

“Talk *with* me...and listen, really listen. See me...”  
–Keith Hamilton Cobb

Now, more than ever, in reaction to political upheavals, rampant divisiveness, xenophobia, and the push for new immigration policies, much is being written and argued about the absent role of empathy in our contemporary society.

Researching the word, one discovers that the formal concept of empathy is but 100 years young. A translation of the German word “*emfühling*” meaning “feeling-in”, the word empathy has its roots in the Latin “*em*” meaning to “lean in” and “*pathos*” meaning to “feel”. Its original definition not only meant a “means to feel another person’s emotion...” but also to “enliven an object, or to project one’s own imagined feelings onto the world.”

One defining value of theatre is its power to induce empathy in the viewer. Since the Ancient Greeks, to this moment, today in this very theater, people have been gathering, sitting side by side, sharing time and space, while collectively listening to stories. It is a widely held belief that the deeper an audience can relate to the plights of others, mentally and emotionally place itself in another person’s shoes, the more potential there is for understanding just how much of our human experience is commonly shared. From this exposure and empathy, understanding and respect grow, compassion is cultivated, constructive values are reinforced and can eventually become accepted, reciprocally beneficial norms.

To respond with empathy is no small task. It requires vulnerability, mental exertion, honesty, and a generosity of spirit, empathy asks us to respond ethically, morally and respectfully to the “other”. It forces us up against ourselves and can be quite painful as it cracks us open in order to better see.

*American Moor* asks us to do the great work of empathy, to put fears aside, to lean in, to talk with rather than to each other, to listen respectfully, to see - really see an other – it acknowledges that although we may not look exactly like one another nor react like one another we nonetheless are much more similar than different and in the very act of acknowledging our shared humanity, we can begin to take the actions necessary that lead to a better society for us all.

-Kim Weild, Director