

April 6, 2013

DIRECTOR, DABBLER IN NEUROSCIENCE

Anne Bogart



Anne Bogart may not be a household name but the pioneering director has changed theater as we know it. Along the way the Columbia University professor has written three books. Her production of “Trojan Women” runs at ArtsEmerson April 17-21.

BOOKS: Did growing up in a Navy family influence you as a reader?

BOGART: It had an effect on absolutely everything, reading included. I hated the Navy as a kid because we moved every year. What happens is you stop falling in love with your friends because you’ll be torn away from them. I fell in love with reading instead. My family’s idea of a good time was to get on a boat and go off until you couldn’t see land. And then stay there until it was time for my dad to report back to his ship. I hated it. I’d sit in the bowsprit and read Ayn Rand novels and think my family was Communist. Around that same time, when I was about 14, I discovered Virginia Woolf. I was profoundly affected by writers like Woolf who could create worlds that were not the ones I lived in, that had some kind of grace.

BOOKS: How did you come across her at that age?

BOGART: I would read everything by a particular writer, and little by little, got lifted out of easy reading to more difficult reading that, if I sweated a little, would give me chills and visions of what it would be like to live lives other than the one I was living. I

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also realized the importance of not understanding everything. That allowed me to approach people like Woolf.

BOOKS: What is your reading like now?

BOGART: I read a tremendous amount of nonfiction. I'm currently reading Adam Phillips's "Missing Out," which is in praise of not getting everything you want. I recently read "Antifragile" by Nassim Nicholas Taleb about the things that get stronger by being disturbed. It's about how we need to lead anti-fragile lives. "In Praise of Messy Lives" by Katie Roiphe is another recent read in that vein. Oh my God, it's so gorgeous. I just got Douglas Rushkoff's, "Present Shock," which is about how we've been concerned with the shock of the future, but that the present is the shock, which has a lot to do with social media and technology. Then I love gossip. I read things like Susan Sontag's journals, which are being published one by one, the Leonard Cohen biography "I'm Your Man" by Sylvie Simmons, and a book on gossip called "Gossip" by Joseph Epstein. I also read a lot about neuroscience and sociology like "Thinking, Fast and Slow" by Daniel Kahneman or "The Secret Lives of Pronouns" by James Pennebaker, which is really fun.

BOOKS: What started you on neuroscience?

BOGART: I'm interested in change, and it's become clear that the brain is changeable. You can change not only how you think but who you are by what you think. That reading was also influenced by a magazine article in The New York Times Magazine that said everyone needed to learn about quantum physics, that it would change your ideas about life and death. I started buying books for dummies on quantum physics and astrophysics. I'm terrible at math, so I'd read up to an equation and then put them down. Then I was driving a lot for work, like to Kentucky, and got books on tape like "The Tao of Physics" by Fritjof Capra. When the tape got to a point where I would have put the book down I'd just stop listening and look at the scenery. All of a sudden I'd get fuzzy logic or special relativity. The trick was I wasn't trying to understand. So it entered my understanding in a different way. I was so knocked out by that.

Amy Sutherland

<http://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/books/2013/04/06/bibliophiles-interview-with-director-anne-bogart/QEso0nU92gi95wGWV7G1pI/story.html>