

a director prepares

- 'I am interested in the artistic process. In order to approach the theatre as artists, we should have a good look at our tools and how we make decisions. How do we approach one another in the arena of a rehearsal or on a stage? How do we begin, how do we proceed, and what are our allies?'

From the Introduction

- *A Director Prepares* is a fascinating and thought-provoking examination of the challenges of making theatre. In it, Anne Bogart speaks candidly and with immense wisdom of the courage required to create 'art with great presence'.
- Each chapter tackles one of the seven major areas Bogart has identified as both potential partner and potential obstacle to art-making. They are Violence; Memory; Terror; Eroticism; Stereotype; Embarrassment; and Resistance. Each one can be used to generate extraordinary creative energy, if we know how to use it.
- *A Director Prepares* offers every practitioner an extraordinary insight into the creative process. It is a handbook, bible and manifesto, all in one. No other book on the art of theatre comes even close to offering this much understanding, experience and inspiration.

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introduction

- Art is large and it enlarges you and me. To a shrunk-up world its vistas are shocking. Art is the burning bush that both shelters and makes visible our profounder longings.

(Jeanette Winterson)

I regard the theatre as an art form because I believe in its transformative power. I work in the theatre because I want the challenge of decisiveness and articulation in my daily life. Directing chose me as much as I chose it. We found one another. I like to watch. I like to study. I like to meet people in the charged atmosphere of a rehearsal room or in a theatre.

memory

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●●● One has only to read, to look, to listen, to remember.

(Virginia Woolf)

Inside every good play lives a question. A great play asks big questions that endure through time. We enact plays in order to remember relevant questions; we remember these questions in our bodies and the perceptions take place in real time and space. For example, the issue of *hubris* is an issue that humanity is still working on, which is why certain ancient Greek plays feel completely fresh and current. When I reach for a play on the shelf, I know that inside the book is a spore: a sleeping question waiting for my attention. Reading the play, I touch the question with my own sensibilities. I know that it has touched me when the question responds and provokes thought and personal associations – when it haunts me. Presently, everything I experience in daily life is in *relation* to it. The question

has been unleashed upon my unconscious. In my sleep my dreams are imbued with the question. The disease of the question spreads out: to actors, designers, technicians and ultimately to the audience. In rehearsal we try to find shapes and forms to contain the living questions, in the present, on the stage. The act of remembering connects us with the past and alters time. We are living conduits of human memory.

The act of memory is a physical act and lies at the heart of the art of the theatre. If the theatre were a verb, it would be 'to remember'.

During the mid-1980s, the late Polish theatre director and philosopher Jerzy Grotowski accepted a position in the theatre department at the University of California at Irvine. The university agreed to build a studio to his specifications and to bring participants from around the world to work with him on what he called 'objective drama'. My friend, the actor Wendy Vanden Heuvel, travelled from New York to Irvine to participate in Grotowski's research and upon her return I asked about her experience. 'It was very frustrating at first,' she said. Asked to work intensively from sun-down until sun-up, she and participants from Africa, Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe, South America and the Middle East persevered for many weeks. Wendy's initial frustration stemmed from her trouble locating a source of energy and physicality to get through the long hours. After extreme physical exhaustion, the other participants would access familiar patterns and codes from their respective indigenous backgrounds. This seemed to give them an endless reservoir

- The Historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a

simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.

(T. S. Eliot)

Memory plays a huge role in the artistic process. Every time you stage a play, you are embodying a memory. Human beings are stimulated to tell stories from the experience of remembering an incident or a person. The act of expressing what is remembered is actually, according to the philosopher Richard Rorty, an act of *re-description*. In re-describing something, new truths are created. Rorty suggests that there is no objective reality, no Platonic ideal. We create truths by describing, or re-describing, our beliefs and observations. Our task, and the task of every artist and scientist, is to re-describe our inherited assumptions and invented fictions in order to create new paradigms for the future.

- Truth cannot be out there – cannot exist independently of the human mind . . . The world is out there, but descriptions of the world are not. Only descriptions of the world can be true or false. The world on its own – unaided by the describing activities of human beings – cannot.

(Richard Rorty)