

*Theatre Journal*  
Special Issue for September 2026  
“Institutionality”  
Call for Papers

In her introduction to a special section in a 2002 issue of *Dance Chronicle*, Sally Banes called for attention to an emerging subfield in dance studies that she dubbed “critical institutional studies.”<sup>1</sup> Distinct from what were established discourses of institutional critique in art history and visual and media studies, critical institutional studies would align more directly with critical museum studies, new materialisms, and Marxist criticism in its focus on material structures of support for dance creation, presentation, and reception. Since Banes’s 2002 call, predominant strands of “critical institutional studies” have emerged in relation to theatre, dance, and performance studies. These include scholarship in critical university studies that is more broadly concerned with how the arts function (or don’t) in “the” university<sup>2</sup> as well as more discipline specific investigation into what Sarah Wilbur calls an “infrastructural approach” investigating “cultures of support,” such as Hillary Miller’s 2016 book *Drop Dead: Performance in Crisis, 1970s New York*.<sup>3</sup> We could also consider recent works like Lisa Biggs’s *The Healing Stage: Black Women, Incarceration, and the Art of Transformation* (2022) and her analysis of the prison as an institution under the umbrella of critical institutional studies. Administrative and editorial labor are also matters of critical institutional studies, as Olive Demar makes clear in her incisive introduction to a recent special issue of *Dance Chronicle* on “critical institutional research.”<sup>4</sup>

Another angle on critical institutional studies, that of “institutionality,” “suggests that institutional characteristics can be regarded as a general condition of modern societies.”<sup>5</sup> Analyses of institutionality, the editors of a 2022 volume in political theory and ethnography claim, attend to the “heterogeneous, dynamic, and contingent” qualities of institutions and their histories, qualities that also might characterize the work of theatre, dance, and performance studies.<sup>6</sup> For this special issue on “Institutionality,” *Theatre Journal* invites submissions that consider “institutionality” as a keyword for histories and theories of performance across temporalities and geographies.

Submissions might address:

- Precarities of state institutional support for theatre, dance, and performance under historical, ongoing, and increasing authoritarianism
- Counter- or anti-institutional performance formations
- Institution-building efforts and their commitments to and refutations of cultural imperialism, colonialism, and white supremacy
- Figures, collectives, and performance works that advance institutional critiques (of arts presenting spaces but also of institutional spaces like schools, hospitals, parks, and prisons)
- Limits and affordances of institutionality for performance cultures, practices, and values often considered peripheral to the political economic work of institutions in modernity

This special issue will be edited by *Theatre Journal* Editor Ariel Nereson. We will consider both full-length essays for the print edition (6,000-9,000 words) as well as proposals for short provocations, video and/or photo essays, and other creative, multimedia material for our online platform (500-2,000 words). For information about submission, visit:

<https://jhuptheatre.org/theatre-journal/author-guidelines>.

Article submissions (6,000-9,000 words) should reach us by January 1, 2026. If this deadline is not possible for you due to extenuating circumstances, please contact Ariel Nereson to inquire about a possible extension. She welcomes questions and inquiries at [anereson@buffalo.edu](mailto:anereson@buffalo.edu).

The deadline for submissions to the online platform (500-2,000 words) is April 1, 2026. Online Editor Tarryn Chun welcomes questions and inquiries regarding submissions to the online platform at [tchun@nd.edu](mailto:tchun@nd.edu).

Submit via ScholarOne: <https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/theatrejournal>.

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<sup>1</sup> Sally Banes, "Introduction," *Dance Chronicle* 25, no. 1 (2002): 95.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Kandice Chuh, *The Difference Aesthetics Makes: On the Humanities "After Man,"* (Duke University Press, 2019); Ben Spatz, *Race and the Forms of Knowledge: Technique, Identity, and Place in Artistic Research* (Northwestern University Press, 2024).

<sup>3</sup> Sarah Wilbur, "Who Makes a Dance?: Studying Infrastructure Through a Dance Lens," in *Futures of Dance Studies*, ed. Susan Manning, Janice Ross, and Rebecca Schneider (University of Wisconsin Press, 2020), 362, 361. Shannon Jackson's *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (Routledge, 2011) nuances art historical accounts of institutional critique (as a genre) through discussion of theatricality as an aesthetic value and stage management as a labor practice therein.

<sup>4</sup> Olive Demar, "More Than Meets the Eye: Towards Critical Institutional Research in Dance Studies," *Dance Chronicle* 45, no. 1 (2022): 1-6.

<sup>5</sup> Yannick Porsché, Ronny Scholz, and Jaspal Naveel Singh, eds., *Institutionality: Studies of Discursive and Material (Re-)ordering* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 2.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.