Hello. I’m Bob Bradley. This is THE 101, Introduction to Theater and Drama Arts. Welcome. This is the first lecture of the televised series. Just to get us straight and be sure that we are all understanding where we are and what we need, let me enumerate first that you will need during these semester these items.

1) You will need the means by which to see these video taped programs each week. Obviously you are doing it by some particular means at this moment, but you will need then to be sure that you have these available for you every week. These will constitute or be a series of lectures that will be given in a television studio or interviews with various individuals who are professional in creating film, television, and theater. So some of this material in straightforward lecture fashion, which you’re probably used to in terms of a classroom, but others of it will be a series of conversations. And so you will need to listen and follow these, and pick up the important points as they arise.

2) Textbook. The video portion of this course should be regarded as an addition to and supplementary to the text. So you will therefore need to read the appropriate sections assigned in the text in regard and in relationship to the lectures and the interviews that you are going to receive here over the television set.

3) You will need a guide to the television course. Now, this particular guide will give you a program by program breakdown. It will give you some idea of the major points to be covered in this particular program and it will give you some review questions for each of these lectures and interviews so as to help you see if you have picked up and understand the major points of the lectures and the interviews.

4) You will need the syllabus for this particular semester. Every semester the
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syllabus to some extent will change because from semester to semester there will be different kinds of assignments. The syllabus then will give you the specific assignments, the dates for the assignments and the examinations, give you the grading scale, and give you various other pertinent information that you are going to need in order to take this particular course.

The course is called Introduction to Theater and Drama Arts because in these days, in fact, drama can be received in a variety of ways. And that is drama, yes, one does go to the theater and one sees drama, one sees a play. But one may also have the dramatic experience through film, the movies, or receive it on a television set. All of these are methods of delivery that take you to the fictive world that drama creates. So therefore I am using the word drama here to mean the written play or what we usually call it in the theater is the script, the script meaning that which is the written form that we are working from.

Well, let’s start, however, by talking about what are the advantages and the disadvantages of each of these means of delivery. We in fact are going to talk about small screen, big screen, and no screen. Let’s start with that which of course is unquestionably the most familiar to you and that is television, the small screen.

Advantages:

1) Convenience. There’s no special requirements for enjoyment. There’s no dressing to go out. In fact, there may be no dressing required at all. But it appears to you in your home so therefore it is highly convenient for you.

2) Scheduling. Television is available to you at any time. All you have to do is turn
the power on and there it is. And, in fact, if you are even not at home and you wish to see a particular program, then the video recorder can take care of that particular problem and it can be video recorded, shifted, and then looked at whenever you wish at your own choosing.

3) The Environment. The environment is your environment. It’s your private habitat. You make your own choices as to what you want to see and, in many ways, when you want to see it. So therefore this environment is yours. You do the inviting. You bring it into your home, into your habitat. It is, in fact, this that in many ways makes then that the people who appear on television become our friends, whether we think of them — whether we realize it or not, because they are people who come into our living circumstances. They are people that we become -- at least characters that we become acquainted with. So therefore the environment is our environment.

4) There is variety of form and subject matter is endless. There are now hundreds of channels available to you, available especially if you have cable, available so that you can make your choice as to what you enjoy and what you want to see. In this particular course, we’re going to deal with the fictive kind of television and that is the television that creates stories or presents stories that have characters, plots, action, whatever. But television itself is endless in the variety that is possible here.

5) It is free. That is, it is free in that you pay no money up front unless of course you have a cable service, in which case you have to pay your cable bill. But essentially, commercial television is free although eventually, in one way or the other, you may well pay for it and that is in the form that there are going to be commercials that you are going
to sit through and that you’re going perhaps to be influenced by that will then send you out of your home to buy the particular product that you saw touted on television. And so at that point you are now helping pay for that program which you saw on your television set.

Those are the advantages of television. Let’s talk about the disadvantages. The disadvantages are:

1) You are alone or you are in small groups. There is, then, no camaraderie which is going to develop and the experience becomes quite a singular one. And so therefore your reaction while watching it by yourself is quite different from the one that you might have if you were part of a larger group, an audience in some way or the other.

Another disadvantage. 2) It is two-dimensional. It is the flat screen that you have there in front of you.

3) The communication is all one-way. You are a receiver. You get it. But whatever your reactions are, there is no return back to the screen. There is no notice. There is no return communication possible from you to that which you are viewing in some way or the other.

4) Television in some way can become so habit forming that we can almost become immune to the experience. In other words, we become so used to it that we forget that television can indeed be an artistic experience and can indeed be something special.

Film, the movies, the big screen. Advantages:

1) Scheduling. Now, while it is not nearly so convenient in terms of scheduling as the television set is, in most cases films are available throughout the day. They have their
starting times and so long as you get there at the starting time, you can see the film. It is shown many times throughout the day and so therefore there may be two, three, four, five different times that you can have. And so therefore at that time which is convenient to you, you are able to go into the movie house and see it. And you see the same work whenever you go. If you go the first thing in the afternoon or if you go the last time at night, you are still seeing the same work. Whether you are the person who saw it at whatever time, that work continues in the same way all the time.

Advantages 2) You are entering a prepared environment. That is, this space has been created for your comfort and for your enjoyment to have this particular experience, and that is the experience of coming to the movie house, of seeing film. So therefore the space has been set up in such a way as to give you the optimum advantage of enjoyment that you can get.

Advantages 3) While the form and subject are somewhat limited, there are, however, many different choices available. Again, not nearly the same number of choices are available as one can receive on television, but still there are many different films, many different movie houses, many different choices that one can make. And so depending on what one enjoys, what the subject is, or a particular actor that one may want to see, then one can go to the movie house and make that particular choice.

Advantages 4) Here you do become a part of a group. You come in as an individual but at this point you then begin to have a shared experience. That is, you join in with other people in the audience who are experiencing the same thing as you and you all begin having a joint experience. One of the easiest ways to understand this and to see
this is, of course, laughter. And that is that what one might well not laugh at while you are by yourself, when you are with a group and the laughter begins, then this contagious effect or this contagious kind of things goes across an audience and everyone begins laughing. And there is a greater sense of the laughter there when you are part of the totality or a part of the group rather than by yourself.

The disadvantages: You must make an effort. That is, you must go to a special place to see it.

2) You must choose from the time scheduled for the showing. So, no, it is not going to be available in most cases to you 24 hours a day and, yes, you must arrive at the time that the film begins, whatever its particular starting time is. So therefore you must choose from the times scheduled for the showing.

3) Just as in the television set, it is two-dimensional. It is also then — the communication is again one-way. The communication comes from you as a receiver and there is no return. Whatever your reaction will be or even no reaction in no way has any effect on what is happening up on the screen. The screen continues — the experience continues and whatever it is that you may have as a reaction to that in no way changes anything.

4) I'm not sure whether this is a disadvantage or in some ways it may be, but you must be respectful of those around you. Now, in your home and in your private habitat, you may do as you please. You may talk to others, you may eat, you may do all kinds of things. You may get up and come and go as you please. However, once you arrive in a movie house, you must be respectful of those around you. And I think here is the key to
the disadvantage, and that is you in turn must hope that the others who are a part of that audience will be in the same frame of mind and the same mood and be, in turn, respectful of you.

Disadvantages 5) Tickets’ cost. Yes, tickets cost money. And while the movie — the films are not terribly expensive, it still means that when you arrive you must fork over money, you must buy a ticket, and you must then go in.

The theater. Okay. We have been through the advantages and disadvantages of the television set, the film house or the movie house. We now come to the theater.

Advantages. 1) It is a prepared environment. Just as in the film and movie house, then the theater is a prepared environment which is then especially designed for your enjoyment. For you to come into the theater, to come into this world, is going to be presented to you and for you then to be able to enter the world and to detach yourself from your outside world and become a part of the world of theatrical experience.

Advantages. 2) You enter singly, by yourself, or perhaps in small groups. But in so doing, as again in the movie house then, you become a part of the whole. You become a member of the group so that this becomes a group experience. Again, just as in the examples we used in the movie house, your reactions now become a part of the total group, not the reaction of the individual.

3) This is — and perhaps this is the most important advantage that there is. That is, this is a three-dimensional experience. You are alive, you are in three dimensions, you are the audience, and in your midst is the performer. The performer is alive and in this particular case there is complete communication. The communication chain then exists.
And that is the performer sends the experience out to you, you receive it, you react to it, and your reactions are noted and go back to the performer.

You may think that an actor is not aware of what is going on in the audience. The actor is not supposed to give notice necessarily that the audience is there or what their reactions may be, but I assure you a performer is vitally interested in what your reactions are. In fact, there is no question that one of the first things that you — if you go backstage and you talk to an actor, one of the first things that any actor will mention is the reaction of the audience that particular night to that particular performance. They are intimately aware of what you are doing and what your reactions are, and they in turn will react to that. And that is if they feel — if a performer feels an audience is with them and the audience is intent with them, then that sends them up just a little bit more, sends them up just a little higher than they might have been otherwise. But when they feel that the audience is not necessarily with them, they will not necessarily let their guard down, but it just means that that little extra special effort that is needed to make something very special may not happen that particular time.

Also there is going to be some slight change from performance to performance, and that is just in the sheer fact that the performer reacts to you, the performer takes what you are communicating to them, then in turn there are ever so slight adjustments. Most people would never know. And when you only see — you go to the theater and you only see that performance, that production once, then you don’t know. But if you see it two or three times, then in that case you begin to notice little small differences that happen from performance to performance.
4) in terms of advantage. You are in the presence of artists who are there to create and lead you through the experience. That is, you in conjunction with the artist are now creating theater. This is the true nature of theater itself and that is it is what happens between the performer and the audience. That which is created together, that is the theatrical experience.

Disadvantages. Scheduling is highly limited. It is usually — usually a performance is presented only once a day or, in some cases, maybe sometimes twice a day if there is a matinee.

Disadvantage 2) You must make an effort. You must go to the place of presentation. So therefore this takes a particular effort on your part.

3) And it’s the same as we had in the movie house, and that is you must be respectful of those around you and hope — and this, as I said, is the disadvantage — and certainly hope that the others who are part of that audience are of the same mind and are respectful of you and the enjoyment that you are having.

4) Tickets cost money and in the theater frequently quite expensive. In New York it is nothing unusual these days for musicals to cost $100 per ticket. Now, while that is not true in a theater in many places in the United States, but there is no question that people frequently find that having to pay $30 or $35 or $40 or more for a ticket seems to them to be quite steep. But you must remember that what you are doing is, you are paying for the talent, you are paying for the skill, you are paying for the training, you are paying for the energies of those individual performers and the other people who have created the production for you.
Disadvantage 5) If you haven’t made arrangements in advance and the event is sold out, then at that point you don’t get in and you must then attempt to make some arrangements for some other time to attend in what is a highly limited schedule.

6) The production is frequently — and especially this is true in various regional theaters across the country — the production is limited in the number of times that the particular presentation will be available. Many theaters may play productions only for one week or two weeks, three weeks. And most regional theaters usually play three, four or five weeks. Whereas what is in New York, called the open end, open end one, is that so long as the money is being made at the box office to pay the expenses and earn a return on the investment, the production may continue. But this is in sort of one location and one location only, and in most places in this country you are limited in the number of times that a presentation will be available to you.

All of these disadvantages that I have given to you for the theater, however, are outweighed by one thing and that is the advantage of the live artist in our midst reading us to use a creativity to attain an artistic experience. Now, there are two key words I’ve used here and that is “our creativity” and “our artistic experience,” or to create an artistic experience. And as I have already stated, yes, you must realize we are a part of that equation. We enter actively into the creation. Theater is that which happens between us. So therefore the audience is present and is receiving an experiencing the event. We are drawing upon our imagination. This becomes our active part in the creation of the experience. We draw upon our imagination and we enter into the fictive world.

An artistic experience. What is art? Now, that is a most difficult question and
something that certainly cannot begin to be adequately answered in the time we have here. I am going to refer to the writings of Suzanne Kay Langer, a philosopher who is somewhat neglected today but whose ideas are still worth consideration. Let’s start with Langer’s definition of art.

In a book called Feeling and Form, she gives us this short, succinct definition: “Art is the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling.” Ten words long but what ten words. “Art is the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling.” Okay. Let’s start with the last two words, “human feeling.” Don’t confuse that term “human feeling” with “feelings,” and that is feelings with an S on it. Langer is not referring to that. Langer is referring to the awareness of what the novelist Henry James once called “our felt life.” The awareness of life forces within us and around us.

In problems of art, Langer explained it this way: Life is a natural process of tensions, balances, rhythms. It is these that we feel in quietness or emotion as the pulse of our own living. In the work of art they are expressed, they are symbolically shown. Each aspect of feeling developed as one develops an idea. Fit it together for clearest presentation. Our life has a rhythm to it, a pattern to it. But in our aimlessness of our living, we are not aware of it. Drama as an art form shows us that pattern. It gives us a story. It shows us a beginning, a middle, and an end.

Now, we sometimes perceive that there is a pattern in our life and we usually do this as an after-the-fact, at the conclusion. We go through a series of events that we have. We sort of reach a point at which those events come to some kind of a conclusion. And at that point perhaps we reflect on how did I get here? Where did this begin? And at that
point we then sort of reflect and move backward, and at that point we then say, “Oh, yeah. This is where that began.” And then we connect this event to another event, to another event, until we come to the point where we are, we have reached this either plateau or this conclusion in some way or the other.

This is what drama teaches us, whether we realize it or not, because drama is a story, a story which shows us that there is a pattern, that the relationships of one event lead to the other. Drama makes us aware of this pattern, raises it to our conscious level. Drama thus brings us into contact with our primal experience, makes us aware of that which ever so subconsciously we usually are not aware of at all. There it is. Art is making us aware of, letting us feel, letting us get in touch with the mysteries of our own rhythms, tensions, our balances.

What the artist creates, then, is not his or her actual feelings, but what he or she knows about human feeling. Remember, I’ve made a distinction earlier between the word “feelings” and the word “feeling.” “Feeling” is our whole sensuous life. Art is a form created for our perception through sense or imagination. “Sense” here refers to our sensations, to those senses by which we feel, touch, see, hear the world around us.

Think for just a moment in terms of your experiencing music. How do you listen to music? At that point the listening is a sensory experience. It is an aural — that’s a-u-r-a-l — it is an aural experience. We hear it. Think about looking at a painting. You look at it, you see it, the painting is there for one reason. It exists for our eyes, it exists for our perception of sight, it is there for our visual perception. Now, if you really look at what is there, it’s a piece of canvas or some other background upon which has been put a
series of dabs, brush strokes, colors. But that’s not what we see. We don’t see those individual brush strokes. We see color, but we don’t see them as color. We see all those things coming together. We are experiencing that which is in the painting. We experience, then, what the painting is showing us about life.

Now, yes, the painting has a content and, yes, we are cognizant of and we recognize the content. But what we are experiencing as we look at that painting is the arrangement, the pattern, the form that is expressive of human feeling. Now, this is a metaphorical perception. And at that point, what do we mean? This is a metaphorical perception. A metaphor. A metaphor is something that is an idea that in its turn functions as a symbol to express something else. The most highly developed metaphor that we have is our language, and that is everything here — every time everything we say is metaphorical. It is something that we have agreed upon. It is words that we have agreed upon that carry with them an idea. So therefore this is — language is a metaphor.

Art, then, is a metaphor. Art is a metaphor that expresses something to us about our felt life. And in turn, then, art formulates a new conception for our direct, imaginative grasp. Now, if all this is beginning to be terribly complicated, it is and it’s a terribly complex subject that one can spend years, can spend a lifetime studying. In fact, the writer that I’ve referred to and will refer to again, Suzanne Langer, spent much of the last part of — about the 50 years of her life studying the problems of art and how then to grapple with them and make clear what art is and what are the problems inherent in it.

What we have here then is the key word — is the word “imagination.” It is imagination that makes us supremely human. We seem to be the only animal who has
imagination. We seem to be the only animal who is capable of making expressive forms for other imaginations to grasp. In other words, art is something that sets us apart from all of the animals in the universe. Art is something that we should value because it is something which is so supremely human. The artistic form, then, is congruent with the dynamic forms of our direct, sensuous, mental and emotional life.

Let’s look a little closer, then, at how drama is an art form. We live in a world of chaos. We don’t see unity or pattern or form in our everyday lives. We react to what happens around us. We move from one event to another as they arise in our lives and we don’t see in there that there is a pattern there. However, the art form of drama shows us that there is pattern, that our life has rhythm, that we are not aware of this.

Aristotle has said that drama is a story that has a beginning, a middle, and an end. So therefore what we find here is drama is organized around the story, the story is organized in such a way that it has a beginning, a development, a middle, and that we come to a conclusion. So therefore this brings us to unity. Drama shows us unity. Story is the architecture that drama uses. We don’t see that our lives have stories in them. We don’t see a beginning, a middle, and an end.

Now I say “we don’t.” We sometimes do. We sometimes do when we arrive at some event which seems to be a conclusion or a sort of closing of events of some kind within our life. At that point we ask ourself, “How did that begin? How did we get there?” And at that point we look backward and we can perhaps see then where that beginning was, how it developed, and how we arrived at that particular moment. That shows us pattern. That’s something we have learned from drama. That is something that the art
form has shown us and has raised us to a conscious level.

At this point you ask, “Well, then why aren’t we all playwrights? Why aren’t we all writing dramas down?” Well, most of us don’t and most of us can’t because what the dramatist has is — when writing the script, the dramatist has a sense of destiny and it is that sense of destiny which is the elusion of drama. It is something which from the very moment that the play began, we began to sense the future. We began to sense that we are moving toward a destiny.

Again, Suzanne Langer has said here, “In the theater we see the whole setup of human relationships and conflicting interests long before any abnormal event has occurred that would in actual life have brought it into focus. Dramatic action is a semblance of action so constructed that a whole indivisible piece of virtual history is implicit in it. As a yet unrealized form long before the presentation is completed.”

Through drama, then, we connect to something which is inherent in us and that is the ability to organize, the ability to use our imaginations. We reconnect here then with something that we don’t use often enough and that is our imagination. Drama, in fact, can help us use our imagination, can take us back to a time when we were children. Drama can bring us into contact with our primal experience or with a primal experience.

I like to use here — and I think it’s a very good example of how we can use our imagination, but also shows us how then theater began. Robert Edmund Jones, a scenic designer in the first half of the 20th century, tells us in a very simple story but one which in many ways brings together all of these factors that we’re gonna be looking at this particular semester. So from a favorite book of mine called The Dramatic Imagination,
Robert Edmund Jones tells us this in *The Theater as it Was and as it Is*:

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I’m going to ask you to do the most difficult thing in the world: to imagine. Let us imagine ourselves back in the Stone Age, in the days of the caveman and the mammoth and the altimelar frescos. It is night and we’re sitting together around a fire: Ook, Pal, Pong and Glop, and Luzowie, all the rest of us all together. We sit close together. We like to be together. It is safe that way if the wild beasts attack us. And besides, we are happier when we are together.

We are afraid to be alone. Over on that side of the fire the leaders of the tribe are sitting together, the strongest men. The men who can run fastest and fight hardest and endure longest. They killed a lion today. We are excited about this thrilling event. We’re all talking about it. We are always afraid of silence. We feel safer when somebody is talking.

There is something strange about silence, strange like the black night around us. Something we can never understand. The lion skin lies close by, near the fire. Suddenly the leader jumps to his feet. “I killed the lion. I did it. I followed him. He sprang at me. I struck at him with my spear. He fell down, he lay still.” He is telling us. We listen.

But all at once an idea comes to his dim brain. “I know a better way to tell you. See, it was like this. Let me show you.” In that instant, drama is born. The leader goes on. “Here, sit around me in a circle—you and you and you, you. Right here where I can reach out and touch you all.” And so with one inclusive gesture, he makes a
In its essence, a theater is only an arrangement of seats so grouped and spaced that the actor, the leader, can reach out and touch and hold each member of his audience. Architects of later day have learned how to add convenience and comfort to this idea but that is all. The idea itself never changes.

The leader continues. “You, Ook, over there. You stand up and be the lion. Here’s the lion’s skin. You put it on and be the lion, and I’ll kill you and we’ll show them how it was.” Now Ook gets up. He hangs the skin on his shoulders, drops on his hands and knees and growls. How terrible he is. “Of course he isn’t the real lion. We know that. The real lion is dead. We killed him today. Of course Ook isn’t a lion. Of course not. He doesn’t even look like a lion. You needn’t try to scare us, Ook. We know you. We aren’t afraid of you.”

And yet, in some mysterious way, Ook is the lion. He isn’t like the rest of us any longer. He is Ook all right, but he is a lion too. And now these two men, the world’s first actors, begin to show us what the hunt was like. They do not tell us; they show us. They act it for us. The hunter lies in ambush, the lion growls. The hunter poises his spear, the lion leaps. We all join in with yells and howls of excitement and terror. The first community course. The spear is thrown, the lion falls and lies still, the drama is finished.

Now Ook takes off the lion’s skin and sits besides us and is himself again. Just like you and just like me. Good old Ook. But no, not quite like you or me. Ook will be, as long as he lives, the man who can be a lion when he wants to. Pshaw. A man
can’t be a lion. How can a man be a lion? But Ook can make us believe it. Something strange happens to that man sometimes. The lion’s spirit gets into him and we shall always look up to him and admire him and perhaps be secretly a little afraid of him. Ook is an actor. He will always be different from the rest of us, a little apart from us, for he can summon spirits.

Many thousands of years have passed since that first moment of inspiration when the theater sprang into being, but we still like to get together. We still dread to be alone. We are still a little awed by silence and we still like to make believe that when an artist speaks aloud in our midst, a thing that is in the minds of all of us and fuses our various moods into one common mood, we are still lost in wonder before this magical art of the theater. It really is a kind of magic, this art. Oh, we call it glamour or poetry or romance, but that doesn’t explain it. In some mysterious way these old simple ancesteral moods still survive in us and an actor can make them live again for awhile. We become children once more. We believe.

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And there it is. That’s the essence of this semester. Everything that we have been talking about, or will talk about, for most of the semester is in some way summed up in that little story that Robert Edmund Jones has here. He tells us about the first actor, the creation of the actor. He also tells us to use our imagination, to bring us to this particular story. He shows us coming together and, in this particular case, making a circle. That first performance area in which we then sit around and watch these two actors perform. The idea that Ook has of “let me show you.” This becomes then the essence of drama.
Drama is now an art form that is shown to us. It is something that we come to view.

The coming together, then, to form a group, to form that special kind of bond that happens as we now witness something together. The actor who becomes the perform, the actor who becomes the shaman, to use the term. The actor, then, who leads us, who guides us, who helps us then open up our imagination, who helps us to reach into our creativity and to bring together that particular performance. All of these are various facets of what we will be talking about during this semester, the creation of theater as an art form. Also the creation and the use of theater as entertainment, the use of theater as indeed a piece of commerce. The commercial theater is there to make money and so therefore we must also look at the business of theater. During this semester what we indeed are going to do is learn once more how to be children, why and how do we become children once more, and why do we believe it.

I have a brother who is six years younger than I am. At the point when I went to school and he was still too young to go to school, I would arrive home in the afternoon. And since there were no other children in the neighborhood his age, he would frequently be playing by himself. I would watch him as I came in and I remember seeing him frequently play football games, and he would play the football game by himself. And he would, in fact, be the whole game. He would be all the players. You could see him then down, take the football, become the center, then pass it back, and then very quickly move back from the person to whom the center had sent the ball. Then attempt to make a run down the field and, yes, would even eventually trip himself in order to show that he had been tackled. This was causing him no problems. It was indeed for him a use of his
imagination. It was indeed of his creativity.

What is he today? He’s a basketball coach. And, yes, he uses that same imagination. Yes, he uses that same tactic except this time he is creating the plays, he is creating the tactics that will be used by his particular team. He is drawing upon that which he learned as a child and that is his imagination. He is now drawing upon it and using it as an adult. And, in fact, there’s no question that he puts himself in touch with his imagination and he once again becomes a child.