

The Audience





THE ACTOR-AUDIENCE RELATIONSHIP

- The relationship between the actors and the audience is the foundation of the theater experience: it is a personal exchange that gives theater its special quality.
- In the theater the actresses and actors can hear the laughter of the audience, sense their silence, feel their tension. In short, the audience can affect, and in subtle ways change the performance of the actor's and actresses who are trained to respond instinctively to audience feedback.

Audience as Evaluators

- The members of the audience watch the performers closely, constantly evaluating, consciously and subconsciously, how skilled they are and if their characters are believable.



How should the audience be involved?

- Drama is not life, but it reflects life , like looking at a reflection of life in a mirror. Like looking in a mirror requires a separation between the person looking and the mirror itself, theatre requires a separation between the play (actors, scenery, etc) and the observers (the audience).
- This separation, or distance is known as *aesthetic distance*, and it is necessary in the theater.

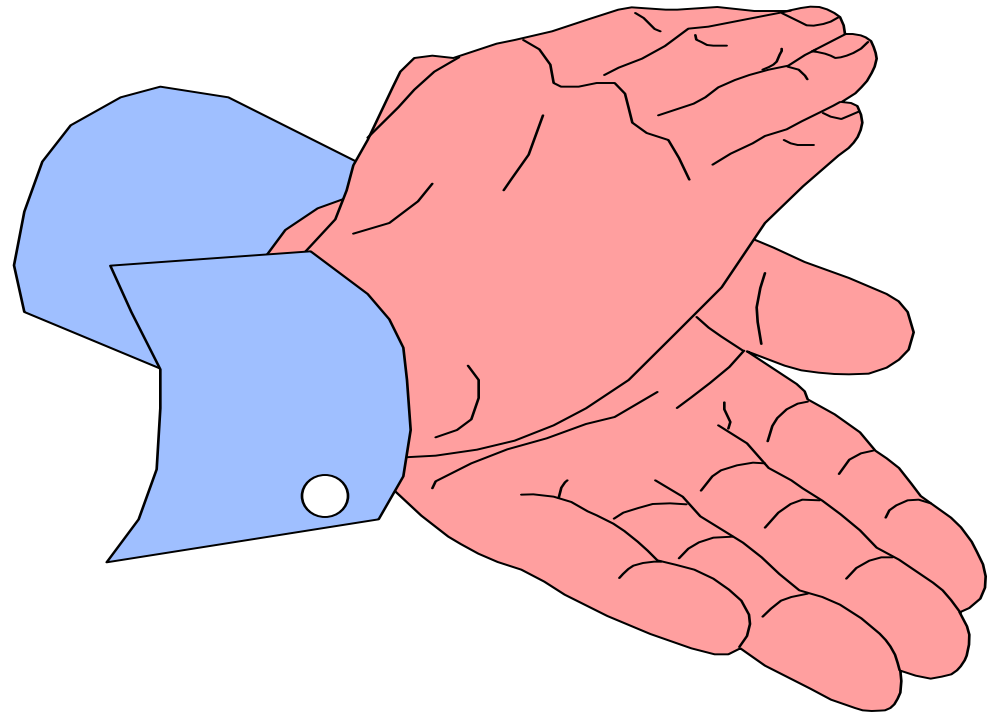
How should the audience be involved? (cont..)

- The audience is involved by allowing their imagination to believe, for a moment, that the reflection of life on the stage is real. This is called responding empathetically. *Empathy* means we enter into the feelings or spirit of another person - in this case, a character on a stage.

Audience Etiquette

For the Theatre-goers

- Dress for the occasion
- Be prompt
- be considerate
- respect property
- keep quiet
- participate
- stay
- appreciate

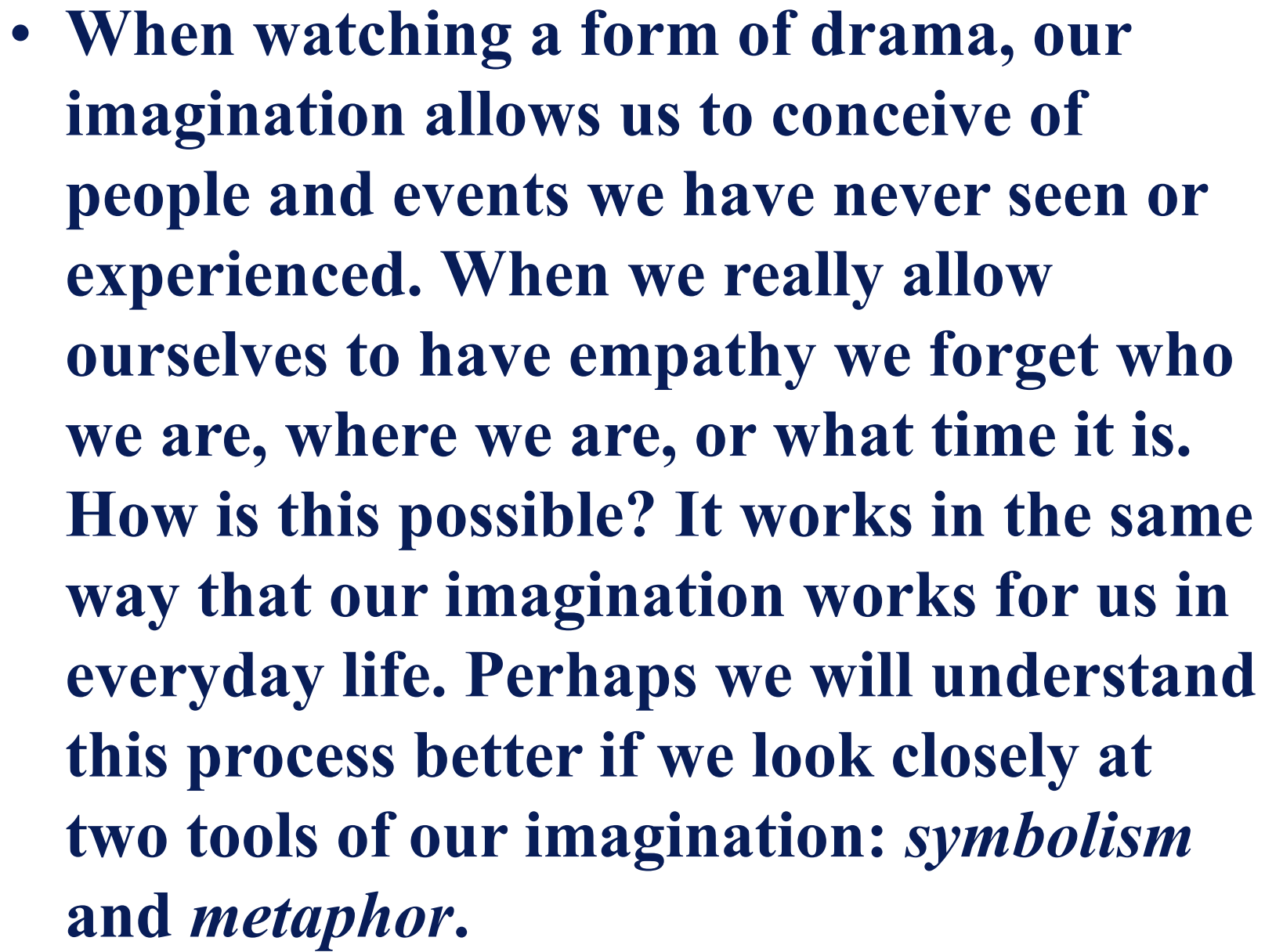




Audience Etiquette

for drama class performances

- **Keep Quiet**
 - coughing, whispering or shuffling papers will disturb the actors and your neighbors
- **Participate**
 - bring your imagination skills. Let your emotions respond. Listen
- **Appreciate**
 - Applaud **ALWAYS**

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- **When watching a form of drama, our imagination allows us to conceive of people and events we have never seen or experienced. When we really allow ourselves to have empathy we forget who we are, where we are, or what time it is. How is this possible? It works in the same way that our imagination works for us in everyday life. Perhaps we will understand this process better if we look closely at two tools of our imagination: *symbolism* and *metaphor*.**

symbolism

- In general terms, a *SYMBOL* is a sign, token, or emblem that signifies something else. A simple form of a symbol is a sign. Signs stand for a single uncomplicated idea or action. We see signs around us all the time. A car horn, a stop sign, mathematical symbols like + and =, and even the letters we write and the words we speak are symbolic.

symbolism (cont..)

- Psychiatrist Carl Jung said “ symbols can represent many things beyond the range of human understanding, we constantly use symbolic terms to represent concepts we cannot define or fully comprehend.”
- Whatever for a symbol takes - language, flags or a religious emblem like the cross - it can embody the total meaning of the religion, nation, or idea.

Metaphor

- Metaphor is another form of imaginative substitution. With metaphor we announce that one thing is another in order to describe it or point up its meaning more clearly.
- Like symbols, metaphors are part of the fabric of life, as the following common expressions suggest:
- *“That’s the bomb”, “He’s really out of it.”, “That’s off the chain”, “He’s hot”*

Metaphor (cont..)

- These are metaphors; we are saying one thing but describing another. Everyone knows, for instance, that the statement “He’s hot.” does not mean that a young man is sweating profusely. The meaning is still perfectly clear: He is good looking.
- Metaphor, like symbolism, is part of everyday life.

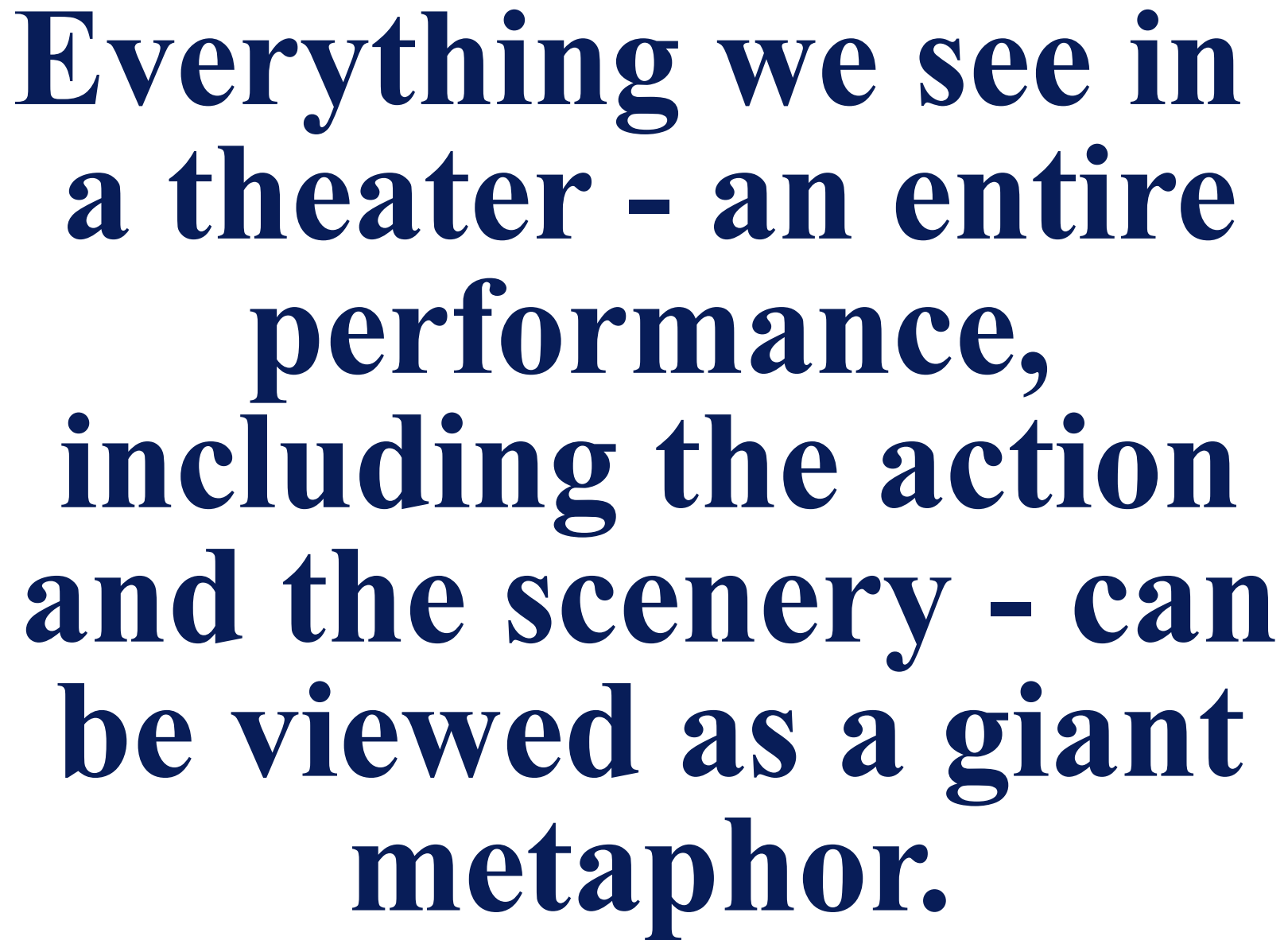
Theater is a metaphor

- Theater is a great example of both symbolism and metaphor. Though the situation and characters are pretend; if you, as an audience, allow yourself to empathize with them, it can be painfully real in an emotional or intellectual sense.
- Within theaters there are symbols and metaphors all over the place! All characters portrayed on a stage are symbolic of real people. Costumes and scenery are created to be symbolic, or to represent the real thing.

Theater is a metaphor

(cont..)

- Besides using symbols and metaphors, it can be said that **Theater itself is a metaphor.**
- When an actress stands on stage dressed as a witch, she does not say “I am going to act like a witch now,” she just acts the way she imagines a witch would act. In the same way, a theater program would not read “a room designed to look like Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.” It simply says “Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.”

A decorative border of colorful triangles (red, yellow, blue, pink, grey, black) surrounds the text.

**Everything we see in
a theater - an entire
performance,
including the action
and the scenery - can
be viewed as a giant
metaphor.**



SEPARATING STAGE REALITY FROM FACT

- » **No Matter how much you allow yourself to believe what is happening on stage, a film, or a television program, it is still different from the reality of everyday life.**
- » **You can be distracted from your imaginary reality by an actor forgetting a line, somebody next to you getting up and going for more popcorn, or your parent calling you from the next room.**

SEPARATING STAGE REALITY FROM FACT (CONT..)

- » Most of the time, though, we allow ourselves to imagine that what we are seeing is real during the time we are watching it. This is called a *Willing suspension of Disbelief*.
- » This Willing suspension of disbelief is made possible because of the *aesthetic distance* mentioned earlier. We all understand that what we are seeing isn't real, but the mind is prepared to go along with it in order to enjoy the experience.

Summary

- The actor-audience relationship is a “live” relationship : each is in the other’s presence, in the same place at the same time. It is the exchange between the two that gives theater its unique quality.
- Theater, unlike television or film, is a group experience. The makeup of the audience has direct bearing on the effect of the experience.
- For the person in the audience, theater is an experience of the imagination and mind. Our minds are capable of accepting what is taking place, who the characters are, and when and where the action occurs.
- Our minds are capable of leaps of the imagination not just in the theater, but in our everyday lives, where we employ symbol and metaphor to communicate with one another and to explain the world around us.

Summary

- Theater, films and television are closely linked to the society in which it is produced; it mirrors and reflects the attitudes, philosophy, and basic assumptions of its time.
- All individuals in the audience bring their own personal backgrounds with them - these become part of their response to the play.

**Remember - whenever you turn on
the TV, go to a movie, or to a
theater... you are responsible for
being a good and imaginative
member of the audience!**

