

For the Harry Ransom Center

By David Mamet

I started keeping a journal over forty years ago, and, so, established the habit of writing longhand.

Virtually everything I've written since: plays, screenplays, non-fiction, and novels, existed, first in hardbound, lined notebooks full of black or blue ink.

Subsequent drafts of my work, for forty years, were (and are) typed either on an old manual, or on an IBM Selectric typewriter. All of this material had been gathering in a famous storage facility in Cambridge, Mass.

Why was the facility famous? On one side, two stories tall, was written, sometime in the forties, the advertisement "Fire-Proof Storage."

Seen from a certain angle to the East, however, set backs in the building's construction caused the sign to read "Ire-Proof Rage."

To generations of MIT, Harvard, and BU students, and to other clients of the facility, this anomaly seemed to suggest some deeper meaning.

Like much other modern poetry, however, the meaning remained inarticulable. Nonetheless, the presence of the sight led me to meditate on the transitoriness of all things.

Why, I wondered, had I collected this mass of junk, none of which I ever wanted to see again? (I never wanted to see it again as the process from first inspiration to putatively finished product was a reminder, if not of pain, then of effort I'd much rather forget.)

Aha, however, I thought, perhaps some imaginary future soul, possessed of a surfeit of time, and an interest in the arcane, might find diversion, if not benefit, in the perusal of the growth of this or that project, or, indeed, of my career. This is every parent's fantasy: that those who come after one would actually "care."

I dunno. During the length of my career, various scholars, interviewers, fans, and members-of-the-audience have, most flatteringly, asked questions about my work. I could vouchsafe no cogent answers; for, neither I nor any other artist knows where he "got his ideas," or "what he meant by that." That's why the product is art, which may connect the unconscious of the artist to that of the audience.

So, to conclude, having an archive in the care of the Ransom Center, in the care, if I may, of intelligent, and dedicated enthusiasts, fulfilled both the fantasy of the parent, and that of the artist, who now, though absent, might envision a cost-free colloquy with a perfect interlocutor.

I look forward to interactions with students and otherwise interested people at the University in the coming years, as A) I love to teach, and B) anybody who is interested in my work is "okay with me."

I don't know how students and scholars will make use of my archive in later years, but it's all there. Good luck, and thank you for the compliment.

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