

In Memory

Jim O'Quinn

A New York Editor from New Orleans
1947–2021

Jim O'Quinn, who passed on 11 October 2021 at the age of 74, was an extraordinarily fine editor — and a very good person. I knew him from the days he was an MA student at NYU. Jim worked most closely with Michael Kirby, my very close friend and at that time *TDR*'s editor. Jim was ebullient, direct, smart, and easy to be with. Jim was first a *TDR* assistant editor (1978–81) and then Michael invited him to become managing editor (1981–82). It was a time of big change. NYU's School of the Arts became "Tisch" and the Graduate Department of Drama morphed into Performance Studies. Fifteen *TDR* issues appeared while Jim worked on the journal, ranging from *Autoperformance*, *Women and Performance*, *Structural Performance*, and *Jewish Theatre to Dance/Movement*, *African Performance*, *Actor/Director*, and *Intercultural Performance*.



Figure 1. Jim O'Quinn. (Photo by Jamey O'Quinn)

In 1982, Jim found his life's work. He became editor of the Theatre Communications Group's newsletter, *TheatreCommunications*. Two years later, Jim transformed the newsletter into *American Theatre*, a full-fledged 10-issues-a-year magazine. In *AT*'s April 1984 premiere issue, Jim concluded his Editor's Note: "And, through its departments, its guest opinion columns, its editorials and critical commentary, the magazine aims for scope as well as depth. [...] Like its predecessor *TheatreCommunications*, *American Theatre* finds its focus in the non-profit professional theatre nationwide, but Broadway, international theatre and a wealth of related art forms also fall under its purview. We are pleased to have you as a reader." Under Jim's guidance, *AT* was lively, beautifully illustrated, and far-ranging — always nudging the mainstream to be a little more expansive and inclusive. Over time, *AT*'s readership grew to more than 50,000. Its contributors included major playwrights, directors, producers, and critics.

Jim retired from *American Theatre* in 2015. He returned to his hometown, New Orleans, where he'd gone to college, been a reporter for the *Times-Picayune*, wrote music for children's shows at Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré, and did some work at the Contemporary Art Center. Jim had a deep affection for New Orleans, which I share; and we had parallel experiences in NOLA: I also studied there, directed at Le Petit, and appeared at the CAC. The Crescent City is simultaneously american and international: black, white, hispanic, and french. A seaport opening to the Gulf, the Caribbean, and beyond, yet also where the Mississippi River points all the way to Chicago. This profoundly complex gumbo drew Jim back home.

Others have written powerfully and personally about Jim's abilities as an editor, his mentoring of writers, his visions for the theatre, his ebullience even when facing pain and hardship.¹ Todd London put it superbly: "Jim lived like one of those red-and-white ocean buoys that marks the opening of a bay, washed over by waves, pulled under by rip tides, before bobbing up again, shiny and bright in the sun, as if to say, 'Well, look who's here!'"

—Richard Schechner

References

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Lee Breuer

You Are Here and There, Both 1937–2021

On 3 January 2021 at around 11 in the morning, Lee Breuer passed. I don't write "died," though that's the biological fact. "Passed" is about movement, going from one thing to another. Near the end of his life, his longtime life- and artistic-partner Maude Mitchell told me, Lee shifted from fear to curiosity: What is that country from which no traveler returns? Is it oblivion, not a place or "state of (non)being" or anything we can describe? I don't know, though I think I know.

Lee Breuer was/is a great performance person. In the summer of 1970, Lee along with Ruth Maleczek, JoAnne Akalaitis, Philip Glass, and David Warrilow founded Mabou Mines, named after an abandoned coal mine near Akalaitis's and Glass's house in Nova Scotia. From the founding of the company until his death, Lee was a leader of the group. His works were many, but of their plenitude I remember these most vividly: the *Animations* (*Red Horse* especially), *A Prelude to Death in Venice*, *The Gospel at Colonus*, *DollHouse*, *Peter and Wendy*, and *Lear*. His brilliance as a writer and director was dazzling in his ability to fuse the popular and the classic, the culturally specific and the global. He embodied an unstoppable humanity, an enthusiasm in the ancient greek sense of possessed, inspired.



Figure 2. Lee Breuer (2007). (Photo by Tom LeGoff; courtesy of Maude Mitchell)

1. See Weiner-Kendt (2021), London (2021), and Berson (2021).

A few hours before he passed, I spoke with him, or rather to him because his eyes were closed, Maude told me. She said he was listening, he smiled. I told him how much he meant to the world, to me, to so many. His work was a stone in the great pond—radiating waves that effect/affect untold numbers, most of whom don't even know that they are touched and formed by Lee's art.

Lee: You are here and there, both. What you did here will live and change people. What is there is beyond my ken. But even if nothing, it is a nothing made more whole by your having been.

—*Richard Schechner*