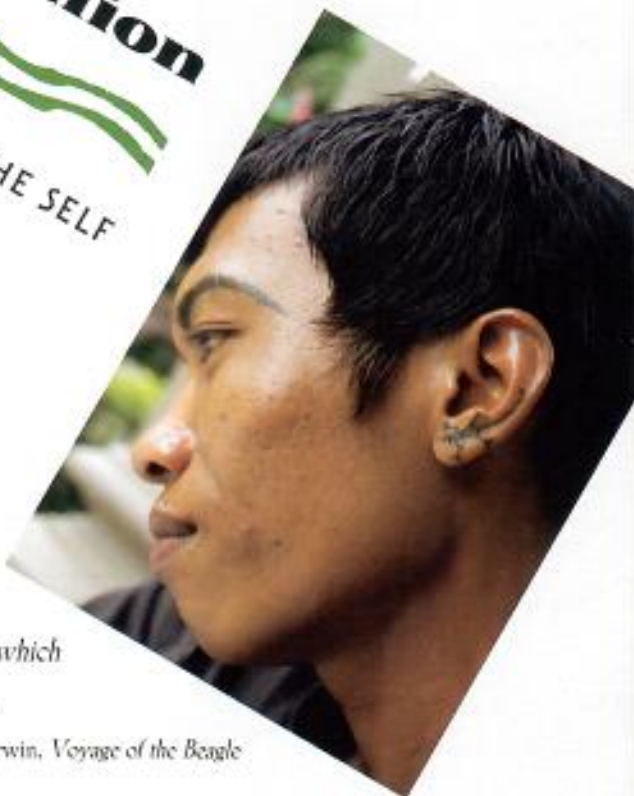




Introduction

CELEBRATING THE BODY AND THE SELF



Not one great country can be named, from the polar regions in the north to New Zealand in the south, in which the aborigines do not tattoo themselves.

Charles Darwin, *Voyage of the Beagle*

And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying: Ye shall not round the corners of your heads, neither shalt thou mar the corners of thy beard. Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh, nor print any mark upon you: I am the Lord.

Leviticus 19:1, 27–28 (King James translation)

IN THIS BOOK I shall attempt to provide ample evidence, in text and images, that the great variety of practices aiming at adorning, beautifying, or even modifying the human body are the most ancient and most direct expression of human creativity, known and practiced all over the globe and at all times.

In recent decades, various forms of body adornment and decoration—such as

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WORLDWIDE RENAISSANCE

PAGE VI

THE EMERGENCE AND/OR RENAISSANCE OF THE ANCIENT TRIBAL ARTS OF BODY ADORNMENT IS BY NO MEANS RESTRICTED TO THE PRESENT GENERATION OF YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN IN WESTERN COUNTRIES. AFTER HAVING BEEN OUTLAWED AND SUPPRESSED FOR A CENTURY OR TWO, THESE ANCIENT AND TRADITIONAL ARTS ARE ALSO BEING REVIVED BY YOUNG SAMOANS, HAWAIIANS, MAORIS, AND OTHERS IN OCEANIA. THIS PHOTOGRAPH, TAKEN IN 1995, SHOWS THE TATTOO MASTER TAVITA OF MOOREA, TAHITI.

PERMANENT MAKEUP



PAGE I

APART FROM THE GECKO TATTOOED ON HIS EAR—A RATHER PAINFUL AND THEREFORE RARE PLACE FOR A TATTOO—THIS YOUNG BALINESE MAN HAS CHOSEN TO PERMANENTLY MAKE UP HIS EYEBROWS AND LIPS WITH REAL TATTOOS RATHER THAN THE LESS PERMANENT COSMETIC TATTOOS NOW AVAILABLE AT MANY A BEAUTY SALON.

Return of the Tribal

makeup, ear piercing, some body painting, and much cosmetic surgery—have become more or less accepted by our contemporary societies, whereas others—nonmainstream practices such as piercing the eyebrows, lips, breasts, and genitals; decorating the skin by tattooing, scarification, or branding; or completely changing the shape and look of one's body—are often thought of as weird, strange, slightly perverted, or outright asocial.

The last years have brought an explosion of interest in—and demand for—all types of body decoration, though it is mainly tattooing, followed by piercings of all kinds, that has undergone a true renaissance. Once the domain of people at the fringe of society, tattooing (and piercing in its wake) is slowly becoming as accepted as lipstick and face-lifts. This is evidenced by popular trading cards, advertisements of major companies, and the appearance of more and more tattooed heroes and heroines on the screen and in the fashion world.

These pages will show that the impulse to shape one's body and one's self in one's own desired image, far from being something only for social outcasts, seems as intrinsic to being human as are (self)consciousness, art, communication, and sexuality.

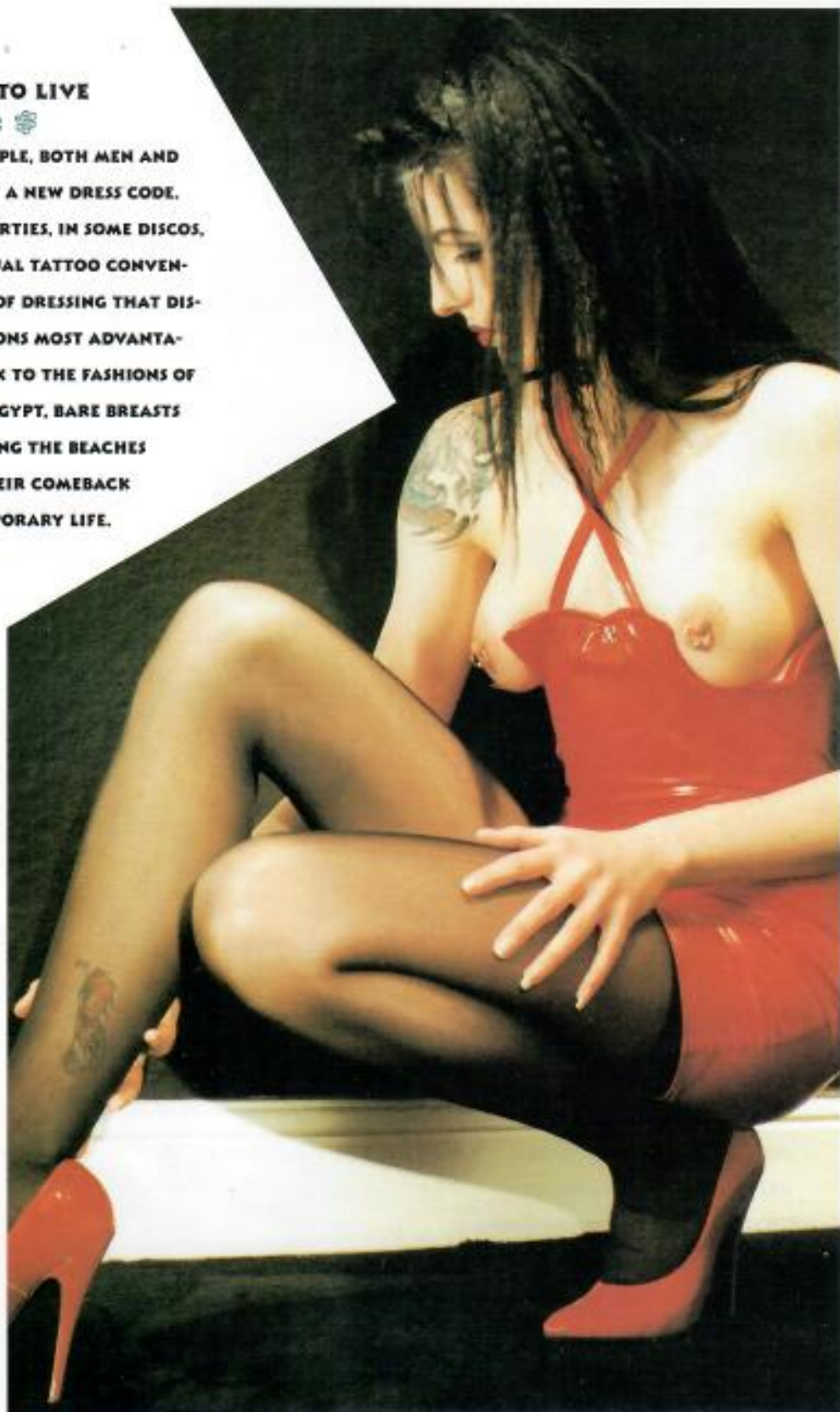
To those with a prejudice against these practices, I would like to say that they are quite normal, once one looks at humanity as a whole rather than assuming that the conventional values held by many of our contemporaries are the only valid ones. To those who contemplate joining the new and fashionable trend by getting their first tattoo or piercing soon, I would like to show the multidimensional background of these traditions in tribal societies of the past and present.

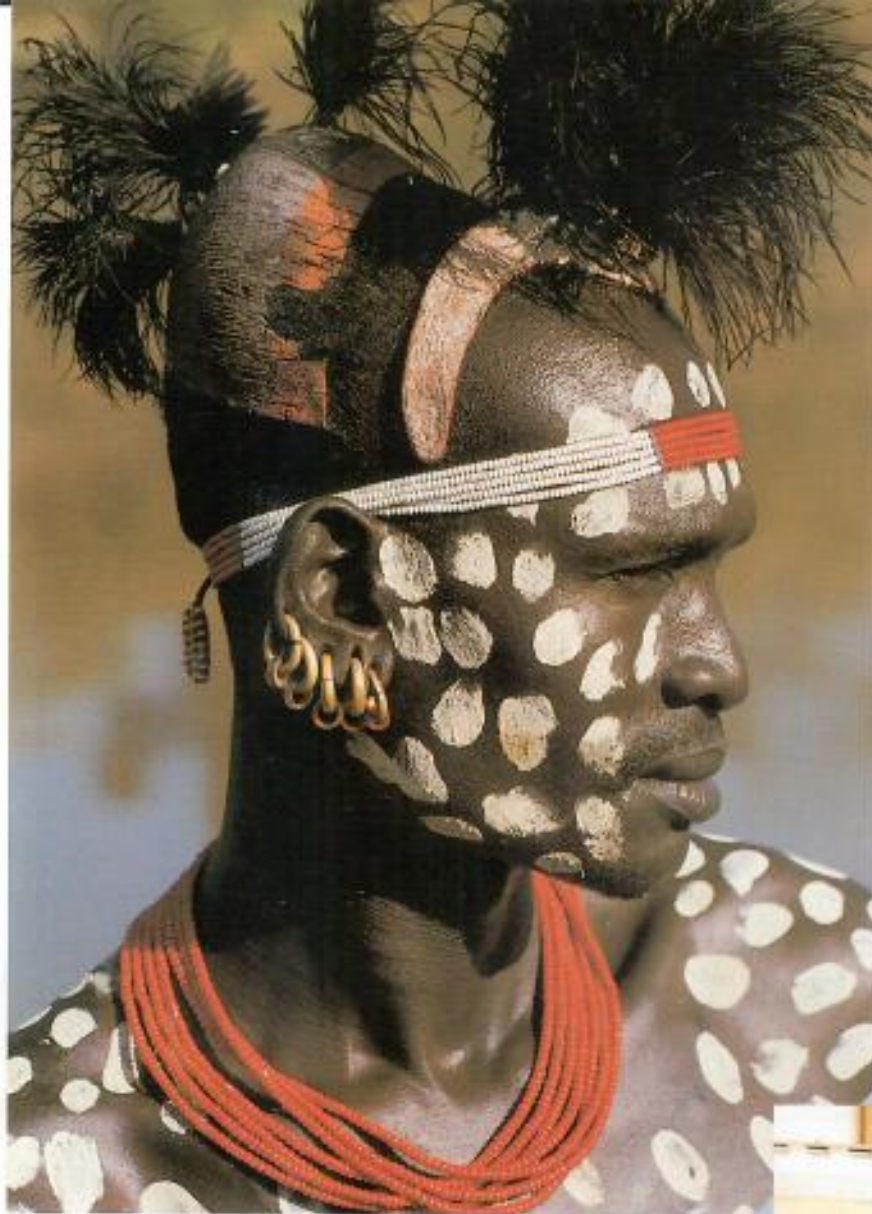
As more and more individuals fully reclaim control over their minds and bodies—a basic human right, yet often usurped by political or religious groups—we see them revive not only such ancient arts as tattooing and piercing but also—more or less simultaneously—many other forms of self-expression within the

DRESSED TO LIVE



BODY-DECORATED PEOPLE, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, OFTEN ADOPT A NEW DRESS CODE. WHETHER AT PRIVATE PARTIES, IN SOME DISCOS, OR AT THE MANY ANNUAL TATTOO CONVENTIONS, THEY FIND WAYS OF DRESSING THAT DISPLAY THEIR DECORATIONS MOST ADVANTAGEOUSLY. HARKING BACK TO THE FASHIONS OF ANCIENT CRETE AND EGYPT, BARE BREASTS ARE SLOWLY LEAVING THE BEACHES AND MAKING THEIR COMEBACK INTO CONTEMPORARY LIFE.





KARO MAN



ELABORATE HAIR DESIGN, BODY PAINTING, AND MULTIPLE PIERCINGS OF THE EAR ARE THE TRADEMARK OF MANY A KARO MAN OF ETHIOPIA. HOWEVER, SCARIFICATION OF THE CHEST, OR WEARING A GRAY AND OCHRE HAIR BUN AS THE MAN IN THIS PHOTO DOES, IS ALLOWED ONLY TO THOSE WHO HAVE KILLED AN ENEMY OR A DANGEROUS ANIMAL. THE SAME HOLDS TRUE AMONG THE KARO'S NEIGHBORS, THE HAMAR.

TRADITION MEETS TECHNOLOGY

JUST AS DISH ANTENNAS CAN NOW BE FOUND IN THE DEEPEST REGIONS OF BORNEO'S RAINFOREST, SO CAN ONE MEET TRADITIONALLY ADORNED TRIBAL PEOPLE IN THE MODERN CITY OF KUCHING. HOWEVER, WHEREAS OTHER TRIBAL PEOPLE OFTEN DISCARD THEIR HEAVY EARRINGS WHEN LEAVING THEIR VILLAGES, THIS ORANG ULU WOMAN PROUDLY DISPLAYS HER TRADITIONAL JEWELRY TO THE WORLD AT LARGE.



social context. Seemingly modern forms of sexuality—especially in group-related forms—indicate that self-directed humans are more playful than the rules and regulations of the last centuries have led most of us to imagine. Again simultaneously, the last three decades have shown a return of many people to values, practices, and ways of thinking that were born in shamanic societies of old—for example, the ritual and communal use of drugs and other techniques aimed at personal transformation by way of ecstatic and extraordinary experiences.

The emergence or renaissance of the ancient tribal arts of body adornment is by no means restricted to the present generation of men and women in Western countries. After having been outlawed and suppressed by Christian or Islamic missionaries and the resulting governments for a century or two, young Samoans, Hawaiians, Maori, and others in Oceania are also reviving their ancient and traditional arts. Stimulated by the new appreciation of, and demand for, their arts and knowledge, peoples from the Pacific to Africa are now recovering and reviving what was almost lost, motivated and helped by a new kind of tourist who is interested in these practices.

Together, all these apparently unrelated “movements” clearly spell out that we are witnessing a Return to the Tribal—something that Marshall McLuhan profoundly sensed and predicted thirty years ago:

Ours is a brand-new world of allatonce-ness. . . . We now live in a global village; a simultaneous happening. . . . We have begun again to structure the primordial feeling, the tribal emotions from which a few centuries of literacy divorced us.¹

THE PENDULUM OF HISTORY: BODY ADORNMENT AND MODIFICATION IN THE FLOW OF TIME

- circa 60,000 B.C.E. Australian Aborigines, probably the oldest peoples still now surviving, practiced body painting and ritual scarification as well as penile subincision and elongation of the labia.
- 15-10,000 B.C.E. Masked figures in the rock engravings of La Madeleine (Dordogne, France) show signs of body painting, possibly tattoos.

Return of the Tribal

- 8-5000 B.C.E. Many of the images at Tassili (Sahara) show markings that probably represent scarification or body painting.
- The Vedas, India's earliest sacred scriptures, mention the goddess Lakshmi as having her nose and earlobes pierced.
- 7000 B.C.E. Skull elongation was practiced in Neolithic Jericho, one of history's first urban centers.
- 4200 B.C.E. Egyptian mummies of two Nubian women show a series of tattooed lines across their abdomens.²
- 4000 B.C.E. Men in pre-dynastic Egypt wore decorated penis sheaths, and women were tattooed.³ Also, pharaohs and other members of the royal family are usually depicted with elongated skulls.
- 3000 B.C.E. "Circum-Pacific" cultural zone, as proposed by Heine Geldern, was formed.⁴ This means, in plain language, that most of the techniques practiced by peoples from Borneo to Hokkaido to Samoa to the Amazon—such as tattooing; piercing of noses, lips, ears, and genitals; and earlobe elongation—may be roughly five thousand years old.
- 2200 B.C.E. A mummified priestess of the Goddess Hathor, during the eleventh dynasty in Egypt, shows tattoos.
- 1900 B.C.E. Anthropomorphic figures of deities in the eastern Mediterranean cultural zone, Eastern Europe, and the Near East show markings that could be tattoos or body painting.
- 1500 B.C.E. The Mesoamerican Olmec culture, and later ones influenced by it, practiced tattooing, scarification, skull elongation, and a variety of piercings, including the forehead and the genitals.
- 1000 B.C.E. In Egypt and Nuba, dancers and prostitutes were tattooed on the thighs or pubic area.
- 500 B.C.E. Approximate date for the archeological find, in the Altai Mountains, Siberia, of the mummified skin of a male hand, tattooed with mythical animals.



IDENTITY AND FREEDOM

A GOLDEN RING IN THE FRONT OF THE RIGHT NOSTRIL IS THE TRADE-MARK OF HADENDAWA WOMEN, WHEREAS OTHER BEJA—ALL MUSLIM AND HEAVILY VEILED—WEAR DIFFERENT TYPES OF NOSE-RINGS. AS WITH OTHER TRIBES ACROSS THE WORLD, PEOPLE'S ADORNMENTS ARE OFTEN DETERMINED BY BEING BORN INTO A PARTICULAR TRIBE. SUCH RESTRAINTS DO NOT EXIST FOR PEOPLE IN NON-TRIBAL SOCIETIES. THE ELEGANT AND UNUSUAL TATTOOS BEFITTING THE ELEGANT LADY AT RIGHT IS A DESIGN TRULY UNIQUE TO HERSELF.





FRESH SCARS

ONCE HEALED, THE LINES OF THIS RECENTLY CUT SCARIFICATION WILL CERTAINLY ENHANCE THE OVERALL LOOK OF THIS ALREADY BEAUTIFUL HAND.

SURI WOMAN, ETHIOPIA

IT TAKES ONLY SIX MONTHS TO STRETCH THE LIPS TO DIMENSIONS THAT CAN HOLD THE HUGE LIP-PLATES OF WOOD OR CLAY THAT ARE WORN BY SURI WOMEN. THE PLATES CAN EASILY BE TAKEN OUT FOR PRIVATE MEALS OR SLEEP. OTHERWISE, THEY MAY BE TAKEN OUT ONLY WHEN THE WEARER IS IN THE COMPANY OF OTHER WOMEN. SOME TRIBES HAVE INTRODUCED THESE PLATES AS A MEANS TO LESSEN QUARRELS WITHIN THE TRIBE; IF A PERSON CAN'T SPEAK THE WHOLE DAY, FEWER IRRITATIONS WILL ARISE IN THE COMMUNITY.



- 450 B.C.E. Faces on Japanese clay figures show tattoos.⁵
Herodotus (484–420) reports that the Thracian aristocracy wears tattoos and that leading Greek citizens were often tattooed according to their profession.
- 400 B.C.E. The Maya, like various peoples in Africa, chipped their front teeth in a way that made them look like animal fangs.
- 250 B.C.E. Chinese and Korean literary records show that the full-body tattoo was practiced in Japan.
- 200 B.C.E. Plastic surgery documented in India: a lost nose was reconstructed with folds of skin.
- In Greece, slaves were marked by branding.
- Fifth century Roman soldiers gave the name *Picts* to Gallic warriors who went into battle naked, displaying their “fearsome” tattoos. The centurians, the reigning caesar’s elite bodyguards, enhanced their show of strength and virility by displaying their pierced and bejeweled nipples.
- 550 In Japan, people of the lower castes (butchers, executioners, circus people, and others) were marked by tattoos on their arms.
- 720 In Japan, facial tattoos (for example, the word *traitor*) were used to mark delinquents, and the aristocracy was also still marked with tiny tattoos near the eye.⁶
- Thirteenth century In Japan, tattooing was no longer restricted to the lower classes and became regarded as a fine art.
- 1685 The “Black Code” specified that black slaves should be marked by a brand on the chest.
- 1791 Until this time, craftsmen throughout Europe were identified, in the absence of written diplomas, by tattoos that were proof of their profession.
- Eighteenth century Japan ended the use of tattoos or branding to mark criminals, yet tattoos remained stigmatized and only social outsiders, such as prostitutes, had them.

Return of the Tribal

This century of discovery, with now-famous explorers roaming the world by sea, saw many sailors get tattooed in styles influenced by the peoples they "discovered."

In Europe, the technique of elongating a child's skull slowly ceased to be practiced. Before this time, it was known from Holland to France and eastward into the Caucasus.

- Nineteenth century** Having been imported from China via a kind of comic book, around 1750, the artistic full-body tattoo so characteristic of Japan reached the height of its development.⁷
- 1852** In France, printed police records replaced the practice of marking thieves by tattooing a fleur-de-lis on the right shoulder.
- 1870** In Japan, tattooing was forbidden by Emperor Meiji, and the ban remained until 1945.
- 1882** The Japanese art of tattooing reached Victorian England through the works of tattoo masters such as Sutherland MacDonald, whose clientele included several monarchs of this time. In the wake of this event, many Chinese and Japanese tattoo experts moved to Europe and the United States, and local artists also learned this trade.⁸ This new popularity also resulted in the exhibition of tattooed people at fairgrounds.
- 1891** Invention of the electric tattooing machine.
- 1939 to 1945** In Germany, Hitler's henchmen tattooed prisoners in concentration camps with a number on the arm. Members of the SS, however, were tattooed with their blood group in the left armpit to aid doctors in treating them.
- In the wake of Hitler's proposal for an ideal race, some parents revived a form of skull modeling in order to make a round baby's head into a high, longish one conforming to the proposed "master race."⁹

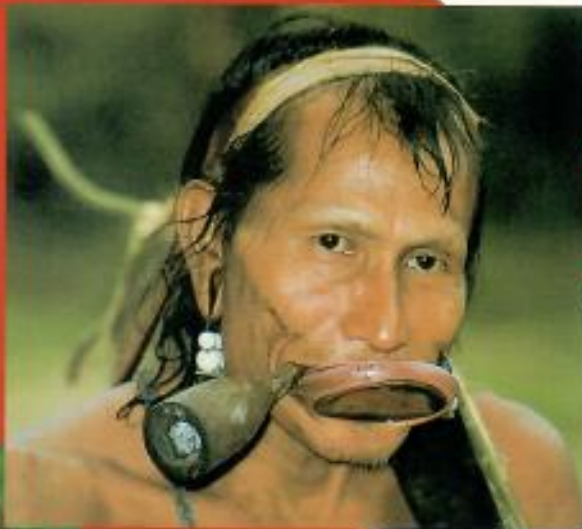
Introduction

- 1945 Tattooing was once again allowed in Japan.
- 1950s Subcultures such as the early rockers and teddy boys helped bring the tattoo to a new popularity.¹⁰ Also, the mohawk hairstyle, based on the practice of a Native American tribe, appeared among members of New York City street gangs.
- 1960s to 1980s More subcultures, from hippies to Hell's Angels and punks, practiced tattooing extensively, often as a language of defiance against prevalent social norms. At the same time, body piercing became popular in the gay leather scene, or "tribe," of San Francisco. Specific names associated with this trend are Doug Malloy (d. 1979), Jim Ward (of Gauntlet), Fakir Musafar (of Body Play), and Alan Oversby (a.k.a. Mr. Sebastian).
- 1970s Punks, apart from often wearing tattoos, also adopted such tribal techniques as piercing and coloring their hair like that of Papuan warriors, and they, too, adopted the mohawk hairstyle.
- 1977 Fakir Musafar coined the term *Modern Primitives* and introduced tribal and spiritual concepts and language into the growing ranks of those who practiced piercing and other forms of body modification.
- 1989 Publication of the book *Modern Primitives*, largely responsible for popularizing so-called neotribal tattoos as well as a further resurgence of techniques such as piercing, branding, and scarification, often performed in a more or less public and/or ritual context. England's immediate attempt to ban this book on charges of obscenity helped make it famous.¹¹
- 1990 Musician Perry Farrell created the first so-called *Lollapalooza* tour. With Farrell himself being tattooed, scarified, and adorned with multiple piercings, and the show being a kind of wild, tribal-like gathering combining entertainment with political and human rights concerns, the tribal renaissance already in process was enhanced.

KAIAPO WARRIOR WITH LIP-PLATE AND PIPE



ALTHOUGH MUCH OF TRADITIONAL KAIAPO CULTURE IS STILL ALIVE AND GENERAL NUDITY, BODY PAINTING, AND ELONGATION OF THE EARLOBES ARE WIDELY PRACTICED, THE CUSTOMARY LIP-PLATE OF THE MEN IS DISAPPEARING. THIS PHOTOGRAPH SHOWS IREKUM, ONE OF THE FEW MEN STILL TO WEAR SUCH A PLATE.



DARING TEENAGERS

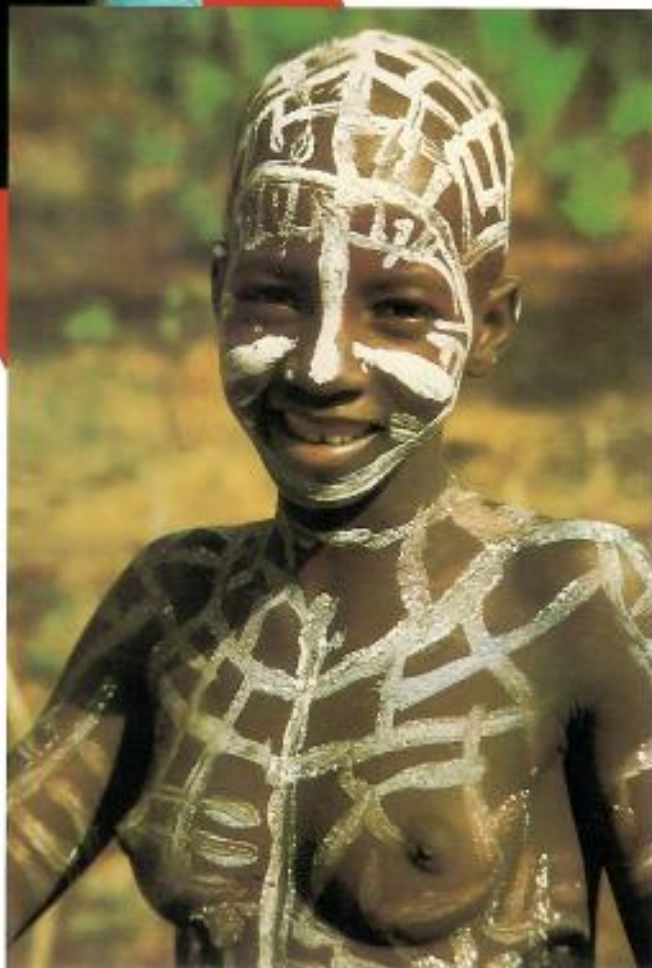


EVEN IN SMALL TOWNS AND RURAL AREAS, SUCH AS ROCHESTER, VERMONT, THE MORE DARING AND ADVENTUROUS YOUTHS HAVE BEGUN TO EXPERIMENT WITH PIERCINGS.

INITIATION AND DEATH



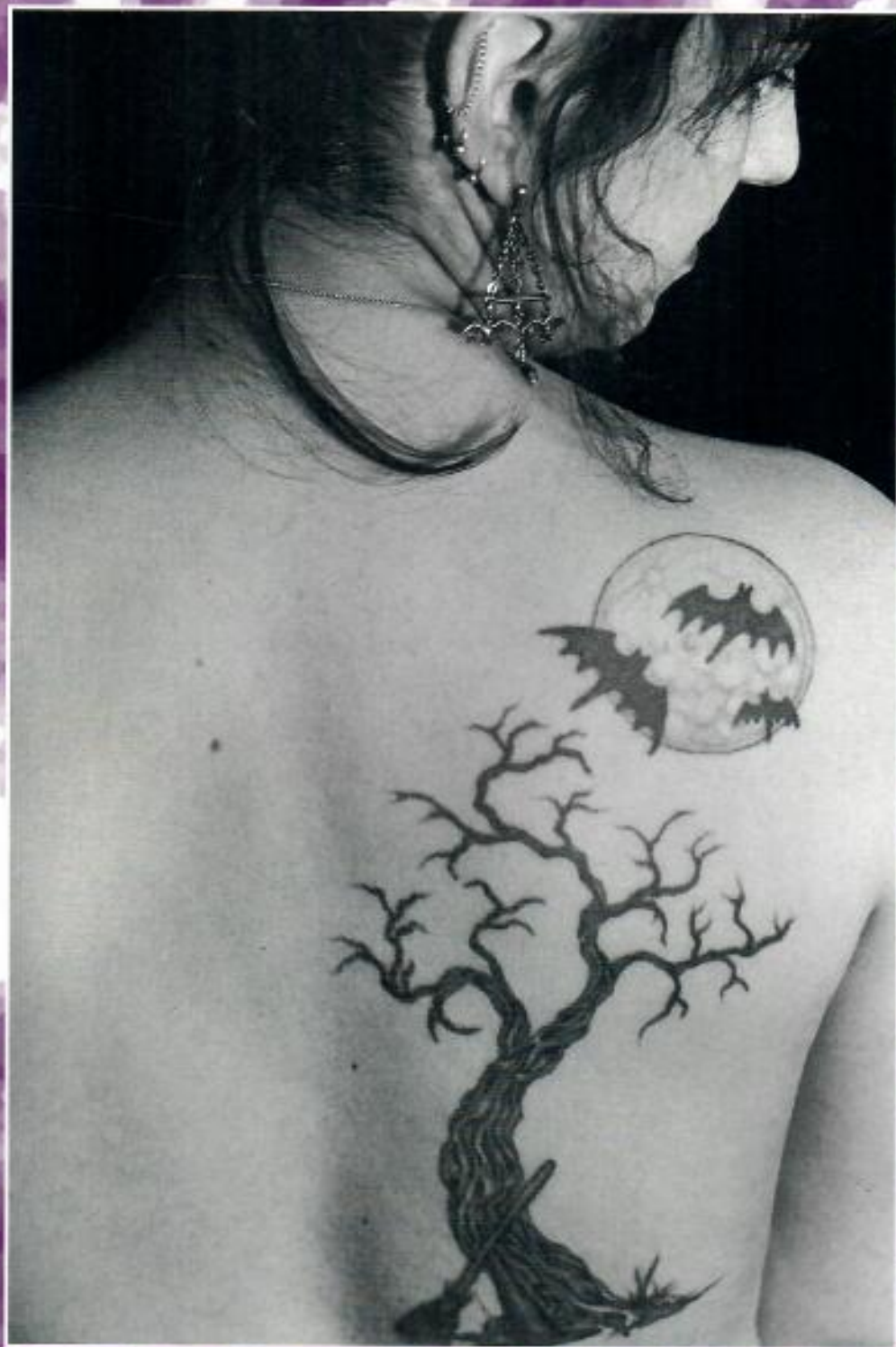
AMONG THE LOBI OF UPPER VOLTA, THE BOYS AND GIRLS TO BE INITIATED ARE PAINTED IN A MANNER THAT MAKES THEIR BODIES RESEMBLE SKELETONS. OUR OWN ASSOCIATION OF A SKELETON WITH DEATH, MERELY A CULTURAL BIAS, DOES NOT ACTUALLY BEAR ON THIS. RATHER, AMONG TRIBAL PEOPLES IN AFRICA, AUSTRALIA, AND PAPUA NEW GUINEA, SUCH SKELETON PAINTINGS INDICATE THEIR SENSORY ABILITY OF "X-RAY VISION," WHICH IS COMPARABLE TO THE SONIC ABILITY OF DOLPHINS TO DETECT CHANGES AND DISEASES IN SOMEONE ELSE'S BODY. SEE PAGE 53 FOR A CROSS-CULTURAL EXAMPLE.



Introduction

1980s to 1990s More and more research on tribal people, their arts, and lifestyles, and more and more available images of body-decorated people have led to the publication of many specialized books and magazines (see Bibliography).

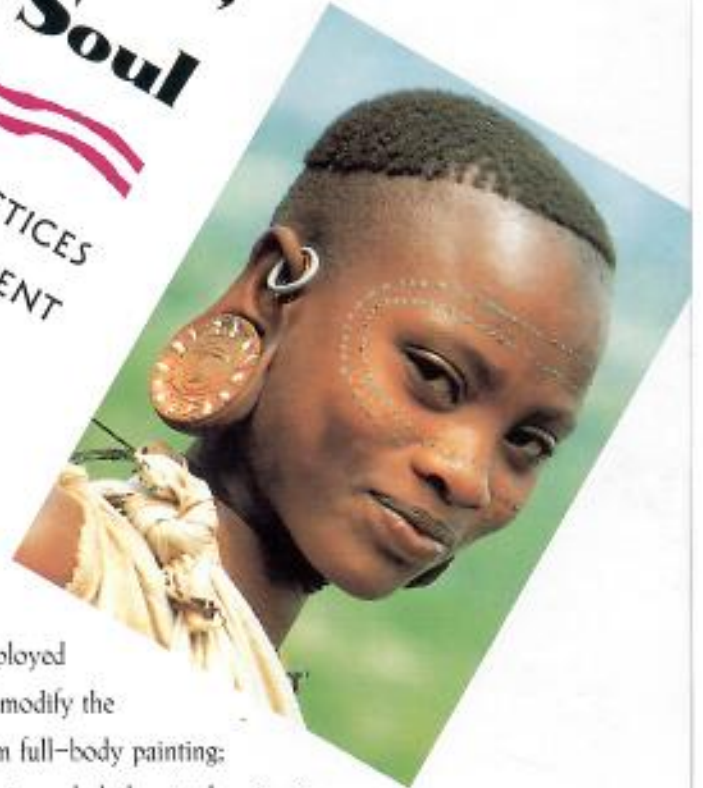
Unfortunately, many techniques and many peoples do not appear in this short history of adornment and modification, simply because certain techniques have no known chronicle. In India, for example, piercing and tattooing have long been part of the tradition, yet there is no record of when these practices started. Similarly, in the absence of a written history, we cannot know when people from the African deserts to the Amazon rainforest truly began painting their bodies or elongating their earlobes and lips. To say they have done so since the beginning of time does not help. Yet, I am convinced—as an avid student of history and anthropology—that most of these practices are older than any existing and archeologically validated works of art, which started to appear about 30,000 years ago. One must not forget that, with the exception of mummies, all art on the human body disappears into fire or ashes along with its bearer. The arts of body decoration and modification are truly ephemeral.



1

Skin and Bone, Body and Soul

ANCIENT AND MODERN PRACTICES
OF BODY ADORNMENT



SINCE THE DAWN of humanity, a great variety of practices and techniques have been employed by both sexes to decorate, beautify, enhance, and modify the body we inherit at birth. The practices range from full-body painting; facial makeup; tattoos; and wearing jewelry, lingerie, and clothes to the piercing of ears, noses, mouths, and nipples; genital adornment and enhancement; shaving, cutting, or coloring of one's hair; and more permanent modifications through sacrifice, amputation, binding, or elongation.

Whereas many people today who decorate their bodies are motivated mainly by a personal or collective rebellion against a culture that seems to reduce humans to mere numbers, or by fashions inspired by the streets and the media, tribal cultures have a great variety of other motivations for these practices. Some decorations are self-motivated expressions of personal freedom and uniqueness. Most,

PERSONAL PROCLAMATION

OOOOO
PAGE 14

NOT UNLIKE THE CLAN-MARKS FOUND IN TRIBAL SOCIETIES, THE LADY IN THIS IMAGE STATES HER ALLEGIANCE TO THE OLD RELIGION BY WAY OF HER TATTOO THAT FEATURES SEVERAL SYMBOLS TYPICAL FOR WICCAN THOUGHT AND CEREMONY: A BROOMSTICK AND THREE BATS ALIGHTING FROM A WILLOW AND FLYING TOWARDS THE FULL MOON.

EAR PLUGS

PAGE 15

AMONG MANY TRIBAL PEOPLE THE EAR IS PIERCED NOT MERELY TO ACCOMMODATE A SIMPLE EARRING BUT TO ALLOW FOR CAREFUL ENLARGEMENT UNTIL THE PIERCING CAN HOLD EVER LARGER OBJECTS. THIS SURI GIRL FROM ETHIOPIA WEARS AN EAR PLUG MADE OF CLAY, AS DO MOST OF THE WOMEN IN HER COMMUNITY FROM YOUNG GIRLHOOD ONWARD.

however, have to do with traditions that mark the person as a member or nonmember of the local group, or express religious, magical, or spiritual beliefs and convictions.

In most parts of the world, tribal people have used body decoration for a variety of reasons:

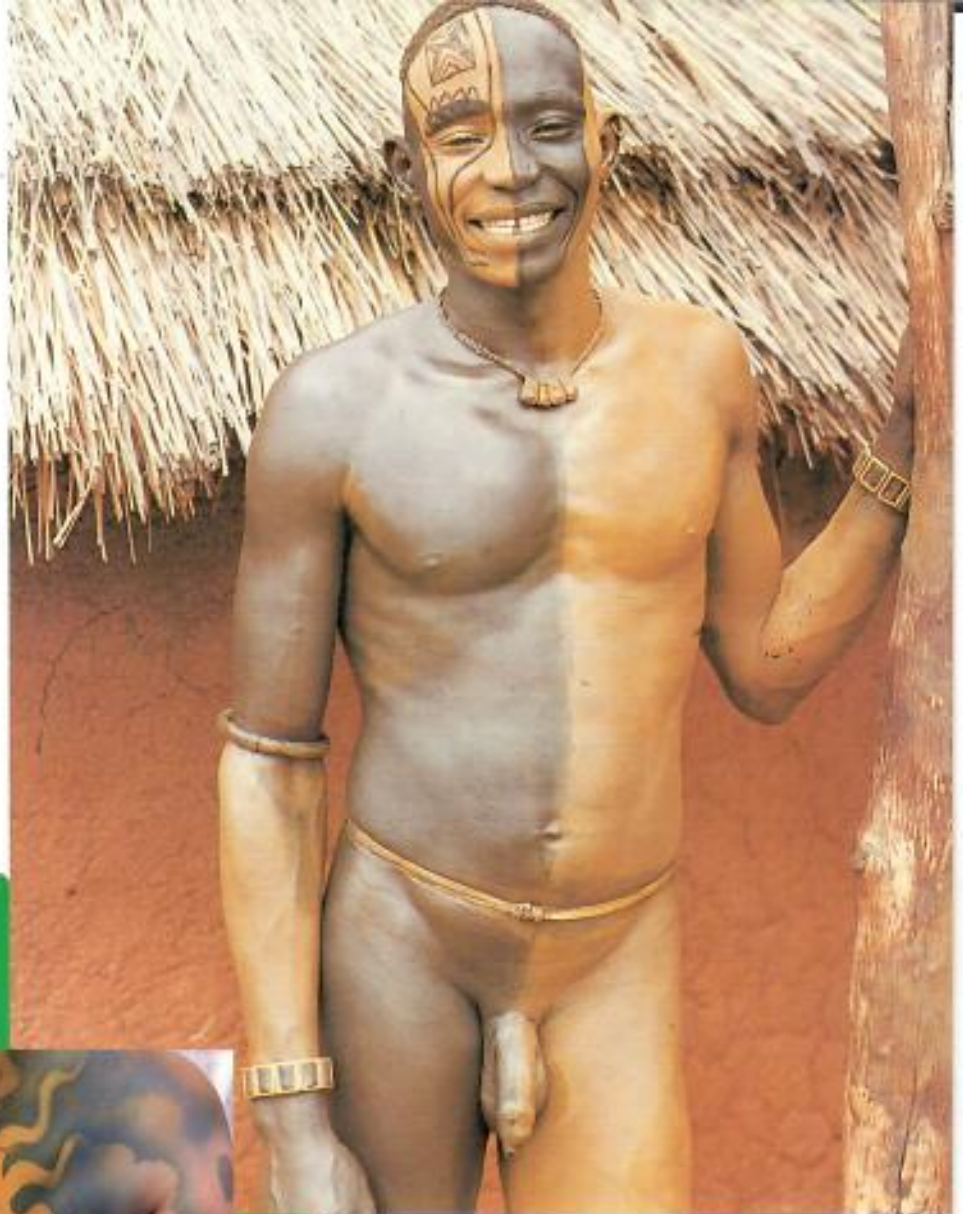
- ♦ to indicate one's affiliation to a clan, tribe, or totemic group
- ♦ to indicate one's age group, social ranking, or status
- ♦ to mark slaves and/or criminals
- ♦ as a sign of mourning
- ♦ to deflect evil and illness
- ♦ to gain entry, on dying, into the other world
- ♦ to attain magical powers
- ♦ to appear fierce and frightening to enemies
- ♦ to be (more) attractive to others and/or oneself
- ♦ to enhance sexual stimulation for oneself and/or one's partner(s)

Seen from an individual point of view, or from within the framework of a given group, society, or culture, certain of these practices are regarded as normal or harmless. But whoever moves beyond the currently accepted behavior or defined boundaries is usually labeled with terms that range from crazy or weird to criminal or pathological. It is important to remember that other people's cultural and spiritual practices are no less valid than our own.

Numerous practices of body adornment and modification range from Cain's mark in the Old Testament and Maori facial tattoos to the piercing, branding, and scarification of contemporary urban tribals in London, New York, Tokyo, and Amsterdam and neotribals throughout the world. If we look at the variety of these body adornment techniques with a more or less impartial eye, it is evident that in all these different practices—ranging from shaving and from applying eyeliner to amputating the foreskin—only a few similarities can be discerned. The clearest patterns emerge when

NUBA PERSONAL ART

UNLIKE THE MANY OTHER PEOPLES WHO OFTEN USE BODY PAINTING AND OTHER MARKS TO SYMBOLIZE AN INDIVIDUAL'S AGE OR STATUS, PEOPLE IN SOUTHEAST NUBA HAVE A GREAT DEGREE OF CREATIVE FREEDOM IN THEIR DESIGNS, WITHIN A FEW LIMITS IMPOSED BY TRADITION. MOST NUBA BODY ART, LIKE THAT SHOWN HERE, FURTHER DISTINGUISHES ITSELF BY A GREAT DEAL OF ATTENTION TO SYMMETRY OR ASYMMETRY. NOTICE ALSO THE PIERCED UPPER LEFT EAR.



SUN GODDESS

EVEN MORE DETAIL AND MORE CREATIVE FREEDOM THAN IN THE NUBA EXAMPLE ABOVE HAS LED TO THE BEAUTIFUL EXAMPLE OF CONTEMPORARY BODY PAINTING AT LEFT. ARTIST NATASHA VON ROSENSCHILDE SPECIALIZES IN USING THE SKIN OF BEAUTIFUL WOMEN AND MEN AS HER CANVAS, THUS CREATING STUNNING IMAGES THAT TURN THESE PEOPLE INTO COSMIC ARCHETYPES. SEE PAGES 25, 36 AND 50 FOR MORE OF HER WORK.

we use the objective criteria of permanence (how long the decoration lasts) and possible structural change to the body (whether it is soft tissue or bone that is altered) rather than arbitrary cultural standards. Thus, using the available evidence presented by ancient and modern practices, we can classify the great variety of techniques of decorating, enhancing, and modifying the human body into a simple fourfold scheme: noninvasive, invasive,* temporary, and/or permanent.

➤ **NONINVASIVE PRACTICES** ➤

Noninvasive practices include all methods of body decoration that are applied only to the body's surface. Noninvasive techniques do not involve any structural change or modification of the body or any of its parts; they remain superficial in the true sense of the word. Typical examples of noninvasive body decoration range from using nail polish to wearing clip-on earrings, from changing the color of one's hair to wearing colored contact lenses, and from facial makeup to full-fledged body painting, coloring of teeth, face design, foot design, hand design, and growing long fingernails.

➤ **INVASIVE PRACTICES** ➤

This classification refers to those techniques that modify any part of the body—temporarily or permanently—by means of elongating, perforating, cutting, or amputating; introducing foreign substances; or changing the body's bone structure. Typical examples of invasive body decoration range from specialized haircuts, "permanent makeup," piercing, and tattooing to the elongation of the neck or skull, circumcision, subincision, and cliterodectomy.

Invasive body decorations:

- *Temporary*: cosmetic tattoo, simple piercing
- *Permanent modifications*: beading, elongation of earlobes, elongation of labia,

*Although the term *invasive* has a slightly negative connotation, I do not imply any such negativity by using it. *Invasive*, in this context, simply indicates that skin or other tissue is "invaded" by a tool and/or material. Rather than creating a new term without negative connotations, I have preferred to use this one, which is used by many scientific publications.

certain types of cosmetic surgery, infibulation, insertion of ear-disks, insertion of lip-plugs, enlargement of piercings, scarification (branding and cutting), subincision, tattoo

- *Permanent modifications involving bone:* certain types of cosmetic surgery, elongation of the skull, elongation of the neck, foot-binding
- *Amputations:* castration, circumcision, clitoridectomy, certain types of cosmetic surgery, finger sacrifice, labial removal, tooth extraction, tooth filing

✦ TEMPORARY DECORATIONS ✦

To the temporary decorations belong all those techniques that *seem* to change the body but in fact only change its surface appearance and possibly the individual's sense of self and personality. Temporary decorations can be classified as either short term or long term, depending on the length of time they endure once they have been applied.

A typical short-term decoration is noninvasive and can be fully removed at any given time after its application. Depending on the materials used, these decorations may disappear fully or they may leave traces for a short while. Typical examples of short-term decorations are facial makeup, hair removal, coloring of teeth, and body painting.

A long-term decoration cannot easily be removed because of the invasive nature, however slight, of its application to the body. The only natural manner of removal is in the form of the regenerative powers of the body over time. A typical example of long-term decoration is the contemporary cosmetic tattoo, also known as "permanent makeup," which lasts about three to six years. Another is the decoration applied to the hands or feet with henna dye. Piercing can be a temporary adornment, given that a simple perforation of the skin will often close again once the inserted jewelry is taken out for a length of time, though for our purposes we will classify piercing as a permanent change.

✦ PERMANENT CHANGES ✦

Most types of body decorations that are permanent are invasive modifications, with piercing and scarification as the foremost examples. Permanent modifications come in several distinct types, depending on whether only soft tissue (skin or flesh)

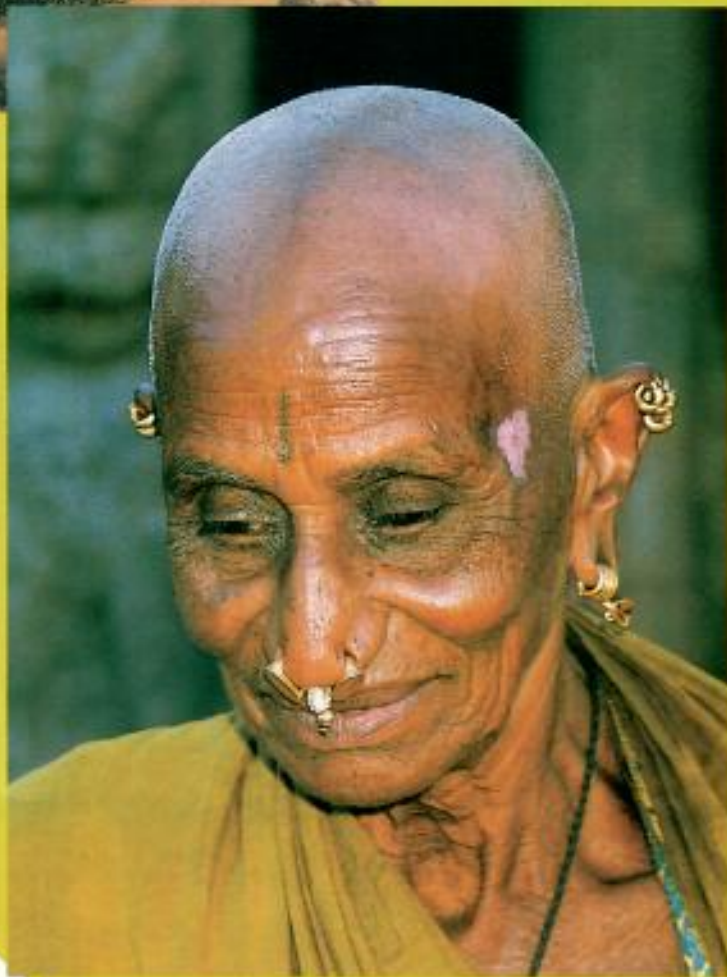
MODERN VIKING

ALTHOUGH FACIAL TATTOOS CAN PROVE TROUBLESDOME WITHIN SOCIETIES WHERE SUCH TRADITION DOES NOT EXIST, THE YOUNG GERMAN SHOWN HERE HAS FOUND OUT THAT PEOPLE DO GET USED TO HIS MULTIPLE TATTOOS ONCE THEY KNOW HIM, AND THAT PREJUDICE THEN USUALLY DISAPPEARS WITH TIME.



INDIAN PILGRIM

UNIQUE, HEAVY GOLDEN JEWELRY IS WORN BY THIS AGED INDIAN WOMAN IN HER PIERCED EARS, NOSTRILS, AND NASAL SEPTUM. ONE SHOULD REALIZE THAT THIS WOMAN IS NOT "TRIBAL" BUT—WITHIN HER CULTURE—A TRUE CONTEMPORARY. DURING HER PILGRIMAGES, SHE SHAVED HER HAIR IN ORDER TO OFFER IT TO HER DEITY.

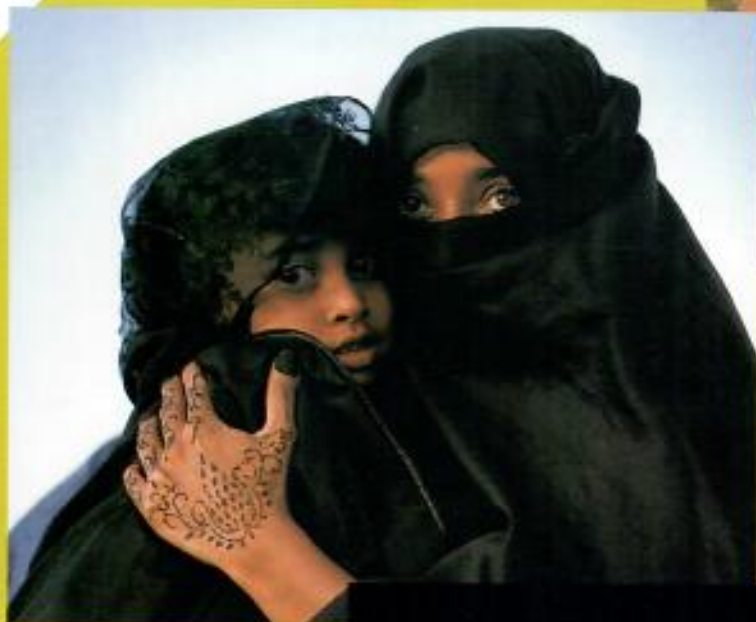
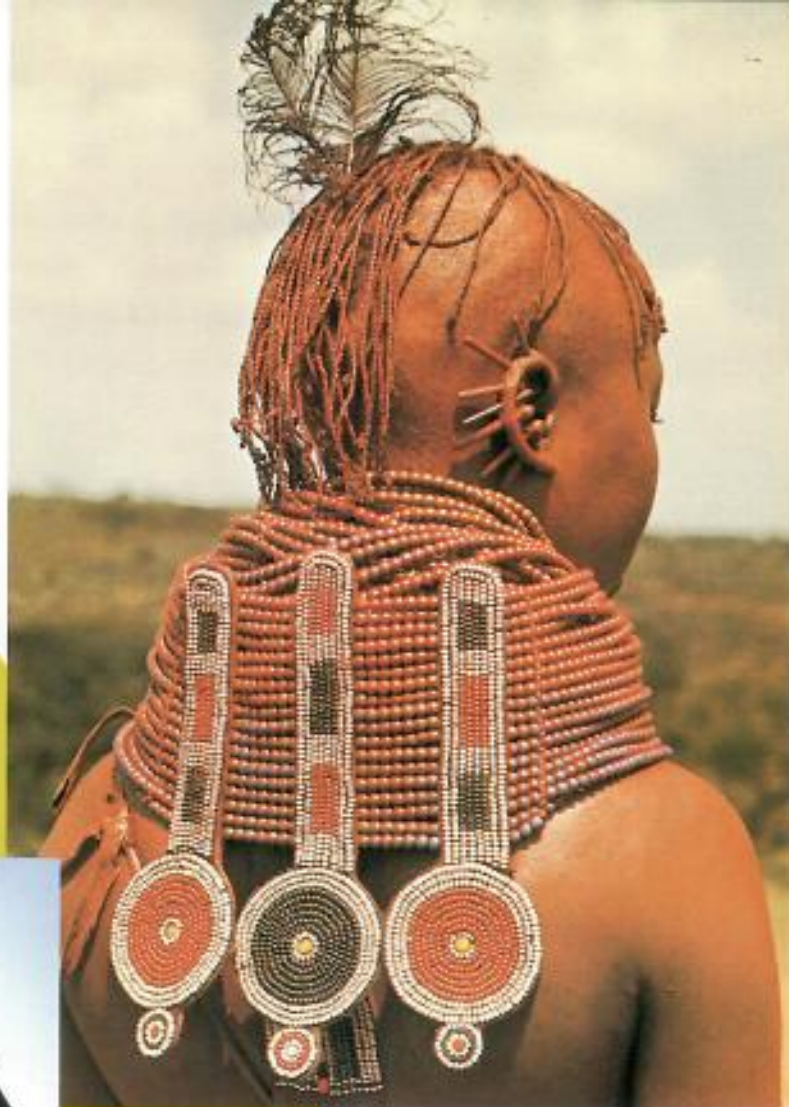


EAR INSERTS

TURKANA WOMAN FROM KENYA
WITH MULTIPLE PIERCINGS ALONG
THE OUTSIDE EDGE OF HER EAR.

HENNA DYE

THE HAND OF THIS SWAHILI
WOMAN FROM LAMU, KENYA,
SHOWS THAT HENNA PASTE CAN BE
USED TO COLOR THE FINGERNAILS
AND TO CREATE INTRICATE DESIGNS
ON THE SKIN.



CONTEMPORARY SCARIFICATION

PHOTOGRAPHED SHORTLY
AFTER THE INCISIONS HAVE BEEN
MADE, THESE STILL-BLOODY
SCARS WILL SOON TURN INTO A
SOFT AND FLOWING DESIGN, LESS
VISIBLE THAN A TATTOO BUT
COMMEMORATING FOR ALL
TIMES THE EFFORT OF WILL THAT
WAS NEEDED TO ENDURE AND
TRANSFORM THE PAIN
ACCOMPANYING THE CUTTING.

is involved or whether the body's bone structure is actually altered.

Soft-tissue alterations include tattoos, circumcision, and face-lifts as well as piercings that are enlarged and kept open over time (for example, with disks, plugs, or sticks inserted in the ears or lips).

Soft-tissue alterations:

- *Decorations*: cosmetic tattoo, simple piercings that are not enlarged
- *Modifications*: certain types of cosmetic surgery, elongation of earlobes, elongation of labia, infibulation, insertion of ear-disks, insertion of lip-plugs, enlarged piercings, scarification (branding and cutting), subincision, tattoo
- *Amputations*: castration, circumcision, clitoridectomy, removal of labia

Hard-tissue changes, or structural changes to bones, occur in such practices as elongation of the skull or neck, filing the teeth, or inlaying the teeth with precious stones. All of these changes are invasive, permanent modifications. Some of these practices are actual amputations that result in the permanent loss of a part of the body, however small.

Hard-tissue alterations:

- *Bone changes*: elongation of the skull, elongation of the neck, foot-binding
- *Amputation*: finger sacrifice, tooth extraction, tooth filing, certain types of cosmetic surgery

Many of these practices have surfaced over the last few decades in the urban centers of both Eastern and Western societies. But they differ in several ways from those that are and have been practiced by tribal peoples across the globe. Whereas, for example, tattooing and piercing various parts of the body are more or less common in many cultures and across time, some practices have not yet resurfaced here and may never do so. Elongation of the skull, for example, as has been practiced in China and Egypt, or elongation of the neck, as is still done in Burma, do not occur in our societies. These are techniques that have to be set in motion at a very early age, and parents who would attempt to do so today would almost certainly end up in prison.

In societies such as ours, where the body is usually covered, body-decorated

men and women often feel the need to adopt a new dress code in order to show or exhibit the artistic creations that have become part of their bodies and selves. Whether at private parties, in some discos, or at the many annual tattoo conventions, ways of dressing are found that display these decorations most advantageously (see page 3). Harking back to the fashions of ancient Crete and Egypt, bare breasts are slowly leaving the beaches and making their comeback into urban life.

Certain individuals, however, seem to go too far for almost everyone's taste but their own. Sometimes, especially within the "inner circle" of those who have acquired multiple tattoos and piercings, the old human spirit of competition comes forward. In those cases, it seems that all moderation is lost and the question becomes merely: Who has the most? Who dares the most? Who is most outrageous?

With all due respect for people's individual choices and all celebrations of one's body, I believe there are certain borders it is better not to cross in order to remain an accepted member of whatever group, and certain practices it is better not to follow or encourage, such as forced clitoridectomy, circumcision, or castration. Those latter practices do not result in the dazzling works of art produced by men and women of the world's remaining tribal cultures, which seem to compete with the spectacular, colorful, and exotic plants, birds, and butterflies that are part of their environment, nor do they result in the joy that is visibly expressed between the young flirting Ethiopian couple on page 72.

Whether one applies simple facial makeup, full-body painting, multiple scarifications, tattoos, or piercings, it is my conviction that only those adornments, decorations, and modifications that enhance joy in living and a person's love and respect for self and others are true expressions of humanity. All such enhancements, whether temporary or permanent, invasive or not, are expressions of celebrating the body, celebrating the self, and celebrating life as a human being.



I Am Marked, Therefore I Am

THE SELF IN THE SOCIAL MIRROR



LIKE IT OR NOT, none of us can escape being reflected in the mirror that consists of the eyes—and thoughts—of all others we encounter in a given moment and throughout our lives. We may feel or act as individuals as much as we like, need, or dare; yet we still cannot escape the fact that we are members of small and large groups—family or tribe, society or subculture, clan or totem, gender or race. If all else fails, each of us is at least a member of humanity, that particular species of primates known for a few essential traits that differentiate it from all others.

One of these human traits, although schoolteachers around the world forget to mention it when they speak about brains, intelligence, and verbal and manual skills, is the love and need for adornment, decoration, and true modification of the human body.

Almost all peoples of all ages and all continents have done so—and continue to do so—and for a variety of reasons and with various motivations. Specific ways of

**TRADITIONAL
TXICAO BODY
PAINTING**



PAGE 24

SOMETIMES, AS HERE
AMONG THE TXICAO
INDIANS OF THE
AMAZONIAN TROPICAL
FORESTS, THE COLORFUL
DESIGNS PAINTED ON THE
NUDE BODY IN PREPARA-
TION FOR CEREMONIAL
GATHERINGS INDICATE THE
AGE GROUP TO WHICH AN
INDIVIDUAL BELONGS.

SNAKE GODDESS



PAGE 25

DETAIL FROM ANOTHER
EXAMPLE OF NATASHA VON
ROSENSCHILDE'S BODY ART.
HERE, A WOMAN HAS BEEN
TURNED INTO A MYTHICAL
REPTILE BY COVERING ALL
HER BODY WITH MULTICOL-
ORED SCALES.

body adornment and modification have been and are applied with completely different rationales. From the point of view of a group, they have been applied in order to mark someone as a member of the general group but also in order to mark someone as not being a member, as an outcast: the famous Biblical mark of Cain. From the point of view of the individual, again, one can mark oneself as a member and/or one can try to present or exaggerate oneself as an individual not bound by the dictates of others.

The combination of these four related yet different motivations has led to a particularly rich art form, which only recently has become recognized as such. It has also led to a rich history of approval and disapproval, sanction, or prohibition. Primarily, it has led to a great virtual library of signs, symbols, and techniques, and today, in the age of information distribution, we can, as many do, draw on all that our ancestors all over the world have done. Sometimes ancient techniques and symbols are faithfully copied; at other times they are adapted more or less skillfully and changed more or less successfully.

The two most basic distinctions of marks seem to be whether or not we are dealing with a *mark of Cain* or with a *mark of civilization*.^{*} The clearly negative mark of Cain was used in many cultures, from Canaan of the Old Testament to modern Japan, and from ancient China to twentieth-century Nazi Germany. In such cases, the tattoo or another way of marking the skin has been used to mark murderers and other criminals and also to brand human slaves in the manner of cattle. A similar practice has also been used by tribal peoples, for example, to publicly shame someone for cowardice. In that manner, a former chief of the Dayaks in Borneo was marked by a large tattoo for having fled from the enemy when he should have stood with his braves.

^{*} For the phrase "marks of civilization," we are indebted to researcher Arnold Rubin, who used it as a title for his outstanding work (see Bibliography).



IBAN MAN

○
**THIS MAN HAS THE BODY
TATTOOS TYPICAL OF
MOST OF THE DAYAK
GROUPS IN BORNEO.**

SURI BODY PAINTING

○
**A YOUNG SURI WOMAN OF ETHIOPIA
WITH SCARIFICATIONS AND LARGE EAR-
PLUGS IS BEING PAINTED. MOST OFTEN,
THIS IS DONE BY MEN OF THE TRIBE.**



To the present-day sensitivities of many of us, such practices belong in the category of what we now call human rights violations. It is much easier, then, to accept one or more of those practices of marking that are intended as adornments, even though they may be as painful as being branded as a slave. On the whole, people are much more attracted to the marks of civilization: those types of tattoos or scarifications that show the individual to be a member of the group, to be initiated, or to be of a certain age or standing. These kinds of marks, adornments, and modifications have been used around the world not to set a person apart but to make that person recognizable as part of the group—someone who can be trusted or is even to be regarded as a human being at all.

Whether by requiring a full-body tattoo or by circumcising, many cultures and peoples regard only those with the right markings as pure, clean, or valuable members. Sometimes a marked member of the group is called "cooked" (seasoned, experienced, human), whereas an unmarked outsider is regarded as "raw" (an unknown and unproven entity, closer to the animals than to humans).¹²

However, in most of these cases, the individual has no real choice in the matter, neither in choosing whether to be marked at all nor concerning the time, manner, and design of marking. Most often, tribal people adhere in these matters to rather rigid traditions, into which changes creep only slowly.

Among many African peoples, for example, not only do young girls have to undergo the fearsome clitoridectomy, but the life cycle of a woman is repeatedly inscribed in painful markings on her skin. From menarche and marriage to motherhood and menopause, she is marked by painful scarifications. Less painful, but nevertheless involuntary, is the manner in which Dinka men and others paint their bodies or the way Burmese women reshape their legs with heavy metal rings.

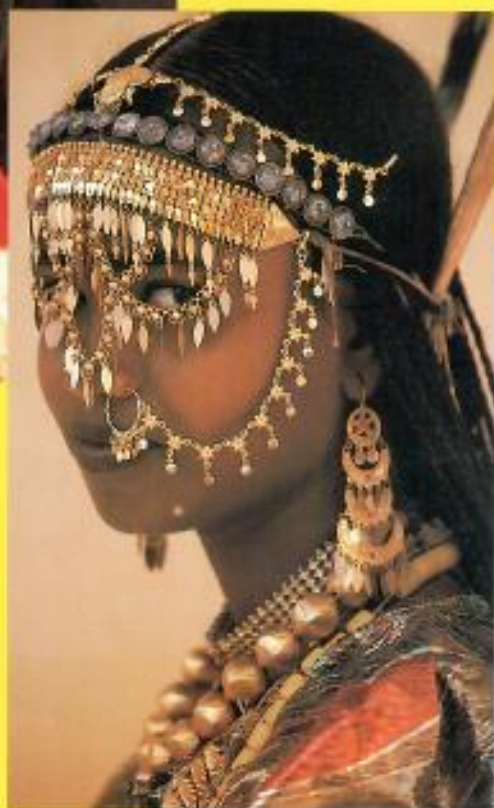
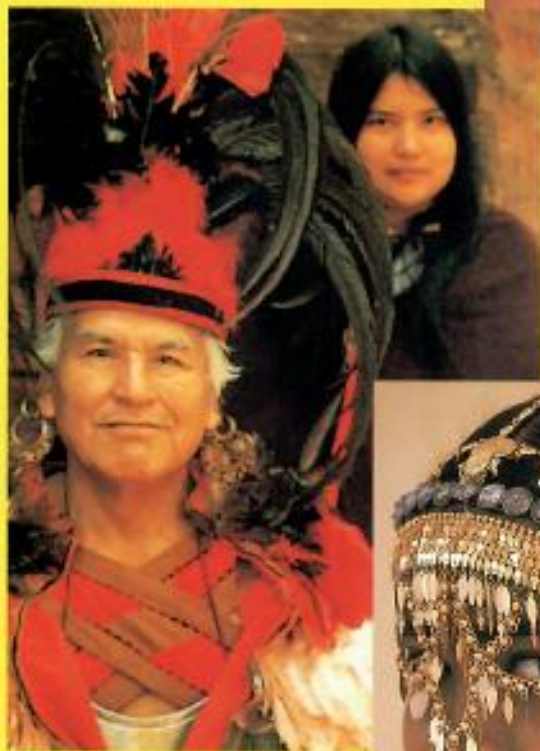
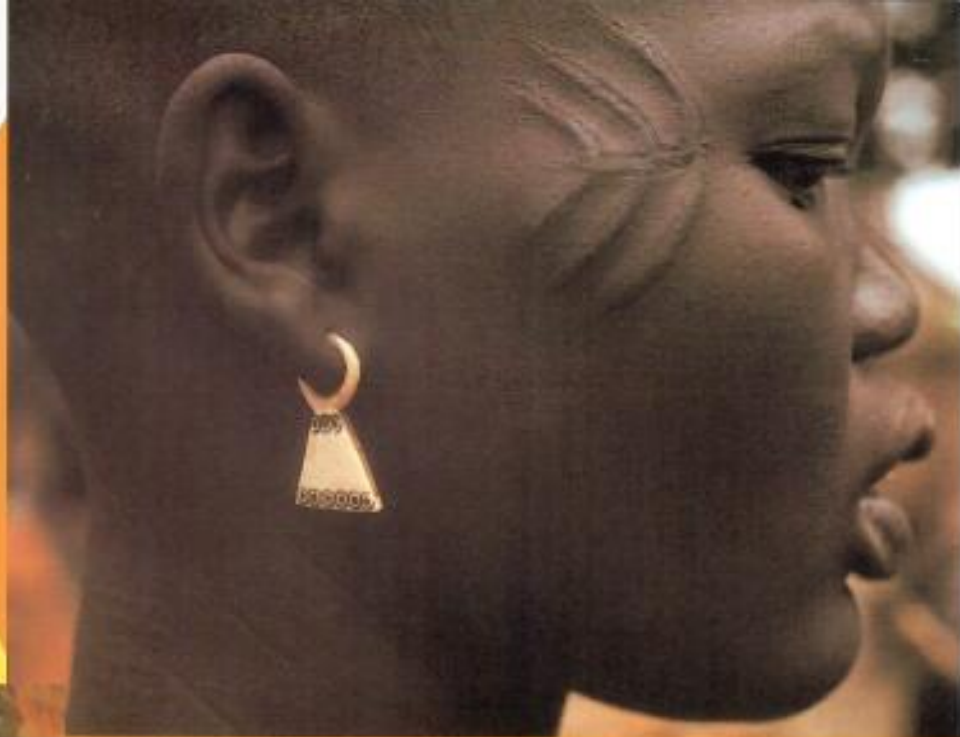
Although most of the markings hitherto mentioned are permanent, we should realize that ephemeral forms such as the headdress of a Cherokee woman and the finery of an Afar bride equally mark their status, as does the bowler hat of an English member of Parliament or the designer clothes of a wealthy lady. In that way, most of us—usually without realizing it—have never left the customary procedures of our tribal ancestors; we merely exchanged the old codes for new ones.

Today's renewed interest in the more extreme forms of body decoration, such as punk hair styles, full-body tattoos, and facial piercings, has its very roots in

YOUNG DINKA WOMAN



AMONG THE DINKA OF
SUDAN, CLAN IDENTIFICA-
TION MARKS ARE ACHIEVED
BY PAINFUL YET ELEGANT
FACIAL SCARIFICATION.



CHEROKEE WOMAN

THE ELABORATE HEADDRESS AND LARGE,
HEAVY EARRINGS OF THIS CHEROKEE
WOMAN (FAR LEFT) NOT ONLY MARK HER
STATUS, BUT IDENTIFY HER TRIBE.

MUSLIM AFAR BRIDE



A STUNNING EXAMPLE OF CROSS-CULTURAL
FERTILIZATION, THIS AFAR BRIDE FROM THE
DJIBOUTI REPUBLIC SHOWS THE INFLUENCE
OF INDIAN CULTURE ON PRACTICES IN
AFRICA, BOTH IN THE STYLE OF DRESS AND
JEWELRY AS WELL AS IN THIS PARTICULAR
FORM OF NOSE PIERCING.

A MAN OF MEN

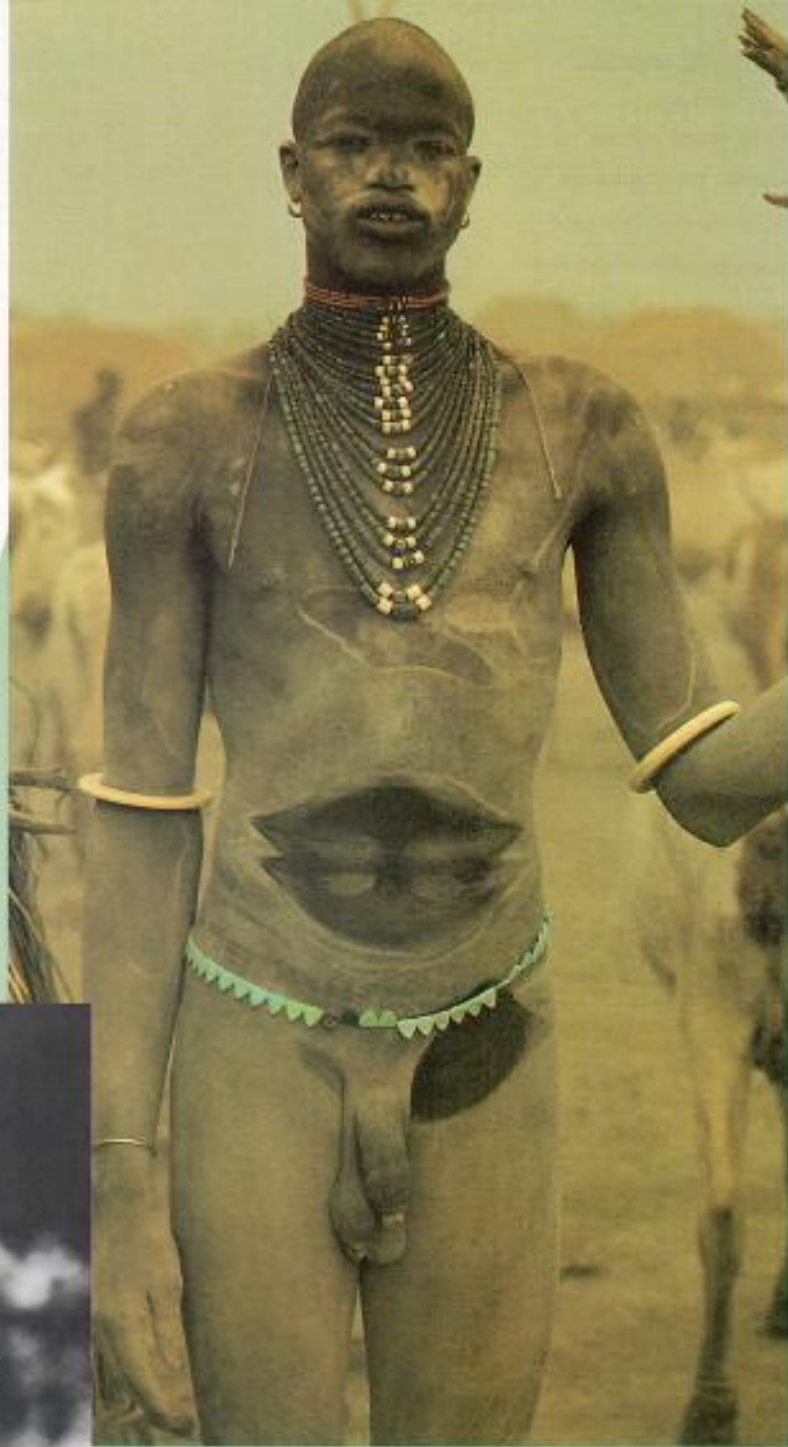


A GIANT DINKA MAN IN HIS MOST TYPICAL STYLE OF ADORNMENT: COVERED IN ASHES. WHEREAS STRANGERS HAVE GIVEN THESE PEOPLE THE NAME "GHOSTLY GIANTS," THE DINKA SEE THEMSELVES AS "MONYJANG," A TERM THAT MEANS "MEN OF MEN."

YOUNG NUBA WOMAN



THIS GIRL RECEIVED THE TRADITIONAL SCARS WITH THE ONSET OF PUBERTY.

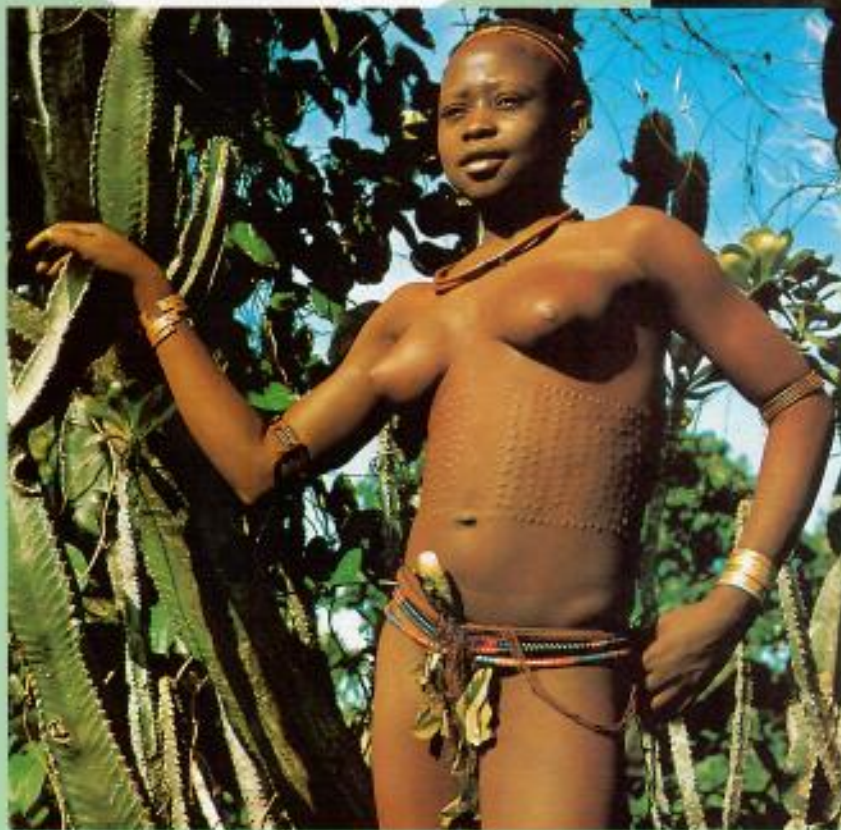
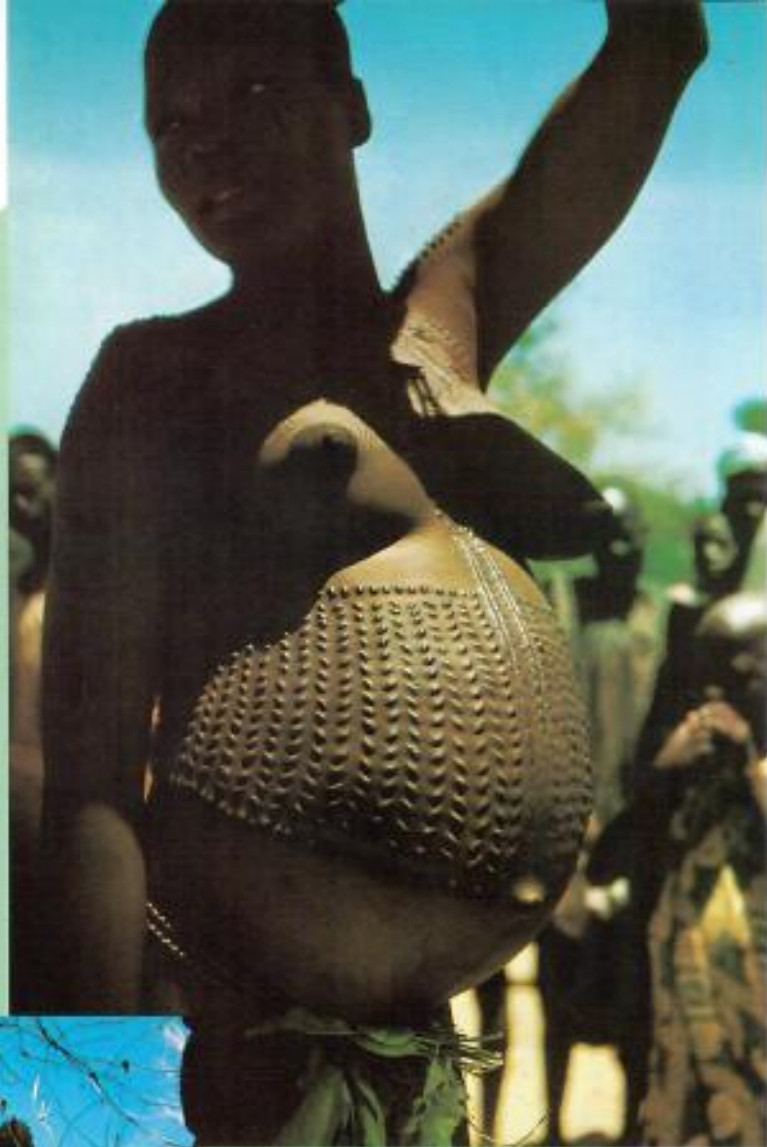


AFRICAN SCARIFICATION

THIS KALERI WOMAN OF NIGERIA HAS RECEIVED VARIOUS SETS OF SCARIFICATION MARKS ON HER BELLY, A PROCESS THAT BEGINS WHEN A GIRL REACHES MENARCHE.

YOUNG KALERI WOMAN, NIGERIA

A YOUNG KALERI WOMAN WITH HER FIRST SET OF SCARIFICATIONS. AS SHE IS NOT A MOTHER YET, HER MARKINGS ARE DIFFERENT FROM THE WOMAN ABOVE. UNFORTUNATELY, THIS PARTICULAR TRIBE OF BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE IS NOW ALMOST EXTINCT, BUT SIMILAR CUSTOMS OF SCARIFICATION CONTINUE IN OTHER COMMUNITIES AND REGIONS OF THE AFRICAN CONTINENT.



A NEW TATTOO

A PERFECTLY EXECUTED NEOTRIBAL DESIGN BY
TATTOO ARTIST VYVYN LAZONGA, PHOTOGRAPHED
IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE TATTOOING.

KAYAH LADY



AMONG THE KAYAH, A BURMESE HILL-TRIBE NOW TAKING
REFUGEE IN NEIGHBORING THAILAND, THE WOMEN WEAR HEAVY
EARRINGS ELONGATING THEIR LOBES CONSIDERABLY.

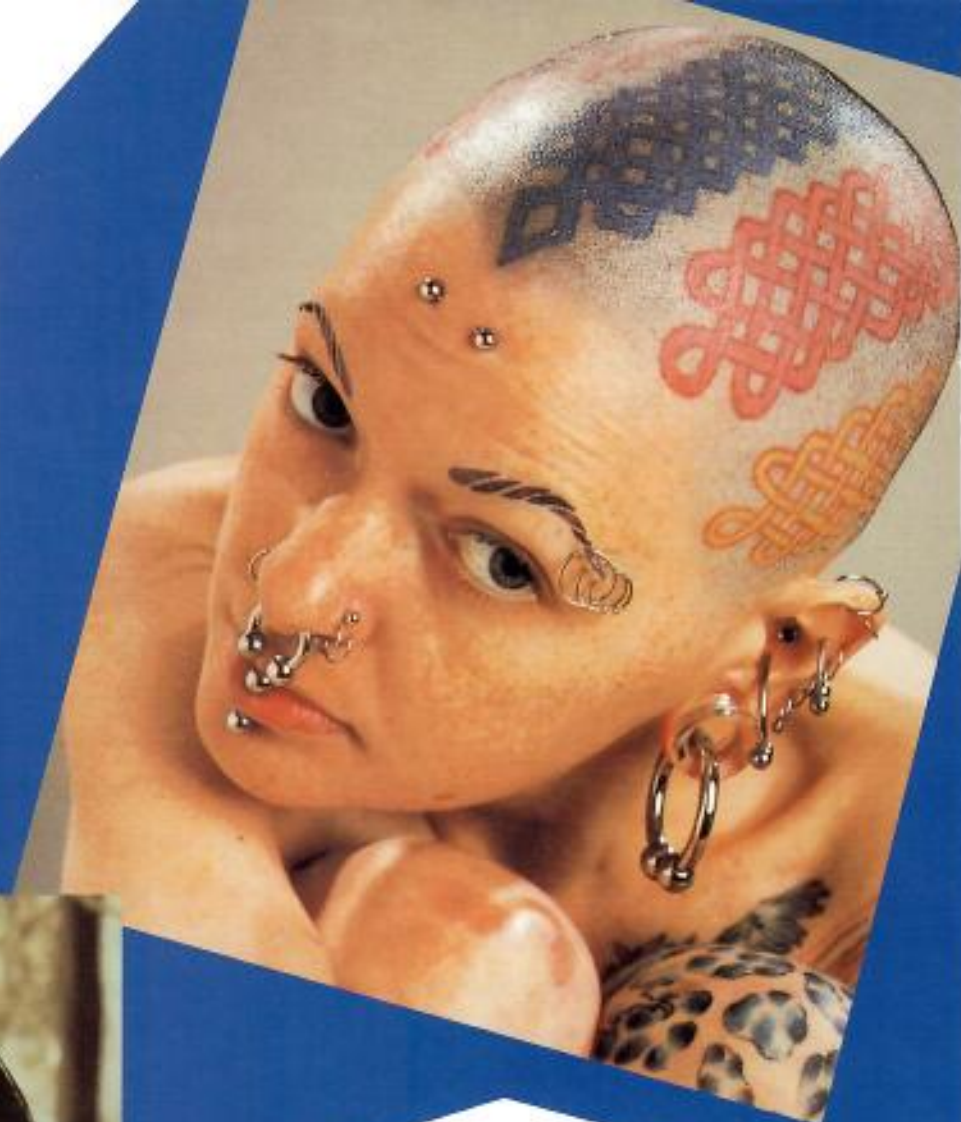


KAYAW WOMEN OF BURMA

ALTHOUGH THE HEAVY METAL
RINGS SEEM NOT TO HINDER
EVERYDAY MOVEMENT, THEY
COMPLETELY RESHAPE THE
WOMEN'S LEGS.

JEN HAS IT ALL

THOSE WHO HAVE FOLLOWED THE DEVELOPMENT OF BODY ADORNMENT AND MODIFICATION IN RECENT YEARS HAVE BEEN ABLE TO NOTICE THIS WOMAN CHANGE. OFTEN PHOTOGRAPHED FOR PUBLICATION, JEN HAS HAD MORE AND MORE PIERCINGS AND TATTOOS ADDED TO HER SKIN, MAKING HERSELF INTO AN EXAMPLE OF ALMOST ALL THAT CAN BE DONE.



KAIAPO BOY FROM MEKRANOTI VILLAGE

MEKRANOTI MEANS "PEOPLE WITH BIG RED PAINT IN THEIR FACES." HOWEVER, RED PAINT IS BY NO MEANS THE ONLY MAJOR ADORNMENT OF THE KAIAPO OF CENTRAL BRAZIL. BOTH MEN AND WOMEN SHAVE THEIR HAIR IN THE PARTICULAR STYLE SHOWN HERE, USE BLACK PAINT FOR INTRICATE DESIGNS ON FACE AND BODY, AND PIERCE AND ELONGATE THEIR EARLOBES. IN THE PAST, THIS BOY'S PIERCED LOWER LIP WOULD HAVE BEEN THE FIRST STEP TOWARD THE LIP-PLUG TYPICALLY WORN BY ADULT MEN.

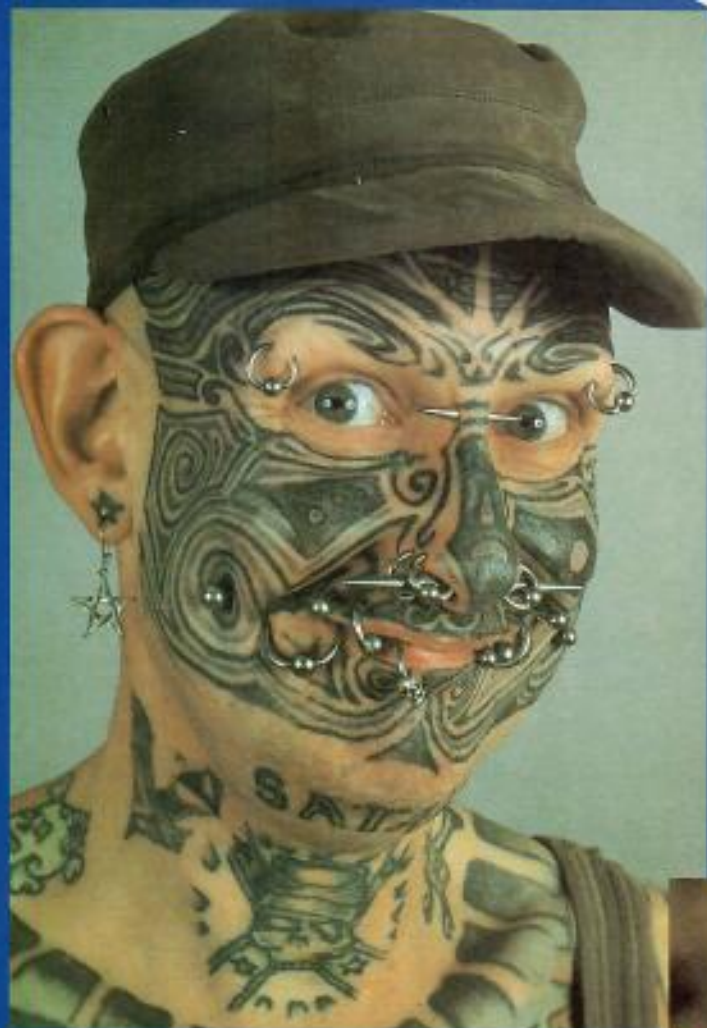


those old customs, but with a changed perspective. Then, society marked the outsider to set him or her apart. Now, the real or would-be outsider marks himself or herself as a sign and proof of being a rebel, of not conforming to the standardized supermarket humanity promoted by mainstream media and society at large.

Individual choice is what makes today's renaissance of tribal practices a totally different matter. Although clearly inspired by the great variety of adornment, decoration, and modification from Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas, most of today's practitioners have the added benefit of total choice as to what, where, and when they will apply their markings. Exceptions to this general rule are found in close-knit urban groups such as street gangs, where again, certain clearly defined markings are mandatory and serve as both ritual initiation and a way of establishing identity. In this way, such marks are more truly tribal than most others.

These days, anyone else who gets tattooed with tribal or neotribal designs, who pierces his or her face like a warrior, or who enlarges an earlobe in the manner of tribal people around the world, does not, without other efforts, become tribal in his or her consciousness or lifestyle. Whether or not one likes these particular techniques, the appearance of the results, or the abundance of markings that almost seem to hint at a form of addiction to a different kind of needle is not important. What is important is that each of us is allowed to choose what he or she does with body and self, just as a Padang girl (page 90) is allowed to choose whether or not to wear her neck-rings. Once chosen, however, she must do so for the rest of her life—a fact that is also true for all forms of tattooing. That dimension of freedom, and that only, is the hallmark of civilization. Let us all hope that the pendulum of permissiveness and liberty does not swing back as it has done so often in history.

By now, of course, so many "outsiders" and "rebels" have marked themselves in one or another of these ways that they have suddenly become almost mainstream themselves. Some people seem to have gotten involved in a progressive spiral of being the most outrageous of all. Once a single facial piercing, on lip or eyebrow, was enough to catch everyone's attention and the admiration of some. Now we can read of more and more brandings, scarifications, and such extreme forms as metal nails and plates inserted into the lips and even horns into the skull. To some of these extremists, neither the enhancement of beauty nor learning to deal with pain seems important; rather it's being radical that is the point.

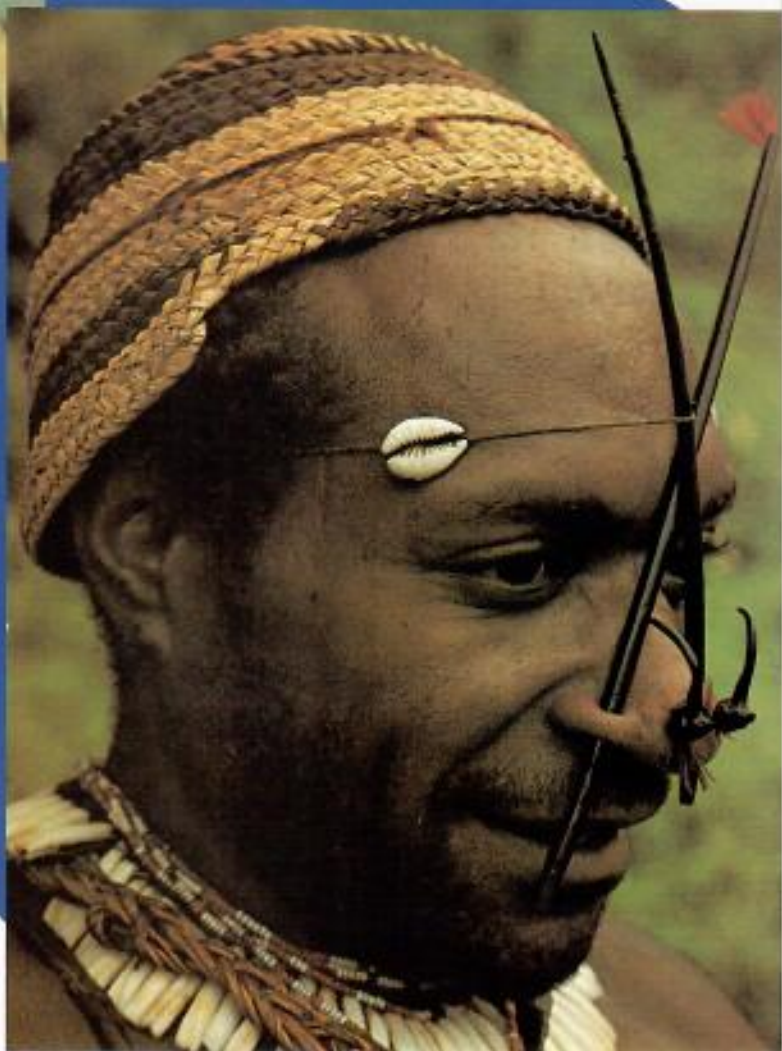


MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WALL

WHO IS THE MOST INCREDIBLE OF THEM ALL? SOMETIMES THE OLD HUMAN SPIRIT OF COMPETITION SEEMS TO RULE AMONG THOSE WHO HAVE ACQUIRED MULTIPLE TATTOOS AND PIERCINGS, JUST AS IT DOES IN OTHER GROUPS AND AREAS OF LIFE.

THE FIERCE GENTLEMAN

OBVIOUSLY A WARM AND GENTLE MAN (JUST LOOK AT HIS EYES) THIS MAN FROM NEW GUINEA HAS DECORATED HIMSELF BY INSERTING THE HORNS OF A SCARAB BEETLE INTO HIS PIERCED NOSE TO LOOK LIKE A FIERCE WARRIOR OF HIS TRIBE.

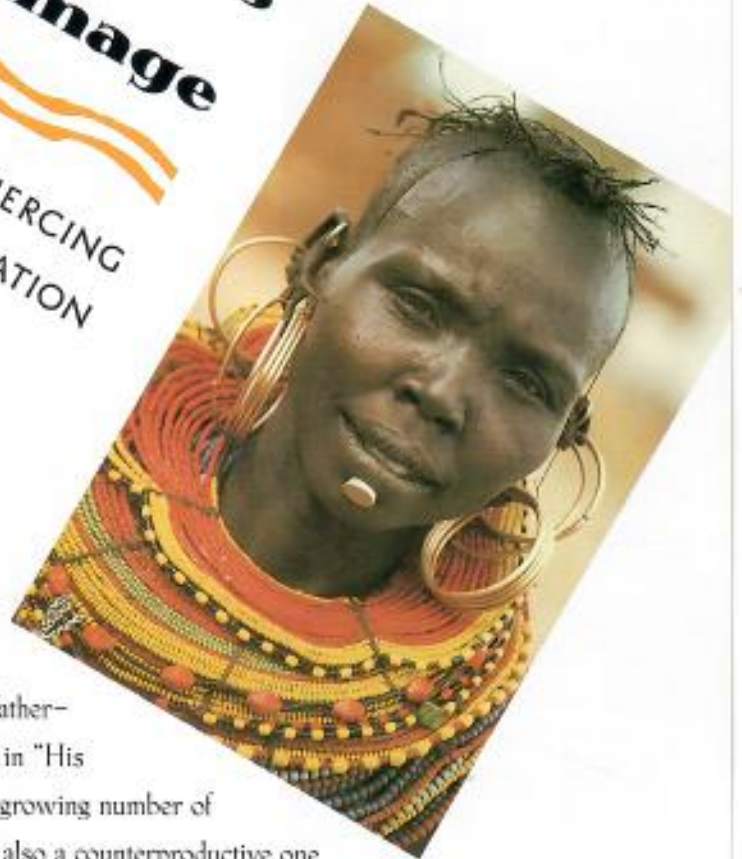






In One's Own Image

PAINTING TO PIERCING
TO TRANSFORMATION



WHEREAS THE GREAT monotheistic religions have fostered the belief that humans are made in the image of a Heavenly father-figure and have to live according to the scripts in "His book," the time has obviously arrived when a growing number of people consider this to be not only a myth but also a counterproductive one in terms of living a joyous and fulfilled life. Rather—and this is what we see emerging today concerning many issues—more and more people write their very own scripts and try to live accordingly.

The most extreme examples of this trend to (re-)create oneself in one's own image are people who spend a large part of their lives and great amounts of money to change their appearance partly or fully, by means of cosmetic surgery. Michael Jackson and his creation of an androgynous self is a well-publicized example, as is

SCORPIO ANGEL

PAGE 36

COMBINING PAINTING,
BODY PAINTING AND
PHOTOGRAPHY, ARTISTNATASHA VON
ROSENSCHILDE CREATED
THIS VISION OF MALE
BEAUTY, STRENGTH,
AND ASPIRATION.**CIRCUMCISED AND
UNMARRIED**

PAGE 37

SOMETIMES, CERTAIN
ADORNMENTS (OR THE LACK
OF OTHERS) ARE CLEAR SIG-
NALS OF STATUS. AS BLA-
TANTLY LEGIBLE TO EVERY-
ONE AS IF A MAN IN NEW
YORK WERE TO WEAR A
BUTTON SAYING "I'M
IMPOTENT." THE SMALL LIP-
PLUG OF THIS POKOT GIRL
FROM KENYA SPELLS
"UNMARRIED," AND THE
MULTIPLE EARRINGS SIGNAL
"CIRCUMCISED."

Cindy Jackson and the Barbie-doll inspired remake of herself.*

We may not understand their motives, we may not share their extremism, and we may not agree with the fact that one's outer appearance, one's so-called beauty, should count that heavily. However, these attempts at determining not only one's own life but the look and feel of one's very flesh and bones is merely a legitimate extension of the individual freedom we all value so much. In principle, there is no difference between determining whether or not to live the heterosexual or monogamous lives prescribed by convention and deciding for ourselves how to look and when to die. The freedom to choose what to do with one's own body and life, even if that choice may be possibly harmful, is to be favored above any arbitrarily sanctioned forms of sexual behavior and/or adornment. Naturally, all of these principles are to be understood within the setting of not harming others and of mutual consent.

A look at human societies, past and present, makes it obvious that whatever is sanctioned in a given group is very, very arbitrary. One society will see as (self-)mutilation (for example, penile subincision among Australian Aborigines) what another society regards as necessary to the well-being of the group (the Aborigine's attempt to have a virtual vulva in addition to the phallus); also, practices that one may easily judge to be harmful may not at all have that effect. A good example is the ancient custom of skull elongation as it was practiced from Egypt to China, and as it is still practiced among the Mangbetu people of Zaire. There are no reports of impairment, disease, or early death among people who have such carefully and skillfully remodeled heads. Equally interesting is the custom of tooth-filing, a very painful experience that

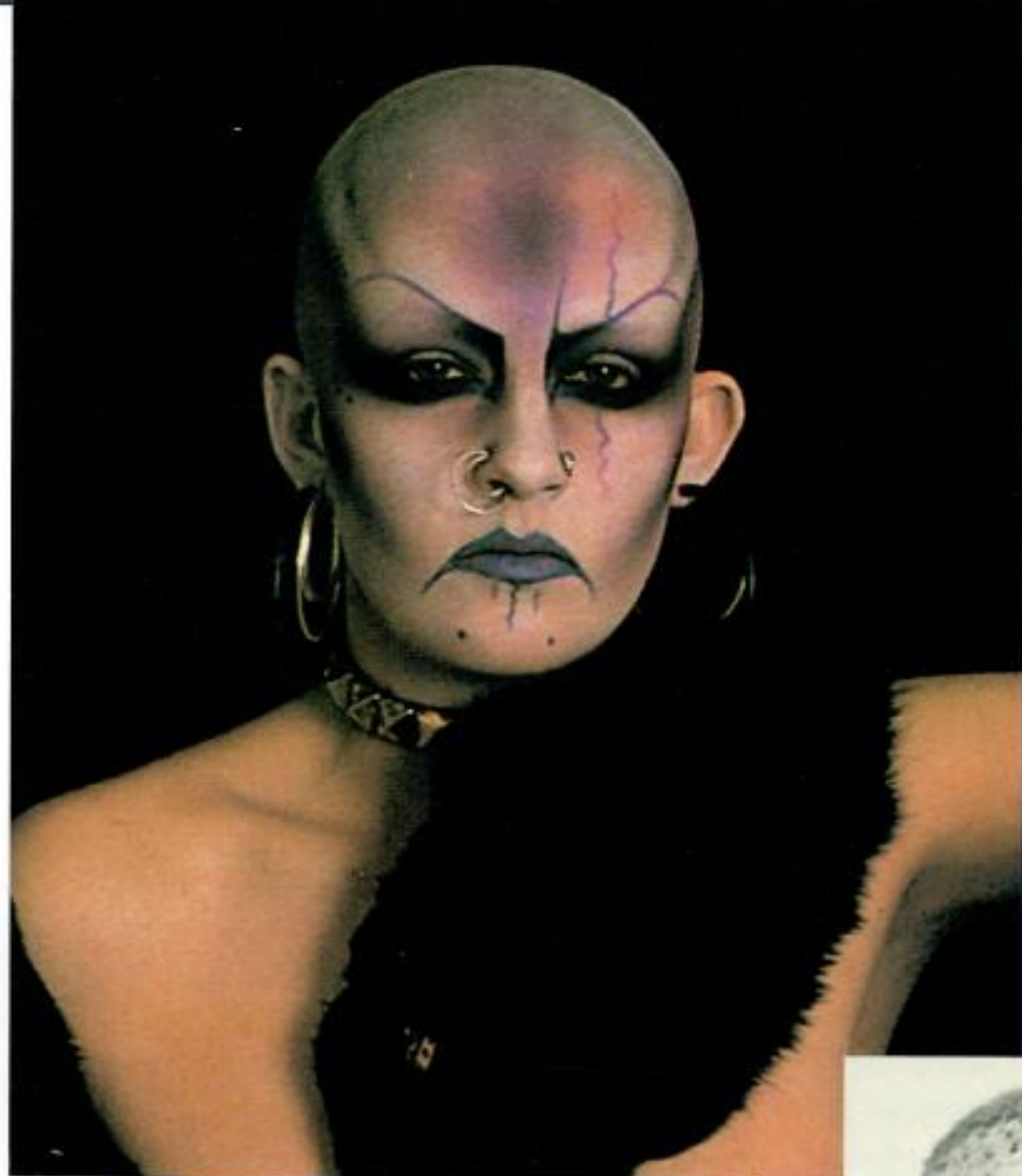
*Cindy Jackson of Fremont, Ohio, had twenty-six sessions of cosmetic surgery (at a cost of more than \$100,000) that changed her body into that of a "live" Barbie doll. See Bibliography for information about video tapes of this transformation.

also results in an appearance that is not very enticing. However, though we may judge this practice to be harmful, research has shown that people of African tribes who file their teeth are less suspect to a variety of diseases than others. It should be borne in mind that tribal people did not, and often do not even today, have the kind of dental care and health care that most of us have become accustomed to.

Although I have seen an image of a contemporary male Caucasian with a subincised phallus, not in print but on the Internet,¹⁵ some tribal practices have not yet reemerged. Skull elongation is one, and the neck elongation of the Burmese Padang is another. It is interesting that in the latter case it is not, as the term implies, that the neck is elongated, but simply that the shoulders sink as their bones adapt in early childhood to the weight of the rings. The practice is, as I found out when visiting these beautiful ladies, essentially voluntarily, and most of these Burmese women do not choose to wear the rings anymore. However, the fact that many of them are now homeless refugees does entice many to choose the rings. A steady flow of tourists armed with cameras, dollars, and yen helps the women and their families survive and, last but not least, helps them finance the resistance movement in present-day Myanmar.

The return of the tribal elements into modern Western culture is present in the simpler, less painful, and less time-consuming forms of adornment such as temporary facial and body painting and, of course, in the form of piercing, a practice that has recently gained much popularity. It is interesting to see that tribal piercings are almost exclusively centered on ears, noses, and lips, often with the intent to elongate lips or lobes. Contemporary piercings are also found on foreheads and eyebrows and in the erotic and sexual regions such as the nipples, navel, and genitals (see chapter 5). Considering this, it seems that most of those pierced today, as well as many a professional piercer, have forgotten that tribal people have reasons for piercings and wearing jewelry beyond the obvious desire for adornment. As in the Chinese system of acupuncture, India's Ayurveda, for example, makes use of the marma points, and piercings were and are placed accordingly; each known and meant to stimulate or enhance specific psychosomatic processes and/or states.

An example of just how such ancient and esoteric knowledge has been used is the nostril piercing so often seen on women in India and the neighboring countries



INNER SPACE— OUTER SPACE

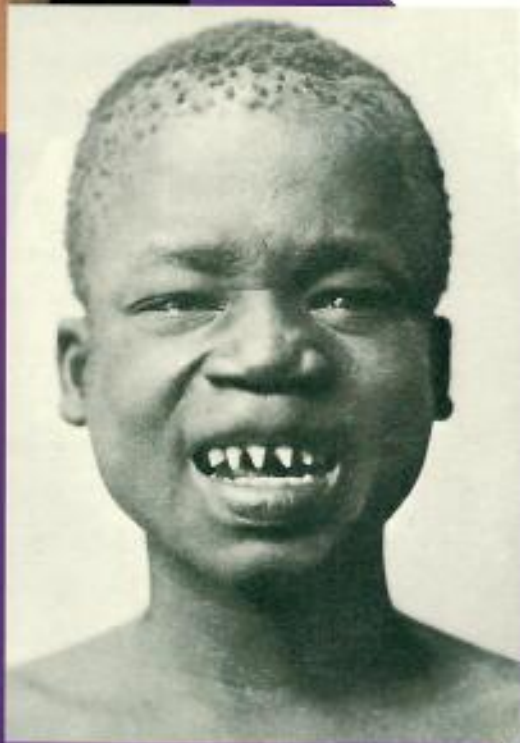


CLAIREY, THE FIERCE
PAINTED AND PIERCED
WOMAN IN THIS PIC-
TURE, HAS GIVEN OUT
THE WORD THAT SHE IS
AN EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL
FROM VENUS. BODY
DECORATION, COMBINED
WITH THE RIGHT
ATTIRE, CAN MAKE
ANYONE INTO THE
CREATURE OF HIS OR
HER DREAMS, VENUSIAN
OR OTHERWISE.

DENTAL FILING INSTEAD OF FILLING



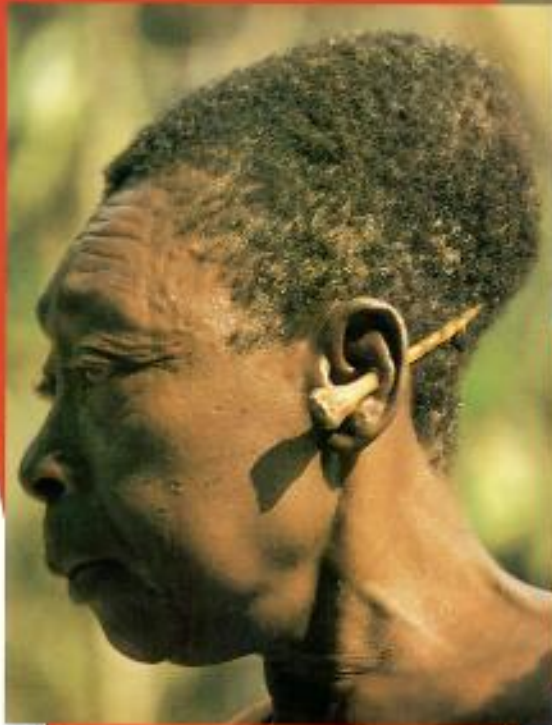
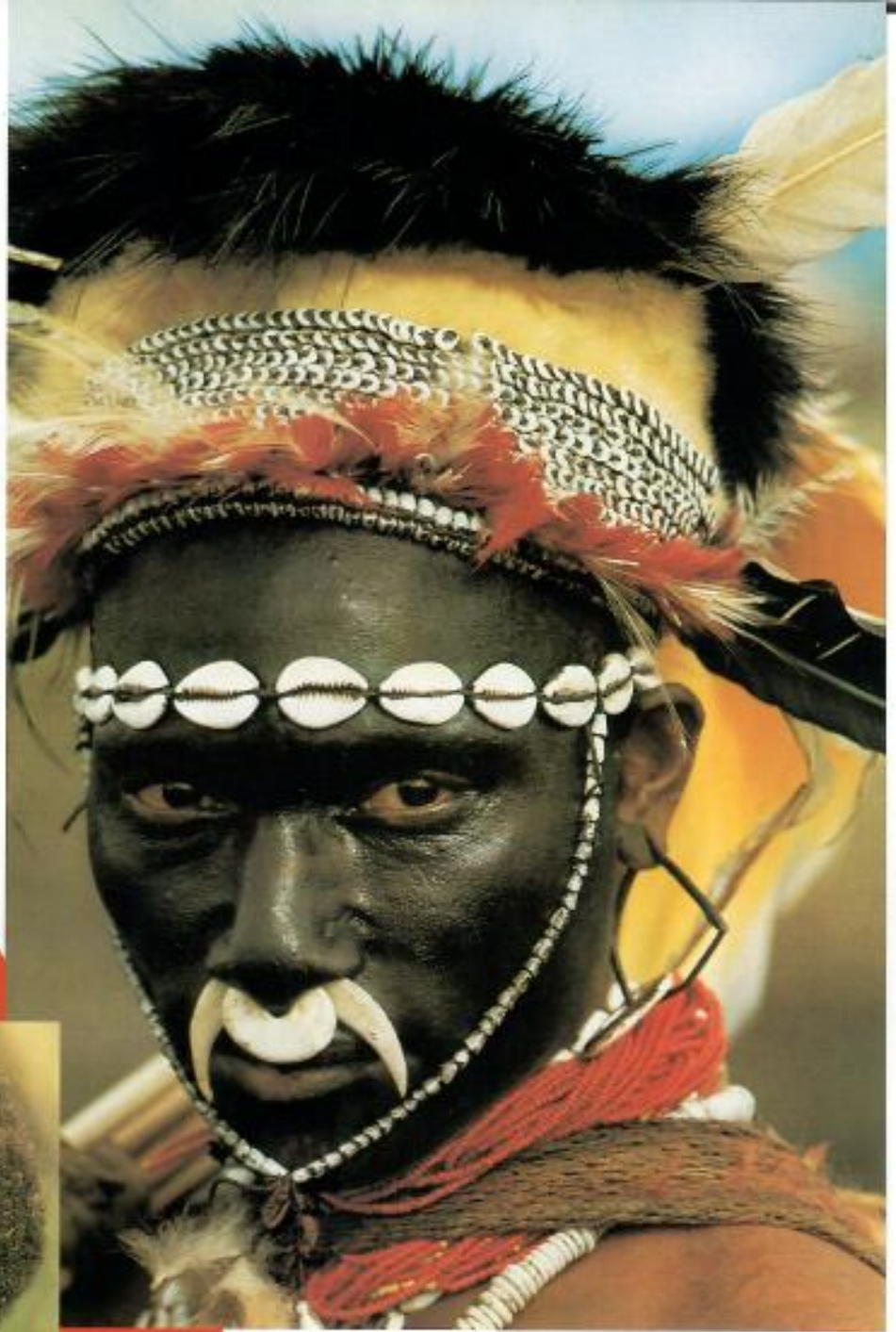
WITH PAIN STILL VISIBLE ALL OVER HIS FACE, THIS BOY
FROM CENTRAL AFRICA SHOWS OFF HIS NEWLY FILED
TEETH, USUALLY DESCRIBED AS AND BELIEVED TO BE A
TYPE OF COSMETIC SURGERY TO ENHANCE ONE'S BEAUTY.
RESEARCHERS HAVE NOW ESTABLISHED THAT PEOPLE
WITH FILED TEETH—AND IN THE ABSENCE OF MODERN
DENTAL CARE—ARE LESS PRONE TO A NUMBER OF
DISEASES. THE FILING OF TEETH OCCURS AMONG MANY
PEOPLES AROUND THE GLOBE.



SKULL ELONGATION



THE ANCIENT HUMAN PRACTICE OF SHAPING THE CRANIUM SO AS TO CREATE AN ELONGATED SKULL SLANTING BACK AND UPWARD HAS SURVIVED INTO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY AMONG THE UPPER-CLASS MANGBETU OF NORTHERN ZAIRE (SEE BELOW). SKULL-SHAPING IS POSSIBLE ONLY DURING THE FIRST HALF YEAR AFTER BIRTH WHEN THE SKULL BONES ARE STILL SOFT. ALTHOUGH OTHER TECHNIQUES ARE KNOWN, THE MANGBETU SIMPLY WRAP THE CHILD'S HEAD TIGHTLY WITH THICK CLOTH, CREATING A KIND OF TIGHTLY FITTING HEADGEAR THAT SHAPES THE SKULL.



IWAM WARRIOR



THIS MAN FROM THE UPPER SEPIK RIVER, NEW GUINEA, HAS A PIERCED NASAL SEPTUM.

of Nepal, Pakistan, and Bangladesh (see page 43). In the guise of a simple beauty enhancement—a delicate golden ring or another piece of jewelry—this piercing is actually known to help induce a state of submissiveness in the wearer. For this very reason, many women who have become aware of this and have achieved a certain degree of self-determination, even in India, now decline to have this piercing done. It can be seen in this example that the mere copying of an adornment is rarely wise. It is somewhat paradoxical that just as Indian women are discontinuing the practice, many young Western women have unknowingly put themselves in this state of mind, which—if they were aware of it—only a few would actually enjoy or choose.

Little can be said here about the limitless variety of makeup used for facial skin, eyes, eyelashes, lips, and fingernails—the cosmetics industry is most diligent in exhibiting their creations and informing us of their possibilities. Unfortunately, however, present fashions, customs, and gender-typing in most Western and Westernized societies have limited the use of makeup almost exclusively to women's faces, fingernails, and toenails. Only a few men dare, at the risk of being declared effeminate or homosexual, to break through this barrier and sometimes use a bit of makeup, just as fewer men than women wear more than a single piece of jewelry.

This was, and still is, quite different in many tribal societies. The Woodabe men of Niger and also the men of Papua New Guinea spend hours in applying makeup and making themselves look special and beautiful. When one looks at images of people from across the globe, it becomes clear that our very definition of makeup is very limited and that somehow, somewhere along the line, the border between makeup and body painting is very fluid. This can be seen by the succession of images on pages 43–46 and 49–54.

Makeup, or should we say facial design, can also be used in such a fashion as to create a virtual mask, thus consciously obliterating personal identity for a given time—for example, during a ceremony. Such a temporary loss of identity, a practice known to humanity since the earliest times, has begun to reemerge into contemporary life. From Woodstock to Lollapalooza, from house parties to “darkroom” activities, being masked—painted or otherwise—helps loosen the restraints of the

COSMIC RESONANCE



HAVING INSCRIBED SUN, MOON, CLOUDS, AND STARS ONTO HER SKIN, THIS CONTEMPORARY WICCAN CAN THUS MORE EASILY ATTUNE HERSELF TO THE FORCES OF THE UNIVERSE.



PROTECTION FROM EVIL



WHILE MOST PEOPLE CONSIDER THIS INDIAN GIRL'S PIERCED NOSE A SIMPLE BEAUTY ENHANCEMENT, IN ACTUALITY THIS PIERCING CREATES A STATE OF SUBMISSIVENESS IN THE WEARER. FORTUNATELY HER CHIN TATTOOS ARE DESIGNED TO PROTECT HER FROM HARM.

WOODABE MAN

AMONG THE WOODABE OF NIGER, IT IS CLEARLY THE MEN WHO ARE MOST GIVEN TO THE CULT OF BEAUTY AND WHO ARE, IN MODERN TERMS, THE OBJECTS OF SEXUAL ATTENTION. DURING ANNUAL FESTIVALS, THE MEN DRESS IN THEIR BEST FINERY, PUT ON THEIR BEST MAKEUP, AND TRY TO PRESENT AS MUCH OF THE WHITES OF THEIR TEETH AND EYES AS THEY CAN. AFTER THE DANCE OR PRESENTATION, WOMEN THEN WILL PICK OUT THE MEN THEY FIND MOST ATTRACTIVE.



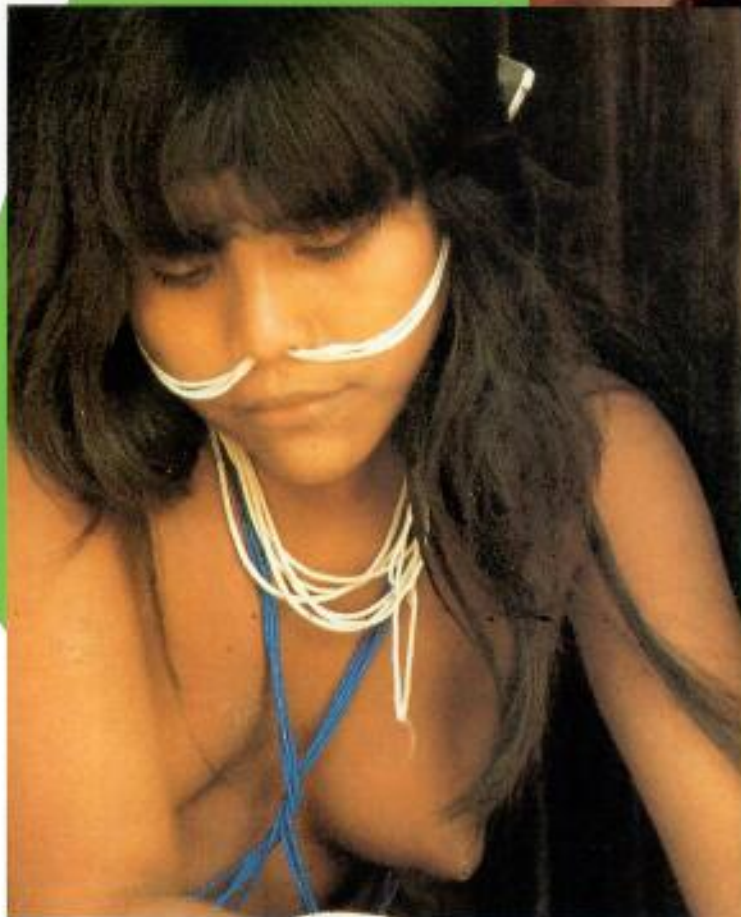
LIP STICKS

AMONG THE YANOMAMI OF THE AMAZON, WOMEN AND CHILDREN OFTEN PIERCE THEIR LIPS, EARS, AND NOSES. INTO THE OPENINGS THUS CREATED, THEY SUBSEQUENTLY INSERT STICKS IN THE LOWER LIP, FEATHERS IN THE EAR, AND CORDS IN THE NASAL SEPTUM. SIMILAR DECORATIONS ARE KNOWN AMONG OTHER AMAZON PEOPLES, AND ALSO IN AFRICA. SUCH FACIAL AND BODY DESIGNS ARE OFTEN USED TO TRANSMIT MORE OR LESS VEILED MESSAGES BETWEEN COURTING COUPLES OR LOVERS.

FULL-FACIAL MAKEUP



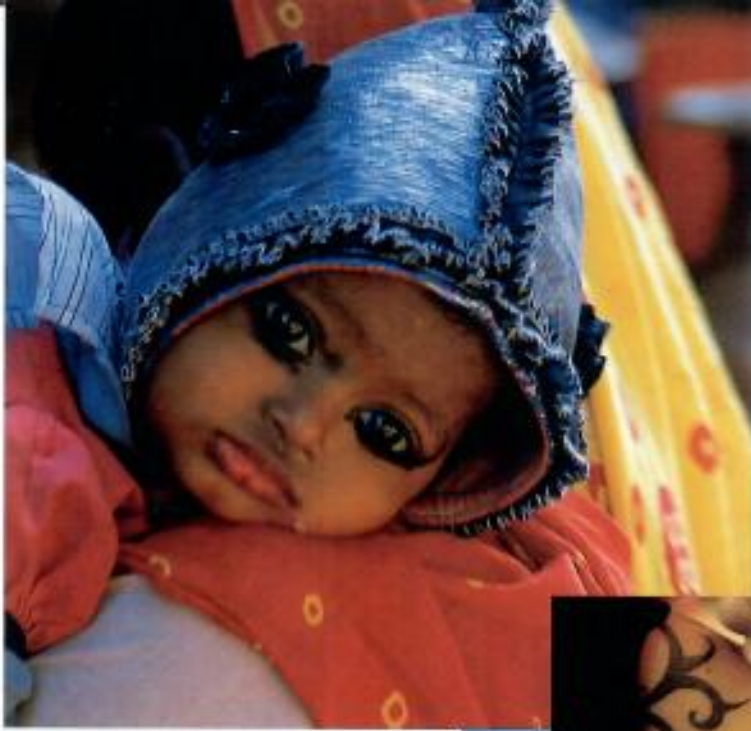
RATHER THAN APPLYING A BIT OF ROUGE AND A BIT OF LIPSTICK, WOMEN FROM PAPUA NEW GUINEA PRESENT THEMSELVES TO THE WORLD WITH BRIGHTLY AND FULLY PAINTED FACES THAT BEFIT THE ABUNDANCE OF COLORS USED IN THEIR JEWELRY AND HEADDRESSES.



YOUNG MARUBO WOMAN



AMONG THE MARUBO OF WESTERN BRAZIL, BOTH WOMEN AND MEN PIERCE THE NASAL SEPTUM AND THREAD BEADED STRINGS THROUGH THE HOLE, THE BEADS BEING REGARDED AS A MEANS OF ATTUNEMENT TO THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT OF WHICH THESE PEOPLE REGARD THEMSELVES AS CARETAKERS—NOT OWNERS.



PROTECTIVE MAKEUP

THE USE OF BLACK KOHL ON THE LOWER RIM OF THE EYE OF THIS NEPALI CHILD IS MEANT TO HELP PROTECT THE EYE FROM STRONG SUNLIGHT. THUS, ON A MEDICINAL LEVEL, THE MATERIAL ACTS AS A PROTECTION AGAINST VARIOUS DISEASES OF THE EYE AND, IN EXTENSION, IS THOUGHT TO BE A MAGICAL PROTECTION AGAINST THE EVIL EYE.

HENNA PASTE

CONVENIENTLY PACKAGED IN SMALL TUBES, HENNA PASTE CAN EASILY BE USED TO PAINT THE HANDS, ARMS, AND FEET. LESS PERMANENT THAN A TATTOO, THE DESIGNS LAST FOR ABOUT TWO WEEKS AND ARE ALSO USEFUL FOR TESTING THE APPEARANCE OF A REAL TATTOO. (PHOTOGRAPHED DURING THE AMSTERDAM TATTOO CONVENTION, 1996.)



SKIN ADORNMENT

AS IS CUSTOMARY FOR WOMEN AMONG MANY ISLAMIC PEOPLES FROM AFRICA TO INDIA, THIS YEMENITE WOMAN HAS ADORNED HER HANDS AND ARMS WITH HENNA PASTE. SUCH ADORNMENT IS REQUIRED NOT ONLY FOR A BRIDE AT HER MARRIAGE CEREMONY BUT ALSO IN PREPARATION FOR VARIOUS RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS.



social self and helps one's true self to emerge. Thus, masking, and temporarily obliterating, one's person (from the Greek *persona* for "mask") is, in fact, tribal therapy in action, and it therefore comes as no surprise that people masked or heavily made up often feel more free to dance in wild abandon, to be nude in public, and possibly even to make love to a complete stranger—all things that have occurred at large festivals during the last thirty years.

Somewhere between makeup and body painting are specialties and preferences that to some readers may seem unthinkable but that to others simply belong to their erotic imagination and/or practice. It was once fashionable, for example, for women to paint their nipples. The late eighteenth-century fashion for diaphanous blouses and very low-cut dresses lent itself perfectly to this practice, as would some of the more open and transparent women's garments of today.

Somewhere between body painting—an adornment that will be lost with the first rain, a dip into the river, or an extended shower—and the permanent tattoo we will discuss in the next chapter, there is an interesting custom of body decoration that results in tattoo-like designs lasting about two weeks. Using a paste made from henna, better known as a coloring agent for the hair, women in many countries across northern Africa, in Turkey, and in India use henna paste to adorn their hands and feet. Often a woman does this purely as a form of adornment and to enhance her beauty in order to attract the eyes of men. In some cases, however, the designs thus created are intended as magical protection against evil and disease—a significance that is usually found in the more permanent practice of the tattoo. After the henna paste is applied as shown on page 46, it dries, leaving a design in reddish orange or sometimes black, which remains visible for ten to fifteen days. Not only do the geometrical designs create the desired protection, but so does the henna itself. Apart from henna's medicinal quality as a cooling agent, henna is regarded as imbued with magical properties, foremost a sensitization that makes the wearer more receptive to the invisible yet omnipresent fields of energy in which we live. In this respect, the use of henna is very much related to the value placed on red ochre as blood of the earth by Australian Aborigines, Africans, and other ancient tribal cultures. This knowledge goes back to Neanderthal man at the dawn of history.

All in all, the great variety of body painting practices makes it clear that both

the extended individual freedom of the late twentieth century and the relative anonymity of life in the great urban sprawl have contributed to the reemergence of an art form that is so essentially human as to have survived—with ups and downs—from the Stone Age to the present. It is quite possible that the future, if we believe the visions of science fiction writer William Gibson, of *Neuromancer* fame, will bring even more far-reaching ways of modification, in which computer chips will play a larger role than do the gold and precious stones that decorate the Kayan woman on page 54.

Although many body adornment practitioners today often seem to think that the choice of technique matters greatly—for example, scarification above tattooing or tattooing above painting—this is not true in all cases. Although the aspects of endorphin emission and attunement through pain involved in several techniques play their own role, the symbols and patterns inscribed or painted on the skin are certainly of equal importance. For example, Australian Aborigines—a people very much aware of the processes set in motion through cutting, blood, and pain—certainly do not use these techniques indiscriminately. As Robert Lawlor has shown in his detailed study, even temporary patterns “merely” painted rather than tattooed on the body have a clearly defined effect. Both at the time of initiation and immediately following death, Aborigines paint the person’s clan totem design on the area between the nipples and the pubic region. The intricate pattern, so Lawlor says, “carries a vibrational affinity to a particular region in the sky where the ancestral source of that totem is said to reside. This resonance assists the soul of the deceased in reaching its ancestral dimension after death.”¹⁴

Different in technique, yet similar in being an aid to establishing resonance, is the Australian practice of establishing psychic—that is, telepathic—contact with relatives by touching specific wounds created by earlier scarification; using the body’s memory of the earlier pain to tap into deeper or higher levels of consciousness not normally accessible. Perhaps a similar rationale has given birth to the practice of blood brotherhood as practiced among Native Americans. Attuned by the mutual exchange of blood—actual body cells and molecules—the persons so bonded were then able to tap into a form of transmission between each other that is usually reserved for twins or for persons within the mother-child continuum.

DRESSING UP

AS DO MANY OF THE AMAZON TRIBES, THE XINGU INDIANS PAINT THEIR BODIES IN PREPARATION FOR FESTIVE AND CEREMONIAL OCCASIONS.



CEREMONIAL ADORNMENT

TWO YOUNG KAIAPO WOMEN FROM MEKRANOTI FULLY ADORNED FOR THEIR NAMING CEREMONY, AN ANNUAL OCCASION DURING WHICH CHILDREN'S NAMES ARE RITUALLY CONFIRMED BY THE GROUP.

A woman with dark hair and a white feathered headdress is shown in profile. Her skin is painted a vibrant blue, adorned with white star-like patterns and feather designs. She wears large, ornate earrings and holds a large, fan-like object made of feathers and a wooden base with a white feather tuft. The background is a soft, ethereal blue and white.

**FEMALE FALCON
WIND ANGEL**



IN THIS IMAGE, ARTIST NATASHA VON ROSENSCHILDE BRINGS ALIVE A VISION THAT MIGHT BE ENCOUNTERED DURING THE SPIRIT-JOURNEY OF A NATIVE AMERICAN BRAVE DURING AN INITIATION, OR SIMPLY IN A DREAM.

WARLPIRI WOMEN



AMONG THE AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINES, BODY PAINTING IS NOT MERELY USED AS AN ADORNMENT, BUT HAS RITUAL SIGNIFICANCE. THE WOMEN SHOWN HERE, FROM THE WARLPIRI CLAN IN CENTRAL AUSTRALIA, ARE ADORNED FOR A DREAMTIME RITUAL.



DRESSING UP

AS DO MANY OF THE AMAZON TRIBES, THE XINGU INDIANS PAINT THEIR BODIES IN PREPARATION FOR FESTIVE AND CEREMONIAL OCCASIONS.



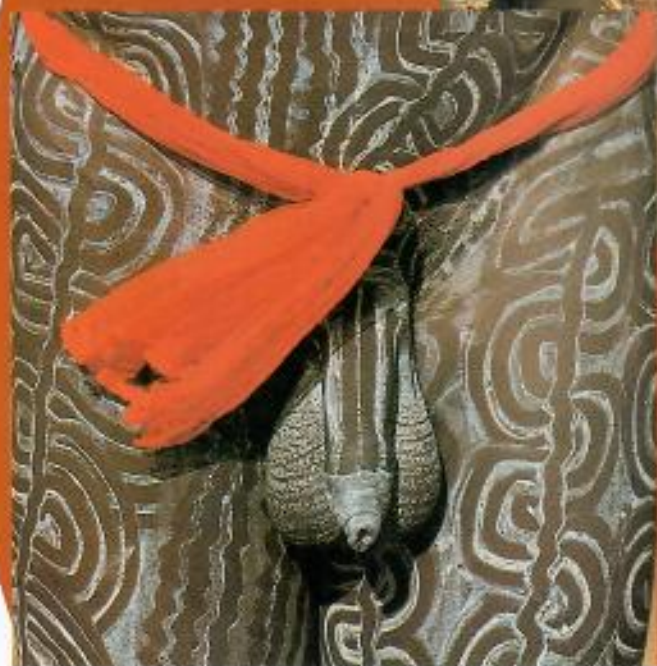
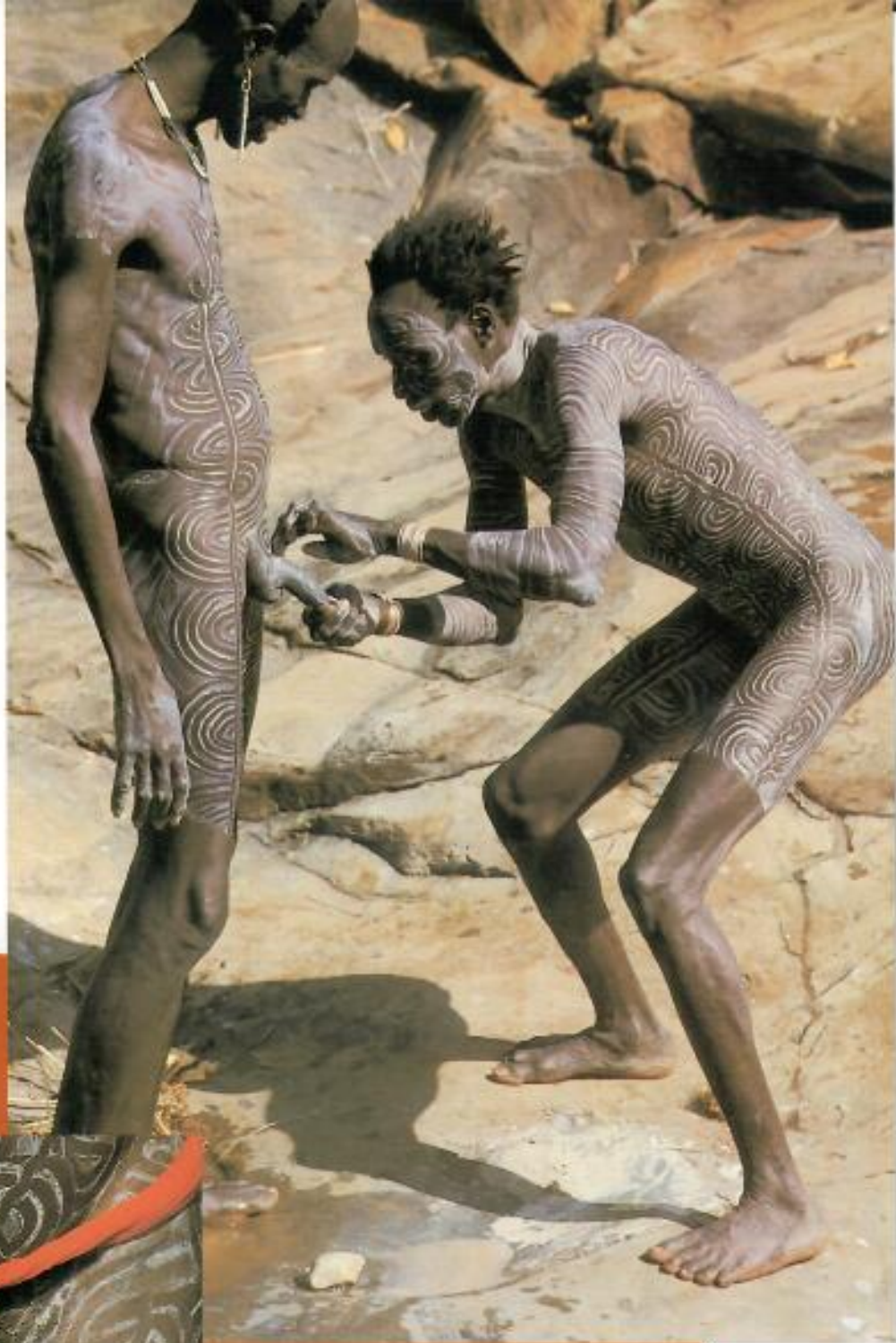
CEREMONIAL ADORNMENT

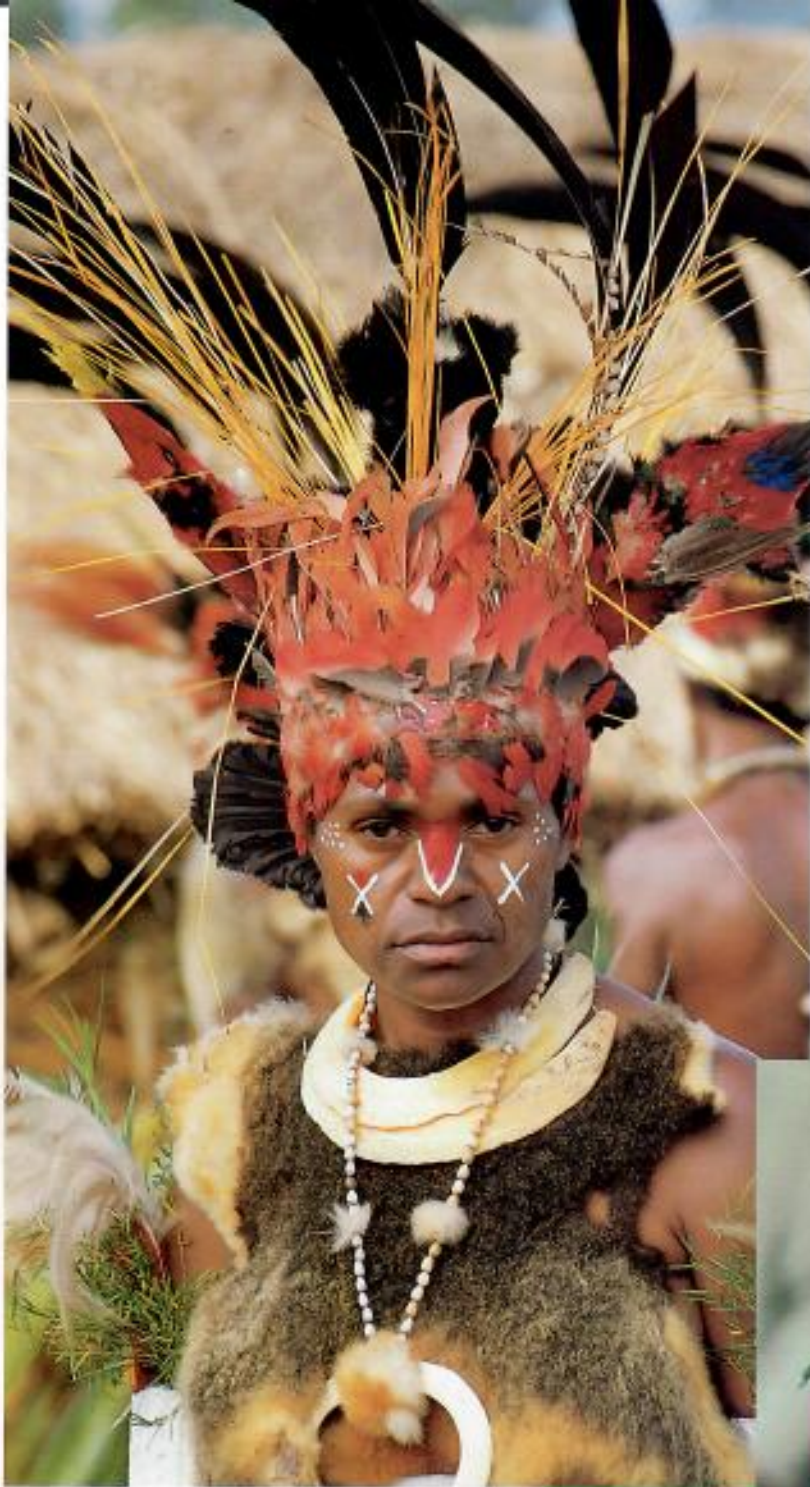
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**ARTIST AND
LIVING ART**



**AMONG THE ETHIOPIAN
SURI, MEN PAINT EACH
OTHER, INCLUDING
THE GENITALS, IN
PREPARATION FOR THEIR
REGULAR STICK FIGHTS.
THE RESULT OF THE
CAREFULLY EXECUTED
GENITAL ADORNMENT AT
RIGHT CAN BE SEEN
BELOW.**





FIERCE WARRIOR

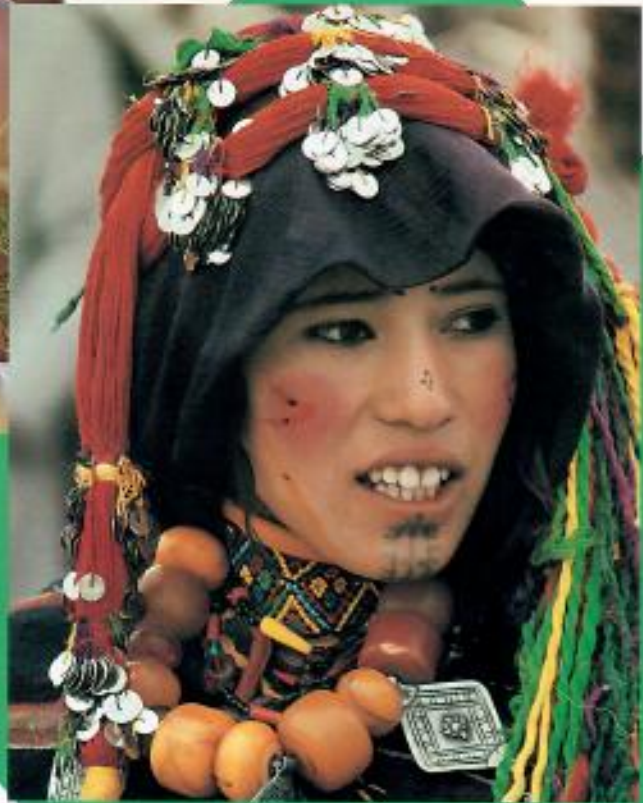


AMONG THE TRIBES OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA, UNLIKE MOST CONTEMPORARY SOCIETIES IN THE EAST AND WEST, EXTENSIVE AND RADICAL MAKEUP IS NOT JUST THE PRESERVE OF WOMEN. IN HIS CULTURE, THIS WARRIOR'S IMAGE AS A "MAN" REMAINS FULLY INTACT, WHEREAS HERE PEOPLE WOULD LOOK AT HIM AND WONDER.

BERBER WOMAN



THIS WOMAN OF THE AIT HADDIDU TRIBE, MOROCCO, COMBINES MAKEUP AND PERMANENT TATTOOS ON HER CHIN AND NOSE.



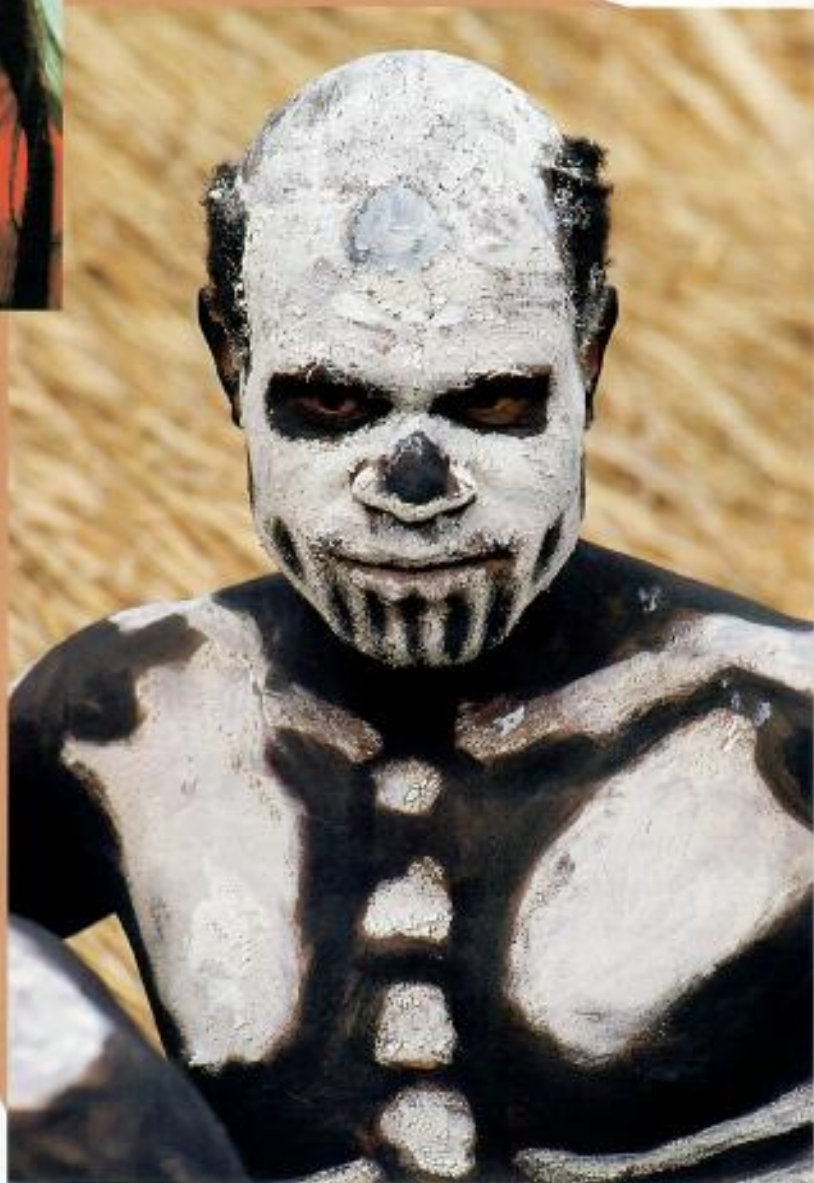


MAKEUP

MOST CONTEMPORARY MEN AND WOMEN WOULD DEFINE THESE TWO WHITE DOTS NOT AS MAKEUP BUT RATHER AS PART OF A BEAUTY MASK. TO THIS NAVAJO WOMAN FROM ARIZONA, HOWEVER, IT IS SIMPLY HER MAKEUP: A FACIAL DESIGN THAT MAKES HER FEEL AS BEAUTIFUL AND CONFIDENT AS EYELINER, LIPSTICK, AND ROUGE DO TO MANY WOMEN TODAY.

X-RAY VISION

COMPARABLE TO THE AFRICAN GIRL PICTURED ON PAGE 12, THE DESIGN WE SEE ON THIS WARRIOR FROM PAPUA NEW GUINEA IS NOT SIMPLY A SKELETON, BUT ATTESTS TO THE ABILITY OF MANY TRIBAL PEOPLE TO SEE BEYOND, OR INTO, NORMAL PHYSICAL APPEARANCES.



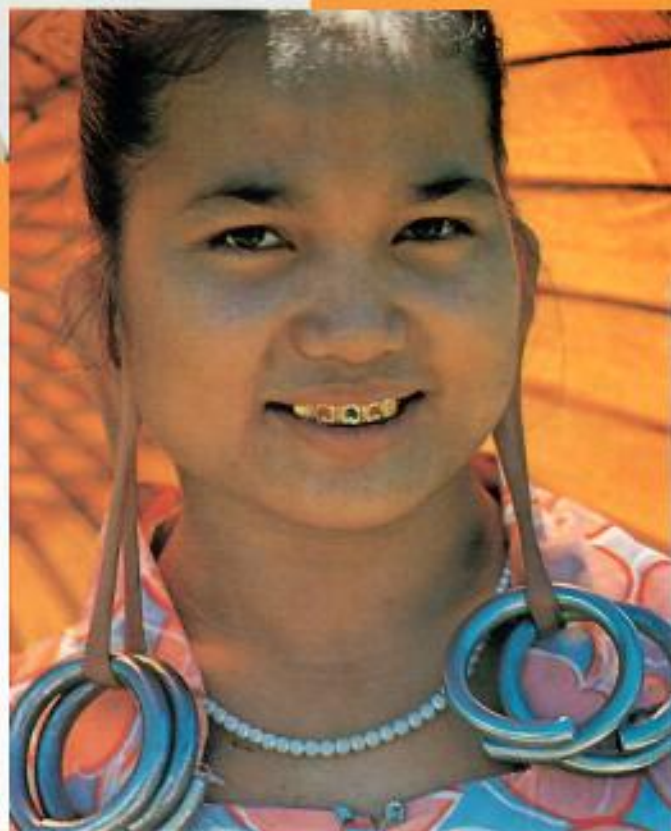


PAINTED SURI MAN

AMONG THE SURI OF
SOUTHERN ETHIOPIA,
MEN PAINT THEM-
SELVES LIKE THIS IN
PREPARATION FOR
THEIR STICK FIGHTS
AND IN ORDER TO
LOOK MORE FIERCE.

BORNEO BEAUTY

TO THE ADMIRERS OF THIS YOUNG KAYAN (DAYAK)
WOMAN FROM SARAWAK IN MALAYSIAN BORNEO,
BOTH HER EARRINGS AND HER GOLDEN TEETH
ANNOUNCE CLEARLY THAT SHE COMES FROM A
WELL-TO-DO FAMILY, MAKING HER ALL THE MORE
ADMIRABLE IN THEIR EYES. THE TEETH OF THIS
WOMAN ARE INLAID WITH AN EMERALD AND TWO
RUBIES, AND HER HEAVY EARRINGS HAVE CREATED
VERY LARGE, ELONGATED EARLOBES.



MAKEUP

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As the above examples clearly show, and as we'll encounter equally often in the following chapters, many types of body adornment and body modification thus have little or nothing to do either with attaining an individual "look" or with conforming to a personal or social vision of "beauty." Rather, many of these techniques are aimed at awakening potentials of consciousness that are fully human and natural, rather than extrasensory or paranormal, but that need to be trained and activated just as our brains and muscles need to be trained and activated in order to function at their very best.