Filling in the Blanks: Textual Analysis and Acting Methods

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Abstract

In *Filling in the Blanks: Textual Analysis and Acting Methods* I attempt to bridge some of the gaps between how actors and directors approach the topic of the textual analysis of scripts. While each acting teacher of the past 115 years has approached the idea of using improvised tactics to fill in empty backstories within scripts differently, I believe there are areas of common ground within each method that are bound up in history, and thus can be difficult to decipher at times. This thesis brings some clarity and opens up the discussion of textual analysis for a contemporary audience.
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I. Introduction

In essence, the art of acting is the art of storytelling. However, acting and storytelling use two different mediums to get to the end goal of a narrative experience. A storyteller is usually a single person who describes with great detail and emotion the plot of a story. Actors, on the other hand, live through the story, so that the audience can see and hear everything that is going on. Actors utilize human behaviors in order to bring about an experience within the members of their audience. From the ancient hunter-gatherers reenacting great hunts for their tribe, to the great Greek tragedians writing plays for their festivals, to the great poets of the Spanish Golden Age, to Elizabethan/Jacobian theatre, to wandering minstrels and troupes, to psychological realism and film, actors have embodied performance in different ways, and have shifted their role in society (Kazan 4). Actors, at different points in history, have been viewed as artists, prostitutes, celebrities, and pop cultural icons; and in that same way, acting techniques have changed from auditory to visual, with speech heavy Greek plays and Elizabethan Blank Verse giving way to psychological realism and absurdism (Kazan 7-9). Few can deny the profound effect actors have had upon our culture, our society, and indeed our very way of life. The creation of film has shaped acting by making it more widely available and accessible, leading a majority of citizens (at least within the confines of the United States) to have at the very least a peripheral knowledge of acting (Bandelj 387). Even so, live theatre has remained in an important place in performance to this day. That being said, where does one begin to explore the inner workings of theatre performers?

There is a legend among the western theatrical community that the great acting teacher Uta Hagen once remarked during a lesson that “acting is both the easiest, and the hardest thing in the world.” (Nathan 151). Renowned Russian acting teacher and scholar Konstanin Stanislavski,
a man mistakenly named as the inventor of “The American Method Actor” who was active between 1888 and 1938, identified the foundation of all action on stage (at least, in regards to realism) as behavior. How one behaves in the world, one should also behave on stage.

Stanislavski’s goal for his actors was truth. Stanislavski’s students, particularly Richard Boleslavsky and Maria Ouspenskaya, took his ideas from Russia to the fledgling Broadway theatre community in the United States. There, they taught at the American Laboratory Theatre before founding the School of Dramatic Art in New York City. In turn, their American protégés became great acting teachers, among them Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler, Sanford Meisner, and Uta Hagen.

All of these teachers have explored and interpreted Stanislavski’s initial vision of behavior leading the way to truth. Real, honest behavior on stage has been shown and qualitatively supported time and time again to lead to great performances, at least, from the critic’s perspective (Nathan 152). Where the some artists start to differ, and where directors and playwrights often lend their own artistic expertise, is how to interpret a script (Bandelj 389). This may sound counter-intuitive, as a script is often the blueprint of staging a production. No one denies that text fuels performance. But how do we as artistic communities interact with these texts? Not every production has the luxury of the playwright being on deck and available to answer questions. And what about plays where not everything is explicitly explained in the story? What if crucial details are purposefully left out in order to fulfill an artistic vision?

Textual analysis is the art of divining the setting, characters, arcs, and subtext of a work from the source, most usually a script. Textual analysis is one of the divisive topics when it comes to teaching acting, and indeed interpreting scripts. There has been much discussion over how to approach a text, and countless acting teachers have approached the subject differently
To a layman’s perspective, it may seem that every acting teacher or directing scholar seems to approach text differently, particularly when it comes to staging a production. How does one navigate or open up a discussion about textual analysis? From an outside glance, it would appear to be that the rule of thumb for a director’s interpretation of a text is to do what best serves his or her artistic vision, and the logistics of the production itself. But what about the actors? Are they merely tools at a director’s disposal? Or is there something greater inside of them and their talents that brings out and evolves the text into some of the most memorable performances?

By no means do I intend to publish or advocate one sole “method” for actors to use in all circumstances. I merely intend to navigate the history of modern textual analysis in the art of acting, focusing on the teachings of Konstantin Stanislavski and Sanford Meisner (an American actor and scholar who shaped some of Stanislavski’s works away from emotional memory in the mid twentieth century); as well as supplementing the theoretical knowledge with anecdotes from my own production of Sam Shepard’s play True West, which I directed, and was staged at North Central College in February of 2015. I hope that my findings may shed some light on the discussion of textual analysis that all readers may take away and use within their own discussions and bodies of work. This should be useful in explaining why textual analysis is something that should always be considered for both actors and directors in staging a production. I must admit that my study only covers North American psychological realism, as opposed to the works of Brecht or epic theatre.

True West takes place in 1980, in an unidentified Californian suburb that is being built at the cost of the desert that surrounds it. In the midst of nature being destroyed, we meet our two main characters, Austin and Lee, two brothers who were raised by an abusive and alcoholic
father who later abandoned the family when the boys neared twenty years old. Austin and Lee’s mother suffered psychological and emotional damage as a result of the abuse. Austin became an emotionally distant up and coming screenwriter with an Ivy League degree, and Lee became a drifter and delinquent, who commits petty crimes and works odd jobs to support his loner lifestyle, which he secretly abhors. Through the circumstances of fate, the brothers find themselves together again after a long separation when their mother asks them to housesit her plants. Austin is trying to pitch a screenplay to Hollywood agent Saul Kimmer, and Lee tries to repair their estranged bond by helping his brother write a screenplay. Over the course of the play, the brothers are forced to confront the curse of family, and the constructed narrative of the “American Dream.”

I chose *True West* to serve as an example of how textual analysis is crucial for actors and directors because Shepard follows in the tradition of plays such as Edward Albee’s *Zoo Story* by leaving certain major parts of the character’s backstories and motivations left purposefully unexplained, leaving them up to the actors to explore and bring to life on stage. While the plot points may be missing, intentionally left up to the imagination of the audience, the actors must confront these issues, and indeed allow them to drive and influence their lives on stage.
II. Konstantin Stanislavski

Prior to the turn of the 20th Century, specifically between 1800 and 1900, an overwhelming majority of textual analysis knowledge was derived from “the classic plays”. That is to say, ancient Greek plays, or blank-verse plays, especially works by William Shakespeare and his contemporaries (Billing 385). While these texts were far from the only plays being written during the 19th Century, there was not a whole lot of discussion about how to work with contemporary texts. The attitude within the field of theatre during the 1800s seemed to be that since the plays were so modern, there wasn’t really a need for actors to focus on textual analysis, and that if they were any good at their craft, they would: “simply get it” (Brestoff Acting Teachers 35).

Konstantin Stanislavski, in the late 1800s, was one of the first actors to question this way of thinking. If there was so much focus on textual analysis of classic plays, why were we not transferring and adapting this knowledge to benefit modern performances (Billing 385)? Stanislavski began developing his method with this question in mind, and he even tested out his methods on Shakespearian texts such as Hamlet and Othello, as well as having his students start with the classical texts before starting on some of his contemporaries’ work (Coco 2).

For Stanislavski; the most crucial and first step of textual analysis was identifying the “Given Circumstances” (Stanislavski 37). In his own words, Stanislavski stated:

For my part I will add that this is precisely what our intellect requires of an actor, with this difference, that the circumstances which for the dramatist are supposed for us actors are imposed, they are a given…what do we mean by the words Given Circumstances? They mean the plot, the facts, the incidents, the period, the time
and place of the action, the way of life, how we as actors and directors understand the play, the contributions we ourselves make, the mise-en-scene, the sets and costumes, the props, the stage dressing, the sound effects, everything which is a given for the actors when they rehearse. (Stanislavski 53)

In summary, any internal factors that the playwright explicitly writes down are the Given Circumstances. But what about the things that are not definitely defined, or only hinted at by the author of the play? Stanislavski clearly stated that such things should be left up to the actor to fill in, and for the actor to use the absences in a way to make it personal for themselves, in order to bring out truth on stage. As Stanislavski himself put it: “If I ask you to go up onstage and look for a piece of paper that isn’t there then you will have to create the Given Circumstances, “ifs”, your ideas, you will have to arouse all the Elements of your creative state. Only with their help will you be able to recall once more, to recognize (feel) once more how the simple Task of looking for a piece of paper in accomplished” (Stanislavski, 304). For Stanislavski, an actor’s imagination is one of the strongest tools at their disposal.

Once one has identified the specifics, how does one go further? Stanislavski chose to mirror the practices of the scientific paradigm of his time, and look at things in their smallest workable form. And just as in life, how atoms are the smallest building blocks of life, the smallest building blocks in textual analysis for Stanislavski were the bits.

Bits are ways one divides up a play. Bits can also always be divided into even smaller bits. For example, take any five act play. Each of the acts are a bit. Each scene in the act is a smaller bit. Each line in the scene is a bit, and every word in the line is also a bit. The smaller the
bit, the easier it is for an actor to approach. The smallest bits are useful in the sense in which they add up to a *task* (Stanislavski 136).

Tasks are anything an actor does on stage, be this a physical action, such as moving or cleaning an object, to emotional and psychological actions, which come to life in the interaction of actors and objects on stage. But the purpose of the task is to overcome an obstacle, be this washing oneself in order to overcome the problem of being dirty, or rescuing a loved one from the clutches of a villain (Stanislavski, 142). Tasks and bits must flow in a logical sequence, in order for them to be truthful (Stanislavski, 143).

While some tasks are expressly identified and demanded by the playwright, there are a multitude of tasks that actors bring to plays on their own. Often, these tasks are useful in order to fill in plot holes, either intentional or accidental. With such a multitude of tasks, it is easy for artists to accidentally apply ones that may be harmful to a performance. In his research, Stanislavski was able to identify eight “necessary” tasks, which are always beneficial to a text and a performance:

1. Tasks that exist on our side of the footlights and not on the other. In other words, Tasks which are related to the play, directed towards the other actors, and not to the audience in the front rows.
2. Tasks which are right for the actor as a person, and are in keeping with the role.
3. Creative and aesthetic Tasks, that is, ones which are conducive to the basic role of acting, the creation of “the life of the human spirit of a role” and into communicating it artistically.
4. Genuine, living, dynamic, human Tasks which drive the role forward and are not histrionic, conventional, dead ones which bear no relation to the character but which are there to amuse the audience.

5. Tasks in which the actor, his fellow actors and the audience can believe.

6. Fascinating, exciting Tasks which are capable of stimulating experiencing.

7. Apposite Tasks, that is, ones which are typical of a role and precisely, not approximately related to the meaning of the play.

8. Tasks which are rich and correspond to the deeper meaning of the role, not ones that are shallow, and skim the surface of the play. (Stanislavski 145)

According to Stanislavski, every task has a psychological spark behind it, motivated in the text of the play by the characters. This spark is identified by Stanislavski as an objective. Objectives are what the character wants, so some tasks can be what the character does to get what they want (Stanislavski 147). Such tasks utilized for this purpose have been identified by contemporary scholars as tactics (Brestoff Acting Teachers 10). And while Stanislavski does not identify tactics by the name “tactics,” he does state that they are tasks defined by a verb, most often, a want (Stanislavski 150).

It is important to recognize that objectives are a scene-to-scene tool. A character’s objective will usually change at the end of a scene, sometimes; they change multiple times in the same scene! Objectives that stay true to the character throughout the entire play are known as super-objectives. Super-objectives are the strongest motivators that the text provides a character (Stanislavski 151).
When using Stanislavski’s textual analysis techniques, it is important to start big and work small, re-organizing the play into the smallest navigable parts, and rebuild it. When I was directing *True West*, one of the first things I had my actors do after initial read-throughs and physical exercises was to identify their character’s super-objectives. Then, we went scene by scene through *True West* and identified each character’s objectives within each scene. Lastly, we talked about the tasks and tactics each character employs in order to get what they want. As a director, it was so important to do this style of textual analysis because it allows actors to identify what they want, and informs how they interact with each other on stage. Without these tools, we merely would be mindlessly reciting Sam Shepard (as brilliant as he is) to the audience, and that just won’t do; because “everything that happens onstage must occur for some reason or other...acting is action. The basis of theatre is doing” (Stanislavski 39-40).
III. Sanford Meisner (“The Method” in America: Textual Analysis through the eyes of Sanford Meisner, Lee Strasberg, and Stella Adler)

One of Stanislavski’s American students took the idea of action and doing and expanded upon it even further as an acting approach. Starting in the mid-1940s, Sanford Meisner took these ideas and shaped them into his own building block, which he referred to as “the reality of doing” (Bandelj 390). To this day, Meisner teachers focus on the “reality of doing” when it comes to teaching young actors and acting students. For Meisner, the reality of doing was taking real actions and emotions and employing them within a performance (Meisner 10).

Meisner was exposed to the teachings of Konstantin Stanislavski by his friend, another great “method actor” by the name of Lee Strasberg. Strasberg first encountered the Moscow Art Theatre in a performance in New York City in 1923, and in 1925, Strasberg was taking acting classes at the American Laboratory Theatre under Maria Ouspenskaya and Richard Boleslavsy, two of Stanislavski’s star pupils (Strasberg 24).

Strasberg and Meisner had met each other in productions at the Lower East Side’s Christie Street Settlement House, where Strasberg directed and Meisner acted. Both Strasberg and Meisner received scholarships to study at New York’s Guild Theatre. Through the Guild Theatre, Meisner and Strasberg met young star actress Stella Adler, and aspiring young director Harold Clurman. Adler and Strasberg had actually taken classes together at the American Laboratory theatre together, and Clurman had been a regular audience member at Stanislavski’s American tour of the Moscow Art Theatre in 1923. In 1930, Clurman and Strasberg, along with the like-minded Cheryl Crawford, founded the Group Theatre, of which Meisner and Adler were among the first members (Clurman The Fervent Years 32).
At first, Strasberg was the primary acting teacher at The Group Theatre, but soon each of the five friends were alternating as acting teachers for The Group. Strasberg’s “method,” to which the phrase “method acting” is commonly referred to today, focused on a very psychological approach to Stanislavski’s teachings. One of the methods he utilized in his teachings was that of improvisation, which both Adler and Meisner adopted into their own methods even after The Group Theatre dissolved. For Adler, Meisner, and Strasberg, improvisation is crucial to understanding the situations within a script, and making those situations personal for the actor playing the role (Clurman On Directing 65).

For all of these teachers, imagination is the driving force behind improvisation, which expands Stanislavski’s idea of “The Magic If” and combines it with the Given Circumstances set down by the playwright (Brestoff Under the Circumstances 7). Strasberg, however, took this a step further by combining improvisation with affective memory, a controversial Stanislavski technique in which actors use their own memories and experiences as the impetus for their work (Stanislavski 410). This practice, while it has led to some truly great performances, has also caused hysterical performances, and in the worst-case scenario, long-term psychological trauma for the actors using it (Clurman The Fervent Years 100). In spite of protest, Strasberg defended his method, saying:

The human being who acts is the human being who lives. That is a terrifying circumstance. Essentially the actor acts a fiction, a dream; in life the stimuli to which we respond are always real. The actor must constantly respond to stimuli that are imaginary. And yet this must happen not only just as it happens in life, but actually more fully and more expressively. Although the actor can do things in
life quite easily, when he has to do the same thing on the stage under fictitious conditions he has difficulty because he is not equipped as a human being merely to playact at imitating life. He must somehow believe. He must somehow be able to convince himself of the rightness of what he is doing in order to do things fully on the stage. (Cole 24)

The way in which Strasberg was using emotion memory became an increasingly larger point of contention within The Group Theatre. The effectiveness of affective memory was also being called into question, as some of the productions The Group put on were gigantic successes, and others were hard flops (Clurman *The Fervent Years* 104). Stella Adler in particular was struggling to work with affective memory, and in 1934, she and Harold Clurman traveled to Paris to meet with Stanislavski himself. Stanislavski gave her some acting lessons, and over the course of a week he explained how he had long since abandoned the use of affective memory, due to it being “dangerous.” Taking this revelation and sharing it with The Group Theatre did nothing but deepen the divide between its ensemble members, and by 1941 The Group Theatre had dissolved (Clurman *The Fervent Years* 140).

However, the breakup of The Group Theatre did not stop Stella Adler from taking the teaching that Stanislavski had personally given her and apply it to her own acting career and her teaching career. Adler was a huge advocate for actors doing research on their roles, making them culturally and historically correct in order to bring about truth on stage. As Adler argues in her book:
…for instance, if a character talks about horse riding, one needs to know something about horse riding as an actor, otherwise one will be faking. More importantly, one must study the values of different people to understand what situations would have meant to people, when those situations might mean nothing in the actor's own culture. Without this work, an actor walks onto the stage naked.

(Adler 39)

Adler was also a proponent of the technique known as “sensory imagination,” which she believed would make a character’s onstage experience more vivid. Sensory imagination uses the bodily senses of sight, smell, touch, hearing, and taste to bring the finer points of the text to life on stage. When it came to improvising backstories for characters within the play, Adler advised her actors to use sensory imagination to relive the physical experiences of a moment from the character’s past, and that these sensory experiences would fill in the missing emotional pieces from the performance (Adler 22). Sensory imagination would later become a useful part of my own experiences in directing True West, where I asked my actors to remember the uncomfortable heat of a desert, and apply that constant heat to a debilitating family dynamic. It worked particularly well within the confines of True West because the weather gets hotter and hotter as the play progresses, and as it gets hotter and hotter outside, old tensions and wounds are brought up between Austin and Lee.

Sanford Meisner, on the other hand, approached textual analysis by directly applying the use of imagination with the given circumstances of the text and combining them into a process for actors that he called preparation. Meisner defined preparation as “the device which permits you to start your scene or play in a condition of emotional aliveness. The purpose of preparation
is so that you do not come in emotionally empty” (Meisner 78). For Meisner, imagination was the key that takes the text and makes it applicable and personal for the actor using it. The more personal and specific the choice of the actor’s imagination, the better chance that the text would bring about truth within an actor’s performance.

Meisner often warned his actors of the risks that preparation could bring to a performance. He explained that:

Preparation is going to present you with certain problems. One is the temptation to show it…Another thing, which cannot be repeated too often, is that preparation lasts only for the first moment of the scene, and then you never know what’s going to happen…In the early days of the Stanislavsky System, Mr. S. was looking for true behavior, and if what he wanted was great pleasure, he asked where you look for the reality of great pleasure. His answer was simple: you remember a time when you were under the influence of great pleasure. That’s called ‘emotion memory.’ I don’t use it, and neither did he after thirty years of experimentation. The reason? If you are twenty and work in a delicatessen, the chances are very slim that you can remember that glorious night you had with Sophia Loren. The chances are slight that you know the full pleasure of that kind of glorified sex…In other words, what I am saying is that what you’re looking for is not necessarily confined to the reality of your own life. It can be your imagination. If you allow it freedom—with no inhibitions, no properties—to imagine what would happen between you and Sophia Loren, your imagination is, in all likelihood, deeper and more
persuasive than the real experience...our imaginations are every bit as strong as,
if not stronger, than the experiences we can recall from our past. (Meinser 79)

When it came to the application of these ideas for my production of *True West*, I found that the practices and teachings of Sanford Meisner were the most easy to grasp and apply to the actors performances. Using imagination and preparation, the actors were able to take the situations of the play and the characters that they represented and really show some true, honest emotion. As far as I was cognizant, neither Jack Lindberg (the actor playing Austin) nor Alex Moerer (the actor playing Lee) had ever experienced the trauma of an abusive, abandoning parent. However, using their imaginations and drawing from real relationships with their parents that they had actually experienced, they were able to pull off *True West* with great skill. I use the word “skill” because both Alex and Jack have great relationships with their parents, and while acting is the art of pretending to some degree, the utilization of textual analysis to supplement their performances truly moves the art of acting away from Stanislavski’s idea that life experience makes for the best acting. What makes this even more incredible, is that both Alex and Jack are onstage throughout the entire ninety-minute play, and we were really able to balance the fact that the preparation only lasts the first moment, and yet keeping their textual analysis relevant throughout the play. The first moment of *True West* is a difficult one to stage: neither brother has seen the other in five years, and they both left their last meeting with deep enmity and animosity towards one another. The brothers meet each other in the moment before the play begins by chance, and the entire first scene we see them slowly opening up to each other with some awkward phrasing that a casual reader might not understand at first. An actor must understand what they are saying, otherwise the effect is lost. One way that Sanford Meisner put it
in an interview was that “within a play, the text is a canoe upon a turbulent river. Your emotion is the waters upon which that boat sits and flows down. Your preparation is merely the first stroke of the oar as you glide down the river of the performance” (Coco 62).
IV. Harold Clurman

Now that we have discussed how actors can approach and utilize textual analysis when it comes to staging a production, one may be wondering how directors approach the same issue. Harold Clurman, one of the founders of The Group Theatre, first began to develop his own directing style while directing The Group Theatre’s production of Clifford Odets’ play, *Awake and Sing!* in 1935. Clurman’s directing style is one that has been constantly discussed and extremely influential within the western theatrical communities for decades (Kazan 24).

Clurman’s principal belief was that all elements of a play—text, acting, lighting, scenery, and direction—needed to work together to convey a unified message. When approaching a script, Clurman would read the text over and over, focusing on a new character during each subsequent read-through. This in turn would shape how each character contributed to the story, and know what clues the text provided about the lives of these characters within the world of the play (Clurman *On Directing* 70-74).

According to Clurman, the text is the force that drives the theatre, and that one must understand it in order to contribute fully to the overall message of the production. To help his actors with textual analysis, Clurman was a large advocate of Richard Boleslavsky’s “spine” system. Boleslavsky’s spine system was influenced by Stanislavski’s concept of a super-objective, which is the overarching want of a character throughout a play. In Boleslavsky’s theory, by identifying the super-objective (the spine) and having all tactics and actions a character uses play towards that end goal, an ideal mode of performance would be achieved (Clurman *On Directing* 68). Once Clurman and the actors had identified the character’s spines/super-objectives, he combined them to form the spine of the play, for Clurman believed that all of the different character’s different wants in a text were not mutually exclusive, but
rather contributed fully to the intentions of the playwright (Clurman *On Directing* 83-86). Within each scene, Clurman further helped his actors get a sense of their characters within the text by encouraging them to find “active verbs” to describe what the characters are trying to accomplish in the story (Clurman *On Directing* 28).

When working with designers, Clurman truly set the precedent of today’s great directors by inspiring, guiding, and constructively critiquing the design and technical team as opposed to dictating his desires to them. For Harold Clurman, and many other artists, a piece of theatre is not merely a sole vessel of a director’s ambition, but a collaborative work that showcases the talents of all artists involved, and raised a question about a societal issue or problem for the audience to think about, digest, and discuss, as opposed to forcing a message down their throats or hitting them over the head with anvilicious morals (Coco 54).

Clurman’s book, *On Directing*, was a pivotal influence upon my own directing style. I truly believe that theatrical art is a collaborative process, and not just me forcing my will upon my colleagues. Everyone involved in a production must get their chance to bring to life their interpretation of an author’s work, and it is the director’s job to make these ideas cohesive and palatable to an audience.
V. Conclusion

In spite of sporting a cast of four characters, and an entire plot that takes place within a kitchen of a house in a California suburb, *True West* is a play that tackles so many issues within the society of the United States of America. Often, when I was asked by friends, colleagues, and strangers what the play was about, I would often find myself at a loss for words. “It’s…about…life” I would eventually manage to say. In a lot of ways, it is about life. It’s about love (Austin is married and unhappy, Lee is single and unhappy), loss (both brothers miss their boyhood days which they can never reclaim), disappointment (Austin has tried for years to break into the screenwriting community in Hollywood), the curse of family (Austin and Lee’s father was an alcoholic, and now both of the brothers are alcoholics too), the broken American dream (the brothers face the realization that the American Dream may only be a construct designed to make people in lower classes work harder towards socioeconomic goals they may never achieve), rapid advancement in technology at the expense of the environment (the desert in which they grew up in is being renovated to become a suburb), and growing up. All of these are favorite topics of Shepard’s, and these themes are particularly noticeable in his “family trilogy”, of which *True West* is supposedly the final installment (Coco 87).

When it came to directing this unique piece of theatre, in a sense, I began where Harold Clurman would begin, reading the play numerous times with a different character’s view point in focus, then combining these points into a through-line that serves as the arc of the play. Once I had my cast, I worked with them in identifying their character’s wants and tactics, and broke them down using Stanislavski’s useful tasks which can be found through readings of the script, which we did together. Then, before we fully began blocking the play, we used Meisner’s tactics of imagination and preparation to ready ourselves for the journey that was to come. That journey
had a successful end. Two of our three nights of performance had completely sold out, and each audience laughed and cried, and were moved by the experience. I believe they were moved by the realization that in one way or another, we have all experienced the hardships and realities that Lee and Austin are forced to confront in the play, and that sometimes life is a cycle of preventable violence that could have been stopped if only humans would communicate with each other, as is evidenced by the violent confrontation in the final scene of *True West*.

If I were to offer any final pieces of advice to aspiring directors out there, I would say two things: the first is to have that strong vision of what you believe the text to be. Second, be flexible, and get ready to accommodate changes, because your actors will soon know the play better than you, for truly, textual analysis is only the first step in putting a play together. When one is in the moment with the actors, the search for truth on stage is not about wrapping oneself up in a mask, but rather, removing that mask, and showing off a little light from the human soul.
Bibliography


