

Hair Manifesto

by Anissa Weinraub, '02

Whenever I travel to another part of the US or another country in the world I find myself taking on the vocal and speech patterns of a native speaker. I lose my own way of speaking, and adopt that area's accent.

I am an Accent Chameleon.

I find it a fun little linguistic/sociological game.

And so, this summer while working in a restaurant deep in the heart of Dupont Circle in Washington DC, an area known far and wide for its dense Guppie (gay male + yuppie) population, where 80% of the staff was gay, it seemed only natural that I should adopt this Guppie mode of communication, behavior, self-representation.

I was a Sexual Identity Gender Expression Chameleon. SIGEC, for short.

I became a gay boy.

It was a sociological extrapolation. Further beyond the reach of any autonomy I possessed.

And afterall, who doesn't simply adore another acronym in their life?

So much of my demeanor changed. I incorporated that flipping of the wrist thing into my every interaction. My body developed a certain poise, as I flowed gracefully, melodramatically from room to room. I oozed sass. And to uphold just a few more stereotypes about gay male culture of the 21st century, it was during this SIGECian period of my life when I first discovered my Inner Hair Dresser.

It started with a minor compulsion to do hair. I found myself spending more time than ever before staring into the mirror, strategically situating each strand. But it quickly escalated, infecting the realm of my desire: I wanted to cut hair. Mine, my housemate's, that guy who walked by me in the park and so desperately needed to trim off his mullet. Anyone. I found myself nightly snipping off different pieces of hair, my wastebasket mounding with black, brown, bleached little trimmings, the cast-offs of my art.

I became irked easily when people paid \$9.99 for a shoddy Super Cuts do. The judgment of a hair snob.

I became restless, itching to conquer hairdos of all genres. Strolling on busy streets, I was a flaneur, constantly taking in the hairstyles moving past me. In the supermarket, I insatiably devoured the hair concepts sprouting atop all the shoppers. I was a machine, always, everywhere calculating length and luster, shade and sheen and type of sheers used. I had undergone a pop-cultural metamorphosis, emerging from my cocoon a hair person.

For me, there was always a stigma attached to the label of hair person. I mean, I'm not the shallow, valley-girl type. I don't manically rush out to buy the latest Cosmo or Elle or Teen People so as to bask in the beauty that is Gwyneth Paltrow or Jennifer Anniston's new do, in pure awe of the shine or cut or angulation of those soft, wispy bangs, wildly ecstatic over all the new hair-ideas it presents me, strangely soothed like an addict finding her overdue fix. That's just not me.

I mean, I'm that rabid feminist, always managing to work a radical critique of Capitalism or Patriarchy into every conversation I enter. I'm that crunchy little dyke with unshaven legs and armpits, always shrieking about the image of womyn in the media and those fascist beauty standards that consume womyn's lives as they quite literally kill themselves off in order to attain them. I'm that dirty kid who lives in a coop, a little Luddite denouncing the evils of American Consumerism while eating organic tofu and alfalfa sprouts.

A hair person? Certainly not me.

But like so many other components in my life, hair simply needed to be re-appropriated. And not unlike those faux-poetic Calvin Klein waifs, I like to embrace my contradictions.

Sometimes it's not even about the hair on my head. Sometimes Doing Hair is a much more conceptual art. Grappling with what really constitutes a Style: is it based solely on outcome, precision? or does intent matter? or is it realized within the space between conception and production? It can easily bust into a discourse on Essence.

Sometimes it's just the time spent with myself. A moment of pause, for reflection or affirmation. Some people do yoga or bake vegan chocolate pies or legally gamble in the stock market. I do hair.

I do hair.

I can reach a state of self-awareness, a tweaked less-about-the-greatness-of-the-world-more-about-the-greatness-on-my-head mindfulness. There's an almost zen headspace that exists in a 3am touchup of the strands on the back of my head that I've never really seen. Only sensed.

Doing hair is a type of calisthenics, in which I maneuver my scissors over the terrain of my head, its dips and juts, twists and matted patches. My scissors with the hot pink plastic handles that I bought at Target back in 7th grade.

There is such strength attained in personal transformation, in the ability to carve out, trim up, or buzz off some new identity. Better than a self-help book, taking the sheers into your own hands is a momentous step toward self-sufficiency.

It cuts the obligatory ties between you and an Imperial Barber Force; no longer must you rely on some superior entity that controls the wealth of hair expertise. Yours is an act of the redistribution of that knowledge, an act of Revolution. Throw down that hammer and sickle, and pick up some sheers and a comb.

The Hair Moment.

As in, going up to a stranger with a style you adore, envy, or simply want to emulate: "Let's have a Hair Moment. What do you do?"

Pure De Tocquevillean communitarian principles in action; it is Participatory Citizenship.

The Hair Moment has the potential to bridge the gap between strangers. It facilitates the transition from blindly sharing the streets with dark figures, anonymous forms, to sharing great hair tips with a new friend. But even more than just a pizza night product-swap on the kitchen table or a public restroom quickie session of "gotta-tries" or "stay-away-froms", the Hair Moment takes the form of two strangers quickly uniting as they share their processes of etching out their individual Hair Personas. It can forge the link between individuals who have forgotten about their fellow mammal, so accustomed to interacting only with cold technology, or commuting for hours in isolating little cars on a mega-highway from an unfriendly home to a dehumanizing work.

The Hair Moment can restore society's hope in itself.

Triangulation Method.

The tour-de-force of my hair cutting repertoire, the Triangulation Method incorporates both shortening and thinning in a series of blunt chops made somewhat randomly. Its utilization of varied angles of scissor-approach creates a textured, multi-lengthed, kinda-punky style.

I was once explaining Triangulation to someone who happened onto my porch-stoop-turned-beauty-parlor. I described the Method with such zealous detail and emphatic hand gestures; launching the epic tale, complete with an exposition of eerie foreshadowing, an incremental augmentation of the dramatic tension, finally reaching the hair climax, and ending with a swift, yet settling denouement. I must say, one of my finer Hair Moments. But she just rained on my parade, with a flat, "Oh. Like spiking."

Well, excuse me. But, in order to make it in a world in which you're implicitly told that your vote doesn't really count all that much, or that your identity can easily be marginalized by the Powers That Be, or that your struggles and movements for changing the system can be squashed by the Asymmetrical Warfare (we're armed with guns, all you've got are those silly puppets) existing under democratic martial law - in order to just make it through the day, breathing and laughing and ready to take on another, you need a little inflation. You need to feel sublime, majestic, even invincible about something. Like you have an irresistible offering to the world. Even if it is meager by some essentialist standard of value.

Even if it is cutting hair.