

Metaphors at work

None of us has ever been as light as a feather, nor during a discussion have we literally used a hammer to hit the nail on the head. Metaphors pervade our everyday lives just as nerves pervade our bodies - we are not aware about how often and how extensively we use them.

There are numerous theories aligned to the differentiation of metaphors, especially when the common term "metaphor" is applied to all classes of symbolism and imagery.

Metaphors help to convey complex multi-dimensional information. Metaphors create a discourse that runs parallel to the content proper. This makes them a handy tool for art mediation.

IN CONVERSATION

A metaphor is *full to the brim* with implications. It activates memories of sensory experiences - "*she got in hot water*". It denotes a history - "*he met his Waterloo*". It refers to a broad range of subjects - "*as fast as the wind*".

For conversations in art mediation, metaphors help to talk about sensory perception with greater detail. "*This is a cold picture. Would you say it is cold as steel or as cold as a mountain stream?*"

As metaphors offer so many connections to other fields of information or experience, they make it easier to link statements, to provide information about the artwork and to connect artistic strategies with the everyday experience of the visitors. "*In this installation, the latex pulls off the dust from the wall, just as if you have stuck adhesive tape to a surface then pulled it off. The dust and residues of life stick to it and give a picture of what life has left behind.*"

In communication, metaphors reserve blank space for our individual projections: someone who has playfully experimented with the lightness of feath-

ers has a completely different approach to our metaphor than someone who finds feathers disgusting. The use of metaphors - "*to carry one's cross*" - can provide clear indicators to cultural, religious and social communities; in order to understand the meaning of "*to make hay while the sun shines*", you need to have an idea about the working rhythms of peasants.

METAPHORS AND ART MEDIATION FORMAT

Art mediators might invite children to play music to the pictures or to dress up in a way that fits into the picture. Art mediators might induce adults to imagine what kind of animal this installation might be or what the people in the photograph would say if they could talk. These are metaphors at work.

Art itself works with metaphors on many levels and in different ways. Artworks can open up new spaces in the ways we perceive and think. Using metaphors allows us to reflect on artworks together with other people, without needing to close the gaps or windows to the new spaces that the artworks have proposed.

A metaphor is built parallel to the creation of the artwork. Visitors and mediators can talk about the metaphor without fear, they can get personal, they can work regardless of institutional barriers. The metaphor works as a model. This model highlights particular aspects and in turn, this affects the way in which the art work is perceived.

Metaphors always tell more. They mirror unconscious knowledge and networks. This allows us to make complex correlations within a brief time. For instance, at an exhibition of Action paintings, you ask young visitors to write their signatures on sheets of paper and then to match the sheets to the various artworks. By doing this, you refer to the fact that handwriting is a gesture which can reflect the personality of the artist. You imply that a gesture has an emotional message and that it leaves traces on the sheet. You also refer to the magical quality a gesture or a signature may have. Only the proper signature will get you money at the bank. Chains of association arise, steered by the metaphors the art mediator uses in the format.

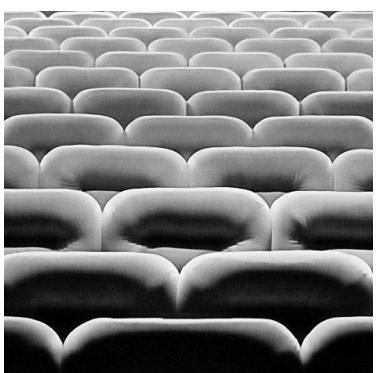
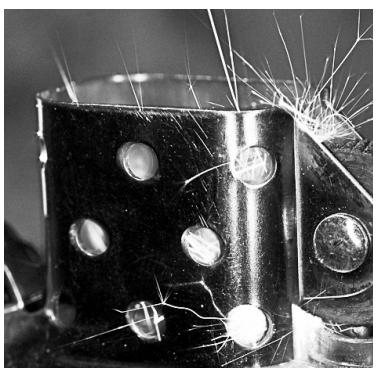
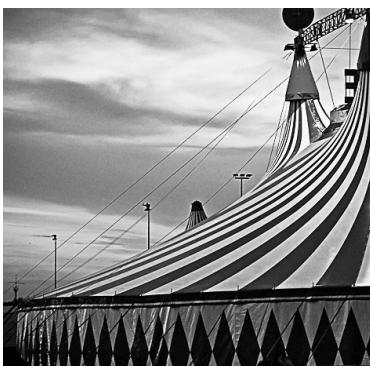
RESEARCH WITH METAPHORS

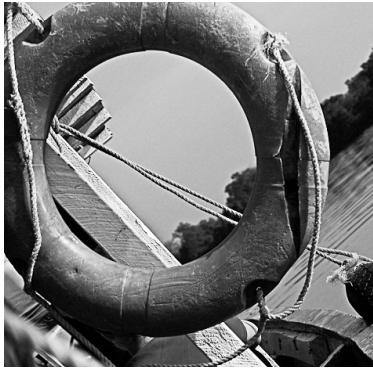
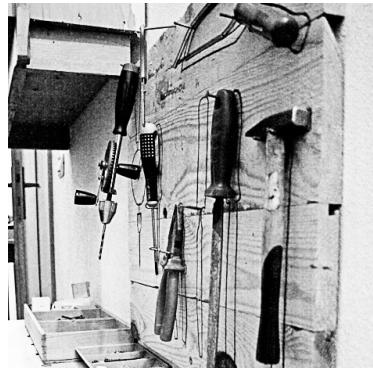
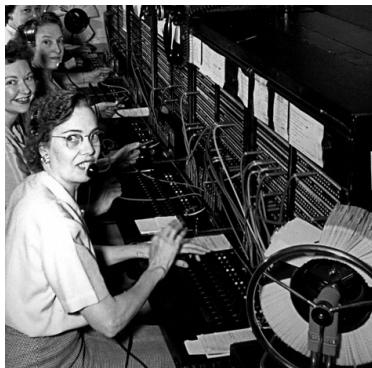
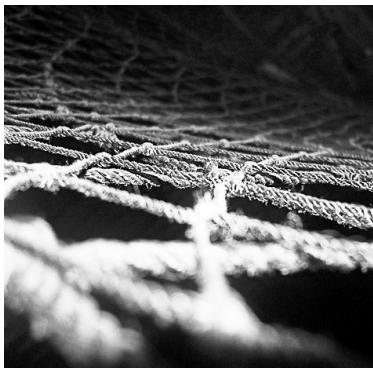
How to use the pictures

Print the pictures out - you can make individual cards if you want - and ask the team or the visitors to find a picture which best shows how they feel at that moment.

Print the pictures out and together with the art mediator, curator or student, discuss the question: What picture best represents your idea of art mediation? Or what picture represents your main goal for this exhibition?

Try this also with objects other than the pictures themselves - different cups, gloves, stones, fruit, etc - and be aware of how a material may influence the direction of your work.





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