

# Theater After Social Networks

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Technology has bizarrely embraced the whole life today. Every day, we are witnessing changes and breakthroughs in science and technology which influences every minute of our life. In one sense, no idea seems impossible to be implemented into a new technology. Science is eccentrically gaining momentum. Ralph Lapp (1961), in his metaphor of speed of science (concerning over the implications of the revolutions in science and technology), puts it very intellectually:

“No one, not even the most brilliant scientist alive today-really knows where science is taking us. We are aboard a train which is gathering speed, racing down a track on which there are an unknown number of switches leading to unknown destinations. No single scientist is in the engine cab and there may be demons at the switch. Most of society is in the caboose looking back-ward.”  
[Lapp, quoted by Alvin Toffler in *Future Shock*. Toffler 1971:431]

Meanwhile, social networks play a significant role in that they enhance communication among people and eliminate confining borders. This has increased our confidence and we have made more friends in virtual world compared to the real world.

People always go online to keep in touch with each other and get connected to the world. These networks and sites will soon take over our whole relationship and communication. Modern man is distinctly different from his precedents in the realm of science and communication. Indeed, every aspect of our life has been influenced by technology and social networks. Technology is no longer merely a part of our life rather it has made most of us its professional full-time users. The music of life is playing faster.

Now, what will happen to theater? Will technology take over the seats? How will theater take advantage of social networking? Is it time for the communication between theater and social networking such as Facebook, Instagram, and other companies, e.g. Google, and Yahoo.

Future's assault to our current life is so ruthless. The explosion in the use of social networks has entered us into the most complicated and perplexing era in the history. Technology has terminated the practice of performing arts which used to be dynamic and lively in even very distant places. Old and young people alike have created a considerable number of pages in these sites to be able to connect to others in every corner of the globe, while it has been for months and years to see a play. Due to a numerous reasons -political, economic, and social-, theaters in developing countries are increasingly getting emptier and emptier, while most of the theatergoers now spend their time on posting and sharing photos of diverse tastes.



Moreover, technology has facilitated access to the latest news and the events happening around the world, which enables the clarifying the information gained and criticizing the ruling systems' actions. At times, these pressures result in changes in the politician and the rulers' patterns of behavior, even in some cases it ends in the subversion of the ruling system. However, theater, unfortunately, merely seeks to entertain; it depletes itself from its critical and political nature, playing a luxurious and worthless role in man's life. The

most absurd scenario is when theater has a political stance but gives the same politicians and the wealthy the agency to influence people all around the world. In this case, theater is being two faced.

All the users of these networks have equal opportunity, advantaging no one over the others and it is only the page itself that attracts the audience not necessarily the power and the money.

Perhaps, with rapid advancements and constant changes in social networks and their impacts on our lives, we live in Paleolithic Age of technology. However, as the invention of writing system thousands of years ago brought much advancement, social networks would definitely enable us to make huge giants to continue the changes in future.

Looking back and analyzing the contemporary word issues and trends, one can easily notice that theater has been lethargic and suffered from a cardiac failure. It has come up with neither a new movement nor an innovative form which would attract more prospective spectators. All acting approaches and methods used are those adopted from theorists such as Stanislavski, Brecht, and Grotowski. There has been no theater development in line with economic crises, particularly in developing and advanced countries. Furthermore, there have been no attempts, on part of the activists in the field, to devise ways to raise funds and mechanisms to attract more theater enthusiasts!

“Since the 1970s, globalization has tended to push theatrical production in two opposite directions. On the one hand, large theatrical institutions caught up in the globalization process – many national theatres, international festivals, and corporations producing mega-musicals – have expanded, and their costs have escalated.

On the other hand, many artists around the world have dedicated themselves to local and regional theatrical institutions that have fought the incursions of Western capitalism and cultural homogenization in their local cultures and economies. Many grassroots theatres in developing regions – often operating on very small budgets – opposed the imperialism, political dictatorships, loss of economic control, and deteriorating social conditions that accompanied cold war divisions and globalization in their countries. If a large map were scaled to contrast the economic importance of all of the theatres

in the world in the year 2010, the theatrical capitals of the West and Japan, plus a few other cities with large festivals, would take up most of the room on what would be a very skewed drawing. Squeezed into odd pockets and corners of this funny map, however, in parts of Africa and in the inner cities and underdeveloped areas of Western countries would be many small but vibrant centers of theatrical activity.” [Rich and Poor Theatres of Globalization by Bruce McConachie in *Theatre Histories*]

There is not justice neither for spectators in different parts of the world nor do theater companies share equal opportunities. There are also some who turn their back to changes and acting as if nothing were happening and suppose if they pay no attention to a change, that particular change does not seem to happen. They want theater an elderly who is conservative, not as a rebellion and revolutionizing young person. Unlike cinema industry, theater seems to be unwilling to give a shock to the industry itself and to the world! Without doubt every kind of change would disturb some. However, if we search for innovative forms of performing or try to reach out more spectators, we need to take the current situation and the needs of modern people into consideration. To remedy, it is imperative to discern that “having a lively theater is not just paying attention opera and ballet houses in advanced countries while social networks have made their way into even the smallest and poorest towns and villages in the world.” [Kazemian, 2016].



For one thing, if we do not acknowledge the changes, technology whirlpool will eliminate all of us. Due to its particular nature of being performed live, theater has always been criticized for not being capable of being watched by a large number of spectators as it is the case with cinema. Now, what is theater industry’s plan for future? What innovation can we imagine in the particular case of a better communication of theater and social networks? Is it an opportunity for theater to be broadcasted universally?

Herman Kahn and Anthony J. Weiner (1967), two preeminent futurists, include a list of 100 future innovations in their book *The Year 2000: A framework for Speculation on*

*the Next Thirty-Three Years*. The list which is called “One Hundred Technical Innovations Very Likely in the Last Third of the Twentieth Century” contains predictions from several applications of lasers to new sources of power to new airborne and submarine vehicles to 3-D photography. One can also see such lists in other books. There have been numerous innovations in some fields such as communication, transportation, and almost in every other imaginable field and some fields which are rather hard to imagine (Toffler, 1971).

In a world where one of its criteria for freedom and human rights is accessibility to the Internet, theater can also take advantage of new technologies to provide equal opportunities for its spectators around the globe. Considering this rapid change caused by technology, today, more than any other time, we are in the need of approaches and insights and the means of absorbing more enthusiasts towards theater. Theater needs some tricks to make the whole world to buy tickets for each other’s plays, increasing the number of audience to millions of buffs, and making it possible for the people from even far-away places to attend theaters. Maybe, in the same vein as the biggest and toughest companies consulting futurists and science-fiction writers, theater industry also ought to consult these fantasists to break the glass ceiling of being attended and watched. Mobile devices and the internet has recently belittled even governing powers, thus, as a result, the flow of information is not transmitted via institutional media supported by those in power rather by social practice of sharing by laymen. Tech-

nology provides theater with the opportunity to step further from the imagined limitations and even would pave the way for inter-cultural performances. (picture 3)

One of the most primary opportunities theater using social networks can take advantage of is “live broadcasting”. Theater festivals, companies, and groups can use this feature of social networks and present their work globally and commercialize their efforts. Also, directors and dramatologists can create new forms and perceptions of performing by using social networks technically and innovatively. Employing new experiences opens new windows of opportunities in acting. As a result, the study and creation of new social networks for the sake of theater to share the information and performances of resourceful theater groups is not unimaginable. Theater is ubiquitous in our life and our routines. We are playing new roles every day. On the other hand, social networks have embraced our lives, too. We are expressing our emotions and experiences using these social networks. Thus, both theater and social networks are prevalent in life; they are a means of expressing our humanistic emotions and raising the awareness of the nations. It is a space for presenting ideas and criticizing the rulers and politicians. Theater and



Fig. 1 Teheran Nahand Theater, Teheran (Iran)



social networks are immense powers in the transmission of conceptions and traditions, sharing many different intercultural exchanges, which ultimately would help bridge the gaps and discover new talents and forms of acting. Knowing and investigating the future can reconcile us with possible changes. Then there would be no injudicious fear and resistance against the future world.

Finally, as the Canadian professor of media studies center Marshall McLuhan (1967) believes that “we shape our tools and thereafter our tools shape us”, we can be hopeful that technology and social networking will create a new window of opportunity for theater, encourage more people to watch plays all over the world, and persuade them to make more efforts in inter-cultural acting projects. We can achieve this goal if we prepare ourselves and take the appropriate actions.

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