I consider myself to be well-educated. I can sit down and have an intelligent conversation on any number of topics from philosophy to history, current events to literature, and if you want to go a few rounds of movie trivia, I’m often a very challenging opponent. However, despite all my hard work, people still call me uncultured simply because I have little appreciation for one field: the theater.

Many people have tried to convince me that staged performances are far superior to the cinematic experience and while I can definitely see why they feel this way, I see no reason why one should be tagged as uncultured because of it. In fact, I’ve developed somewhat of a theory of my own. It is my belief that because today’s pop culture is essentially defined by our films and music, they are what unquestionably define the American culture. Any attempt one makes to ignore that seemingly undeniable fact ought to define them as the uncultured of America.

For example, while some may ask me how I can consider myself cultured without having seen Rent or Les Miserables, I ask how one can go through life in America without having seen The Godfather or Citizen Kane. On a day-to-day basis I’d say more people make casual reference to The Silence of the Lambs than The Phantom of the Opera and while surely not every movie is worth seeing, after all we’ve admittedly got our Ben Affleck and Reese Witherspoon releases, there’s always a Broadway show every bit as ludicrous like Cats. I’ve been told that there isn’t as much that goes into a blockbuster release as a staged performance and that there’s no thought process involved. I’ve been told that there’s nothing that can be taken out of the cinematic experience of any real social or educational value, but I do not agree.

Cinematography is an art completely lost in the theater where the camera, its movements and its positioning, become just as important in telling a story as the words printed in the script. Granted, while cinematography is likely lost on forgettable B-movies like Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle and Napoleon Dynamite, it adds entire dimensions to masterpieces like Schindler’s List and Psycho (1960) that allow viewers to lose themselves in the performances and suspend their disbelief in a way that would be impossible to directly translate to the stage. Don’t get me wrong, it’s not that I have no respect for the theater, I’ve frequently enjoyed Rider productions (The Children of Fatimah and Musical Chairs were particular favorites of mine over the past few years) and, when I have the time, there are few books I see that I reach for more often than the screenplay for Mischief, but I feel that there is nothing uncultured about a person who prefers the cinema over the theater. Clearly it has surpassed the theater in both production and popularity. So the next time you find yourself scoffing at a film fanatic because they can tell you the home planet of Luke Skywalker or the speed at which a DeLorean will break the space time continuum, ask yourself if it’s justified or if you’re just falling out of touch with today’s American culture.