

Call for Papers:

Early Twentieth-Century Dance Photography Transnational and Transdisciplinary Approaches

This special issue for *Dance Research Journal* will bring together 5-6 articles from scholars in Dance Studies, Visual Studies, and beyond, to explore the transnational and transdisciplinary aspects of dance photography, considering how innovations in photography helped document global life in the early twentieth century. Dance photography functions as a primary and portable archive of dance performances in the period. It also sheds light on the importance of corporeal movement and performance to experiments with technological developments in photography as well as photography's ongoing, often self-conscious, development into a form of art. At the same time, dance itself was developing under the impact of the new documentary possibilities of photography, especially as advances in technology opened new ways of capturing, and thus seeing, movement. Thus, while photography is often associated with stillness, dance photography complicates the multiplicitous relationships between stillness, movement, and performance. Dance photography in the period also importantly contributed to the (self-)exploration of queer, racial and ethnic identities, providing a window into an oft-neglected part of early twentieth-century (global) history. Dance photography in the West contributed to the exoticization of non-White bodies, for example as part of popular forms of ethnography in magazines. The productiveness of a transnational approach is further suggested by the advances in portability of both camera and photograph through the first half of the 20th century and the role this mobility of photography played as part of the increased movement of people across national borders.

But a focus on photography also allows us to unearth the dynamic affordances of dance photography in people's lives across time and place: photographs are staged, shot, processed, touched, framed, printed, moved, exhibited, exchanged, destroyed, manipulated, remembered, rediscovered, archived, etc. That is, the study of early twentieth-century dance photography *now* is also the study of the people who have used these photographs in the intervening century.

Recent scholarship has shown the productive place of archival and new materialist methodologies in the study of dance photography (e.g. Wortelkamp 2022; Auslander 2018; Wortelkamp 2016; Reason 2006). Such approaches have importantly contributed to the study of, for example, queer cultures, but are often focused on photography in and of the West. Yet, as Ajay Sinha's *Photo-Attractions* (2023) has shown for example, there is much important work to be done with global and transnational approaches to dance photography, for example as they help open up questions around racial and national (as well as queer) identity formation. While relatively little work has been done in English that centers photography of non-Western dance of the period, the work that has been done highlights the (sometimes ongoing) role of dance photography of the period in broader cultural and political narratives, including in nation-building, (post)colonialism, and 'visual sovereignty' (Raheja 2010; Tsinhnahjinnie 2003; see, e.g., Steer 2008; Glass 2009; Wilcox 2016; and Maguire 2025). Restoring such hidden and overlooked narratives to the history of dance photography is an urgent scholarly priority and forms part of recent and ongoing initiatives to 'decenter' and 'decolonize' Dance Studies.

By bringing dance and photography together through a transnational and interdisciplinary perspective, our special issue will demonstrate the shifting corporeal imaginaries at the beginning of the last century.

Exploring dance photography from a transnational perspective opens up its important place as a visual medium in migration, ethnography, and self-exploration and -assertion and its relation to the development of queer, ethnic, and national identities. The transnational approach of this special issue is not only meant to broaden our view away from Western-centered approaches (including those working under the term 'modernism'), but also meant to further 'provincialize' European and American dance by showing how these were situated in global exchange and migration – of people, gestures, and choreographies – supported by the circulation of photographs (Chakrabarty 2000). Furthermore, transnational perspectives on dance photography give critical insight into the complex nature of social, economic, and political processes.

We invite contributions from scholars working in a variety of disciplines interested in dance photography in the early twentieth century from transnational perspectives whose work centers dance. As we recognize the complexity of designating a specific time period given differing regional and national histories, we use a

flexible approach to the early twentieth century as long as contributions roughly relate to photography originating in the first half of the century. We explicitly invite contributions that study non-Western dance photography and/or study dance photography's intersections with questions of race, gender, sexuality, and disability. Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- dance photography and migration
- dance photography and Orientalism
- dance photography and the practice of anthropology/ethnography
- dance photography as advertisement
- collecting dance photography
- dance photography as archive
- dance photography as pornography
- dance photography and colonialism
- dance and advances in the technology of photography
- dance photography and memory
- dance photography and disability
- dance photography re-used and/or in other arts
- dance photography and imaginaries of the body
- dance photography, portraiture, and celebrity culture
- dance photography as transnational co-authorship

Please send us your abstracts of no more than 500 words to wesley.lim@anu.edu.au (Wesley Lim, ANU) and meindert.peters@mod-langs.ox.ac.uk (Meindert Peters, Oxford) by March 1, 2026, for a deadline for final submission of the article of July 1, 2026. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any queries.

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