# Cuban Theater Digital Archive: A Multimodal Platform for Theater Documentation and Research*

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**Abstract.** The Cuban Theater Digital Archive (http://cubantheater.org) is a unique digital collection of Cuban theater resources established by Dr. Lillian Manzor at the University of Miami. Working at the intersection of humanities and digital media, its purpose is threefold: it is a resource for teaching, learning, and research; a digital repository for important Cuban theatrical materials little known outside the island; and a forum to foster scholarly communication in this field. This paper presents a theoretical overview of CTDA's design and development, its technical infrastructure, and its role in research, teaching and learning.

**Keywords:** Cuba, theater, performance, performing arts, digital archives, digital humanities, community archives, multimodal writing.

## 1 Introduction

The Cuban Theater Digital Archive (CTDA, http://cubantheater.org and http://teatrocubano.org) is a unique digital collection of Cuban theater resources established by the first author in collaboration with the University of Miami Libraries and the College of Arts and Sciences. Working at the intersection of humanities and digital media, the CTDA's purpose is threefold: it is a resource for teaching, learning, and research in Cuban theater and performance as well as in related fields; a digital repository for important Cuban theatrical materials little known outside the island; and a forum to foster scholarly communication in this field. As such, the CTDA participates in a virtual culture that allows for communication and exchange to take place between communities that are often politically separated. CTDA includes materials digitized and filmed in Cuba,

as well as resources and information related to Cuban theater in the diaspora with a special focus on theater produced by Cuban communities in the United States. At present, the site contains links to 2,800 digital objects, including photographs of theater productions, theater programs, stage and costume designs, and other ephemera. Of these, 92 are filmed theatrical productions. This paper presents a theoretical overview of CTDA's design and development, its technical infrastructure, and its role in research, teaching and learning.

## 2 Background

Live theater and performance are probably two of the most evanescent forms of cultural heritage. They are always provisional, ephemeral, and non-repeatable. This non-repeatability points to two salient characteristics of theater as live-art performance: 1) It is a transient and fleeting art form. The ontology of each performance is, of course, the present. It exists insofar as it knows itself to be a representation without reproduction [1, 2]; 2) it is collaborative rather than individualistic in nature. Live-theater involves collaboration from a wide range of participants such as playwrights, designers, directors, actors and performers, musicians, technicians, administrators, etc. It also includes the collaboration of critics, analysts, theorists and reviewers. As intangible cultural manifestations, they transmit an embodied memory that is extremely fragile and risks disappearing. This non-repeatability presents challenges to any theater researcher and theater artist in relation to documentation, challenges that are exponentially increased in the case of Cuban and Latino/a theater.

Researchers know that the fleeting nature of performance transforms research for historians and scholars of theater as live-art performance into a search. As Patrice Pavis has suggested, theater research is, indeed, a search for a lost object: a non-locatable and inaccessible representation[3]. Any writing/research on theater is partly a search for documentation that serves as a trace of that non-repeatable performance. Documents for theater re/search are comprised of the researchers own notes of the spectacular text (representation) and published or unpublished verbal texts. Other important elements are photographs, video recordings, sketches for costumes and stage design, program notes, directors' notebooks, newspaper clippings, and oral histories with audience memories. This ephemera is a trace of the live representation, the missing object of the re/search, and, as José Muñoz has argued, is "a kind of evidence of what has transpired but certainly not the thing itself. It does not rest on epistemological foundations but is instead interested in following traces, glimmers, residues, and specks of things [that] maintain experiential politics and urgencies long after those experiences have been lived" [4, p.10].

U.S. Cuban[1] and Latino/a theater artists, cultural institutions and theater companies also recognize the need to create archives of their work. Documentation on U.S. Cuban theater exists but it is scattered in different personal collections. Resources may be available at different institutions. However, the drive for many institutions traditionally has been to collect. With limited budgets, theater collections may not have finding aids and other organizational elements

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[1] For the use of U.S. Cuban instead of Cuban American see [5].

that accompany full processing, serve research, and provide the infrastructure necessary for digitization projects and broader access. Only in rare circumstances is there collaboration between librarians, archivists, theater faculty and artists in the processing of theater collections.

The Cuban Theater Digital Archive was developed precisely to facilitate the search for that missing object, to document and preserve part of this intangible cultural heritage, and to be able to write a theater history that takes into account live performance.[2] It considers and constructs Cuba following Ana López' notion of Greater Cuba, that is, it takes into consideration theatrical work on the island and in the diaspora. In addition, we use Greater Cuba to suggest that "border zone" in which citizenship is reformulated as a result of the encounter between competing national jurisdictions and the global economy[6]. Finally, CTDA is conceived as a research, teaching and learning program that integrates classroom education in Cuban theater, new media, and archival primary research with an online scholarly publishing effort that provides a unique view of contemporary culture in Greater Cuba.

## 3    Entering the Archive

The construction and development of CTDA involves five components:

- **The physical archive**, primarily a repository of theater related materials housed within the Cuban Heritage Collection (CHC) at the University of Miami Libraries, includes published and unpublished play scripts, playbills, posters, reviews, photographs, videotapes, DVDs, and other ancillary materials.[3]
- **The filmed theater collection** contains over 200 VHS, DVDs, and mini-DVs of selected productions and staged readings as well as rehearsals and interviews of plays produced in Cuba, the US, Spain and Latin America.[4]

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[2] Initial conversations for a digital archive started in 2002 between Manzor and the library. The main collaborator at the Library was Lyn MacCorkle–a faculty librarian in the Digital Initiatives section of the Library who was responsible for designing and developing digital projects and had done interdisciplinary research on the Cuban community in the United States. In Spring 2004, the library funded Manzor's proposal and the legacy site began to be developed. The Cuban/Latino Theater Archive was launched in 2005 at http://scholar.library.miami.edu/archivoteatral. The new, more robust archive is being developed since 2009 with funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the University of Miami Libraries and the College of Arts and Sciences. Information on staff and project participants can be found at Cuban Theater Digital Archive - People.

[3] The physical archive holds over 47 collections. For highlights of these collections see [7]. The reader may also consult the Cuban Heritage Collection Theater Research Guide (http://libguides.miami.edu/chctheater).

[4] Producers and artists donated the videos to the founding director over the years. The DVDs and mini-DVs are a result of the documentation project associated with the archive. DaLi Media Lab, artists and others have donated them. See the CTDA Productions Collection in CTDA's Digital Objects
http://cubantheater.org/digitalobjects/collection/cta0009

Manzor has also worked with community videographers and two student videographers and has developed best practices for filming and editing theater performance for the purpose of scholarly documentation. Our results can be found in CTDA Guide to Filming Live Theater [8].

- **The video-streaming database** includes moving images. Part of the filmed theater collection has been digitized and video-streamed and is available on the theater website [9]. Those streams are sent from a separate video-streaming server.
- **The image database** also includes the master copies and lower resolution derivatives of still images that are displayed on the site. To make analogue images accessible, they are subjected to a digital image scanner. The scanned images are stored in content-DM, the digital content management system of the Richter Library, and reviewed by digital collection librarians to ensure that the required quality standards are met. Lower resolution derivatives are ingested and displayed in CTDA. Presently the archive contains over 3,000 digitized images of selected materials in the physical collections, and images received from theater practitioners in Cuba, the United States and elsewhere.[5]
- **The directory database** is the main component of the theater website and is accessed from the homepage. The database contains information on playwrights, plays, directors, productions (including actors and roles, as well as different designers), theater companies, theater venues, theater festivals, and awards. A user can navigate through the web site using the preset directory entries (creators, productions, venues, written works, and digital objects; awards and theater festivals available June 2013) as well as conduct a complex search to generate a custom list of objects. This directory database has a back-end data-entry module that is used by the project collaborators to add information to the directory.

## 4    Database Design: Theory

Our research on other digital archives as well as on technical communication and multimedia corroborated that collaborative teams of artists, humanists and scientists are usually behind research on, and development of, databases and multimedia systems. These teams have identified three paradigms of system architecture: the database paradigm, the communications paradigm, and the hypertext paradigm [10–12]. CTDA's development team was faced with intellectual and technical challenges very early because a theatrical performance is an activity, an event in real time. However, the design paradigms and the existing standards for archiving and cataloguing are not designed to capture or describe temporal concepts.

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[5] Alberto Sarraín, the theatre director who participated in the first phase of the project, was the main contact with our colleagues in Havana. Odalys Moreno under the direction of Jesús Ruíz in Havana was in charge of the digitization of the Cuban materials.

The database paradigm assumes that knowledge about objects and events can be categorized, formalized, and then retrieved as a set of "facts." The role of technology in this paradigm is to enable the accumulation and retrieval of information. As we developed our database, however, we realized that some facts can be organized and retrieved as "data" (information considered universal, in this case author, title, director), but others could not. From the very beginning, the category author was inoperable. How do we assign authorship in the case of translations and adaptations, even *creación colectiva*, specific to Latin American theater? In spite of the fact that it is an unprob-



**Fig. 1.** Interaction between CTDA components

lematic term for librarians, theater scholars and historians know that there is no single author/creator of a live performance. Thus, as soon as we moved to productions, the events in real time, we were faced with the fact that our two basic categories - "author" and "text" were insufficient to capture the specificities of live art performance. Thus we abandoned the notion of author-text and organized our "data" based on the concepts of creators, creations, and places and spaces of creation. From the onset, we realized that databases, as Tara McPherson now argues, strip things from their context; their ontology depends on the loss of the thing itself [13]. They become meaningful only when interpretation is included, in other words, when accompanied by an information base. Interpretation, of course, implies choices, decisions about what stories to tell and how to tell those stories, an approach antithetical to databases, but one that lead us to the second paradigm. The communication paradigm approaches the computer and new digital media as a medium by which humans communicate knowledge. Thus, the role of language in this paradigm is critical. The implication for multimedia design is that the designers need to study the user's professional language and incorporate it, as far as possible, as the language of the system. Finally, the hypertext paradigm is based on the viewpoint that knowledge is infinite, and that we can only have a limited access or perspective on it. A scholarly hypertext, an argument based on bodies of linked texts, constitutes an attempt to access knowledge through the linking of multiple nodes. This is why hypertext
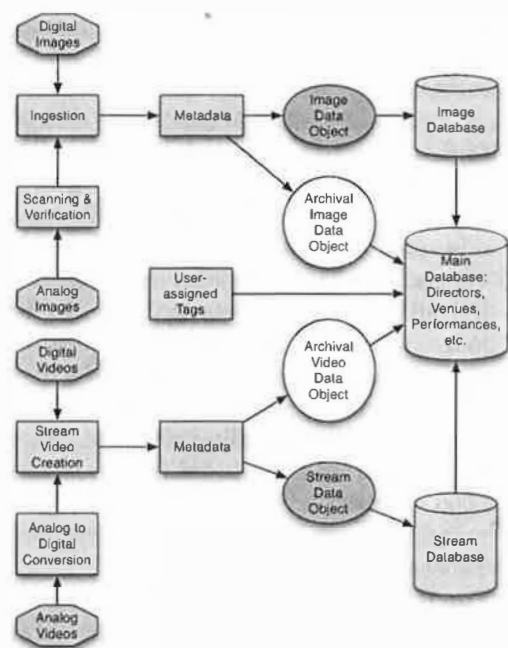
has been described as "the art and science of linking." These three paradigms tend to operate discretely. As a matter of fact, digital archives and websites that document theater as live art performance are usually developed using one of the above paradigms. One of the most salient innovations of the Cuban Theater Digital Archive is the fact that it is based precisely on the interaction of these three paradigms.

## 5    Technical Infrastructure

Our program objectives centered on developing the data model, software tools, hardware expertise, and best practices to support future phases of intensive multimedia content collection and collaborative content authorship with partners in the United States, Cuba, and internationally. The development process began with the creation of a data model for theatrical performance based in part on the site's legacy relational database structure as well as on user needs for improved site navigability. This data model guided the creation of a modular system architecture, built using existing open source software to ensure interoperability with other tools or modules being developed elsewhere to support digital humanities initiatives.

CTDA's content management framework, named Romeu after the Cuban musician Armando Romeu, was made live at http://cubantheater.org in early 2012, with access to the system opened to all significant content contributors. In addition, the Romeu software powering the CTDA was made available as open source software at https://github.com/umdsp/romeu. Romeu is built on the Python-based Django framework and it aims to be a simple but powerful content management system for multilingual theatrical archives. Vaunting itself as a "web framework for perfectionists with deadlines," Django allows for the quick, elegant deployment of textual data-driven websites. As another plus, the Python programming language which underpins it has always been at the forefront of internationalization, a distinct advantage when compared with certain other options on the open source market. This new infrastructure provides rich interaction and easy navigation of site content, facilitates contributions of text and multimedia content from geographically dispersed partners while placing intellectual property rights at the forefront of the content submission workflow, increases capacity to create and deliver video content, and allows for the peer review, approval, and innovative scholarly interaction with and publication of site content.

The search on CTDA is processed using Solr by way of accessing the metadata stored in an XML format. It is in an alpha test mode and will be completed soon. For information exchange the site allows its users and administrators to leave comments on specific entries. In the next 12 months we plan to add to the site a publication capability, that is, a system for a user to author a multimodal scholarly essay with embedded videos and photographs from the archive on CTDA's Web-Scenes / Red-Escenas.

## 6   CTDA and Digital Humanities

CTDA is a leading Humanities 2.0 publication at the University of Miami. Humanities 2.0 "refers to a humanistic practice anchored in creation, curation, collaboration, experimentation, and the multi-purposing or multi-channeling of humanistic knowledge" [14]. Digital Humanities 2.0 is possible thanks to Web 2.0 platforms offering us new publication models that are not limited to print culture. Participatory scholarship and collaborative, interdisciplinary research are at the heart of these publications.[6] Kathleen Fitzpatrick discusses the changes introduced in 2.0 digital publications in the second chapter of [16]. She summarizes these paradigm shifts as:

- from product to process
- from individual to collaborative
- from originality to remix
- from intellectual property to the gift economy
- from text to something more

As a Humanities 2.0 publication, CTDA participates in and contributes to the above paradigm shifts. We would like to focus on the ways in which the very design of CTDA responds to three of the above.

### 6.1   From Individual to Collaborative: Community Archives

Since the Cuban Theater Digital Archive tends to approach culture not only as something that we inherit, but also as something that we create and experience, it invites community participation. Thus, we work with individual artists and theater companies acknowledging that "by collecting, preserving and making accessible documents, photographs, oral histories and many other materials which document the histories of particular groups and localities, community archives and heritage initiatives make an invaluable contribution to the preservation of a more inclusive and diverse local and national heritage" [17]. We expect contributions of other unique collections of either previously digitized or "born-digital" images, which may not meet technical archiving standards. Since our work involves digitizing for preservation, digitizing for access, and preserving born-digital information, we are cognizant of the fact that that research needs, community interest, cultural heritage and preservation considerations may occasionally take precedence over best practices in determining if an object will be added to CTDA.

The above concerns demonstrate our shared "post-custodial mindset for archives" [18]. This paradigm approaches the physical record in relation to the context of its creator and creation process (who created it, why and how) underscoring its multilayered hidden meanings and its connection to power, memory, and identity construction instead of the traditional focus on the physical record

[6] For an analysis of the development of Digital Humanities in the U.S. see [15].

as neutral and objective evidence under custody of institutions [19–21]. It is precisely this mindset that has guided our appraisal and selection of born-digital and other images and has framed the following questions of context: 1) we have to take into consideration what these images mean in the context of why and how they were created; 2) we are cognizant of the fact that one of the most important aspects of this project, beside preservation, is to enable access to information.[7].

This post-custodial concept has long been an ambition of the CTDA, even though its previous iteration lacked the technical and organizational structure to make it a reality. Many libraries and archives, realizing the limitations of the content-ownership model are beginning to establish digital presences that cast a wider net outside the walls of their own physical collections into the communities they serve. CTDA, as a community archive, complements and extends the role of traditional archives and special collections in virtual space. Thus, beyond a digital portal to access content, it works with a more inclusive paradigm for the curation, distribution and dissemination of Cuban performing arts materials.

### 6.2   From Individual to Collaborative: Artists, Students, Scholars, and Archivists Working Together

CTDA has developed effective and innovative collaborations between teaching faculty and digital library specialists in building and deploying new scholarly resources for teaching and learning in the performing arts. Activities include defining conventions particular to live art performance in the Latin American and Latino/a context that impact on database design and metadata as well as training student researchers who enter data and efficiently provide clips from filmed productions. The participation of several theater artists in the early phases of the project was crucial for the redefinition of fields for the database as well as its conceptual design.

At the center of this collaboration are student contributors. As one of its key strengths, the CTDA provides students with rich experience, through classroom assignments, in the research, editing, and on-line publication of directory entries on the CTDA website; processing and researching archival collections at the CHC; developing new media projects based on digitized archival materials and digital video of theatrical performances; and gaining a first-hand view of Cuban culture on and off the island through research interaction with Cuban theater companies and theater artists.

CTDA collaborates regularly with the CHC to provide students with unique learning opportunities related to collections of original theater materials in digi-

[7] The question of who should be responsible for digital preservation is key to issues of preservation and access: "Much current 'archiving' is done by individual researchers, research and development units, etc., and many researchers wonder why they would have to depend on others to archive data. As long as research results are merely shared among a handful of colleagues, this approach has a proven track record. But, clearly, it is not fail-safe and it can leave much to be desired if we expect universal accessibility. What happens when the research project folds, or when the researcher retires or dies?" [22].

tal and physical formats. These projects introduce undergraduate and graduate students to the rigors of academic research in a digital context, and provide many with their first experiences in archives and special collections. Since the CTDA's inception in 2004, Manzor has offered service-learning projects for course credit to students interested in theater materials. Students have worked with a number of CTDA and CHC collections. In the course of their service-learning projects, students have helped process selected collections, and have authored biographical and/or historical essays on the theater companies and artists published in CTDA, as well as documentaries and new media projects repurposing the digital assets.[8] They have also selected visual materials to be scanned and have provided original information needed for metadata. Most of the digital material now available in CTDA originated in these projects.

Whether it is in theater, cultural studies, or language instruction, the CTDA has opened up many research and learning opportunities to students. Long-term benefits of participation in CTDA projects include: improved research skills and techniques; enhanced methodology and problem-solving skills; knowledge of effectively accessing original records in archives and special collections; experience creating a research plan, using finding aids, and reading and interpreting visual material; first-hand knowledge of information technology and its social, cultural, and political implications; development of a high level of engagement, sense of ownership, and enhanced skills with technology.

## 6.3   Intellectual Property

Faced with the myriad difficulties of intellectual property laws for filming theater and putting performances online as well as the challenging gray area of Cuban IP law, CTDA stakeholders sought a simple framework for managing intellectual property which would promote the sharing of open content when possible while also placing the rights of content creators in the forefront. As a solution, CTDA is using Creative Commons categories to manage the submission of new content into its digital archive. Creative Commons is a nonprofit corporation dedicated to making it easier for people to share and build upon the work of others, consistent with the rules of copyright. They deliver free licenses and other legal tools to mark creative work with the freedom the creator wants it to carry, so others can share, remix, use commercially, or any combination thereof. Creative Commons has been very successful at addressing copyright from a practical, hands-on approach. It has a global reach and impact that is based on the same sort of trust implicit in the creation and maintenance of the Archive. It offers a predictable way to provide attribution, and encourage use with appropriate stewardship of the content.

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[8] For an example of a representative student project, view this profile (http://library.miami.edu/chc/scholars/marcelaarcosholzinger/) of 2010 CTDA/Goizueta undergraduate scholar Marcela Arcos and her work with the INTAR Theater Records. For examples of new media projects see the documentary on Teresa María Rojas (http://cubantheater.org/creator/594) and the video "The Business of Being Exiled"(http://cubantheater.org/creator/7025).

### 6.4   Beyond the Text: Database-Driven Scholarship and Multimodal Writing

Two of the ways in which CTDA has contributed to the shift from text to something more are data-driven scholarship and multimodal writing. Data-driven scholarship employs "the database logic of new media, in which textual and media objects can be created, combined, remixed, and reused" [16, p.32]. The key elements of database driven scholarship are annotation, organization, analysis, and visualization; these allow us to explore a topic and present scholarship in ways that were previously unavailable. It is this logic that informed Manzor's conceptual design of CTDA's technical platform in order to open up a space for the creation of video documentation, and the inclusion of pre-existing texts and images along with different genres of original commentary. As a Digital Humanities 2.0 site, the remixing of materials presents "curation as a sophisticated digital scholarly practice" [16, p.32]. Most importantly, CTDA allows others to repurpose the "originally" curated materials and to create their own, networked arguments.

The need to develop a space for multimodal writing (Web-Scenes / Red-Escenas, currently in development) comes out of the limitations imposed by the printed page on the teaching, documentation and research of live-art performances. While there are several examples of pioneering multimedia and hypertext projects in the Humanities, when we started CTDA there were only two examples of innovative documentation/research projects on theater. One is a CD-ROM produced and directed in England by Dixon, documenting and presenting theoretical background on his own production of Chameleons. It includes rehearsal footage along with critical and conceptual commentaries on concepts that are key to the performance such as Surrealism, and Theater of Cruelty [23]. The other ones are the Cuadernos and other publications of the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics at New York University (http://hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/). The Cuadernos are on-line hypermedia publications on performance and politics in the Americas using a combination of photos, videos, texts, hyperlinks, bibliographies, and audio recordings. CTDA is currently working with the Scalar team (http://scalar.usc.edu/scalar/) in order to incorporate Scalar's multimodal authoring platform for our Web-Scenes.

## 7   Paradoxes of Archive Fever

It could seem paradoxical to attempt to "stabilize" a fleeting, collaborative art form in an archive-- primarily a repository of physical documents. Live theater and performance transmit knowledge in non-written fashion. Since the knowledge privileged by traditional archives is that of the permanence of the written text, what Schneider has called "the patrilineal, West-identified (arguably white-cultural) logic of the Archive" [24, p.100], we lose the knowledge that "embodied" performance of the repertoire transmits, "the memory passed down through bodies and mnemonic practices" [2, p.35]. Acknowledging the constructed nature of a digital archive as well as the simulatory impulse inherent in digital images,

we propose digital documentation as a possible way to expand our notion of the archive, as a way to give space to the gestural and mnemonic practices transmitted by live performance. The digital capture and presentation of ephemera challenges performance studies' commitment to an ontology of presence. They approach "performance not as that which disappears (as the archive expects), but as both the act of remaining and a means of reappearance" [24, p.103]. Indeed, the glimmers, traces, and memories that inhabit the digital archive, and the users' interaction with them in the present, are proof that there are "other ways of knowing, other modes of remembering, that might be situated precisely in the ways in which performance remains, but remains differently" [24, p.101].

## 8     Conclusion

Although the focus of CTDA's first phase is one particular community (Greater Cuba) and one particular form (theater/performance as intangible culture), the technical platform is available to other communities of scholars, historians, and artists interested in the preservation of live theater and performance as intangible cultural heritage. Following the etymology of the word archive, our aim is to make this digital archive be the "beginning", "the source" of any research on theater in Greater Cuba first, and then on Latino/a theater, as well as a source for multimedia theater documentation and research. This archive, like theater, aims to be collaborative, always in progress. Faculty members with student interns are working with the Library's staff and the Digital Media Library to provide an ever-expanding digital collection of visual materials, primarily videos and photos, as well as performance texts-both published and unpublished. The design is enhanced based on input and feedback from librarians, theater practitioners, and artists in the US and in Cuba, and scientists from the Center for Computational Science at the University of Miami. Scholars, professors, and students from any university, who are interested in collaborating, can help build it as part of their class projects.[9]

As a cultural heritage initiative, the archive is part of a virtual culture that lives beyond cyberspace and allows communication and exchange between two communities that are politically separated. Like other virtual communities, "our constructed communities live within and around the relationships we form by moving within an electronic space that connects us with others. Virtual cultures extend, rather than exclude, our physical contact with each other" [26, p.32].

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[9] Spring 2008, Gwendolyn Alker at New York University's Drama Department gave students the option to develop pages on María Irene Fornés. Students wrote analysis of the Signature Season dedicated to Fornés and their advertising strategies, critical responses to plays, and interviews with several cast members. See, for example, Harrison Hill's analysis of the critical response to "Letters from Cuba"(http://cubantheater.org/production/2195) and Harrison Hill and Maurya Scanlon's interview with Beth Whitaker, Associate Artistic Director of the Signature Theatre Company (http://cubantheater.org/creator/7967). For the advantages of archival research at the undergraduate level, see [25].

By capturing the non-verbal memory of a fleeting event, this archive reflects changes in the practice of theater as it serves as a witness for thousands of productions via programs, photographs, video clips, video-streaming, newspaper reviews, cards, etc. As an interactive pedagogical tool, it offers professors and students the opportunity to use these materials in the classroom, and it allows students to be involved in research as they can add information to the database as well as author specific pages or Web-Scenes. Researchers in theater and in other fields - African American Studies, Anthropology, History, Latin American Studies, Political Science, Religious Studies, Women and Gender Studies - have access to materials otherwise unavailable to them that they can now annotate and rearrange in order to create other interpretative histories and "stories." Finally, it provides a useful link to the artistic community who can build their pages and use CTDA as a showcase of their work and as a reference point for potential publishers, directors, casting agents, and grant agencies.

The Cuban Theater Digital Archive is unique, then, because of the range of materials it encompasses, the ways in which it combines the database with digital documentation, and the space it offers for innovative multimodal publication in theater research. CTDA's goal of preserving and providing access to evanescent performance materials while fostering scholarly communication between "communities that are politically separated" will continue to push the boundaries of what is possible at this time of potentially changing attitudes in U.S.-Cuba relations. It is creating a virtual community in which common goals operate outside of the cold world rhetoric that guides US-Cuba relations. Through this process, the CTDA may even find itself in a position to serve as a model to other digital initiatives exploring US-Cuba collaboration.

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# How Are On-Line Digital Libraries Changing Theatre Studies and Memories?

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**Abstract.** The on-line access to digital video allows for a new management of Performing Arts documents. The audiovisual document, conceived in the past by its creator as a complete work in itself now has to be flexible and open to suit the needs of its on-line users.

Information Retrieval's activities for Performing Arts have to be improved by finding new tools and by developing a specific P. A. semantic.

We have to be aware that the abundance of available items on a given subject could transform an opportunity into a challenge.

A new pedagogy of abundance has to be reshaped, based on User-generated content, not losing track of the first original document, via an authenthicity assessment of the digital record. Original works - first created electronically now through digital technologies - have to be reconsidered as new content, not as old content on new platforms. From Antonin Artaud's radio recordings of 1947 to portable Electronic Arts of the Seventies, ending with the Digital New Media of the new millenium, a new aesthetic and a new imaginary are rising, and it is strongly different from the old way of describing the world.

The Performing Arts studies are shifting from scarcity to abundance of digital data, witnessing the scarcity of available funds to preserve culture.

The more the digital archives will be open to new formats and free downloading, the more we will encourage the diffusion of European primary values and, in the same time, get a chance to preserve the millenary history of the Performing Arts.

## 1    The Digital Era Is Transforming Performing Art Studies

The computer as hypertext, as symbol manipulator, is a writing technology in the tradition of the papyrus roll, the codex, and the printed book. The computer as virtual reality, as graphics engine, as perceptual manipulator, belongs to and extends the tradition of television, film, photography and even representational painting.

Jay David Bolter

This essay will underline the new challenges that opened up for Performing Art studies in the digital era.

The quote by Bolter regards the complex reality of computers as new media. Cyberspace is not one place or one thing, and digital theory struggles with its multiplicity, hybridism and fluidity.