

FROM TEMPLE TO TRANSNATIONAL:

THE POLITICS OF HAIR AND ITS GLOBALISATION

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Chapter Two

Lifeless Living Locks: The Zombie-Commodity

In contemporary Western society the fantasy of autonomous selfhood appears to prevail.¹ According to Nick Mansfield, the self is identified with the uniqueness and separateness of the individual body (Mansfield, 2000:82). However, as Haraway observes, ‘to be One is an illusion’ (Haraway, 2004:35). The primary concept delineated in this chapter is abjection, with particular attention to the coiling together of, ambiguity and flux in life and death, cleanliness and dirt, beauty and horror in hair. I use these theoretical strands to avoid treating a critical politics of hair with a binary logic that bleaches out its nuances. This chapter engages with the ethics of the global hair trade through what I call the *zombie-commodity*: objects simultaneously dead and alive, like hair, marketable monstrous merchandise. It explores why hair extensions are zombie-like, in particular by describing hair’s liminality and its relationship to Kristeva’s work on abjection. It looks to how, despite their being aware of this zombie-commodity’s abject status, many consumers disavow such knowledge in order to achieve a happy hybridity, which, as explored in the following chapter, necessarily fails.

While the commodification and parcellisation of human hair on the global marketplace reflects a struggle between the First and Third Worlds, its hybridisation might also compel bodily subversion. In other words, to consume the hair of the Other might contribute to reinscribing colonial boundaries, the First World’s hair-extended women playing out a narrative reminiscent of *Rapunzel* in which they climb towards alterity. Up the West’s ivory tower, this is a climb endured on borrowed braids. However, the excess that extensions represent – great lengths of hair, rope-like – might also be instrumental in creating a productive delinquency: rebellious bodies that challenge the limits of femininity. This chapter asks: Are human hair extensions solely a site of happy hybridity for their wearers, or do they also create monstrous bodies and both...or even more? If they do generate the latter, how do the global hair trade’s consumers use both cleansing rituals and the commodification of hair to mediate abjection? Indeed, where does (racial) hygiene and global capitalism fit into Kristeva’s vision vis-à-vis the politics of (post)colonialised hair?

‘Abjection Overruled’?

Within a Kristevan framework, the abject is that which challenges the symbolic order by transgressing those boundaries that seem inherently contradictory. For example, in April 2006, a series of ‘sculptures’ by contemporary Australian artist Helen Pynor brought hair’s ambiguity to the fore by using it to create shapes and garments – a pair of clasped hands, a

man's shirt – at once subject and object, both calcified and fluid. In an informal email I received from Pynor, she writes that she is 'interested in the way in which hair traverses, or exists between...polarities'² (Pynor, 2006, pers. comm.). Perhaps this is the reason that the works in this exhibition were displayed under the name 'Breathing Shadows', a title that, according to Jan Guy, suggests translucence, '[s]hadow and breath...[being] at times visceral, at times imperceptible. Such are the objects of...Pynor' (Guy, 2006:n.p.). Two of these objects are life-size coats that hover motionless in the space that surrounds them; they are knit from single-stranded human hair sourced by the artist from a hair dealer in London who supplies his clients with hair from Spain, Eastern Europe, India and China³ (Pynor, 2006, pers. comm.). Pynor calls the hanging coats *Exhale* (2006) (figure 18). Spectre-like they seem



Figure 18: *Exhale*, Helen Pynor (2006)

to vaporise before the viewer. They are woven from black and auburn tresses that become a lush silvery grey at the base of their silhouettes, thus resembling 'a cloud of steam', 'the momentary out-breath of a life no longer here' ('Helen Pynor, *Breathing Shadows*', 2006:n.p.) or a spread of cobwebs. *Exhale* illustrates hair's composite qualities, as its two forms, hung from wire coat hangers (as insubstantial as the 'bodies' to which they are fastened), seem to be at once present and absent, embodied and disembodied, living and dead. When discussing her experience of viewing *Exhale* Guy recalls:

[L]ike discarded teeth and bones, [they had] entered the realm of Kristeva's *Subject* [sic]... repelling one's desire to touch yet compulsively attracting the same. This reminds me of the time I...stroked the hair of my mother, as she laid not long dead – the hair sparse and softly damp with sweat (Guy, 2006:n.p.).

The abject causes anxiety within the subject for this very reason: it signals the confusion of seemingly rigid borders, of things that cross lines, especially those that seem to belong to both sides, ‘that blur and question the whole process of demarcation’ (Mansfield, 2000:83). Guy expresses this idea when her hand makes contact with the hair of her deceased mother: an affective response at the layering of body past and body present. Here, hair becomes the doppelganger of life and death, beads of sweat (evidence of persisting viscera) clinging to its dead and dying strands.

For Kristeva, the social subject works hard at alienating the abject parts of itself that it finds disgusting (2000:83): ‘clean and proper’ bodies forever sickened by their own physical flows, bodily secretions and wastes (Kristeva, 1982:2, 3): urine, blood, sweat, tears, semen and now, due to globalisation, the flow of human hair. Perhaps this is a reason hair donors are kept anonymous, for example, the hair sellers-from the Hairwork website – nameless and faceless as illustrated in the previous chapter – so that the process of acquiring abject bodily flows and discarded body parts feels less personal, the identities behind the hair more easily detachable from their associations with monstrous and threatening life processes.

Kristeva describes abjection as ‘a twisted braid’ (1982:1), the metaphor of a hairstyle standing in for the threading together of affects and thoughts, of body and ideology important to a critical reading of transnationalised hair, itself an amalgam of multiple and unstable meanings. The ambiguity plaited throughout hair’s many narratives, the contradictions that it embodies, situates it within the realm of the abject, what Kristeva describes as being a ‘repulsive gift’ bestowed to the subject (1982:9). I am aware that Kristeva’s work on abjection has been picked up by a number of different disciplines. Due to the scope of this research, however, I will not directly address these varying discourses on the abject. Rather, I will hone in on its relationship to the corporeal, to constructions of purity and impurity, as well as to fears of defilement, contamination and filth.

Perhaps, as Martin Jay suggests in ‘Abjection Overruled’, the abject’s unequivocal association with discourses of transgression helps to reinscribe the very dichotomies that it seeks to explode (by virtue of its ambiguity): subversion exceeds order; carnality and affect outdo reason⁴ (Jay, 1998:151, 154, 155, 156). I agree with Jay that the concept has the potential to be over-used and, therefore, rendered prosaic (1998:151), abjection dumbed down. I also agree with Jay that abjection can at times be romanticised, deemed adorably abject. Indeed, what part of the abject body could be more loveable than a lock of hair, Shirley Temple-like, full of spring and shine? Despite these arguments, I will consider how abjection can be a powerful theoretical tool to use when describing the conceptual and bodily landscapes of human hair and its trade. For instance, if according to Jay, Kristeva ‘defines abjection in terms of mourning for an impossible, always already lost object’ (1998:152), then the concept might be useful when addressing hair extensions because they are unassimilable:

after three to six months Great Lengths hair extensions fall out and must be replaced (Great Lengths, 2006). They are obscured for their wearers. Abjection does not, however, provide an adequate ethical model for dealing with transnationalised tresses or othered bodies. For instance, to refer to Third World women 'in the same terms used to [describe] bodily wastes may well contribute to the diminution of their dignity, [not]...enhance it' (Jay, 1998:151). An alternative ethical framework to abjection will be considered in the following chapter.

In 'Too Traditional Once Again: Some Poststructuralists on the Aspirations of the Immigrant/Third World Female Subject', Kalpana Ram questions hybridity, which she also argues builds 'new hierarchies on the ruins of the old' (1998:155). Ram suggests that, within postmodern discourse, those subjectivities that are deemed to be the most composite are valued more than those thought to be less hybrid. With regard to the hair trade this resonates because the more selectively amalgamated one's extensions are, the more bodies they comprise, the more 'royal' they become. Also, as we will learn from Ulrich Beck in the final chapter, a subject able to move between a number of landscapes (here, a 'geography' of bodies) holds a privileged position as, in its hybridity, it has access to social and 'cultural' mobility.

Ram speaks honestly about her 'hermeneutics of suspicion' regarding what she calls 'the romance of the hybrid' (Ram, 1993:11, 12). Hybridity should not, however, be conflated with abjection. While both have the same potential to collapse false binaries, their ramifications are different because of the dissimilar contexts in which these terms operate: abjection is situated within psychoanalytic and ontological frameworks, while hybridity is a term particularly associated with the work of Homi Bhabha.⁵ It appears (not without its critics) mostly within postcolonial theory to designate the constant transformations of culture and identity. In other words, it is not about the mixture of two discrete categories but about the inability to designate or stabilise the discreteness of these imagined categories. When discussing 'cultural hybridisation', Bhabha calls for the revival of discourse surrounding boundaries and their permeability (Bhabha, 1998:30). For him, hybridity opens up a space of negotiation for equivocal articulations of power⁶ from cultures that are forever in between, their 'containedness' impossible (1998:30, 37).

While the abject and the hybrid are related in their emphasis on boundary breakdowns, they have distinct philosophic and political emphases. As such, rather than use hybridity and abjection interchangeably, I reflect on how, in many ways, when applied to hair, abjection does not come up a washed-out theory but highlights the way a curl, seemingly insignificant to the body's material and discursive goings-on, might in fact condemn the happy hybridity of which theorists like Ram speak of with suspicion.

According to Ram, hybridity 'is the postcolonial equivalent of the fractured, split subject that commands centre-stage of Western theory...Thus a new flurry of interests...in

the diasporic exiles. The half-castes, the Creoles – all extensions of the interest created by the decentring of the Western subject’ (Ram, 1993:12). The crux of Ram’s argument is that the decentred, dispersed subject championed by postmodern discourse operates under a trope of benevolent assimilation: *all* must be included in a ‘celebratory rhetoric of difference, diversity, heterogeneity and localisms’ (1993:11) when, perhaps, this decentring and hybridity is not what the subject wishes to embody or celebrate. Thus, while hybridity seems to be inclusive based on its multifarious status, it can also encourage a universalising logic that excludes those deemed, in Jay’s terms, not to be subversive/transgressive enough. For example, regarding international feminism, a contentious issue is the deployment of the ‘upper-class hybrid female’⁷ as emblematic of all women’s interests (Sharpe qtd. in Spivak, 2002:613). This is problematic because in privileging the voice of this primarily First World hybrid subject, one excludes the voices of the women who are at issue within many feminist arenas: Third World women ‘collected for the occasion’ of First World feminist debate (Spivak, 2002:614). As above, the privileging of hybrid subjects and the glorifying of abject body parts and processes cannot be married. A dialogue between abjection and hybridity can, however, help to communicate the ways in which happy hybridity might be the *response* to abjection brought about by the hairy body, but not that they amount to the same thing.

The Zombie’s Phantom Limbs

Although hair unceasingly provokes the work of culture (Obeyeskere, 1998:xii), and its trade involves a dialectical intermingling of ‘authenticity’ and artifice,⁸ as a signifier of selfhood, it is seemingly ‘natural’. It is rooted in the body, itself associated with base materiality, sexuality, indulgence and dirt (Dyer, 1997:75), while also extending outward, away from the body and its sins. As Warner suggests, it maintains a ‘suspended corruptibility’ (Warner, 1994:373): it is between the sacred and the profane. Hair is organic but less subject to natural corruption than other body parts because ‘like a fossil, like a shell, it lasts’ (1994:372). In spite of its insubstantiality, it retains an imperviousness – an uncompromised resistance – that warrants it powerful symbolic meanings. It can be cut, curled or straightened with hot irons, singed, dyed with harsh chemicals, cajoled with combs, brushed and pulled into submission and yet it does not bleed and, save at its roots, it feels no pain (1994:372). When a body perishes its hair survives. As its skin dehydrates and recedes, it gives the illusion that its follicles continue to grow. Hair thus becomes the flesh’s last claim to life; it becomes its last claim to flesh itself. Yet, as Warner contends, hair is ‘the least fleshy production of the flesh’ (1994:373); it eclipses death and decay, as it defies its burial and outgrows the scalp and skin in which it is embedded. Nevertheless, hair – a fetishised sign of

femininity so commonly associated with life⁹ – continues to be unequivocally bound up in the perishable flesh from which it grows.

The latter point gives hair its zombie status, hair extensions' own zombification beginning here in hair's symbolic materiality. As something that is simultaneously living and dead, hair can feel unsettling; this was the desired effect of many early twentieth century photographs¹⁰ (figure 19). Identifying hair as tissue-like suspensions of sepulchral substance

is an idea newly (and fervently) debated in the United Kingdom's judicial arena. In April 2005, Michael Ross Smith of Dudley in the English Midlands cut off the hair of his ex-girlfriend, Michelle Tether, without her consent. Holding her down in his bedroom, Ross Smith used a pair of kitchen scissors to sever her long ponytail (Leonard: 2006:10). This act caused great controversy in the British High Courts. Two senior judges debated whether Ross Smith could be tried for grievous bodily harm. At issue here was whether hair is considered to be a valuable body part or a trivial bodily appendage and, most important for their purposes, whether it is dead or alive. It is, as we have just learned, both at once; it is, to revisit Greer's description of hair, 'a dead mane' on a living form (Greer, 1971:61). The political, cultural and biological schema of human hair and its transnationalisation substantiate a fear of borderlessness. Perhaps this is why the Ross Smith case spanned almost an entire year¹¹ and was granted an appeal by the High Courts after initially being dismissed.¹² because hair is a slippery part of the body that evades categorisation,¹³ a body part turned commodity whose contradictory status and subsequent zombie 'body' situates it within the realm of the abject.



Figure 19: Livig hair (early twentieth century)

Rooted in a zombie ontology, hair has the potential to be a zombie-commodity not only because while 'it is in full possession of vitality' (Warner, 1994:373), it is in fact lifeless, hair consisting as it does of many dead keratinised cells¹⁴ ('Hair', 2004), but because, in

Marxist terms, it cannot be reified. Here, I refer to Georg Lukács' analysis of the Marxian definition of reification in which when social subjects are commodified under capitalism, namely, one's labour (or in this context one's hair), they become objects alienated from the self¹⁵ (Marx 1965:72). In this sense, the commodity becomes spectral: a ghost of the subjectivity it once had or was once a part of. In Lukács' terms, therefore, each commodity takes on a 'phantom objectivity' as it conceals 'every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation [to] people'¹⁶ (Lukács, 1968:83). Hair extensions make obvious the spectral emporia of commodity culture; in some case exploring them in this way states the obvious. Like phantom limbs – extremities that feel pain even when they are no longer present – the absence of one's extensions, as Giancroce stipulates, can be felt. However, human hair extensions cannot be phantom goods because, as will be discussed in Chapter Three, the process of reification that separates the commodity from its original identity does not hold for these great lengths: the bodies and alterity of their seemingly absent 'donors' never fully gone, in keeping with the zombie metaphor, never completely dead.

Hair has, historically, been made into talismans of mourning; for many cultures, it is a way of maintaining a relationship with the deceased¹⁷ while also protecting the living from the (un)dead (Hallpike, 1987:156). In the West, hair was braided into Victorian jewellery (Betterton, 1996:142), the living subject robed in remembrance. Indeed, many people keep their hair after it has been cut or save the severed locks of loved ones to preserve the memory of a body as it once was, hair liminal between past and present, enmeshed with time and identity like rings grown into trees. These talismans, like Pynor's *Breathing Shadows*, possess the power and properties of the uncanny as they make the beholder's flesh creep and crawl by both substituting and commemorating missing corporealities. In Pynor's case, the hair of her sculptures might act as a living memorial, however crafted from dead



Figure 20: *Loop my Loop*, Helen Chadwick (1991)

‘material’, to her father who passed away during the making of *Exhale* in particular¹⁸ (Pynor, 2006, pers. comm.).

In other contemporary artworks, such as in British artist Helen Chadwick’s work *Loop my Loop*¹⁹ (1991) (figure 20), in which a gleaming pig’s intestine intertwines with locks of blonde hair in a braided embrace (Betterton, 1996:142), the slippage between living and dead contributes to hair’s zombie potential. The golden hair suggests a grotesque but gorgeous meeting of blonde beauty and its carnal reality: the corkscrewing of glamour and guts. The straddling of these boundaries reflects the very haecceity of hair itself. In Finnish artist Helena Hietanen’s work too, installations crafted from human hair seem both touchable and yet repulsive to touch. They give the spectator the opportunity to experience abjection in the same way that Kristeva argues the skin on the surface of warm milk causes an abject response in the subject who tries to consume it (Kristeva, 1982:2-3): one gags and feels nauseated, unsure of whether it is solid or liquid or both (Mansfield, 2000:84). Unsettling and soberly redolent of the bodies from which they once came, tufts of hair quiver and undulate across *Painting with Asian Blonde*²⁰ (2002) and *Spread*²¹ (1996) (figure 21), drawing from them the promises of monsters.

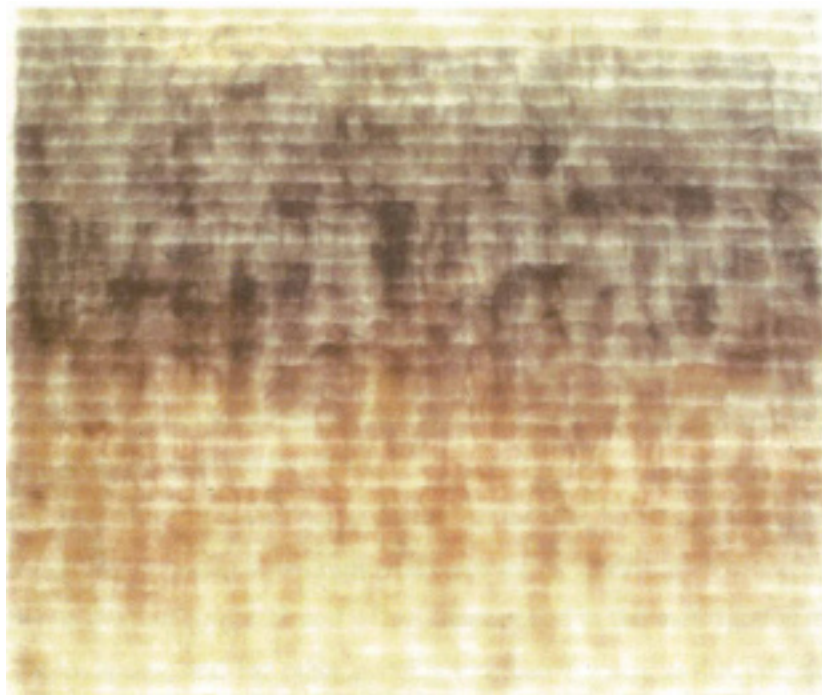


Figure 21: *Spread*, Helena Hietanen (2000)

Why is it that one can easily be made to feel uncomfortable by hair in the ‘wrong’ places, for example, in Meret Oppenheim’s *Fur Teacup* (1936) (figure 22)? Yet, when the very same hair from Hietanen’s installations appear on the heads of its consumers, it does not inspire repulsion or anxiety, rather it is accepted as ‘normal’, ‘natural’ and, in many instances, beautiful. One possible response would be to consider that this idea depends on what Mary Douglas refers to as ‘matter out of place’ (James qtd. in Douglas, 1969:164): the body’s waste, like hair clippings, is generally classified as dirty,²² disconnected, ‘ontologically neutral’²³ (Waldby and Mitchell, 2006:84).



Figure 22: *Fur Teacup*, Meret Oppenheim (1936)

For example, the room at Auschwitz filled with bales of hair cut from the heads of Holocaust victims is a space in which hair conjures up death (figures 23 and 24). As mentioned in the introduction, for many post-war Jewish communities, and for other persons too, hair framed in this context can be said to signify non-regeneration. Whereas, bought hair circulates; it is seemingly part of ‘life’, animated by global bodily flows and exchanges. Although ‘circulation...does not carry with it the principle of self-renewal’ (Marx, 1973:254),

the contract of purchasing extensions can seek to preserve life from death in the sense that hair severed from its donor body is saved from being waste and reanimated through its attachment to a new living form. As discussed in the following chapter, within a Derridean framework, this process of regenerating the body of the Other vis-à-vis bodily assimilation with another subjectivity necessarily fails.



Figure 23: Bags of hair at Auschwitz



Figure 24: Prisoners' hair at Auschwitz

Hair is an interesting zombie-commodity to untangle within this framework because, unlike a heart donated for transplant or oocytes sold for donor insemination, it can be perceived as being lifeless. To recapitulate Warner's point, hair cannot feel pain (Warner, 1994:372), a sensation associated with the living body. According to George Fairburn, appearing for Ross Smith in court, hair may have importance from the point of view of vanity, and it might be something that helps to identify a person's lifestyle and personality – 'but that should not allow such importance to be attached to it in the way injury or pain [caused] to another part of the body might' (Fairburn qtd. in Aston, 2006). Hair can therefore be read as more ethically purchasable because of what seems to be its more dominant objecthood. However, this commodity deemed dead does come alive as it breathes voluminousness, 'strength' and 'body' – 'luscious' life – into the heads of its consumers (figure 25) (Great Lengths, 2006). This rhetoric of hair as possessing a life force that is critical to one's femininity also appeared in the Ross Smith case. In his final ruling, Justice Cresswell stated that '[t]o a woman, her hair is a vitally important part of her body. It has sheen and is lifelike' (Armstrong, 2006). In some senses this is correct. As previously discussed, unlike the body, which itself eventually turns to bone and dust, hair evades putrefaction. Moreover, as a commodity, hair 'is not one kind of thing rather than another, but one phase in the life of [a] thing' (Appadurai, 1986:17), a 'thing' whose status shifts between being a dead object for sale and body part awaiting fleshy reanimation.

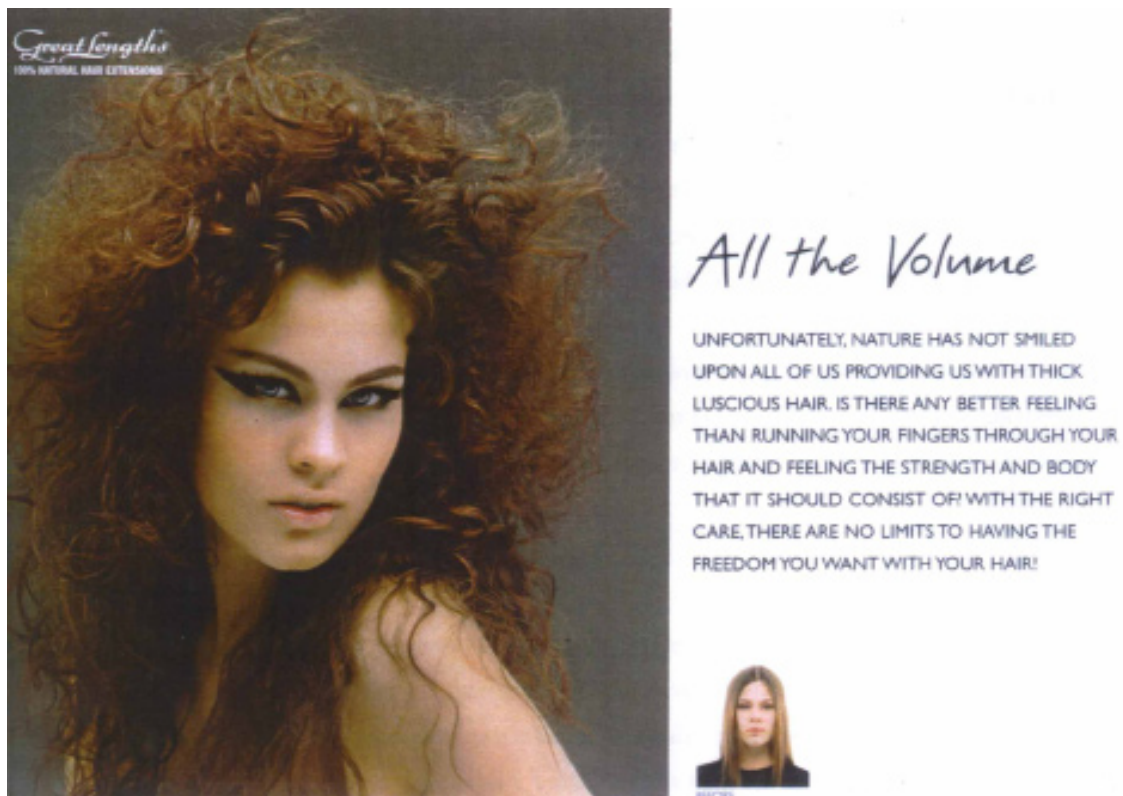


Figure 25: Great Lengths International advertisement

At this point, I would like to place the emphasis on the failure of saving the ‘life’ of extensions from their inevitable demise because, as previously mentioned, they unavoidably fall out. The discourse of replacement that ensues – buy more great lengths to mediate the absence of the old ones – can be read as a discourse of futile attempts at regenerating what is dead and dying. The intermingling of life and death at work in the very biology of human hair is also played out in its globalisation. As transnationalised tresses, it passes from one body to the next, finally disposed of so that, in its new context as waste, it takes on a zombie presence through its literal and quasi-literal (dis)connection from the lives of both its producers and consumers. Hietanen’s piece, the room of hair at Auschwitz and discarded extensions all seem to be situated in proximity to the abject because they exist, in different ways, on the periphery of life worlds. They challenge their spectators with the zombie prospect that hair and its extensions – dead tissue jettisoned from living flesh – can upset and abject when, disembodied, they teeter on the borders of ‘death infecting life’ (Kristeva, 1982:4).

Hair extensions might also to some extent reverse this logic, the very abjection Kristeva refers to as bending towards death²⁴ (1982:3) used to ‘infect’ the latter with vitality because, within Kristevan logic, that which threatens to destroy life also helps to define it (Creed, 1993:9). The process of commoditisation, returned to at the end of this chapter, illustrates this point. Categorising that which is or is not a commodity can involve distinguishing between the realm of persons and that of objects, something that has become culturally axiomatic in the West (Kopytoff, 1986:84); this, we have already learned from Latour. I do not want my argument at the end of this chapter to be unduly pre-empted. However, I will note that part of the distinction between the zombie-commodity and the individual is also a differentiation between an apparently inanimate object for sale and a living subject for consumption. As such, if this object beats, bruises or bleeds, both it and its commoditisation take on a life of their own. They are no longer ‘dead’ things, rather they are zombie-commodities that provoke moral controversy because societies place limitations on the commodification of certain ‘sacred objects’ associated with the living human form (Waldby and Mitchell, 20006:25-26). In short, they are contentious commodities because they uncover a discourse of cannibalism. I return to this idea in Chapter Three.

Objects Come Subjects

In *We Have Never Been Modern*, Bruno Latour argues that not only is ‘[o]ur fabric... no longer seamless’ (Latour, 1993:7), but that, in fact, it never has been. I find Latour’s work on hybridity suggestive for a critical analysis of transnationalised hair because, as with Derridean logic teased out in the following chapter, Latour’s own theoretical mappings recognise the myriad ways in which the body is mediated by the alterity of its

Others (Deutscher, 1998:17). The everydayness of hair and hair extensions as liminal is not such a radical idea. This is evident when hair is lived and experienced in settler colonial societies, sites of hybridity from the first moments of contact and colonisation²⁵ (Bhabha, 1998:29-30). Indeed, the very quality and texture of hair for many colonised persons became composite through the process of miscegenation. For example, Australia's Assimilation Policy that, during the 1930s, aimed to 'Breed out the Colour' of its indigenous population with discourses of biological absorption. It was responsible for racist rhetoric surrounding a perceived need to 'develop the native race' by slowly making them white (Cowlshaw, 1999:104). One such way to 'develop' the Other was through the gradual lightening of skin and straightening of hair, a genetic hybridisation of coloniser and colonised designed, ironically, to maintain the purity of white Australia (Moran, 2005:168). Thus, for Latour, 'we have never been modern' (modernity being associated with a penchant for dualisms)²⁶ because we are always already confusing myriad boundaries (Latour 1993:2, 4, 5), even in the very 'quality' of our curls.

Applying Latour's logic to hair is useful regarding what he calls 'quasi-objects': 'objects of external reality on the one hand, subjects of society on the other' (1993:95). Although I wish to replace Latour's latter notion of a 'subject of society' with a 'subject of the body', I would still like to situate hair within the realm of quasi-objects: zombie-objects deceptively 'dead'. Doing so provides the opportunity not to make an *a priori* separation between hair as an *object* outside of the body, and hair as inside of it or, in other words, as part of the *subject*. Rather, I want to allow hair to breathe life into the theory that describes its illusory objectivity. Like Pynor's artistry, in which hair is a testament to its own brittle materiality as well as to the intimate memory of the bodily shapes and subjectivities that it forms, in this thesis hair is given the opportunity to be neither object nor subject, but to *Exhale* as both. Hair might represent an interface between these two thresholds (subject and object), or it might exist beyond 'the universe of people *and* the universe of objects' (Kopytoff, 1986:84, italics added). Ultimately, however, hair can be read as being quite literally both subject and object:²⁷ it grows from beneath the scalp's surface and is therefore part of the subject, while also extending outward from the flesh such that it connects the bodily interior with the external world of objects. When hair itself becomes an object for sale it mediates the world of human subjects by becoming, however detachable, part of its wearer's corporeality; it is (phantom) object come (zombie) subject.

Reading objects as though they are subjects might have contributed to recent controversy in the United States in which a number of orthodox Jewish women have been urged by rabbis not to wear wigs made of real hair and to opt for synthetic ones instead (Heilman, 2004). Potentially crafted from Indian temple hair, for orthodox Jews, such wigs represent idolatry because the hair comes from Hindu women whose spiritual practices,

including the tonsuring of their sacred strands, might have involved the worship of idols (2004); in Judaism, idolatry is forbidden. Here, it seems that the wig, used in the Jewish faith to cover women's hair in order to preserve their modesty (ironically with yet more hair), takes on the identities of its producers. Perhaps the problematic caused by a perceived infidelity to Jewish doctrine, as in the Torah, that prohibits the derivation of benefit from any accessory, decoration or sacrifice to idol worship (2004), also involves anxieties around an object taking on the history, religion and, therefore, the partial subjectivity of its original body, a commodity whose former 'life' is still partly alive. This object might cause anxiety for an orthodox Jewish consumer because it tangles up too tightly the sacred and the profane. Within this context, transnationalised hair extensions truly are a 'repulsive gift' that its consumers might both desire and abhor. Alternatively, for many consumers, human hair products invite pleasure. This is why it is important to consider Jay's and Ram's earlier arguments, because the hair trade's clientele might understand their extensions to be a zombie-commodity but romanticise the abjection that their new hair provokes. Beckham, for instance, seems to maintain a happy hybridity in her declaration of wearing 'Russian cell-block H on [her] head' (Beckham qtd. in 'Posh's Hair', 2004:13), an arguable response to the abjection she might experience were she to critically consider the ethics of her 'intercorporeality'.²⁸

Happy Hybridity Unravelling

If, according to Haraway, 'to be [O]ther is to be multiple' (Haraway, 2004:35), has Beckham become a disparate subject? In a globalised climate that calls for fluidity and fragmentation, where does her body begin and end? Does her corporeal feel more coherent because it has been enhanced, extended, made whole, by the bodies of other women? Does she see her body as monstrous – a form that deviates, threatens and disrupts – like the body of 38-year-old Frenchwoman Isabelle Amiens, the world's first recipient of a partial face transplant,²⁹ who has opened up new and unfamiliar categories of corporeality? Visibly hybrid, Amiens is both (living) host body and (deceased) donor body at once (figure 26).



Figure 26: Isabelle Dinoire (2005)

Alternatively, might we compare Beckham to Cindy Jackson's physique, which has undergone more than fifty plastic surgeries to remake it in the image of the Barbie Doll³⁰ (figure 27). Visibly altered, Jackson is both 'authentic' self and artificial Other. Might Beckham's extensions, like

Amiens' new face and Jackson's new body (which includes a mass of platinum blonde hair), situate her beyond what Judith Butler has called 'the limits of what we think we know'³¹ (Butler, 2004:74): past normative intelligibility that distinguishes between dualisms that are used to explain our bodies to ourselves? Is Amiens, with the nose, mouth, cheeks and chin of another woman (after having her own ravaged by a dog), comparable with Beckham? Indeed, Beckham's body, like Amiens', and to some extent Jackson's, is dependent upon a fluid, 'disassembl[ing] and reassembl[ing]...collective and personal self', the hallmark of a cyborg-like figure,³² ever wary of holism (Haraway, 2004:9-10, 23) All three women have in different ways positioned themselves in their own discourses that fall outside the perimeters of bodily integrity, past an autonomous identity that is supposed to inaugurate one's humanness and subvert monstrosity. Perhaps the consumers of human hair extensions explode essentialised definitions of womanhood through what Rosi Braidotti calls the 'commodification of the monster' (Braidotti, 1994:92). Put differently, through buying and wearing other women's hair, one's body might become an ambiguous object of display onto which is grafted the image of 'woman' as well as that of the monstrous: 'a bodily entity that is anomalous...vis-à-vis the norm...[that is] mixed, in-between' (1994:81).

It is to corporealities like those of Amiens and Jackson that one can look for this sense of rebellious flesh, their bodies radically altered either literally to 'save face' or to create an entirely new one. Rather than simply reading bodies gone to such physical extremes as contributing to a patriarchal status quo that values certain kinds of femininity over others, I wonder what can be learned by critically considering how they transgress physical and ideological boundaries. How might Jackson, in her bodily emulation of the Barbie Doll, the very icon (for many) of sexist oppression, also simultaneously subvert it? Might her Barbie body parody the 'perfect' pink contours of this feminised figurine? Although crafting hair-extended bodies involved far less physical risk than radical forms of plastic surgery, they might, in their own monstrous excesses, also contribute to a democratisation of beauty by making it accessible to women who inhabit bodily boundaries. By engaging with Beckham as a woman who, knowingly or unknowingly 'reorient[es] the proliferation of monsters by representing their existence' (Latour, 1993:12) through her hair and its styling, it becomes plausible to seriously reconsider her subject position as shifting



Figure 27: Cindy Jackson (2006)

from ‘Babs’ to borderless. Furthermore, the ambiguity that Beckham embodies – an identity both restrictive (as explored in Chapters One and Three) and transgressive (a zombie body reanimating the blur between aberration and adoration, beauty and horror, proper and improper, self and Other, life and death) – reflects the liminal qualities of hair itself.

With its infinite contradictions, however, it seems that hair cannot be contained ‘happily’: not by the confines of the skin from which it extends; not in the works of artists like Pynor whose ghostly silhouettes of hair tell both of elegy and of living testimony. While some, like Braidotti assert that the monstrous is potentially romantic (Braidotti, 1994:81), when hair is monstrous, it can be threatening: it is mediated by death and atrophy, it continually splits and sheds. Moreover, to wear its extensions can invite horror rather than romance as one is literally dressed in the tissue of an unknown donor. As such, hair takes that which is exoticised for its hybridity, like Beckham’s ‘beauty’, and makes it dangerous, makes it politically suspect, makes it strange, indeed, makes it fail. These ideas are discussed in the following chapter.

It is worth noting the arguable difference between the sense of a happy hybridity that some consumers of hair extensions intimate they experience (for instance, Riddle, Speer, Giancroce and Beckham) versus the discourse of shame and even humour that appears to surround the wearing of toupees.³³ From vocabulary associated with the toupee such as ‘rug’, ‘carpet’ and ‘road-kill’, to public figures like Donald Trump (figure 28) who is frequently the subject of toupee jokes made at his expense in the media, to Australia’s leading hair-loss

treatment company, Ashley & Martin’s ‘RealGROWTH’ rhetoric,³⁴ it seems that the toupee has become its own taboo. The reproach at the appearance of the toupee wearer might in fact be an abject response to a zombie-commodity that too obviously straddles its perceived ‘dead’ objecthood and the living body to which it is attached. Great Lengths extensions vanish seamlessly into the hair of their wearers and thus seem part of the living body: they are washed,



Figure 28: Donald Trump on the Larry King Show

fingert through, knotted up in the consumer’s own strands. Toupees, however, are a striking reminder of blurred boundaries as artifice (the hairpiece) literally (and in many cases visibly) sits on top of naked ‘authenticity’ (the bald head untouched by hair-loss remedies). One can read the toupee as being a hairier incarnation of Kristeva’s earlier analogy vis-à-vis warm milk’s coagulated surface.

Chapter 2:

Lifeless Living Locks: The Zombie Commodity

¹ The fantasy of an autonomous selfhood that persists in the West might be attributed to what, in ‘Private Parts: Body Organs in Global Trade’, John Frow suggests is a neo-Kantian tradition that values corporeal entirety; this is a tradition that seeks to restore the perceived integrity of a fractured body (Frow, 1995:93, 97).

² In an informal email received from contemporary Australian artist Helen Pynor, I was told that the polarities she is interested in exploring with regards to hair’s liminality are: life and death, past and present, memory and imagination, subject and object, self and Other, nature and culture (Pynor, 2006, pers. comm.).

³ Pynor bought the hair for the artworks that appeared in her exhibition *Breathing Shadows* (2006) from a ‘hair dealer’ in London who, according to the artist, ‘is known for supplying very high-quality hair for wig-makers and to the film and theatre industries...[He] sells hair to customers all over the world, including, apparently, Opera Australia...[I]t certainly wasn’t cheap...[He] buys his hair mainly from women in Spain, Eastern Europe, India and China. He explained to me that he used to also buy hair from Italy but as the economy of Italy developed more, there was no longer a market; presumably Italian women had better options. He also explained that hair from Spanish women was the best quality (closely followed by Eastern European women), he thought because of extra oil in their diet. On the other hand Indian and Chinese hair was drier...For me it was very important for my process to have very long lengths of hair (to save masses of time in the hair knotting process, to make the yarn) and also strong, good quality hair that wouldn’t break easily as I knitted it’ (Pynor, 2006, pers. comm.). It is important to be aware that the global trade in human hair amassed from countries such as India and other countries in Eastern Europe, reaches beyond a market for commercial hair extensions. In this context, transnationalised tresses are incorporated into the world of contemporary High art. Here, it is critical to ask: Does using transnationalised hair for art rather than for cosmetic purposes change the ethics of its consumption? When it appears as a conspicuous ‘material’ in a work of art as opposed to its seamless incorporation into Western scalps, do the bodies of its ‘donors’ also become more apparent or do they remain entangled in a politics of invisibility?

⁴ In ‘Abjection Overruled’ Martin Jay points out that ‘[t]he themes of abjection have become... commonplace in our culture...“For all its local insights,” Michael André Bernstein warns, “the sweep of Kristeva’s account elides its specificity, so that her abject is hypostasised, functioning as a global concept...” There is [also] a danger in...creating some new value hierarchy on the ruins of the old... [The] one-sided exaltation of the abject as a liberating antidote to the repressive subject...[and] the increasingly sterile dichotomy that pits order against subversion [and] law against transgression...must now also be questioned’ (Jay, 1998:151, 154, 155, 156).

⁵ In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha refers to hybridity as emphasising ‘incommensurable elements... as the basis of cultural identifications. [Thus], what is at issue is the performative nature of differential identities: the regulation and negotiation of those spaces that are continually, *contingently*, ‘opening out’, remaking the boundaries, exposing the limits of any claim to a singular or autonomous sign of difference – be it class, gender, or race...[D]ifference is neither One nor the Other *something else besides, in between* (Bhabha, 1994:219, italics in original). For Bhabha, like a stairwell, hybridity is a liminal space, ‘the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy’ (1994:4).

⁶ In ‘Culture’s In Between’, Bhabha writes that ‘[a]t the point at which the precept attempts to objectify itself as a generalised knowledge or a normalising, hegemonic practice, the hybrid strategy or discourse opens up a space of negotiation where power is *unequal* but its articulation may be *equivocal*’ (Bhabha, 1998:34, italics in original).

⁷ In ‘A Conversation with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: Politics and the Imagination’, Jenny Sharpe refers to the ‘upper-class female hybrid’ as being the problem of contemporary international feminism because it ‘she’ used as a model for the gender training of poor rural women (Sharpe qtd. in Spivak,

¹⁶ Georg Lukács asserts that, within a Marxian framework, the basis of ‘commodity-structure’ revolves around the ‘relation between people tak[ing] on the character of a thing and thus acquir[ing] a “phantom objectivity”, an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing’ that it masks its relationship to the subject from which it originally comes... The transformation of the commodity relation into a thing of “ghostly objectivity” cannot... content itself with the reduction of all objects for the gratification of human needs to commodities. It stamps its imprint upon the whole consciousness of man; his qualities and abilities are no longer an organic part of his personality, they are things which he can “own” or “dispose of” like the various objects of the external world’ (Lukács, 1968:83, 100).

¹⁷ In ‘Hair’, Christopher R. Hallpike notes that, for many cultures, hair helps to maintain a relationship with the dead by being ‘placed with [a] corpse or on [a] tomb. In Islamic society, boys who had been dedicated to a saint at birth had their heads shaved at sometime between eight and twelve years of age, and their hair was placed on the saint’s tomb. Conversely, among the Iroquois [Native American peoples], a lock of hair from the dead was given to the nearest relative of the deceased, while the Zuni believed that to burn the hair of a deceased friend and inhale the smoke would produce good health. Among Arabs, the hair or beard is regarded as the seat of vitality and thus is specially suited to serve as the substitute for a life’ (Hallpike, 1987:156-157).

¹⁸ Pynor notes that throughout the process of creating her work *Exhale* (2006) she considered the experience of time, life and death (Pynor, 2006, pers. comm.). She remembers the following: ‘[d]uring the process of making *Exhale* my father died, and this added another resonance to the work for me. I have only just recently named this work *Exhale* but I am making the connection now... that my father actually died of collapsed lungs, a complication after heart surgery’ (2006, pers. comm., italics added). If, for Pynor, *Exhale* did involve a process of mourning, it is interesting that it would be mediated by the use of cut hair because, as Hallpike observes, ‘the cutting or tearing out of hair in mourning is one of the most commonly reported uses of hair’ (Hallpike, 1987:157). Thus, whether the subject (in this case specifically the artist) is or is not aware, hair, death and mourning can be inexorably intertwined.

¹⁹ Due to the scope of this research I cannot examine in detail the way in which in British artist Helen Chadwick’s piece *Loop my Loop* (1991) not only does the bodily interior mix and merge with the bodily exterior, but beauty and horror are, arguably, made manifest in the fragile boundaries between expiring soft tissue and hair that, despite its being cut away from the scalp, persists. Chadwick’s piece, totem-like, might conjure up an abject response from its viewers because it underscores ‘the impossible but necessary transcendence of the subject’s corporeality, and the impure, defiling elements of its uncontrollable materiality’ (Grosz, 1990:87-88).

²⁰ Also due to the scope of this research I am unable to explore *Painting with Asian Blonde* (2002) in any great detail. A brief description is, however, worth noting: using butterfly clips, on a large white wall, Finnish artist Helena Hietanen has mounted hair imported from Asia by the European wig-making and extensions industry (Hietanen, 2006, pers. comm.). According to Apinan Poshyananda in ‘Paradise Regained: Beyond Paradise, Nordic Artists Travel East’, the installation is covered in strands dyed various shades of blonde, some fake and some real to create a new space of exotica and superficiality (Poshyananda, 2002). Moreover, in this piece, Hietanen ‘conjures up the idea of blonde infatuation... comment[ing] on Asian youth culture, with its obsession with dyed blonde hair, coloured contact lenses and white skin’ (2002). Although in this installation Hietanen is not commenting directly on the global hair trade *per se*, this particular piece is seminal to exploring transnationalised hair because it uses it as its raw material, thus confronting its spectators with a body of foreign follicles used to enhance and extend the bodies of many Western consumers. Like Meret Oppenheim’s *Fur Teacup* (1936), also discussed in this chapter, Hietanen’s piece takes repulsion at a hair in one’s soup to the next level by confronting the viewer with the horror of hair appearing where it does not ordinarily belong: in her work, from a human head to a gallery installation. Mostly bleached, Hietanen’s raw material has been stripped of its biology and made artificial; it has been removed from the flesh and made into art; it seems both lifeless and living as its hair quivers, creating shimmering shadows on its surface (2002). In further research I would like to explore the ways in which *Painting with Asian Blonde* deliberately provokes questions about the politics of abjection and transnationalised body parts. Here, art is seemingly more able to blur the very boundaries of such a politics than, for example, popular culture.