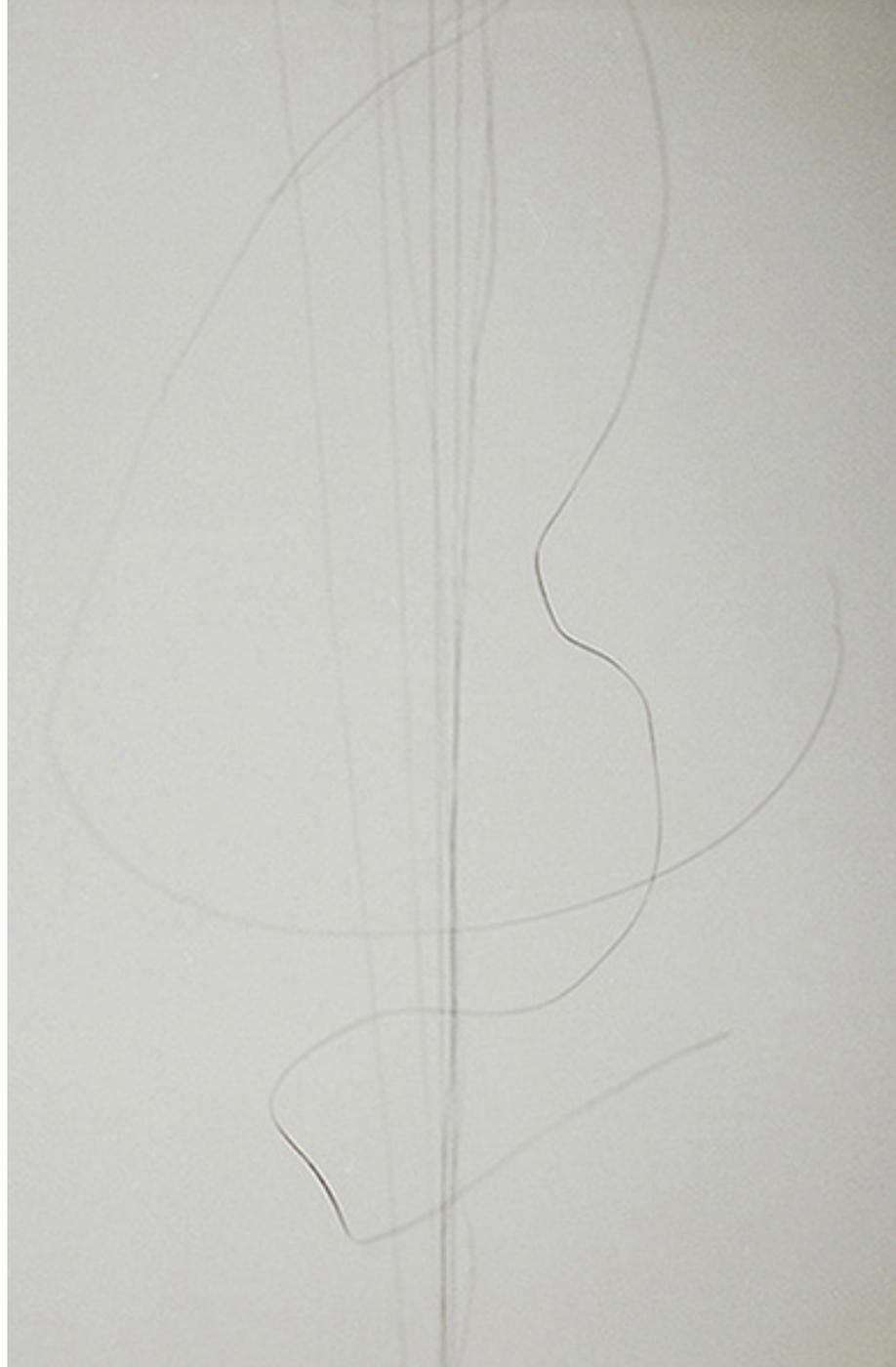


# WHAT THE HAIR ARE WE DOING?

*A brief selective history and  
contemplation about human hair*

Krisztina Czika - 1020631  
Thesis designLab - Gerrit Rietveld Academy  
Tutor: Xandra de Jongh  
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Ugh. With everything happening today,  
I don't know whether I am coming or going.

*I thought I saw you on the street,  
on the corner by the bar.*

*Thought I saw you in the car,  
in the shadow of the park.*

*Saw you waiting in the dark,  
for someone to explain just how it ended this way.*

*Why would you have to go and cut your hair?  
Why would you cut your hair? \**

Anyway, I'm glad you're here now. I didn't know how you take your coffee, so I ordered it black, with cold milk, the way I take mine. That's the best way to see how the colours merge, when the milk is added. Somehow this is my favourite part of the whole coffee-drinking experience. I never drink the last sip because in the last sip you can still see a reflection, of yourself and your surroundings. I think I was always aware of the reflections around me, as much as I was aware of myself. Look, today I found a hair I almost lost as I made my way here! I mean, I was sitting still, but the train was moving, coming here, really fast in fact. I was reading very slowly and carefully, when a hair fell onto the page. It's been a while since I witnessed losing my hair. I picked it up and examined it closely. Thin, fragile even, and blonde with a golden shine. It made me think and I fell into something of a reverie...

Srinivasa Ramanujan was an autodidact who received no public education and very little formal training, yet still managed to make extraordinary contributions to pure mathematics. Initially Ramanujan worked alone, developing his own research in complete isolation, but he was quickly discovered and recognised by other Indian mathematicians. His skills became obvious and known throughout the wider mathematical community, at that time located primarily in Europe. After he mailed a substantial amount of his research to Cambridge, it found its way into the hands of British professor G.H. Hardy, who was hugely impressed and keen to establish a more serious partnership. If Ramanujan were to take advantage of this collaboration with the professor, however, he would have to make a personal commitment that involved some considerable sacrifice. Sailing across the sea to England meant not only leaving his home-town behind, but also his family, his wife and — not insignificantly — his hair.

In a way then, Ramanujan's hair became a symbol of his culture and his country's relationship with Britain. There was no doubt that the British colonisation of India generated the widespread illusion (in Britain at least) that Britain was superior to India. This meant that even though he'd be working in close collaboration with Hardy, they would never be considered — at least by the outside world — as social equals.

One of the many aesthetic differences between the two cultures, with regard to masculinity and propriety, was the way men wore their hair. In India men wore their hair long, with a deep conviction that it was a gift from God, a beautiful gift that must be cherished and should remain — ideally — unchanged, unaltered, uninterfered with by human hand. Moreover, the longer your hair was, the more beautiful it appeared and the more respected it was. In England, the opposite was true and the trend for gentlemen — particularly gentlemen of a certain class — was for short hair. All across Europe at the time, appearance was a representation of status and wealth and a messy, unkempt hairdo could mark a person out as poor and unworthy.

Knowing the differences and the disparity Ramanujan would face, cutting the long hair that he used to wear in a knot was crucial if he was to fit in and be accepted in his new life in Cambridge. His hair, being his connection to God and the symbol of a devout Hindu, would have to be left behind. So he presented himself in the United Kingdom with short hair and once he was there, he soon came to recognise that not only were there differences in culture and aesthetics, but in education as well.

Professor Hardy felt the need to educate Ramanujan as to the finer, European ways of dealing with mathematics, so that he'd be able to publish his research. It took years for him to acclimatise, but Ramanujan was determined. Throughout the years of his acclimatisation, his hair never stopped growing and needed cutting regularly, causing me to wonder if hair could be considered as an infinite, limitless phenomenon. Limit, as the furthest reach of one's physical and mental endurance.

## HAIRS BETWEEN US

We count things all the time, without really questioning what and why we count. For instance, have you ever counted how many hairs you have? Or how many hairs your lover has? Perhaps even the idea sounds rather silly and frivolous? Without serving a purpose, counting is not a very satisfying pastime. Knowledge, however, is satisfying, and we count in order to know things. So if you count one hair every second, then in that moment, hair becomes a metaphorical hourglass, measuring time. Not the kind of time that tells us when to wake up, but the kind that shows us the continued progress of existence, the space between us or the space between Ron Mueck and his "Dead Dad".

Time represented in a hyper realistic silicon sculpture of a human corpse, two thirds its natural size. This is the only work of Mueck's that uses human hair — his own. The mixed media corpse sculpture faithfully reproduces the minute details of his father's body. By attaching his own hair to his father's silicon scalp, the artist brought something emphatically personal to his painstaking work, enhancing both time and space in the process. One by one, second after second, he recreated his father's eternal physical being and preserved thousands of seconds of remembrance.

The average human being is born with between 90,000 and 150,000 hair follicles on the scalp alone. This does vary, however, according to natural hair colour. Blonde humans have an average of 150,000 hairs. Redheaded humans have around 90,000 hairs. And humans with black or brown hair

are somewhere in between, with 110,000 hairs. And that's for one person. When you think about the number of people on Earth — roughly 7.4 billion — it can be quite mind-boggling. Consider that if we take just one average hair from every single average human being's head, we're already talking about nine billion metres of human hair that, left in place, continues to grow, constantly. In one year, we're talking about something like 111 billion metres of hair.

However, each of these single hairs has its own life, which means that so long as it's alive, it grows through its various different stages of development, always sustained by the energy gained from its living and breathing human host.

Isn't it fascinating that the human body manages to maintain enough energy for a single hair to grow 1.25 cm every month? Multiply these numbers by the numbers of hairs on the average head and the numbers quickly become unmanageable, too vast for our ordinary perception to grasp. But how could we so easily lose a personal connection?

To perceive hair realistically in the state in which it actually exists, rather than as it may appear or be perceived, it is important to see through to its core essence. It is important to examine a single hair. Like the photographs of Ábel Szalontai that are studies of very small amounts of hair from people known to him. These single hairs feel vulnerable and somehow misplaced, absent from the owner. The photographs themselves create an abstract existence. The objective reality of the topic disappears and what remains is a visual image. It is abstract and at first we might not recognise it, but it is hair. Gazing at these depictions that emphasise the vulnerability of hair makes us wonder: do we really see hair when we look at it every day?

It's never really just hair, as we never isolate its true meaning, but rather focus on the relationship between the object and ourselves. Thus when it comes to hair, why is aesthetics our immediate connection with it?

We're obsessed with superficial questions concerning what we call 'bad hair days' or hair loss. How does my hair look today? How does my lover's hair look today? Is that a hair on his shoulder? Presumably you've lost a couple of hairs yourself today too, or maybe even a lot. You just haven't noticed. Or maybe you have. Maybe you even kept the fallen hairs and put them somewhere safe?

Which makes me wonder... Could we keep every fallen hair and treat it as a treasured relic? A single hair that captures memories and replays moments from the past, like a photograph.

There are various ways to remember or commemorate a period of time, a moment, or a special event, something that leaves a deep impression. One way to remember is by simply documenting it. The world's longest hair, for example, was captured in this way, with the extent of its growth and the kudos that it brought to Xie Qiuping, whose hair reached a length of 5.6 metres when it was documented in 2004. Xie has been growing her hair since 1973, when she was only 13 years old. According to fairly rough calculations, she is the most impressive living example of hair growth, although of course, her hair will stop growing with her death.

We now know, thanks to advances in our understanding of such matters, that human hair does not continue to grow after death. The body, the energy source does not produce more hair tissue, so technically hair stops growing when we stop breathing. Nevertheless, the length of your hair would be still different on the day you die compared to a few months later, giving the impression of growth. This is in fact an illusion brought about by the shrinking of your skin as your body loses moisture — in actual fact, quite the opposite of growth. In a perfect life scenario your maximum hair length is equal to your lifetime. But what exactly is our lifetime and why does it matter if our hair is still growing or not? Can we benefit from our hair on our death-bed or after life?

Death is real. It comes without warning and it cannot be escaped. Teachings on death and dying are no longer common in the West, yet they remain weaved into the fabric of daily life in the Buddhist culture of the Himalayas. According to Buddhist teachings, Buddhahood or Buddha-mind is at the heart of every living being. Even yours or mine. This basic awareness is the essence of life and it is beyond birth and death. You might describe it as an honest compassion for everything that lives, the basic intention for the path through this life leading to our death. So even if the indescribably pure existence of our soul is reincarnated into a new form ready for a new life... the original body is left and the remaining hair is attached to the body and not to the soul. But what could possibly be the motivation for anyone to grow their hair to such an extreme length without tangible benefits? Especially if the body and the hair that belongs to it is not bound to the soul. Could hair perhaps seen as a symbol of life and death, an expression of eternal existence?

Hair workers have made jewellery from human hair throughout history, principally for use in rituals of private worship or mourning. It was traditionally used in a funeral ritual that eventually faded away and disappeared.

From the Middle Ages to the early twentieth century, memorial hair jewellery remained common. Considered a remnant of the person, hair often played a part in myths and legends, like the Swedish proverb that claims that rings and bracelets of hair increase the likelihood of love. Like the love felt by Charlotte Bronte towards her sisters that was one day captured in an

amethyst bracelet woven with Emily and Anne Bronte's hair. It was a way of keeping the feelings of the deceased alive. At the same time it was a memorial of the tragic deaths of the Bronte siblings.

Charlotte may have asked Emily and Anne for the locks of hair as a gesture of sisterly affection. Or the tresses may have been cut from their corpses, which was common practice in preparing the dead for burial in an era when mourning jewellery made from human hair was part of the grieving process. This leads to the assumption that Charlotte wore her amethyst bracelet as a physical and spiritual connection to her sisters after their passing. In this context, hair, the smallest physical part of the human body, in all its fragility and immateriality, becomes a reminder of eternity.

In a biological sense, hair is nothing more than a blood vessel without nerves. (And without blood.) However, lasting as it does longer than any other part of the human body, the pure endurance of hair seems almost to transcend life itself.

Perhaps this is why hair is often used as a reminder of death, a Memento Mori, or a gift to God. This is certainly the case in a 17th century textile in which Buddha is depicted laying on his side by the withered 'sal' trees. The historical textile pictures the deity in nirvana, a transcendent state of mind in which there is no suffering, no desire and no sense of self. Embroidered using human hair, the image was created by the Buddhist priest and artist Kunen in 1678. The hair he used was donated by devotees who believed their donation

would help them gain entrance to paradise after death.

Hair used as raw material in this case adds a new layer of meaning to the piece. In Buddhism, hair often suggests wild, untamed sexual energy, and its use in the embroidery can be seen as an attempt to control or transform the negative power of that sexual energy into something more positive. Thus, with the belief that hair signifies the human body undergoing a purifying metamorphosis, human "imperfection" is turned into "perfection" and the distinction between buddha and believer collapses as the two merge into one. In this manner then, the offering of human hair is recognised as a desire to become one with God.

In India some ascetics tear out their hair, while others, like the great poet Rabindranath Tagore who found God within himself, leave it completely untouched until it becomes a tangled mass. As a God-realised man, Tagore's first action was to throw his shaving kit into the ocean, giving up his ego and surrendering himself to nature to live in the form that God had given him. This way of life is also depicted in the story of Prince Siddhartha and his journey towards Buddhahood. When he left his palace to seek a way beyond ageing, sickness, and death, it is said that one of his first actions was to shave his head. Buddhist monks always completely shave their head and beard, showing their commitment to the Holy Life that Buddha exemplified, sacrificing wealth for a life of poverty and homelessness. In these cases, the goal of an enlightened way of life was shared, but it was attempted from two very different paths. Growing or shaving.

Most of us are born with hair, arguably the most valuable source of energy and vitality we have and definitely a sacred part of our identity. As human beings, we are the only creatures on Earth whose hair grows longer on the head, and there might be a reason for this privilege. In some beliefs, if you leave your hair uncut, it will grow to a particular length and then stop all by itself at the correct length that is meant for you. From this yogi perspective, hair is an amazing gift of nature that can actually help increase creative life forces, also known as Kundalini energy, which increases vitality, intuition and tranquility.

This knowledge and science of hair was one of the first lectures given by Yogi Bhajan when he arrived in America. Bhajan taught that if the hair on your head is allowed to attain its full, mature length, then phosphorous, calcium and vitamin D are produced. These vitamins then enter the lymphatic fluid and eventually the spinal fluid through two ducts at the top of the brain, creating a more efficient memory and leading to greater physical energy, improved stamina and increased supplies of patience. Qualities any leader should have. Is it possible that Hillary Clinton's new, short haircut was the reason behind Donald Trump accusing her of lacking stamina? And if so, what does Donald Trump's extremely unusual hairstyle suggest?

Your hair is not there by accident. Neither is it there for aesthetic reasons. Rather, it has a very definite purpose, which saints will discover and ordinary men will scoff at and ridicule. When you allow your hair to grow to its full length and coil it on the crown of the head, the panic life force (anxiety) is drawn down to the spine. During the day, the hair absorbs solar energy, but at night it absorbs lunar energy. Therefore, keeping the hair up during the day and down at night aids the process and your hair develops as tens of thousands of antennae that gather energy and channel them to the frontal lobes, the part of the brain you use for meditation and visualisation.

These antennae, our hair, act as conduits to bring greater quantities of subtle, cosmic energy into our life. The sages or saints who discovered this force were known as Rishis. Coiling the hair up in a “rishi knot” on top of the head during the day is said to energise the brain cells, energising a person’s magnetic field (aura) as well as stimulating the pineal gland in the centre of the brain. This pineal activation is said to result in a secretion that is central to the development of higher intellectual functioning, as well as higher spiritual perception.

As evolved humans, we believe that every part of our body has a purpose, although this belief tends not to manifest itself in our daily life. When was the last time you observed the colour of your tongue, for example, or the white markings on your nails? And more importantly, what were the questions that emerged from these observations? Was there a keen desire to draw conclusions? Without this day-to-day understanding, we lose touch with ourselves and our bodies, perhaps at the same time losing some of our instinctual power.

Like skin, hair is an extension of the nervous system. Our hairs are like feelers that can quite rightly be viewed as externalised nerves. These feelers became useful in the Vietnam War, with particular regard to Native American code talkers. During the conflict, known in Vietnam as the Resistance War Against America, special envoys of the war department were sent to Native American reservations in search of tough, young and talented scouts who were adept at moving through and sniffing out especially rough terrains. Scouts with a reputation for seemingly supernatural tracking abilities became premium quality candidates for recruitment. However, the scouts’ tracking skills seemed to disappear completely in the field. New recruits failed consistently, not performing as anticipated. These mass failures and casualties caused the US armed forces to conduct a study to get to the bottom of the issue.

The test they used was simple; the new recruit would be instructed to commence an overnight training operation. After falling asleep, an armed ‘enemy’ would attempt to sneak upon the recruit. Ideally he would be awakened by a strong ‘fight or flight’ instinct long before the supposed attacker was even close, or his movements could be even heard. The recruit would often follow some sort of sixth sense and pretend to sleep rather than flee, so when the ‘attacker’ was close enough, the recruit would grab and overcome him. After basic training, however, the same recruit would consistently fail the same test.

Significantly, a required military haircut was part of the basic training. Losing their hair seemed to leave the Native American

soldiers unable to connect to their sixth sense, that had previously been purely instinctive. After discovering this, there was further investigation and experimentation. Some soldiers were allowed to keep their hair while some received the required military haircut. As you might guess, those Native Americans who were allowed to keep their hair performed exactly as the standards predicted, how they would have performed prior to recruitment. As a result, it was recommended that Native American recruits were allowed to keep their long hair.

Hair also has some sort of supernatural connotation in Christianity, most famously in a story in which hair is a conduit of physical strength. The story of Samson appears in the book of Judges in the New Testament. Samson was a man who was given great strength by God, but ultimately lost his strength when Delilah, his lover, allowed the Philistines to shave off his hair while he slept. The son of Manoah, Samson was born into an Israelite family. After an angel of the Lord visited the husband and wife — the latter of whom is never named in the Bible — they were told that their child would be a Nazirite from birth. Nazirites were Israelites consecrated to the service of God and they lived according to certain vows. They had to abstain from alcohol, for example. They had to avoid defilement by contact with corpses. And they had to let their hair grow to its full length. Samson grew up keeping his vows, and served his God and his people as a soldier with supernatural strength provided by his hair. The eventual cause of Samson losing his hair and his strength was his lover Delilah, who betrayed him for money. Delilah is one of several dangerous

temptresses found in the Hebrew Bible, and one of the first emblematic examples.

Delilah was approached by the lords of the Philistines and asked to discover the secret of Samson's strength. Three times she asked Samson, but all three times he gave her false answers and lied to her. On the fourth occasion, he told her the truth, that not cutting his hair was the fulfilment of his vow to God and the source of his strength. The night after Samson fell asleep in Delilah's lap, she betrayed his trust and allowed his enemies to shave off seven locks from his head. But was Delilah actually disloyal to Samson or did she simply serve justice? Samson used his strength to defeat others, the power he got from God to serve God. He was a soldier, he fought, he harmed and killed people. His hair was the source of his power and his special ability to serve governmental issues. We could argue either that Delilah's action amounted to one of the first "whore" play storylines, or that she was actually the one who distinguished God from Government and acted for justice.

We often cut our own or our lover's hair, mostly for the purpose of maintaining its health or simply for aesthetic reasons.

Furthermore, we live in a society with unwritten rules related to our hair. We might even describe this as a kind of pressure where long hair is considered and acknowledged as a symbol of femininity and short hair of masculinity. Today artists and activists question and seek to subvert this idea. One such artist is Rebecca Horn, who as part of a nine-part exercise in 1974-1975, captured a four-minute long self-haircut on 16mm film. The film addresses the subject of femininity, and the impression created by Horn's act of careless, apparent self-sabotage is associated with symbolically freeing herself from the tyranny of societal expectations. As the artist herself said of her work: "Cutting one's own hair with two pairs of scissors simultaneously, when a woman and her lover lie on one side looking at each other; and she twines her legs around the man's legs with the window wide open, it is the oasis."

In the film, the imminent threat is portrayed with the simultaneous use of scissors cutting her long red hair. Horn's hair is transformed from mid-length red hair to a no-shape, abstract hairdo, using no hands but two pairs of scissors. The hair feels like a pair of curtains, parallel to the surface of the screen and merging into the foreground. Meanwhile the two pairs of scissors merge with the hair, the act of cutting becoming a fast and violent motion that seems almost uncontrollable. Is the artist alright? Is she crazy? What is she doing? As the hairdo becomes shorter and shorter and more and more uneven, some kind of fear grips the specta-

tor. A feeling that Rebecca Horn is attacking herself. We are not sure why the scene creates such anxiety. Perhaps it is the fact that the artist is so determinedly creating a self-portrait in such a careless manner, without any regard for how it will end or look. Ultimately, however, a messy haircut or a hairdo that's too short or almost shaved — does it matter?

The older I get, the more I understand the Britney Spears meltdown. The second child of Lynne Irene Bridges and James Parnell Spears, Britney was already a solo artist at the age of three. She had her local stage debut at the age of five singing, "What Child Is This?" Her first professional role was as understudy for the lead role in the off-Broadway musical "Ruthless!"

She made friends with most of her classmates, yet compared school to the opening scene in "Clueless". A life that's beyond our understanding. She was bored at a young age. She had a boyfriend, she went to homecomings and Christmas formal events, but she wanted more. So she reached for more. With a manager and a label, the Britney Spears we know from "Oops, I Did It Again" was created and shaped specifically to fulfil the requirements of mainstream pop culture. One of the most significant changes she underwent was that her natural gold brown hair was bleached to a vivacious platinum blonde, resulting in an appearance that other women either admired or judged, but were definitely not indifferent to. At age of 25, the twice divorced mother of two shaved her head in front of the paparazzi and treated the tabloids to a dramatic breakdown. Like Demi Moore in the Ridley

Scott movie “GI Jane”, Britney looked like she had something on her mind. She was on a mission and nobody was going to stop her. So said the owner of the hair salon where the media attraction took place. A shocking act, caused by living under 24/7 paparazzi surveillance and almost an entire life of media attention. Was it a desperate plea for help or merely a plea for publicity? One dramatic gesture transforms a blonde sex bomb into a skinhead celebrity freak. Could the same dramatic gesture just be an instinctive act of numbing the antennae? Britney herself said that she merely wanted to rid herself of the hair extensions she was required to wear most of the time, displaying an even richer and more artificial hairdo than she had naturally. It could just have been an excuse, or a more acceptable reason.

The problem of recreating her ‘acceptable’ appearance after the outrageous and rebellious head-shave seemed to be solved by wearing wigs until her natural hair got to a 2-3cm length when hair extensions could be reapplied. Soon she had platinum blonde long hair like once before, and her illusory self was restored.

“Nobody wants to look old. We all want to keep our youth as long as possible. Fashion models are getting younger and younger, teenage girls go into puberty sooner and sooner and we make ourselves young again with stitches and Botox.” A critical commentary and part of a project by the artist Maria Arnardottir, who associates hair with the desire of youth. In this project, Arnardottir questions our acceptance of our bodies, emphasising development and ripeness by preserving the hair from her 24-year-old self and making it into a wig for her 80-year-old self. In this way, she declares her role in our society’s unwritten rules of appearance. Yet, as an artist, cutting her own hair and preparing her own wig from it involves an additional aspect. Hair as a symbol of youth and life emerges with an eagerness to process hair as a material.

Making wigs and hair extensions is the most ancient and currently the largest industry surrounding human hair, one which is constantly increasing due to the global expansion of the fashion industry. The oldest known wigs are from Egypt in 1,400 BC, and some are still intact today after 3,400 years. In Eastern countries, such products cater primarily to the world of theatre, but in the West they evolved significantly with the fashion industry. Human hair products are expensive and the industry behind them ‘dirty’.

Clumps of half-burnt and rotting hair is a toxic hazard and a common sight in Bhagyanagar, a village in the Koppal district of northern Karnataka in India. At the root of the problem is the hair processing industry present in the area. What started

as a small trade in the early 1980s has today expanded into a multi-core business. With business booming, the quantity of hair strewn in Koppal has increased, all with no regard to the risks associated with such dumping. For hair products, good quality human hair is needed in a variety of lengths and textures. During the manufacturing process, production waste piles up and causes major health and environmental issues.

Health officials in the region have pointed out that by burning the waste, particles enter the respiratory tract and cause severe allergies. More than 75 cases of tuberculosis are reported annually at the village's primary health centre, a direct result of the pollution caused by the hair processing industry, while hair is a long-term biodegradable material that takes hundreds of years to decompose naturally. But what does time matter to a business worth over a billion dollars annually? In 2010, India alone exported a million kilos of human hair worth \$238m and total global imports were valued at \$1.24bn. These sums account mostly for wigs, hair extensions and so forth, the same trade that has resulted in many of the above-mentioned environmental and health issues.

Apart from the fashion industry, human hair as a material is considered useless in most societies, resulting in a huge amount of waste all around the world. In rural areas or areas with a low population density, hair is usually discarded into nature, where it slowly decomposes over the years and eventually returns to its constituent elements of carbon, nitrogen and sulphur. While in urban areas or areas with high population

density, it often accumulates in large amounts in the solid waste streams, choking drainage systems and creating other multifaceted problems. Due to slow degradation, hair occupies large volumes of space. Over time, leachate from these dumps increases the nitrogen concentration in the water bodies, causing problems of eutrophication.

The best way to address such issues is to develop ideas and methods that utilise hair, the waste material, as a resource. In addition to reducing waste, human hair could actually be a potential material resource that contributes to the economy. Human hair has the advantage of being completely biodegradable, renewable and readily available in every locality, yet the efficient and environmentally safe utilisation of human hair requires the identification of appropriate uses and technologies that can be adapted according to the kind of hair waste available and the local circumstances. Hair as a material as mentioned before, however, hair as a material has several sociocultural and personal associations, which often determine how it might be used.

While studying at London's Royal College of Art, Studio Swine developed a technique to infuse hair in natural resin to create a viable alternative to wood. As they are interested in the future of natural resources, they recognise that hair is one of the few predominantly unused natural resources that is increasing globally. Hair grows sixteen times faster than trees used for tropical hardwood, trees that can take 300 years to reach maturity. For the "Hair Highway" project, the designers travelled to China to visit a hair market in Shandong, filming parts of the hair trade in the process. It was important for the duo to follow the route back to the factories that process the hair, as well as the traders that take it to market and the people that grow and sell it, exploring the full potential of this abundant natural material. Ultimately, they are looking to create a series of accessories to show off the properties of

human hair in order to change preconceptions about using it in products.

They believe that the moment will come when human hair becomes 'dehumanised' or separate from its source, in the same way that silk and wool have become separate from the insects or sheep from which they originate. But should human hair become the next material for creating such design items as sunglasses, boxes, vases or dressing tables, as Studio Swine has proposed? Is the movement to dehumanise human hair a good thing? Are there objectively good and bad uses for human hair?

Studio Swine used Asian hair specifically, because it grows faster and it is thicker and said to be of higher quality than European hair. Could hair be mass-grown? Or is the whole concept of 'mass' a cosmic delusion that through our own ignorance, always ensnares us?

This is the leading question that inspired the series of mugs at the heart of one of my school projects, "This is not a VÄRDERA". The VÄRDERA mug is an everyday object made by IKEA. In the Scandinavian chain, the VÄRDERA mug is one of the best sellers because of its exciting, soft square shape and simple design. Susan Pryke, the designer was aiming to create a good quality, practical and timeless piece that naturally becomes a part of your home. The mug is made from feldspar porcelain, making it impact-resistant, durable and ideal for mass production. The key features of the mug are: quality, reproducibility and efficiency. But how do these terms affect the consumer's appreciation of the item?

For my project I made a long-lasting mould that could be used continuously and freely, along with materials such as human hair and cosmetic wax, raising questions about our relationship with raw materials. Replacing the porcelain with materials that are readily available and require the input of the human body creates a new way of perceiving the same object. Can you drink from it? Well, the question should probably be: would you like to drink from it?

My intention with this project was not to propose or to provide possible applications, but to increase awareness. Aside from the materials used, there was another crucial aspect to the project: the amount of mugs I could make. Ultimately, this was limited by the amount of hair I was able to source from different donors.

Dehumanising human hair and objectifying it as a raw material that could potentially replace wood or other raw materials that we have already 'dehumanised' highlights human ignorance towards time. Comparing hair to wood and concluding that hair has absolute potential because of its faster growth reveals the disrespectful approach of humankind. For a maker of things, the possibility for reproduction influences the outcome, in terms of introducing their products to the market. "Yet," as Moholy Nagy Laszlo has stated, "design is not a profession, but an attitude" and could be seen as a blessing where makers can be critical concerning raw material sources and usage. Today, we have designers and industrial designers who are making conceptual pieces and installations while we have visual artists

delving into making everyday items. As an example, the Israeli artist and sculptor Gideon Gechtman, whose work is well-known for holding a dialogue with death, poses a question for all makers: Is it not possible to grow our own material?

His series of Brushes made between 1974 and 1989 are an example of human hair used in everyday consumer items, objects we use daily to scour dirt. Objects associated with making something clean and bright through hard scrubbing. Usually wooden brushes are made from some kind of animal hair, rough or delicate, depending on the purpose. These brushes we do not throw away with the change of the season, because of their aesthetics. Rather, we simply keep them and use them till they fail to fulfil their functions or fall apart in our hands. Like a good old Russian washing machine that exhales its last breath during the spin cycle.

Gideon did not make brushes with human hair for practical use, but he created them to represent an approach to human hair, in the form of an everyday object. An object on its own reflecting the material it's been made from, an object that in essence becomes a reflection of the material from which it's made: his and his lover's hair. From an artistic point of view, we can see it as a metaphor, a reflection on the magnificent journey of human hair, from head-covering to scrubbing brush used to clean and polish our shoes or kitchen floor. While from a design perspective, we can see it as a critical approach, questioning the distinction between animal hair and human hair and challenging our perceptions of both. It can also be viewed as a suggestion that we think a little more about the environmentally friendly materials that lie within our reach.

As a maker in the luxurious position of being able to access raw materials in bulk from the hardware store around the corner, or by ordering from the world-wide web, I am losing my connection to time and space, right down to an appreciation of where certain materials such as wood or cotton come from and how long it took for them to grow. What would happen if makers were limited to only using materials produced by themselves? Planting and growing trees on the balcony in order to make a chair, but only after thirty years when the tree reaches the right height and volume for processing. Spinning dog-hair into thread and knitting a sweater. Secretly half-looking forward to your cat's death, so you can throw her fur around your neck.

Today, thinking in terms of mass production means separating materials from their source, numbing our relationships with them and ignoring the responsibilities we have towards nature, humanity and time. The whole idea of mass production is to think of everyone as a consumer. If Asian hair grows faster and is of higher quality than other human hair, as Studio Swine claim, what will it take to offer good quality Asian hair on the market? And what will be the price paid by humanity?

Shift your focus from all the noises and thoughts spinning in your mind to the space within your inner nature, and contemplate the intuitive notions you feel now. When you think about your hair, contemplate its weight and how it feels today. Contemplate the clarity of your hair frequency and listen to its static. Your forehead prickles. The two ducts on the top of your brain are clean. Air comes in and out with every breath you take. Still you might feel that your greatest difficulty is concentrating on your own hair, while you are still digesting the thoughts, impressions and information that you have read since you embarked on this written journey.

Make sustained efforts to return to your own relationship with human hair, and more importantly, with your own hair. Your mission is only to remember the thoughts that arise in the present moment, not to think about the meaning of those thoughts or to react to them. As time passes and you steep yourself in the feelings of your own hair, you will discover an increasing number of sonic details. Each of these details will lead you to the next one. When ultimately you succeed in seeing and feeling your own hair in the state of its entirety, you will find that the distance between yourself and your hair has diminished, and that your hair has become your antennae. You will find that the people around you no longer notice your hair for aesthetic reasons.

Later, you will slowly begin to notice that your self is rising to the surface of your consciousness in the form of cohesive lumps of forgotten moments, and images will flash before your eyes, revealing an abundance of the hair you left behind. You will feel overwhelming emotion thinking of the places you left it and the memory of you grabbing your lover's hair with the intention to never let it go makes you smile. Your self will begin to regain your true nature. Your hair will stick to the air as a sign. You are unsure of the reason, but you sense something indescribable.

My first fascination with human hair feels tied to a memory of a Dutch porcelain doll I received as a child from my aunt. What a scary creature! (The doll, not my aunt.) I didn't understand what I had done to deserve it, as it felt like a punishment. I can clearly remember her eyelids opening and closing seemingly randomly, revealing her entrancing green eyes, like an unpredictable response to a rhetorical question — the type of questions we all have, but never expect to be answered. That motion is burned into my brain to this day.

It wasn't long before I took the doll apart to see and understand exactly how this unpleasant blinking movement worked but what I found instead was more interesting: the hair. Chocolate-brown human hair was knotted in strands and glued to the inside of the porcelain skull. Not exactly the way I imagined human hair growing at the age of six. From the outside, it looked exactly like everyone else's hair, so I couldn't tell if it was normal or completely absurd.

When I was given my first Barbie, I cut the hair immediately. I was so excited to see how the strands were connected to the plastic head. My mother didn't share my fascination and was actually quite furious, just as she was when I cut my own hair one Sunday morning. At the age of seven, it just felt like the right thing to do, a sort of next step; a moment of truth. My father took me to his barber to fix what was left. He fixed many other things too. I remember he let me play with his tools, the ones he used while he was still an electrician. Those tools became my good friends, and with them I was able to take things apart and learn how certain elements connected. It was important to observe and analyse everything properly in order to manipulate it at a later date. Today making things, the act of creation feels natural to me. Art or design? Applied or autonomous? It doesn't matter to me, but what does matter is the material.

My father had amazing hair. Great volume, sort of blonde-brown with a golden shine. My mother was never able to find a man with such good hair after their divorce. For years she dated men with not much hair, or even bald men. Good men — even those without hair — and always taller than her. Backcombing her hair was a trick my mother employed to appear taller than she was, perhaps to compensate for her feelings of inferiority about her height. She feels better being taller, or at least appearing taller.

I remember once in a while I cut her hair. She was never really satisfied, so most of the time I was only required to dye her hair dark brown, her natural colour, to hide the grey hairs that began to appear after my father left her twenty years ago. He was cheating on her, like my stepfather on his ex-wife.

Today, my stepfather takes care of my mother's grey hair, dying it regularly, even though he doesn't actually mind her grey hair at all. He is grizzled himself, yet he has enough hair for a traditional gentleman's hairdo. Short, wavy, combed to the side. A hairdo that you take seriously, like him.

As they are getting older and older, their hair is becoming more sparse. The shine fades away, and the structure becomes brittle.

I've always had a sentimental reaction to human hair. Observing it daily, yet never paying it enough attention until the day I shaved off all of my own hair. The intention was purely practical, because the weight of my hair — I assumed — made it unbearably painful. There were long days of excessive headaches. Despite having quite thin hair, it was heavy, maybe because of its length, maybe because of all the symbols and unwritten social associations that were part of having long blonde hair.

Getting rid of my long hair became a sensation, a topic of fevered discussion. Questions were asked, assumptions came to light and even judgments were formed. I was judged for being unable to decide what kind of hairdo I wanted and for refusing to spend time figuring it out. Moreover, I was judged for being a woman who shaves her head. Taking it down to the scalp seemed like the best idea, however, and subject for others, deciding if it was madness or something to be admired. For me, it was the first time I got the chance to really observe hair, as a lifeless but still alluring material, just laying on the ground. Also, once again it felt like the right thing to do, a sort of next step; a moment of truth.

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CREDITS

ENGLISH EDITOR

Karl Webster

HUNGARIAN TRANSLATOR

Katalin Zita Csillag

HUNGARIAN EDITOR

Georgina Dávid

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Naigel Vermeulen

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Michal Jurys (Pear Paper)