SHEDDING MY HAIR: reflections on a cross generational theater experience

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For my Columbia MFA Directing Thesis Project I decided to direct a production of *Hair: The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical*. This document constitutes a small record of all the work that went into developing the concept and actually creating this thesis production, which premiered in New York City at the Connelly Theater on March 29th, 2017, and ran for five performances. One of the most universal aspects of a theater event is its ephemerality; it pops into and out of existence very quickly and leaves a trail of effects in its wake. In my opinion theater is uselessly judged with conventional categories like beauty, entertainment value, even intention or clarity. Theater can only ever be measured by the force and form of its collision with our society, and by the magnitude of the ripples that this impact leaves behind.

With Love
Ari Rodriguez
INTRODUCTION

First, a story:

Once upon a time in the United Stated of America people believed that all of our problems – social unrest, inequality, violence, injustice, and disenfranchisement – could be solved overnight, in an instant even, if only we could collectively alter consciousness. If only we could stay awake to the living spirit in everything around us, we would radiate peace and spread peace like an infection. All of our problems, with all their seeming complexity, all of our entangled strategic long term solutions and compromises, all this would simply dissolve, if only we could bring to fruition this change at the level of individual consciousness. The revolution need not be bloody nor the political strategy complex. Connect with our inner, un-alienated happy selves and in simply being such creatures we'll lead others to do the same. If we allow ourselves to even peek beyond the illusions of money and politics, we will see they are only a means to an end of our contentment and prosperity, things that can be found within rather than without. Society would naturally reform itself and follow suit to our revolution of consciousness, since social codes and structures are mere reflections of our individual attitudes.

Oh, it was a beautiful, revolutionary, and very real idea and though it went by many names, this one concept mobilized an enormous amount of people with disparate backgrounds and political agendas. It is important to stress that the logic of this grassroots styled social change was completely sound and the possibility of a global revolution completely real.

1 This "story" comes right out of my notebook for Hair production research.
But this direct path towards a new social order of peace and community is no longer afforded to us in the United States. The door was long ago shut. It cannot be determined exactly why or how, but the Age of Aquarius has been forfeited. We have before us now a much longer, much steeper, much more bureaucratic climb towards the triumph of the collective human spirit. This is the chapter we are on in the story of our country.

The story above is pure imagination. And yet it's also recognizable. A well known bed time story for the living generations of the United States. For nations are nothing more than imagined communities\(^2\), created and sustained by the very real effects of their shared fictions. The cultural imagination and shared interpretations of cultural memory are like culture's DNA. These are the foundations for our triumphs and blindspots, foundations for the futures we might be able to imagine.

The spectre of the 1960s haunts America. We cannot forget it, we cannot stop examining and appropriating this decade branded by its particular ethos. Even those like me – born forty years too late to join the groovy revolution – know the mythology, aesthetics, values, and sounds of the sixties. I am not talking about the real decade, full of all sorts of disparate and contradictory events, but about the decade that lives squarely in the cultural imagination. A decade, turned into an image and a feeling, a decade in which we can store all of our idealistic yearnings and left-leaning ideas without ever having to measure them up to our contemporary reality. In my story above, I was hoping to write the discourse of the american psyche's relation to the cultural upheaval of the1960s. As always it is full of both love and hate, both desire and denial. As we continue to document and remember, the myth of this decade only grows larger and more distorted. As we idealize and get nostalgic for our

\(^2\) Anderson, *Imagined Communities*
past we also distance ourselves from it's reality and multivalence. This is perhaps the first great critique of the discourse (the “american bedtime story”) above – it is shallow because it reduces the past to the glory days and makes the present impotent.

At the same time the potency of sixties mythology is no accident. Some seed was planted here, a seed probably stolen from the foot of a babaji's tree and grafted onto American soil. Through countless transfers of the hand and many translations and revisions some kernel is still recognizable, still magnetized towards ancient (and probably eastern) sensibilities. For the ascendant possibility of humanity is ancient and religious in nature. If there really was an ethos and a spirit of that time it was only a western atheistic riff on a much larger human theme. Yet somehow it was coded in a new way that allowed these old ideas to have an important renaissance in the new culture being created by a youth full of questions.

One can see that, within the lines of my very short story, with its well known and easy to gloss over attitudes, we could examine the discourse bit by bit. In taking careful stock of the possible implications of each turn of phrase, we could make a quite rigorous analysis of the entire American Political Imagination. That is a much longer story of which I hope to tell certain parts. Let us quickly say that in the story of america presented above there is much hope and open-mindedness, we must be thankful for that, but also, much of it is dangerously inoperative. It is a political imagination aimed at the past and not the future, and one that valorizes immediate watershed miracles rather than long-term changes. In my historical analysis I propose we take a step back, and analyze discourses such as this from a removed vantage point, placing as few value judgements as we can bear on whether things sound progressive or conservative, left-wing or right-wing, good, bad or ugly. I hope to look
directly at folk conceptions of where America has stood and stands now within it's master narrative. *The stories we tell ourselves, about ourselves* – that's where the study of theater and culture merge – are full of gaps and inconsistencies, clever little turns of phrases and unfinished sentences that help sustain the logic of these well-rehearsed ways of interpreting our own past. In every word of our seemingly innocuous historical discourse, our ways of recounting personal memories and “reminiscing” included, there is room for almost infinitely deep and and winding cultural analysis. I hope that my production and these pages written here may shed some light on how to unravel that which seems obvious in cultural reflections.

But let us not rule out or forfeit the uplifting and hopeful aspects of our little story. For still it calls to us, the siren song of peace. We are told it is naive and still it calls to us, the purity of the message, a melody that needs no explanation. It resonates because it has always been possible, it has always been true. The louder and louder we sing it, the truer and truer it sounds. Our song becomes a mantra. A spell. This possibility of a new way of life, so long ago foregone due to all the cynicism, hypocrisy, and opportunistic-capitalistic activity of our time, all the conservative forces of the world that have no face and no name... do you dare? Do you dare accept a truth however naïve? Do we dare collect under one banner despite our differences and despite the pit in our stomachs reminding us that we will always, eventually, fail? And ought we still to try?
WHY THIS PLAY NOW?
WHAT SPECIFIC QUESTIONS DOES THIS PLAY PROVOKE?

*Hair* is a musical full of ideological baggage, full of signifiers of American identity pointing in myriad directions. *Hair* is slippery. This musical means very different things to different people. For some it is the beacon of radical politics and radical theater practice. For others it is not nearly radical enough, neither theatrically nor politically, and represents the camp, the cheesy vacuity of american displays of “liberation.” However one may feel about *Hair*, it is an artifact of the USA and perhaps overly emblematic of it's historical period. It is a show that in its every aspect lives caught between two worlds: it is remembered as a Broadway box office goldmine\(^3\) and also an underground, iconoclast, protest play\(^4\), all at once. It has been said that it is the contradictions within an ideology that best define and describe that ideology. By the same token the way *Hair* holds it's cultural contradictions together cuts right to the heart of what this play truly captures. We are so used to many of these cultural contradictions that often they hide in plain sight. I was attracted to the play as much for its hidden inconsistencies as for it's strong and heartfelt messages.

*Hair* gives us a slice of the counterculture of the late 1960s. I need not mention that this cultural moment is remembered for its unwavering radical politics, for ways of living that directly attacked traditional values, and perhaps most importantly for a chaotic uncertainty that was palpable in a rapidly accelerating world. But in *Hair* this is all reduced and sublimated into the figure of the “hippie,” depicted enthusiastically though made palatable and comprehensible for a traditional audience. Whether *Hair* ultimately furthers radical agendas or empties and commodifies them is what is hotly debated.

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3  Many examples, see: <https://www.lakesregion.org/the-tony-award-winning-smash-hit-broadway>
4  Also many examples, see: http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/hair-premieres-on-broadway
The choice to do this material always came with a kind of double meaning, a double objective. I love the play and I am also embarrassed by it. I want to honor the Baby Boomers for their political bravery and steal from their optimism, but also chastise them for their failed promises and glaring contradictions. Today, a new wave of protest and culture wars have begun in this country. It is imperative that we ask ourselves where our ideas about protest and civil disobedience are coming from. It is imperative that we talk candidly—across generational lines and without recourse to nostalgia or entrenched political ideologies—and look closely at the successes, pitfalls, and real effects of American protest movements. Above all, *Hair* is a rich piece of cultural evidence about the most important period of social upheaval in the modern United States. My aim was to use this iconic, clichéd piece to investigate the genealogy of American counterculture in a precise and rigorous way. Much of this chapter will be critical of the material I decided to present. But my ultimate aim beat perfectly in time with the heart of this play however flawed it may be: to WAKE UP the audience, to dare to propose alternative kinds of community and actually enact them, to send a radical message out to meet and influence an uncertain future. The way to do this in our threatening political moment was not to recapitulate old clichés that keep us asleep but to crack these clichés open. Such was my objective.

*Hair* has become synonymous with hippies. Hippies have become synonymous with a tightly knit set of political positions, aesthetic affiliations, and certain attitudes. The play is so deeply overdetermined that we all know exactly what it is supposed to be and what it is supposed to do. It is the hippie play, par excellence. *Hippie* is famously a term coined by newspapers, it is said it first appeared in Time Magazine. It was a word meant to reduce and codify the massive changes brewing in youth culture of the 1960s and at first it was
vehemently opposed by those same groups who it claimed to connote (see: The Diggers “Death of the Hippie” ceremony as one of many examples). The hippie was a cliché from the very inception of it's term. It is exactly the cliché of the hippie that interests me. My argument will be that it was the war with cliché and reductionism that most plagued the radical movements of the late sixties. The new possibilities of mass media and instant communication birthed both the cultural renaissance and it's antidotes all at once. A clear line can be drawn from the engaged and politically agitated hippie and it's more docile spawn, today's hipster. Something curious seemed to be happening in how radical ideas and specifically radical political imagination and action was being repressed in this country. While violent repression seemed to only fuel the flame of radical causes (think: Kent State), attacks at this other level seemed to finally erode the radical pangs of a new american youth. These attacks were at the level of branding, reducing, emptying and commodifying whatever the radicals created or set out to create. *Hair* itself which premiered in 1968 is a strong example of how “hippie” culture was already folding to the simplistic definitions that the outside world was imposing upon it.

So it was not a violent repression but rather a sinister acceptance that curbed the Baby Boomer generation, and changed them from possibly the biggest threat to American society to the center of economy and the productive workforce just a few years later. In this chapter I will try to outline the governmental strategies that toppled the fervor of the sixties and threaten our very society today, zoning in on neoliberalism as a central historical theme. It is the threat to, but also seeds of neoliberalism within *Hair* that make it a useful text outlining the political fork in the road that our country and the world is currently at. By taking a look at what we are calling neoliberalism (we'll go into detail defining this term
later) we can take a wide angle look at how the story of the hippies and american
counterculture fits into major geopolitical trends of the 20th century. This seemingly friendly
and nostalgic play becomes a site where we might gather the generations and take a careful
stock of the effects of a long implemented neoliberal agenda. Why this play now? Because
the yearnings for completely new utopian visions for our society must be reignited, and have
very visibly been corroded. Why a critical rendition of this play? Because the slippages in
American political discourse must be addressed and the ready-made political ideologies and
party lines must be exploded.

What we have in America is an infrastructural problem, below the level of party
politics. For what I'll be calling neoliberalism extends across our entire political spectrum, it
is in the very foundational idea of this country. With the setbacks of xenophobic nationalists
taking power all over the world there is one small hope: the left wing has a chance to
regroup, take stock of where it stands, and change up its strategies. In this moment of pause
we ought to look far back into our history and incorporate what we have learned. This is
why I believe this play has to be revisited today. The sixties is like the Ancient Greece of
American Resistance Movements – there is no way to have a successful new renaissance (or
American resistance) without reinterpreting or rediscovering this historical moment.

In order to go forward we have to look back. The sixties and it's cultural emblems
like Hair contain some of the best from our past, like the hope we need, and some of the
worst, like political posturing and unquestioned assumptions. Hair is a great piece for
thinking about American Identity and how national identity has been shifting throughout the
last century, at a moment when all of us are thinking hard about the path that our country is
on.
Before jumping into neoliberalism let's return briefly to our discussion of the cliché. At the center of any signifier is an internal tension between specificity and ease of transmission. Specificity makes a sign useful by referring accurately to something, and transmission makes a sign useful by making that reference communicable across people and time. This is the balancing act of any symbol – specific enough to have a clear meaning, compressed enough to be easily communicated and useful in many contexts. A cliché is a sign that has fallen too far on the side of transmission. It is a sign which is so often referenced and in so many contexts that the specificity of it's meaning starts to suffer. This is where the term cliché comes from, it is the french onomatopoeic word for the sound a typewriter makes when it hits the page – it is the sound of an infinitely repeatable gesture. A cliché is something we don't think twice about, something we take for granted and already know. Hippies are a cliché because we already know what they are going to say (maybe “peace love and rock and roll, man...”). A cliché is predictable, and thus easy to tune out or look over without giving much thought. Clichés put our critical awareness to sleep. But every cliché is full, completely full of contexts in which it is uttered (that's how it became a cliché in the first place) and thus full of a thick web of references. When we think of the hippie we immediately begin this long laundry list of references and corollary iconography (bell bottoms, peace signs, the beatles, etc.). Something becomes a cliché when all of the information around that idea is reduced into an image, into an easily callable form and outline. But if that cliché is opened, sat with and truly investigated, it is an absolute treasure trove of possible implications and cultural understanding. It has encoded on it a tremendous amount of cultural material. It has passed many hands and traversed the whole of society being reflected on and added to by countless agents. Clichés are useless and deadening for
theater when they are slipped in to make something simpler, to get at an idea quickly or without really investigating it. But if a cliché can be cracked open it is one of the theater's most prized subjects, it is a bountiful store of material. The hippies are one of America's easily recognizable clichés. That means that the subject of the hippies is very easy to mishandle. It is easy to present lazily without saying anything, it is easy to create dead theater\(^5\) out of hippie-clichés. But it also means that if this cliché could be cracked open it would have within it stores and stores of possible material to sift through. Opening this cliché could be the nexus of a new understanding for many of the issues, paradoxes, and divides in American culture.

My first question approaching this play was: how can I re-open this topic and unpack this cliché? How do I make people look again and look harder at the hippies when we all feel we know what we are going to find there? When I looked at the actual structure of the show I saw that it was a very simple piece. It is mostly direct address to the audience. The show takes place in the theater itself. It is supposed to be a meeting of the traditional audience with this young and crazy tribe. At first all the lines point to the fact that the audience is shocked, and scandalized by these hippies. “I know what you're thinking, what is it Agnes a boy or a girl? What is this goddamn thing?” says the character Berger in his first direct speech to the audience. By the end they're singing *Let the sunshine* and inviting the audience onstage. So the piece has an arc built around coming to accept and love the hippies. We, the middle class, mid-century audience, are supposed to be shocked by these hippies at first but slowly soften to them and see that we have common ground. The problem with this play in a contemporary setting is the hippies are no longer dangerous or scary, and from the moment these characters arrive we *already know* what they are going to say and do,

\(^{5}\text{ In the Brook-ian sense see: The Empty Space} \)
and we are already won over by them. The cast might as well come out and simply sing the finale and bow. I workedshopped a few different ideas for a way to revitalize the energy of this play and restore some of the danger it had in its original context. I thought of making the hippies seem really dirty and homeless for instance. But in the end I settled on a concept that had deeper implications than I even understood at first: I thought the play might seem dangerous and radical again if this group of orgiastic, singing and dancing, multi-racial prophets of love and peace were all elderly people, not the sorts of faces and bodies we associated with political radicalism. We will get back to the formation, elaboration, and implications of our never before tried concept for Hair. What is important for now is that we found a way to bypass the cliché by startling the image of the hippie. We found a way to wake this play from it's slumber by questioning one of it's fundamental unquestioned assumptions – that radical communities and political activism have to be instigated by young people.

Our production is absolutely necessary because cross-generational analysis is necessary. Cross generational analysis is necessary because we are far too quick to assign the value and impact of different historical moments when in fact these moments usually have far reaching antecedents as well as long lasting effects. One of the most frightening things about our current political arena is that the inundation of media outlets make our political memory very short. We are constantly alerted of crisis and impending doom and we rarely have the chance to put the pieces together over a long period of time and track the undercurrents of our present society and where it seems to be headed. It is the political drift of the Baby Boomer generation that reveals the true scope of both the beauty and hypocrisy of this generation. The same will be true of my own generation. But in our concept, by
having the old re-enact the time of their own youths, we were able to look at the social and political drift that this generation has been through. We were able to see what values of hippiedom stuck for these people and which faded like an old tie-dye shirt. All of this is to say that by aggressively altering the standard casting decisions we were able to make our play into this sociological and generational study we wanted it to be. We were able to take the play out of it's fantastical and nostalgic dream-america and place it in the real world of today. It was like we turned the fluorescent lights on at a discotheque and asked “what is really going on here?” We were able to jostle our cliché and ask questions like “is this lifestyle and rhetoric still retrievable today?”

So where are we. We started with a heartfelt but possibly campy anti-war musical. From here we've gotten ourselves to the genealogy of counterculture, cross-generational analyses of American Identity, and a critique of neoliberalism. The cliché has opened, and its contents are pouring out.

In the following paragraphs we will delve deeply into an analysis of neoliberal art of government. Know that some of these technicalities can certainly be glossed over if they are of no interest. Neo-liberalism is a haughty and over used technical word which connotes a new form of liberalism, basically a laissez-faire economic policy. In order to delve into neoliberalism we will be utilizing the well researched critique provided by Michel Foucault.

Michel Foucault's *The Birth of Biopolitics* traces modifications in the “art of government” of western societies over the last few centuries. Foucault analyses what he calls “governmentality,” a domain that includes actual governmental practices and the way government reflects on itself and its own operation. Foucault says “the state is far from

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6 Foucault, 28
being a kind of natural historical given, which develops through its own dynamism...it is the correlative of a particular way of governing.” So instead of theorizing some abstract state out of thin air he tries to “locate the emergence of a particular type of rationality in governmental practice, a type of rationality that would enable the way of governing to be modeled on something called the state.”

Beginning from this formation of the State out of a certain kind of government rationality which he calls *raison d'Etat*, Foucault traces the development and modification of *raison d'Etat*.

A fundamental and easy to conceptualize part of governing on this state logic is the continued aim of the enrichment and growth of the state. But Foucault acutely explains how the logic of diplomatic States that was forming in the 17th century makes for limited external objectives (states no longer ceaselessly seeking imperial domination of each other, as in feudal societies) but unlimited internal objectives (states competing with each other by having more efficient and productive workforce/society). The unlimited internal objectives of the State are easy to see in the growing administration, documentation and policing that was well under way by the 18th century. The management of the population was the way in which a State could continue to increase it's power – instead of expanding ceaselessly outward States began to expand inward, to tap the potential of it's citizens for the benefit of the State by better managing and controlling it's population. This is exactly what the term *biopolitics* connotes, it is the political arena of population management and control, of things like birth rates and death rates. It is the political arena that can only truly exist once we statistical trends and models are invented and become a part of our social reality.

Wherever there are major social planning initiatives at the level of whole populations –

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7 Foucault, 6
8 For more detail See Foucault's *Security, Territory, Population*
whether vaccine implementation, or state-sanctioned racism – there is biopolitics. By the 18th century as Foucault tells the story we have (in Europe) “Police States” with unlimited objectives in its management of the population. The only counterbalance to the unlimited objectives of the state became the way that the law protected the rights of individuals. The characteristic feature of a neoliberal governmentality is best introduced by the shift from external limitations on government (often appealing to inalienable rights) to “an internal regulation of government rationality.”

What does this mean? This is probably the central concept from which all the other attributes of neoliberalism spiral out of so it is worth pausing here. A quote:

External legal limits to the State, to raison d'Etat, means first of all that the limits one tries to impose on raison d'Etat are those that come down from God, or those which were formulated in the distant past of history. Saying that they are extrinsic to raison d'Etat means that they function in a purely restrictive, dramatic way since basically the law will only object to raison d'Etat when the latter crosses these legal limits, at which point the law will be able to define the government as illegitimate, to argue against its encroachments, and if necessary to release subjects from their duty of obedience.

So the State's indefinite hopes of maximizing the potentials of its citizens are curbed by external legal limits, by laws that are created by the ideas of inalienable rights and legitimacy of sovereignty. A simple example might be policy around workers rights: perhaps the king wants everyone to work 100 hours a week (assume we're in some sort of wartime

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9 Foucault, 30
10 Foucault, 10
economy with an extreme State need for labor), but the law protects citizens from a workweek over (let's say) 50 hours. This protection was determined by the courts out of certain abstract principles about the rights of individuals to leisure time, or to sleep. What is important is that these civil liberties that the law protects are completely outside the domain of an uncritical government apparatus seeking to maximally control and manage its population.

The instrument which makes an internal regulation of government practice possible is political economy: the stable functioning of a free market economy is used as a tool to critique government with regards to its effects on the market, a market whose laws can "gauge the validity" of governmental actions. With the new inventions of the tools of political economy, and the new metrics that were being introduced by the first wave of real statistical data in the form of populations, birth rates, rates of urban development etc., comes the beginning of a new kind of governmental strategy in the west:

Unlike sixteenth and seventeenth century juridical thought, political economy was not developed outside *raison d'Etat* and in order to limit it. Rather it was formed within the very framework of the objectives set for the art of government by *raison d'Etat*, for what objectives did political economy set itself? Well, the objective of the state's enrichment... Political economy reflects on governmental practices themselves, and it does not question them to determine whether or not they are legitimate in terms of right. It considers them in terms of their effects rather than their origins... success or failure, rather than legitimacy or illegitimacy now become the criteria of governmental action.¹¹

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¹¹ Foucault 14-16
So, these are some of the far reaching antecedents of a neoliberal way of governing. It is a way of governing that is above all pragmatic, and self-limiting. To take up our working week example the neoliberal formula would not be external legal limits about leisure time but simply the law of demand dictating how much of an economic incentive would be necessary for a private firm to contract an individual to work a 100 hour work week. Government balances itself and looks to intervene as little as possible. It says where can we allow stable, regulatory mechanisms like a free market economy, do our work for us? Remember that in no way is this self-limiting government rescinding any power, it is trying to increase it's power of management and control by increasing its efficiency (no need to manage something that manages itself). It is the beginning of the structure of our modern world where governments are governed by economy and governmental actions are constantly measured in economic terms. Classical Liberalism is where the people ask the government to laissez-nous faire (leave us alone, let us be). That is, the government respects the invisible hand of a free market and does not intervene on market relations. Some things work better if they are not supervised. A regulated market is less efficient for everyone while a free market finds stable prices spontaneously that actually respect the laws of supply and demand. To drastically oversimplify, one can see the transition from classical liberalism where the State (intrinsically defined on old parameters of sovereignty and legitimacy) supervises this free market, to a neoliberalism, a new phase of government where the free market supervises and defines the State.

Now I am sure you are asking – how in the hell can this be important for a production of Hair? I'll just make a few brief points:

We see in Hair and in the entire sixties mythology, a central figure of the military
draft. Now a more rough historical picture can make no statements about where opposition to the draft is really coming from. The incongruence between an America of the world wars where the draft was never questioned, to the America of the late sixties has to be hand waved away. Usually something about the injustice of the Vietnam war in comparison to other “just” wars will be invoked. But while that could be true under certain parameters, it's not nearly the whole story. We can already paint a very different picture. The subject of the draft is really about changing attitudes towards the duty of subjects to the sovereign. The staunch opposition to the draft has everything to do with a public who does not see themselves as intrinsically tied to these sacred sovereign duties. By the mid-twentieth-century we really are no longer *subjects of right* but *economic subjects* tied to our nation by a completely different set of principles.

To the generations that preceded the Baby Boomers, every generation had it's war. It was typically an honor and a privilege to serve. This was simply the model upon which society was set up, the way to get ahead, get an education, stay in the community of your peers, all of this was linked to military service for young men. There was a sense of an exchange between individual and sovereign, and included in that exchange was a pact of possible military service. All of this was part of the social contract theory that underpinned a nation. But governments were in the process of restructuring around a completely different locus for nationhood as we have just been describing, around the motor of economic incentives and other regulatory economic mechanisms. These do not involve any exchange of rights with the sovereign, but an agreement to function as a competitive agent within the general economic game. Put this way we can see our outrage at the draft as hugely important in creating the current military careerism of today which is perhaps even more sinister than
the draft. Instead of ending war, we updated war to its present neoliberal context where finding soldiers is linked much more to economic incentives than to bonds of sovereignty. Roughly put it is these long term changes that produce the seemingly unexplainable phenomena like a radical shift in attitudes towards military drafting. We must look beyond the grounds in which people explicitly make their objections and see what specific governmental technologies might be the unconscious motor of history. While personal justifications like pacifism or political resistance may have been completely real to individuals, they are made possible by these more general, long term shifts in the governmental substructure.

Another example might be found in the important notion of individualism. The individual, and rhetoric around individual freedoms, are at the very bottom of our country's political discourse. Our country was born out of demands about taxation – around a kind of radical liberalism where we wanted the sovereign (the English Monarchy) to get himself out of our economic affairs. Our country has, at its very core, anarcho-liberal tendencies that were much more detectable in the 19th century landscape, our cowboy culture full of land up for grabs and gold waiting to be mined. The stable functioning of the economy and the individualistic enterprise-man need each other. A free-market economy is made stable by its governmental aim of pure and fair competition between enterprises (or individuals as enterprises). Competition is not some natural given that must be respected (related to some crass and pessimistic Hobbesian intuitions about human nature) but is instead a useful regulatory mechanism for population management through a suitably constructed economic sector. This is the critique of individualism afforded by our analysis of the neoliberal mode

12 Foucault, 135
13 See Foucault's description of ordoliberalism on March 4th
of governing.

Protecting individuals and protecting the economy are often blended together, this is the classic rigamarole of Republican politics. But the deep ties to individualism go much further. For instance all of hippie resistance had a very interesting relationship to individualism and collectivity. While *Hair* certainly points towards the utopian collectivity that the rising commune culture of the sixties was engendering, it just as much falls into the trap of hailing and reiterating American individualism. The right to be able to be “whoever you want” and express your individual being were insisted upon. And it is exactly here that the administration saw how to reintegrate these terrifying hippies back into the fold of their economic styled society. In my estimation this has been the constant battle of American resistance. While the specific demands, and collective aims of each movement fade into the background, the vector of individualistic fervor is always doubled and its energies reverted back into the economy. This is the “sinister acceptance” of the hippies by the administration – as long as you are individuals who respond to economic incentives, we can still ensnare you in our system, so even if the individual you are fighting for is antithetical to our socially conservative values, it can still be monitored and controlled within the logic of our economy. This is a start to how the hippies of the sixties became the yuppies of the next two generations.

We could go on forever but we ought to reach some conclusions. Looking at these sweeping trends in nationhood help us to remember the different levels of social and political changes that were all happening at once. Perhaps the sixties was the beginning of the end of modernity, the invention of the post-modern. Perhaps the hippies were taking on
demons much larger and more far reaching than just Nixon, or one single war, but the entire face of the oncoming political and technological order. Perhaps all of their flamboyant resistance was because they knew their revolution would fail, so they were hoping it might fail *in style*, and fail boldly enough to be remembered, to capture the cultural imagination and thus have some influence over a bleak seeming future.

Most important of all to me was to paint a picture where much stronger and much larger tectonic political forces were playing themselves out on the surface of hippie culture. Hippies were not right or wrong, simply the first generation to have to wrestle definitively with the end of modernity and with the repercussions of a globalizing world. They were the first children of the new age caught between the old world and the new. In this way we could avoid reductionism, of simply saying “weren't the hippies swell?,” or “weren't the hippies buffoons?” and instead ask the much more interesting and much more relevant question of “doesn't the fact that the Baby Boomer generation styled themselves as hippies (and then as yuppies, and post-modern parents etc. etc.) expose interesting fractures and mutations in American Identity?”
HOW WILL WORK ON THIS PLAY CHALLENGE YOUR DIRECTORIAL SKILLS AND ABILITIES?

Here is what I jotted down in my notebook just a few weeks before rehearsal:

I am planning to work with a cast of exclusively Baby Boomers, people over the age of fifty five. This presents a number of exciting challenges. Really think about it: they'll have to be singing and dancing like a crazy tribe! How do you create and facilitate that kind of community not with a group of energized and malleable young people but with a group of older people on a completely different wavelength than me? That will be a big challenge.

It will be a further challenge to create the sense that we are doing something else – not just examining hippies or the trials of these specific characters, but using this play as a forum to hear one last time from a dying breed of revolutionaries, or would-be revolutionaries, about the lessons they have learned and want to pass on to a new generation.

In the confrontation between their actual life experiences, their familiarity with the lives of the characters in the play, in short the literal knowledge that comes with witness, and my puffed-up imaginary research on such a period – how can I be an authoritative leader? How can I both: a. be humble and listen to the things they have to say and take in what they try to communicate to me about their generation's perspective; and b. stick to my vision and to the privilege that a perspective with remove can provide?

I have never directed a musical before.

I have never worked with a cast who all come from a specific community that I am not a part of. Will I know how to relate to this “sourced” cast?
In retrospect:

I was right about many of these challenges though I thoroughly enjoyed most of them. I feel that this final question has now become an affinity – I definitely hope to continue working with “sourced” casts who come from some kind of shared specific community of which I may or may not be an outsider.

But I also laugh at this journal snippet because there were, many, many unforeseen challenges. For instance I could have elaborated on how being new to a musical was going to be a difficult directing task. The amount of moving pieces was a real sweat to finally put together and I think it is telling I just threw this in as a one sentence remark. The musical was daunting to produce. I was stretched as a businessman, producer, and “boss,” more than ever before. Managing salaries, budgets, limitations from multiple institutions was a major undertaking that caused many learning opportunities. I feel like a much more confident director in the purely professional sense.
Preparing for this piece was an intricate journey, and hopefully it's a fun story. In many ways I do feel that I was preparing my entire life for this experience. But we'll begin the timeline from the moment I chose to take on this project and if we need to jump further back in time, we will.

In April 2016 I had the initial idea. I wanted to challenge myself in a few specific ways and I wanted to use the resources and platform of the thesis to certain ends. I knew that since this was our one chance at school to do something with more production staff and pre-production planning, I ought to not use the platform to workshop a new concept for the first time and potentially waste the access to a number of resources. So I wanted to do something a bit more “producorial” than most of my usual laboratory work. I thought I ought to go to the complete end of that spectrum and do a musical, or at least something in the classic American Theater canon. At the same time I wasn't looking to purposefully avoid myself, my style, or my preferences. I wanted to do a piece both personal and true to my heart but also producible, recognizable, accessible to a mainstream audience. Recognizability and accessibility were both a bit uncomfortable for me but I thought this might be an interesting new avenue for me and a great time to try my hand at it.

A friend was listening to the cast album one evening when I was just about to leave on an internship to Croatia to work on a Baroque Opera. In listening to the song Walking in Space, I instantly recalled a production of Hair I saw at Brown University, a completely flawed production but I remember the breathlessness my parents and I had after the show, the jolt of energy we felt. This was the very first moment that directing this show for my thesis crossed my mind. I closed a new choreographic work I was doing at Columbia and
boarded the plane for Croatia.

At this moment the idea was only still a vague possibility, a hat to try on. I have to say that it felt awkward and there was a lot of embarrassment in me simply for having the idea, shame in my desire to do a musical when I spent so much of my young-adulthood rejecting the form, shame in my overt desire to become a sixties hippie, shame for wanting to do the show called *Hair* as a man with my own mane of hair usually in the now clichéd *man-bun*. It was all very embarrassing to say out loud and I thought that was all very curious. So the idea started to float around in my head and annoy me and preparations were already beginning. I thought *if I really am going to do this piece I'd have to have an angle*, because I'd just be mortified if I did a one-dimensional parody of myself and my values. Out of fear of being ridiculed I started to really search for every possible way this play and these values could and do get ridiculed. I pause here because this shame, while in many ways brought on for silly reasons, was the first really interesting result of the thought experiment “what if I directed *Hair*?” Out of the shame came my interest in a more critical, more historically situated production.

Next I began my internship in Croatia – this internship was full of interesting lessons but I'll zone in on the ones that had a very strong impact on Hair. It had something to do with the entire model upon which European theater gets created. Nationalized systems end up identifying and preening theater-makers throughout a long and free nationalized education that keeps reducing the pool at each institutional level. What this creates is both an elitist but also a highly educated theater culture of artistic directors and theater makers with large state funds at their disposal. At the same time nationalized theater makes the entire ethos of theater more grounded in public goods, in a kind of community service and
political forum that has nothing to do with entertainment and much more to do with preservation of culture. All of this reflected directly in the work. The opera we worked on was an amazing amalgamation of incredibly intricate and high-concept dramaturgy of a classic, but the ethos of the process as well as the target audience for the production was only comparable to school or community theater in the United States. The chorus was full of amateurs we saw selling potatoes in the market. The process was organized just like a large-scale high school production in the way that families got involved and the whole community had to come together to make the work possible. It was inspiring to see all this in a post-industrial port town of Croatia, in the pursuit of a deconstruction of the form of Baroque Opera. This mixing of high concept dramaturgy with a purposefully amateurish process and community oriented final product was an extremely interesting and useful model to me. It took the best of what high-brow avant-garde theater and low brow populist performance had to offer. Eventually I decided to model the process for my show on exactly this experience but for now I was simply living it, and endlessly critiquing *Hair* in my own mind.

When I returned to the US that summer I spent some time in California. While in Los Angeles I saw what is referred to as “Skid row” the homeless pop-up tent cities that the poor of Los Angeles famously maintain. Here came my first entry point into *Hair*. I thought about the reality of what “living on the street” means in a contemporary 2016 context and I thought of how incongruous this was with the picture of liberated New York City youth living day to day in makeshift ways during the 60s and 70s. This was my first interesting place to start with *Hair*. What if this tribe living on the streets of New York, singing about their idyllic community, looked smelled and acted like the homeless of today’s New York
city streets? This thought was highly important for me. It was the first time I was able to pull the play out of a golden years type nostalgia and actually make a contemporary analog for the piece. *Hair;* for a classic in the canon, seems to resist attempts to change the aesthetic or have a production with any sort of cultural analog. The only well known production that did this with any success was Theater Mitu's *hairless* production of *Hair* that highlighted the cultish aspects of the play and of course got rid of all the hair (and thus all the aesthetic baggage of the visual hippie vocabulary).

By this point I was starting to resign myself to the terrifying idea that I really was doing this embarrassing piece for my thesis and I was starting to look for some good ideas and real inspiration. The first piece of very concerted and conscious research I did was take a camping trip in Big Sur, California. My girlfriend and I were both complete novices but we had a tent and a rental car and a car full of new groceries. We spent three nights completely off the grid and learning how to fend for ourselves in the wild. Because we were both beginners we learned everything from scratch and I fell in love with the freedom this lifestyle gave me. I really forgot about the business of my life and I was amazed at how just a few short days made many of my plans and goals disappear. I felt naturally acclimated to the wild and I felt like if we hadn't needed to return the car I could have accidentally stayed weeks, months, or years in this natural paradise. On our final day of camping we took both took a tab of LSD and spent the day alone on a gigantic beach. We were most amazed by the size of everything. The coast of California is so gigantic and sublime it almost makes you burst out laughing, like it's the caricature of itself. What I learned from taking psychedelics was not tremendously profound but there were many useful details I brought to the rehearsal room, all the unspoken codes and rituals that go along with taking a “trip.” A
thousand little details like this were learned on that camping trip, though raw unfiltered experience. I was simply having fun and looking to have some summer adventures that rhymed with my new project – but this experience set me off on a new and important course for two reasons.

The first reason is that as we were driving home from our camping trip it finally dawned on me, as a complete joke at first, that one could have an elderly cast for the musical *Hair*. Again this idea was born out of my own perceived absurdity of wanting to do this show in the first place and all of a sudden the joke of a nursing home producing hair jumped out of my mouth. But before the joke had even reached it's punch-line it wasn't a joke anymore. These are the interesting slippages in American Values, we ironize and at the same time our irony reveals our most secret earnest desires. And so it was somehow out of this psychedelic camping trip that the Baby Boomer production was first actually articulated, though just like the idea to do the show it was first dismissed as a laughable but impossible idea and it was simply stored in the back of my mind,

The second reason is that the camping trip outlined a new way for me to envision my preparations as a director. I knew that if I had a whole semester to “prepare” I’d end up wasting a lot of my time. I thought I might do a kind of durational performance and commit myself to a year of searching for hippie experiences. I went right to the heart of my embarrassment – that my identity is formed in the image of some sort of hippie-cliché and I decided to lean right into it. I would allow myself to be my most unadulterated hippie self for six months as I prepared for the rehearsals of this play. I thought if I was going to direct this play I would really have to become someone else, not learn about the hippies, but actually invest, in a sustained way, in whatever this lifestyle we were all constantly
referencing really was. So my preparation was full of experiential learning and a lot of wandering through experiences which opened my heart and mind in subtle unforeseen and difficult to document ways. I tried to live freely and on the edge of my seat following both my most immediate desires and also my most sacred duties to service my community and the people around me.

By this point the summer was over and this project was beginning to be a complete reality. The month of September was the beginning of my first preliminary meetings with my Stage Manager and with potential designers and collaborators. Along with my new commitment to a lifestyle actively influenced by my subject matter came an action plan for research and development.

On the research side I began to outline my methodology. In true sixties fashion I would allow for a certain amount of randomness, accident and intuition to enter my research. I also wanted to carve out an image of the sixties that was personal, intellectual and somewhat unexpected. The sixties is so full of references and symbols that if you try to gather all of the imagery and influences you end up with something watered down and well known. So I decided to create my own personal pantheon of sixties icons in each important field and center my research around these personal icons. In poetry I took on Allen Ginsberg, a leader of the beat generation who ushered in the culture of the sixties, as well as a mentor and father figure to the psychedelic and hippie movements. I also chose Ginsberg because he was one of the few icons of the Baby Boomer generation who stayed consistently prolific into his old age. With that came poems and “mind-language” as he would call it that really investigated how a hippie-youth might be incorporated and interpreted in elderly life. I read his complete works and watched a few documentaries,
focusing in on many of the last poems that he wrote in the early 90s.

I should mention that while in Croatia I had picked up my first copy of the Bhagavad Gita and had already begun a serious foray into understanding hindu philosophy from my very atheistic and analytical perspective. I fell in love with the Bhagavad Gita, Stephen Mitchell's translation, and when I had returned from my trip to Europe I had slowly been incorporating the Bhagavad Gita into my life. When I was out in California a friend who also loved the Gita recommended Ram Dass' book *Paths To God: Living the Bhagavad Gita* as a good self help read. So I began a deeper study of the Gita with Ram Dass' book as a companion. Ram Dass became the central spiritual figure in my sixties pantheon and he was an interesting alternative to an emphasis on Timothy Leary when it came to researching the rise to prominence of Psychedelics and the strange history this has entangled with academic and government institutions as well as with the drug friendly youth of the mid-century.

To round out my pantheon I began a long study into the philosophy of Marshall McLuhan and he was my pre-eminent sixties philosopher and theorist from the North American Continent. My background in french semiotics made McLuhan a juicy and interesting read full of potential references and ideas. I also picked up a copy of *The Artist's Way* a famous self-motivating book for people with creative blocks. Between the Bhagavad Gita, Ram Dass, The Artists Way as well as a new daily meditation and writing practice I was really diving into an ascetic way of living and grasping at a new spiritual journey. The more I read the Gita the more deeply I feel in love with it. Some combination of meditation Ram Dass's spirit and stories , and the Gita itself got me to take my new spiritual journey quite seriously. During this fall I have to say I got happily lost and subsumed in the task I had given myself – to live as much like whatever I thought a hippie was as I could – and it
was seeping into every aspect of my life. I had no idea whether I was doing these things for the sake of my upcoming project or simply for my well being anymore. I was successfully immersed.

One unexpected and interesting tangent of my preparation for *Hair* was the formation of my mindfulness soccer team. With a group of peers I registered myself and other theater folks as a team in a highly competitive soccer league. We began having practices where I would act as the coach incorporating both theater training and the spiritual teachings of the Bhagavad Gita into our sports training method. It was a helpful side project that helped change who I was as a director in a way that no direct sort of action could have. I was simply flexing my “guru” muscles and seeing if I could make use of all I was learning from my own spiritual journey to help others succeed and grow. We were a miserably bad soccer team but we still practiced offering all of our actions on the field as worship to Krishna and began seeing how our self-deprecating or self-aggrandizing modes actually distort the reality we perceive and keep us from performing our dharma. While we no longer incorporate the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita directly I am happy to say that our soccer team is still in existence with most of the original members still at the core of the team.

As the semester continued we began to have macro production and design meetings for *Hair*. I officially decided to pursue my difficult concept of working exclusively with elderly actors from the Baby Boomer generation and so I began a 4 month long hunt for my group of actors. I had meetings with the few older actors I knew and got contacts through them. I put out ads in backstage and playbill and had a preliminary audition for the piece in the fall just to meet some more folks. In meeting with these older actors I liked to hear stories from their youths and I asked them all the same questions about what values they
used to have as a young adult that have morphed or completely inverted as they got older. It was in these conversations that I started to learn about how to navigate sifting through cultural memory with a real person and their real memories. All the subtle politics of delving deeply into the tender stories of older people became apparent – the type of care and attention they needed to open up, the way they needed to be pressed or coddled in order to be more honest or more specific. In every conversation I learned to harp on my impartiality – whatever they said that they thought I would support or despise I always tried to argue a bit of the opposite. I was not hearing their stories to see if they were actually cool when they were young or not, or to see if they were authentic enough hippies for me. Instead I was hoping to grasp their relationships to these very things, to being “cool” and to “doing the right thing” and so on. I wanted the reality of their experiences with all the glaring inconsistencies and I was shocked at how often I felt my interlocutor was trying to prove something to me about themselves and how their values aligned with mine and the hippies when that wasn't what I was asking for at all. It was great practice for the rehearsal room I was soon to create a few months later and all the one on one meetings I had with many actors who were later cast were extremely helpful in putting a strong relationship of trust between each actor and I.

After a short hiatus working on my internships and other projects I returned to Hair in the winter a changed person. I was fully invested in my project and the recent election and it's surprise result had only doubled my fervor and my passionate commitment to live an alternative lifestyle proudly and bravely. I began fundraising and outreach efforts for our intergenerational hair experiment and I was met with a lot of strong enthusiasm. I began to put a lot of energy into producing and fundraising and I saw an opportunity for us to make a
strong political statement. By this point I had contracted musical director, choreographer and most of the designers. With my two main collaborators we were beginning to storyboard the show and I actually began some thick dramaturgy on the script trying to work with complete conceptual abandon just like the directors in Croatia had. Dramaturgy at the absolute height of my intelligence and including the full breadth of my research on the period, crystallized into direct images and metaphors that would suit a community theater style process. This piece, because it was the first I had ever made that had so much pre-planning attached, was the first piece where I really understood the job of a professional director. With my close-knit team I felt we had basically finished the show by the time we were ready to start rehearsals. By that moment it was a matter of execution and most of the big decisions had already been made – this was my first time truly working in this way.

A few other books and media were important companions. Many of the interviews of William F Buckley with left-wing public figures were watched to get some real context for the divisions between right and left during that time. We ended up using a portion of Buckley's interview with Ginsberg and I learned a lot of useful information from Buckley's hostile interview of Noam Chomsky. Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool Aid Acid Test* was the only novel which became an important touchstone, as were some conversations with a Brooklyn College PhD student writing specifically on generationality and Baby Boomers. Lastly was my continued interest and direct study of Foucault's major works, the philosopher who taught me how to read the depths and intensities on the surface of our seemingly innocuous historical discourse.

In January we finally had our week of casting sessions – an intense and meaningful process and the first few litmus tests for how this idea was going to work. Myself, the music
director and the choreographer all did sessions at the callback. I thought it was important that we all got to feel first hand how it would be to lead a room of older actors alone. There was an electric energy in the room as all the potential actors were mingling and trying to suss out me and my team of lead artists. I told the group that the play had “already started since our play was really all about our generational encounter and cross-generational conversation around this material.” The potential actors seemed excited and were giving us their all. The language really suited their ways of speaking and living. We were all very invigorated by the callback and when we had over forty people in their 50s and 60s singing *Let the Sunshine* together at the end of the night I saw that we were really onto something and that our show was going to work.

The final phase of preparation during casting was the most intense. During three sleepless nights I reworked the dramaturgical concept around my actual cast and their abilities, spending all day on the phone individually with actors and producers hammering out logistics and fundraising goals. With actors of this age group everyone had different needs and desires and idiosyncratic issues. I dealt with everyone personally on a one on one basis, and at certain points I felt like a giant fraud, but eventually I had a full cast and budget structure. I learned more about the real challenges of trying to direct and produce a new work at a professional level in these three days than in all the rest of this timeframe combined. One extremely small practical skill I learned was to pick up the phone and call people, even those who you'd think would never answer to you. I'd spend the nights working on my concept for the play and developing a plan of attack for who to cast where and who to call when. Then I would be on the phone with actors, designers, dramaturgs, and others for quite literally the entire day and at nights when I couldn't sleep I returned to my script and
notebook. Somewhere within these three days it just so happened that we passed from Aquarius into Pisces, a relevant astrological moment of the year since the border of Pisces and Aquarius is the same bored for the oncoming spiritual age!

As visibility for our show started to grow I started to reach out to more and more people. I finally got the last living playwright of *Hair*, James Rado on the phone. I convinced him to come to our show. He read out some line changes and an entirely reworked scene of his fifty year old script. We discussed the often overlooked spiritual dimensions of the text and he talked about how he has been told that “the image can overpower the sound sometimes” which I understood to mean that the music is sometimes one-dimentionalized and trivialized by a bad production of the show. His blessing and his comments were a huge jolt of encouragement.

My choreographer and I had a dynamic and useful relationship before rehearsals because we actually spent a few hours a week in a studio putting a few small things on their feet. We also did some joint research together, enrolling an a short Bharatnatayam class and getting the full scoop on what the implications of the “Age of Aquarius” are from a professional astrologer.

In the last week before rehearsal began I focused on meditation and closing out my personal practice which had spiraled into a complete life detour. I was now doing a full exploration of *The Mahabharata* and was becoming a small time expert on the Krishna story in the Mahabharata. I was starting to view my project as an important political and spiritual mission in a time of intense crisis and doubt. I was exchanging materials and emails with my lead actors and we were talking about what our show could mean. I continued my morning pages and daily meditation right up until the day of the first rehearsal. I printed a
dramaturgical packet with some Ginsberg poems and one of Marshal McLuhan's approachable treatises on media. My last ditch piece of preparation proved to be an important one. I decided last minute to make a short “Tribe Social Contract” for our first day of rehearsal. Then my trusty SM Shalyn and I took all the binders up to our rehearsal space and the rest was history. The process itself was a quick blip in time and a simple culmination of all that I had learned. I was surprised at how many of my intuitions and surmises were proved correct throughout the process. There were many accidents and unexpected moments of terror and beauty but the general arc of the experience and my role as both interpreter and translator for both the production team from my generation and the actors from theirs was more successful than I ever thought possible. Many of the actors commented how I really won them over at the first rehearsal – when I handed out the Social Contract. It's re printed on the next page in full.
THE TRIBE'S SOCIAL CONTRACT

I hereby bind myself by the bonds of fellowship to all those working creatively on this production for the next 5 weeks.

I consciously and willingly join this TRIBE, and happily embark on this collective journey into uncharted theatrical territory

I actively seek to respect and appreciate every member of our TRIBE

I share in the goal of a meaningful and powerful production and rehearsal process, I share in the common goals of our TRIBE

I am free: free to do what I know is right, free to leave the tribe when it no longer works for me, free to live my best life, free. I want the others of the TRIBE to feel just as free as I do.

In taking this vow, I becomes we, and the journey begins.
HOW WILL YOU WORK WITH THE DESIGN AND DRAMATURGY TEAM?

Working with my design and dramaturgy team was very exciting. Before we got started all I knew was that I wanted us to make highly declarative and strong gestures. I wanted to have an “angle” on the piece and after all that I learned in Croatia I felt that it was possible to have a traditional process but still make boldly intellectual and personally meaningful dramaturgical and design decisions. In the fall before our process we had one very preliminary production meeting. I showed the video of my favorite Ginsberg-Buckley interview snippets and I explained my vision for the first few minutes of the show (beginning with this interview and then a meditation based rendition on Aquarius). I gave some broad strokes of my dream for the piece and I briefed everyone on the importance of our generational encounter with these older actors and creating a shared culture with them. Then I let everyone mull things over before making any decisions that were too specific.

With my dramaturgs we worked quite close together and we were divided into two groups. With Philip Santos Shaffer we were researching the history of the play and getting to know the specific actors. Philip was more closely involved in the rehearsal process, providing suggestions and forming intimate relationships with the actors. Philip knows everything about about the Living Theater as a current member and has a lot of experience interacting with people from this generation. He understood the ethos of the show completely and was very helpful in the room. Ned Moore was more of an outside help coming to just a few runs but providing extremely important feedback as someone not so close up to the work in rehearsal. With Ned we would meet to talk about the script and to keep streamlining our vision of the very thin plot that runs through Hair. He understood the
metaphors I was trying to open up with the central character Claude and he helped make sure we didn't ever stray too far from that narrative since it holds the whole play together. Having two dramaturgs was amazingly helpful and I think I'll continue to work in this way when working on large-scale projects. Dramaturgy as an active role in the process of creating theater is only becoming more and more important. Working with two people in this way allowed me to have an up close and a zoomed out dramaturgical conversation. I loved it.

With designers I had a very exciting plan, but I learned the most from our last minute bravery in making changes. For months before the process we developed a concept that placed the show in a highly naturalistic setting, a camp-grounds, something like the old commune they all lived on in Upstate New York. We thought this would be an interesting inversion for *Hair* which is normally done in a kind of abstract setting. The lighting and set concepts worked together to create a highly naturalistic feel for our preliminary models. The light would help place the time of day as these older people came together reminisced and slowly became debauched over a whole weekend of camping. We planned a few jokes with scenes that we would place in the middle of the night or in the early morning, depicting camp-site lifestyle. It was a very exciting concept that provided A LOT of flavor in rehearsal. But when we finally got in the space and tried a run of the piece with all our props it was becoming clear that the literal nature of our setting was getting in the way. With less than a week to go we totally revitalized the set and the lighting, opting for a more bare and abstract stage that provided hints about Claude's death from the very outset. This bravery never would have come without the urgings of my professor Brian Kulick. When I told him that I didn't think we'd be able to make a lot of changes, he said “they will rise to the
occasion if you are making the show better.” It was very hard to completely change the frame for the largest work I had ever been preparing in my life. But when I did make the decision the play was much better for it. This was one of the best learning experiences I could have had.
WHAT IS THE AUDIENCE'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE EVENT?

Everything we were hoping to make different in our production of this play was to address this exact question. We wanted the audience's relationship to this event to be active and layered. Through our extremely unconventional casting the play is being watched at two registers all the time. We are seeing the play both from then and now, with these people as the youngsters they were and also as the seniors they are. What is great about a musical is that it flows seamlessly no matter what you do. So we can go through the motions of the usual story of this musical. But we are so acclimated to this tempo and rhythm of classical musical storytelling that there is room to watch a completely different play alongside this one. And that is the play which is these elderly humans attempting to put this musical on.

We wanted this double vision for the audience to be subtle and not overwrought. I think the audience's relationship to the performers in the actual show was extremely exciting. We saw the audience playing out all the different tropes of how we react to and deal with the elderly. There was a real fear in the audience, a need for these elderly people to succeed and “be ok.” And yet at the same time people craved the accidents and near disasters in our performances as much as they feared them. By the time the cast was used to performing for an audience they were interacting with them quite wildly throughout the show. I always hate “audience participation” especially in the cheesy contexts that it usually is allowed to exist in Musicals. But something was different here. When a 65 year old lady was making eye contact with a young audience member while gyrating her hips and singing “black boys fill me up” there was something unplaceable happening. These moments of reality were exactly what I was searching for in this piece. When moments in performance
are uncanny and uncategorizable then they slip out of their intense artifice and into a radical reality. This is what I was always searching for in my production.

It was a delicate balance between spectacle and it's opposite. But putting our show in what we came to call *age-drag* was profoundly successful. It literalized the ways that hippiedom has aged in the cultural imagination. It made us stop and reconsider hippie tropes that get carelessly glossed over.

It was also very exciting to see how the show touched different people of different ages. The young usually had a harder time being won over by the spirit of the show. It was the older who released into it's energy the easiest. The resistance of the young audience was palpable on their faces and in their posture. In my opinion it had a lot to do with two important things. One was the simple knee-jerk reaction we still have to older sexuality and to really having to watch and to hold the intimate and internal lives of older people. The second was a more acute awareness of the failures of this generation, which made all of the happy antics of our cast a bit more bitter sweet and made all their nostalgia a bit more dangerous. But the audience's relationship was everything. If we could give them this double vision, we had our play.
IN WHAT WORLD IS THE PLAY TAKING PLACE?

Hair takes place in the United States of America. This much is certain. At the audition one of my eventual cast members said this play is “psychedelic vaudeville,” and I have to agree completely. The play has an interlocking set of locales. One is an over assumed american context. It feels by americans, for americans. It simply doesn't exist without centralizing the American experience of the world.

Then there is it's semi-literal setting of New York City. This is probably the least interesting, or least believable aspects of Hair. The script is too direct and too real to have any naturalistic setting and so the New York City of the play seems like a bit of an afterthought. Both in the original version and in our play we really were performing in the lower east side and even still the invocations onstage seemed to reference a somewhere else. But this is part of the dream-america the play takes place in and the literal locations that are addressed in the play.

Finally there is the theater itself. Hair takes place in a theater – it is a play that never really establishes a narrative divide with the audience. It really performs at and to the real audience in the room and the stage-craft works best if it is exposed. The scenes and songs fit together quite impressionistically and while we get a sense of the group simply by hanging around them, the order of action seems almost arbitrary. It really is psychedelic vaudeville. It really does take place in the location of the american psyche. This world has been the entire topic of this thesis.
WHAT SKILLS DO YOU REQUIRE FROM THE ACTORS
AND HOW WILL YOU DISCERN THEM?

From the actors I required something much larger and much more difficult to give than skill. I required their history, manifested in their living and breathing bodies. A body is a complete history staring you in the face, all of the things it does and says, all of it's capabilities and especially all of it's scars are in fact the result of all the prior experiences that this body encountered. This is what I love about the title *Hair*. The title seems to be about the signature “long hair” of young hippie men, about how choices in hair*style* are extremely important for signaling your place in the cultural milieu. But there is another great unexpected slip here because one's hair can be a metaphor for their living history and body clock. So in this way the title connotes the living history that head-hair always embodies, hair as a kind of diary for the human body. This second layer was much more operative for our production – *Hair* is the stories of bodies *as* cultural material, we “get” the story and the values being optioned in the show not from their skill in actions but in their choices in how to maintain their bodies. This is that kind of political show. Now skill can of course still come into play – it is in being able to just be, to show yourself and your scars and your failures openly. It is in the bravery to do less. I needed actors who either knew how to do this or did it by accident. I definitely found people who fell into both of these categories, both highly trained actors who knew how to take on roles in this manner, and also total amateurs who simply embodied the spirit and aesthetics of this show.

At the same time a musical requires a lot of specific skills from the performers and a tremendous amount of energy to perform every night. I needed people with the gall
to try and exert this kind of youthful energy every night of the week. I didn't just want energizer bunnies in my cast, but I did need people who even if in a very quiet way, were willing and ready to exert this kind of daily energy in the pursuit of a meaningful performance. I needed people who knew how to give their all.

The piece essentially cast itself. I needed crazies and the crazies needed me. I think many of the people on this team really needed the project – and the project needed them in return. Discerning who I wanted to work with was a painstaking job, I dealt with each individual on their own terms and left most of the standard “ability level” kind of auditioning at the door. I wasn't looking for the most trained actors but for the people with whom I could feel a connection. From a practical standpoint this energy was balanced by the very practical concerns and aesthetics of my musical director. We had many fights over personalities as I was always opting for the highly singular and unusual in the bunch.

Lastly it was profoundly important for me not too all into the same trap I have been rehashing over and over. I didn't just want true on the nose bandana wearing ex-hippies (and in new york city you really could find a whole cast of these). I needed people who had that general sense of open mindedness that the play really encourages and needs from the actors. But I wanted people who “look” like all kinds of typical americans. I wanted people who looked like investment bankers as well as hippies. I wanted all sorts of hair cuts and a whole range of American lifestyle tropes. I wanted housewives as well as anarchists. I found a great mix.
WHAT ARE THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE CHARACTERS?

This question must be answered two ways, since in a sense we were doubling two plays. There were the social and political relationships of the characters within the narrative of the written text, and then there were the characters “all grown up,” who had imagined social and political relationships of our contemporary moment, then finally there were the social and political relationships of the actors themselves, also often exposed during our performance. In our play you can simultaneously be watching a. who the characters were or b. who the characters might have become today, or c. who the actors were when they were young or d. who the actors are today. All of these categories intermingle and somehow they still add up to one coherent play and set of characters. At least, this was the subtle magic we were hoping to achieve.

So to answer this question I'll have to delve into both the play, and also the real lives of the actors, both of which were being presented on stage. Let's take as our first example the characters of Claude and Berger. Claude and Berger have an interesting social and political relationship. They represent two sides of the same idyllic mid-century white boy. One side was the more adventurous more flamboyant more extroverted side, Berger. He is the class clown and prideful, flashy hippie leader. But his counterpoint is Claude, a more gentle, more confused, but also more truly spiritual character. Their relationship plays out as the central, high school age white male fantasy. It involves rivalries over women, displays of machismo, and value conflicts. Their relationship plays out an important flower generation dichotomy – Berger is vehemently opposed to the Vietnam war and to the draft and burns his draft card along with the other
boys, while Claude is incapable of burning his draft card, incapable of choosing between old fashioned values of manhood, national and familial loyalty and the values of his young community – pacifism, and radical political disruption. When Claude is drafted we see the tensions in these naïve high-school age youngsters. Claude devastated that he has been drafted is trying to figure out how to get out of his coming post in Vietnam. He keeps saying “I'm not going.” But at the same time everyone knows that Claude is too afraid to burn his draft card, the only sure-fire way to oppose and avoid the draft – he even pretends to rip up his card in front of everyone but Berger checks and it's actually his library card. Berger is offended by the false displays of Claude, Berger is angry that he wants to act like a hippie but can't put his money where his mouth is and actually do any radical deeds when it comes to his own life. Berger yells “You will go. And you will loot and rape, and kill for your country. You will do exactly what they tell you to do!” It is one of the strongest moments in the play because it is full of layers. We see two friends arguing in that angry and heated way that only those who truly love each other can argue. We understand both sides and we know that Claude is in the hardest situation and his life is the one at risk. But at the same time we understand Berger's frustration. They can all see that Claude is toying with the idea of “doing what he ought” and going to war. They all understand this line, because all their parents have the same general attitude, and they have all found a way to resist it. Claude is afraid to actually reveal his hidden stake in this possibility for his future, pretending he just needs to find a way to “get out of going,” even though there is one way staring him in the face that he is simply not ready or willing to do. They are a tribe banded together by exactly this bond, by the bond created by resisting what the government and the status-quo wants for them, by
dangerously living in accordance with their own internal values. Claude is in a way rejecting the tribe and questioning its validity by not actually being able to do its foundational act of committing to an outsider's life.

On the other hand Claude sees through some of the antics of Berger and frankly of the whole tribe. He sees the hypocrisy in the fact that if they burn their draft cards, they are only sending another man in their place. Claude doesn't know who he is yet. He feels like a “poser” both at home with his family in queens, but also with the tribe and his friends. While Berger may be more politically brave, this bravery sometimes seems vacuous. Berger seems more concerned with the image of who he is than any political upheaval. Claude is unwilling to burn his draft card just because it's what everybody else is doing. He is a simple and gentle soul who “believes in god,” (From song Manchester England) who needs to make his choices on a larger and more cosmic scale than “what is cool.” Claude is the perfect example of how young idealists get gobbled up by the system. He represents the real confusing internal feelings of a conflicted generation choosing between radicalism and creature comfort. Claude says he is “destined for greatness or madness,” which represents the true schizophrenia brewing in American Youth at that time. Claude's flaws are honest and he is so naïve that they are glaring. Berger is constantly masking his flaws but since they go unposed and unquestioned they might have even more negative effects. This is the dynamic of their relationship as I see it.

So then we have the second layer. Who would these hippies have become? Our play takes place 50 years later and we get a sense of who these characters became. Claude was our most radical choice as we decided to portray him as a ghost, as a dead man who gets a chance for a day to walk among his friends again. This was our most
blatant directorial gesture as our set was full of scenery that connoted the death of a soldier. So Claude is a dead man, is a spirit. All of his songs about spiritual matters take on a new significance. He sings *I believe in god and I believe that god believes in Claude* when he first arrives on the stage. Well that took on a whole new meaning in our production. At the end of the first act he will sing the song *Where Do I Go?* And instead of someone wrestling with a dire situation we see someone reflecting on his life choices. As our ghost Cluade's journey becomes one of searching for a cosmic understanding that reaches beyond the short lives and deaths we all have. It is about a young man reaching for enlightenment through the intense and difficult circumstances he lived. His decision to go to war perfectly mirrors *Arjuna's* journey in the *Bhagavad Gita*. He eventually accepts war but only because he has seen the full scope of his spiritual journey and has understood that his path in “this life” is one part of a much larger story. When Claude says *I want to be invisible and perform miracles* we see him yearning for enlightenment, to be a part of the unmanifest, to return to the simple category of living spirit. These were the references for Claude at this second layer.

For Berger we imagined his washed up future, and the decay of his mind and his body as caused by his rock and roll lifestyle. So we saw in Berger the questions he never asked himself as a youngster coming to haunt him. His song about being kicked out of high school now has a twinge of tragedy. We imagined hat his chaotic relationship with Sheila eventually ended in divorce. He seems to be a lonely and wayward soul who like many true-to-the-cause hippies has fallen in economic status and seems a bit fuzzy and out of touch in his political logic. But still he was a loving friend and still a leader in all the social communities he inhabits. He still has that spark and he still has his freedom.
All of this was also layered into the character Berger.

Then we get to the actor layers. Berger was a sensitive gay man, and Claude was a macho guy who had a chip on his shoulder for being short and a bit movement impaired by a bad hip. They were both balding white men in their sixties. The actor playing Claude had an energy that almost felt like an ex-soldier with a battle wound, some PTSD, and some un-investigated homoerotic desires. The actor playing Berger was a more down to earth guy who was more of real hippie when he was young, but in a very gentle and considered way (unlike in the flashy kind of way he was portraying Berger). When Claude was young it seems like he never really identified with Hippie culture. All of these attitudes were braided into their scenes to make one, semi-coherent character. My aim was never to make coherence but allow all contradictory dimensions of the character and actor emerge. Coherence emerges anyway because the form of the musical is so strict and well constructed. This is how the four dimensions of the character and actor fit together in our play. We could make this analysis for every single character and actor who were each given a unique story. But the description of these two central characters gives a general impression and outline.
It is time to conclude this winding paper and this journey. What is written here reflects most of the work that was done in pre-production, a meandering set of interlocking intellectual intuitions which were tested by the concrete reality of a rehearsal process. It was that reality which Columbia prepared me for. It was linking that reality to all of this research in a meaningful and comprehensible manner.

With my two maestros I learned more than I could ever possibly put down on paper so I dare not try. Academic training to youngsters is completely embodied experience. I cannot accurately appraise what I have learned because I truly have become a different person that the one who entered this institution. Through a long series of accidents were are continually set on the new path of our lives. What I have learned could be summed up in a book I now revere, a book I found completely by chance, by another set of accidents, the Bhagavad Gita. I have learned to accept the path of my life with grace. I have learned to surrender to my dharma. I have no other task. Here I go.
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