

Challenges of Design in the Set of *Hair: An American Tribal Love-Rock Musical*

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Dedication

The author wishes to dedicate this thesis to Liam Guangren Leber who has given her new purpose in life.

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Abstract of Thesis

Challenges of Design in the Set of *Hair: An American Tribal Love-Rock Musical*

Hair: An American Tribal Love-Rock Musical, with lyrics by James Rado and Gerome Ragni and music by Galt MacDermot, was produced at the George Washington University in the spring semester of 2012. Under the direction of Roberta Gasbarre, it opened on February 23rd in the Dorothy Betts Marvin Theatre on the George Washington University campus in Washington DC. The lighting designer was Amanda Demczuk and the costume designer was Adalia Vera Tonneyck.

This thesis looks at the process of the set design of *Hair*, which included the planning, and execution of the set in the light of an organic design process as opposed to a structured one. The challenge was to use a flexible design process and finite time frame to fit the needs of the show and of the director. The history of the musical, analysis of the time period, original designs, development, and an analysis of the successes of the design and the design process will be discussed.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The aim of this thesis project was to design and produce a successful set for the musical *Hair* that evoked a hippie “nest” of 1972, New York. The biggest challenge in this production was to maintain control of the design while working under a more fluid and flexible design methodology and adopting what was a different design aesthetic for me. This process forced me to expand my design experience while keeping active ownership of the design in a collaborative media. The director, Roberta Gasbarre, had her own philosophy about discovery and growth in design, which I learned to work with and understand.

Roberta had a personal connection to the hippie movement and to the show. She considered herself lucky to have seen the original production and wanted to bring back the spirit of the original - a production that rocked 1968 and “purposely broke every theatrical convention as it strove to become the anti-musical musical¹.” She wanted to delve into why the musical was so influential and why it is still celebrated by today’s audience. In order to do this she wanted to transport the audience back in time through the senses (sight, sound, and smell). The designers were instructed to be as accurate to the time period as possible, and actors were encouraged to interact with the audience to bring them into the experience. Roberta wanted everyone to discover the experience through the process of being a “tribe”. The acting, designing, and production were all experimental; the process was collective research, design, and production.

¹ Taken from the director’s program notes

This exploration-centered approach to the production meant that the set design was a constant barrage of ideas that were being accepted or rejected even up until opening night. In a more typical and familiar design process, these decisions would have been made earlier on in the production before set pieces were being put on stage. This included set dressing, surface treatments, masking, as well as placement of some set pieces including the stage left staircase and subsequently the stairs to stage left of the band platform. The process of sorting through these ideas sometimes involved trial and error. In the end, the set had evolved so much that none of my original drawings reflected what was on stage; many of the ideas that were talked about in the earlier phases of the design had to be left out because we ran out of time and money to implement them. In the final analysis, the set design did morph into something more interesting and engaging than my original plans. By staying on top of the design choices I made as we went along, I was still able to preserve the aesthetic that I needed to make the show both successful and my own.

Chapter 2: History and Significance of the Musical *Hair*

The original Broadway production of *Hair: An American Tribal Love-Rock Musical* debuted in April 1968 at the Biltmore Theater and ran for 1,750 performances. James Rado and Gerome Ragni, two actor friends in New York City, wrote the lyrics. They started working on a musical about hippies in early 1965 because they were fascinated by the youth culture of Greenwich Village¹. The music was written by Galt MacDermot, a Canadian-born composer, who was described by Nat Shapiro (a Columbia Records executive) as “one of the few mature, technically equipped musicians around who is not only aware of what is happening in popular music but understands and loves the roots and the dynamics of the new thing.”² The Broadway production was directed by Tom O’Horgan and choreographed by Julie Arenal. The design team was made up of Robin Wagner, sets, Jules Fisher, lighting, and Nancy Potts, costumes.

Wagner created an industrial looking urban set that was set on a steep raked stage with graffiti stenciled on the floor to make it look urban. The upstage had a large tower of scaffolding that had random hippie bric-a-brac attached to it that included a neon sign, a jukebox, and a large “third eye.” Wagner housed the band onstage in a hollowed-out truck, a novelty at that time, different from the traditional pit orchestra. Everything else onstage was exposed theater including the wings, radiator pipes, and stagehands. The

¹ Grode, 25

² Grode, 29

greatest challenge with the set and the lighting was that it all had to be loaded in the theater within four days.³

Hair originally debuted Off-Broadway in 1967 at Joseph Papp's Public Theater, being first directed in its baby stages by Gerald Freedman, the Public's artistic director at the time. After the Broadway debut, the show gained tremendous momentum and critical praise. By 1970, *Hair* was being performed by 11 companies around the United States and toured overseas through Europe and Asia. It was made into a film in 1979, earning \$13 million at the box office, and had a popular Broadway revival in 2009. Diane Paulus directed the 2009 revival with Scott Pask, sets, Michael McDonald, costumes, and Kevin Adams, lighting. It won both the Tony Award and the Drama Desk Award for best revival of a musical that year.

The musical was a portrait of hippie counter-culture that explored the sexual revolution and the anti-war movement of the time. It was controversial for its profanity, depiction of sexuality and illegal drugs, irreverence for the American flag, and nudity, which in 1967 was a huge shock to the audience. The musical also addressed prevalent issues of the time, notably the draft, racial equality, sexual freedom, and the rebellion against mainstream culture. It allowed mainstream America a window into the hippie world from the safety of a theater seat. *Hair* was really a reflection of that world, not a causation. The producer, Michael Butler, really believed in the musical's anti-war message and wanted it to influence society, which is why he took it on. As such, the show reflected many sentiments of the time.

³ Grode, 65

The biggest cultural impact of the show was seen in the music and theater world. It was unprecedented and almost unthinkable by today's standards that a Broadway musical score impacted popular music the way *Hair* did. The album was the top selling recording in the country for 13 weeks in 1969. There was even a Muppet version of "Good Morning Star Shine" on Sesame Street.⁴ It influenced theater with its radical unconcern for story line, actor interaction with the audience, and the on stage nudity. In a time period where nudity anywhere was a shock and scandal, *Hair* put it out there. The attitude toward nudity in theater has drastically changed since into an analysis of artistic choice rather than a reaction to the presence of it.

The musical resonates with today's audience because it celebrates people who radically fought for freedom, truth, and awareness in a volatile time of social change and political turbulence.

⁴ Grode, 91

Chapter 3: The 60's and the History and Philosophy of Hippie Subculture

The 60's were a time of tremendous social change and political unrest in the United States. At the top of it all was the Vietnam War. America started overtly sending troops into Vietnam in 1965. By 1968, American involvement in Vietnam was peaking at the time of the Tet Offensive. Back home, involvement in the war, which had substantial approval in 1965, was now greatly protested. As historian Robert Dallek writes, "Lyndon Johnson's escalation of the war in Vietnam divided Americans into warring camps... cost 30,000 American lives by the time he left office, (and) destroyed Johnson's presidency..."

¹No one wanted to be drafted into the war; while the draft was a random lottery by birthday, those who were sent were largely made up of underprivileged young men. These were men that were often poor or unable to make it onto college while about 125,000 men fled the country to Canada to avoid the draft. America was split into those who sincerely believed that the war would end the further spread of communism around the world, which grew out of the Cold War fear, and those who were anti-war. The Cuban missile crisis in 1962 was fresh in the minds of all Americans when nuclear war seemed about to destroy the Earth and was very narrowly avoided. Also, on the home front, civil rights protests were at their most volatile. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in 1968 and cities across the whole country erupted in violent riots. Women were also calling for equal rights and equal pay for equal work legislation for women. In addition, the approval of the birth control pill in the US in 1957 allowed women to have

¹ Gerdes

sex without the fear of getting pregnant. All this was a perfect setting from which the hippie movement and preoccupation with peace, truth, and free love would emerge.

The term “Hippie” was first coined by Michael Fallon, a San Francisco newspaper columnist on September 5th, 1965 in his article titled “A New Haven for Beatniks.”² Hippies stemmed from the beatniks of the late 40’s with whom they shared many anti-authoritarian beliefs. Some differences with the beat generation were that hippies favored Eastern mysticism over mainstream Judeo-Christian beliefs and were anarchical as opposed to the more libertarian beatniks.

In July 1967, *Time* magazine ran a cover story, “The Hippies: The Philosophy of a Subculture.” The article described the guidelines of the so-called hippie code: “Do your own thing, wherever you have to do it and whenever you want. Drop out. Leave society, as you have known it. Leave it utterly. Blow the mind of every straight person you can reach. Turn them on, if not to drugs, then to beauty, love, honesty, fun.”³ (Here, “straight” refers to participation in mainstream culture or the perceived Establishment as opposed to sexual orientation.) This can also be seen in Timothy Leary’s mantra of “Turn on, tune in, drop out.”⁴

Hippie philosophy was about being true to you and learning through experience and discovery. The movement was a rebellion against going with the mainstream, especially when it came to values of society at large. This was an age of people that grew up out of the civil rights struggle, the McCarthy communism scare, threats of nuclear

² Issitt, 8

³ Grode, 14, Skidmore

war, and the sexual and gender repression of the 50's. Hippies had an agenda unique to their time period where the prevalence of nuclear weapons from the Cold War and the escalation of the Vietnam War - "lent an added sense of urgency to the hippies' insistence on peace and harmony" and "confirmed many of their attitudes in opposition to what they called the Establishment."⁵ The political climate of the late 60s and early 70s was just right for the hippie message of love and peace; civil rights were gaining steam, thousands of young men were being sent to Vietnam, and the anti-nuclear movement was growing in response to cold war tensions.⁶

To push the envelope, hippies embraced anything unconventional. This was the beginning of the sexual revolution; growing integration, protest of the war and the draft, and exploration of substance use. Both the hippies and the beatniks before them espoused "expansion of consciousness through controlled substances."⁷ This preoccupation with the psychedelic experience was promoted and spread mainly by two "gurus", Ken Kesey on the West Coast, and Timothy Leary, of Harvard University, on the East Coast.⁸ The use of marijuana by the hippies became a ritualistic practice of almost religious-like ceremony, sacred and secretive, practiced behind locked doors. In Roberta's memory, alcohol was not as important as substance use to the hippie population. She remembered

⁴ Issitt, 76

⁵ Grode, 13

⁶ Issitt, 3

⁷ Grode, 13

⁸ Issitt, 4

the alcoholics to be a completely separate subset of people from the drug users, so, consequently, there was no depiction of alcohol on stage in the production.

The hippies were also very conscious of “vibe,” a term they used to describe feeling. They needed everything to have a good or positive “vibe.” This was significant because they felt a real disconnect with mainstream culture; they saw how a sense of duty could mask real feelings, an example being how women catered to their families dutifully while sometimes neglecting their own feelings or needs of independence and intimacy. There was also a sense of disconnect between the sense of duty and patriotism towards the country and the unwillingness to serve in the military out of fear or disagreement with the war. Hippies searched for truth, and part of this search was examining “vibe.” This was important for the production because Roberta wanted us to pick up the “vibe” of the time, as well as the whole hippie mindset of searching for what is right.

The main hippie centers, including the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood in California, and Greenwich Village on Manhattan in New York, all started as blue-collar communities of affordable housing where ethnically and culturally diverse populations lived in relative harmony. These neighborhoods were a perfect incubator for socially progressive thought and became the epicenters of the hippie world.⁹ The New York scene, which is more relevant to the musical, was more driven by intellectual activism as compared to the West Coast scene and gained following by the continued work of radio DJs and the alternative press.¹⁰

⁹ Issitt, 3

¹⁰ Issitt, 9

An explosion of popularity, caused in part by large concerts and gatherings called “be-ins,” induced a mass migration to perceived centers of hippie culture. People wanted to get in on the hippie movement because it was forward thinking and addressed political and social issues. The summer of 1967 would be known as “The Summer of Love,” the height of hippie popularization, and also the start of its decline.¹¹ The influx of people to these hippie centers naturally created a demand for housing and many hippies became homeless. The public perception of hippies deteriorated, becoming more and more negative, reflected in the rise of hedonistic excess and indifference over love, beauty, and social justice. The movement was further discredited and then reviled by the public after violence in 1969, which included several murders by followers of Charles Manson, who adopted the aesthetics but none of the ethics of hippies, and the stabbing of an 18-year-old at the Altamont Free Concert or “Woodstock West” by a member of Hell’s Angels motorcycle gang who was working on security detail.¹² The hippie movement was fading.

¹¹ Grode, 14

¹² Grode, 18

Chapter 4: The Hippie Aesthetic

The hippie aesthetic was extremely textured. It incorporated tribal arts and crafts with natural elements as well as south Asian influences. The look, especially in clothing, incorporated hand-dyed textiles and intricate beading stemming from a preoccupation with Native American Culture and anything ethnic. The textures were really emphasized through the costumes and the props in the show (figure 33). Textiles, including saris and Indian bedspreads and different styles of rugs, were an important element in the set and served to soften the industrial look of the set structure.

Color schemes of the time incorporated rich saturated earth tones (tomato red, and terra-cotta orange) that were paired with seemingly unlikely matches such as powder blue, puce green, brown, or pink (figure 10). While the east coast palette was much more subdued than the psychedelic bubble-gum colors of the west coast that people typically associate with the 60's, the director and I wanted to stick mainly to the characteristic warm colors of the 70's with the reds, oranges, and golden yellow.

The graphic work of the times was heavily influenced by Art Nouveau style and had a fluid and organic nature to it. Even the text of print work followed the style with bubbly and curvy lettering (figure 10); I found a lot of inspiration in the works of Peter Max in terms of color and style. I used Art Nouveau patterns to inspire the floor treatments in the final design and Kirk did extensive research in print media for the posters and stickers that were put on stage, which were all designs from the time period.

I found that, while hippies were very stylized in what they wore, they did not stylize their surroundings so much. Pictures of hippies show them mostly in parks and streets and run-down apartments (figure 2). They made and collected art and transformed spaces, but they were much less concerned about places and things and much more concerned about people and experiences. In accordance with this was the idea of traveling around the country and living in your car. It was common to paint vans and buses in elaborate murals, many of which had swirling, psychedelic patterns. These psychedelic vans became the iconic symbols of hippiedom. Included are several images of hippie vans that I used to inform my design (figures 8, 9), but the organic shapes, nature elements, and symbols used on the stage van were all my own designs.

Chapter 5: Production Team Goals

The production of *Hair* at GW was an amalgamation of four theses in costumes, lighting, set, and stage management.

Adalia Vera Tonneyck designed the costumes. She wanted to create a largely found-object show in which all of the costumes were found and embellished, sometimes by the actors themselves. The director then approved each ensemble for the characters.

Amanda Demczuk, who provided a psychedelic projection series on top of lighting the show, created the lighting design.

Kirk Kristlibas was the props designer. Especially in this production, set and prop design were an integrated whole. He chose his props based on authenticity derived from certain “vibes” he got looking at photographs and other visual research from the time period. He also took care to create a handcrafted and unique energy with his props so that the actors could connect, relate, and interact with the items dynamically as the “tribe”.

Chapter 6: Design Development

I started my design development by reading the script and listening to the music of the show. I purposely did not look at previous productions of the show because I wanted to come to the design with my own ideas and not be influenced by what had and had not been done before. I collected relevant images from the late 60s and early 70's including photos of people, events, places, and objects. These gave me an idea of the original setting and mindset of the musical.

In my initial stage of the design process, I thought very literally about the setting of the musical and wanted to place it directly in lower east side Manhattan. I wanted to use a ruin such as a burnt out firehouse or apartment building where hippie squatters would have been found in the early 70s. Using a plausible setting would inform the design choices in the set and provide an overall logic to the look. The first time I heard the soundtrack to the musical, I was immediately struck by the eastern influences of the music. I thought about incorporating some elements of eastern influenced architecture and design - Indian, Pakistani, and Persian looks. This led me to also explore the idea of tying the themes of the play into modern day issues such as the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars. The hippie revolution was so anti-war that I wanted to relate it to the modern day as well. I thought that perhaps something to evoke a bomb ruin would be interesting, especially if it had that middle-eastern/Islamic design aesthetic present. However, Roberta, the director, made it clear from the first production meeting that she was not thinking of anything so timely, representational, or literal.

Roberta wanted something that was very true to her personal memory of the time period. She had very specific opinions about what she did and didn't like, but didn't have a structure in mind. We talked a lot in the beginning stages about elements that she wanted in the set; she had a vision for the production that needed to keep true to the time period while emphasizing the boundary-breaking nature of the original show. She described the musical to be the anti-musical, a show seemingly without story or structure, which would be translated into the set design. She described neither what she envisioned as "un-placeable" - neither inside nor outside, not anything recognizable. She had a very specific "vibe" that she wanted to come across to the audience, specifically a cocooned space that seemed safe and warm, but would transform into a harsh setting for some of the colder scenes. My idea was to create an industrial looking set and juxtapose it with soft elements to create a cocoon environment. The industrial elements could then be featured with lighting and blocking to make the stage colder. She loved the look and texture of old oriental area rugs. She wanted to incorporate several specific elements for the actors - a bed or couch; an oil-drum trash can, a 20ft diameter playing space on the thrust, towers, the iconic VW van, and possibly a telephone booth. She also wanted the actors to be climbing and sliding and actively engaging with the set. Roberta's aim was to transport the audience back to a different time that was true to history. Through the course of the production planning, some of these elements would be left behind and others would take their place in precedence.

I started to run into procedural differences with Roberta in the second meeting. I wanted to get the main structures approved and the kind of playing space Roberta would

need before addressing the style and finishes of the set. This would allow construction to begin. Roberta, however, was really looking for a realization of details that meshed with her idea of the “vibe” of the set. She wanted to talk colors and textures and the overall concept first. I couldn’t get her to agree on a structure because she wanted to see something with all the finishes first. This was a struggle for me because we were on a different logistical wavelength. While I was trying to figure out structures to go on stage, she was trying to direct the tone of the production and make sure I was in tune with the collective aesthetic. I became discouraged when she kept rejecting my black and white sketches and computer model mock-ups (figure 11) with phrases like “I don’t feel it”, or “I don’t get it.” I needed to reroute myself to get a more positive reaction from her.

The decision to do several color sketches in order to give Roberta some options was a success. I sketched three sets using the same colors and dressings in each but with different elements. Roberta responded very positively to the last one that I showed her and I used it as the main springboard for my design.

Another significant part of the design was acquisition of materials. I based a lot of my design on elements that we had in storage and found objects such as the van and the stage left staircase. I wanted the stage set to look pieced together so my theory was that if I sourced all or most of my material from found objects, I would end up with a collection of set elements that I would not necessarily have thought of on my own- making it more random. In the end I realize that, even though the thought of acquiring everything randomly might sound good, the process was not random at all. Everything passed under my scrutiny, creating a personal design bias. I was looking for elements that were harder

to build but had great aesthetic qualities such as windows, stairs, doors, and platforms. I was also looking for industrial finishes and bare materials - things with paint splatters, rust, or otherwise unfinished. This process of acquisition was in itself an organic process because I would be adding things to the set way after plans were due because they improved the design. The stage left stairs are an example of a major element that was successful and added late in the design/build process.

Many ideas that were talked about in the beginning stages of the process were cut at the end of the design/build because of time and budgetary constraints. We talked about having a news wall in the back of the house that would help transport the audience back into the mindset of the era with all the issues of race and gender equality, the war, and super-patriotism coming out of the cold war and McCarthyism. While this would have been exciting and informative, the resources to produce this were just not available. There was also the idea of having a telephone booth. We would have sourced one from campus, but the ones on campus were the wrong style, being English, not American, and would have been more work than reward to get in the theater and try to modify to work with what Roberta had in mind. I did propose a wooden telephone booth that could have worked and would have been a built set-item. It had a trapdoor upstage of the audience which would have been used for Jeannie to get in and appear “magically” (figures 6, 18). In the end, the booth got cut because Roberta didn’t think it was necessary. In production meetings we also discussed the possibilities of a street lamp, clotheslines, and even an elaborate painted tile floor (figure 21) that were all decided against. Even though these

elements might have been an asset to the production, their absence did not detract from the production value of the design.

At design presentation, about five weeks before the opening, I presented a white card model (figure 19) and a color sketch (figure 12) of the plans for the set. The model helped the most in showing the actors the kind of space they would be playing on and the sketch indicated the colors and the stage dressing. The tribe was very enthusiastic and was very helpful in the build process by volunteering hours in the shop, working the installation, and in on set painting.

Chapter 7: Design Documentation

Normally, in a more structured design environment, shop drawings and renderings would be detailed and finished before the build process. In this scenario, the plans were constantly being changed and updated to reflect changes and acquisitions of found set elements. As such, I wasn't able to get a full set of drawings to the shop; while there were details that I could have figured out and drafted, the rapidly evolving nature of the set made keeping the plans current difficult. The stage left stairs never got put in the plans because they were a last minute addition that went directly on stage. In a structured design setting this might not have happened because it would have been too late in the process to change or put something in after they were drawn and submitted. However, the nature of the production being flexible, and Roberta approving the set piece, that element was included on stage even though it wasn't in the drawings. The stairs did make for a far more interesting set than my original tower plan.

The only really significant rendering I had was that first sketch rendering I did to base the design on. I didn't get to a more detailed rendering because all the set dressing seemed to be up in the air in terms of what we could get, and, before I knew it, it was time to dress the set. I did keep up good communications with the shop and my props designer in order to convey design choices. With the scene shop, I was available through phone and email if I was not there in person and communicated surface treatments directly to the TD, the ATD, and the work-studies.

Chapter 8: Production

The production of the set started with the material sourcing. We had to source many of the elements in the set including the VW van. We used prefabricated pieces from set storage including the platforms, staircases, windows, some metal platforms, ladders, and some facing elements made out of old doors. Set elements were acquired from sources available to our producer including the stage-left staircase and the diamond plating for the ramp. There were also set elements acquired from the director and her resources. The VW van was her family's old VW van. The difficulty was trying to figure out whether we could use it on stage. After determining whether or not we could get it onstage, we had to price out the gutting of the van and the transport of it to and from the theater. We were lucky that there was an auto body shop that was interested in it and was able to give us a great price for taking it apart and getting it to and from the theater. The director was able to get us the large main area rug from her other production with the Washington Revels and she also pulled in favors to acquire many of the props and set dressings that she wanted to see on stage. In a structured design setting, these items would have all been inventoried at the beginning of the design/build process and then incorporated as the design progressed. In our organic process, however, acquired items were constantly being added to the set, even up until the week before dress rehearsal.

The building process started a couple months before the show was installed in the theater space. At this point, some of the set was still undecided, but the shape of the platform and the band platform that had to be built were set to go. The scene shop started

with these elements in the build. They built stud walls for the band platform, shaped the platform and stairs for the center-stage area, and cut Masonite for the facing of the built platform and stairs. While all this was being built, set elements were being brought into the shop from set storage. I indicated the elements that would be put together for a back wall panel that would go behind the bottom of the catwalk area; the other pieces were used as windows above the catwalk and the band platform. The plans were crucial at this point of the production because everything was being built and there was not enough space in the scene shop to have everything put together in a trial set up.

Installation of the set in the theater was a long process. First, the van arrived and went into the stage right room. We had to thoroughly clean the van, which involved wiping it with wet rags a couple times over and then again with some chemical cleaner. We then removed the side and driver side door. After the tires were removed, the van was put on dollies for transport into the theater. The mirrors were folded back to allow for it to pass through the door onto the stage and the van was carefully rolled into the theater space. It would need to be painted, have its wheels attached, and be parked where it would sit in the production.

We started the process of putting the set together by painting the floor treatments and starting to paint the van. I had painter's elevations and had the graduate students and undergraduate volunteers help start the process. The floor treatments had to be plotted out based on a painter's elevation (figure 20) and drawn freehand on the floor. The colors were all pre-mixed and I instructed which was supposed to go where. We finished the water design first while I was figuring out a methodology for getting the gradient in the

sunrays. My solution was to make a paper template and tape it to the floor; then I used the bug sprayer to get a nice gradient of first yellow and then red paint. When that was dry, we worked on painting the center of the sun. Meanwhile, I had the actors start painting the van according to the painter's elevation (figure 23). In retrospect, I should have outlined everything before letting unskilled painters attack the bus; afterwards, my fellow graduate students and I repainted large portions of the van to give it a more sweeping, bubble quality.

After the floor elements were painted, we placed the two tower elements, taped out the platform placement, and moved the van in place. The rest of the set was built around the van. The platform went in, then the catwalk and spiral stairs, the band platform stud walls, and the band platform. After that, the rest of the installation was the escape stairs, windows, and facings.

After all the set pieces were in, the surface treatments could be placed. I chose some industrial carpeting for the elevated surfaces of the catwalk and the band platform. For the Masonite on the main platform and the stairs, I had already done a layer of paint speckle (figure 24) in a neutral gray color to make it seem like concrete. This paint treatment was not as successful as I anticipated and didn't read very well from the audience. I used a stippling technique to suggest that the floor might have at one point had square tiles on it, but again, this wasn't dramatic enough. I ended up using a huge paintbrush and just dripping black and white and grey paint all over the floor in splashes and puddles to give it a random look. This finally conveyed the loose dirty looking

texture that I wanted. I also pooled dark areas around the steel structure to make it look like there was water damage.

Besides the platform Masonite, I also worked extensively with the paint treatments of the rest of the set in the week before dress rehearsal. There were exposed beams that I washed with a dark brown to make them blend in more with the rest of the set. I also toned down any polished steel surfaces with a wash of black paint sponged on to look like aging. The facing of the carpet was also aged and toned down with brown paint before we decided it would look better with a solid Masonite panel facing instead. I also worked with the other graduate students and undergraduate volunteers to spruce up the spiral staircase and the van with more painted detailing.

After all the set was installed, painted, and dry, Kirk and I started dressing the stage. This was really a matter of trying different things on set from the collection of things we had acquired. We fully involved Roberta and she indicated specific places where she wanted elements. She wanted to see fabrics draped on the staircase and in the towers and wanted to see props up in the catwalk as well as in amongst the band members. I worked with her closely to determine the exact placement of the rugs that she wanted and we taped them down in their final places. Kirk and I then determined places to hang posters and put sticker fliers. Kirk also created little vignette areas. One was a shrine under the keyboard, another was a collection of instruments and signs by the stage-left staircase, and another included a collection of travel memorabilia by the stage-right tower. We were constantly making notes and adding things right up until the opening show.

I made a dream catcher out of a wooden hoop and some yarn, beads, and ribbon. When Roberta commented that it looked too contrived, I took it down and re-made it with an old fan grate that I found in the props closet. We painted a peace sign in the center of it and she liked it so much better because it was made from a found object.

We also ended up dressing a lot of the off stage area because Roberta said that it looked too bare. We hung things in the masking off to the sides and also used some large cable spools way upstage to create a sense of depth and interest in those off-stage areas. In retrospect, I would have liked to have left everything outside of the playing space bare. I wanted the attention to be onstage, so I didn't want anything to draw the eye away from the color and texture in the playing space. This is one instance in which I should have been more persuasively aggressive with the director in asserting my design opinions, but she really wanted to see things in the wings of the stage. In the end, it didn't intrude all that much, but a blankness in the background would have made for a cleaner aesthetic.

Another development that happened during installation was the addition of bare light bulbs to the set. Speaking with the producer, it was determined that there was something visually lacking around the windowpane areas of the set (the "second stage"). I tried to make it more interesting by adding some rope rigging - draping rope elements that would tie the stage right tower more to the main center-stage set piece. This didn't work because it made the set seem more nautical than it should read, and instead we installed, at the lighting designer's suggestion, the bare bulbs which worked well. She and I worked together to get the exact placements down so that it would create a balanced overall picture. They ended up looking like industrial stars above the set.

There were several majorly significant trouble-shooting moments in the installation process. The first was with the placement of the spiral staircase. The radius of the spiral was much wider than what the drawings indicated, so the footprint of the staircase was much larger than had been anticipated. It ended up not fitting on the platform originally designed for it. Luckily, we had modified the catwalk to be six feet instead of three feet wide, and we were able to push the stair back from ending on the downstage portion of the catwalk to it ending on the upstage side. We were lucky that this gave us just enough room to fit it on the platform perfectly. The second major trouble-shooting issue was in the support of the catwalk. The catwalk was originally going to be supported by 1" x 1" steel box tube legs. We found that weight of the platforms and the scenery made it so that the legs did not provide enough structural support for the catwalk to be stable. The structure had some lateral wiggle to it that we decided was both unsafe for the actors and visually unsettling to the design. We needed to cross brace the box tube with diagonals and horizontal pieces that ended up changing the overall look of the underside of the catwalk. This was also applied to the stage right tower for the same reasons. I thought that the changes were acceptable under the catwalk, but the changes in the tower made it such that I really wanted the bracing to be upstage of the audience. This caused us to change the orientation of the tower and changed the placement of the ladder. In the end, the actors didn't even use the ladder to get up and down off of the tower because they ended up using prop/dressing items to step up to the platform. The last significant item to troubleshoot was the escape from the van. In the shop drawings and plans, I had not planned for an escape route from the driver side of the

van. However, Roberta, after seeing the van on stage with the band platform behind it, wanted that exit for the actors. She needed someone to be able to enter the van via the driver-side door. We had to remove the door and cut a hole in the facing of the band platform in order to allow for that entrance. Luckily, the structure underneath the band platform consisted of stud walls and could be easily traversed to upstage of the scenic elements. These ordeals could have been avoided if we had better planned ahead of time.

Chapter 9: Final Product

The set as it evolved was an urban jungle gym for the actors. It incorporated a main playing floor framed by an upstage deck and two towers on the proscenium and was a hodge-podge of stairs, platforms, ramps, ladders, and windows, dressed with a period VW camper van, bare light bulbs, pops of color, and textiles. Everything had an old second-hand air to it.

The main playing area was primarily located on the three-quarter thrust of the stage. It was dressed with old and faded oriental rugs - all in warm colors of red, orange, and brown - that were overlapped and strewn together (figure 25). This was to create a nest-like quality, a warm and a little bit messy sort of “vibe.” The rest of the stage floor was black except for two graphic elements that spread out from under the main center-stage deck structure and ended under the center rugs (figure 26). These two decals represented the sun and water, both iconic symbols of nature and life and important elements in the show (“Let the Sunshine In,” and the symbolism of Aquarius). Both were done in colors of the 70s and in an art nouveau style with organic flowing shapes. They provided a visual tie between the area rugs and the deck as well as giving the set an unplaceable psychedelic element.

The main center-stage consisted of a multi-level structure made up of a two-level band platform on top of the VW van, a catwalk area, three staircases, and a smaller “second stage” area accessed by a surrounding step level and a ramp on stage right. It also included large broken windowpanes and a mix of wood and steel structure that gave

it a pieced together, run-down look (figures 4, 34). The windows served as a canvas for the lighting designer's projection series (figure 37). Originally, the platform was supposed to have a built-in mattress that would double as both a bed and a couch/lounger, but the director and I agreed that that would have been too contrived, so we decided to have mattresses on the deck under the catwalk instead and change the original built-in space into a ramp. This was used for people to roll off of, particularly in the number "Hashish" in the first act.

The proscenium towers were added to the set when the director requested them and went through several design changes and adjustments throughout the process. The director wanted something that the actors could climb up onto and hang off of that would also break up the harshness and reality of the proscenium arch (figures 29, 30) and were a way to branch the set off into the rest of the theater.

Chapter 10: Reviews and Analysis

Even an organic design is a design made with conscious choices - a theoretically random design, while random in practice, may not be perceived to be as random as a design that was made to look random but was actually carefully crafted to look that way. This process of organic design challenged me to learn when to exert control and when to allow things to just flow, which is acceptable when directed but cannot be allowed to escape control. Letting the design flow on its own worked with varying degrees of success.

The greatest challenge in this design was when to exercise contrived design as opposed to theoretical design. If you design something to look random, can it really be called random, or should you find a way to actually make it random? I explored this concept in some of the surface treatments of the space. The theory behind the design is that since the tribe was made of a collective group of people, the aesthetic of the set should also be collaboration where possible. I was hoping to come across inspirations that would be separate from me but still work in my set. It was a success in a few places such as the van and the stairs, but a failure in others, such as the marker graffiti. On the painting of the bus and the stairs, I allowed my painters some artistic license, but it was controlled. I dictated color choices, as well as the sizing of brushes and themes and styles that I wanted. Then I allowed them to fill in spaces with their own creativity, which turned out very well. The bus was and looked like a collaboration with different skill levels present. Where the idea of literal collaboration was not so successful was in the

marker graffiti in which I allowed the actors to partake. For the marker graffiti, I purchased chip-tip permanent markers and asked the cast to mark up the set; I left it up to them what they wanted to write which I thought would give a more textured aesthetic to the space. Overall, the markers did not read from the audience. I tried retrospectively to darken/thicken some of the lines from the actors' work so that it would be more legible, but most of it got lost because of the distance from the audience. The graffiti closer to or facing the audience was far more successful.

Found objects were another area of difficulty. Often, the items as they were fit my design aesthetic, but I was pushed by my adviser, the TD, to put my own interpretation on every object on the set. I liked the look of a lot of the old and chipping paint in the doors we found, as well as the metal platforms that were speckled with random paint flecks. I even wanted to leave the platforms un-faced but, as my advisor, the TD strongly suggested that I still use facing. I would have liked to have left the staircases as I found them, in their random colors, but the TD wanted me to choose colors for them, saying that I could create a more random finish. Some things were better modified, but painting the stairs was not a good choice on my part. It seemed afterwards that they became very flat, too uniform and clean and we didn't have the time to distress them. This is part of the reason we ended up painting the staircase as a mural as well. The TD was right that a deliberate choice of finish could work very well in terms of making things look distressed however, in this case, it looked great as it was before modification and the stairs would have worked better if they were left alone.

The overall reception of the set was a positive one. The general impression that I got from reading reviews online was that the set worked but was very similar to the Broadway set. According to Jennifer Perry of the *MD Theater Guide*, the production value was “first rate,” and “the cast has the considerable privilege of getting to play on Paula Wang’s intricate, colorful, yet industrial set, which includes a van decked out in 60s style.”¹ She mentioned that it was reminiscent of the recent Broadway revival set, but allowed that the industrial nature of it added to the allusion to downtown NYC.

The relationship between the 2009 Broadway revival set and mine was something of a surprise. I purposely did not look too closely at any of the other production sets in my research because I didn’t want to be influenced by them. It is possible that the set became so much like the revival set because of the themes that were advanced by the director: hodge-podge, industrial materials, and the placement of important elements, especially the band and the van. These two elements dictated the rest of the set, from the placement of the catwalk to the shape of the platform. My set seemed to have more dimensionality than the Broadway set because of the thrust stage, and the lack of backdrop, allowing a sense of negative space behind the playing area.

The most successful areas were the van and the floor. The van was a centerpiece of the set that firmly anchored the audience in a frame of mind. It was a quintessential indication of era as well, one of the only indicators of time frame on the set. The intrinsic nature of the vehicle, and the color and patterns that we painted on it, made it the most interesting and aesthetic set element on stage. The floor of the thrust was also really

¹ Perry

successful for creating that warm inclusive space that was necessary for the tribe, a space that included the audience as well. The carpet created the necessary warm textured quality to the floor and the paint treatment on the floor tied the thrust area to the main set piece. The floor treatments were both interesting to look at as well as symbolic and added that whimsical psychedelic element to the set.

The least successful areas were in the two proscenium towers, the material in the broken windows, and the masking and wings. The two proscenium towers, which were a work in progress up until opening, were adequate for their purpose of having playing space with levels that would provide opportunity for composition. However, in retrospect, I should have put more thought into the accessibility and function of the towers. The stage left staircase ended in mid-air, which was fine in terms of aesthetics, but didn't make very much sense otherwise. I would have liked to see something up there, either an escape of some sort or a landing. The stage right tower seemed pretty bland in comparison to the stairs on stage left, and from its construction, looked a little top heavy as well. I would redesign that tower to incorporate different size levels as well as more ways to get up and down on it. It seemed closed off to the audience because we were forced to orient the ladder downstage to allow for additional structural support diagonals. I would have preferred a redesign of the tower, perhaps in the form of a small platform with that telephone booth that never got built.

The material for the broken windows looked cheap and read as plastic in window panes. It was adequate for its purpose, but it would have been more impressive to have actual acrylic for glass panes, some of which could have been backed with screen

material for the projections. While it would have looked more polished and might have been a better material for the projections, it also would have been too expensive for this production. Lastly, the masking and wing clutter could have been more than it was. I would have been more comfortable with a blank theater space in the wings and back but, under the aesthetic viewpoint of hodge-podge, the amount of clutter was right. It could have been finessed some more to be less random and more interesting.

If we had had more time and budget for the production, I would have liked to see the back of the house completely decked out with period posters and headlines. It would have created a great transition zone from the outside of the house to the theater and would have really set the tone in terms of all the social and political turmoil that was going on at the time. We had the idea of even having a 60's television set going with clips from pop culture and news. In the end, the lack of these design elements did not detract from the audience impression because the stage and the costumes were effective in transporting the audience back to the time period.

Overall, the design of the set did what was needed in providing an interesting playing space for the actors and an early 70's "vibe" for the audience.

Chapter 11: Conclusions

Throughout the design of *Hair*, conscious design choices were made about the set. The main challenge of this whole process was in maintaining control of the design while adapting to last minute changes, working in a different design aesthetic, trying to create a hodge-podge space (grappling with leaving the really random alone or trying to recreate a really random), and advocating my design in the not just a collaborative, but also the hierarchical art form of educational theater. As opposed to a more traditionally structured production, the timing at which design choices were made in this environment was very last minute. In particular, the lack of documentation and the constant modification caused the build process to be more harried than it could have been if the design were more completely planned beforehand. However, I realize retrospectively that, despite the last-minuteness of the design process, I still made decisions about the set that kept the design to a coherent aesthetic, proving that an organic process of design can still yield a successful product. Everyone involved had to be very flexible with the plans of the set, especially towards the end of production when the set was being installed. Areas such as the catwalk structure, the set dressings, the paint, and the masking were constantly being worked and added to and revised; this process fully resonated with the director's style. Roberta seemed to realize and embrace that the end product would be something different from what was originally planned. She wanted and encouraged it to be something that grew into a design, which became vibrant and alive rather than stagnant and unchanging.

This was an exercise in learning the balance between asserting control over the design and letting the design be unduly influenced by others. Working with a director is like working with a client. They have the final say but, as the designer, I have to convince them that my opinions and design choices are the best for the project without creating antagonism.

I've concluded that, as a designer, everything should be a conscious choice, including whether or not to leave something as you found it. Some of the set elements worked best as we found them (surfaces of the metal platforms), and others needed to be modified to work with the overall concept and vision (new materials and carpets).

I learned that an assertive designer really needs to be a sales person for their design and that more planning earlier equals less work later. Even so, some directors like making decisions later in production when they can physically see what they are working with. This is when the designer needs to be adaptable to the director's ideas while keeping the design coherent.

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