

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FILM AND THEATRE

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Abstract

There are some differences that must be taken into consideration and addressed in the course of the work. The first and most obvious of these is the question of size. We've examined the issue of size of screen in the chapter about the actor and the camera, particularly in the use of close-ups, but here I am referring to another aspect that is almost the opposite concern. It is that in theatre, the presence of a proscenium, or whatever separates the live audience from the actors, demands a certain level of projection. It is not only necessary to be seen and to project the actions and activities clearly, the actors must also be heard and understood in the upper reaches of the balcony. The actors training therefore must include the ability to retain the truth of their characters while finding a level, often slightly larger than life, that will project that reality to the large watching audience. The camera, conversely, is like a microscope examining the actor's every move, the slightest twitch. But the quick wink of an eye, so telling on the screen, might be lost to an audience of more than 25 in a theatre environment.

Key Words:

The Language: A Similarity, Size: A Difference, Environment: The Theatre and the Film Set, Venue: Where's The Actor? Where's The Audience?, Script: Shakespeare Doesn't Write Movies,

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FILM AND THEATRE

The general misconception held by most laypeople and some professionals seems to be that there must be a difference between the crafts of directing and acting in theatre and those in film. The belief is that there are stage actors and screen actors, film directors and theatre directors. I don't agree with this. It is true that some actors and directors have more experience in one or the other form and thus have to make adjustments or add their awareness of certain elements in crossing over. But it is my contention that the basics of the crafts remain the same. However, it is true that the skilled actor does not necessarily automatically become the skilled director nor should one assume that the skilled director can also act.

The list of actors goes on and on, but what do they all have in common? Each of them started as a stage actor but is better known for being an Academy Award-winning film actor. Clearly, using these actors as examples leads to the conclusion that the acting skills learned in the theatre can translate to film. Put another way, acting is acting, whether you are on stage or in front of a camera.

However, there are key differences between the stage and the screen that need to be understood. Moving between theatre and film can be equated to a painter who moves between acrylics and watercolors. The painter is still a painter, but the medium has changed and, therefore, the process will change. For an actor, knowledge of the difference in the environment, venue, and script between theatre and film is crucial to becoming a double-threat.

The Language: A Similarity

What is certainly the same, at least in my approach, is the language of communication. Although the director's work calls for an overview of the Material and an awareness of the throughline and outlines for each character as opposed to the actor who simply has to focus on

his/her own role, the means of communication by which the actor and director collaborate to lift the words off the page and breathe life into them can be the same. My workshops, which always include actors, directors, and yes also writers, all work together with the same approach. The results are testament to the fact that this can be done successfully.

The realities of economic survival demand that both actors and director be capable of moving with ease from theatre to film or television if they have the desire for a roof over their heads and food on their tables. It is well known among members of our industry that working in the theatre is a luxury ill afforded if it means taking time from the much more lucrative remuneration offered by film and television. There is frequent mourning by the theatre community over the apparent loss of talented playwrights who have opted for the good life by writing screenplays and who have seemingly deserted the theatre. In the days of what is lovingly called the "golden age" of theatre (the forties, fifties, and sixties), the motion picture industry derived much of its material and talent from the theatre. Plays were purchased from successful runs on Broadway and adapted into films. Actors were discovered in Off Broadway plays and quickly became stars, As I write this book, it seems the worm is turning: Work initiated in film is adapted for the stage. Actors known entirely for their film work are appearing for the first time on the boards and even directors, some of whom began in the theatre, are either returning to the fold or trying on the experience of directing theatre for the first time. And this is all happening with varying degrees of success or failure.

Size: A Difference

There are some differences that must be taken into consideration and addressed in the course of the work. The first and most obvious of these is the question of size. We've examined the issue of size of screen in the chapter about the actor and the camera, particularly in the use of close-ups, but here I am referring to another aspect that is almost the opposite concern. It is that in theatre, the presence of a proscenium, or whatever separates the live audience from the actors,

demands a certain level of projection. It is not only necessary to be seen and to project the actions and activities clearly, the actors must also be heard and understood in the upper reaches of the balcony. The actors training therefore must include the ability to retain the truth of their characters while finding a level, often slightly larger than life, that will project that reality to the large watching audience. The camera, conversely, is like a microscope examining the actor's every move, the slightest twitch. But the quick wink of an eye, so telling on the screen, might be lost to an audience of more than 25 in a theatre environment.

In the previous chapter i've referred to the case where, when working with talented trained actors who have had extensive background in theatre but little or no film experience, my film students have, on viewing their dailies, had rude surprise. What seemed so right in the protected intimacy of the rehearsal hall suddenly leaps from the screen seeming pushed or indicated. What happens is that the actor goes into performance mode in front of the camera and reflexively projects in the manner customary to the theatrical experience. Without realizing the effect that this seemingly slight change might have on the balance between actors, the choice of actions, and so on, the team presses blithely on. It is a sad moment in the editing room when the director realizes that the lack of attention to even the most subtle of changes in the actor's performance might make it necessary to reshoot or, even worse, to settle for something less than desirable.

Environment: The Theatre and the Film Set

Theatre is a nurturing art form. The best of theatre productions have adequate rehearsal time, cast bonding, and time to experiment with the director before opening night. Stage actors become familiar with their roles slowly and by the time they perform publicly, they have practiced dozens of times.

In contrast, film sets are chaotic places packed with specialized, high-paid artists. For an actor, this presents several challenges. For one, you will receive very little, if any, rehearsal time. For another, depending on the size of the role, you may not receive any direction. Films hire actors under the assumption that they will come to set performance-ready.

Preparation is vital in both theatre and film, but the process of preparation is vastly different. In addition, the pace of filming pressures actors to hit their performance quickly. Theatre actors, especially, may find the pace of a film set to be jarring, so be extra prepared and flexible when new to film.

Venue: Where's the Actor? Where's the Audience?

The literal difference in physical location between theatre and film is one of the greatest obstacles for actors who are transitioning into a different medium. It is often said that theatre actors are "big" and film actors are "natural." This is a result of the venues in which the actors perform.

In a theatre, actors and audience are separated by a distance ranging from a few feet in a small black box to hundreds of feet in a large auditorium. Everyone in the audience needs to see the action and hear the dialogue on stage, so theatre actors must exaggerate their movements and speak loudly to bridge the gap. Films, on the other hand, use a camera to eliminate the distance between performer and observer. The presence of the camera, lights, microphones, special effects, and music all serve to enhance a film actor's performance, so no embellishment is needed. Cameras pick up every twitch, inflection, and subtle pause that an actor has and on film, the actor's goal is to replicate reality. Speak to the other actors as you normally would and gesture as you normally would.

Script: Shakespeare Doesn't Write Movies

When audiences attend a play, they know what to expect because plays are performed repeatedly and scripts are publicly available to read. Think about how many times Romeo and Juliet has been performed around the world thousands upon thousands of times, to the point that the story is a cultural icon. Such knowledge creates an expectation in the audience. They want to see and hear the story that they are familiar with and they will tolerate very little change

The beauty (and difficulty) of film and television is that the scripts are being produced for the first time. There are no past performances to be compared to and the audience has no preconceived notion of what the characters should look and sound like. This gives film actors more freedom in performance. No one knows if you flub a line or forget some blocking. The only thing that matters on camera is a realistic performance.

Many of the best actors started in the theatre and made the switch to film and television later in their careers. The techniques, skills, garnered as an actor in one medium can translate nicely into the other. However, understanding the unique characteristics that distinguish the stage from the screen is necessary to guarantee an actor is prepared.

- Experiencing Theatre - the influences of theatre -
- Theatre, like all performing arts, takes place in time as well as space.
- We use the word theatre to describe activity in daily life.
- Theatricality is all around in many of the popular art forms that engage. The relationship between theatre, film and television is very apparent.
- On television, we see a wide range of dramatic offerings: daytime soap operas; Nighttime situation comedies, Hospital and police shows, News documentaries.
- Movies provide dramatic material of many kinds.
- Theatre also informs rock and roll in a variety of ways
- Current rock concerts are often highly theatrical events, using live performers, lights, sound, costumes and props that are multimedia stage presentations

1. Historical - Theatre is the foundation of all drama.

- The ancient Greeks established the categories of tragedy and comedy 2500 years ago that are still used today.
- They also developed dramatic structure, acting, and theatre architecture (at least for the Western world).
- Each time we see a performance we are participating in theatre history.

2. Theatre is different from all other forms of theatrical presentation because it is live.

- In many ways, the presentation of drama in theatre, film and television are much alike: Both offer a story told in dramatic form - an enactment of scenes by performers who speak and act as if they were actually the people they represent.
- There is a fundamental difference when we contrast theatre to movies (and it has nothing to do with technical differences) - *it is in the relationship of the performer to the audience.*
- Theatre's unique ability to incorporate into dramatic material profound, provocative, timeless observations about the human condition.

Elements of Theatre

- Performers
- Dramatic Action embodied in a Text
- Structure in Drama - Essentials of Dramatic Structure –
- The structure of a play is analogous to that of a building
- Plot
- Action
- Conflict
- Opposing Forces Balance of Forces
- Unities
- Theatre vs. Film -
- Theatre -
- Performance is • Intimacy
- Connection with the audience.
- Spectacle may be present.
- Each performance is unique and different

- The playwright is sacrosanct. There is respect for the author's work.
- A highly specialized cadre of creative and technical positions.

Film-

- Originates in the early 20th century.
- Performance is recorded.
- Intimacy is gained through camera angles and close ups.
- No direct connection with the audience.
- Each performance is identical.
- Spectacle is often present.
- Technical effects are often cutting edge.
- The screenwriter's work may be continuously reworked throughout the filming process.
- A highly specialized cadre of creative and technical positions that may number in the hundreds.

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