may negotiate a transfer of content to repositories such as the New York Library for the Performing Arts. For smaller entities, a community-oriented approach may be more effective. The 'Chicago Dance History Project' (CDHP) is an example of how volunteer efforts to collect oral interviews of influential dance figures has grown into an invaluable resource.¹⁴ In Europe and Australia, various institutions have challenged the traditional image of dance archives through their use of digital technology. Numeridanse offers high quality online dance videos of famous and lesser-known dance works¹⁵ in contrast to the Deutsches Tanzfilminstitut Bremen¹⁶ and the National

¹⁰ Imogen Smith, 'The Dance Heritage Coalition: Passing on the Vitality of American Dance,' *Dance Chronicle* 35, no. 2 (2012), 250-58.

¹¹ Dance/USA, 'Artist's Legacy Toolkit,' Archiving and Preservation, accessed 29 August 2021, <https://www.danceusa.org/archiving-preservation-artists-legacy-toolkit>.

¹² USC Libraries, 'Dance Heritage Video Archive,' Digital Library, accessed 29 August 2021, <https://digitallibrary.usc.edu/Archive/Dance-Heritage-Video-Archive-2A3BF1WTA7?Flat=1>

¹³ Dance/USA, 'Dance Heritage Coalition Integration,' accessed 29 August 2021. <https://www.danceusa.org/dhc-integration>.

¹⁴ Chicago Dance History Project, Chicago Dance History Project, accessed 29 August 2021, <https://www.chicagodancehistory.org/>.

¹⁵ Numeridanse.tv, 'Numeridanse, the first free online dance video library,' accessed 29 August 2021, <https://www.numeridanse.tv/en/home>.

¹⁶ Deutsches Tanzfilminstitut Bremen, 'Willkommen,' accessed 29 August 2021, <http://www.deutsches-tanzfilminstitut.de/>.

Library of Australia¹⁷ which provide contextual information in the form of text, photographs, and other media. The Siobhan Davies Replay website is dedicated to providing detailed information about all the works of a single choreographer¹⁸ while Wholodance makes use of motion capture technology to preserve dance techniques.¹⁹

When examining the technology behind the online platforms maintained by archives and how these services are used, it becomes apparent that dance archives have been presenting dance online for quite some time, albeit not usually for a real-time performance. Despite the wealth of content in these repositories, they were often underutilised and, in some cases, struggled to sustain their funding. This struggle is due to the high cost of starting and maintaining a full-fledged physical and/or digital repository. Almost all of the examples mentioned above have had generous private or government funding provided over many years. In recent times, competition or collaboration (depending on one's perspective) in the form of social media platforms such as Vimeo and YouTube and the proliferation of self-made dance videos have also changed how dance is presented online. Unfortunately, digital technology is not necessarily permanent and innovative archives projects can disappear. Specific examples include the 'Digitaler Atlas Tanz'²⁰ which

¹⁷ National Library of Australia, 'Collections,' accessed 29 August 2021, <https://www.nla.gov.au/collections>.

¹⁸ The latest version of the Siobhan Davies archives (<https://www.siobhandavies.com/work/siobhan-davies-work/>) was under construction at the time of publication. For screenshots of the original Siobhan Davies Replay website and information about its development, see <http://dx.doi.org/10.35492/docam/5/1/12>.

¹⁹ Wholodance, WhoLoDancE, accessed 29 August 2021, <http://www.wholodance.eu/>.

²⁰ Verbund Deutscher Tanzarchive, 'Digitaler Atlas Tanz,' accessed 29 August 2021, <http://www.tanzarchive.de/projekte/digitaler-atlas-tanz/>.

was intended to connect various German dance archives and ‘Digital Dance Archives’²¹ which proposed a new way of searching for dance works.

Although Hong Kong does not have a major dance archives, there are still several creative art organisations and projects that could inform the structure for one. In terms of administration, Asia Art Archives and M+ have established good standards. Both have dedicated specialist staff overseeing their collections and daily operations.²² In terms of movement arts, the Chinese Opera Information Centre and the Zuni Experimental Theatre Arts Archives would encounter many of the same challenges that a dance archives would. One interesting aspect of the Centre, which opened in 2000 and housed at the CUHK,²³ is that they collect materials from productions as they happen rather than retroactively seeking materials. As there is no comparable central archives, the work of the Centre in educating users and collaborating with practitioners to acquire materials is essential. By contrast, the Zuni Archive is a searchable online portal focused on a single organisation with a relatively basic user interface.²⁴ It is not tremendously sophisticated but is effective in ensuring that valuable metadata is kept and connected to various multimedia files. Lastly, there is the ‘Oral History of Hong Kong Dance Development’ website created by the City Contemporary

²¹ Coventry University, ‘Digital Dance Archives,’ accessed 29 August 2021, <https://www.coventry.ac.uk/research/research-directories/current-projects/2015/digital-dance-archive/>.

²² Asia Art Archive, ‘About Asia Art Archive,’ accessed 24 August 2021, <https://aaa.org.hk/en/about/about-asia-art-archive>; LinkedIn, ‘Angharad McCarrick,’ accessed 24 August 2021, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/angharad-mccarrick-a14b5a50/?originalSubdomain=hk>.

²³ Lo, 231.

²⁴ ZUNI, Zuni Experimental Theatre Arts Archive: Danny Yung, accessed 24 August 2021, <http://archive.zuni.org.hk/>.

Dance Company.²⁵ It consists of an online collection of video interviews with key figures of the Hong Kong dance community to illustrate the dance history of the region. If such a project were expanded upon with additional materials, it could potentially become a very extensive public resource.

When performance venues everywhere suddenly closed in 2020, there appeared to be an acceleration in the interest of online digital presentation of dance on a global scale. Nonetheless, there seemed to be a contrast between Hong Kong and their American and European counterparts in terms of trends and approaches. These differences created a perspective shift to how all the online digital productions of dance in 2020 impact the future of dance archives in Hong Kong. To better understand what might have led to all these differences, it is necessary to revisit how dance was being shared and presented during the onset of the pandemic. On a basic level, there were some commonalities such as creating collaborative videos with smartphone footage and offering dance classes online. Social media accounts of individuals and companies alike featured clips of serious rehearsals mixed with comedic behind-the-scenes jokes. Live streams that used to be reserved for special events like World Ballet Day suddenly became more common with upgrades in image quality and cinematography.

When lockdowns and venue closures forced audiences to turn to digital

²⁵ City Contemporary Dance Company, *An Oral History of Hong Kong Dance (1950s-70s)*, accessed 24 July 2021, <https://www.dancehistory.hk/?lang=en>.

and virtual experiences online, the most immediate source of content was social media platforms and existing video repositories. Since the latter are usually seen more as an academic research resource, they would not be immediately known to the average viewer. Individuals and organisations would already have built up a following through their social media platforms. Transferring archival content to social media and other platforms, such as New York City Ballet sharing previously restricted archival footage,²⁶ could help satisfy dance fans waiting for dance cinema and relevant viewing events to be created in order to replace live performances. The trend of dance companies or other institutions sharing historical dance photographs and videos on social media, however, was not so widely seen in Hong Kong. Funding for innovative projects also seemed to be more abundant in some countries than others. Choreographers like Corey Baker (who also worked with the Hong Kong Ballet) directed a vast team of dancers provided with high-end smartphones over Zoom to reinvent *Swan Lake* that still ended up with cinematic-level quality.²⁷ Academic symposiums on virtual dance and mixed reality technologies foreshadowed the kind of online virtual performances that Gilles Jobin would produce.²⁸ Unfortunately, as the rate and range of creation increased, the existing backlog of materials to be processed by archives did not reduce at the same pace. This now leaves a conundrum of how to steward a whole new set of works that have some

²⁶ New York City Ballet, 'New York City Ballet Announces Digital Fall Season,' accessed 24 August 2021, <https://www.nycballet.com/about-us/for-the-press/new-york-city-ballet-announces-digital-fall-season/>; Charlotte Barnett, 'City Ballet's Fans and Dancers Revisit Past Triumphs Through an Online Spring Season,' *Observer*, 14 May 2020, accessed 24 August 2021. <https://observer.com/2020/05/new-york-city-ballet-spring-season-online/>.

²⁷ Lyndsey Winship, 'Swan Lake in the bath and a quarantine Elvis: dazzling lockdown dance,' *The Guardian*, 10 July 2020, accessed 24 August 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2020/jul/10/swan-lake-in-the-bath-and-a-quarantine-elvis-dazzling-lockdown-dance>.

²⁸ VR_I, 'VR_I: A project by Cie Gilles Jobin and Artanim,' accessed 24 August 2021, http://www.vr-i.space/vr_i/.

technical similarities to previous content in addition to their own specific requirements.

In summary, an 'archives' is not the same as 'historical', 'old', or focused on conservation even if it does overlap with those areas. Archival collections usually span a longer period of time with the result that institutional anniversaries tend to generate motivation for establishing an archives.²⁹ The collections should consist of records generated in the course of daily activity rather than being an artificially generated artefact; if it is an artistic work, the collection should include more than a copy of the final output. In some cases, these records also hold financial value as a type of asset. Depending on the discipline and field, the term 'archives' can be used and have different meanings. For dance archives, contextual information enhances the value of performance footage by providing additional understanding about the people and organisations behind a dance performance. The dance performance itself can be documented both tangibly (e.g., scores, videos, photographs) and intangibly (e.g., memories, embodied knowledge). Furthermore, the differences between dance works produced for the camera, documented by the camera, and then produced for online presentation can also change how a dance work is archived and referenced for new works.

Initial Observations and Questions

After contemplating both the general circumstances of the pandemic and how the global dance community responded to those circumstances, my

²⁹ Lo, 73.

initial thought was that Hong Kong went through a different experience compared to its peer cities. In particular, there were four points that stood out in my mind:

1. Hong Kong never entered a severe lockdown to the extent that some cities of equivalent international status did. No documents were needed to leave the house and no laws were enforced to prevent people from visiting each other. The result was an in-between state of maintaining daily operations as best as possible but with extreme restrictions or interruptions.
2. Hong Kong choreographers and dancers rarely had access to the amount of living and working space that a number of their global professional peers had even before the pandemic. This is partially due to restrictions imposed by existing architecture and general lack of lateral space.
3. The Hong Kong dance industry operates in a more business-like manner than a number of peer cities where many ‘professional’ dancers may volunteer their services for free. At the same time, even its highest paid dancers are unlikely to be making the same money as their peers in other major cities where there are more opportunities to add luxury product endorsements, commercial stage and film appearances and other side projects for income.
4. Hong Kong simply does not have an extensive centralised dance archives and none of the dance companies are known to maintain an extensive public archives at this time. That does not mean that the content is lacking or that no one is maintaining the content. It does, however, mean a lack of accessibility for the general public.

In reviewing these facts, I have quite a bit of admiration and respect

for how much adaptability and flexibility have been shown by dance practitioners in Hong Kong. The lack of space and appropriate flooring alone severely affects both a dancer's ability to stay in top condition and what they can do remotely on video. The loss of revenue from live performances and general dance classes would affect who could continue to keep dancing. And replacing new performances with footage of old ones is not so simple if the past videos are not already prepared.

Admirably, what seemed to happen in Hong Kong was a fixed focus on the future and maintaining steady progress towards 'tomorrow'. This context creates a shift in what it means to engage in online digital production by making it a natural progression of the dancemaking process rather than a consequence of a lockdown. The focus on the future also means that individuals and organisations have more motivation to preserve the present for the future. Social media platforms have led to a major shift in how this takes place by acting as an interim archives where content is immediately accessible by anyone at any given time. The ability for users to add metadata through tags and comments as well as indicate which kind of content that they value also challenges traditional archival practices. Functions such as efficient search, easy uploading and cross-platform connectivity are also features that make it easier to start at least collecting materials together.

After taking into consideration all of the above factors, it seems that rather than try to simplify everything into a single question along the lines of how archives impacted online dance production or if there was a connection between archives and online dance production, it would be

more logical to investigate the following questions:

- How did archival footage or revivals impact the digital dance content generated in Hong Kong in 2020?
- How can preserving various elements of digital dance productions contribute to preserving the overall dance work for the future?
- How does all the digital dance content produced in 2020 support the need for a substantial dance archives in Hong Kong?

To answer these questions, I selected several case studies from dance projects started, completed and/or released in 2020 that were presented online in Hong Kong. The purpose of this approach was to identify any commonalities, differences, and unexpected outcomes that might help provide insights and recommendations for archives and dance production. Each case study also represents a different archives model to demonstrate the range of existing needs in Hong Kong.

Case Studies in Hong Kong

Even with the pandemic, there were quite a lot of dance activities taking place in Hong Kong at any given time across schools, amateur groups, small companies, large organisations and even international entities. To answer the questions that I raised earlier, I looked at the activities of Hong Kong's major dance companies, training institutions, individual artists, and community projects for various ways in which either archival material was used or generated in the course of production. It should be kept in mind that the following case studies do not encompass all of the relevant activity started or completed in 2020 that meet this criterion. They are meant to be representative and showcase the diversity of approaches across Hong Kong's dance community. In keeping with the

theme of ‘archives’, all information collected and observed are public records available online or otherwise published with the exception of one case.

When selecting case studies, the following criteria were considered:

- i. Is the project in question focused on dance performance and/or production? (Projects focusing on pedagogy, history or other non-performance goal were not considered)
- ii. Is there a balance in representation between the major dance companies in Hong Kong and other types of dance companies?
- iii. Are multiple types and aspects of dance performance represented?
- iv. Does the project incorporate archival content, set the foundation for a future archives, and/or generate content that supports the need for a dance archives in Hong Kong?
- v. Does the project reflect global trends or issues in dance at large?

There are inevitably connections between all the case studies due to the structure of art funding in Hong Kong as well as the close-knit nature of dance communities in any city. Nonetheless, each initiative presented has its own unique attributes, journey, and approach to keeping dance production alive during an extremely difficult period.

1. Hong Kong Ballet: ‘360 Goes Streaming’ and ‘HKBallet@Home’

When the phrase ‘dance performance’ is mentioned, the first example that might come to mind is that of a completed work shown in a theatre on a stage. In reality, dance performances can be in a variety of venues and range from impromptu and informal to meticulously planned formal

affairs. Lecture demonstrations and final class days can also serve as a type of performance. In particular, behind-the-scenes presentation of productions provide previews and greater understanding of a work for potential audience members to better enjoy the final output. As these types of presentation often require dancers to fully perform excerpts of choreography as interwoven within a larger informational narrative, these kinds of events are simply different in nature from a traditional ballet performance without being any less performative.

Since 2018, the Hong Kong Ballet (HKB) has held a series of behind-the-scenes events for the public each season titled ‘Ballet 360’. The first documented one was for *ALICE (in Wonderland)* on 7 August 2018 and included an explanation of the creative process, the dancers’ experiences, performances of excerpts from the ballet, and a question-and-answer session.³⁰ Prior to the 2018/2019 season, HKB offered both pre-performance talks and workshops for the public as far back as 2014. Other relevant outreach activities included the ‘Ballet Plus’ series specifically intended for promoting contemporary ballet.³¹ The differences between ‘Ballet 360’ and the pre-performance talks include:

- Duration: one-plus hour vs twenty minutes
- Timing: stand-alone event vs pre-show event
- Accessibility: free to public vs ticket holders only
- Language: English vs bi-lingual
- Level of interactivity: participatory vs informative

In general, ‘Ballet 360’ events provide a more in-depth contextual

³⁰ The Hong Kong Ballet, ‘ALICE (in wonderland) – Ballet 360°,’ accessed 16 July 2021, <https://www.hkballet.com/en/see-hkb/hkb-upclose-programme/alice-in-wonderland-ballet-360>.

³¹ The Hong Kong Ballet, ‘HKB Upclose,’ accessed 16 July 2021, <https://www.hkballet.com/en/see-hkb/hkb-upclose?season=5&tags%5B%5D=37>.

understanding of a ballet independent of viewing the work while pre-performance talks are meant to prepare audience members for what they are about to watch. In other words, outreach as opposed to extension of a performance. The last in-person ‘Ballet 360’ event before the pandemic was 15 October 2019.³²

During 2020, there were two ‘Ballet 360’ events streamed online using Zoom. They were for *Don Quixote* (October 2020) and *The Nutcracker* (December 2020).³³ Although the descriptions for both events were less detailed than previous ‘Ballet 360’ events, it showed that HKB is on top of the trend set by ballet companies such as American Ballet Theatre and the Royal Ballet of streaming behind-the-scenes talks online. These were not the first events to be streamed by HKB as they had already begun offering online dance classes starting in August 2020. Other content shown online included the *HKBallet@Home* series starting on 13 March 2020 which featured a series of online classes, interviews, and footage from past performances.³⁴ As a whole, this sort of online programming was very much in line with the kind of activity that other international ballet companies had been providing prior to 2020 and continued to provide throughout the pandemic. It was capped by a modified version of *The Nutcracker* through a special streaming event on 26 December 2020 and then an on-demand version of a 2019 performance from 25 December 2020 to 23 January 2021 through MyTV Super and TVB Anywhere.³⁵

³² The Hong Kong Ballet, ‘Swan Lake – Ballet 360’, accessed 16 July 2021, <https://www.hkballet.com/en/see-hkb/hkb-upclose-programme/swan-lake-ballet-360>

³³ See note 31.

³⁴ The Hong Kong Ballet, ‘Hong Kong Ballet Announces HKBALLET@HOME,’ accessed 16 July 2021, https://www.hkballet.com/en/meet-hkb/media/press_release/hong-kong-ballet-announces-hkballethome.

³⁵ The Hong Kong Ballet, ‘Hong Kong Ballet’s *The Nutcracker* TV Broadcast is a Christmas Gift for All,’ accessed 16 July 2021, https://www.hkballet.com/en/meet-hkb/media/press_release/hong-kong-ballets-the-nutcracker-tv-broadcast-is-a-christmas-gift-for-all.

Although HKB has now resumed its regular live season, the online programming has revealed some very interesting attributes about the company. First of all, its 40th anniversary brand video from 2019³⁶ shows that the organisation can produce content that is in line with other video content released on social media platforms. The cinematography, editing, colour scheme and choreography, amongst other elements, all show an awareness of what was globally appealing at the time. Therefore, it already had some foundation for online dance production before the pandemic began. Secondly, the development of events series such as ‘Ballet 360’ and all the archival content from its 35th anniversary and 1979-2019 retrospective videos³⁷ show that it has produced and continues to produce archival content that would lead to a very extensive collection. Video footage from recent years that was shared as part of ‘Flashback Fridays’ reveal high quality content that could have been released as standalone performances throughout 2020.³⁸

Based on all this content, HKB would probably benefit the most from a traditional in-house dance archives that maintains both physical and digital collections. In terms of comparable models, the New York City Ballet archives could probably provide the most useful strategies. Since the typical ballet repertory consists of both new and restaged works, HKB would be able to augment their already extensive outreach campaigns with archival footage or preserve innovative works as they are rehearsed. Given how well maintained all the historical content in their retrospective

³⁶ The Hong Kong Ballet, ‘Hong Kong Ballet 40th Anniversary Season Brand Video,’ YouTube, 16 May 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SwrAbehaSA>.

³⁷ The Hong Kong Ballet, ‘The Hong Kong Ballet 35th Anniversary Video,’ YouTube, 8 January 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=koJedYDU_-c; The Hong Kong Ballet, ‘Hong Kong Ballet 1979-2019,’ YouTube, 19 April 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=InqcSEZHdoM>.

³⁸ The Hong Kong Ballet, ‘Highlights of New Story Ballets,’ YouTube, 15 May 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m5bfXjhLCjo>.

videos was, it is likely that someone is taking care of content even if they do not have the title of archivist. Previous recordings are likely being referenced during the rehearsal process as well. Therefore, questions for the future might include when will HKB produce a performance for live streaming and make their archival content available to the public. In the case of the second question, I would like to imagine that the HKB archival collections could someday inspire and educate a young Hong Kong dancer as part of their career from performer to leader.

2. City Contemporary Dance Company: Virtual Film Festival and Residency Programmes

Of the three major dance companies in Hong Kong, it could easily be argued that the City Contemporary Dance Company (CCDC) was nearly psychic in its preparations for using new forms of technology and presenting dance online. For example, the 2012 CCDC Media Lab as funded by the HAB focused on exploring how dance and technology could come together for interdisciplinary multimedia collaborations.³⁹ By 2014, they had secured funding from the HAB again for the ‘Jumping Frames Festival’⁴⁰ which has now become an annual international event. In 2015, they started the ‘Oral History’ project⁴¹ which includes a website featuring video interviews of key figures from the dance community over time. A 2019 West Kowloon residency resulted in a VR work as part of the ‘City Contemporary Dance Festival’ that year.⁴² Thus, by 2020, CCDC

³⁹ Home Affairs Bureau, the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China, ‘Contestable Funding Pilot Scheme for the Major Performing Arts Groups,’ accessed 15 July 2021, https://www.hab.gov.hk/en/policy_responsibilities/arts_culture_recreation_and_sport/funding_pilot_scheme.htm.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ City Contemporary Dance Company, *An Oral History of Hong Kong Dance (1950s-70s)*, accessed 24 July 2021, <https://www.dancehistory.hk/?lang=en>.

⁴² West Kowloon Cultural District, ‘CCDC in Residence: VR Dance Video,’ accessed 20 July 2021, <https://www.westkowloon.hk/en/event/ccdc-residence-vr-dance-video#overview>.

already had quite a history of producing video and other multimedia works which might make a transition to online presentation seamless. Nonetheless, soon after the pandemic had affected HK, CCDC directly addressed the question of how to share dance performance online through its ‘Digital Audience Engagement’ online artist residencies. More precisely, the main theme and questions asked were

*Today, art organisations around the world put their massive videos online, and a variety of online art classes. How do artists use the Internet to create and teach? What are the limitations and unexplored possibilities of this form? Can we preserve the relationship between the viewer and the audience in the virtual interface, and at the same time develop a new approach to audience engagement?*⁴³

This series had two tracks, Creation and Education, which ran for two weeks from 14-27 April 2020. Participants included artists of all disciplines from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Italy, and Germany, amongst others. The residency included a mix of Zoom sessions and separate project time where small groups might experiment in testing ideas or reflect upon the discussions. It culminated in a presentation for the general public as well as an internal report written by Ann Mak.⁴⁴ For the sake of transparency, I admit that I was a participant in the Creation residency and will be focusing on that track for this essay. In terms of

⁴³ City Contemporary Dance Company. ‘“Digital Audience Engagement” Online Artist In Residence Programme,’ accessed 20 July 2021, <http://www.ccdc.com.hk/en/digital-audience-engagement-online-artist-in-residence-programme/>.

⁴⁴ Ann Mak, ‘CCDC *Wanglushulijihua houji*’ (Notes on CCDC ‘Digital Audience Engagement’), (unpublished report, City Contemporary Dance Company, 18 May 2020).

content, however, I will be focusing on the work of other participants and of the general themes discussed.

Although the residency started with the question of online video, the direction of the residency quickly diverted into a variety of technologies ranging from Zoom, social media platforms, AR/VR, and hybrid combinations of various technologies.⁴⁵ This was likely due to the diverse background of the participants which ranged from emerging to established artists, academic researchers to commercial producers, and traditionally trained performers to avant-garde creators. Some of the participants, such as Jacqueline Choi and William Leung, were not dance practitioners but still offered useful perspectives based on their extensive multimedia experience. Certain longstanding members of the Hong Kong dance and multimedia community such as Yip Choi-fung Koala and Yeung Chun-yip Adrian provided insight into past endeavours and mentored newer artists such as Kit Hung and Zelia ZZ Tan. Both Yip and Yeung were involved in projects that directly referenced the pandemic, such as supporting mental health remotely or illustrating how literally ‘crushing’ the virus could be to life and society. Another notable project involved Yeung Chun-kong Daniel and Lee Cheng using 360-video to document the old CCDC space as a form of virtual cultural heritage.⁴⁶

In the end, there was very little discussion in the residency about sharing video online or how archives might play a role. There was some mention about the difference in dance for camera and documenting

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

live performance, which is a constant topic amongst all dance preservationists. Indeed, 'On the Boards' would have been a great organisation to consult on this matter as their *Ontheboards.tv* platform focuses on recording dance works for camera and documentation.⁴⁷ After the residency ended, the 'Jumping Frames Festival' began its activities, including a live stream of several films on 3 September 2020.⁴⁸ Although all of the films presented were definitively dance cinema and not documentation of live performance, there was still a distinct difference between *MAZE* (analysed in this essay as its own case study) and the other films in that *MAZE* was adapted from a stage work.

While it is quite likely that CCDC needs and has both physical and digital archival collections, it would definitely benefit from a digital repository specifically designed for multimedia. Jumping Frames has also existed long enough to have amassed enough works to need its own video repository.⁴⁹ Between the CCDC repertory and Jumping Frames, a video platform similar to Numeridance could be created to showcase dance in Hong Kong and other Asian locales. The fact that CCDC has channels on both Vimeo and YouTube indicate that efforts to at least provide a portal have already begun.

3. Hong Kong Dance Company: *Convergence*, VR and Dance Research
 In 2018, Hong Kong Dance Company (HKDC) was awarded a three-year grant from the Contestable Funding Pilot Scheme for the Major Performing Arts Groups through the Home Affairs Bureau to study

⁴⁷ *OntheBoards.tv*, 'About,' accessed 27 July 2021, <https://www.ontheboards.tv/about>.

⁴⁸ Editor's note: 'Jumping Frames' took place between 29 October and 1 November 2020. See Festival programme, accessed 7 February 2022, https://issuu.com/ccdcmt/docs/jf2020_booklet185x220mm-preview_1005.

⁴⁹ City Contemporary Dance Company, 'CCDC@HK / On Demand pages,' Vimeo, accessed 27 July 2021, https://vimeo.com/ccchk/vod_pages.

Chinese martial arts and the connection to Chinese dance.⁵⁰ More specifically, they focused on Southern Chinese styles as taught by local masters and partnered with Chao Hing of the International Guoshu Association to design the learning process.⁵¹ Mr. Chao is not only a martial artist but also a history scholar and has worked on a number of multimedia projects involving motion capture with artist Jeffrey Shaw.⁵² Other scholars such as Dr. Mok Kin-Wai Patrick from Hang Seng University served as advisory members of the research team.⁵³ According to the artistic director of HKDC, Yang Yuntao, the goal of this research project was about ‘upholding Hong Kong culture while adapting elements from other forms of cultural and artistic knowledge.’⁵⁴

Structurally the research project was divided into three year-long phases with the last one ending in 2020. Over the course of the first two years, a series of live workshops, seminars, and performances were presented to the public. There were also preview, promotional, behind-the-scenes and interview videos created for online publication through YouTube and the project website.⁵⁵ For the final phase, a live performance work, *Convergence*, was planned for showing at Freespace in the West Kowloon

⁵⁰ See note 39.

⁵¹ Hong Kong Dance Company, ‘Hong Kong Dance Company Inaugural Artistic Interdisciplinary Research Study: Research study on Chinese martial arts and Chinese dance Plant a Seedling Today – Reap A Body Reborn Tomorrow,’ accessed 15 July 2021, https://hkdance.com/materials/pressroom/Hong%20Kong%20Dance%20Company%20%E2%80%93%20Research%20study%20on%20Chinese%20martial%20arts%20and%20Chinese%20dance_Press%20Release.pdf.

⁵² The Asian Conference on Cultural Studies, ‘Hing Chao,’ ACCS22: The 12th Asian Conference on Cultural Studies, accessed 17 July 2021, <https://accs.iafor.org/dvteam/hing-chao/>.

⁵³ Centre for Teaching and Learning, Hang Seng University of Hong Kong, ‘Culture and Technology: Convergence of Chinese Dance, Martial Arts and Virtual Reality for Art Appreciation and Education,’ accessed 24 August 2021, <https://ctl.hsu.edu.hk/culture-and-technology/>.

⁵⁴ Li Meng, ‘Matching steps with kung fu masters,’ China Daily Hong Kong, 13 March 2020, accessed 24 August 2021, <https://www.chinadailyhk.com/article/124207>.

⁵⁵ Hong Kong Dance Company, ‘Research Study on Chinese martial arts and Chinese dance,’ accessed 24 August 2021, <https://www.hkdanceresearch.com/>.

complex alongside a fifteen-minute VR version titled *Convergence – A Journey of Chinese Dance and Martial Arts* as part of an autumn residency.⁵⁶ The VR version combined 360-degree video and motion capture technologies. These works were intended to showcase the results of the knowledge gained by HKDC members in learning various martial arts forms and applying that to their dance knowledge. In the end, *Convergence* was presented as an online video performance on 18 October 2020 with additional viewing dates from 19 to 24 October 2020. The VR experience was supposed to be shown from 8 to 13 December 2020 at Freespace but was ultimately cancelled.⁵⁷ A bilingual, written publication was also released on the project website which shared documentation, findings, and insights on the research process.

In some ways, this particular case study is most representative of the essay's theme. On an archival level, HKDC was both referencing embodied archival knowledge from martial arts masters while creating their own online archives of their creative process. This exploration and creation of archival content was in support of producing a new dance work over several years that was ultimately disrupted by the pandemic. In response, they modified the work so that it could be shown online in a digital format alongside other content. Although one might argue that the project had already been underway for several years before the pandemic struck, HKDC still responded fairly quickly to the volatile circumstances. It is worth noting that the born-digital content – the VR work – was the only content not simply released online for the public's use at

⁵⁶ West Kowloon Cultural District, 'HKDC in Residence 2020: *Convergence*,' accessed 17 July 2021, <https://www.westkowloon.hk/en/event/hkdc-residence-2020-convergence#overview>.

⁵⁷ West Kowloon Cultural District, 'HKDC in Residence 2020: VR Video,' accessed 17 July 2021, <https://www.westkowloon.hk/en/hkdcvrvideo#overview>.

home. Given the 360-degree video capability of video platforms such as YouTube or Vimeo, it would not have been as difficult to disseminate as a fully interactive VR experience. This implies that the decision of what digital content to release online is not as simply based on technical feasibility.

As a digital archival collection, *Convergence* would be very fascinating and have value to future scholars, dance practitioners and other users. The challenges to be addressed in preserving *Convergence* have already been discussed amongst information science, new media art, and art history researchers. Given the emphasis on understanding traditional Chinese martial arts and dance techniques through embodied memory, the ‘Wholodance’ project may provide some ideas on how to build upon the existing research. Furthermore, HKDC has already completed much of the foundational work needed to build out such a collection. At this point, the main question would be where such a collection could be housed and who would be responsible for the stewardship of such a collection.

4. Passoverdance, Maurice Lai: *MAZE* and Digital Resurrection/Re-interpretation of a Work

One of the films featured in the 2020 Jumping Frames Festival was a collaboration between Passoverdance and Maurice Lai, titled *MAZE*. Co-produced and commissioned by Freespace, CCDC and Jumping Frames, with involvement of the School of Film and Television from the Hong Kong Academy for the Performing Arts (HKAPA), the film was shot in

The Mills in Tsuen Wan.⁵⁸ *MAZE* originally began as a collaboration between choreographers Pewan Chow and Rosalind Newman in 2012 and was presented as a stage work in the multimedia theatre of the HKICC Lee Sau Kee School of Creativity.⁵⁹ Over the following years it would evolve into a series of live and other derivative works based on an underlying theme of changing audience sightlines and experimenting with performance sites. Settings ranged from theatre venues to multiple shopping malls with both professional dancers and HKAPA student casts. This evolution has been documented on the Passoverdance website for the general public.⁶⁰

The 2018 *Maze 2.0 'Pushing Boundaries'* choreography served as the starting point for the film *MAZE*; although production began that same year, the final film was not released until 2020.⁶¹ Throughout the process, posts were made to Facebook to share dancers' experiences as well as production stills.⁶² *MAZE* was livestreamed as part of a Jumping Frames Festival event on 3 September 2020 before being screened in a venue on 29 October 2020, and the trailer uploaded to YouTube on 5 November 2020.⁶³ Artistically, the theme of changing audience sightlines was maintained through the cinematography. The truly striking aspect of the work was that it reflected the emptiness of public areas and isolation created by social distancing as well as some of the despair certainly being felt throughout the city. Yet all the production was carried out

⁵⁸ Passoverdance, 'Maze Filming,' accessed 26 July 2021, <https://www.passoverdance-en.org/maze-filming>.

⁵⁹ Passoverdance, 'Maze,' accessed 26 July 2021, <https://www.passoverdance-en.org/maze-series>.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ See Note 57.

⁶² Passoverdance, '#9月3號約定你網上見' (#See you online on 3 September), Facebook, 3 September 2020. <https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/9%E6%9C%883%E8%99%9F%E7%B4%84%E5%AE%9A%E4%BD%A0%E7%B6%B2%E4%B8%8A%E8%A6%8B>.

⁶³ Jumping Frames, 'Maze,' accessed 27 July 2021, <http://jumpingframes.com/en/event/maze/>.

⁶⁴ BEYOND Bollywood, 'About,' accessed 28 July 2021, <https://beyondbollywood.org/about>.

before the pandemic could even be conceived of. Furthermore, the lack of bystanders in the film's set seemed like a stark contrast to the theatres and shopping malls that other versions of *Maze* had been performed in.

Similar to HKDC, Passoverdance has done a remarkable job of simultaneously creating a foundation for a digital archival collection while drawing upon the embodied archival knowledge stored within dancers' bodies. By repeatedly revisiting a theme and existing work to create new pieces that can reveal unexpected insights, Passoverdance is demonstrating one of the most valuable ways that dance archives can be used. Maintaining so much documentation over time also makes it easier to track changes in movement trends over time or the evolution of choreographers and artists alike. One interesting aspect of translating *MAZE* into a dance film is that the cinematography captures details that normal rehearsal or performance documentation might miss. A poignant example would be close-ups of the main soloist doing very subtle hand gestures and facial expressions. These kinds of details are valuable for a performer hoping to better understand a role.

From a cultural history perspective, maintaining the existence and artistic output of companies like Passoverdance is just as vital as preserving and sharing the works of the three major Hong Kong companies. Other similar companies would include Y-Space, E-Side Dance Company, Zuni Icosahedron, and many others. These organisations represent the true grassroots of the Hong Kong dance community with many of the choreographers, performers and administrators having worked their way up through difficult artistic soil. Dance film is but one way to preserve

their collective legacy. I would hope that social media platforms can continue to provide an easier point of entry for documenting their presence and form the basis for their online presentation and archival foundation over time. Collecting additional metadata, creating profiles for each version of *MAZE* and compiling all the information into a format similar to the ‘Siobhan Davies Replay’ website could later be very helpful for understanding how a work can evolve over time.

5. *Dance Virtual @TAI PO: An ‘Arts Go Digital’ Initiative*

Most of the professional dance activities in Hong Kong take place in Kowloon and Hong Kong Island with CCDC only recently branching out into the New Territories by way of Tai Po Arts Centre. Before CCDC’s arrival, however, BEYOND Bollywood has already been residing in the Centre and serving the local community in multiple ways. This hybrid art organisation was founded in 2015 by four individuals with diverse cultural and educational backgrounds before expanding to a larger team.⁶⁴ Besides promoting Indian dance through performance and education, they are also heavily involved with youth outreach and promoting cultural diversity. Their activities include working with academic institutions and directly working with young people. Although still relatively small, their artistic expertise and administrative savviness reveal a fairly sophisticated approach to operations. Therefore, it is almost not surprising that they were able to produce a high-quality virtual dance experience in a fairly short time.

⁶⁴ BEYOND Bollywood, ‘About,’ accessed 28 July 2021, <https://beyondbollywood.org/about/>.

Dance Virtual @ TAI PO is an interactive online dance experience that aims to promote both the local community of Tai Po and the presence of Indian dance in Hong Kong. The experience consists of two parts: a 360-degree map that provides an interactive tour of culturally significant locations in Tai Po and a series of webpages featuring dance films shot in those locations.⁶⁵ The project was funded by the Arts Go Digital programme which was an initiative of the Hong Kong Arts Development Council in summer 2020 ‘to provide timely relief for artists and arts groups, who are encouraged to channel their creativity through the development of digital or virtual artistic content’.⁶⁶ Promotion of the projects began in January 2021 and continues at the time of writing. A total of sixty-eight projects are selected from across various arts disciplines.⁶⁷ All projects are expected to be completed by June 2021⁶⁸ which reflects a fairly rapid turnaround time.

Like several of the other case studies, *Dance Virtual* reflects two levels of archival activity. The first is capturing the current state of tangible cultural heritage (i.e., buildings, historic sites) in Northern Hong Kong. While this might not seem immediately relevant to dance archives, it is worth remembering that all dance is framed by its social and environmental contexts. As Tai Po is representative of a unique part of Hong Kong, it is worth documenting that the creative arts flourished in even the non-cosmopolitan parts of this city. Another level of archival activity is to reflect the presence and integration of ethnic minorities in

⁶⁵ Arts Go Digital, ‘Dance Virtual@TAI PO,’ accessed 28 July 2021, <https://www.artsgodigital.hk/project/dance-virtual-tai-po/?lang=en>.

⁶⁶ Arts Go Digital, ‘About Us,’ accessed 28 July 2021, <https://www.artsgodigital.hk/about/?lang=en>.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Hong Kong Arts Development Council, ‘Arts Go Digital Platform Scheme,’ accessed 28 July 2021, <https://www.hkadc.org.hk/en/explore/promotion/arts-go-digital>.

Hong Kong culture; that is to say, just as the population of Hong Kong does not consist solely of Chinese and European descendants, neither does dance performance in Hong Kong consist solely of Chinese and European dance forms. Furthermore, although labelled as an 'ethnic minority', it should be acknowledged that Indian, Pakistani, and other South Asian groups have had a significant presence in Hong Kong for quite some time with multiple generations now native to Hong Kong.

One of the best ways to raise awareness of community-based groups is through online platforms. In the case of BEYOND Bollywood, the pandemic sparked a beneficial situation not only for the arts but for the cultural history of Hong Kong overall. A community archives for dance may not seem prestigious but quite often the value of these types of archives emerges over time. Occasionally small efforts carried out by an individual can become quite sophisticated. The CDHP is an example of how a simple website of interviews transformed into a major resource. Using *Dance Virtual* as a starting point, BEYOND Bollywood could help re-define what it means to establish a community dance archives.

Thoughts for the Future

When looking across the case studies, it seems reasonable to say that the pandemic created opportunities for and accelerated progress of online production of dance. This was possible in most cases due to the foundations laid by dance organisations prior to 2020 in the areas of dance cinema and multimedia technology. Likewise, the overall efforts over multiple decades to raise awareness about archival practices in

Hong Kong by various individuals such as Chu Fook-keung Simon and organisations such as Hong Kong Archives Society established a foundation for any potential future dance archives. When considering the relationship between production of new works for online release and archival collections, however, it seems there are not really any revivals or in-depth mining of existing repertory in Hong Kong and mainly just generation of new content.

Based on the case studies reviewed, it is apparent that a significant amount of archival content does already exist. The potential of this content cannot be fully mined unless it is properly maintained. The issue of maintenance leads to the following challenging essential questions:

1. Who would take the lead?
2. Who has the most need for an establishing a dance archives?
3. Is it sufficient to have a purely born-digital archives or are physical materials still worth preserving?

The logical conclusion would be that the three major Hong Kong dance companies and HKAPA would have the most need and also be most suited for taking the lead. Indeed, the HKAPA has already started collecting and sharing archival materials online as part of their 'Digital Performing Arts Repository'.⁶⁹ I also recall that Ma Choi-Wo Victor of Y-Space initiated a conversation on dance archives in Hong Kong during 'i-Dance 2017' through both a video installation and discussion panel of experts.⁷⁰ It would be useful to know if any concrete plans, findings, or collaborations resulted from that event. From a realistic perspective, the relatively

⁶⁹ The Academy Libraries, 'HKAPA Digital,' the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, accessed 14 August 2021, <http://dpar.hkapa.edu/>.

⁷⁰ Y-Space, 'Highlights of i-Dance Festival (HK) 2017,' accessed 5 September 2021, https://www.y-space.org/newsletter_1804a/?lang=en.

high on-going costs of properly caring for and making archival content accessible suggest that a federated model (i.e., a coalition) or government backed system (either directly or through a research university) would be more effective. To provide perspective, the DHC received \$4,773,371USD (~\$37,096,968HKD) from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation over nearly twenty years of which \$1,100,000USD (~\$8,548,815HKD) alone was dedicated to the Secure Media Network video repository.⁷¹ These amounts of funding did not cover the entirety of their operating costs, nor the work needed to construct and maintain the Network. The annual budget of a single member institution in the DHC would likely have used or exceeded this amount of funding as well. Yet there are no current grant programmes within Hong Kong for dance, archives, or the arts in general that could begin to approach this funding range.

Other important considerations beyond funding and technology include the time and effort for processing and checking materials, cataloguing them, clearing rights (this is perhaps the most difficult step) and making storage/preservation plans that extend beyond three to five years. A more difficult but rapid solution might be a community archives but the same issues listed above would still need to be addressed. In the interim, dance creators and companies should keep as much content and metadata as possible so that an archives can be built. An interesting shift from previous times is that with more and more materials being generated digitally or 'born digital', there is less of a need to collect and preserve physical objects. This factor alone could be beneficial to Hong Kong given

⁷¹ The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, 'Advanced Search,' accessed 5 September 2021, <https://mellon.org/grants/grants-database/advanced-search/?grantee=4611&y=1969-2020>.

the lack and cost of available real estate. It would also be historically significant if the first dance-only archives in Hong Kong was born-digital rather than physical and digitised.

Regardless of funding, capacity, and other resources, the most important action is for the dance community and general public to recognise the value of the dance works produced in Hong Kong, not just as artistic creations but as forms of cultural heritage and reflections of society at any given time. The works produced in 2020 hold special significance as a demonstration of resilience and problem-solving during adversity. They can also be analysed for improving future efforts in online dance production. The motivation to collect and preserve content related to a dance work usually starts with someone valuing that work first. As long as one individual or organisation is motivated to keep his/its records, that is an essential significant contribution.

Conclusion

The traditional role of archives has been to collect, preserve, share, and otherwise maintain records of an organisation. For dancemakers and companies, this would be their choreographic works and related content including daily business records. To create an online production does not necessarily require referencing the past. With the advent of the Internet and social media, however, it is far too easy now to look up similar content or background information or other related information. The Internet and social media as well as other digital technologies have made it easier for people to create their own community or unofficial archives. Whether a creator intends for his/her work to be archived or

not, by putting any footage online, his/her creative output becomes part of a greater, collective online ‘archives.’ Additionally, since Hong Kong is unfettered by a strong archives tradition, the dance community actually has more freedom in how it might create and use archives for its purpose.

Some lingering questions almost a year out after the end of 2020 are whether it makes sense for dance to be presented online and whether the ‘liveness’ of dance can be transmitted effectively through digital means. When it comes to being online, it cannot be denied that the Internet has permeated daily life, from communications to the Internet of Things. More fundamentally, reaching out to and making performances as accessible to audiences as possible has always been crucial for the dance world. Online platforms have made these activities more affordable and efficient. Therefore, while it may be inevitable for all aspects of a dance production to be shared online – publicity, rehearsal, outcome – I would posit that online platforms are just one of many vehicles for sharing dance and is not necessarily the superior one. In 2020, putting dance online was done out of limited options and necessity. Now dancemakers must decide whether an online platform is ideal for their work.

The question of ‘liveness’ can be answered similarly in that there are many factors to consider. Fundamentally, the technology available today for capturing dance and other movement is still not optimised. It is still considerably better than the technology available several decades before. If these developments continue, then it may be possible in the future to transmit ‘liveness’ even when filtered through a machine. Other factors include how a work is choreographed, performed, and had its production

elements (e.g., costume, sets, lighting) designed for specifically being captured. The way the final product is viewed also does a lot to enhance the feeling of ‘liveness’. Watching or participating in a viewing within a special environment can provide an experience more reminiscent of a traditional live performance compared to looking at a video alone on a smartphone. In developing dance works for online dissemination, one option would be to first clearly define and break down ‘liveness’ into tangible design elements (which has been investigated by dance researchers) and select the proper capture methods. Another option would be to simply consider that viewers may grow accustomed to another category of dance performance.

Given the trends of the past few years and the potential future outcomes, I hope that a concentrated effort to build a digital dance archives is made not only for educating the public and young artists about their past, but also for creating a repository of foundational material from which new derivative works can be created and shared. This would effectively lead to a network of archival and new work becoming connected through digital technology and made available globally for greater accessibility.