

Tertium non data

Hair is funny stuff. It attracts and it repels. It is the fur of us, the undeniable animal of us. It's wild. It demands manipulation. Groomed, combed, brushed, snipped, shaped, washed, glossed, coloured, twisted, deloused, pulled up, let out, it becomes the ultimate cultural expression of the self - a crucial part of the language of appearances.

But when it is separated from the body, what then?

When is the keepsake not a fetish? What responsibility do we have for the body from which it comes? Hair stands for the whole person; it does not evoke memories of them, it is them.

So what to make of this odd pasture, this odd assembly of snipped straws? What crop will it bear? Is there a whispering of a new, at least a hidden nation - or does it announce the death of the old? Do we really look like *this*, is this how we really are? What to make of these names that are commemorated - are they the new heroes or the fallen dead or the usual anonymous? What are these cold bare globes a silent, spectral investigation?

Hair is its own alchemical substance. To borrow its secret powers is to commit ourselves to responsibilities and destinies we cannot even begin to guess at. Hair never dies. We cannot kill it off, we can only dispose of it. The treasury is only a short step from the garbage bin. Alchemy is hit-and-miss. It sets off processes which cannot be contained.

John von Sturmer (1998)