

# Editing, A Life

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Dear PAJ Reader:

Over the years, I've written extensively in these pages about the founding of *PAJ*, in 1976, emphasizing our long commitment to interdisciplinary work, criticism, and artists' writings. Now, it is time to tell you that I have decided to end my editorship of the journal, which will cease publication with this issue, *PAJ* 138. Working with many of the great theatre and literary minds, experiencing the work of the most influential contemporary artists, helping writers to establish an individual voice, and simply having the great good fortune of a public forum, the opportunity of editing the journal has given me a life of tremendous joy and enrichment. To a certain extent, I feel that *PAJ*'s work is done, even though the vision for what Gautam Dasgupta and I conceived as *Performing Arts Journal* forty-eight years ago, still retains the potential to suggest new areas of exploration.

How to put together the final issue? I wondered, as I began to invite contributions to *PAJ*. At first, I had some ideas about which direction it might take, but as the completed essays were submitted it became apparent that many of them took the form of reflective, often personal, narratives. The journal has always encouraged a literary, journalistic approach to writing, and a number of the contributors landed in this direction on their own, unknowingly generating conversations among the individual writings. Some of them started out with one kind of essay in mind and were drawn to another more compelling direction. They offer models for different approaches to writing on the arts. What matters is that the contributors chose subjects that are meaningful to them in this present moment, which is why they can feel like pieces from the heart. Perhaps, against the background of the journal's ending, this led to their thinking back on younger days or legacies, theatrical images that still appear in their dreams, struggles surmounted—how they got to where they are. It was the light cast by art and artists and a learned wisdom that seems to have urged them on. I like the way that many of the contributions express a deep attachment to artistic life, an abiding passion, though what whispers between the lines is the desire for a theatre that can restore some of the marvel it has lost as an art form.

Many of those writing in this issue will be familiar to you as regular contributors to *PAJ*, which has always tried to create a hospitable home to writers. Surveying the collection of their writings published here, I realize that this issue reflects what I had envisioned decades ago as a more intimate and literary kind of writing that would convey the feeling of the voice and employ techniques in genres other than criticism. In a matter of time, four titled sections fell naturally into place as a thematic guide to the issue: Inspiration; Writing Life; Earthward; Mediaturgy. They highlight an interconnectedness of nuanced journeys through

writing, teaching, and making work that play such essential roles in thought set free, and which taken together evince a surprisingly spiritual resonance.

In these times that grow more difficult each day there are decisions to make in the light of many forces in contemporary society eating away at all forms of social, artistic, political, and intellectual life on both sides of the cultural divide. We are on the cusp of a shape-shifting impending election, whichever way it turns, and the instability of global turmoil. Theatres, indeed, the arts in general, have never fully recovered from the Covid era. For many, it has been a time of assessment, personal and professional, charged by the economics of inspiration. What is the value of the work that I do? Where will it lead me? I look forward to a return to the neglected study of theatre history and plays/texts, along with a move away from deterministic, overly specialized areas of research and scholarship. Added to that list is a more rigorous training that engages multiple art forms and provides eclectic models for varied and distinctive kinds of criticism that can move knowingly across performance and the visual arts. Changing our name to *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, in 1998, signaled that editorial interest. Equally necessary is a knowledge of those artists, critics, scholars, and institutions whose foundational work created the modern and contemporary theatre but are too often taken for granted or forgotten. Honoring their efforts would require historical perspective (often wrongly confused with nostalgia) that challenges the obsession with contemporary culture and offers a more solid grounding.

There is still more work to be done as PAJ Publications envisions its future. There are nearly fifty titles (of our over 150 published) still in print and distributed by Theatre Communications Group. It gives me great pleasure to announce that the press has acquired the rights to a long-out-of-print book that is widely considered a classic in the field, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* by Jonas Barish, with a new Foreword written by Joseph Roach. Today, for a younger generation of scholars rethinking theatricality and antitheatricality and, increasingly, the performative, this magisterial study remains timely four decades later. It will be available in the early fall. There may be titles from our own backlist to reprint or special volumes of essays to offer in the future, as new activities are considered. Meanwhile, the entire run of the journal (1976–2024) will remain available on Project Muse and JSTOR. Our issues of the zine for downtown performance that was published in the late seventies and early eighties, entitled LIVE, is free online on the home page of our long-time publisher, MIT Press Journals, at <https://direct.mit.edu/pajj>, where the journal can also be read.

Lastly, a major development in the ongoing life of the press is the recent acquisition of the PAJ Publications Archive and my Personal Papers by the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Yale University, which opens to researchers in 2025. This material provides a unique collection of correspondence, manuscripts, ephemera, book and journal files, focusing on the downtown New York and international theatre over more than four decades—a treasure-trove of cross-generational and cross-genre interrelationships that awaits new perspectives on this era.

Now, I want to thank our steadfast readers and all the writers and artists and editorial staff who have contributed to *PAJ* over nearly half a century, allowing us to bring to our followers in more than one hundred countries the important performance ideas, critical writing, and original works of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The journal began with a strong desire to engage the developing new forms of theatre, performance and video art, dance, and music outside the mainstream. It is gratifying to know that over the decades the ecology of this community has evolved in its pages to contribute to the ongoing writing and documentation of theatre and performance histories. Editing *PAJ* has been a wonderful conservationist endeavor.