

## The New Faces of Criticism

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Conversation Notes

### Theatre/Performance Criticism in the Toronto Scene

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#### Current State of Criticism – Impressions

- Some detailed, some not; wish they all were the same length
- A little bit of information damaging because privy to assumptions
- Wish there was an equal amount of information available for every show
  - (From critic: 24-hour-turnaround can be brutal; critics are given word and time limits but don't want to write something unfair to the performers)
- NOW Magazine has a standard 2.5 paragraphs for every show — 200 words. Equal information.
  
- As print declines in the industry —> rise of technology —> you lose physical space.
- Hence, fewer/shorter reviews and *reliance* on shorter “capsule” reviews
- Space and length are a much more deep and complicated area of investigation
  
- **What is a reviewer?** Reporting on a specific experience. Sometimes, a reviewer has to review a play who doesn't normally review theatre. Fringe, for example, gets a lot of reviewers who aren't “theatre people.”
- **What is a critic?** Someone who is very well versed and knowledgeable about performance, theatre, the artwork that they're evaluating. Critics can take more of a macro look at it.

The **Toronto Star** has someone specifically covering dance, music, etc. — You don't normally enroach on someone else's territory.

Today's critical landscape — weekly papers and daily papers, two of which have regular theatre views/coverage in them. The Sun only does one or two every season.

#### What are the standards that we're asking of people writing that theatre? Or are we at a point where we want anyone to respond? Is there a place for everyone to respond?

- How do you decolonize reviewing?
- Two papers in Toronto, a handful of websites also running reviews — but some cities have one person, which is the beginning and end of the conversation.
- Counter to that: social media
- **Do professional critics have power?**

“There is power in the individual, I only wish there was more power year-round from the individual.”

- Nice to have as many voices as possible with different world perspectives
- Well-rounded idea of what the show is
- “The truth is in between what I think the story is and what you think it is.”

**The more voices = the more elements?**

- Power and reach
- Toronto Star has reach, etc.
- Intracommunity influence has a lot of social capital in community.
- Media that could bring in the middle class, the non-theatre-professionalized middle class.

(ie.) “John” — show in Toronto. Phenomenal show, but people did not go out to see it (until the last week of the run) even though every critic raved about it. It was a “hard sell.”

- Does the status of “**expertise**” in general / the elevation of certain voices / Does that actually make critics just across the board less powerful in this discipline because people are inclined to listen to institutionally appointed experts?
- Embedded art criticism — expensive and time consuming.

Do big institutions like Mirvish still “fear” a bad review?

- No fear of a particular person/individual anymore

### **What should a review do? And are they doing that right now?**

- It doesn’t do much unless it gives you something you want to know more about
- Coles Notes? — Don’t want reviews that give out spoilers.
- Criticism that speaks to the reader, or who the people who make it?
- OR criticism through .gifs? In a Twitter essay?

### **What form should a review take in the digital age?**

- “Five word reviews” for Fringe reviews — effective for Millennials? (shorter attention spans)
- Reader — what am I looking for right now? Gets away from the idea of “spoiling.”
- Reporting the moment about your feelings right after the show ends — on Twitter?
- Interesting to see if things changed for critics right in that period — after the show ends, they give an immediate tweet/feelings/reaction, and then follow it up later with a review.

“We are lucky in Toronto in that we have various levels of criticism and review, and diverse reviewers from different backgrounds.”

### **Do you think criticism is seen as something that is — have you ever thought (besides the people who have done it), has it ever been something that you’ve thought of as something you could do?**

Not wanting to be a reviewer because not wanting to “piss off peers?”

- Wish to stay respected among peers
- “If I give this person a bad review, will they not cast me next year?”

Training people as a critic vs. making your own opportunities / starting your own blog?

Do we know how to disagree with each other in this culture? Can things get easily toxic between producers and creatives in both/all directions?