

## **The Pursuit of Answers: An Investigation of Twenty-First Century Theatre**

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**Bio:**

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**Abstract:**

As Americans adjust to the high-tech life of the twenty-first century, accommodate to the heightened socio-political awareness caused by today's current events, and to the severe recession affecting the American economy, I observe distinct change underway in today's society. Electronically-based forms of media entertainment are becoming more popular than live theatre and produce a greater socio-political impact than live theatrical plays. Are such observations accurate? Can they be proven empirically? If these observations are correct, will live theatre become extinct or obsolete in the twenty-first century both as a popular form of entertainment and as a medium for social change? For this investigation, I will examine scholarly literature, survey two contrasting classes of students from the University of North Texas, and then report, analyze, and discuss the findings.

## Introduction

As I finish another year of college, I cannot help but notice certain changes going on around me. One of the biggest changes I notice is the technology. It seems like only yesterday that *YouTube*, *Facebook*, and *MySpace* were first developed, and now these websites are an integral part of everyday life. I notice how iPods, Blackberries, Bluetooth, and MP3 players have made most young people's lives easier, and then I look at the advancements made in theatre. I marvel at how, nowadays, people can not only view a movie in a movie theatre or TV but can also download movies from the internet or rent DVDs via *RedBox* or *Blockbuster Express* kiosks. I am also in awe at how people make their own videos/movies and post them on *YouTube* for the whole world's view. While I marvel at these achievements in technology I wonder how these forms of electronic media are affecting live theatre.

I notice that today's electronic media are becoming more political. The content of this media carries increasingly overt socio-political messages/propaganda. These messages reference today's current events, expressing concerns about global warming, the war in Iraq, the nation's dependency on oil, the push for green energy, and the economy, to name a few. I notice how these forms of media are used to demonize or ridicule certain past and current presidents or political figures in order to push certain political agendas and campaigns. Then finally, I notice how people react to these messages in an emotionally or politically-charged atmosphere either privately or publicly through the media. Some react by protesting in the streets, others by expressing disgust or disdain toward others with those they do not share the same socio-political opinions. While I know that theatre has always been a tool for social change to highlight and expose injustices or wrongdoings in society and in government, I wonder if live theatre is

fulfilling the same socio-political role it once did now that the electronic media has become popular. Today, live theatre seems to consist of only a repertoire of plays that were written decades, if not centuries, earlier.

Our society has a growing dependency on electronic media. With a click of a button, people can view videos and movies. They can rent DVDs for one dollar a day at any twenty-four hour *RedBox* or *Blockbuster Express* kiosk. Is live theatre becoming less popular as the use of electronic media increases? Will live theatre become obsolete in this century? What about live theatre's socio-political impact? With today's movies, documentaries, and TV programs becoming increasingly political, including more and more overt socio-political messages and opinions about current events, is live theatre continuing to spur social change in our society? Can live theatre stay socially relevant in today's lightning fast digital world? In order to help answer these questions, I first researched scholarly literature on the subject.

### **The First Step: Published Literature Consulted**

There does not appear to be any study or scholarly articles that directly address these questions, but several scholars have written articles that are relevant to my study. One article of interest is Jenkins's "Through a Glass, Nostalgically: The Death and Life of Broadway." According to Jenkins, live theatre and Broadway have been losing popularity and social influence since the development of radio and film in the 1920s. Jenkins states, "Straitened financial circumstances that followed the stock market crash, however, certainly combined with the rise of talking pictures after 1927—and an increased demand for creative personnel in films—to help depress new Broadway production. Technological change similarly affected theater as radio grew in popularity and accessibility as a form of mass entertainment."

Over the ensuing decades, Broadway's luster dimmed considerably as the number of new productions continued to fall and the excitement generated by Prohibition-era nightlife subsided with repeal and the lingering effects of the Depression (196).

Jenkins's article was written three years before our country entered into an economic a depression that is similar in many ways to the Great Depression. In both the 1930s and today, new technologies developed to improve and redefine mass entertainment. These technologies became available and popular despite economic downturn, whereas live theatre's popularity and social influence declined. While Jenkins's article comments on how live theatre's popularity was being replaced by new technologies before the 1990s and how radio and film have contributed to this decline in popularity and social influence of live theatre in the past, this article cannot elaborate on live theatre today nor can this article assess theatre's popularity or social impact. Jenkins's findings beg the question: if live theatre was becoming unpopular as long ago as the 1930s, why has live theatre not yet become extinct?

I consulted Dolan's article, "Performance, Utopia, and the 'Utopian Performative' " for an answer to that question. Professor Dolan investigates why people seek out live theatrical performances and describes how theatrical performances can influence a society's culture (455). Dolan's contention is that people go to live theatre because theatre defines and shapes society's culture. Through this idea, Dolan believes that theatre sets an example for our society by helping improve our culture. Dolan identifies the following reasons for audiences attending live theatre: to seek out new ideas and social change, to engage in a forum for political discussion, to feel the "magic of theatre" by attending a live performance, and the audience's inherent desire to see it (478). While, it provides some interesting insight to why people continue to see live theatrical

performances and how these performances contribute to social change, this article does not explain the extent to which live theatre motivates such social change or whether people still see live plays for a political discussion.

In Bay-Cheng's article "Theatre Squared: Theatre History in the Age of Media," Bay-Cheng recognizes the rising popularity of viewing recorded productions, such as movies and film, which Bay-Cheng acknowledges contributes to the decline of popularity of live performances (37-38). While Bay-Cheng predicts that recorded theatre will become the dominant medium for theatre both in education and in viewing theatre, he does not measure how far this trend has penetrated today's market. Yet despite these dire predictions, there seems to be a sliver of hope for live theatre. At least, this hope is what I found in my review of this article and other literature on this subject.

Saltz discusses in his article, "Live Media: Interactive Technology and Theatre," how theatre directors could use the twenty-first century technologies to better aid live theatre. Saltz acknowledges that "Interactive media" has affected live theatre by creating a new art form. "Interactive media" also alters the practice of theatre and impacts theatre history education (Saltz 107). What Saltz means by "Interactive media" is "sounds and images stored, and in many cases created, on a computer, which the computer produces in response to a live performer's actions" (107). Saltz argues the case for interactive media to improve live theatre while also warning of dangers by presenting an extreme example. Saltz notes that,

...If we take this reasoning to its extreme, we will soon find ourselves questioning the very institution of live theatre, including and most pressingly theatre's use of live actors. If perfect invariance between performances and the absence of risk were the ultimate

ideals, then live theatre would have no reason to exist at all in the twenty-first century.

(109)

Saltz reasons that if interactive media is over-utilized, the need for live actors may cease, ending the classical tradition of live theatre. To phrase the predicament simply, if interactive media were capable of doing the work of a live actor, then live actors would no longer be necessary. Live theatre would change forever.

In "Of Both Worlds: Exploiting Rave Technologies in Caridad Svich's *Iphigenia*", Gharavi critiques the previously discussed article by Saltz with the argument, "[t]he live actor performing with a prerecorded partner becomes, in other words, subject to the tyrannical inevitability of the linear media. For Saltz, this tyranny saps live performance of its most critical values: spontaneity and variability" (Gharavi 225). Linear media (analog) is the technological predecessor to digital media commonly utilized prior to the 1990s (Gharavi 226).

Gharavi disagrees with Saltz when he argues that spontaneity and variance in a performance are the most critical values. Gharavi argues that such values are only perceived by the audience if they are able to view repeated performances of the same production; therefore, spontaneity and variability are irrelevant (225). Throughout the rest of the article, Gharavi cites his own production of *Iphigenia* in order to demonstrate how new technologies, such as interactive media, could be used to benefit live theatre and not hinder it.

Apart from critiquing Saltz's article, Gharavi provides useful explanations as to why this new technology became popular when first introduced to the public. Gharavi recognizes that use of digital media in theatre has been caused in part by the success that consumer-level digital telecommunications have had in the marketplace in the 1990s. These inexpensive technologies



provided users with a simple way to create and manipulate content using projectors. Through these technologies, theatre and performance companies with even the strictest of monetary budgets would have been able to incorporate digital media into their productions (Gharavi 223-24).

Gharavi also states that widespread use of digital media may be accounted for by the ease of handling such technologies as home computers which are employed to distribute content. Gharavi names this phenomenon the “democratization of media,” calling it “one of the most notable developments in the cultural scene of the West during the last decade” (224). Gharavi further explains how digital media has greatly changed our society’s culture and media.

These technologies are so easy to use that every novice computer owner is capable of using them to distribute information and subject matter across the world via the media and the World Wide Web. The digital dramatic production is not produced or regulated by a big-name corporation, media tycoon, or politician but by common everyday people-hence Gharavi’s contention is that they constitute a “democratization of media.” Unfiltered distribution and production of media content has greatly changed our society in a way that is making a traditional medium, such as live theatre, less popular and contributing to a loss of social influence.

Based on the words of these scholars, live theatre appears to decline in both popularity and social influence. Performance is declining in connection to the popularization of new digital technologies. While these articles do not address this trend directly, they help illustrate not only how and why live theatre is losing popularity and influence to such new technologies, but also offer suggestions as to how live theatre could still be practiced in the twenty-first century.

### **The Second Step: My Own Study**

While I was able to uncover some interesting articles about live theatre, my questions about new technology, live theatre, its current popularity, and social impact were still not fully answered. Apart from questions I have already asked, how effective is live theatre today in terms of popularity and social impact? To help answer all my questions, I decided to take my study a step further.

To obtain empirical data to answer my questions and to support the scholarly literature I had found, I chose to develop and distribute a survey among two separate classes at the University of North Texas in Denton with the approval of the Institutional Review Board. This twenty-five multiple choice question survey examined the relationship between live theatre and electronic media and was designed to help measure and compare how many of the students watch live theatre versus the other electronic media and how each of these modes of entertainment affect the student socio-politically.

The two classes surveyed were those of two different subjects open to any college student because they fulfilled the requirement for the university's *College of Arts & Sciences*' core curriculum. The surveys were distributed only once to each class during the final week of the semester. Refer to Table 1.

The first class surveyed was "Theatre History After 1700." This class of 48 students (30 choosing to participate) consisted of mostly theatre majors (41) with a small group of non-theatre students (7) in regular attendance. The other class surveyed was called "Theatre Aesthetics." This class of 68 (60 choosing to participate) consisted of a mix of underclassmen and upperclassmen but contained a significantly larger number of non-theatre majors than theatre students (65 to 3 respectively). By gathering my survey data from these two classes and then

comparing that data both between the two classes and by themselves, I was able to discover some intriguing findings.

### **The Third Step: The Data**

#### **How Often, Why, and More?**

While it was not my original intention, I discovered through my analysis of the surveys that the vast majority of the students were between the ages of 18 to 25 with only a handful of students ages 26 to 35. This range, in retrospect, should have come as of no surprise to me, but it was an advantageous discovery all the same. What makes this discovery advantageous was that the 18 to 25 age groups contain young adults that would most likely use new digital technology on a daily basis. Surveying these techno-savvy individuals about the popularity and socio-political impact of live theatre versus electronic media should provide a clearer perspective about live theatre's current situation.

One of the first questions in the survey—and probably one of the most pertinent—was, “How often do you go to see plays?” The results among the classes were very different. Refer to Table 2. For example, out of the 60 participating students in the “Theatre Aesthetics” class, 72% indicated that they almost never go to see a play. On the other hand, of the 30 students in “Theatre History,” 57% of them said they go to see plays on a monthly basis. This finding begs the question, are theatre students more motivated to see plays than non-theatre students? Why would this be?

To help answer this question, I further examined the data. The second question on the survey was, “Why do you go see plays?” The answers varied between the two classes and were split in student majority between each class. Refer to Figure 1 and Figure 2. One thing I noted

about the data was that the students in both classes gave reasons that varied widely in percentages.

In “Theatre Aesthetics” for example, the modal class response (35%) was that the main reason going to see plays was to support friends or family that were directly involved with the play whereas only 20% of “Theatre History” students gave that as their reason. Another example is that, in “Theatre History,” the second highest class response (23%) was they go to see plays because they are a fan of one of the actors, designers, or directors, yet few students in “Theatre Aesthetics” responded with this choice as a reason.

Out of the ninety surveys taken, only five students responded that they go to see plays to learn about and contemplate current social dilemmas. What does that mean? Does that mean that Dolan is incorrect about live theatre being a forum for socio-political discussions?

Based on the survey data, these students do not attend live theatre primarily to participate in a socio-political discussion. I must ask, however, what if that is a desirable after-effect for theatre. It is commonly assumed that an audience’s overall expectation in going to see theatre is to be entertained, and, therefore, I speculate that another aspect is that people want to be actively engaged in a social or political conflict presented in a play. While I disagree with Dolan that people will go to live theatre primarily to participate in a socio-political discussion, I can appreciate Dolan’s thesis if it were viewed as a secondary, tertiary, or even a subconscious reason theatre-goers go to see a play.

After further examining the survey answers, I also noticed a difference among the students who viewed television, movies, and videos via various forms of electronic media. While the vast majority of these students in both classes watch television every day and 73% of all

students watch television for less than three hours a day, I was surprised to discover that comparatively few students who watched movies on TV, also watched, rented, downloaded, bought, or watched movies in movie theaters.

Although most students watch TV every day, the modal category of students from both classes (42%) only watched movies on television on a weekly basis. As for the rented, downloaded, or purchased movies, the students were split between students watching those movies on a monthly basis and a weekly basis. See Table 3. In Theatre History class, 53% of Theatre History students said they watched movies weekly while another 37% said monthly. Conversely, in Theatre Aesthetics, 32% of students said weekly and 50% said monthly.

I further investigated how often the two classes of students watch movies in a movie theater. According to the surveys the vast majority of students in both classes overall (61%) watched movies in a movie theater on a monthly basis. Comparing that to live theatre, movies in movie theaters are certainly watched more often, but comparing that data to the other electronic media, suggests that movies in movie theaters might also be on the decline.

As previously mentioned, the majority of students from both classes watched TV *every day*; watched movies on TV *weekly*; watched, rented, downloaded, or bought movies either on a *weekly basis* or on a *monthly basis*; and then finally, the vast majority of students watched movies in a movie theater on a *monthly basis*. The issue for this particular set of students seems convenience. To go to a movie or play in a theater, people have to travel to one location at a specific time to see the event. This constraint is not always the case when you watch a movie on TV or when you download, rent, or buy the movie. If attendance at live theatre continues to

decline in the twenty-first century, will movies in movie theaters be next? I will attempt to address this matter later in this article.

While it seems clear that not only live theatre and movie theater movies are on the decline in today's society, questions about the internet application service *YouTube*'s popularity remain unresolved. Through the use of the surveys, I discovered a three-way split in the classes surveyed. Refer to Table 4. In Theatre Aesthetics, 23% of the students said they almost never watched *YouTube*. In Theatre History, however, 40% said they watched *YouTube* daily compared to only a quarter of the Theatre Aesthetics students. Finally, in Theatre Aesthetics, 35% of students said they only watched *YouTube* weekly, an amount similar to the 33% finding in the Theatre History class.

As I have stated previously, there seems to be a correlation between viewing theatre, regardless of whether or not it is live or electronic, and being a theatre student. This topic would be a worthwhile for further study in the future. Despite the time that has passed since *YouTube*'s introduction, it seems that this website's popularity is not to be assumed and that interest in it greatly varies. Theatre students, more so than others, seem to be more motivated to watch *YouTube* than non-theatre students.

### **Issues of Convenience**

While examining the data, I wondered whether the reason for electronic media's growing popularity was convenience and ease of access in comparison to live theatre. I chose to investigate this idea further through the use of my survey.

The first question I asked was why the students preferred to watch electronic media over live theatre. The answer to this question reflected the consensus that electronic media is more

convenient than staged plays. This finding was similar for most of students regardless of class. The responses were: (1) it is more convenient; (2) it is less costly; (3) there is a larger variety of shows available on an hourly basis; and (4) the shows can be recorded and replayed at later times. These reasons would seem to explain the preference for electronic media.

The second question I asked was what mode of entertainment the students preferred. The two classes offered differing answers but their responses were predictable. In Theatre History, I discovered that 50% preferred watching staged plays whereas, in the Theatre Aesthetics, I found that 48% of students said they preferred watching movies in a movie theater. Although these results were foreseeable, what I found when I compared the overall outcome of the surveys did surprise me.

The overall preference for seeing movies in a movie theater was slightly higher than that for seeing staged plays (38% versus 30% respectively). The preference for viewing bought, rented, or downloaded movies was slightly higher than that for watching a movie on TV (14% versus 12% respectively). Was the issue of convenience the only determining factor as to why these students preferred movies in movie theaters over staged plays or *RedBox* DVD rentals over movies on TV?

In order to be certain about this finding, I asked the students if their expressed preference was the most convenient one. The results were puzzling. In Theatre Aesthetics, the results were split down the middle. Half the students answered that their preferences were based on convenience and another half answered that their preferences were not. Furthermore, in Theatre History, the class in which 50% of the students preferred staged plays, 43% responded that their

preferences were convenient and another 53% answered that their preferences were not convenient.

According to the data, convenience appeared to be a factor for the students seeing different forms of electronic media entertainment. Many students tended to watch more TV, movies, and *YouTube* than staged plays, and the vast majority of students even responded that convenience was a major factor in their choice. Concurrent with this finding, the classes responded that their entertainment preferences were split between ones that are convenient and those that were less convenient.

I consider three possibilities that might explain this phenomenon. These possibilities are not verified by my study, but might be when further examined. One possibility is that convenience is not a factor in determining these individuals' entertainment preferences regardless of times accessed. A second alternative is that these individuals are split between modes of entertainment where those they prefer are becoming increasingly inconvenient and others more convenient. Finally, a third possibility is overlap of both. The students could be using an electronic mode of entertainment more frequently despite the fact that they really prefer some other form of entertainment. This logic suggests that those individuals actually watch less of their preferred entertainment because of the inconvenience associated with their preferred medium.

### **Claims, Questions, and Socio-politics**

Since writing the introduction to this article, I made additional inquiries to ascertain how live theatre's socio-political influence stands as compared to electronic media. To obtain additional data, I surveyed these two classes asking questions about movies and how they



compared with staged plays. I asked if the students understood the socio-political messages and themes found in both forms of entertainment and if they ever felt compelled to improve society based on what they had experienced through watching these forms of entertainment. I will examine these findings in the context of other questions I asked later in this paper.

I found that the majority of the students in both classes claimed that they were able to identify and understand the socio-political messages and themes found in both plays and movies. However, the answers I received when I asked the students whether or not they felt compelled to improve their society were not as I anticipated. Refer to Table 5.

In the Theatre History class sampling, 63% of the students responded that they felt compelled to improve society after attending a play whereas 33% said that they did not. In Theatre Aesthetics, the majority registered a different response. In that class, only 42% said that they were compelled whereas 58% said that they were not. Examining the 90 total surveys, the results were 49% responding for feeling compelled and 50% for not feeling compelled. Only one student failed to answer the question.

While the responses about movies in the Theatre History class were exactly the same, the responses concerning movies in Theatre Aesthetics were surprisingly different. In the Theatre Aesthetics class, 70% responded that they felt compelled to effect societal change after watching a movie whereas 30% said that they did not. The overall results reflected the majorities in both classes in that 68% responded that they felt compelled and 31% responded that they did not. Again, only one person failed to answer the question.

Based on what I can determine by examining Table 5, I conclude that movies have a much greater socio-political impact on the majority of students than do plays. How can I explain my conclusion? Why are movies more influential than staged plays?

Here I must speculate that most plays that students see performed in community, college, and professional theatres are plays that are popular and widely known, such as *Peter Pan*, *Annie*, *The King and I*, and *The Merchant of Venice*. These plays were written in earlier eras before this generation of students began attending live theatre. Consequently, the socio-political messages of these plays were geared for other generations, not for contemporary students.

Because these plays were not specifically addressed to contemporary students, their socio-political impact may be too remote or difficult to access or determine. Therefore, I speculate that those plays do not have a strong socio-political impact. Movies attended by students, on the other hand, seem more contemporary and aimed at their generation. I speculate further that movies seen by students are movies that have been newly released. It should be noted that I did not ask specifically whether they only attended new movies. It may be that the messages in recently released movies better relate to the students and are assumed by them to influence today's society and sway public opinion on certain current events. Of course, that is mere speculation, but the speculation raises issues worthy of future research.

### **So What Can Change?**

This question beleaguers me: if the data supports the thesis that live theatre is becoming less popular and losing socio-political influence because it is dated, then how can this trend be reversed? Is it even possible to reverse these perceptions among contemporary college students?

In order to attempt a definitive answer, I surveyed students to ascertain which specific aspects of live theatre they liked or did not like. The responses were not terribly enlightening.

The first question I asked students was, “What might better motivate them to attend live theatre?” I provided several options including the use of more electronic media technology, more “razzle-dazzle” such as more pyrotechnics and death-defying stunts, and more outspoken themes relating to current socio-political events. Despite a small percentage of students indicating that they would be more motivated if such aspects were included, the modal response for both classes was that they were content with the way plays are performed today. The results were 48% for Theatre Aesthetics and 53% for Theatre History. When the students were asked what style of productions that they like best, the majority responded that they like a diverse range of plays. Preferences ranged from traditional to modern as well as futuristic or science-fiction styled. The students were also asked what they like about watching plays. The survey options listed reflected the quotes and findings that I noted through readings from the previously mentioned scholars.

In his article, Saltz notes, “Live performance is inherently interactive. The spontaneous give-and-take between performers and spectators, and among a group of sensitive performers, is integral to theatre’s appeal as an art form” (109). From that quote, I created the survey option asking if the respondent liked live theatre because of its live group-wide interaction between performers and themselves and the audience. In “Performance, Utopia and the ‘Utopian Performative,’ ” Dolan comments that watching plays differs from watching movies because electronic media lacks intimacy and connectivity between actors and audience (458-59). From this comment, I created the survey option which asked if the respondent liked live theatre

because electronic media lacked such intimacy and connectivity between the actors and audience.

After reading Gharavi's article, I reflected on how technology was used extensively in one version of the play *Iphengia* to display images on a screen that helped interact with the performers as well as create special effects. Such an extensive use of technology might have limited the audience's use of their imagination to fully enjoy the play. From this reflection on Gharavi's article, I provided an option in the survey for participants to indicate if they liked live theatre because they were better able to use their own imaginations. Then finally, I provided the options to indicate whether they did not like watching plays as well as an option for "none of the above." The majority of students in Theatre History (57%) and half of those in Theatre Aesthetics agreed with Dolan that electronic media lacked intimacy and connectivity between the actors and audience.

The results become more puzzling when the students were asked about their political opinions of movies and plays. In both cases, the 65% of the Theatre Aesthetics class and the 63% of the Theatre History class responded that the political views found in the themes of movies and staged plays were neither too liberal, too moderate, nor too conservative. Furthermore, the vast majority of students in both classes responded that they would not discourage others from seeing movies or plays in which such views expressed were different from their own nor would they stop watching a program on television if its political views were in opposition to theirs.

To me, this set of responses did not seem to make sense. Today's American population is frequently divided according to political ideology such as liberal, conservative, moderate,

progressive, Democrat, Republican, and libertarian. My expectation was that this finding would reflect these political ideologies, and that some respondents would say that they found the entertainment to be “too liberal,” “too conservative,” or “too moderate.” Instead the students responded that they would not discourage others from viewing a movie or play that was in conflict with their own political views, but with regard to broadcast media, their responses were similar. In other words, they also responded that they would not stop watching a program on television even if they opposed political views.

I can appreciate the students’ responses that, out of respect for other people, they would not discourage others from seeing such movies and plays. But what really confounded me is that these students also responded that they would not stop watching a program on television if it directly conflicted to their own political views. I expected that these students would have stopped watching such a program unless, of course, they had a desire to hear and consider the opposing views to perhaps re-evaluate their own opinion on a certain issue.

Were I to speculate, I might conclude that today’s youth are bombarded with so many political messages in the media that they have become desensitized to all of it, which of course would hinder the media’s social influence. Or perhaps, it might be that today’s youth have been exposed to so many differing political views that they have trained themselves to hear all sides of an argument in all political discussions. Again, this is an interesting topic for further research.

### **The Student Smith**

In a final attempt to bring about some clarity, I decided to conduct an interview with one of the students of the Theatre Aesthetics class. Student Smith is a pre-psychology major and chose to enroll in Theatre Aesthetics because of a life-long interest in theatre. Assuming this

student was representative of the Theatre Aesthetics class, through the interview I was able to discern interesting information pertaining to my research.

Smith and I both agreed that live theatre is becoming less popular. According to Smith, this decline is mostly due to the issue of convenience and a lack of effective advertising. Smith stated that rented, bought, and downloaded movies can be paused and replayed in the comfort of a person's home, making movies more popular than stage plays and more convenient because limited, if any, travel is necessary, and that newly released movies are much more readily viewed than newly produced plays because movies have a much more effective way to advertise via the use of commercials on television. Although some of the bigger theatre companies are able to afford commercial advertisements, nearly every other theatre company simply cannot afford them.

### **The Final Step: Conclusion**

I started this research to get answers to a specific set of questions, but I found that the answers to these questions have led me to ask more questions. Will live theatre become unpopular? Could theatre become extinct one day? Will its socio-political influence continue to wane? Yes, unless something changes. Will films being screened in a theater lose their popularity? One could say that this process has already begun thanks to convenient renting from *RedBox* and *Blockbuster* kiosks and the ability to download movies off the internet.

One of the primary goals of new technology and innovation is to make people's lives easier. With this awareness, I was not surprised to discover that live theatre is becoming less unpopular, whereas movies are becoming increasingly popular, especially rentals or downloads.

Using new technology and adapting to constantly changing technology is a definite challenge for theatre, whether community based or in another venue.

Reflecting on Smith's concerns, I do not know how local theaters could compete in expensive television media markets. As Smith noted, the comparative lack of advertising for live theatre on television deprives ordinary people from knowing when, where, and how to get to local theaters. Putting up flyers on walls and lamp posts appears to have become ineffective even as a method for reaching local populations, but that is my assumption. This inference can be verified in a later study.

In terms of socio-political impact, movies definitely continue to be a very effective way to influence today's society. Unlike stage plays, a single movie can be played in dozens of movie theaters in a single town as well as in theaters nation-wide. Also, rented and downloaded movies reach a much larger audience than stage plays, which of course, helps to make them more influential. Furthermore, newly released movies can be more timely and relevant to today's society and to current events and politics on a national basis than a stage play. This relevance, in turn, helps to keep the overall message of movies applicable to today's audience. It is also a challenge for any theatre with a repertoire that has been in existence for decades or even centuries, offering a relevant message is a challenge.

In conclusion, this study reaffirmed my earlier hypothesis that live theatre is being eclipsed by electronic media that more closely reflects the times in which we live. My study revealed that students felt that live theatre lacked the contemporary social relevancy. Electronic media, on the other hand, was able to communicate to these students even though it lacked the immediacy of live performance. What needs to change for live theatre? Should, for example,

municipal governments start funding commercial advertising for community theatres? Or perhaps live theatres should start selling and distributing video recordings of their performances or start to produce more contemporary plays that address issues that are more relevant to today's society. I honestly do not know. The focus of this study was to research some growing problems with live theatre, electronic media, and society—not to solve them. In the end, society and government will decide what actions, if any, are taken to address these issues. Regardless of what happens, I look forward to the future, and I am eager to embrace this new technological society and lifestyle.



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Table 1. Survey Pool Concentration of Study Including Participants and Non-Participants

<i>Theatre History</i>	
(30 participating)	
Theatre Majors	41
Non-Theatre Majors	7

<i>Theatre Aesthetics</i>	
(60 participating)	
Theatre Majors	3
Non-Theatre Majors	65

Table 2. How Often to Students Go to See Plays

	Theatre History (n = 30)	Theatre Aesthetics (n = 60)
Never	3%	8%
Almost Never	27%	72%
Monthly	57%	20%
Weekly	13%	0%
Daily	0%	0%

Table 3. Frequency of Viewing of Bought, Rented, or Downloaded Movies

	Weekly	Monthly	Other?	Total
Theatre Aesthetics	32%	50%	18%	100%
Theatre History	53%	37%	10%	100%

Table 4. Frequency of Viewing YouTube

	Almost Never	Weekly	Daily	Other	Total
Theatre History	13%	33%	40%	14%	100%
Theatre Aesthetics	23%	35%	25%	17%	100%

Table 5. Felt Compelled to Social or Political Action Based on Staged Plays and Movies

*Theatre History*

	Staged Plays	Movies
Theatre History		
Compelled	63%	63%
Uncompelled	36%	36%
Unanswered	1%	1%
Total (n = 30)	100%	100%

*Theatre Aesthetics*

	Staged Plays	Movies
Theatre Aesthetics		
Compelled	42%	70%
Uncompelled	58%	30%
Unanswered	0%	0%
Total (n = 60)	100%	100%

*Overall*

	Staged Plays	Movies
Overall		
Compelled	49%	68%
Uncompelled	50%	31%
Unanswered	1%	1%
Total (n = 90)	100%	100%

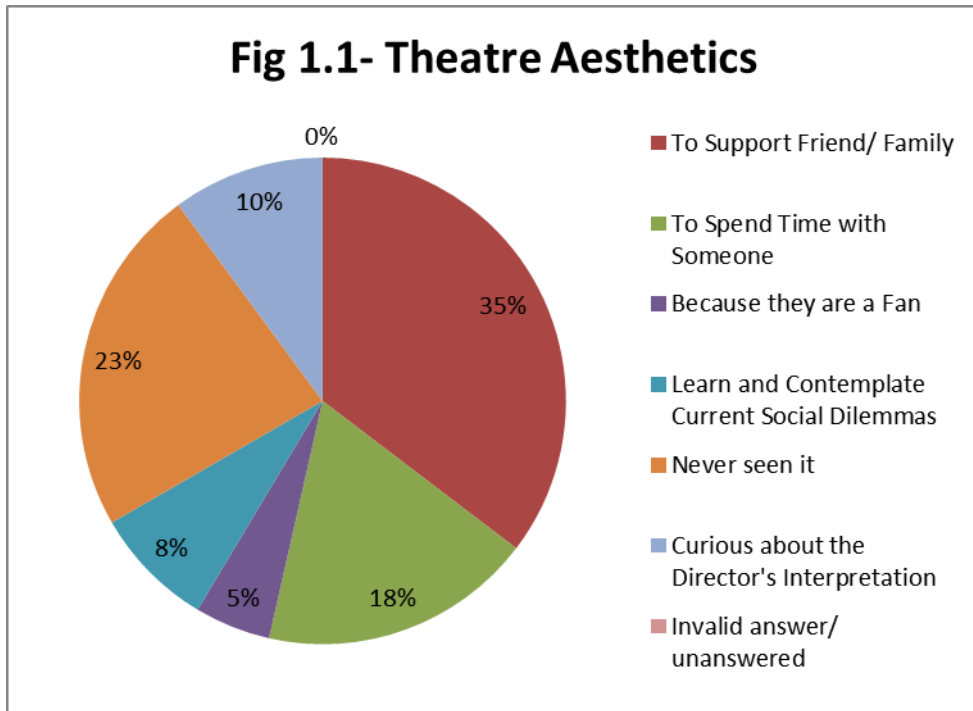


Figure 1. Theatre Aesthetics Class: Reasons to Attend Plays

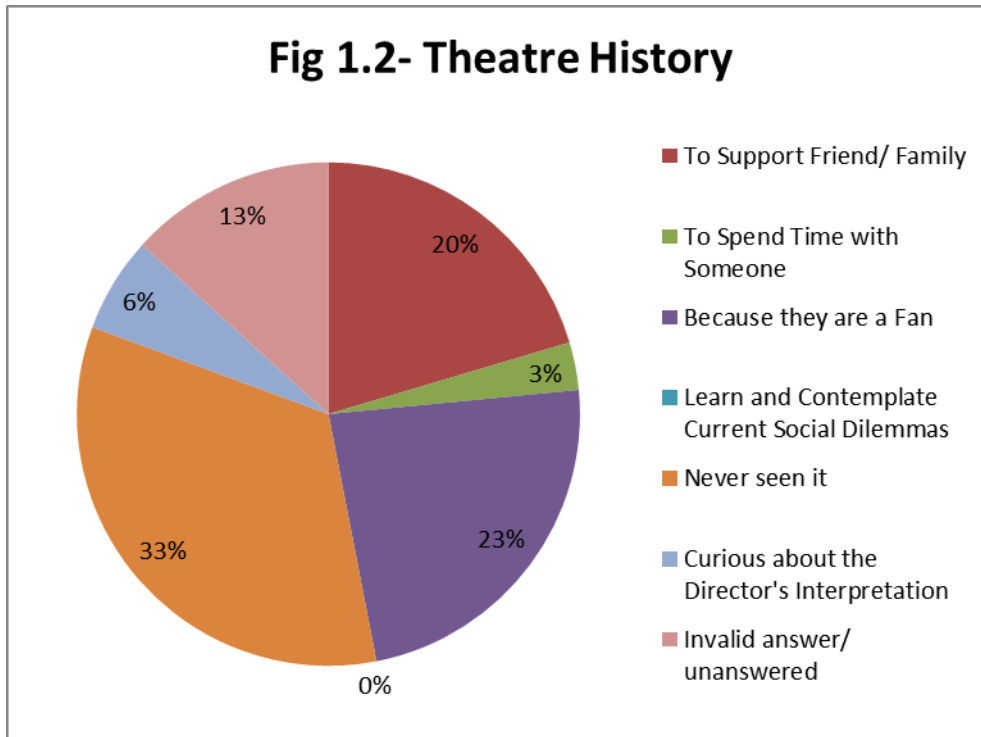


Figure 2. Theatre History Class: Reasons to Attend Plays