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Mapping The Toronto Theatre Blogosphere

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Mapping the Toronto Blogosphere UWill Discover Abstract

Team Members: Julia Belton, Bry-Anne Edwards, Flora Janos, Avery Macdonald, Shahan Mansoori, James Monminie, Emma Robert

From online reviews, to live tweeting during a performance, to “liking” a production on Facebook, the blogosphere is transforming how we talk about theatre. Theatre criticism in the digital world is now a “team sport,” where audience members and artists play alongside professional critics (Fricker 49). This shift holds much potential: online critical discourse can help us develop a more diverse and inclusive picture of theatre reception and theatre-going cultures than print reviews, and expand the historical documentation of performance, which, as a vanishing art form, leaves very few traces of itself. However, the limited research in this area has yet to fully understand the role of the blogosphere in theatre ecology or how to archive the criticism found there (Collins ; Poll ; Radosavljevic). “Mapping the Toronto Theatre Blogosphere” is a new research project bringing together Dramatic Art and Computer Science students. It attempts to answer two key questions: how is the blogosphere changing how we talk about theatre, and how can we preserve the critical discourse occurring there? To answer the first question, we tracked and archived the online critical response (blog reviews, online publications, tweets, and Facebook posts) to a representative sample from the fall 2016 Toronto theatre season. Our resulting dataset was examined using a content analysis approach in order to identify which productions generated the most critical response (posts) online, the demographics of the posters (including age, gender, occupation, and ethnicity), and the purpose of the posts (including commentary on the production, socio-political commentary, endorsements, and check-ins). To answer the second question, our CS team member is developing an open-access website to archive the materials collected, which the public will be invited to use and contribute to once it is launched. Our preliminary findings suggest that the blogosphere is changing how we talk about theatre in three key ways: it is providing more coverage to new plays and plays about political or controversial subject matter; it is increasing and diversifying the participants in critical discourse, allowing women and people of colour more access into the conversations; and it is connecting discussions about theatre to other topics such as political issues and identity. Our UWill Discover presentation will summarize our findings about the Toronto theatre blogosphere and include an interactive demonstration of our database.

Works Cited

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