© The Author(s), 2026. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of Dance Studies Association.
doi:10.1017/S0149767725100806

Editor's Note

Each of the articles presented in this volume explore how dance frames, generates, and interrogates human relationships, emphasizing community, vulnerability, interdependence, and the embodied negotiation of social power. Across disparate cultural and political contexts—Mexican migrant communities, Asian American ballroom dancers in New York, activists commemorating migrant deaths on the U.S.–Mexico border, and contemporary intermedia collaborations drawing from butoh and Surrealism—the essays collectively highlight how dance becomes a site for rethinking belonging, grief, racial and gender hierarchies, and the boundaries of the human body itself. While stylistically diverse, the works converge on the idea that movement is not merely aesthetic expression but a relational practice shaped by histories of displacement, structural violence, and the persistent human desire for connection.

The opening essay, Michelle Castañeda's "Danzantes del Alba: Dance, Textile, and the Communitarian Weave," offers an extended analysis of Danzantes del Alba, a project created by Teatro Línea de Sombra (TLS) in collaboration with migrant shelters and textile collectives. Castañeda argues that this work is not simply a performance but an enactment of what she calls a "communitarian weave"—a material and relational fabric that sustains collective life in the face of capitalist extraction, migration, and the erosion of traditional communal practices. Drawing on Marx's critique of enclosure, she explains that capitalism destroys not only shared physical resources but also "commons-sense": the memory and knowledge required for communal forms of living. Danzantes del Alba responds to this destruction through its mobilization of dance, textile work, and collaborative processes that reconstruct social bonds.

The project began in 2016 in Tenosique, Mexico, when migrants residing at the shelter La 72 participated in a carnival comparsa wearing makeshift Loco de la Danza costumes assembled from discarded clothing. Their presence in public parade space temporarily transformed them from criminalized figures into celebrants with agency and visibility. This event initiated a long-term artistic and ethnographic partnership that resulted in 36 intricate costumes composed of thousands of stitched-together fabric retazos. These garments were made by women's cooperatives and LGBTQ + collectives whose collaborative labor TLS describes as "wasting time"—a deliberate, slow, relational practice that privileges mutual care over capitalist speed and productivity.

Castañeda situates these textiles within Mexico's long history of displacement of subsistence workers, the exploitation of garment labor, and the colonial transformation of Indigenous dance practices. Whereas state folklorization sanitized agrarian dances into mere cultural displays, Danzantes del Alba reconnects dance to communal reproduction, textile labor, and cosmological relationalities. Through its emphasis on material density, collaboration, and interdependence, the work becomes a living process that sustains the possibility of the commons. The project offers not nostalgia but an active practice of collective autonomy and ontological regeneration within a commodified world.

Crystal Song's "Vulnerable Relations: Redefining Lead and Follow in Asian American Dancesport" shifts the focus to New York City's competitive ballroom scene, examining how Asian American

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0149767725100806 Published online by Cambridge University Press

dancers navigate its racialized and gendered power structures. Although ballroom dancing is framed as a gender-normative form in which "men lead and women follow," Song's ethnographic research demonstrates that the practice relies on interdependence, mutual responsiveness, and a willingness to share risk—conditions that resonate with what she calls "vulnerable relation." This vulnerability is intensified for Asian American dancers who occupy a paradoxical space in a largely white, Eurocentric industry. They are welcomed as consumers but rarely granted full aesthetic legitimacy.

Song details how ballroom's contemporary visual standard idealizes whiteness, height, elegance, and heteronormativity. Within this framework, Asian American couples often feel compelled to "compensate" for their lack of proximity to the ideal by demonstrating technical perfection or exaggerated emotionality. Many describe the phenomenon of the "white buff," an unspoken advantage given to white-presenting couples by judges and coaches. Asian American women confront Orientalist expectations of passivity or erotic delicacy, even though the role of the follow requires constant activity, strength, and rapid decision-making. Additionally, female follows face physical risk, as their roles often involve extreme extensions and off-balance movements that demand deep trust in their partners.

Asian American male leads, meanwhile, face pressure to counter stereotypes of Asian masculinity by projecting dominance, assertiveness, and sometimes even aggression—demands that conflict with the sensitivity and attentiveness required to sustain genuine partnership. These tensions reveal the contradictory nature of racialized and gendered expectations within dancesport.

Despite these structural constraints, Song highlights alternative community spaces, such as Five Borough Ballroom, that cultivate consent-based pedagogy, mutual care, and collaborative improvisation. These spaces reframe partnership not as domination and submission but as a co-created practice in which both partners shape and are shaped by each other's movement. Song critiques neoliberal solutions that focus on individual empowerment—such as simply encouraging women to lead—arguing that they sidestep systemic inequities. Instead, she advocates for "remaining in vulnerable relation" as a feminist and anti-racist practice that challenges ballroom's established hierarchies and reimagines belonging through embodied interdependence.

Janet O'Shea's article, "We Walk Until the Deaths Stop: Sentiment and Corporeality on the Migrant Trail," examines the Migrant Trail Walk, a seventy-five-mile commemorative journey from Sásabe to Tucson that honors migrants who have died crossing the Sonoran Desert. Approaching the walk through dance and performance studies, O'Shea argues that the event operates as reflexive activism, in which participants' corporeal experience—their exhaustion, pain, and grief—becomes the primary medium of political meaning. Drawing on figures such as Judith Butler and Jason De León, she suggests that grief possesses social and political agency: by publicly mourning those rendered "ungrievable" by state violence, participants resist the dehumanization produced by border militarization.

O'Shea introduces "sentiment" as a central analytic concept, distinguishing it from affect. While affect theory emphasizes spontaneous emotional eruptions, sentiment integrates cognition and emotion, resembling the Sanskrit concept of bhava. Through this framework, participants' experiences during the walk—including the rituals of remembrance, the physical endurance required, and the collective reflection—form a deliberate, constructed emotional environment. The walk does not simulate migrant suffering; instead, it creates an embodied experience of solidarity and recognition that counters the invisibility of migrant deaths. O'Shea argues that understanding such grief-based protests requires integrating performance studies with social movement theory, as only then can scholars appreciate how emotion, thought, and corporeal effort interact in the production of political consciousness.

The final article, Jonathan W. Marshall's analysis of Vessel (2016), explores Damien Jalet and Nawa Kōhei's collaboration as a fusion of dance, sculpture, and media art shaped by the intermedial

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0149767725100806 Published online by Cambridge University Press

influence of butoh, Surrealism, and Georges Bataille's acéphale. Vessel features dancers whose heads are obscured as they intertwine and dissolve into pools of white starch. Their bodies blur into ambiguous shapes, at times appearing sculptural rather than human. Nawa's black, headless sculptures echo these choreographic forms, reinforcing themes of dissolution, formlessness, and posthuman embodiment.

Marshall situates Vessel within broader genealogies of artistic exchange between Japan and Europe. He argues that butoh—particularly Hijikata Tatsumi's "dance of the back," which emphasizes bodily deformation and the decentering of the self—provides a crucial but often unacknowledged subtext for Jalet's choreography. This intermedial lineage extends from butoh pioneers' collaborations with filmmakers and photographers in the mid-twentieth century to Vessel's contemporary melding of bodies and materials. Drawing on Aby Warburg's concept of Nachleben, Marshall suggests that the gestures and images of butoh survive across time, resurfacing in new contexts and forms.

The essay critiques Eurocentric modern dance histories that present butoh as a derivative form. Instead, Marshall demonstrates that Vessel's aesthetics of liquefaction, dissolution, and posthuman transformation reflect butoh's anticipatory influence on global contemporary performance. He further reads Vessel through Bataille's notion of the formless, which resists categorization and destabilizes the sovereign human subject. In this confluence of butoh, Surrealism, and ecological materiality, Vessel becomes a site where bodies merge into collective states and the distinction between life and matter blurs.

Across all four articles, the volume emphasizes vulnerability—as exposure, interdependence, grief, or dissolution—as a central motivation for movement. Dance emerges not merely as cultural practice but as a method for rethinking how bodies relate to each other and their worlds through labor, risk, memory, and shared transformation.

Taken together, these essays demonstrate how dance exposes the fragile yet generative bonds that shape human life. Whether through the collaborative making of textile-laden costumes, the intimate negotiations of ballroom partnership, the physically demanding work of grief-based activism, or the dissolution of bodily boundaries in intermedia performance, each article reveals vulnerability as a creative force. Dance becomes a mode of relational practice capable of resisting erasure, challenging racial and gender hierarchies, transforming mourning into recognition, and reimagining the human body beyond individualism. In these varied contexts, movement offers a means of sustaining connection amid displacement, inequality, and precarity.

Nadine George-Graves

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0149767725100806 Published online by Cambridge University Press