

Women Framing Hair: Serial Strategies in Contemporary Art

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By

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Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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This book first published 2015

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-7607-0

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-7607-0

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book would not have been possible without the support of so many people, and my deepest gratitude goes to The Open University for the three-year bursary that made my initial research possible. Thanks also to my supervisor, Professor Gill Perry, for her unstinting patience, advice and generosity. Heartfelt thanks to the artists whose works have been central to this study, in particular to Chrystl Rijkeboer and Annegret Soltau, who have both been exceptionally generous with their time, and shown a genuine interest in this book, and to Alice Maher for her obliging and constructive responses to my questions. Thanks also to Heidi Weitzel, and to Ruth Spurgeon for their translation services. Finally to Elizabeth, Esmée and Katie for their encouragement and support in all my endeavors, and to Séamus, for everything and always.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The language of the self would be stripped of one of its richest resources without hair: and like language, or the faculty of laughter, or the use of tools, the dressing of hair in itself constitutes a mark of the human.¹

Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement.²

Hair is relevant to every human being; we grow it, cut it, style it and depilate, and sometimes it fails to grow at all. Yet even as we manipulate and exert our preferences on it, hair maintains a complex and enigmatic function in our lives. Acting as a marker of identity, it has remained paramount throughout history in cultures across the world, and as Marina Warner says in *From The Beast To The Blonde* (1995), it is one of the “richest resources” of the self.

Part of hair’s abundant reserves of meaning includes its ability to thwart our desires to conform to what we perceive as conventional standards of beauty. Yet, hair can also be considered a liminal and abject part of the body, with the potential to destabilise identity. Such is the complexity of associations to hair that a mind map centred on this topic might throw up an intuitive tangle of connections reminiscent of the neural and circulatory systems of the body.

Mirroring this, literature on hair has been equally diverse and complex, revealing many different cultural and gender issues as it touches on disciplines as far-ranging as the numerous scientific fields of medicine through anthropology and history to sociology and the arts. As part of our changing fascination with hair it is not surprising that it has become a productive site of meaning in visual representation, and themes around hair and hair imagery have become increasingly popular in contemporary

¹ Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers*, (London: Vintage, 1995), p. 371.

² Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa”, trans. by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs*, 1, 4, (Summer 1976), 875-93 (p. 875).

art. As a result of the diverse and contradictory nature of hair, many of the ideas produced by artists working with either actual hair, or associated material or imagery, defies simple understanding. This further underlines the complications, intricacies and nuances inherent in the topic and its metonyms.

This book explores what it is about hair that suggests itself as such a productive site of meaning, and why it is particularly prevalent in the practices of artists who are women. The artists discussed here include Annegret Soltau (1946-), Alice Maher (1956-), Kathy Prendergast (1958-), Chrystl Rijkeboer (1959-) and Ellen Gallagher (1965-). Their artistic careers all began within a twenty-year period in the latter part of the twentieth century. Soltau lives and works in Germany, Maher and Prendergast are Irish, the former works in Ireland and the latter in England, Rijkeboer lives and works in The Netherlands, and Gallagher who is half Irish lives and works between New York and Rotterdam. These artists, based around their diversity of use and strategies with hair and the body, also have a shared European cultural connection. Irish connections to Maher, Prendergast and Gallagher signal some post-colonial issues, and both Rijkeboer and Soltau explore the impact that events such as the Holocaust and Chernobyl can have on the embodied being through various themes, including trauma and wounding.

That these artists are women is of considerable significance to me as a woman writing, although I do not suggest that these artists can either be taken as paradigms of all women who make art, or that their work is only of significance to women. I chose this combination of artists because their work has not been explored specifically in relation to either hair or the serial, and this book attempts to find new possibilities in their work. My concern is with exploring what happens when specific female artists locate their work in and through the body, and in this instance, by framing hair through serial strategies.³ When the two engage, that is artist and body, questions arise as to what new meanings and connections can be made between them, both conceptually and aesthetically. Arising from this, the significance and potential of the spaces and means of framing hair are called into inquiry, and also, where possible new meanings might occur or reside. To this end, close analysis of the artworks assists in understanding how such potential meanings might be evoked or suggested.

Crucial to this book has been an approach that rejects predetermined interpretations and definitions including fixities such as the dualism of

³ Mel Bochner, "The Serial Attitude", *Artforum*, 6, 4, (December 1967), pp. 28-33, also reproduced in Mel Bochner, *Solar Systems and Rest Rooms: Writings and Interviews 1965-2007*, (Camb. Mass.: MIT Press, 2008), pp. 42-7.

gender, giving preference instead to fluid notions and possibilities, and by treating meaning as a process rather than a result. In this respect my approach has been informed by the writing of Marsha Meskimmon, among others, including her *Women Making Art: History, Subjectivity, Aesthetics* (2003), and *Contemporary Art and the Cosmopolitan Imagination* (2011). Meskimmon sustains an approach in which she positions herself as a partner in a dialogue with women who make art rather than a privileged interpreter of art works. By reconceiving her methodology (in Deleuzian terms) through actions and process, her observations enable different articulations of female subjectivity.⁴

Although my chosen artists have exhibited in an international arena, it might be argued that their art retains a freshness from not being over-visited by historians or critics, and provides a greater potential for the researcher. Soltau, Maher, Prendergast and Rijkeboer have used actual hair in their art while Gallagher has worked with printed images of hair. Just as the practices of these artists can be seen to evolve over time, so can the ways they use or evoke hair. While Rijkeboer continues to combine it with other materials in her work, Soltau, Maher, Prendergast and Gallagher increasingly sustain its presence through metaphor and metonym.

It became apparent at the outset of my research that there are many more artists who use hair in their art practice than would be possible to include in this book, or indeed in any but a cursory survey. North American artists include Diane Jacobs, Victoria May, Kerry Vander Meer, Karin Stack, Kate Gilbert Miller, (all dates unknown), Anne Wilson (b. 1949), and Paula Santiago (b. 1969), Doris Salcedo (b. 1958 Columbia), and Cuban artist Ana Mendieta (1948-85). Wilson, Mendieta and Salcedo have been represented in critical terms perhaps more than others.

In the United Kingdom and Ireland, less well-known artists including Nicola Donovan, Pearl Heneghan, Susie MacMurray and Nicole Mollet, (all dates unknown), Alice Anderson (b.1976), Emily Bates (b.1970), and Jemima Brown (b.1971) the more prominent Chapman brothers, Jake and Dinos (b. 1966 and 1962), among others, and Marlene Haring (b.1978 Austria, working in London), also either reference hair or use it as a material in their practice. Other internationally acclaimed artists including Ron Mueck (b.1958 Australia, working in England), Mona Hatoum (b.1952 Lebanon, working in England), Kiki Smith (b.1954 Germany, lives in US), and Vanessa Beecroft (b. 1969 Italy, works in US), as well as the German artist Birgit Dieker (b. 1969), Wenda Gu (b.1955 China),

⁴ Marsha Meskimmon, *Women Making Art: History, Subjectivity, Aesthetics*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 2-4.

Francis Alÿs (b.1959 Belgium), and Chiharu Shiota (b.1972 Japan), have also produced bodies of work that could have been included in this book.

It is plain from this list that many of the artists working with hair are women, and my interest in issues of gender and women's art has helped formulate my choice of artists. These particular artists employ a variety of ways of presenting their work with hair and metaphors of hair, including drawing, painting, and sculpture, further emphasizing the diversity of the topic. However a recurring genre in their work is installation art, which warrants a short explanation.

The tactile nature of hair and its relationship to the body arguably lends itself to more sculptural forms and installational configurations than it does to two-dimensionality. Because hair is a component of the physical body, it demonstrates the concept of embodiment through its manifestation as (part of) the body, and, by its symbolic and paradigmatic qualities. Kristine Stiles describes installation (together with video and performance) as art forms that differ from sculpture or painting in that these media produce what she describes as "living art" that can more fully interact with social practices, environments and technologies.⁵ Claire Bishop similarly describes installation as a "decentred" aesthetic experience, one in which the viewing space is "a living area".⁶ For both Bishop and Stiles the descriptor "living" is the predominant concern of installation, suggesting the active communication of social questions and considerations through the body or references to the body.

The term installation can be used to explain both "a work of installation art" in which the various elements of a piece are unified into a single totality, and the installation of works of art within either specific or mutable environments that may be termed "an installation". In the first meaning the installation has a physical presence within the same space as the audience and as such immediately encourages a whole body experience rather than the visual, more centred viewing of the spectator in front of a painting or sculpture. Bishop suggests that although installation art offers different types of audience participation, all are based on the premise of the sensations experienced by the embodied viewer within the installation or work of art that serves to activate the role of the spectator. *After the Dream* (2009), by Chiharu Shiota, from the exhibition titled

⁵ Kristine Stiles, "Eye/Oculus: Performance, Installation, Video", in *Themes in Contemporary Art*, ed. by Gill Perry and Paul Wood, (Newhaven and London: Yale University Press in Association with The Open University, 2004), pp. 183-229 (p. 185).

⁶ Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 11, 81.

Walking In My Mind held at the Hayward Gallery, London (June-September 2009), might be seen as an installation that demands such interaction; black threads surrounded and touched the audience as they moved through the work.

Movement of the embodied audience arguably becomes a haptic experience in which stimulation of the senses of both touch and vision occur. But even in relation to the non-installational artwork this argument is also useful in locating it as more than a solely visual object, because meaning is repeatedly enabled by the corporeal subject viewing it.⁷ Throughout this book I endeavour to show how meaning can shift and flow in the embodied experiences of an activated spectatorship. Many of the art works explored are either installations or take on the qualities of installation, in that they evoke both conceptual and sensual experiences in site-specific environments.

During this examination of the artists' negotiations with hair in relation to historical and social perceptions, common areas of interest emerge as recurrent themes in relation to both hair and the artworks. One concern is the artists' strategies and negotiations with notions of seriality, as well as the serial qualities of hair itself. I have deliberately chosen to pursue both these aspects of the serial in each chapter in preference to the numerous other possibilities of addressing hair that emerged from the research as recurring aspects in the work, such as biography, memory, the significance of the head, loss, and trauma. Although secondary to this examination of hair in the work of these artists, my investigation of the serial demonstrates an approach that goes beyond that of Mel Bochner and Briony Fer, on whose theorisations of seriality this book draws, as well as that of H el ene Cixous' philosophical enquires into writing the body in endless ways that unsettle hierarchical structures.

One concept of the serial can be found in the repeated use of, for instance, an object, image or material; versions on a theme. In his essay "The Serial Attitude" (1967), Mel Bochner described what he saw then as the differences between serial use, including working in series, and seriality as a method of working.⁸ He argued that the former could be seen as a stylistic phenomenon, and the latter as an attitude, and it is this second notion of seriality that I am concerned with in this book. Briony Fer more recently explored this latter point about a serial attitude, which she suggested arose in the aftermath of modernism, through a notion of the serial connected to difference and repetition, and which she argues enables

⁷ Meskimmon, (2003), p. 5.

⁸ Bochner, (2008), p. 42.

new ways of producing and thinking about art. Her theorizations in *The Infinite Line: Remaking Art After Modernism* (2004) explore how seriality can be seen as generative of meaning as well as appealing to disconnections and disintegrations.⁹ Both Fer and Bochner's arguments are discernible throughout this book, for example, in Chapter Four, where repetition of the photographic image, and a persistent diversity of line, including hair and threads, can be seen to enable aspects of disintegration and generation in Annegret Soltau's work.

Seriality, together with gender issues, identity and the body—specifically the significance of the head—and memory as a marker of biography, are key themes throughout the book. The work of each of the five artists is also positioned where relevant within an extended aesthetic or visual cultural field to further develop increasingly prominent concerns with hair within the discipline of art history. A growing corpus of theoretical writing on hair in cultural theory, psychoanalysis, history and anthropology has inflected art historical discourses, and which in turn has variously informed this book.

Why Hair?

My interest in hair and art practice arose out of earlier research into how artists Alice Maher and Ana Mendieta might be seen to reframe femininity, and which briefly touched on notions of veiling in relation to hair.¹⁰ I suggested then that acts of veiling may enable destabilisation of identity by blurring the boundaries between absence and presence, and that hair might provide a rich subject matter for further study in relation to identity. That previous study drew on Derrida's concept of *différance* to examine those notions of absence and presence, whereas my intention here is for a more Deleuzian approach.

Hair has the ability to nurture fruitful and diverse paradigms for transference. Not only is it constitutive of the languages of culture, including myth, beauty and femininity, it is also a powerful medium through which metaphors can be inflected and sustained. In combination with its historiography, the medium of hair and its simulacra in art practice will be shown to have the potential to challenge and subvert conceptions of feminine identity and some of the bastions of traditional painting and

⁹ Briony Fer, *The Infinite Line: Remaking Art after Modernism*, (New York and London: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 4.

¹⁰ Heather Hanna, "Re-framing Femininity: *Informe*, Abjection and *Différance* in the Work of Ana Mendieta and Alice Maher", (unpublished master's book, The Open University, September 2007).

sculpture. For example, and as I more fully discuss in Chapter Three, Alice Maher's diverse treatment of hair in *Folt* (1993) can be seen to both appeal to, and destabilize cultural perceptions of feminine styling, while her strategy of combining a non-traditional sculptural material (a quantity of actual hair) with drawings, challenges art historical traditions.

The body, as a site of living meaning, can indicate a contested subject in flux.¹¹ That is to say, not only is the body a physical object within the world, but it is also a sentient and embodied location from where we communicate with, and constantly adjust to and influence, our environment; in other words, it is the locus of our ever changing physical and psychical identity. As an extension to the body, hair is its most visible sign, and so of considerable significance to notions of identity. Hair's characteristics, functions and associated meanings can also suggest somatic connections as it evokes nature and the organic. Moreover, its versatility enables its centrality within some socio-cultural discourses, through which it can play a pivotal role in suggesting a plurality of meanings and imagery within the domain of the body. Hair can be suggestive of the gendered body's desire for "orientating the wearer in his or her community and history."¹² Even as it is braided, coiled, coloured, extended or removed, each action or process seems to evoke associated stereotyping. The plaits of the "innocent" girl, or the implied power directed onto the shaved head stimulate issues of beauty and shame, and racial and cultural differences. As a metonym for the "whole person" hair that is coloured can suggest and deny intellectual capabilities, something often discussed in discourses of bloneness.¹³

It has also been argued that the more subversive hair is of societal norms, the greater its potential evocation of the liminality of the body's boundaries. According to Julia Kristeva, its positioning as a liminal paring of the body, as well as its excess and, conversely, its lack, "disturbs

¹¹ See Amelia Jones's reading of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith, (New York: Routledge, 1962), in "Body" in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. by Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 251-66 (pp. 260-1).

¹² Marina Warner, "Fur and Fleece: The Language of Hair", in *Haare-Obsession und Kunst*, exh. cat. ed. by Roger Fayet, (Zurich: Museum Bellerive, 2000) pp. 9-20 (p. 10).

¹³ Molly Myerowitz-Levine "The Gendered Grammar of Ancient Mediterranean Hair", in *Off With Her Head! The Denial of Women's Identity in Myth, Religion and Culture*, ed. by Howard Eilberg-Schwarz, and Wendy Doniger, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 76-130 (p. 85).

identity, system, order.”¹⁴ This transitional state aligns hair with other body detritus and fluids echoing the notion of the abject body. The following chapters engage with Kristeva’s assertion that whilst hair is included among the rejected and abhorrent evidence of the body’s excess, its liminality may also facilitate the body’s desire to interface with the world.

Hair and Art Histories

The inescapable dialectic of hair specifically associated with the female, can be traced throughout history in its symbolism and portrayals of rituals and adornment. Fifteenth-century European artists such as German sculptor Tilman Riemenschneider (1460-1531) and Italian painter Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510) are among the many who have made use of the symbolism of hair. Riemenschneider’s *Saint Mary Magdalen* (1490-2) visually depicts the saint repenting her immodesty by growing her hair, while Botticelli’s *The Birth of Venus* (1482-86) can be seen to employ hair as a metaphor of virginal purity and beauty. From at least the sixteenth-century onwards, “Western” thinking broadly speaking has associated hairiness with virility in men, but wantonness in women.¹⁵

Blondeness as a symbol for virtue and innocence has been evoked repeatedly in visual and written portrayals of Goldilocks and Cinderella, while Rapunzel and Melisande have often been characterized through their tresses of flowing hair. But as Wendy Cooper argues, there are conflicting aspects of hair symbolism where loose uncut hair has also been seen as a metaphor for promiscuity.¹⁶ In literary depictions of the German folklore character Lorelei, for example, German composer Clemens von Brentano (1778-1842) was reputedly inspired by a journey he made along the Rhine in about 1801 to write a ballad about a beautiful sorceress who he named after the rocky outcrop Lore Lay. As a myth grew around the story, she later became known as the mermaid who combed her long hair while she sang, supposedly luring Rhine boatmen to their death on the rocks below her.

Such discussions of eighteenth-century visual representations of hair can provide a bridge to contemporary depictions and use of hair. Louisa Cross’s study of William Hogarth’s engraving *The Five Orders of Periwig*

¹⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 4.

¹⁵ Here “Western” refers to the histories and perceptions of social and ethical norms and traditions, as relating to white, mainly European thinking.

¹⁶ Wendy Cooper, *Hair: Sex Society Symbolism*, (London: Aldus, 1971), p. 67.

(1761), for instance, and the fashionable spectacle of hair in the eighteenth-century, highlights both the historical importance of the wig, and also the subordination of feminine styles to those of their male counterparts.¹⁷ Hair, as depicted in contemporary prints and paintings of the late eighteenth-century Britain, increased in its volume and eccentricity for both men and women. Wigs such as those Hogarth portrayed in the 1760s were associated with masculinity and public life, and varied as to the wearer's profession or leisure state. Women also followed fashionable styles (including wigs and hair pieces) but conversely were often expected to wear their own hair and appear "natural".¹⁸ Men might be disparaged for wearing an inappropriate wig in terms of their social position, but women were chastised for their vanity and short-sightedness.¹⁹ Amelia Rauser argues that British caricaturist Matthew Darly (1720-78), for instance, criticised the role of "unnatural" wigs as vehicles to promote deception (of the female face and body) by obscuring age and ugliness.²⁰ Generally, similar concerns do not however, appear to have been raised in relation to men. In these discourses men's hairstyles can be seen as part of masculinity's unrestricted public role, whereas femininity was constrained by associations with the body to the private and the personal. Disparities in commentaries at that time on the wearing of wigs by men compared to those worn by women thus highlights gender as a site of inequality in eighteenth-century trends. Through wigs, introduced by Charles II to the English court, hair's long and ambivalent associations with sexuality further emphasised the importance of the head as a visual metonym for identity in cartoons, painted portraits, prints and other forms of visual culture. Marcia Pointon has usefully explored connections between hairstyles and wigs and the symbolism of body posture including the position of the head, which extended even to the placing and hanging of portraits.²¹ The significance of gendered distinctions and the importance of

¹⁷ Louisa Cross, "Fashionable Hair in the Eighteenth Century: Theatricality and Display", in *Hair: Styling, Culture and Fashion*, ed. by Geraldine Biddle-Perry and Sarah Cheang, (Oxford: Berg, 2008), pp. 15- 26.

¹⁸ Amelia Rauser, "Sex and Sensibility: Hair in the Macaroni Caricatures of the 1770s", in Penny Howell Jolly, ed. *Hair: Untangling a Social History* (Skidmore College: Tang Museum and Art Gallery, 2004), pp. 29-37 (p. 31).

¹⁹ Rauser, in Jolly, (2004), p. 31. See also Amelia Rauser, "Hair, Authenticity and the Self-Made Macaroni", *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 38, 1, (Fall, 2004), 101-117.

²⁰ Rauser in Jolly (2004), p. 31. Cross in Biddle-Perry and Cheang, (2008), p. 18.

²¹ Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth Century England*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 13-52.

the head in artistic practices are concerns raised throughout this book. In Chapter Two, for example, I discuss Chrystl Rijkeboer's consideration of the dichotomies of male/female through the ways she uses hair and the head as an indicator of identity that allows exploration as well as subversion of dualistic aspects of gender.

Drawing on these historical associations, *Wig/Cunt* (1990) by American artist and lecturer Millie Wilson (b.1948), can be seen as a direct critique of Hogarth's *The Five Orders of Periwig*.²² Her ironic appropriation of male images of vanity and power invites reflections on the relative status of the female body. Wilson's juxtaposition can be seen to signal connections between Hogarth's caricaturing of masculinity (in the preposterous wigs), and the patriarchal reduction of women to what has been called one of the most offensive words in the English language.²³

I suggest that Wilson's borrowing from Hogarth enables differences to be shown between masculine discourses of demonstrating individuality through artifice and appendage, and feminine dialogues of, and through, the body alone.²⁴ In her playful visual parallel she can also be seen to raise more serious questions about the stability of identity as a complex and often contentious issue. At the time of Wilson's *Wig/Cunt*, numerous artists had already used the body as a living canvas, including Austrian artist Valie Export (b. 1940). Export used her breasts and pubic area as symbols of female sexuality, engaging with socio-cultural media exploitation of the female body. Her performance *Genitalpanik*, (1969), reveals not the actual flesh of her genital parts, but a possibility, or secret place veiled by pubic hair. What emerges from photographic records of

²² http://www.learn.columbia.edu/courses/fa/images/medium/kc_femart_wilson_107.jpg

²³ *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. by Amelia Jones, (London and New York, 2003), p. 387.

²⁴ Conversely, Wilson could also be argued as essentializing "woman" as a site of artifice. Several artists including Ana Mendieta have been accused of essentializing the female body; Mendieta through her close references to "Mother" earth. Because essentialism as a concept is reliant on inherent and stable characteristics of people or phenomena, the gendered implications for women are that man, through patriarchal law from as far back as the Greek philosophers, essentially subjugates them. British philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) distinguishes between a real and a nominal essence, the former implies unchanging meaning while the nominal is associated and generated through language. Uzgalis, William, "John Locke", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2010 Edition), ed. by Edward N. Zalta,

<<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2010/entries/locke/>> [accessed 18 June 2011]

her performance is that she controls what she chooses to parade of her body/genitalia to the viewing audience in a cinema. A few years earlier than Export, Japanese artist Shigeko Kubota (b.1937), raised similar issues in *Vagina Painting* (1965), by attaching a brush to her crotch, simultaneously questioning the primacy of the male artist and his media whilst reframing the status and categories of art.²⁵ American Carolee Schneemann (b.1939) later challenged representations of female sexuality, female subjectivity and genitalia in *Interior Scroll*, (first performed 29 August 1975).²⁶ Her performance can be seen to raise issues of the female body as a site of mystery or privacy by bringing female sexuality and genitalia into the public domain. Amongst various issues with which Schneemann was reputedly concerned was that of exploring the female body as a material site for creative energy, as well as its potential for the locus and subject of the work.²⁷ I suggest that the legacy of this point still remains relevant to contemporary explorations of the female body, including those of my chosen artists.

By the 1970s, feminism had made its influence felt in art practices and aesthetic dialogues to the extent that corporeality of the body had become increasingly visible, although sometimes with associated “accusations” of “essentialism”.²⁸ Identifying women with an “essentialist” politics of the body has been challenged as reducing the female to the biological specificity of her body. However, as Janet Wolff says: “Biology is always overlaid and mediated by culture, and the ways in which women experience their bodies is largely a product of social and political processes.”²⁹ Although essentialism might be defined etymologically, I suggest this does not take into account its cultural and historical contexts; it is subject to the discursive practices in which it exists, and as such can

²⁵ Gill Perry, “The Expanding Field: Ana Mendieta’s *Siluetas* series”, in *Frameworks for Modern Art*, ed. by Jason Gaiger, (London and New York: Yale University Press in Association with The Open University, 2003) pp. 152-205.

²⁶ Jenni Sorkin, “Carolee Schneemann”, in *WACK!: Art and the Feminist Revolution*, exh. cat. ed. by Lisa Gabrielle Mark, (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 2007), pp. 295-6.

²⁷ Elizabeth Manchester, (November 2003), *Interior Scroll 1975*
 <<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=76319&tabview=text>>
 [accessed 22 July 2011]

²⁸ Marsha Meskimmon, “Chronology Through Cartography: Mapping 1970s Feminist Art Globally”, in Mark, (2007), pp. 322-335, or *Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art*, ed. by Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin, (London and New York: Merrell, 2007).

²⁹ Janet Wolff, “Reinstating Corporeality: Feminism and Body Politics”, in Jones, (2003), pp. 414-26 (pp. 420-2).

be seen as an active process. Notions of “woman” have been posited as a generic opposite, or other, to how the male perceives women as having certain inherent and distinctive qualities that are stable and “natural”. In this ideology dominant (male-based) cultural and historical attitudes and values are naturalised so that they appear as normative representations of women, and through them, particular understandings of women come into being and are reinforced. Thus ideology and representation are inextricably connected, the one unable to function without the other; both are constructed of signs or perceptual codes that are active participants in the construction of realities. Without ideologies that we can recognise or challenge, some of the meaning of images, as representations of particular ideologies, might be lost or inaccessible. Informed by Lisa Tickner here I suggest that the material circumstances of an art work may provide an image, but the power relations of ideologies are structured in ways so that the image can become more than the material; in other words it can become a representation.³⁰

The women in this book belong to a generation of artists who, “came of age in the late 1980s and forever changed the muscular practice of sculpture with their new interest in nature and a penchant for painstaking craftsmanship, domestic references and psychological metaphor.”³¹ Where artists in the 1960s and 1970s made visible the female body as never before, this appears to have initiated an escalating occurrence and use of the body, and hair in subsequent art practices and their histories. The work of my chosen artists coincides with a period of feminism often concerned with addressing so-called poststructuralist issues. Such considerations generally include the exploration of relationships between the structuring principles of a given thing with its margins. As I will discuss, these liminal locations are not seen as dualistic sites of exclusion but significant for their own relevance, as differences, variations and places of transformation. Philosophers Gilles Deleuze (1925-95) and Félix Guattari (1930-92) inform my understanding of this when they contend that the self is a liminal location; “a threshold, a door, a becoming between two

³⁰ Lisa Tickner, “Sexuality and/in Representation: Five British Artists”, in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Donald Preziosi, Oxford: Oxford University Press, (1998), pp. 356-69 (p. 357).

³¹ Susan Krane, “Petah Coyne: Above and Beneath the Skin”, (Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, 2006), <<http://www.smoca.org/exhibit.php?id=121>> [accessed 8 May 2009]

multiplicities.”³² They also suggest that, neither subject nor object, multiplicities establish rhizomatic connections; lines of flight, connections and discontinuities.³³ Their reasoning is underpinned by an anti-dialectical way of thinking. For Deleuze in particular, difference and becoming are critical to his corpus. He argues in *Difference and Repetition* (1994) for difference as being grounded in itself, rather than in resemblance or opposition to identity. That is to say, rather than difference being understood as a re-presentation of a particular set of circumstances, for instance, a historical event that is portrayed in different ways in several films or works of literature, Deleuze examines energies around difference that are fundamental to the creation of the event. He says at one point in his discussion:

“In every case repetition is difference without a concept. But in one case, the difference is taken to be only external to the concept; it is difference between objects represented by the same concept...In the other case, the difference is internal to the Idea, it unfolds as pure movement, creative of a dynamic space and time which correspond to the idea.”³⁴

Deleuze theorises “becoming” as the continual movement of unique events of difference between systems and structures and which informs some of my explorations of the work of my chosen artists in discourses that include among others art, science, geography, and technology. He grounds his dense and sometimes contentious ideas in a concept of repetition that refuses stasis. Seriality as a manifestation of repetition in, for example, an art work or piece of music, can be seen as being based in difference, albeit difference in itself, not one that relies on dissimilarity from something other, although of course that aspect may be visible/audible too.

This book does not suggest that the artists discussed have been directly informed by specific feminist or poststructuralist theories, but rather it should be stated at the outset that some of these issues can be seen to have impacted on, or indirectly inspired, the art works and some of their critics

³² Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi, (London and New York: Continuum, 2004b), p. 275.

³³ Deleuze and Guattari, (2004b), pp. 8-9, 13.

³⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), trans. by Paul Patton, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994a), pp. 23-4.

to a greater or lesser extent, albeit among other factors. They have also informed this interpretation of their work.

For my part, I approach feminist issues in this book through concerns about identity and the female body, and specifically in relation to hair. As Warner says; “Meanings of all kinds flow through the figures of women, and they often do not include who she herself is.”³⁵ In Chapter Five, for instance, I discuss how Kathy Prendergast’s work can be seen to explore ideas of female identity as a transient site of meaning in relation to issues of landscape or mapping, although not one that excludes other possible meanings. Joanna Frueh’s inclusive approach to feminism, where visible differences associated with ageing seek to relocate the female body as vital and dynamic rather than repulsive, has also informed my approach to the diverse ways of interpreting the female body and identity.³⁶ Frueh seeks to redress the stereotypes that have been attached to the old/er woman, such as witch or hag that may have arisen in response to perceptions of changed or deteriorating physical flesh. I argue in Chapters Four and Six that Annegret Soltau and Ellen Gallagher respectively, show how radicalized images of the female body can expose preconceptions of the feminine, even though as in some of Soltau’s work, it led to censorship.

I suggest also that Griselda Pollock’s discussion about framing feminism in the late 1980s still resonates in the twenty-first century. She has said:

“The real excitement of feminist theory and the cultural analyses it currently draws upon is the debunking of mystifying ideas about creativity, the artist, art. Instead we work (artists and historians alike) with a recognition of skills, insights, sensibilities.”³⁷

This idea of challenging notions of the primacy of the (usually male) artist as genius is an aspect with which I engage, whether through the artists’ stated intentions, or through their material practices, and specifically in Chapter Three where Alice Maher’s work raises such questions.

³⁵ Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985), p. 331.

³⁶ Joanna Frueh, “Visible Difference: Women Artists and Ageing”, in *New Feminist Criticism: Art, Identity, Action*, ed. by Joanna Frueh, Cassandra L. Langer, and Arlene Raven, (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), pp. 264-288.

³⁷ Griselda Pollock, “Framing Feminism”, in *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology 1968-2000*, ed. by Hilary Robinson, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 207-12 (p. 209).

A later or “second” wave of feminism enabled a more playful, although no less serious articulation of the body. Drawing on mass culture as a site of mediation in her work, Ellen Gallagher, for instance, cannibalizes fashion and beauty magazines to critique the artificiality of wigs through the medium of Plasticine. I suggest that her playful use of this through its direct referent to childhood creativity, comments on assumptions about the materials of “high art” (as Kubota can be seen to in the mid-1960s) as well as the contrived and the artificial, within discourses of racial and gendered significance.³⁸ Maher, on the other hand, explores connections between femininity and some of the possible spaces of play through her uses of hair and the girl-child.

It has become apparent during research for this book that hair can sustain notions of seriality, both as a serial material and also through its place in popular trends and fashions of hairstyles. When Andy Warhol (1928-97) created his *Marilyn* prints and paintings in the 1960s, he can be seen to demonstrate through his use of serial images of the film star Marilyn Monroe (1926-62), conventions of mass production including repetition, systematic processes and modular or grid principles. In these works the idea of an original “Marilyn” is constantly deferred through repetition, whilst simultaneously suggesting the consumption and commodification of a particular woman, image and hairstyle. Thus the embodied subject appears to be manufactured, something emphasised in Warhol’s use of non-representational colour of the head, face and hair. Mel Bochner describes the “unnaturalness” of serial art as; “heightened artificiality due to the clearly visible and simply ordered structure.”³⁹ The multiplicitous nature of hair and its importance as a marker of identity enable the artist to align repetition with the aesthetic.⁴⁰ Any dispassion that is sometimes associated with repetitive processes is negated by allusions to the personal in the hair, for instance, as I will demonstrate in my examination of Soltau’s photographic images in Chapter Four. I show that in art practice seriality can offer the possibility of deferral of the work through revisions, as well as development of narratives through the mechanical or laborious repetition of process. When hair and serial processes combine (in an artwork or action), the limits and frameworks within which the work are sited are in complex relationships with the

³⁸ See Jo Anna Isaak, *Feminism and Contemporary Art: The Revolutionary Power of Women’s Laughter*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

³⁹ Bochner, (2008), p. 40.

⁴⁰ Meskimmon, (2003), pp. 131-3 for useful insights into aesthetics in connection with female subjectivity

potential of hair for repetition and revision. As suggested by Fer, “dispassion” may be related to the “personal” in an intriguing way:

“Far from objective or neutral, seriality is related to something like an excess of selfhood, not in the sense of the individual subject of course, but a pathological sense of a subject who has lost their bearings to an outside.”⁴¹

The following chapters probe the usefulness of this idea of “excess of selfhood” that Fer describes, by focussing on the concentrated obsessions, and responses to hair and femininity in the work of these particular artists.

Hair: It’s Historiography

Because hair touches so many disciplines from the more scientific fields of medicine, psychoanalysis, psychology, physiology, health and beauty, to those of anthropology, history, sociology and art, literature on hair is disparate. Its diverse and multi-disciplinary nature defies effective categorization, and consequently overlaps several categories, underlining the contestations, intricacies and nuances inherent in the topic. In order to manage it more easily I have grouped its historiography in four main areas: history, myth and folklore; anthropological; the beauty industry; and lastly within art history.⁴²

Historical, Mythical and Folkloric Uses of Hair

Encyclopaedic literature mainly discusses hair in broad terms, and is valuable for its general overview of the subject. Texts include *Fashions in Hair: The First Five Thousand Years* (1965) by Richard Corson, Robin Bryer’s *The History of Hair: Fashion and Fantasy Down the Ages* (2000), and *Encyclopedia of Hair* (2006) by Victoria Sherrow. Wendy Cooper’s *Hair: Sex, Society, Symbolism* (1971), discusses biological, social and symbolic aspects of hair, and from folk cures of hair sandwiches to the fetishistic collection of pubic hair. Her suggestion that the biological mapping of hair on our bodies invests it with sexual significance is a relevant point in relation to Chapter Five where I examine Kathy Prendergast’s metaphorical suggestions of hair in her mapping of the

⁴¹ Briony Fer, “Hanne Darboven: Seriality and the Time of Solitude”, in *Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth, and Practice*, ed. by Michael Corris, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 223-34 (p. 224).

⁴² Texts mentioned are listed in the Bibliography.

female body.⁴³ Although Cooper speaks generally, her wide-ranging scope and literary enthusiasm for the topic provides evidence of a broader popular interest in hair and the body in the early 1970s; an interest that was subsequently appropriated and inflected by various feminist approaches.

In comparison with Cooper, who pays some brief attention to hair and fairytales, Marina Warner writing in the 1990s, examines in detail the cultural and historical facets of hair in fairytales, myth and art. Warner's text *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (1995), arguably dominates this genre of literature, and is also informed by aspects of feminism. She discusses the language of hair through a plenitude of symbolic gendered meanings, including hairiness, bears, beards, bloneness, cropping, hairstyles, rituals and traditions. Her examinations of hair span a historical timeline including Virgil's *Aeneid*, biblical narratives, lives of the Saints, Perrault's eighteenth-century retelling of "Donkeyskin", the many fairytales of the Grimm brothers, Freud, and contemporary culture. Painting, sculpture, prints, illustrative art, film and advertisements all command her scholarly attention as she examines hair in relation to sexual attraction, the beast within, and the traditions of the fairytale. In cultural terms Warner's interests and discussions of hair in general offer a depth of specialist knowledge that is a constant well from which to draw information and stimulation. Her treatment of the languages of the imagination that is vital to storytelling, and discussions of the role of women in promulgating, for instance, the ethics of fairytales and myths, and familial and gendered relationships, have been particularly relevant.⁴⁴ Issues of hairiness and bloneness have also informed my own approach and explorations of the work of Chrystl Rijkeboer and Alice Maher.

Anthropological Literature

Anthropological literature on hair from the 1950s, specifically *The Unconscious Significance of Hair* (1951), by Charles Berg, and those who have since drawn on his writing, in particular, Howard Eilberg-Schwarz and Wendy Doniger's *Off With Her Head!: The Denial of Women's Identity in Myth, Religion, and Culture* (1995), Trevor Millum's article "Long Hair: Taboo in England" (1970), and Anthony Synnott's "Shame and Glory: a Sociology of Hair" (1987), all exploit a more psychoanalytical

⁴³ Cooper, (1971), p. 7.

⁴⁴ Warner, (1995), pp. xvi, xix, 12-26.

approach. Berg treats hair as a site of unconscious conflict, rooted in castration anxiety, arguing that men go through a daily private ritual of “castration” of the face by shaving in order to be “clean and free from anal guilt.”⁴⁵ He suggests that although women may be more anxious about their hair, paradoxically they are more defiant about it since they tidy it in public. Either way, his discussions of hair, with close Freudian references, reduce it to a fetish based on strictly dualistic notions of gender, this latter aspect being antithetical to my approach. Synnott’s discussion of hair, as a dialectical site of symbolism that favours norms, sees differences as variations from a standard, which he concludes can be explained in three polar oppositions: “gender (male-female), ideology (centre-deviant) and physique (head-body).”⁴⁶ Although a clearly worked argument, Synnott’s dualistic approach also runs counter to my anti-hierarchical position.

Eilberg-Schwarz and Doniger focus on the female head as a site of socio-cultural meanings. The various gendered themes of these essays draw on the anthropological at the expense of the aesthetic and visual. Molly Myerowitz Levine’s chapter “The Gendered Grammar of Ancient Mediterranean Hair” constructively separates the operation of hair into the metonymic and metaphoric. Her discussion of the metonymic power of hair in the life/death narrative as it signifies the whole person, and her argument that hair may be regarded as interchangeable with genitalia, (taking Berg’s fetishistic claims for hair in a different direction), offers stimulating ideas. Myerowitz-Levine’s approach to the gendered grammar of hair proffers, amongst many other points, valuable insights into wig shops in B’nai-Brak, Israel.

Ayana Byrd and Lori L. Tharps’s chronological examination of black hair, *Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America* (2001) traces its changing state from fifteenth century Africa to present day America. Their documentation of these cultural histories provides key information for Chapter Six which explores Ellen Gallagher’s treatment of black hair.

Analysing the Beauty Industry

Historiographies of hair within the beauty industry highlight a dilemma between hair and what is perceived as beauty (by the Western world and possibly further, regardless of age, sex or gender). On the one hand, in the

⁴⁵ Charles Berg, *The Unconscious Significance of Hair*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1951), p. 41.

⁴⁶ Anthony Synnott, “Shame and Glory: a Sociology of Hair”, *The British Journal of Sociology*, 38, 3, (1987), 381-413 (p. 410).

attainment of “beauty” (a concept widely regarded as governed by patriarchal discourses of power), women in particular have historically succumbed to hairstyling and treatments to achieve specific desired goals. These may include an adjudged increase in femininity, bloneness, long tresses of hair, chemical treatments, straightening, and so on. However, for some women yielding to social expectations raises the dual issues of loss of corporeal subjectivity and reliance on debatable products and treatments, so that attainment to notions of beauty may be seen to a certain extent as taboo and demeaning. *Hair Matters: Beauty, Power and Black Women’s Consciousness* (2000) by Ingrid Banks, teases out many of these issues in her ethnography of the everyday life and practice of African American women and hair.⁴⁷ Her interviewees provide useful insights into bloneness in relation to blackness, and black hair as a site of empowerment. In some ways Banks’ approach and the questions she asks of her participants, such as, “Is hair associated with power in any way?” and “Do African women have a choice or voice?” are shaped by her own race and gender.⁴⁸ This connection between Banks and her interviewees and their insights, are useful in informing my examination of Gallagher’s work and her choice of black magazine images, albeit the latter are passive representations of black women rather than active embodied participants. Furthermore, Banks articulates that she could not occupy a neutral space in her project, something I have also borne in mind throughout this book.⁴⁹

Several of the texts I have already mentioned examine the topic of bloneness, including Cooper, Banks, Warner, and also Joanna Pitman in her book *On Blondes*, (2003). Laine Michelle Burton’s doctoral book “The Blonde Paradox: Power and Agency Through Feminine Masquerade and Carnival” (2006),⁵⁰ investigating the complex and contested myths of bloneness finds it to be an agency of power as well as a site of paradox. Burton draws on Joan Riviere’s essay “Womanliness as Masquerade” (1929), to investigate artist Vanessa Beecroft’s (b. 1969, Italy) use of blonde wigs in her performances.⁵¹ Her proposal that innocence and

⁴⁷ Ingrid Banks, *Hair Matters: Beauty, Power and Black Women’s Consciousness*, (New York: New York University Press, 2000), pp. 4-18.

⁴⁸ Banks, (2000), p. 19.

⁴⁹ Banks, (2000), p. 164.

⁵⁰ Laine Michelle Burton, “The Blonde Paradox: Power and Agency Through Feminine Masquerade and Carnival”, (unpublished doctoral book, Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, 2006).

⁵¹ Joan Riviere, “Womanliness as Masquerade”, in *Psychoanalysis and Female Sexuality*, ed. by Hendrik Marinus Ruitenbeek, (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1966), pp. 209-220.

vulnerability historically associated with bloneness can subvert and transgress feminine stereotyping, has been useful to my research generally, and specifically to my examinations of the work of Rijkeboer and Gallagher. Pamela Church Gibson also examines notions of bloneness in the popular culture surrounding footballers and their wives, in “Concerning Bloneness: Gender, Ethnicity, Spectacle and Footballer’s Wives”, in *Hair: Styling, Culture and Fashion*, (2008), edited by Geraldine Biddle-Perry and Sarah Cheang. Gibson concludes that where (naturally) blonde hair was once a symbol of racial purity, this Aryan fantasy has been appropriated by both black and white footballers through hair bleaching. Some high profile white footballers, including the English player David Beckham, have adopted black hair styling through plaited cornrows, raising several interesting points that again inform my explanation of Rijkeboer’s practices of mixing hair colours, and also aspects of Gallagher’s work where she draws attention to notions of hybridity of black and white hairstyles⁵²

The term hybridity arises from biological ideas of the crossing of two species in which characteristics of both species are combined in varying measures; humanity constantly recreating itself through this. As a metaphor in some post-colonial theories hybridity can refer to cultural and ethnic interactions and exchanges. However, as Michael Hatt and Charlotte Klonk warn, hybridity is not simply about unproblematic cultural exchange of coloniser and colonised.⁵³ Its adoption in post-colonial theory has shown it to be a disputed term of some complexity; Paul Gilroy, for instance, suggests a dilemma between “cultural nationalism” and the theorisation of concepts such as hybridity, which to the ethnic absolutists would be “unsatisfactory ways of naming the processes of cultural mutation.”⁵⁴ Exploring hybridity as a third space, Homi Bhabha draws on notions of translation and negotiation that comes into being when cultures and identities meet and blend, thereby challenging and displacing “our sense of the historical identity of culture

⁵² Biddle-Perry and Cheang, (2008), pp. 141-8.

⁵³ Michael Hatt and Charlotte Klonk, *Art History: A Critical Introduction to its Methods*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), pp. 230-2.

⁵⁴ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 2. See also Niru Ratnam, “Art and Globalisation”, in Perry and Wood (2004), pp. 276-313, (p. 209)