

Madeleine Quinn

Professor Dionisio

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The Public's Perception of Live Theatre Vs. Film

Abstract

In this proposal, I am requesting funding to further investigate the differences between live theatre and film, particularly focusing upon the general public's perception of each. While both live theatre and film primarily work to achieve the same purpose, each medium is viewed in entirely different lights. In modern day, film is regularly attended and discussed, while live theatre often falls by the wayside. True, theatre still possesses a large following, but these fans usually identify strongly as such, while an average person tends to more readily view film. But what qualifies this distinction? My goal is not only to discover these key differences, but also to delve into why these lead to such contrasting public perceptions. What precisely are the two views of the public relating to theatre and film and how did these form? I propose to conduct a general survey, asking people of all ages for their thoughts, critiques, and experiences concerning these two mediums. The results will then be demonstrated through an article complete with multiple tables and figures. The different tables will exhibit the collected data, while the passages of the article will explain said tables and apply these figures to general phenomenons.

Background and Related Work

Live theatre has been an important cultural element for thousands of years. Now, technological advancements threaten to overshadow this art form. While both mediums have their advantages and disadvantages, it's important to preserve and appreciate both.

Current literature deeply explores the relationship between the live arts and cinematic masterpieces, but the majority of sources seem to narrowly focus on only one particular aspect without viewing the big picture. Furthermore, many sources appear to be only interested in the technical disparities. Although this information certainly proves interesting and useful, a lack of public opinion exists. Many authors focus on the contrast between acting or directing for the stage versus the screen, but articles such as these offer only assistance for those hoping to explore career paths of acting and directing. Anyone that finds themselves simply curious as to the general distinction between the two will struggle to discover a clear answer in current literature.

Differences exist in every aspect of film and theatre, but, as mentioned before, the majority of sources seem to focus on the differences for the actor. As the actor is the primary point of focus (from a viewer's perspective) for both mediums, this only makes sense. Actor and director, Bill Britten, divides this study into three major sections: the first describing the relationship between actor and their audience (whether a camera or live people), the second detailing the acting techniques themselves, and the third examining the experience as a whole (Britten). German film theorist, Siegfried Kracauer, touches upon many of the same techniques, but also explores the extensive training and rehearsals required for live theatre while those in film sometimes even prefer "non-actors" rather than experienced actors in order to achieve a

natural appearance. He states that “the film actor must act as if he were not acting at all, as if he were a person in real life who happens to be photographed” while the “the stage actor must *accentuate* his costume, gestures, facial expressions and inflections” (Kracauer 201 and 202), succinctly distinguishing the two forms of acting.

Other studies focus on the differences in directing and how to go about transforming a play intended for stage to a movie on screen. In an interview with Sheldon Epps, long time Artistic Director of the Pasadena Playhouse and director of more than 150 various sitcom episodes, he speaks of the differences of time, rehearsal, audience, approach, and equipment involved when directing theatre as compared to film (Weinstein). Sarah Hatchuel examines the steps that must be taken in order to transform a Shakespeare play into a movie (Hatchuel). She details a step by step process before presenting specific examples and details of particular shows.

With this knowledge of what differences occur behind the scenes, I am now ready to turn to the audience. Matthew Reason begins to examine this perspective in his results and analysis of a study performed when children attended a live performance of Othello, concluding that “theatre-going is a learned activity; something that each individual needs to internalize in order to be able to concentrate on the performance” (240). However, his study considers only children and aims to scrutinize simply their experiences of theatre, film just happening to become a consistent point of comparison. I instead will incorporate all ages and focus on both film and live theatre simultaneously, rather than just one or the other.

Methodology

I plan to interview a wide variety of participants in order to achieve a random sample of the general public. Participants will be majorly chosen by random, but with a fairly even number

of subjects in all age divisions. I will begin the process in Los Angeles, California, conducting the first half of interviews, and then return to my hometown of Kansas City, Missouri, to conduct the remaining half. As Los Angeles is a unique city in its extensive access to the arts, the half conducted in Kansas City will work to ensure that a less dynamic city is considered as well. As briefly mentioned in the abstract, theatre-goers often seem to fall under similar categories, and as actors, directors, and other entertainment based professions will typically attend performances more regularly, for obvious reasons, the high concentration of these professions in an entertainment capital such as LA may off-balance what aims to be a very general sample. These results will be viewed both as a united entity and as separate elements, allowing the two to complement each other in addition to distinguishing each city's own culture of the arts.

Within these two samples, I plan to interview roughly the same number of people from four different age groups: 5-18, 19-32, 33-60, and 61-90. This diverse sampling will identify whether there is a discrepancy in age, especially pertinent as each generation grows up more familiar with technology and digital mediums. Matthew Reason's results, as previously mentioned, present only the views of young children, offering me a foundation upon which to build my hypothesis, but leaving open much room for disparate results.

I plan to ask each participant five questions and record each interview, with the explicit consent of the interviewee of course. This allows each participant to speak freely and expand as much or as little as they desire, without my needing to pause or cause distraction writing comments down. These questions will be as follow: When was the last time you watched a movie and when was the last time you saw a movie in theatres? When was the last time you attended a live theatre performance? Why have you attended [indicated medium] more? What do

you believe are the primary differences between film and live theatre? Which do you enjoy more?

Results

In order to convey my results, I plan to write an article complete with multiple tables and figures. The different tables will exhibit the collected data, while the passages of the article will explain said tables and apply these figures to general phenomenons. Additionally, while the tables and figures will strictly display the percentages of answers expressed, grouping together similar answers and indicating the dominating patterns, the written portions will analyze and interpret this data. I will closely examine my results from multiple perspectives and ultimately develop my own informed theory of the differences between film and live theatre from an audience's perspective, including how these differences are clearly demonstrated in the practices of the public.

Conclusion

Both film and live theatre are undeniably significant elements of human culture and society. They express true human interaction and depict the ultimate human experience, in whatever form that may be. But while both work toward the same ends, their means often conflict. Every aspect of film and live theatre possess both similarities and differences, endlessly overlapping in a twisted web of comparisons and discrepancies. Though many experts and scholars have attempted to explore this crossover, the majority have focused only on one particular element: investigating just one corner of this intricate web, rather than risk entanglement in the whole entity. These critics have primarily focused on the differences for actors, directors, and technical elements, but have stopped short of examining the audience. I

propose to conduct research to investigate the striking differences from an audience's perspective. What differences do they identify? Which do they prefer? What does this mean for the industry of both mediums? I will do this through surveys proctored in Los Angeles and Kansas City, interviewing people from varying age groups and professions. With my results I will write a detailed paper complete with data tables and figures plainly displaying my findings. With this research, I hope to delve into an area of study not thoroughly explored and discover outcomes that inform those pursuing film and theatre as well as the general public.

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Budget

Based upon my plans for this research, I will not require extensive funding. I will only require funds to cover printing of the surveys and my flights to Kansas City. Airfare will cost about \$300 round trip. In terms of time, I plan to spend about five hours conducting surveys in Los Angeles, five hours conducting surveys in Kansas City, five hours analyzing data and creating tables, and twenty hours writing and editing my paper, resulting in a total of thirty-five hours.