

DIRECTING TRUE WEST: CHANGING
THE CHEMISTRY

by

LISA LAWRENCE HOLLAND, B.S.Ed.

A THESIS

IN

THEATRE ARTS

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of Texas Tech University in
Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for
the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

Approved

December, 1997

AC

805

T3

1997

NO. 161

cop. 2

ALC 7861

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks and appreciation to Dr. Jonathan Marks and Professor Christopher Markle for their wisdom, artistic guidance and advice and to Jeffrey Shea Holland for his encouragement and support.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. PRE-PRODUCTION RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS	10
III. EVOLUTION OF DIRECTING CONCEPTS	30
IV. SELECTION AND IMPLEMENTATION: THE FINAL PRODUCT	46
V. EVALUATION AND CONCLUSIONS	69
BIBLIOGRAPHY	75
APPENDIX	78

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“People come into the theatre in very different circumstances, expecting something to happen, and then hopefully when they walk out of the theatre the chemistry’s changed.”¹ This was the response given by Sam Shepard when asked what effect he would like a play of his to have on an audience. As I set out to direct Shepard’s True West, both the responsibility and desire I had to fulfill that statement would remain foremost in my mind.

My initial introduction to and selection of True West was actually the result of the search for a class project. This project would prove integral in the development of my thesis production. It was here that I not only selected the play, but made some very preliminary though vital discoveries about Shepard, True West, and myself as a director. These discoveries laid necessary groundwork for what would ensue, and so I feel it is fitting that I should begin by discussing them.

In the fall semester of 1995 I enrolled in a course entitled “Seminar in Directing Methodology,” taught by Dr. George Sorensen. The primary focus of the class involved the examination, observation, and study of renowned and sometimes controversial theatre practitioners’ directing methodologies. Our investigations included the analysis of such artists as Anne Bogart, Peter Sellars, Joanne Akalaitis, and Elizabeth LeCompte. The culmination of our studies would be the production

and presentation of a fifteen- to twenty-minute scene. In directing the scene we were to explore and experiment with our own burgeoning directing skills, borrowing and creating from what had inspired us during the semester.

I had not selected my scene before the first three had been performed. In those three, there seemed to be recurring and obvious common elements, revolving predominantly around the use of space and stylized movement. For example, one scene took place in a large sculpture garden as actors costumed in black moved in and around the artwork. Another scene was staged on a staircase; actors were placed very carefully on varying levels, and very little movement or interaction occurred between them. My instinctual (albeit perhaps somewhat rebellious) reaction was to create a piece that spoke in an entirely different voice. I immediately began to search for a script that would provide inherent sensuality, immediate and passionate interaction between characters, and a strong element of danger. I was looking for a scene to be challenging, not pretty.

For the next two weeks I mulled over options in my head; some were suggested by classmates, and others just surfaced from pre-existing knowledge. I gravitated toward the work of Sam Shepard. When reading his work, I had always been moved by his use of language, pop Americana culture, and provocative imagery, but I had never had the opportunity to see or work on a production of one of his plays. I located my copy of Sam Shepard: Seven Plays and read through various scenes. I wanted to work with a limited number of actors, so I zeroed in on True West. I had

not finished reading Scene Eight, the infamous toaster scene, when I knew that this would be the one. It was wild, funny, ruthless, and moving. I found two willing actors and set out to rehearse for approximately one week--a week of experimentation and growth that would forever alter my vision of what theatre could be. My previous directing experience had consisted of a very typical, canned approach: read the play, block the play, give actors their blocking, and run through the play a few times. It was all I knew. However, after one semester of graduate study my eyes had already been opened to some of the innumerable possibilities that existed in the realm of the directing. My work with these two actors involved my first efforts delving into this new territory.

Rehearsals consisted mainly of acting exercises birthed out of what we had studied in class, and the immediacy of what I saw growing and evolving right in front of me. I would enter rehearsal with very definite ideas. For example, one rehearsal began utilizing the concept of sourcework created by Anne Bogart. Each actor was given a word (in this case, "predator" or "prey") and three minutes to brainstorm in relation to the word. They were instructed to write down any thoughts, feelings, or images conjured up by their word. After the brainstorming session, we began the scene--incorporating these thoughts, images, and feelings.

Sometimes the necessity was simply to deal with the actors in regard to where they were in the moment. At one point, it was very obvious that the scene was missing a very crucial element: we needed to see the familiarity of brothers evident

in their physical relationship and contact. An off-the-cuff instruction to make some type of physical contact on each line seemed perfunctory at first, but then gave way to a whole new level of work. During the entire process, I never staged one moment. Instead I acted as coach and editor as these two talented actors created the scene. Finally the piece was to be presented in class. We chose a large warehouse-type setting where an arena space was created with yellow police tape; the actors worked within the space. The scene began ten minutes before any audience/class members entered, as each actor focused on his own physical objectives. The scene was both shocking and successful. Evidently the instructor, Dr. Sorensen, also found the work interesting, as he suggested that I submit True West as my first directing choice and as such my thesis project for the upcoming fall semester. I considered the choice and decided in the affirmative.

True West had not only enchanted and challenged me, but also seemed a good logistical choice for the intimate Texas Tech University Laboratory Theater, where it would be performed. The number of cast members was small, and the technical demands of the play seemed very reasonable. Only one real concern for the production had grown out of watching and working with the scene. This concern that surfaced would haunt me later as I read and researched Shepard's critics. Would I be able to create a two-hour production akin to the twenty-minute unrelenting ride that I had just produced without spontaneously combusting? And if so, would Lubbock audiences be able to watch it, accept it, even like it? This thought, in turn, was a key

factor that led to the approach I would ultimately take. Amidst the danger, the universal truths within True West must be illuminated.

In pre-production research, the amount of material I found on its playwright was fairly overwhelming. Even more so was the amazing display of discrepancy in the positive and negative responses of critics to Shepard and his work. In the words of critic Walter Kerr, “. . . the Shepard cult is split in two: he is either loved or hated, and both with equal passion.”² Obviously, it is the first “camp” of which I am a member. However, looking to direct a production for public consumption, I wanted to be cognizant of just why Shepard was indeed so controversial.

Though critics debate the ability to categorize Shepard’s work into phases or stages, it remains true that his body of work, which I will examine more closely in Chapter II, definitely exhibits a sort of evolution. Although it seems to be his earlier plays that attract the most acidic criticism, one of his detractors (John Simon) contends that even some of his new work is “wholly pointless . . . except for adding to the Shepard myth.”³ Reviewing the volume Angel City, Curse of the Starving Class and Other Plays, John Lahr also speaks to the “Shepard myth,” saying: “Having helped to define America’s contemporary wasteland, he may find himself a part of it. If he indulges in his legend, he will no doubt become another disposable artifact in a throw-away culture which needs to waste life to prove its abundance.”⁴ In a review of True West, Drama critic J.R. Taylor says of Shepard:

When he is hailed . . . as the great white hope of the American theatre, the great new American dramatist and all the rest of it, I cannot help

but attributing his Obies and Pulitzers more to lack of competition and the feeling that if no clear successor to Edward Albee exists we shall have to invent one than to dazzling talent, let alone solid achievement.⁵

Mimi Kramer, critic for The New Yorker, who claims that she is “still in search of the good Shepard,” reviews Shepard’s 1991 States of Shock and finds that this new play is simply “another index of the bankruptcy of Shepard’s theatrical vocabulary.”⁶

But why is it that these critics, as well as others I have not mentioned, find Shepard’s work so repulsive, “wholly pointless” at best? In his introduction to Sam Shepard: Seven Plays, Richard Gilman suggests that the main points of contention with these critics lie in the opinion that Shepard is viewed as “always ‘obscure’, usually ‘willfully’ so, and always ‘undisciplined.’” Indeed, New York Times critic Walter Kerr calls him, “. . . deliberately relentless and obscure. His tendency is to stick to his bailiwick and keep on doing what he’s been doing even if this forces him into repeating doleful banalities.”⁷ In reviewing The Tooth of Crime, Irving Wardle uses another word that seems to recur in connection with Shepard (in addition to “obscure”): “brutality.” “Shepard constructs an ambitious stage metaphor . . . to produce an image of insensate brutality.”⁸ Critic David Wyatt sums up a common complaint as he describes his take on Shepard’s characters: “His characters renounce insight and resist growth; they seem, instead, the scene for their author’s projection of violent, contradictory, inchoate emotions.”⁹ Again and again those in the “We Hate Shepard” camp seem to define his work as excessively obscure and gratuitously

brutal--plays driven by characters who only serve as conduits for indulgent behavior. habits and situations that are no more than spectacle. It was this notion that I would consciously work against.

It was my objective to create a production of Sam Shepard's True West that was raw, gritty and dangerous: a production that spoke to the mythic elements inherent in the play, and yet one that would also be able to transcend the "violence," the "brutality," and speak to its universal truths, the truths that lie within the myths. The mythic elements, which are discussed more elaborately in Chapter II, are not myths in the purest sense of the word. They are not legendary stories, passed down through generations of peoples, created to explain an event or phenomenon. Rather, these mythic elements are based on romantic notions that have evolved into collective cultural and social fantasies. The truths may include the innate human desire to experience love and fulfillment, the journey on which man must travel in the search for personal and interpersonal human and spiritual connections, the unseen ties that bind family, and the double nature we all possess. It was my hope that these truths, in turn, would move our audience.

I went into the work intent on concentrating and capitalizing on the actors, their energy and senses. It was my goal to cultivate, for example, individual and shared actor energies, kinesthetic response and connections--as opposed to solely playing visual gimmicks. This focus on the sensual would be further explored and heightened within the technical realms of the production, serving to promote and intensify the

humanity, rather than simply adding contrived props and tricks. It was my goal to present True West in such a way as to reflect the inherent sensuality and humanity that are at its roots, and in doing so create a production capable of “changing the chemistry.”

In a Village Voice interview with Carol Rosen, Shepard speaks about the destination of his plays and his desire that they go into “emotional territory.” “When you begin, your great hope is that it moves into something that is true.”¹⁰ This, too, was my great hope.

Notes

¹ Sam Shepard, interviewed by the editors and Kenneth Chubb, "Metaphors, Mad Dogs, and Old Time Cowboys," Theatre Quarterly 4.15 (1974): 12-13.

² Walter Kerr, "Where Has Sam Shepard Led His Audience?" New York Times 5 June 1983, late ed., sec.2: 3.

³ John Simon, "States of Schlock," rev. of States of Shock, by Sam Shepard, New York 27 May 1991: 71.

⁴ John Lahr, rev. of Angel City, Curse of the Starving Class and Other Plays, by Sam Shepard, quoted in Steven Putzel, "An American Cowboy on the English Fringe: Sam Shepard's London Audience," Modern Drama 36:1 (1993): 131-46.

⁵ J.R. Taylor, rev. of True West, by Sam Shepard, Drama 144.29 (1982): 29.

⁶ Mimi Kramer "Toxic Shock," rev. of States of Shock, by Sam Shepard, New Yorker 3 June 1991: 78-79.

⁷ Walter Kerr, "Stage View," New York Times 5 June 1983, late ed., sec. H: 3.

⁸ Irving Wardle, rev. of The Tooth of Crime, by Sam Shepard, The London Times 18 July 1972: 11.

⁹ David Wyatt, "Shepard's Split," The South Atlantic Quarterly 91.2 (1992): 333-60.

¹⁰ Sam Shepard, interviewed by Carol Rosen, "Silent Tongues," Village Voice 4 August 1992: 34.

CHAPTER II

PRE-PRODUCTION RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

My pre-production research would consist of three essential elements: a brief look at Shepard's life leading up to True West, an examination of his body of work and its evolution up to and including True West, and finally an analysis of the play itself. This analysis, as recounted here, includes a concise synopsis and a quick look at the ancient and universal theme of family conflict. However, the largest part of this analysis will focus specifically on the mythic strains that form the play's skeleton, for it is on this framework that I would concentrate my attention during the rehearsal process. Lastly, I researched and will include a short discussion on True West's inaugural production and its two subsequent New York openings.

Born Samuel Shepard Rogers VII on November 5, 1943 in Sheridan, Illinois. Shepard was given the name his forebears had used for six generations. His father was a career military man, and consequently his family moved from base to base all across America and beyond, even spending some time in Guam. When Shepard's father retired, the family settled in Duarte, California--a small town east of Los Angeles. At nineteen, Shepard left the "hysterical" family scene in California when his father's drinking became excessive and set out for New York as an aspiring musician/actor. Shepard's father had been a semiprofessional Dixieland drummer and had taught Shepard how to play the drums. Perhaps even more significantly, he

had ignited in him a lifelong love for music. In a Rolling Stone interview Shepard says, "I've always felt a great affinity for music. I've felt myself to be more of a musician than anything else, though I'm not proficient in any one instrument. But I think I have a musical sense of things . . . and writing seems to me to be a musical experience--rhythmically and in many other ways."¹ This musical influence would show up in his work time and time again, not only in his writing style (his plays have often been compared to that of a jazz improvisation or to extended country, blues, or rock n' roll songs) but as actual musical numbers and songs that would pepper his productions. In New York, Shepard encountered a high-school friend who got him a job at a jazz club. There he met Ralph Cook, founder of the off-off-Broadway company Theatre Genesis. It was Cook who first encouraged Shepard to write plays.

Shepard took Cook's advice and wrote two one-act plays, Cowboys and The Rock Garden. Produced in 1964 at St. Mark's Church-in-the-Bowery, these two pieces would be the first in what analysts would commonly refer to as his first phase of work. He began to turn out one-act plays very quickly. He told New York, "There wasn't much rewriting done. I had this whole attitude toward the work that it was somehow violating it to go back and rework it Why spend the time rewriting it when there was another one to do?"² (True West, however, was rewritten thirteen times.) Many of these plays, including Chicago, Icarus's Mother and Red Cross, were performed off-off-Broadway and attracted something of a cult following.

Nevertheless, they were also largely panned by critics and rejected by the “average” theatergoer.

Critic Ross Wetzsteon, who has called these plays “abstract collages consisting largely of lyrical monologues, stunning stage imagery, and a sense of paranoid despair,” explains it this way:

The difficulty most theatergoers had with the first group of plays, the abstract collages, was that they didn’t seem to be ‘about’ anything--that is, unlike most plays, they weren’t about their characters (who didn’t seem recognizable, who didn’t have that bundle of traits which we add together and label personality), and they weren’t about their stories (which seemed random, disconnected, even non-existent).³

Instead, Wetzsteon goes on to explain, these plays are more about “pure emotional, psychological or spiritual states--presented directly to the audience, conveyed in image and tone rather than packaged in ‘character’ and story’--they become as lucid as dreams.”⁴ Jennifer Allen of Esquire called these plays “short bursts of feeling, evocative of pure states of mind--abandonment, terror.”⁵ She also mentions Shepard’s well-known “arias,” monologues spoken by characters transformed by “trance states.” Jacques Levy, who directed several of Shepard’s early productions, has said, “Sam is more interested in *doing* something to audiences than in saying something to them.”⁶ Whether or not the audience “gets it” intellectually, the emotions and feelings that are aroused are key, for they will serve to illuminate and elicit responses or reactions. Audience members are called upon only to experience the work; they are not expected, required, or even asked to interpret plot, dissect theme, or analyze characters.

Although Shepard's work has evolved, the desire for spectators to allow sensory images and language to wash over them, evoking what they will, is an element that seems to remain true today. In a 1988 interview, Shepard dismisses his early work, saying:

You end up with a kind of cavorting, which is a lot of fun. I've done that a lot. But it doesn't satisfy you I didn't know how to write a play. That's what happens--if you don't know how to ride a motorcycle, you crash a lot. They were 'fun' to do, they had a lot of energy in them and all that, but I mean I wouldn't stand by them.⁷

In 1971, Shepard moved to England with his then-wife and son, looking to escape the destruction he saw so many of his artist friends suffer due to drug abuse.

Ironically, it was during this self-imposed exile that he became acutely aware of the "pull of his nation's culture and the stresses placed on an artist in that national milieu."⁸ The result was Shepard's second phase: a series of plays dealing with artists and their search for emotional identity and spiritual freedom. Plays of this period include Geography of a Horse Dreamer, Angel City, and The Tooth of Crime.

Shepard once told New York that he saw a growing emphasis on character during this phase ("since 1972"):

When I started writing, I wasn't interested in character at all. In fact, I thought it was useless, old-fashioned, stuck in a certain way I preferred a character that was constantly unidentifiable, shifting through the actor, so that the actor could almost play anything, and the audience was never expected to identify with the character But I had broken away from the ideas of character without understanding it.⁹

Now his characters begin to emerge, and usually as iconic figures--cowboys, rock stars, mythic American characters in search of self-fulfillment. However, more times

than not “they are forced to surrender their private vision to the service of public commerce.”¹⁰ This concept of the “mythic mystery” of the artist is a thread that would continue to run through the third phase of Shepard’s work. It is this phase of which True West is a part.

Though by no means clear of controversy, this period saw a definite swing in mainstream critical response. Many of the critics that had formerly denounced his plays were now seeing some stylistic merit. They seemed to feel more comfortable talking about this work; perhaps because this was an animal they felt they could more easily pigeon-hole. In Modern Drama Charles R. Bachman lauded Shepard’s new work for utilizing “. . . the traditional dramatic values of taut, disciplined structure, vivid and consistent characterization, and crescendo of suspense.”¹¹ Critic Gerald Weales maintained that these conventional strategies and methods did not and never have adequately applied to Shepard’s work: “Traditionally, reviewers have found it congenial to handle plays by talking about what they are about and that is the least valuable way of approaching Shepard’s work.”¹² And to be sure, Shepard has been unmistakably clear that he writes in images. He does not conceive plays in the typical narrative fashion, but instead favors the transformation of imagination directly into craft. As Gerry McCarthy so accurately notes, “He follows the image and controls it.”¹³ In retrospect, to see how and whence True West, part of Shepard’s third phase, grew from these two periods is clear. In it are successfully married his desire to

evoke emotional response through his brilliant use of imagery and the artist's search for identity so apparent in this second phase.

In his third phase of work Shepard began to write a series of plays that focused more on the nuclear family, and which analysts considered to be more representational in style. The first of these was Curse of the Starving Class, which was followed by Buried Child, for which Shepard won the Pulitzer Prize in 1979. True West and A Lie of the Mind followed. Perhaps as Shepard ages, his work begins to reflect or incorporate more images and experiences from his own life.

Richard Gilman, writing about this period, says:

Shepard has withdrawn noticeably from the extravagant situations, the complex wild voices and general unruliness of the earlier work. His themes, so elusive before, seem clearer now, if not pellucidly so, and his vision dwells more on actual society. Physical or economic circumstances play more of a part than before.¹⁴

However, Gilman is also careful to say that Shepard's drama, above all, is still about performing.¹⁵ It is still theatre about theatre. One would not deem that Shepard has now turned to a completely realistic examination of social or psychological themes. Sheila Rabillard in Modern Drama aptly claims, "He (Shepard) employs the trappings of kitchen-sink realism only to dispel the illusion the more effectively."¹⁶

Talking with critic Bernard Weiner about True West and some of his initial objectives, Shepard would say, "I constantly peeled back the language to where I wanted it," and that he didn't want "the tangents and garrulousness" associated with the earlier plays.¹⁷ He insinuated that he felt that this selectivity would afford the

actors more subtext to work with. “It (the language) seems tighter in the script, which gives the actors more room.”¹⁸ I would find this subtext to be integral and apparent in every piece of action on stage. What the brothers cannot say, they put into action.

True West revolves around two brothers. In all of the play’s nine scenes, the brothers are omnipresent. Scene One finds Austin, a college graduate, family man, and aspiring screenwriter, working on a project in his mother’s home some “forty miles east of Los Angeles” (redolent of Shepard’s own homeplace) while she is away in Alaska on vacation. Lee, Austin’s older brother and a small-time thief, shows up on the scene fresh from three months of drifting in the Mojave Desert. Anticipating his upcoming meeting with “big Hollywood producer” Saul Kimmer to discuss his screenplay, Austin attempts to avoid the distractions Lee creates. When Saul finally arrives for their meeting, Lee inadvertently and literally crashes it. He cons Saul into a golf game the next day during which he will pitch his own story idea, “a true to life Western.” Austin is forced into typing an outline for Lee. The next day, after the golf game, Lee returns home with Saul’s golfclubs. Austin learns that not only were the clubs won on a putting bet, but so was the option to develop and produce Lee’s story idea. Austin becomes hysterical when he discovers that his project has been completely dropped, and instead he will be hired as a screenwriter for Lee’s idea. This sets up the primary conflict and hastens a role reversal between the brothers. Austin goes on a drunken toaster-stealing spree (challenged by Lee), while Lee attempts to write and type his own screenplay. Both men grow increasingly more

drunk and more agitated. Completely at a loss. Lee agrees to let Austin come live with him in the desert if Austin will agree to type up his screenplay. Amidst the chaos, both physical and mental, the two brothers attempt to get the story on paper. Finally, Mother returns from Alaska to find her home in complete shambles, her plants dead, and her sons manic. Tension escalates to frenzy, the truce between the two collapses, and Austin strangles Lee half to death with a telephone cord. The play ends as Lee jumps up and the two face off; "lights go slowly to black as the after-image of the brothers pulses in the dark."¹⁹ Shepard's imagery is clearly at work.

Raw elements of this play are specifically American (the myth of the Old West, Hollywood and its clichés, etc.) but, what is more, True West does address an ancient universal theme--the modes of conflict between parents and children, brother and brother. Analyst Robert B. Heilman examines Shepard's use of this theme in an essay entitled "Shepard's Plays: Stylistic and Thematic Ties:"²⁰

In this Shepard is being Aristotelian. Aristotle specifies that the best tragic plots are those that occur within the families: "But when the tragic incident occurs between those who are near and dear to one another--if, for example, a brother kills, or intends to kill, a brother, a son his father, a mother her son, or any other deed of the kind is done--those are the situations to be looked for by the poet."²¹

Shepard is not as interested in what separates us, he says, as in what connects us.

What doesn't have to do with family? There isn't anything, you know what I mean? Even a love story has to do with family. Crime has to do with family. We all come out of each other--everyone is born out of a mother and a father, and you go on to be a father. It's an endless cycle.²²

It is this timeless truth that becomes the seed of my directing process for True West.

And it is this seed that is embedded within the fruit of myth.

In my opinion, the mythic thematic elements in True West are arguably the crux of the work. These elements include the mythic mysteries of the Old West, the artist, double nature, and Americana in regards to pop culture. “Myth speaks to everything at once, especially the emotions,” writes Sam Shepard.²³ It is the truth that lies within these myths that will serve to “change the chemistry.” The first three elements, the mythic mysteries of the Old West, the artist, and double nature, are all explored exhaustively in Tucker Orbison’s excellent essay “Mythic Levels in Shepard’s True West,”²⁴ and it is from this essay that I distilled much of my own analysis.

Exactly what is the True West? The play itself is set “in a Southern California suburb, about 40 miles east of L.A.” Lee describes the neighborhood as having

. . . a sweet kinda’ suburban silence Like a paradise
Warm yellow lights. Mexican tile all around. Copper pots hangin’ over the stove. Ya’ know like they got in the magazines. Blonde people movin’ in and outta’ the rooms, talkin’ to each other. (pause) Kinda’ place you wish you sorta grew up in, ya’ know.²⁵

Later Austin also refers to this “new West” as a “paradise.” “This is a Paradise down here. You know that? We’re livin’ in a Paradise. We’ve forgotten about that.”²⁶

However when the heat starts driving Lee crazy, the desert drifter heads up into the “foothills Up in the San Gabriels.” He comes back and remarks how different the landscape has become. Austin says it has been “built up.” “Built up? Wiped out is more like it. I don’t hardly even recognize it.” snaps Lee.²⁷ In Scene Eight, as

Austin tries to convince Lee to take him along to the desert, he laments, “There’s nothin’ down here for me. There never was. When we were kids here it was different. There was a life here then. But now--I keep comin’ down here thinkin’ it’s the fifties or somethin’.”²⁸ What has started out in Scene One as a “paradise” has quickly been transformed into the void that now constitutes the West. It is empty and plastic. What was once the Wild Frontier is now the new, modern West. It is full of freeways, fast talkers like Saul Kimmer who only want to make a buck, and empty souls. When Saul dumps Austin’s screenplay for Lee’s “Contemporary Western,” Austin shouts at an apathetic Saul, “There’s no such thing as the West anymore! It’s a dead issue! It’s dried up, Saul, and so are you!”²⁹ The values and ideals of the mythic Old West, where the likes of Jesse James and Billy the Kid roamed the plains, are long extinct. Sadly and somewhat ironically, Lee’s life in the desert roaming free albeit somewhat pitiful and alone, and his “true to life Western” are all that remain of the “True West.”

The second mythic element is that of the mystery of the artist; he is frequently envisioned as a romantic, sometimes tortured, outsider whose artistic passion is an all-consuming obsession. This remains as a sort of hold-over intrigue from Shepard’s second phase. In defining the artistic process, Shepard calls it “an unending mystery.” There is no formula or technique for the artistic process as he knows it. “I’m taking notes in as much detail as possible on an event that’s happening somewhere inside me If I find myself pushing the character in a certain direction, it’s almost always a

sure sign that I've fallen back on technique and lost the real thread of the thing."³⁰

Austin, the original aspiring screenwriter, is all about technique--the formulaic, the commercial. He refers to his work as only "a little project." He tells Lee he is just doing "a little research." He avoids elaborating. He is meant to be the "artist" of the two, and yet all he is really interested in is giving Saul what he wants and making some money. He knows the reality of the "system." Lee, who on the other hand embodies the pseudo-romantic idea of the artist as an outsider, conjures up his "true to life Western" and serves up the mythic West of the silver screen by embellishing the fantasies he grew up dreaming about. Austin criticizes his work as "not enough like real life," saying that his characters are only "illusions of characters." Lee, like Shepard, works from the imagery and visions in his mind. In an essay detailing Shepard's artistic process, Gary Grant observes that "Writing and theatre are for Sam Shepard a 'home' where he brings the adventures of his life and sorts them out. 'making sense or nonsense out of mysterious impressions'."³¹ Likewise, Lee holds fast to the belief in his adventures and it is ultimately his "Contemporary Western" that Saul buys into.

Double nature, the third mythic element, may be the most obvious of the four. It is from a 1991 interview with Robert Coe that comes one of Shepard's most frequently quoted remarks about True West. Shepard says:

I wanted to write a play about double nature, one that wouldn't be symbolic or metaphorical or any of that stuff. I just wanted to give a taste of what it feels like to be two-sided. It's a real thing, double nature. I think we're split in a much more devastating way than psychology can

ever reveal Not some little thing that we can get over. It's something that we've got to live with.³²

And though he tries to avoid being "symbolic or metaphorical or any of that stuff" in True West, it does not escape the scrutiny and analysis of the omnipresent critics.

Some analysts speculate that Austin and Lee specifically represent the two sides of Shepard. Others speculate that Lee and Austin are the yin and yang elements of a single individual, that together they form one whole being. Still another take on the two is the Freudian theory that revolves around the id and the ego. Lee is clearly the emotional, primitive side of the two; Austin is the thinking, analytical side. Freud's theory contends that balance must be maintained between the id and the ego, for when imbalance occurs, chaos will erupt. This certainly proves to be the case with Austin and Lee.

On first physical impressions, the two brothers hardly seem related. Shepard colors a vivid picture of each man's appearance in the script. Austin is wearing "light blue sports shirt, light tan cardigan sweater, clean blue jeans and white tennis shoes." Lee sports a "filthy white T-shirt, tattered brown overcoat covered with dust, dark blue baggy suit pants from the Salvation Army, pink suede belt, pointed black forties dress shoes scuffed up, holes in the soles, no socks, no hat, long pronounced sideburns, 'Gene Vincent' hairdo, 2 days' growth of beard, and bad teeth."³³

However, as the play progresses we see that the two brothers possess internal similarities. One such similarity is in the youthful desire they both disclose to have

been in the other's shoes. Each also deals with the reality, fear, and repercussions of being their father's son. Shepard says in a Rolling Stone interview:

Certain things that occur inside the family often leave marks on the emotional life that are far stronger than fantasy Sometimes in someone's gesture you can notice how a parent is somehow inhabiting that person without there being any awareness of that. How often are you aware that a gesture is coming from your old man?³⁴

Both Austin and Lee are victim to many of these same "marks." (Several critics have addressed the father/son relationship in his works, and it is present in True West, too, in tandem with this issue of duality.) Each brother reacts and responds to the impact that their father has had on them and the imprint that relationship has left. Their responses color and shape their individual characters and ultimately drive the two in wholly different reactive directions though, ironically, both are seeking to escape the same fate--disappointment in themselves and life. The role reversal begins to occur after Saul drops Austin's script. Lee takes on the role of angst-ridden screenwriter; Austin takes on the challenge of surviving in Lee's world via stealing toasters, all the while growing more and more drunk. As Lee tries desperately to put his story on paper, Austin laments, "He (Saul) thinks we're the same person He does! Thinks we're one and the same!"³⁵ Austin takes on the self-centered, crass, and negative nature of Lee, and finally even his violent temper as he attempts to strangle Lee to death: but he cannot kill Lee, for if he does he in essence kills part of himself. As Shepard has said of double nature, "It's not so cute. Not some little thing we can get over. It's something we've got to live with."

An interesting personal note and insight for me in regard to double nature was my own identification with the theory. Having been raised in a right-wing, strictly religious, conservative household, it has been difficult for me, at times, to reconcile the opposing sides of my own being. As an artist, I sometimes harbor rebellious, anarchist tendencies; I am drawn to very bohemian, visceral, sensual work. Much like Austin, I long for wild adventure and freedom, and yet conversely, I feel compelled to fulfill the expectations others may have of me, as well as those I create for myself.

Lastly, in regard to the mythic elements in True West, I find Shepard's use of American icons and images fascinating. "Shepard draws much of his material from popular culture sources such as B-grade westerns, sci-fi and horror films, popular folklore, country and rock music and murder mysteries,"³⁶ observes Charles R. Bachman. The comment was made in connection with his earlier scripts and yet is applicable to most, if not all, of his work. From True West's very first character descriptions (Lee is pictured as having a "Gene Vincent" hairdo) to the intermission music specifically suggested by Shepard (Hank Williams's "Ramblin' Man") this play is filled with strictly American icons and images. Lee recounts his favorite film, "Lonely Are the Brave" with Kirk Douglas. His "Contemporary Western" is colored with images of "gooseneck trailers" and terms such as "Tornado Country." Names such as Hopalong Cassidy and Geronimo, references to Safeway, state plates with Idaho decals, and "Forty Ford Flatheads" pepper the script. Scene Eight is filled with

toasters, the quintessential American appliance. They are all familiar pop-culture objects and figures that speak volumes about the mythology of the middle-class world.

To complete and conclude this analysis, a brief examination of True West's first production as well as its subsequent New York openings is in order. The inaugural production of True West was at the Magic Theatre in San Francisco on July 10, 1980. The cast consisted of Peter Coyote (Austin), Jim Hanie (Lee), Tom Dahlgreen (Saul Kimmer), and Carol McElheney (Mom). The director was Robert Woodruff. Its 1981 opening in New York at the Public Theatre was largely a highly publicized flop. Once again, Robert Woodruff was slated to direct. During the production process, some "widely publicized skirmishes" between Robert Woodruff and the Public's producer, Joseph Papp, erupted. Eventually it all led to the resignation of Woodruff, a new director (Joseph Papp) and cast (who allegedly changed and subverted the text), and finally, Shepard's decision to protest and "disown" the production. The results were fairly disastrous. The new cast included Tommy Lee Jones (Lee) and Peter Boyle (Austin). Reviews were poor. Some comments made by critics include: "... they seem distant from the play and uncertain about the effects they are trying for."³⁷ "Boyle cannot find ways to build the criminal brother into a figure of more than routine smarminess and menace; Tommy Lee Jones' screenwriter is only a hopping, blithering pip-squeak."³⁸

At the time some critics considered True West to have marked a positive change in style for Shepard, which would be classified as part of the third phase discussed earlier. Others did not seem to agree. Many of the same critics who panned the Public's production, including John Simon, also panned Shepard's literature: "The whole thing is a feeble imitation of Pinter, without even Pinter's ability to suggest that his meaninglessness might conceal meaning."³⁹ In the same review, Simon goes on to write: "The gifted but erratic Shepard has let us down before, but never so gracelessly, completely and unforgivably as with True West."⁴⁰ Other critics, such as J.R. Taylor, also made derogatory reference to his previous work: "... once again, as so often in Shepard's work, we are left with the image of a lot of bright ideas looking in vain for a vehicle."⁴¹

Two years later True West was vindicated by a long-running revival at New York's Cherry Lane Theatre. It was produced by Chicago's Steppenwolf Theatre Company and directed by Gary Sinise, who also took on the role of Austin. John Malkovich played Lee to the raves of critics and audiences alike. Review after review heaped praises on the actors, Shepard, and the production. Adulation came in the form of statements such as the following: "One of Shepard's most effective stage pieces"⁴², "Not so much a revival as a transformation! . . . due in no small part to the engaging clowning of John Malkovich and Gary Sinise"⁴³, "... not only gratifying, it (True West) illuminated elements of the whole Shepard career."⁴⁴

Two New York openings of True West, one a complete flop and one an almost unabashed success, only typify and befit the controversy that continues to surround Shepard. The events reinforce and illustrate the duality that is True West.

Notes

¹ Sam Shepard, interviewed by Jonathan Cott, "The Rolling Stone Interview: Sam Shepard," Rolling Stone 18 Dec.1986: 168.

² Anne Janette Johnson, "Shepard, Sam." Contemporary Authors: New Revision Series. 422-29.

³ Ross Wetzsteon, "Sam Shepard: Escape Artist," Partisan Review 49.2 (1982): 253-61.

⁴ Wetzsteon, 254.

⁵ Jennifer Allen, "The Man on the High Horse," Esquire Nov. 1988: 146.

⁶ Wetzsteon, 255.

⁷ Allen, 148.

⁸ Johnson, 425.

⁹ Johnson, 425.

¹⁰ Wetzsteon, 258.

¹¹ Charles R. Bachman, "Defusion of the Menace in the Plays of Sam Shepard," Modern Drama 19 (1976): 405-15.

¹² Gerald Weales, "The Transformation of Sam Shepard," American Dreams: The Imagination of Sam Shepard, ed. Bonnie Marranca (New York: 1981): 39.

¹³ Gerry McCarthy, "Acting it out: Sam Shepard's Action," Modern Drama 24.1 (March 1981): 1-12.

¹⁴ Richard Gilman, introduction, Sam Shepard: Seven Plays, by Sam Shepard (New York: Bantam Books, 1984) xxv.

¹⁵ Gilman, xviii.

¹⁶ Sheila Rabillard, "Sam Shepard: Theatrical Power and American Dreams", Modern Drama 30.1 (March 1987): 58-71.

¹⁷ Sam Shepard, interviewed by Bernard Weiner, San Francisco Chronicle 12 April, 1981.

¹⁸ Shepard, San Francisco

¹⁹ Sam Shepard, True West (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1981) 71.

²⁰ Robert B. Heilman, "Shepard's Plays: Stylistic and Thematic Ties," Sewanee Review 100.4 (1992): 638-39.

²¹ Aristotle, Poetics, XIV, 4, trans. S.H. Butcher.

²² Allen, 143.

²³ Sam Shepard, "Language, Visualization and the Inner Library," American Dreams: The Imagination of Sam Shepard, ed. Bonnie Marranca (New York, 1981): 217.

²⁴ Tucker Orbison, "Mythic Levels in Shepard's True West," Modern Drama 27:4 (1984): 506-19.

²⁵ Shepard, True 15.

²⁶ Shepard, True 47.

²⁷ Shepard, True 15.

²⁸ Shepard, True 58.

²⁹ Shepard, True 43.

³⁰ Shepard, "Language" 215.

³¹ Gary Grant, "Writing as a Process of Performing the Self : Sam Shepard's Notebooks," Modern Drama 34.4 (Dec. 1991): 549.

³² Robert Coe, "Saga of Sam Shepard," New York Times Magazine 23 November 1980: 122.

³³ Shepard, True 3.

³⁴ Shepard, "Rolling Stone" 489-90.

- ³⁵ Shepard, True 44.
- ³⁶ Bachman, 405.
- ³⁷ Jack Kroll, "California Dreaming," Newsweek 5 January 1981: 63.
- ³⁸ John Simon, rev. of True West, by Sam Shepard, New York 12 January 1981: 46.
- ³⁹ Simon, 46.
- ⁴⁰ Simon, 46.
- ⁴¹ J.R.Taylor, rev. of True West, by Sam Shepard, Drama 144.29 (1982): 29.
- ⁴² Gerald Weales, "American Theatre Watch 1982-1983," Georgia Review 37 (1983): 601.
- ⁴³ Edith Oliver, rev. of True West, by Sam Shepard, New Yorker 29 November 1982: 160.
- ⁴⁴ Stanley Kauffmann, "Last of the Mohicans," Saturday Review 9 (May/June 1983): 35.

CHAPTER III

EVOLUTION OF DIRECTING CONCEPTS

In looking to direct True West, as with directing any production, it was necessary that I develop some precursory ideas about how to address the piece. And indeed, pre-production research coupled with some ideas that had already emerged from my first encounter with True West comprised most of my first thoughts about how to begin the work. I would also draw on the analysis information from Chapter II--the fact that Shepard was indeed controversial, the mythical elements inherent in his work, and Shepard's belief, which I share, that "Myth speaks to everything"; and finally, why did one premiere production bomb and the other rise to be critically acclaimed?

However the process proved to be more organic than not, evolving with information, ideas, and "problems" that sprung forth during the play's rehearsal period. These would include the intrinsic sensuality that I found, and subsequently wanted to heighten, in Shepard's script; information I learned and experienced while concurrently enrolled in a class entitled "The Teaching of Acting"; a National Public Radio story; and the given space and time with which I was to work.

As a result of my analysis of True West, and wanting to avoid creating food for a critic feeding-frenzy, I chose to find and emphasize its inherent mythical elements and universal truths. It would be my attempt to evade that the production might be

called “obscure” or “gratuitously brutal.” Logical questions would then be: What is myth? And later: Wherein lies the truth?

When questioned about myth in an interview, Shepard replies, “You’ve never seen that word in one of my plays. It comes up after the fact.”¹ And yet he cannot deny its existence in his work. He goes on to say that myth once served a purpose in our lives but that now in its purest form it does not exist anymore:

Myth served as a story in which people could connect themselves in time to the past. And thereby connect themselves to the present and future It was so powerful and so strong that it acted as a thread in culture. And that’s been destroyed All we have are fantasies about it.²

Perhaps he is right. Shepard states that the mythical elements in True West do not strive to “connect us to the family of generations and generations of races of people, tribes, the mythology of ancient people.”³ Instead, these elements address sociohistorical and artistic mysteries, which in turn speak to us on both conscious and subconscious psychological and emotional levels.

Next I will address the question of how specifically each of the four given mythical elements I extracted would affect my directorial approach. The notions of the West--true versus real versus Old--were predominant in the physical evolution and actualization of the set. In my mind, the depiction of Mom’s house was crucial, for at the beginning of the show it is symbolic of what the West has truly become. It is cliché and plastic, and it typifies the fantasy of what Austin calls “livin’ the life.” I went into the first production meeting desirous of an archetypal 50’s-60’s kitchen

setting. This was the boyhood home of Lee and Austin, made apparent as they reminisce about the neighborhood, and therefore should be an older home. The 1950s-60s also constituted an era that typified what is frequently referred to as “the good old days” when America was pure and touted “family values.” The time in which the play is set is not specifically dictated by the script, but Austin’s use of a typewriter suggests that it is definitely before the age of the computer. In Shepard’s script “Note on Set and Costume,” with which I concurred, he says:

The set should be constructed realistically with no attempt to distort its dimensions, shapes, objects or colors. No objects should be introduced which might draw special attention to themselves other than the props demanded by the script. If a stylistic ‘concept’ is grafted onto the set design it will only serve to confuse the evolution of the characters’ situation, which is the most important part of the play.⁴

However, as the show progresses, the set will indeed degenerate into a more surrealistic landscape of chaos. Even though True West is shrouded in a more “realistic” skin than some of his other work, it is by no means a case study in realism. Analyst William Kleb has said about True West that it “does not oscillate between fantasy and reality. Rather the two levels co-exist . . . objective and subjective realities are not juxtaposed, they are superimposed.”⁵ The eventual destruction of Mom’s suburban house, emblematic of what the West has become, would be an almost inverted return to the mythic West where survival is of the fittest. Therefore it was imperative that the set evoke a certain sentimentality from the start.

Saul Kimmer, the smarmy Hollywood producer, would be a comment on what both the West and the artistic world have become. The truth is that Hollywood was

never about "Show Art" but "Show Business". Commercial, money-making ventures are what sells. In Theatre Journal Florence Falk calls Shepard's characters "Exaggerations, intensifications or embodiments of certain attributes or propensities."⁶ Buying into this description, I considered it important that Saul's physical appearance be indicative of that reality--the embodiment of archetypal Show Biz.

Furthermore, the treatment of each brother's screenplay endeavor would speak to the mystery of the artist. Austin's formulaic approach to his script will be seen in the methodical way he writes, the way he sits, how often he physically takes a break or gets a drink. In direct opposition, Lee's lack of experience will be illustrated. He has no "approach," and so will move, sit, and write in decidedly more non-traditional, sporadic ways.

In The Sewanee Review Robert B. Heilman relates Shepard's intention well when he points out that "while his people are strange in visible behavior and audible speech, they are central in psychological reality. To put it another way, he avoids clichés, but he hits upon traditional patterns of human conduct (or in other words, archetypes without stereotypes)."⁷ Shepard's look at double nature is obvious from the play's start not only in the brothers' physical appearance, which is markedly opposite (as described in Chapter II) but also in the way the two move, eat, drink, and speak, and in the lifestyles they choose. They typify archetypal "opposites." As this duality is inherent in the script, and is in fact unavoidable, I felt it necessary to point

up the relationship between these two. I felt that this was the crux of making True West “true.” The truth is that these two are brothers and that is what makes this play greater than, say, if it occurred between two roommates. Yes, they represent the duality of man, but they are also brothers. Consequently, from day one at auditions I was in search of two men who would ensure the possibility of fraternal chemistry.

In regards to similarities that Austin and Lee would eventually exhibit internally (i.e. their desire to have lived one another’s life, the repercussions of being their “father’s son”), I would capitalize on the use of movement and some mirror imagery. Hopefully, these would allow for the ensuing role reversal with some transition, albeit a subconscious one in the mind of the audience. Research provided an essay by Gerald Weales on the Steppenwolf production in the Georgia Review which made note of just such a strategy: “The performers shared mannerisms, realistically or in parody, in a way that made the transformation not only plausible but inevitable.”⁸

Lastly, an interesting point that crossed my mind when exploring the mythic element of double nature but about which I did not find any related material from Shepard scholars was the idea of the female versus the male sides of our personalities. However in a Village Voice article Shepard comments on this very issue:

You know, in yourself, that the female part of one’s self as a man is, for the most part, battered and beaten up and kicked to shit just like some women in relationships. The men themselves batter their own female part to their own detriment As a man, what is it like to embrace the female part of yourself that you historically damaged for one reason or another?⁹

To date I have not read of any women who have directed True West. I have not exhaustively researched that particular subject, but find it interesting that I have never come across a female director's name in the research that I have done. I went into the production wondering what I, as a woman, would instinctively bring to the table and to True West. Perhaps another layer in the duality issue.

In examining Shepard's use of mythic Americana/pop culture images and icons, I decided that I would serve them up in a big way. Besides the fact that I am simply drawn to "kitschy" art and objects, I knew that if nothing else these images would speak directly to my audience. They are the essence of middle-class America, and these images would be ones that I knew our Lubbock audience would identify with. They would find the "truth" in Hank Williams and in chrome and yellow vinyl marbled dinette chairs. In meeting with my set, costume, and sound designers, they were all in agreement. We would look to heighten this mythic aspect of True West, and it was this concept that led to much of what ended up as the final visual product.

After examining the mythical elements I analyzed in Chapter II, another question I had in relation to prior research remained: Why were True West's two New York openings received in two wholly different ways? Besides the obvious cast and artistic staff changes, was there any specific change or problem that I could address or learn from? In reading many reviews, I noticed that the concept of humor kept resurfacing in reference to the second show. This was the production at the Cherry Lane Theatre,

directed and starring Gary Sinise, which was critically acclaimed. In a Village Voice interview Sinise said, "I always reinforce the humor in Sam's plays. They couldn't be funny if they weren't written that way, and not everybody does that. It keeps audiences off-balance."¹⁰ Indeed at one point Gerald Weales called True West "one of the funniest plays Shepard has written in years. That may account for its success."¹¹ This in mind, I would go into the production conscious of where the humor was in the script. I intended to make sure that those moments happened. This would necessitate some carefully constructed physical moments as well as innate comic timing from both actors. In that knowledge I focused, in auditions, on actors' timing. Cold readings included material from Scene Seven, a very funny scene that involves an extremely drunk Austin, Lee attempting to type his screenplay, and some fabulous, immediate interaction and chemistry between the two.

My next investigation would center around the sensuality found in True West. It was my belief that sensuality was going to be key to a successful production, as it is key to our humanity. Apparently Sam Shepard holds much the same belief. I found in my research that not only was sensuality a major intrinsic factor in True West, but in essentially all of Shepard's work. In his desire to speak to the emotions, rather than simply to the intellect, he employs sensuality in its purest form. When I speak of sensuality in relation to True West, I refer to the five senses--smell, taste, sight, sound, and touch--and to the emotions or feelings they may evoke. Gary Grant writes in an essay for Modern Drama:

His plays generate a rhythm of sensations designed to create a strong emotional, pre-intellectual experience. In this way Shepard approaches Artaud's prescription for theatrical vitality: . . . `these appearances will not exercise their true magic except in an atmosphere of hypnotic suggestion in which the mind is affected by a direct pressure upon the senses.'¹²

Another critic whose work appears in Modern Drama, Ann Wilson, refers specifically to the eyes of the Shepard audience, "The visual elements of a performance are the strongest for the audience. Because seeing is believing, perhaps the audience ought to be referred to as spectators."¹³ Critic Florence Falk refers to the ears: "Repeatedly in Shepard's plays, music--its sounds and rhythms--is a magic lure that literally entrances people; that is, enters into and modulates their being through trance."¹⁴ In a production of Fool for Love, Shepard "amplified the sounds of slamming doors and booming walls with the help of microphones."¹⁵ Still another writer (Gary Grant) even incorporates the nose: "(Shepard) concentrates on the 'surface' experience of his own life, the textures, smells and objects in places he has lived"¹⁶ Finally Charles G. Whiting authored an entire article entitled "Food and Drink in Shepard's Theater." He wasn't the only one. Critic Carol Rosen commented to Shepard in an interview that "I can't think of a single play of yours where characters haven't been having breakfast, or boiling artichokes, or burning toast, or spilling cream of broccoli soup all over the bed, or"¹⁷ Shepard interrupts with an interesting answer. He says he never really thought about it--though the subject had come up before--until he began working with Joseph Chaikin on a project called Tongues. In the project, there

was a monologue about hunger and Chaikin started to talk about it. In this discussion, Shepard felt as if he was enlightened to a possible meaning:

His sense of it was . . . the profound emptiness in a person's life is answered by eating in many ways. Somehow, when you eat, food fills some kind of void that's not only physical but emotional. And I think that there's something to that. People who have hunger for anything--the hunger for drugs, the hunger for sex--this hunger is a direct response to a profound sense of emptiness and aloneness, maybe, or disconnectedness. And I think that there's some truth to that.¹⁸

Truth. Austin and Lee each hunger in their own way--for spiritual fulfillment, acceptance, validation, etc. In True West, one finds an abundance of toast, coffee, and beer, and not just in the traditional "eating and drinking" sort of way. Stacks of toast are made and sent flying through the air. Beer is gulped by the bottle and poured all over Lee's body. In looking to heighten this sensuality even further, I encouraged the set, lighting, and sound designers to brainstorm ways in which we might bombard the senses and still serve the work.

During the fall semester in which I was directing True West, I was concurrently enrolled in a course entitled "The Teaching of Acting," taught by Prof. Christopher Markle. The crux of this class was a survey of great acting teachers/masters and their methodologies, much akin to the "Seminar in Directing Methodology" mentioned in Chapter I. Some of the masters we studied included Rudolf Laban, Anne Bogart, and E.B. Vakhtangov. As I was obsessing about True West, it constantly remained in the back of my mind: class time was no exception. Consequently I was always mentally

applying methodologies in my head to that evening's rehearsals. Finally a few brave ideas would emerge to be tested on unsuspecting actors.

Anne Bogart was a hold-over from my previous scene production experience, as I had employed a bit of her methodology, namely sourcework and the exploration of spatial relationship, during the rehearsal process. In wanting to continue this exploration of her ideas, I would capitalize on the concepts and use of spatial relationship, kinesthetic response, gesture, and architecture (four of her "Viewpoints") during True West's rehearsal period.

Spatial relationship involves "the distance between things on stage, especially one body to another, one body to a group of bodies, or the body to the playing space."¹⁹ Specifically, I wanted to utilize this concept to explore the dynamic possibilities between Austin and Lee. When were they uncomfortably close? When would they be noticeably separated by great distance? This would prove to be an important concept in developing and exhibiting this fraternal relationship.

Kinesthetic response has been called "a spontaneous reaction to motion which occurs outside you; the timing with which you respond to the external events of movement or sound; the impulsive movement which occurs from a stimulation of the senses."²⁰ This Viewpoint would be critical in the abundance of actual physical work and connection between Austin and Lee. It would also tie into the sensual elements of the play.

Categorized as a “Viewpoint of Space,” architecture incorporates “the physical environment in which you are working and how awareness of it affects movement.”²¹ The relationship of the actors to the space and the set would be significant. The Lab Theater is very intimate, and the set would be very crowded with appliances, furniture, and bodies. The two actors portraying Austin and Lee were both very tall and lanky, and took up a lot of space, especially when sprawled out on the floor. Later, the stage would also be filled with trash, beer cans, and toasters. These additions would most definitely affect the actors’ movement and sense of space in both a very real and surreal way.

Another acting master whom we studied and from whom I would borrow on more than one occasion was Rudolf Laban. “Man moves in order to satisfy a need”²² was his mantra. His study and methodology was one of movement theory. He believed that movement is “a two way language process through which the human body could communicate by giving and receiving messages.”²³ Furthermore, he knew that the body’s movement, including that of the voice, were the actor’s tools, and therefore actors must be extremely observant with a keen sense for detail. One of Laban’s tasks was to break down movement into what he termed the Eight Basic Effort Actions. These would include: pressing, flicking, wringing, dabbing, slashing, gliding, thrusting or punching, and floating. Of course Laban’s methodology is a whole potential thesis study in and of itself but, armed with an extremely limited knowledge, I would attempt to apply some of these theories in rehearsal.

Another unexpected component in the evolution of my overall concept came in the way of a National Public Radio story. One day I was driving home and listening to the radio when I heard a story about the Chicago Zoo, where there was a new six-week exhibit of “Homo sapiens.” Yes, there would be a man and a woman living within a Plexiglas “cage” of sorts for six weeks and on display for public viewing. My mind started to reel. I began thinking about zoos and cages in relation to the “fourth wall.” Why are there cages? What purpose do they serve? I came to the conclusion that the “fourth wall” of a cage allowed the spectator to view a potentially life-threatening, dangerous situation or animal very voyeuristically, but free from the fear of being harmed or affected by the danger. Humans like to observe dangerous, sometimes even gory or brutal situations if they know that they are safe. In a very Brechtian way, it provides a sense of alienation, allowing the spectator to be objective and subjective at the same time. I knew that this production of True West needed to feel dangerous. Shepard, in talking about the Cherry Lane production of True West, refers to a sort of “controlled anarchy”²⁴ that I would come back to. Having been an audience member at a Shepard production, Steven Putzel recalled that “. . . the raw emotion, the primal passion, the constant imminence of physical violence momentarily shock spectators out of their comfort and force a more aesthetic involvement.”²⁵ I did not want a passive audience, but one that was indeed forced into a sort of emotional involvement. Sam Shepard, when asked whether or not theater should be dangerous, replied:

Well, to a certain extent. You don't want to hurt anybody. I don't believe in theater that hurts people physically at all. I don't think that's what Artaud meant by 'theatre of cruelty.' And I don't like to see people maim themselves or do anything ridiculous. But on the emotional level, there can be a comparable experience without hurting anyone.²⁶

In another article, he remarks that the spectator does not have to be "physically sloshed into something" to be participating.²⁷ I wanted the audience to be able to watch the play, "giving in" to what was onstage. The idea of a cage would allow these spectators to engage in the production sensually and voyeuristically yet maintain a feeling of safety. This would prove to serve a dual purpose, as it would also act as an actual protective barrier between the audience and actors. A looming practical question for both the set designer and myself would be: How do we keep typewriter parts, golf club heads, toast, or beer bottles from impaling audience members? The Lab Theater is an extremely intimate thrust stage wherein the first row of patrons could easily set their feet on the stage's edge. I approached my set designer early on, prior to the first production meeting, telling him about the NPR story and about my concept.

Finally one last, though very real, consideration in the production process would be that of rehearsal time and space. In essence, we had only twenty rehearsals to complete the work, and the first two weeks would be in a classroom approximately 20' x 20' in size. One manifestation of my desire to focus on the energy and relationship between the two brothers in tandem with this schedule would be my decision to work solely with the two actors who would play Austin and Lee for the

first eleven days. This decision made, this schedule would definitely raise some challenges and concerns that shaped the evolution of my concept and process in ways I could have not have foreseen.

Notes

¹ Sam Shepard, interviewed by Carol Rosen, "Emotional Territory: An Interview with Sam Shepard." Modern Drama 36:1 (1993): 5.

² Shepard, "Emotional" 5.

³ Shepard, "Emotional" 5.

⁴ Sam Shepard, True West (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1981) 5.

⁵ William Kleb, rev. of True West, by Sam Shepard, Theater 12 (1980): 65-71.

⁶ Florence Falk, "The Role of Performance in Sam Shepard's Plays." Theatre Journal 33.2 (1981): 182-198.

⁷ Robert B. Heilman, "Shepard's Plays: Stylistic and Thematic Ties." Sewanee Review, 100.4 (1992): 639.

⁸ Gerald Weales, "American Theatre Watch 1982-1983." Georgia Review 37 (1983): 601-02.

⁹ Sam Shepard, interviewed by Carol Rosen, "Silent Tongues." Village Voice 4 Aug. 1992: 35.

¹⁰ Gary Sinise, interviewed by Randy Gener, "Fool for Sam." Village Voice 20 Feb. 1996: 73.

¹¹ Weales, 602.

¹² Gary Grant, "Shifting the Paradigm: Shepard, Myth and the Transformation." Modern Drama 36.1 (1993): 120-130.

¹³ Ann Wilson, "Fool of Desire: The Spectator to the Plays of Sam Shepard." Modern Drama, 30.1 (1987): 46-57.

¹⁴ Falk, 192.

¹⁵ Susanne Willadt, "States of War in Sam Shepard's States of Shock." Modern Drama 36.1 (1993): 147-66.

¹⁶ Grant, 121.

¹⁷ Shepard, "Silent" 35.

¹⁸ Shepard, "Silent" 35.

¹⁹ Michael Bigelow Dixon and Joel A. Smith, ed. and trans., Anne Bogart: Viewpoints (Lyme NH: Smith and Kraus, Inc., 1995) 23.

²⁰ Dixon and Smith, 21.

²¹ Dixon and Smith, 22.

²² Jean Newlove, Laban for Actors and Dancers (London: Nick Hern Books, 1993) 11.

²³ Newlove, 11.

²⁴ Shepard, "Silent" 35.

²⁵ Steven Putzel, "Expectation, Confutation, Revelation: Audience Complicity in the Plays of Sam Shepard," Modern Drama 30:2 (1987): 147-60.

²⁶ Shepard, "Emotional" 4.

²⁷ Ellen Oumano, Sam Shepard: The Life and Work of an American Dreamer (New York, 1986) 98.

CHAPTER IV

SELECTION AND IMPLEMENTATION: THE FINAL PRODUCT

General auditions were held on Wednesday, August 28, 1996. They would serve as the “cattle call” for all four of that semester’s productions. Actors were required to perform a ninety-second monologue (maximum) and sixteen bars of music.

Obviously, I went into the audition concentrating on the monologues. I was looking for definite physical types, but also for a sort of raw energy. I would be attracted to what I would consider interesting and edgy Shepardesque characters--not pretty faces. Strictly American archetypes, Shepardesque characters are those you might find in a small, truckstop diner or on Hollywood Boulevard at 3:30 a.m.; very real, gritty and raw, they are unaware of their own characteristic quirks and eccentricities. They have frequently been the subject of photographers traveling across America, looking to capture the heart of its people.

In respect to the roles of Austin and Lee, I was looking for men, not boys. Unfortunately, there seemed to be an abundance of very young faces, and consequently the potential casting pool was pretty small. In regards to Mom and Saul, the challenge would be even greater. In addition to my search for offbeat characters, I would also be looking for actors with some age: Saul is meant to be in his late forties and Mom in her early sixties. The number of potential candidates meeting these descriptions was relatively minuscule. I knew that these would be

difficult roles to cast, but wanted to stay as true to my vision and to the age ranges as possible.

Callback auditions were held the following Saturday, August 31, from seven until ten in the evening. Over one hundred actors had auditioned during general auditions. I called back a total of six women and sixteen men, from which would be culled all three of the male characters, as well as the one female character. Five women and eleven men showed up.

I concentrated on all of the potential Sauls and Moms first, as I wanted to be able to release them in a timely manner in order to further focus on Austin/Lee candidates. Selections for these cold readings included Scenes Three and Six (Austin, Lee and Saul) and Scene Nine, Mom's only scene. After reading and side-coaching these actors for approximately one hour, I would have some difficult decisions to make at the night's end. There were not any clear-cut choices. Casting Saul and Mom would prove to be the biggest risks I would take. Most of the actors who read were adequate. They neither repulsed me nor knocked my socks off, but most were just not as "quirky" as what I had envisioned or did not seem to exude the type of energy I was looking for. The two actors I would finally select were both very eccentric individuals naturally, the epitome of what I would term "Shepard characters" in real life. They were exactly what I had been looking for physically. The actor who would play Saul moved with a slouchy posture, was average in height and build, balding though exhibiting excessive body hair, and spoke with a very unusual lack of

inflection. He wore a leather biker jacket and boots with Wrangler jeans. The actor who would play Mom was extremely thin, if not fragile, in her mid-60's, with very angular features and hair dyed platinum-blonde and piled upon her head. She moved on her toes and almost sang through her lines. Much like Carol Burnett's parody of Nora Desmond, she seemed an eccentric aging starlet. Unfortunately, neither had much experience. In fact, the actor I was considering for Saul was an MFA Design candidate, only auditioning to fulfill scholarship requirements. (Any student receiving financial aid in the way of a scholarship from the theatre department is required to audition for the season's productions.) In addition, I found both actors' body/vocal control and awareness to be very affected, though they did seem able to take some minimal direction. Nonetheless, after much soul-searching that evening after callbacks, I decided that I would take the risk. Rather than settling for "safe" choices that would more than likely prove to be mediocre, I would take the plunge.

After dismissing the Sauls and Moms, I went to work with the potential brothers. First I would employ some cold readings from Scenes Four and Five. I was looking for the following: physical and emotional chemistry between two individuals, innate sense of timing, a raw energy that rides just under the surface with the potential to explode, and the ability to make choices and commit to strong physical action. I read each and every actor in every possible combination of two that could be created. Any preconceived notions I might have had with respect to casting were annihilated. Some of the pairings in which I was most interested initially proved to create so much

testosterone on the stage that I could not take it: I was genuinely afraid, but not in an interesting uncomfortable way; rather, in a creepy way. I wanted physical, raw energy, but I also knew that the play's nine scenes were not all about anger, and pacing would be key. I began to re-read the actors even if the pairings seemed odd. It was during one of these odd pairings, in which I really did not expect much to happen, that I saw one moment of True West come to life. I was shocked and made note of it. Two actors I would never have expected to connect, much less to be believable as brothers, clicked. They gave and shared energy so naturally that the chemistry was almost tangible. The scene was funny and familiar. Yet within a split second, the scene turned uncomfortably tense and potentially dangerous. The proverbial fine line between love and hate was illuminated.

After completing the cold readings, I took the men outside to play some improvisation games with toys. These toys would include a basketball, a Frisbee, two paddles and a rubber ball, etc. I split the men up into pairs. Fresh from the cold readings, I was already somewhat cognizant of which men would be good potential partners/brothers and took this into consideration when creating the pairs. I gave each team a toy and a brother/brother scenario. For example: "One of you is the older brother, one of you is the younger brother, and you have both been dating the same girl." The men would improvise scenes while physically interacting. The physical interaction would provide me with an additional sense of how well these individuals moved, how aggressive they were, etc.. Most of the men performed very well

individually, but I knew that I was definitely looking for a team. By the end of the callbacks I had easily selected my first choices--definitely the two that I had made note of earlier. In fact, I felt so strongly about these two that I did not really even consider my second choices an option. However, I knew that when I would go into the casting meeting the following Sunday, where all four of that semester's directors would vie for actors, I would need to have first, second and third choices. And so I put them in groups of two. If I did not get my "first choice" Lee, then I would automatically move on to my "second choice" Austin as well. The chemistry between the two had to be right, and this was the only way that I could secure that probability to any degree.

The directors' meeting was the next day, September 1, 1996, and I was a bit nervous. My show would run November 11-17, and so conflicted with every other show that semester. It was sandwiched between two shows with large casts, A Christmas Carol and Cabaret. In addition, the first show of the semester, Red Noses, also had a large cast and would be traveling to a collegiate theatre festival during November. The probability that no other director would want to cast any of my first choices was almost non-existent. Fortunately, at the directors' meeting another very gracious director suggested that I list my choices first to ensure that I could even do a show. I proposed my candidates, and to my complete surprise, only one actor was found to be a conflict with one other director. It was the actor I wanted to play Austin. No sooner was it a conflict than it was resolved. We figured out that there

were really only two weeks of rehearsals/shows that overlapped, and that if I could hold afternoon rehearsals for those two weeks, we would both be able to cast this actor. True West was cast in less than fifteen minutes, and with all of my first choices. The cast would include Miles Chick (Lee), Kelly Russell (Austin), Margaret Hite (Mom), and Pat White (Saul Kimmer).

Going into my first production meeting, I was excited about the prospects of what would arise through the collaborative artistic process that we would employ. From that very first meeting, I felt good about my stage manager, set, costume, and lighting/sound designers, and the fact that we all seemed to be on much the same wavelength. My production staff would include Jill Leven (stage manager), Kevin Carter (set design), Sherry L. Lyon (costume design), and Brett Carlson (lighting and sound design).

Before the first production meeting, I had already met independently with the set designer. We talked about Shepard's admonitions in the beginning of the script not to project any "stylistic concepts" onto the set design, about my desire to see an archetypal 50's-60's kitchen setting, and about the National Public Radio story that I had heard. I wanted him to consider each and to let me know if he felt that a "fourth wall" structure/cage would serve the work and our intentions, or if it would indeed detract from the evolution of the characters' situation. I mentioned Plexiglas and how fabulous it would be to see beer, toast, and bodies smashed up against and running down the walls. The images were vibrant in my mind. However, I also knew that our

limited budget would in no way allow for Plexiglas. I just wanted to translate what I saw in my head in some tangible way. Eventually he came to me with the conclusion that he supported the ideas I had presented. From that point, he went on to brainstorm about the set design on his own.

By the first production meeting, the set designer had already developed an idea that would be a vital element to the final visual product. Inspired by the NPR story, and well aware that Plexiglas was never an option, the designer came up with chicken wire. He had a source that would allow him access to an abundance of wire at little, if any, cost. Encircling the stage, it would serve to protect the audience from any physical harm due to flying metal particles and would create the surreal theatrical effect that I wanted. The audience would be able to watch the danger, unafraid of becoming harmed by it, and yet still entranced and affected by the emotional danger. We tossed the idea around with the other designers and agreed to proceed.

We discussed heightening True West's innate sensuality through the set design. It was not my goal to create a "naturalistic" set; it was my goal to bombard the senses, to heighten the sensuality and thus the humanity of True West. Brainstorming would eventually evolve into implementing props such as a functioning bug zapper, stove top, coffeemaker, and running water. During production, this would prove to cause much confusion backstage. The theater did not really have the adequate power located directly backstage to accommodate all of the appliances that we needed. It was a maze of extension cords and electrical powerstrips. Fifteen toasters and an

electric typewriter did not help the matter any. However, the smell of burning toast, fried bologna, beer, and freshly brewed coffee provided the sensual bombardment that I had desired. Hearing the running water, the keys of the typewriter--whether being pecked lightly or destroyed by a golf club--and the "bugs" (water droplets) as they were "zapped" provided magical aural imagery. My only regret would be the bug zapper. Although visually and aurally stunning, it would prove to be a distraction at times both for the audience and the actors. It was difficult to control how long the "bug" (water droplet) would "fry" and sometimes it felt like an eternity. When it worked it was right; when it didn't it was torture.

Tying together the use of Americana pop-culture imagery and the concept of the New "True" West, the set designer designed and dressed the stage with props that reeked of suburbia, including a wonderful collection of ceramic chickens and roosters (which added a certain level of humor to the chicken wire that surrounded the stage). It was just the kitchen I had envisioned. Most of the appliances used were pulled from the Texas Tech University Theatre's storage/supply house. A white, rounded Westinghouse refrigerator with a chrome pull handle became the set's upstage apex. The table and chairs located down right were a classic 50's dinette set--four chrome and yellow vinyl marbleized chairs and a chrome and Formica table. A screendoor, kicked and slammed open and shut over and over again, opened to the back porch. Plaid yellow, white and blue wallpaper covered the walls where cabinets did not.

I wished to incorporate a bit of multi-media, an added comment on American myth in regards to television icons and the family. We wired the television that Lee steals in Scene Three to a VCR backstage so that, at a predetermined moment, Lee would flip on the television to see the introduction to "The Andy Griffith Show." Andy and Opie, emblematic of the picture-perfect American father and son, are whistling and walking down the dry, dusty dirt road toting fishing poles. The dialogue would continue above of the familiar strain of music. Not only did this speak to the television icons and myths that we know, love, and have watched for years, but to the father/son relationship and the myth of the perfect "All-American" family. Clearly, Austin and Lee were not a part of that kind of family--though each professes a desire to have been.

Overall, I was extremely pleased with True West's completed set design. The only problems I would encounter with the set would be during the rehearsal process. Therefore, those problems will be discussed in a relevant latter section of this chapter.

My costume designer and I also discussed the desire to incorporate the mythical elements into the work. The costumes would serve to punch up the imagery found in the myths of the West, Americana pop-culture imagery, and the artist. The costumes would be true to the archetypes that are Shepard's characters. The costume designer brought me sketches almost immediately, perhaps at the second production meeting. Frankly, I did not expect her to create designs on paper, as I knew the costumes would simply be pulled and assimilated from pre-existing stock. True West is not a

costume-intense show, and yet the work that the designer did proved vital in creating these characters. Saul reeked of the slimy Hollywood producer. Polyester suit, turtleneck, greasy hair, gold chain, and a padded gut helped to define this image of what the West and commercial art have become. Mom, in an embroidered pantsuit and very styled wig, with chiffon scarf and hard-sided luggage, was every bit the American suburban prototype. She looked almost plastic herself. Earlier, the designer had thought about Mom in a skirt and blouse, but we decided that the pantsuit was more appropriate to the vision that we both had.

Double nature was immediately visible with Lee and Austin just standing, silently, on stage. Austin was outfitted just as Shepard had drawn him: khaki pants, light blue oxford cloth shirt, dress shoes, and a navy blue knit tie. As the “role reversal” ensued, Austin stripped down and revealed an undershirt of the sort that Lee would wear. He became more and more filthy and visually more and more like Lee.

The only character that underwent a bit of transformation in pre-production was that of Lee. Initially, the designer had sketched a costume that was a bit too much on the ‘vagrant’ side. Yes, he had been wandering around in the Mojave desert, but he also needed to be reminiscent of the pseudo-romantic though kitschy outsider. I kept having visions of Nicholas Cage in the film “Raising Arizona.” Consequently, Lee ended up with a tattoo and a pair of dual-tone, pointed, forties lace-up dress shoes. He also wore a plain, ribbed undershirt, navy suit pants, and a khaki overcoat.

The final result of True West's costume design was exactly what it needed to be. It served the work and the mythic elements in the script, and carried these characters to the realm of archetype.

My lighting and sound designs would be created by the same designer. My only concrete wishes would be in keeping with my view toward sensuality. I wanted to see practical lights on the set. For example, the light within the refrigerator needed to work each time the door was opened. As to sound, I wanted exactly what Shepard called for in the script. This included the ambient sounds of crickets, which would play throughout all of the night scenes, and the yapping, dog-like bark of "the coyote of Southern California." Shepard goes into great detail regarding this particular coyote, so as it will not be confused with the "solitary howl of the Hollywood stereotype." Shepard requests that these sounds be treated realistically. In addition, I also wanted to utilize the Hank Williams music that Shepard suggests both as intermission and post-show music.

The designer did an adequate job with the lighting and sound. I really had no idea what the designer intended until the week of technical rehearsals. We had discussed these ideas, but the communication did not seem to be as strong with this designer as with the others. The actors were lit satisfactorily, and the sounds were acceptable. The coyote sounds ended up sounding more like some dogs in the backyard, and probably would have been assumed as such, if not for the fact that Austin explicitly mentions the coyotes in one of his lines. The crickets were actually a cricket. Why

better sounds were not found was attributed to a lack of resources and time. The Hank Williams music was located and used, and it was ideal. It was gritty and American--just what you would expect to hear in a truckstop diner in West Texas.

Rehearsals began on Monday, October 14. We would have twenty rehearsal dates before a level-set/technical rehearsal and two dress rehearsals. As aforementioned, the first two week's rehearsals would be held each afternoon for two and one-half hours. Because the rehearsals were to be held in the afternoon, rehearsal in the Lab Theater was not allowed. The technical shop staff worked on the stage during that time, and therefore we were relegated to classroom #06 in the University's Foreign Language building. The room was approximately 20'x20' in size and filled with desks, chairs, and a lecture stand. We would move these items daily, usually creating a pseudo-set with them. Other days, they served more interesting purposes.

The first rehearsal was comprised of a traditional read-through and some discussion. The read-through went quickly, and the humor within the script was most evident. We found ourselves laughing frequently. Next, I talked about some of my ideas concerning heightening the truth that lies within the myths, and sensuality. We also considered all the characters and their relationships to each other in the play. By the first rehearsal we had also had the first production meeting, and so I was able to relay some of the design ideas that were being tossed about. This first rehearsal proved to be very profitable and exciting. The actors had clearly done some homework and brought with them some of their own ideas about the play and their

individual characters, as well as questions and suggestions to discuss. Everyone seemed very excited about the production and eager to get to work.

Due to the limited rehearsal time, there would not be much more group discussion in regard to the script. Honestly, I did not want to analyze True West in the usual, thematic fashion. I do not think that this is what Shepard intends. Instead, I wanted to create the work utilizing the imagery, sensuality, and inherent mythic elements that would speak to the emotions of the audience, rather than strictly to the intellect. Any discussions or questions that the actors might have were addressed as they occurred during rehearsal.

Another result of the limited rehearsal time: I would not see Saul again for another ten rehearsals or Mom for eleven. I had decided to work solely with Austin and Lee for the first two weeks. The chemistry and energy that would be shared between those two actors was of utmost importance to me. There were no big chorus numbers to come in and wow the audience; there were no secondary characters with their own subplot to play out. There was not one scene in nine that these two were not on stage.

I urged the actors to learn their lines as soon as possible. Not that this was a new concept, but because this particular play was so physical in nature and filled with action, the actors must not be encumbered by a script. We could do virtually nothing with scripts in hand.

For the first six rehearsals, we would tackle two new scenes a day and then repeat these two the subsequent day. This would take us through all of Austin and Lee's "duet" scenes. The first six rehearsals were spent working on character development and imagery created through the physical movement and relationship of the two actors. I did not stage a single moment. Instead, we utilized exercises that dealt with the physical space and energy. It was during this time that I capitalized on the concepts of spatial relationship, architecture, and kinesthetic response, as well as mirror imagery.

By way of example, one day the classroom's desk/chairs would serve an interesting function. I gave the actors instructions to arrange and rearrange the desks in certain physical patterns during the course of the scene. They were to repeatedly line up the desks in vertical and then horizontal rows while working through the lines. It had been a spur-of-the-moment piece of direction, and yet it served to illuminate so many levels in the scene. It forced them to deal with the space they were in, put the text into physical action and to discover naturally when the two brothers are drawn close versus pushed far away from each other. The dialogue put into strong, physical action intuitively and alternately polarized them and drew them together in task. They were forced to be completely in the moment.

Another day, I was interested in exposing the internal similarities that would make the role-reversal transition possible, in external physical form. I asked the actor playing Austin to physically follow the actor playing Lee. Directly behind Lee,

Austin would imitate every gesture and energy nuance that Lee exuded, though performing his own lines. He, in essence, acted as Lee's mirror image. After the exercise, the actors instinctively begin to share much the same type of energy and physical movement. This would prove to work very well for Scene Six.

Exploring the physical energies of the brothers, we experimented with some of Laban's techniques. To each of the actors, I gave one of Laban's eight basic effort actions. I purposely chose very opposite energies for each to utilize in the scene. For example, I might have given Austin wringing or dabbing and Lee pressing or slashing. The use of these energies helped to discover and create some interesting patterns and physical manifestations of the actors' lines.

The next four rehearsals we would rework the four scenes that we had explored. During these rehearsals, I would choose to stage specific moments and edit the work that the two actors were doing. We would not return to these scenes until approximately a week later, when we would be running through Act I and II in their entirety.

My work with Saul and Mom began next. I knew that the same type of work with which we had been experimenting with the two actors playing Austin and Lee was probably not going to be the most successful way to attack these two characters. Indeed, it was not. I had only three rehearsals with these two actors before Act run-throughs began. Expediency was key. In retrospect, I realize that I probably should have created a schedule that allowed for these actors' lack of experience. I could have

sacrificed a bit of time from the work I was doing with the two actors portraying Austin and Lee, as they were both more experienced and capable of holding their own a bit more easily, if necessary. Basically, my original desire to direct True West in a more organic, non-traditional fashion, trusting the actors' work, was thrown to the wolves as I had to get this show on its feet. Consequently, I resorted to very tyrannical directing methods. I staged scenes and told actors where to go. And it was just as well. In moments of desperation, I was forced to go so far as to walk with actors, my arm around them, guiding them through scenes. I do not think I was unclear. I only think that inexperience and lack of exceptional acting skills made for more difficult directing. I had taken the risk to cast these real-life Shepardesque characters, and my work was cut out for me. Finally, I went back to an old cliché: "If you cannot fix it, feature it." Or, as one of my mentors would advise me: "If you have a bull in a china shop, do not pretend it is Oscar Wilde."

I would not try to pretend or make these actors into something they were not and could never be in just two weeks; however, I was also aware that if I showed a lack of confidence in the work that they were capable of, it would only shake them. Instead I chose to direct the scenes completely aware of the eccentricities that were on stage. Likewise, I diplomatically suggested that the actors playing Lee and Austin do the same. Do not ignore what is on stage. Live in the moment, with these actors and in this play. Finally, the work was interesting: never predictable, but always interesting.

When we finally moved into the Lab Theater for rehearsals, my biggest concern would be the lack of set and rehearsal props. Throughout our weekly production meetings, my stage manager or I consistently expressed our growing concern over this issue. True West is a prop-intense production, and I knew that the introduction of these physical properties would change everything: pace, staging, the physical placement of bodies and their appendages, etc. I was also very concerned about the safety of the actors. The root of the problem seemed to be the fact that the set designer was concurrently serving as a stage manager for another production. Through no fault of his own, he did not have the time to do what he needed to do. In the end, we did locate or receive all of the props and set pieces that were necessary; however, it was probably the single most taxing element of this production.

As we neared time for the actual performance I was still dealing with a few central issues that I did not know how to address. I also felt that I had become somewhat unobjective. Consequently, I asked Dr. Jonathan Marks, Head of Directing and my immediate advisor, to visit and critique a rehearsal. His critique would prove to be very helpful. Many of the primary concerns that he expressed were the same ones that I had. These included the show's overall pacing in so far as the physical relationship between the brothers was concerned, the relationship between Saul and Lee, and the final moment of the play.

Unlike the typical plot structure (exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, denouement), True West ends in climax. Therefore, it is imperative that the show

build to that end. If the conflict between the two brothers peaked too early, we would be fighting an uphill battle. Likewise, no one wants to listen to two hours of shouting. The audience would finally just tune the actors out. Dr. Marks expressed the concern that the brothers simply moved to physical confrontation too quickly, that there was not enough of a progression. I agreed. At times the action would emulate the Three Stooges with the constant shoves, pokes, and intermediate slaps. This would continue to be an issue that I worried about nightly. Yet, in light of the play's tension, raw energy, and intense subtext it was difficult for the actors to score their performances. Frequently a quick shove or push was the easy way out. As a result, we consciously looked for places where confrontation could become insinuation, where mental "games" would be more effective, and where a subtle pause or beat could make its own point.

The second issue in question was that of the relationship between Saul and Lee. What was it that makes Saul gravitate toward Lee? Why does he agree to a golf game with Lee in the first place? Does he find him interesting, authentic, or crazy? Does he really like something in Lee's screenplay or is it simply fear that wins him over? In the same vein as the physical relationship between Lee and Austin, Lee was becoming physical with Saul immediately upon his entrance: and yet Saul just sort of acted as if it was not happening or as if he did not care. There were many ambiguities in regard to Saul. Therefore, we set out to answer those questions.

It was impossible for the audience to understand the choices the character was making if the actor did not understand the choices either. I felt very strongly that these questions were part of this actor's responsibility to his work, and so I posed these questions to him for us to discuss. I could come up with my own postulations, but wanted the actor to have stock in these decisions. The actor's opinion was that Lee fed his ego and that he was intrigued by this wild character. Lee and Saul have similar seedy sides, and that in some ways Saul fancies himself a "wild guy" too. Saul's primary interest, however, is in making a buck. These answers, as well as other questions we discussed, helped the actor in his journey. Whether or not the journey ever reached the destination that it should have is still disputable.

The show's final image was, very appropriately, my final major concern. "I hate endings. You have to end it somehow. I like beginnings. Middles are tough, but endings are just a pain in the ass"¹ discloses Shepard in a Village Voice interview. He goes on to say that endings are difficult because "the temptation always is a sense that you're supposed to wrap it up somehow. You're supposed to culminate it in something fruitful. And it always feels so phony when you try to wrap it up."² Instead, he prefers endings more akin to music--ones that leave you on the "next note," in anticipation of and leading to the next moment.

And that is just what True West's ending is meant to do. As the two brothers face off in their mother's kitchen, "they might be two wrestlers ready to begin another fall, or two wild animals about to fight to the death."³ Whatever they are, in that instant,

they are for the first time on equal footing. All that has happened has culminated in this one moment. They have toyed with, harassed, intimidated, threatened, slapped, shoved, and nearly strangled each other to death, and now there is this moment. The worry was that this telling flash was not what it needed to be. It was not horrible; somehow it was just not emanating the intensity that was called for. Rather than exhibiting a potential energy, it seemed to harbor a static energy. We tried restaging Lee's jump up, Austin's reaction, the physical placement of the two actors. We discussed what this moment needed to be. All of these attempts were inadequate, quick solutions to a bigger problem. In truth, by the time I realized that this was a sizable problem that required attention it was very late in the day. I was preoccupied with whether or not the toasters would electrocute Austin and what I thought to be "bigger fires" that needed to be put out.

Technical and dress rehearsals went fairly smoothly, considering the fact that they were the only times that we rehearsed with all of the props and electrical devices within the show. Likewise, these were the only rehearsals in which the show's running crew was required to be present. They had no idea what they were getting into, and literally what saved us would be our hyper-organized stage manager. In her wise forethought, she had sought out auxiliary running crew members. There was no way we could have run the show with the number we were originally assigned. Next, she figured out exactly where these crew members would be located, what specific tasks they would be in charge of, and what electrical appliances needed to be plugged

in when and where. There was constant plugging, unplugging and rewiring throughout the show to enable all of the items that needed to function to do so. Hence, these rehearsals were nerve-wracking, but surprisingly successful. I tried to focus on acting notes as best I could, but the main concerns at this point had become logistics.

Performances began on Monday night, November 11, 1996. We had a full house. Many audience members seemed surprised when, as the house opened thirty minutes before the show officially started, Austin sat typing his screenplay, occasionally getting up to make some coffee or get a drink. Later this actor would tell me that most people would sit silently for a while, only staring. Eventually they would begin talking to fellow audience members. He said it was fascinating listening to them talk about him, as if he could not hear a word they were saying. On occasion, others actually tried to talk to him.

I watched the opening night performance, nervous and anxious to witness the audience's response. The house was comprised predominantly of students that night. The most obvious overall response was the laughter that was consistent throughout the production. I thought the production was funny, but the audience appeared to think it was hysterical. Indeed we did focus on the humor within the play, but still I cannot help but wonder if some of it was nervous laughter, as there were some scenes that were very hard to watch and in which I would think laughter a somewhat odd reaction. I could tell that the laughter in Scene Eight, as a typewriter was destroyed

with a golf club, was very strained. The toasters, however, seemed to ease the “uncomfortable” laughter into “comfortable” laughter. I attended every subsequent performance, and the reaction was the same--lots of laughter--which was good.

I was glad for the chicken wire, for practical purposes. At a technical rehearsal, before the chicken wire was erected, I watched as a few token audience members sat very uncomfortably in their seats, their bodies twisted in awkward positions as they were looking to avoid any flying objects. During the performances, audience members sat facing full front, engrossed in the action. Watching and monitoring audience reaction for seven performances, I was pleased with what I saw.

The performance would end in a tableau curtain call. I anguished over this decision, wondering whether or not this would cheapen the end of this play. Finally I decided to allow the audience a sense of closure. With Hank Williams singing in the background, the lights were brought up and down just as quickly, as True West's four characters stood silently in the aftermath.

Notes

¹ Sam Shepard, interviewed by Carol Rosen. "Silent Tongues," Village Voice 4 August 1992: 36.

² Shepard, "Silent" 36.

³ William Kleb, rev. of True West. by Sam Shepard. Theater 12 (1980): 65-71.

CHAPTER V

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSIONS

In re-examining and evaluating this production of True West, I will review each step of my process: preliminary work, casting, rehearsals, and the final product.

Within each of these phases I will address any limitations, problems, or solutions that I experienced and which linger in my mind as particularly good or bad choices.

The preliminary work that I did on True West predominantly consisted of research on Sam Shepard and script analysis. The only historical research done was by the set designer: his inquiry into period kitchens. This proved to be the right approach. I found the essence of True West to be in Sam Shepard's style, his imagery, and the mythical elements which he uses to form the play's skeleton. I only wish that I had done more research before I actually went into the production. What I did was adequate, but I feel that my current understanding of Shepard's work, though not comprehensive, is much clearer.

The casting process was fairly typical in regard to general auditions and callbacks. What was not typical for me were the improvisational games that I incorporated into the callback auditions. Previously, I would have orchestrated some cold readings and that would have sufficed. However, having sat in at least fifteen different callback auditions (as an actor) while at Texas Tech University, I experienced (and endured) a variety of different approaches and techniques. Some seemed very beneficial and

others did not. Whatever the level of benefit, I learned from them all. These games allowed me to see a level of work I would have never seen in a strictly “cold reading” situation.

If recasting the show again tomorrow, with the same availability of actors, I would cast the same Austin and Lee in a flash. They were both actors unafraid to take a risk. They worked brilliantly together and made my work almost easy if not a constant joy. Their chemistry was just what I had been looking for originally. Physically, they were both tall and lanky, and their body shapes filled the space so interestingly. As brothers, they were familiar and believable, making that relationship paramount, just as I had intended.

Surprisingly, I would also recast the same Saul and Mom. Yes, it had been a big risk, but reflecting back on the choices I had I would do it over again. The acting was not the strongest, but the imagery was right. It is still hard for me to comment objectively as to whether their own eccentric qualities passed as character or simply as bad acting. Some performances seemed to work, others did not; but I do feel that these two actors were true to Shepard’s essence.

In embarking on the rehearsal process, I was unable to control the amount of rehearsals we would have. I unwittingly forced afternoon rehearsals when I chose to cast an actor that I knew would be in the middle of another show during our given rehearsal period. This in turn dictated the space we would have to rehearse in. These

two factors, time and given space, definitely affected the process but did not prove grossly detrimental.

The methodologies that I employed during, most specifically, the first portion of the rehearsal process were a direct result of my experiences as a student at Texas Tech University. The freedom I felt to trust my actors, explore, experiment and learn with them was only developed in the past two years. The discoveries that we made together were far greater than I could have ever created or dictated on my own. Armed with new, albeit limited, knowledge and ideas stemming from masters such as Bogart and Laban, I chose to branch out, dive in, and use this time as a period of experimentation and growth for me. I found it to be liberating and exciting. The seemingly common-sense notion that there is more than one way to direct a play is probably the single most important and greatest lesson I take with me from my graduate experience. I have learned that what the Art can be in me is boundless.

Having said that, I still wonder if the physical staging in True West was always as interesting as it could have been. Perhaps I could have commanded some more dynamic images to reverberate with the subtext that was so strong. At the time I was much more interested in natural physical action and kinesthetic response than pretty or representational pictures.

I was, however, forced into a more “traditional” directing approach when focusing on Saul and Mom. In retrospect, my only regret is that I did not create or provide for more time to work with these two actors. I assumed that I could just let them do their

thing and they would be interesting. In a way this proved to be true, but I had not considered the very real possibility that it may just look like bad acting.

The collaborative process that I shared with my designers was fulfilling. Overall, I would also consider it successful. The final products were much of what I had envisioned. The chicken wire was right. The set and costume designs were right. They all served the work, reflected the mythical elements inherent in True West, and heightened the strong sensuality found in the piece.

A very small budget led to resourcefulness on the part of the designers. For example, what the set designer could not find in the University storage/supply house, he found elsewhere. Old, extremely heavy cabinets that had been torn out of an elementary school were donated. They were completely taken apart and restructured into what the designer intended. Old wallpaper that was clearly not very popular was purchased at a flea market at a nominal cost. An “empty food container drive” was held. For three weeks, students and faculty alike brought in empty food containers from home to help fill the cabinets and refrigerator on stage.

The only real problem I experienced in the technical realm of True West was the lack of rehearsal props and necessary functioning set pieces that we needed to work with in a timely manner. The process was somewhat chaotic and haphazard. Consequently, I harbored a constant pang of anxiety in regard to safety, only alleviated when the show actually closed. The amount of time the actors had to work

with functioning props and set pieces was a bare minimum. I was fairly pleasantly surprised, and thankful, that no major mishaps took place.

I do have some regrets in relation to the show's sound and lighting. Had I the show to do over again, I would ensure that the sounds used for the production were more appropriate. They were better than nothing, but not really right. Though not officially in the sound department, but somehow related, the bug zapper would have to be reconsidered. More research/experimentation would need to be done on how exactly to control the length of the "zap." The effect was marvelous when right, excruciating when too long. Finally, the lighting was adequate. My only critique was that it sometimes seemed a bit too yellow in color.

In conclusion, there were aspects of the play that I felt still needed work at the show's close. This included the show's final moment and its overall pace. Though we worked on both, each was something of a last-ditch effort. When I realized that these were very real concerns, it was literally the week the show would open.

Instead of just discussing the end of the show and what it needed to become with the actors, allowing them to fend for themselves and trusting them to create this culminating moment, we needed to do more work. Perhaps more basic, physical and improvisational work akin to what we did at the beginning of rehearsals would have helped to discover the moment. Likewise, perhaps looking at the very purposeful pauses that pepper True West and exploring alternative tactics, other than physical contact, would have served us well in scoring the show's pace.

The final critique of my process that led to this particular production is a mixed review. I set out to find and heighten the truths that lies within the myths and to capitalize on the fraternal relationship between Austin and Lee. I hoped that in these objectives True West would rise above the violence and the obscurity for which Shepard has so often been criticized, and instead speak to the Lubbock audience in a way that would move them. In these objectives, I believe I was successful. However, now I can only wonder if I presented a somewhat diluted version of what Shepard intended. He speaks to the emotions in images and myth, not in serving up relationship or similar thematic strains. He pleads not to the intellect via psychological drama or examination, but rather to the heart and human spirit which may in turn elicit some sort of response. I do not know that I trusted the script and the work as I should have. Rather, I squeezed and molded a more sentimentally evocative story of these two brothers from the script in the hopes that audiences would more readily accept the work.

And yet I am proud of what we accomplished and what I learned. The play was listed by the local arts and entertainment editor as Number Four in a Top Ten List of Lubbock's Best Plays for 1996. The last few performances sold out. Audiences were moved, and this was my goal. I had hoped that somehow True West would move into "emotional territory" in such a way that it might "change the chemistry." I think it did.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allen, Jennifer, "The Man on the High Horse." Esquire Nov. 1988: 146.
- Aristotle, Poetics, XIV. 4, trans. S.H. Butcher.
- Bachman, Charles R., "Defusion of Menace in the Plays of Sam Shepard," Modern Drama 19 (1976): 405-15.
- Chubb, Kenneth and the editors. "Metaphors, Mad Dogs, and Old Time Cowboys." Theatre Quarterly 4.15 (1974): 12-13.
- Coe, Robert, "Saga of Sam Shepard." New York Times Magazine 23 November 1980: 122.
- Cott, Jonathan, "The Rolling Stone Interview: Sam Shepard," Rolling Stone 18 Dec. 1986: 168.
- Dixon, Michael Bigelow and Smith, Joel A., ed. and trans.. Anne Bogart: Viewpoints (Lyme NH: Smith and Kraus, Inc., 1995) 23.
- Falk, Florence, "The Role of Performance in Sam Shepard's Plays," Theatre Journal 33.2 (1981): 182-198.
- Gener, Randy, "Fool for Sam." Village Voice 20 Feb. 1996: 73.
- Gilman, Richard, introduction, Sam Shepard: Seven Plays, by Sam Shepard (New York: Bantam Books, 1984) xxv.
- Grant, Gary, "Shifting the Paradigm: Shepard, Myth and the Transformation," Modern Drama 36.1 (1993): 120-30.
- Grant, Gary, "Writing as a Process of Performing the Self: Sam Shepard's Notebooks," Modern Drama 34.4 (Dec. 1991) 549.
- Heilman, Robert B., "Shepard's Plays: Stylistic and Thematic Ties." Sewanee Review 100.4 (1992): 638-39.
- Johnson, Anne Janette, "Shepard, Sam." Contemporary Authors: New Revision Series. 422-29.

- Kauffmann, Stanley. "Last of the Mohicans." Saturday Review 9 May/June 1983): 35.
- Kerr, Walter. "Where Has Sam Shepard Led His Audience?" New York Times 5 June 1983, late ed., sec. 2: 3.
- Kerr, Walter. "Stageview." New York Times 5 June 1983, late ed., sec. H: 3.
- Kleb, William, rev. of True West, by Sam Shepard, Theater 12 (1980): 65-71.
- Kramer, Mimi. "Toxic Shock," rev. of States of Shock, by Sam Shepard, New Yorker 3 June 1991: 78-79.
- Kroll, Jack. "California Dreaming." Newsweek 5 January 1981: 63.
- Lahr, John, rev. of Angel City, Curse of the Starving Class and Other Plays, by Sam Shepard, Steven Putzel, "An American Cowboy on the English Fringe: Sam Shepard's London Audience," Modern Drama 36:1 (1993): 131-46.
- McCarthy, Gerry. "Acting it Out: Sam Shepard's Action." Modern Drama 24.1 (March 1981): 1-12.
- Newlove, Jean, Laban for Actors and Dancers (London: Nick Hern Books, 1993) 11.
- Oliver, Edith, rev. of True West, by Sam Shepard, New Yorker 29 November 1982: 160.
- Orbison, Tucker. "Mythic Levels in Shepard's True West," Modern Drama 27:4 (1984): 506-19.
- Oumano, Ellen, Sam Shepard: The Life and Work of an American Dreamer (New York, 1986) 98.
- Putzel, Steven. "Expectation, Confutation, Revelation: Audience Complicity in the Plays of Sam Shepard," Modern Drama 30.2 (1987): 147-60.
- Rabillard, Sheila. "Sam Shepard: Theatrical Power and American Dreams," Modern Drama 30.1 (March 1987): 58-71.
- Rosen, Carol. "Emotional Territory: An Interview with Sam Shepard," Modern Drama 36.1 (1993): 5.

- Rosen, Carol. "Silent Tongues." Village Voice 4 August 1992: 34.
- Shepard, Sam. "Language, Visualization and the Inner Library." American Dreams: The Imagination of Sam Shepard, ed. Bonnie Marranca (New York, 1981): 217.
- Shepard, Sam. True West (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1981): 71.
- Simon, John, rev. of True West, by Sam Shepard, New York 12 January 1981: 46.
- Simon, John, "States of Schlock," rev. of States of Shock, by Sam Shepard. New York 27 May 1991: 71.
- Taylor, J.R., rev. of True West, by Sam Shepard, Drama 144.29 (1982): 29.
- Wardle, Irving. rev. of Tooth of Crime, by Sam Shepard, The London Times 18 July 1972: 11.
- Weales, Gerald. "American Theatre Watch 1982-1983." Georgia Review 37 (1983): 601.
- Weales, Gerald. "The Transformation of Sam Shepard," American Dreams: The Imagination of Sam Shepard, ed. Bonnie Marrance (New York: 1981): 39.
- Weiner, Bernard, interview with Sam Shepard, San Francisco Chronicle, 12 April, 1981.
- Wetzsteon, Ross, "Sam Shepard: Escape Artist," Partisan Review 49.2 (1982): 253-61.
- Willadt, Susanne, "States of War in Sam Shepard's States of Shock," Modern Drama 36.1 (1993): 147-66.
- Wilson, Ann, "Fool of Desire: The Spectator to the Plays of Sam Shepard," Modern Drama 30.1 (1987): 46-57.
- Wyatt, David. "Shepard's Split," The South Atlantic Quarterly 91.2 (1992): 333-60.

APPENDIX
PROGRAM COPY

TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY THEATRE'S
1996-1997

LAB THEATRE SEASON

WAITING FOR GODOT By Samuel Beckett
February 17-23
Directed By Roderick Vann

DIVISION STREET By Steve Tesich
April 7-13
Directed By Norman Grueneich

MAINSTAGE THEATRE SEASON

A CHRISTMAS CAROL By Charles Dickens
November 29-30, December 1-3 and 5-8
Directed By Christopher Markle

SANTOS & SANTOS By Octavio Solis
February 27-28, March 1-2 and 6-9
Directed By Norman Bert

THE IMAGINARY INVALID By Moliere
April 17-20 and 24-27
Translated and Directed By Jonathan Marks

Ticket Office Hours:
Monday-Saturday 12 Noon-5:30PM
Reservations (806)742-3603

LAB THEATRE

TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY



NOVEMBER 11-17, 1996

Who's Who in True West

Cast

Austin.....Kelly Russell
 Lee.....Miles Chick
 Saul Kimmer.....Pat White
 Mom.....Margaret Hite

Synopsis of Scenes

Act I & II

An older home in a Southern California suburb,
 about 40 miles east of L.A.

There will be one ten-minute intermission

Technical Crew

Stage Manager.....Jill Leven
 Lights and Sound.....Donica Nice,
 Denise Fleming,
 Karen Rutherford
 Scenery/Properties.....Beth Blemker,
 Theresa Leckbee
 Rhein Pierce
 Costumes.....Melissa Curlee,
 Keith Jose
 House Manager.....Kevin Carter
 Usher.....Cody Whatcott

Please be aware that the herbal cigarettes smoked in this production do not contain tobacco or the carcinogens associated with tobacco. The Department of Theatre and Dance does not condone or promote smoking of any kind.

Brett Alan Carlson (*Light and Sound Designer*)- Brett comes to Texas Tech from Albuquerque, New Mexico and is pursuing his M.F.A. in theatre design. He received his B.F.A. in Theatre with an emphasis in technical theatre and design from Eastern New Mexico University. His other design credits include *A Christmas Carol*, *Sand Mountain*, and *Born Yesterday*.

Kevin Carter (*Set and Prop Designer*)- Kevin is a B.F.A. theatre design major. He designed the set and lights for the University Theatre's production of *The Actors Nightmare*. Kevin designed lights for the Lab Theatre's productions of *Oleanna* and *Night Sky*.

Miles Chick (*Lee*)- Miles is a M.A. student from Austin, Texas. Last year at Tech, he portrayed Daddy Warbucks in *Annie Warbucks*, and Michael Rowen in *The Kentucky Cycle*. He received his undergraduate degree from Austin College in Sherman, Texas and next year he plans to begin working on his Ph.D.

Lisa Lawrence Holland (*Director*)- Lisa is an acting/directing M.F.A. student. Most recently she directed *Insanities* for the Lab Theatre. She was last seen in the Lubbock Summer Repertory productions of *Six Women with Brain Death* and *The Dining Room*.

Margaret Hite (*Mom*)- Margaret comes to Tech from New York City where she graduated from the Katherine Tibbs School. She was the editor of *Lubbock Lights Magazine* and hopes to organize a repertory theatre group for senior citizens upon graduation.

Who's Who continued...

Jill Leven (*Stage Manager*)- Jill is a senior B.F.A. acting/directing major. She was last seen this summer in *The Dining Room* and *Six Women with Brain Death*. This past spring, she was seen in the Lab in *An Evening of Improvisation*. After graduation, she plans to move to New York, continue her education, and act professionally.

Sherry L. Lyon (*Costume Designer*)- Sherry received her M.F.A. in Costume Design from the University of South Carolina in 1989. Her resume includes an internship at the Shakespeare Theatre at the Folger and managing costume shops for The Empty Space Theatre and Mount Holyoke College. She has worked extensively as a designer in the Seattle area, with designs at The Empty Space Theatre, The Seattle Children's Theatre, The Seattle Shakespeare Festival, and The Annex Theatre. As resident designer for The Bathhouse Theatre, she designed *Love's Labors Lost* which was voted one of Seattle's best designs by the Seattle Times.

Kelly Russell (*Austin*)- After Kelly received his B.F.A. in Acting from Southwest Texas State University, he taught theatre at San Angelo Central High School. Last year his production of *The King Stag* placed second at the U.I.L. State meet. This is Kelly's first semester at Tech where he is pursuing his M.F.A. in acting/directing. He was seen earlier this semester on the mainstage as Cliff in *Cabaret*.

Pat White (*Saul Kimmner*)- Pat is originally from Billings, Montana. He received a B.A. in Communication Arts/Theatre in 1993 and is currently working on a M.F.A. in theatre. His previous acting credits include *The Birthday Party* and *Inherit the Wind*.

The Lab Theatre
presents

TRUE WEST

by Sam Shepard

Directed by Lisa Lawrence Holland

Scene Design by Kevin Carter

Costume Design by Sherry L. Lyon

Lighting Design by Brett Alan Carlson

featuring

Miles Chick
Margaret Hite
Kelly Russell
Pat White

*True West is produced by special arrangement with
Samuel French, Inc.*

The taking of photographs, with or without flash, and the use of video or audio recording equipment is a violation of copyright laws and is strictly prohibited. Food and drink are not allowed in the theatre or the lobby. Smoking is prohibited anywhere in the building. Late-comers will be seated by the ushers at the first appropriate interval during the play. For the enjoyment of all patrons, if you have a paging device, please turn it off or leave it, along with your seat number, with the House Manager, who will locate you with your message. Please turn off wristwatch alarms and cellular telephones.

A Special Thanks To... Jeffrey Holland, Mr. "Slat's" Wardrop, Russ and Julie Richard, Mrs. Bairds, Peter Grueneiger, Bonnie Graham, Amy Osmulski, Martin Lujan, and Kristi Mize

Texas Tech University Department of Theatre and Dance

Faculty

Dr. Norman Bert, Chair	Jim Bush	James W. Lee
Prof. Frederik B. Christoffel	Brett A. Carlson	Louise Mallory
Dr. Carale Manning-Hill	Darise Error	Deborah G. Martin
Prof. Christopher Markle	Wade Fransen	Kristi Mize
Dr. Jonathan Marks	C. Patrick Gendusa	Allen Partridge
Prof. Diana Moore	Kerry Graves	Laura J. Proffitt
Prof. Joan St. Germain	Norman Grueneich	Paula Rodriguez
Dr. Richard Weaver	Michael Hannah	Joe Bill Thompson
Dr. Dean Wilcox	Lisa Holland	Kara Wooten
Prof. Peggy Willis-Aarnio		

Teaching Assistants

Lab Theatre Production Staff

Director of Theatre.....	Frederik B. Christoffel
Business Manager.....	Rick Tuman
Departmental Secretary.....	Mary Cervantes
Technical Director.....	Joe Pew
Costume Shop Supervisor.....	Sherry L. Lyon
Asst. Technical Director.....	Todd Proffitt
Costume Shop First Hand.....	Ruth Barrington
Prop Master.....	Samuel J. Hyland
Master Electrician.....	Joe Bill Thompson
Lab Theatre Producer.....	Laura J. Proffitt
Lab Technical Director.....	Russell Hyland
Lab Master Electrician.....	Tayva Pew
Promotion Director.....	Deborah G. Martin
Box Office Manager.....	C. Patrick Gendusa
House Supervisor.....	Darise Error
Publications Director.....	James W. Lee
Scene Shop Staff.....	Maria Isabel Benitez, Brett A. Carlson, Norman Grueneich, Russell Hyland, Rhein Pierce, Pat White, Kara Wooten
Costume Shop Staff.....	Lalon Alexander, Charlotte Farquhar, Becca Fields, Kristi Mize, Allen Partridge
Promotion Team.....	Jim Bush, Frederik B. Christoffel, Darise Error, Michael Hannah, Louise Mallory, Paula Rodriguez, Rick Tuman
Box Office Staff.....	Al Castro, Wade Fransen, Joshua Krause, Tony Morris, Laura J. Proffitt, Christopher Williams

Texas Tech University Department of Theatre and Dance

Members of Alpha Psi Omega* Members of U.S.I.T.T.*

Jim Bush	Maria Isabel Benitez
Miles Chick	Jim Bush
Brian Cooke	Brett Alan Carlson
Darise Error	Kevin Carter
Russell Hyland	Frederik B. Christoffel
Samuel J. Hyland	Samuel J. Hyland
Ryan Ingram	Russell Hyland
Micha Light	Joe Pew
Terra Norberg	Tayva Pew
Allen Partridge	Todd Proffitt
Laura J. Proffitt	Joe Bill Thompson
Paul Tibbs	Christi Vadovic
Peggy Willis-Aarnio	Pat White
Kara Wooten	

Members of Chi Tau Epsilon***

Dina Bolton	Amy Mandry
Jenni Edwards	Krissa Neathery
Evin N. Eubanks	Amber Newbill
Rosemary Flores	Greg Shortes
Heather Free	Kerrie Smith
Becky Jamagin	Donna Snook
Blair King	Melinda Taylor
Erin Lyde	


*Alpha Psi Omega, national honorary theatre fraternity
 **United States Institute for Theatre Technology
 ***Chi Tau Epsilon, national honorary dance fraternity

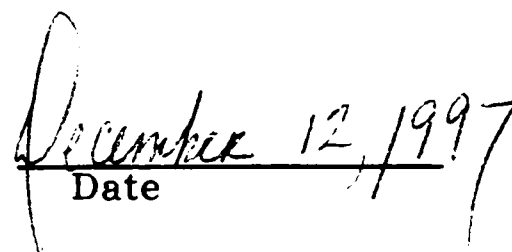
The Department of Theatre and Dance is a member of the Association for Theatre in Higher Education, the Texas Educational Theatre Association, the Southwest Theatre Association, and the American College Dance Festival Association.

PERMISSION TO COPY

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a master's degree at Texas Tech University or Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center, I agree that the Library and my major department shall make it freely available for research purposes. Permission to copy this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the Director of the Library or my major professor. It is understood that any copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my further written permission and that any user may be liable for copyright infringement.

Agree (Permission is granted.)


Student's Signature


Date

Disagree (Permission is not granted.)

Student's Signature

Date