

Morton Marcus: The importance of seeing movies in the theater

Sentinel Staff Report

Article Launched: 09/14/2007 3:00:00 AM PDT

Tell me, would you rather see a film in a theater or, thanks to the new technology, in the comfort of your entertainment-center living room with its 40-inch wall-mounted TV screen, the lights low and beer or yogurt in the nearby refrigerator?

The majority of poorly attended theaters this summer seems to indicate the answer would be "in my living room." I hope I'm wrong, for I've found that whatever gains we make technologically we always lose important things in return.

The last time moviegoing suffered, more than 70 percent of the theaters in the United States closed down. That was in the 1950s when the new medium of television slammed into filmgoing like a giant wrecking ball, and the urban landscape is still haunted by old theater marquees above supermarkets and parking garages, not to mention the ghosts of fabled movie palaces.

Since the 1960s, filmgoing has picked up and, for the past 50 years, has steadily increased. But this summer, theaters showing independent or "serious" films found their business being sucked away by Netflix and Blockbuster, which registered a continuing call for "art house" titles. Sure, ticket prices are high -- thanks to the distributors, not the theater owners -- and mailing away for films and showing them on your new home entertainment center is easy. But as in so many areas where the new "gadget" technology has taken hold, it is usually accompanied by a decline in quality we cannot immediately perceive.

There is still something magical about seeing a film in a theater, even if the theater is not an Arabian Nights movie palace. Simply, in many instances the image is 40 feet, not 40 inches, tall and the picture is sharper. Television images, no matter how "high" the "definition," are still made up of lines and will never replace the acuity of the film image -- not in the near future anyway.

But there are more important reasons for going to the theater. First, it gets us out of the house. More and more, the new technology isolates us from the world outside our doors as well as from our fellow humans. Computers have made our children shut-ins, not explorers of neighborhoods and forests. If we do go outside, iPods keep us in our own worlds, oblivious to bird sounds, wave crashes, wind sloughing through trees. And cell phones, of course, make us bring our private-- and most of the time trivial -- communications into public hearing, not to mention taking our attention from the road as we drive the highways and byways of our daily lives. Home entertainment centers are just another form of this isolation.

In ancient Greece going to the theater was a communal, religious event, since the spring plays were a form of welcoming back the fertility of the land. Going to the plays was a gesture of solidarity with one's fellow citizens as well as a reminder of how the world worked and where each person stood in the scheme of things. With the advent of film, a more psychological aspect became evident. Enclosed in the communal darkness with the rest of the audience, the viewer experienced, both as community member and individual, the culture's dreams and ideals enacted by the 40-foot-tall, god-like images on screen. That darkness was like returning to the womb, the very beginning of the individual's universe, and induced a comfort and openness that has been discussed by some as akin to contemplation without distractions, or to being in church, or communing directly with a deity.

Take a test: See a film at home and then see it again in a theater. The beer in the refrigerator may not be handy, but a whole different experience awaits you, one that in this world of isolating technological novelties we can't afford to lose.

Contact Morton Marcus at wbaine@santacruzsentinel.com.

- Find a Rental
- Find a Business
- Find Stuff
- Get Grocery Coupons
- Special Sections**
- Newspaper in Education
- SantaCruz PHOTOGALLERY
- Sentinel Triathlon
- Santa Cruz Live
- TV Schedule
- Alternative Cancer Treatment Clinic
- Attorney Finder Lawyer Search
- Aupairs & nannies available
- Bridesmaid Dresses
- Cellit Mobile Marketing
- Chrysler
- corporate awards
- Debt Management
- Diamond Rings
- Internet Auctions
- Magic Love Spells
- Moving Companies, Movers
- Personal Loan
- Reverse Osmosis Water Softener
- Vacation Home Rentals
- yellow pages
- Stem Cell Medicine
- Alternative Cancer Treatment
- Sea Logix Pharmaceutical Grade Fish Oil
- Support our Troops
- Credit Help Resource
- Santa Cruz Real Estate
- Free on-line dating: Deception services
- Moving Companies
- Online Degrees
- Isagenix
- 2009 Calendars
- Property South France
- Apartment Amsterdam
- Property Provence
- Property Provence