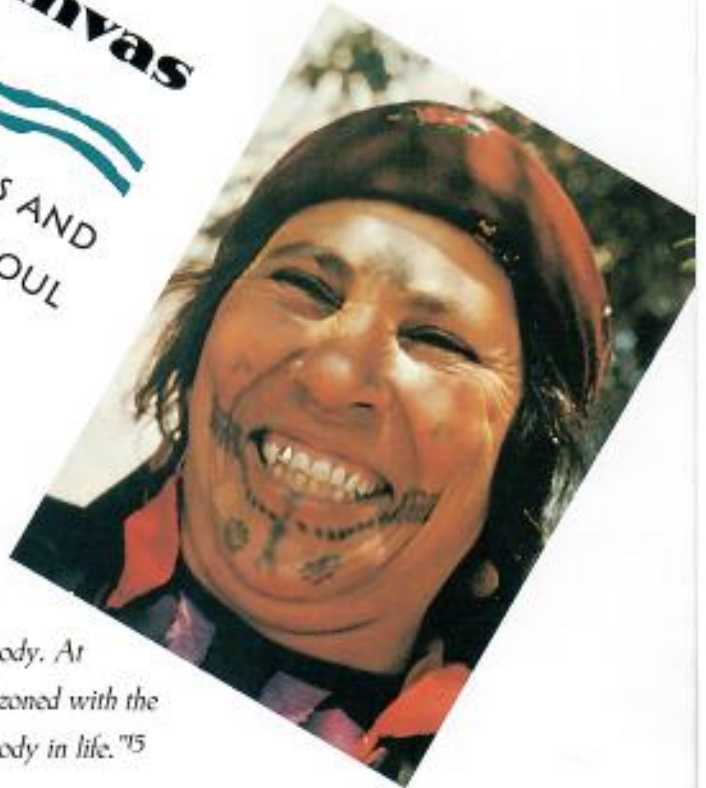




# A The Skin as Canvas

OF SPIRIT DRAWINGS AND  
GRAFFITI OF THE SOUL



*In the Punjab, in India, people believe(d) that a tattoo is inscribed on the soul as well as on the body. At the time of death, the soul "will go to heaven blazoned with the same tattoo patterns which adorned the body in life."<sup>15</sup>*

**T**HE ARTS OF TATTOOING and scarification have an extensive history and are distinguished by great cultural and artistic variety. The tattoo has been put to a truly wide spectrum of uses. Perhaps even more varied is the range of individual and collective motivations that have shaped this ancient art that is, and always has been, known in almost every region of the globe.

The most ancient tools for tattooing gave rise to the name *tattoo*; based on *tau tau*: the sound of the upper stick striking on the lower one during the application of a tattoo. The modern electric tattooing machine was not invented until 1891.

## JAPANESE FULL-BODY TATTOOS



PAGE 56

ALTHOUGH IN JAPAN IT IS MAINLY MEN WHO UNDERGO THE LENGTHY PROCEDURE OF HAVING THEIR SKIN TURNED INTO SPLENDIDLY PAINTED LIVING CANVASES, HERE ARE TWO WOMEN WHO HAVE MADE THIS CHOICE. SUCH FULL-BODY TATTOOS, OR *IREZUMI*, CAN TAKE TWELVE TO EIGHTEEN MONTHS OF REPEATED VISITS TO THE ARTIST, WHO IN THIS CASE WAS THE ACCLAIMED HORITOSHI I.

## BEAUTY VERSUS EVIL



PAGE 57

AMONG THE BEDOUIN WOMEN OF JORDAN AND ELSEWHERE, IT IS COMMON KNOWLEDGE THAT FACIAL TATTOOS NOT ONLY MAKE THEM MORE BEAUTIFUL AND ATTRACTIVE BUT ALSO PROTECT THEM FROM EVIL SPIRITS.

The various cultural and spiritual motivations for adorning the body with tattoos are legion. They range from the uniquely personal facial tattoos of the Maori to Cambodian or Thai spirit drawings meant to protect the wearer from harm; from a prisoner's simple graffiti to the works of art applied to the human body in both old and new Japan.

Before going into cultural detail about which people use tattoos, what designs they use, and their reasons for tattooing, I'd like to quote Henk Schiffmacher (Hanky Panky),<sup>6</sup> a practitioner, historian, and collector of the art who describes in only a few sentences the spectrum of circumstances that may lead to people becoming tattooed, whether in the context of tribal ritual or in a more casual or whimsical setting.

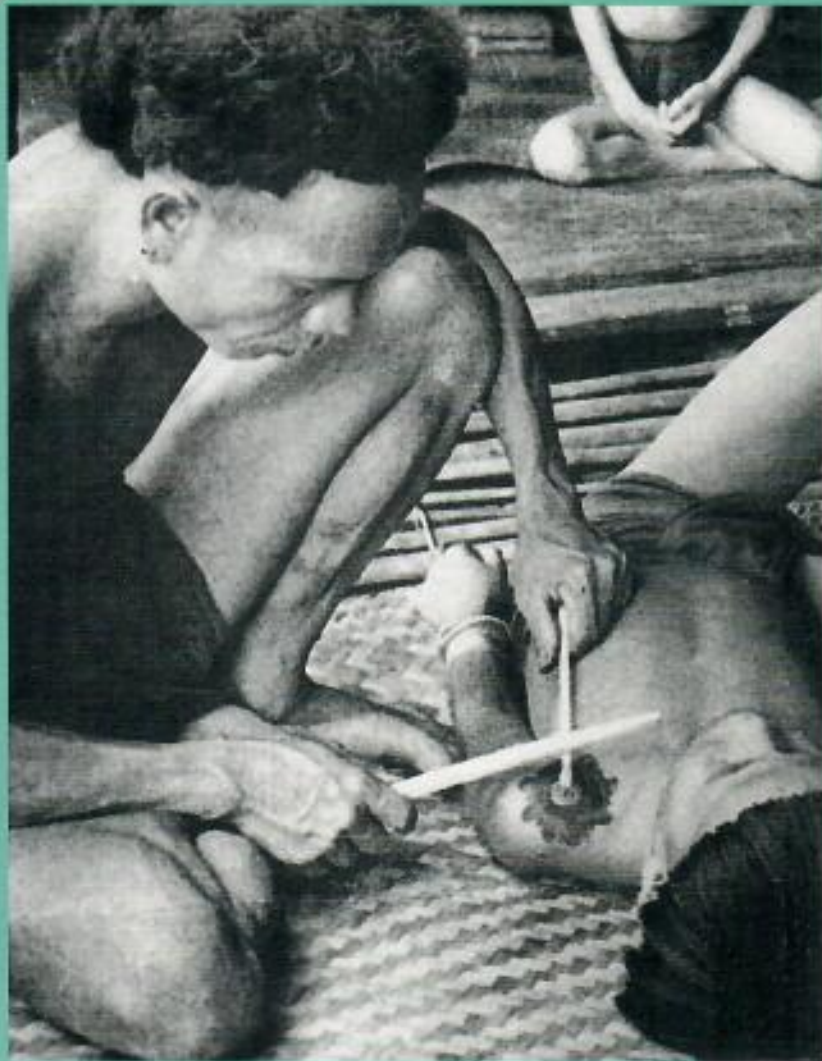
Tattoos can mark the occasion of either a victory or a defeat, can be an expression of joy or sorrow, performed as part of a ceremony or ritual and accompanied by mantras, song and dance. The phase of the moon may determine the time for a tattoo, as may also a particular constellation of the stars, or a season. Some people get themselves tattooed because of certain visions, taboos, oaths or injunctions. The decision to get a tattoo can be a voluntary, sober and well considered one, but there are also cases of tattoos being forced upon someone or performed in a moment of lighthearted spontaneity. The person may be confused, not responsible for their actions, drunk, mentally disturbed or under the influence of drugs. Sometimes, tattooing can have a religious background and at others times be the result of lust, sadism, torture or superstition.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup>"Hanky Panky," as Henk Schiffmacher is widely known, founded the Amsterdam Tattoo Museum in 1996.

## TATTOOING TRADITIONAL STYLE



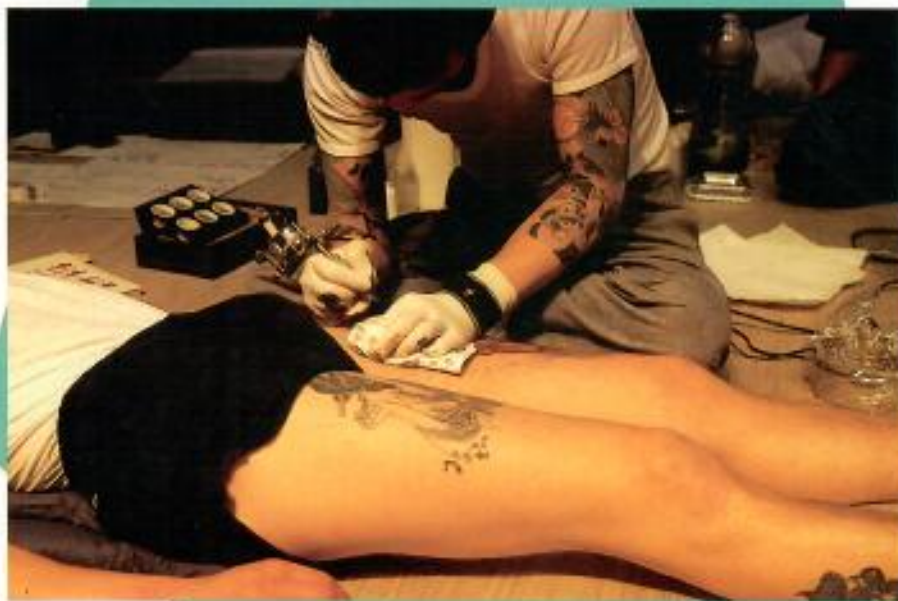
THE RHYTHMIC SOUNDS EMERGING FROM USING THE MOST ANCIENT TOOLS FOR TATTOOING HAVE GIVEN RISE TO THE NAME TATTOO, BASED ON TAU TAU: THE SOUND OF THE UPPER STICK STRIKING ON THE LOWER ONE. ALTHOUGH TATTOOING TOOLS SHOW SLIGHT VARIATIONS ACROSS THE CULTURES OF SOUTHEAST ASIA AND OCEANIA, THE BASIC DESIGN AND TECHNIQUE ARE VERY MUCH THE SAME. (PHOTOGRAPHED CIRCA 1930, BORNEO.)



## JAPANESE MASTER AT WORK



FOR CENTURIES, JAPANESE TATTOO ADEPTS HAVE USED TRADITIONAL TOOLS WHEN APPLYING THEIR BEAUTIFUL ARTWORK TO THE SKINS OF THEIR CLIENTS. TODAY, HOWEVER, THE SPEED OF MODERN ELECTRICAL DEVICES AS WELL AS THEIR BEING LESS PAINFUL HAS CONVINCED EVEN THE TRADITION-MINDED JAPANESE. DURING THE AMSTERDAM TATTOO CONVENTION IN 1996, TATTOO-MASTER HORIWAKA, FROM TOKYO, GAVE A DEMONSTRATION OF HIS SKILLS USING CONTEMPORARY TOOLS AND INK.



Although one can say, in general, that no part of the human body has not been used as a living piece of canvas for a tattoo or some other marking, the available literature and photographs make it clear that the face is least frequently marked, and then usually with small designs only. The reason for this is twofold. First, incising or puncturing the face or neck is one of the more painful experiences one can have with a tattoo, and pain—for most people—is not the major reason for getting a tattoo in the first place. Second, an undoubtedly stronger argument against facial tattooing is of a psychological and social kind. Whereas other tattoos can usually be hidden under clothing, the major rationale for the general form of the Japanese *irezumi* (see page 56), the face is always visible to the outside world. Given the history of the tattoo, which has so often been outlawed and declared illegal, a facial tattoo could easily get one into trouble. The most notable exception to this general rule is found in the facial designs of Maori men, and to a lesser degree in the lip and chin tattoos worn by women among both the Maori (page 62), and the Ainu of northern Japan (page 65).

Contemporary neotribals should, however, be aware that it just won't do to copy a Maori tattoo, however beautiful, from a book and have it inscribed onto the face. To a Maori man, his tattoo both is personal and enhances the natural features of his face and character. In the case of women with chin tattoos, these are often based in family tradition and are, in a very real sense, protected by copyright. Shannon Larratt of BME (*Body Modification Enzine*) puts it this way: "A Western comparison would be if you stole the seal of a royal family and made it your own family seal," and Tom Brazda of Stainless Studios adds, "When Westerners adopt a variation of the moko, the female moko which is just on the chin, the Maori say it insults their women and upsets their ancestors. If a European is seen wearing a female moko, he risks getting beat up."<sup>17</sup>

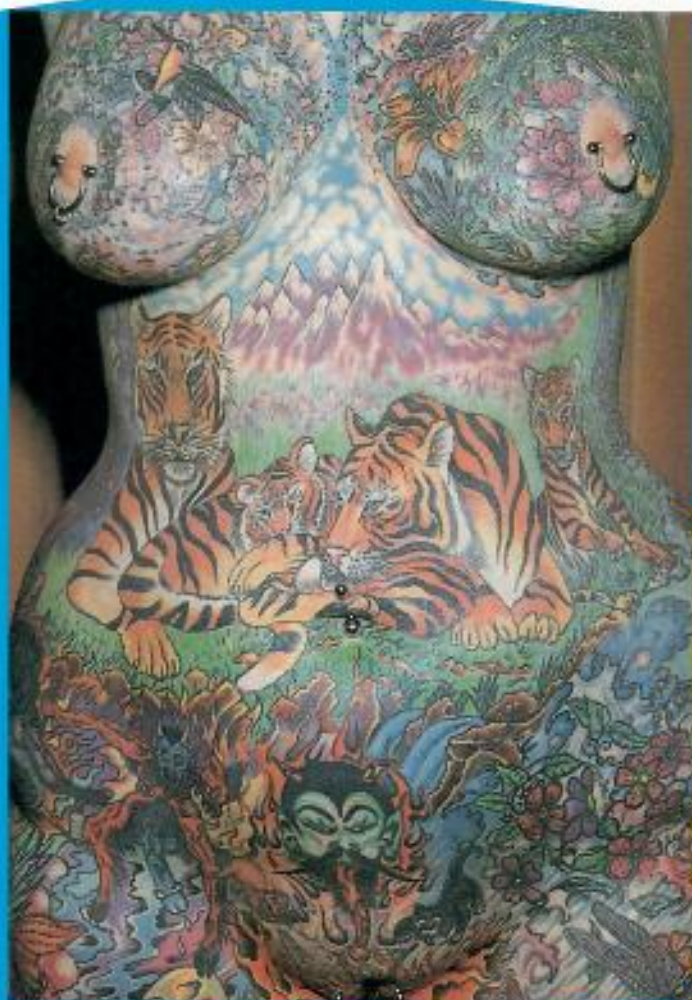
Although the tattoo is presently undergoing not only a renaissance but a period of full bloom in most cities and countries of the urbanized world, other societies are just now banning the practice. In Thailand, for example, where it once was most normal to be tattooed, government jobs are closed to anyone wearing a tattoo. This is comparable to efforts by other countries that on their emergence from the third world into the modern mainstream try to repress and forget aspects of their cultural heritage that were once thought of as primitive by the missionaries and

## KALINGA TATTOOS

YOUNG FILIPINA WOMAN WITH THE HONEYCOMB PATTERN TATTOO OFTEN SEEN IN THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS.

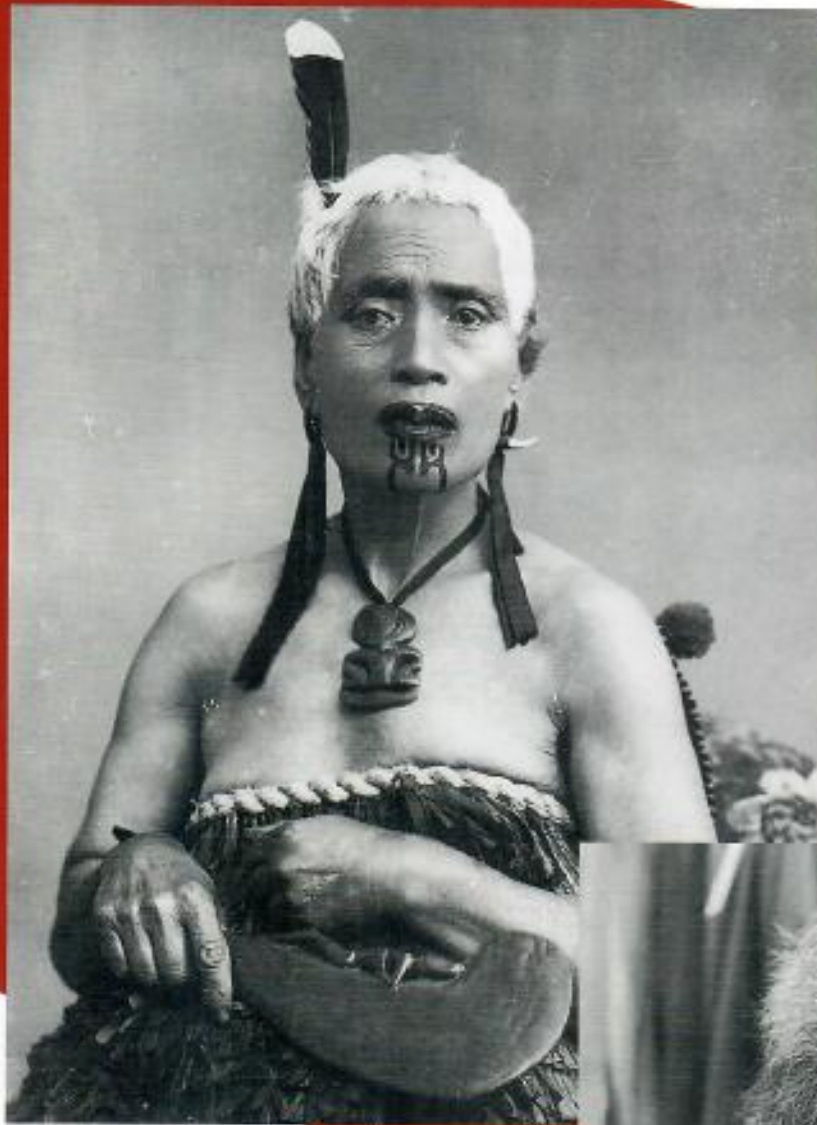
## THE ILLUSTRATED WOMAN

DETAILED FULL-BODY TATTOOS ARE FOUND NOT ONLY IN JAPAN. ALTHOUGH IN THE WEST THEY ARE MORE RARE, THE AMOUNT OF WORK, PATIENCE, PAIN, AND COST INVOLVED ARE VERY MUCH THE SAME. ONLY THE STYLES DIFFER GREATLY.

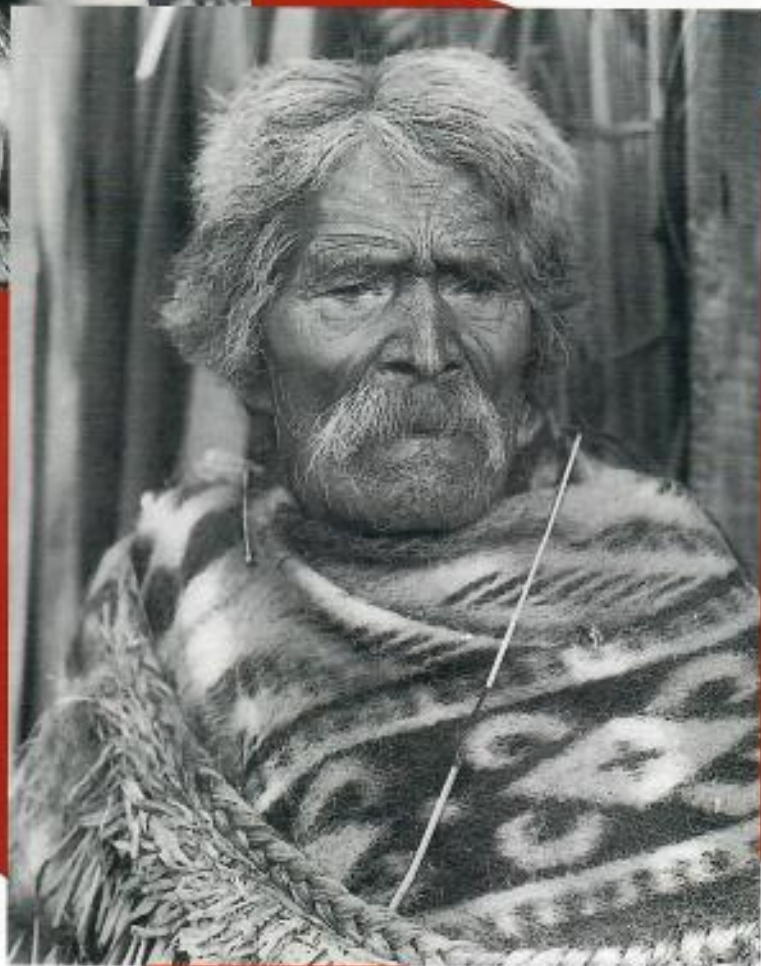


## NUDE OR NOT?

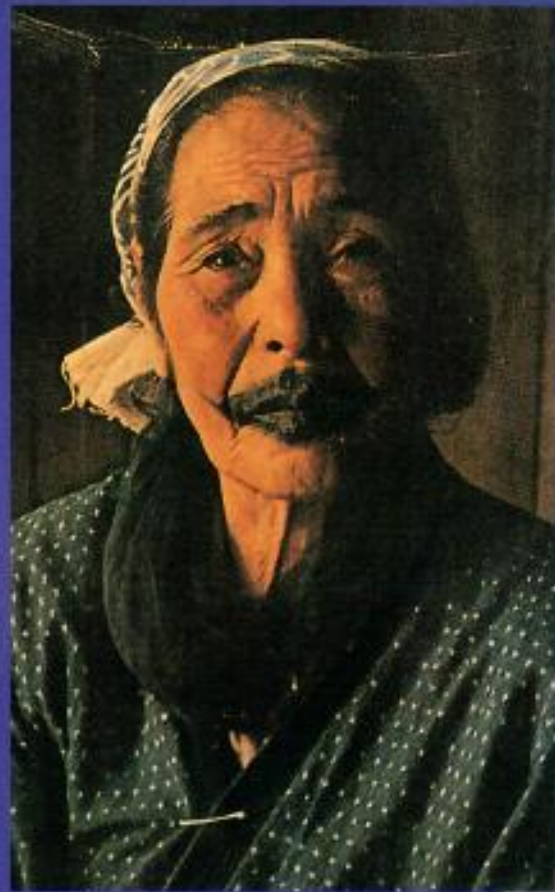
A TYPICAL EXAMPLE OF THE STYLE OF TATTOOING FOUND IN THE MARQUESA ISLANDS AND IN SAMOA. FOLLOWING WELL-DEFINED RULES ABOUT WHICH DESIGNS ARE EXECUTED AT WHAT AGE, A SAMOAN MAN, AS SHOWN HERE, WILL HAVE THE COMPLETE, INTRICATE PATTERN ONLY WHEN OLD.



**MAORI WOMAN**  
**MOX**  
THIS TRADITIONAL CHIN  
TATTOO DATES FROM  
ABOUT 1900.



**MAORI MOKO**  
**MOX**  
MAORI MAN WITH  
TRADITIONAL MOKO  
(FACIAL TATTOO),  
DATING FROM  
ABOUT 1900.



### NO NEED FOR LIPSTICK



AINU WOMEN ENLARGE AND ENHANCE THEIR LIPS PERMANENTLY BY MEANS OF A TATTOO, AS SHOWN IN THIS PHOTOGRAPH (LEFT) FROM 1903, RATHER THAN BY MAKEUP APPLIED DAILY.

MIGHT THERE BE AN ANCIENT CONNECTION BETWEEN THE AINU PEOPLE OF THE JAPANESE ISLAND OF HOKKAIDO AND THE MAORI OF PRESENT-DAY NEW ZEALAND? AMONG BOTH PEOPLES, WOMEN TATTOO AND THUS VISUALLY ENLARGE THEIR LIPS.

### TE AHO TE RANGI WHAREPU



THIS CHIEF OF THE NGATI-MAHUTA TRIBE HAS A TYPICAL MAORI MOKO, OR PERSONAL FACIAL TATTOO. SOMETIMES SUCH A MOKO MAY APPEAR TO SOMEONE IN A DREAM, BUT THE ACTUAL TATTOO IS CREATED ONLY WHEN THE COUNCIL OF ELDERS HAS DECIDED THAT IT ACTUALLY DOES FIT THE PERSON.





traders of the West. As Thailand cracks down on tattoos, so does Malaysia on the beliefs and ritual practices of its folk religion and on the lengthened earlobes of its original inhabitants. Similarly, though on another continent, many African nations try to inhibit their people's ancient traditions of scarification and other types of body adornment and modification.

As with many other types of body adornment, present-day motivations for getting a tattoo differ somewhat from those of our ancestors and of most contemporary tribal people. Whereas the early Neolithic hunters of Europe and Central Asia most certainly applied spirit drawings to the skin with religious and magical intentions, and whereas the Egyptians of 2000 B.C.E. probably combined ritual demands for tattooing with a desire to enhance their attractiveness, today's neotribals show a wide spectrum of motivations.

Among contemporary tribal peoples, the Dayaks and other inhabitants of Southeast Asia provide a good example of how tattoos are not mere decorations but constitute an actual symbolic language instead (see pages 66–67). These peoples allowed only a proven warrior to wear a certain tattoo. Special designs on traditionally determined places of his body would show that he had killed beast or man, or that he was a man with an otherwise less visible adornment: the famous genital piercing known as *ampallang* (see *ampallang* in the Glossary).

However, in the absence of a clearly defined symbolic code in which tattoos are, in fact, a pictorial language, people now often wear tattoos that have been carefully and personally designed (see pages 68–71). Among them are many icons of current media fame such as Ninja Turtles, Mickey Mouse, pop stars, and even brand names, not to mention the many eagles, anchors, and nude women once characteristic of soldiers and sailors.

A striking example of a tattoo that seems truly a return to the tribal is shown on page 70. Author Deena Metzger has a unique tattoo that is representative of the symbolical and magical consciousness usually found among tribal people rather than twentieth-century contemporaries. Once the scar left by the mastectomy of her right breast had sufficiently healed on a physical level, this remarkable woman covered it with the design of a living and budding branch. In her book *Tree*, Metzger makes it quite clear that this symbol of life is meant to override the loss her body suffered at the hand of the surgeon. She describes the tattoo and its symbolism thus:

... where a knife entered, now a branch winds about the scar and travels from arm to heart. Green leaves cover the branch, grapes hang there and a bird appears. What grows in me now is vital and does not cause me harm. I think the bird is singing. I have designed my chest with the care given to an illuminated manuscript. I am no longer ashamed to make love. In the night, a hand caressed my chest and once again I came to life. Love is a battle I can win. I have the body of a warrior who does not kill or wound. On the book of my body, I have permanently inscribed a tree.<sup>18</sup>

Whereas this somewhat reminds us of the ways tribal people often fought psychological pain with physical pain (see chapter 6), others among today's neotribal tribals simply base their designs on traditional ones. A particular form of neotribal style is based in the traditional designs of the Pacific and Southeast Asia yet has transformed them into truly modern and often very elegant patterns that seem both magical and intended to captivate the eye.

In considering again the various known motivations for tattooing the body, it becomes clear that the contemporary return to the tribal represents a swing of the pendulum of history, another loop in the continuous flow of time. Humanity, on reaching the end of one cycle and entering a new one, is more open to change at such crucial moments and seems to become sensitive yet again. Wrongly foreseen in the 1960s as a "New" or "Aquarian" age brought about by stellar constellations, what we currently witness is a reemergence of the tribal spirit from within the human psyche: genetic memory manifesting itself. Amid the concrete and silicon with which we've fashioned our world, the mythical serpent of the dreamtime is once again arising, reminding and recalling us to roots almost forgotten.

Whether some people now adorn their bodies in an attempt to belong to a certain group or "tribe," or others do so as an outward sign that they do not want to belong to a society in which all are all too equal, is not the major point. These are merely the confusions of a new childhood. What *is* important is that those who heed the call do not simply copy—or even steal—symbols, practices, and rituals from cultures of the past and tribal peoples of the present, but rather, as the New Zealand Maori, Native Americans, and other peoples have invited them to do, either come and ask and learn, or develop their own by simply turning within and listening patiently and quietly to the myriad voices of self and universe.

## **IBAN DAYAK**

IN ADDITION TO THE TRADITIONAL TATTOOS ON HIS THROAT AND SHOULDERS MARKING HIM AS AN EXPERIENCED WARRIOR, THIS DAYAK MAN FROM MALAYSIAN BORNEO HAS AN UNUSUAL MARKING ON HIS FOREHEAD, WHERE EACH OF THE THREE DOTS REPRESENTS ONE FOREIGN COUNTRY HE HAS TRAVELED TO.



## **WOODABE WOMAN**

ALTHOUGH TATTOOING IS MUCH LESS COMMON THAN SCARIFICATION AMONG DARK-SKINNED PEOPLE, THE WOMEN OF SOME AFRICAN TRIBES USE TATTOO AS BOTH AN ADORNMENT AND A MEANS OF MAGICAL PROTECTION. THE TRIANGULAR CHIN TATTOO OF THIS WOODABE WOMAN, FOR EXAMPLE, IS MEANT TO GUARD HER AGAINST THE EVIL EYE.

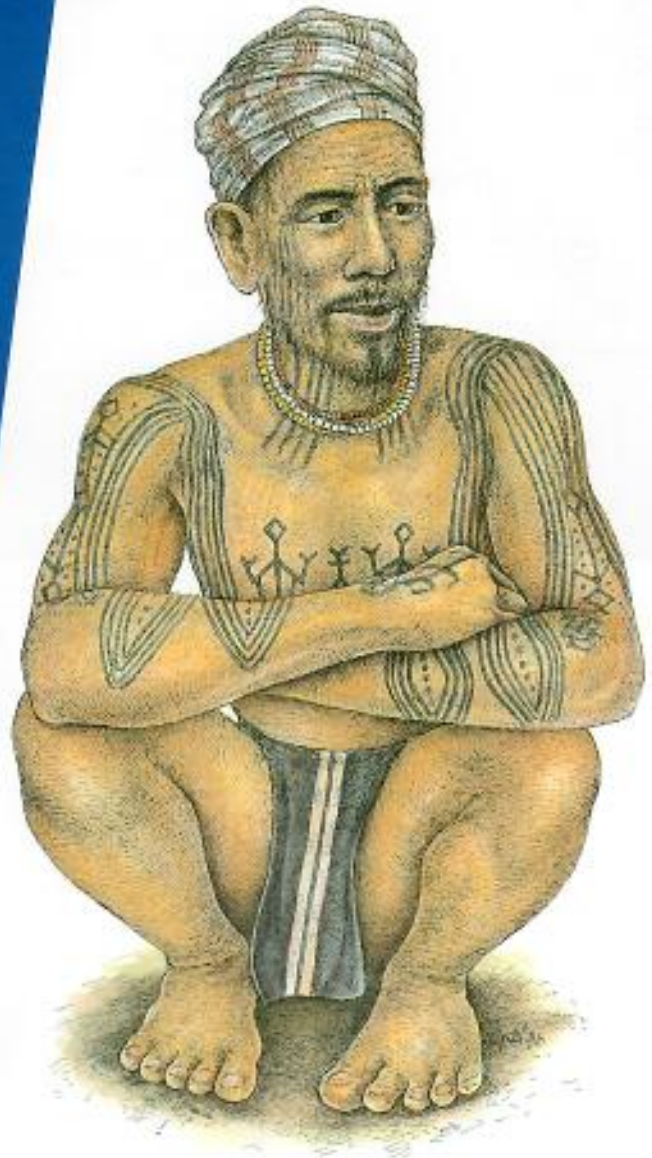
## BORNEO TATTOO

MANY AMONG THE YOUNGER GENERATION OF DAYAKS DO NOT FOLLOW THE ANCIENT TRIBAL CODE OF TATTOOING ANYMORE AND PREFER—IF AT ALL—COMMON WESTERN DESIGNS SUCH AS NUDE WOMEN OR CHINESE DESIGNS SUCH AS DRAGONS. THIS YOUNG DAYAK MAN, HOWEVER, HAS DECIDED TO FOLLOW THE ANCIENT WAYS ON HIS BACK, WHEREAS HIS CHEST HAS A MODERN DESIGN.



## PONYO NAGA

LIVING IN ASSAM AND BURMA, THE NAGAS WERE INFAMOUS HEAD-HUNTERS. THE TWO SYMBOLIC HUMAN FIGURES TATTOOED ON THIS MAN'S CHEST REVEAL HIS HAVING KILLED TWO MEN, WHICH GIVES HIM GREAT STATUS WITHIN HIS GROUP. TODAY, NAGAS FREQUENTLY ABSTAIN FROM TATTOOING BUT HAVE PRESERVED THEIR TRADITIONAL DESIGNS AS PATTERNS ON THEIR CLOTHING.





## ANGEL AND ALEX



ONCE ELAYNE HAD THESE BEAUTIFUL WINGS TATTOOED ON HER BACK BY ARTIST BOB ROBERTS, SHE TOOK ON THE VERY FITTING NAME ANGEL. PHOTOGRAPHED FOR MANY A BOOK ON TATTOOING, SHE IS SHOWN HERE CRADLING THE BODY OF AN INDIVIDUAL WHO BEARS SEVERAL "MARKS OF CIVILIZATION" IN A STYLE THAT HAS COME TO BE KNOWN AS NEOTRIBAL.

## ALEXXX—REBELLIOUS BEAUTY

ALEXXX HAS MULTIPLE TATTOOS, MULTIPLE PIERCINGS IN BOTH EARS, AND A RING IN HER LEFT MOSTRIL.





### DOUBLE NIPPLE PIERCING

WHETHER OR NOT ONE WOULD WANT A COCK TATTOOED ON THE CHEST, ONE MUST RECOGNIZE THAT THE WORK ITSELF, BY A. OVERSBY, HAS BEEN BEAUTIFULLY EXECUTED. NOTE ALSO HOW THE COCKEREL SEEMS TO GRAB THE VERY SAME NIPPLE THAT HAS BEEN PIERCED TWICE. THE WEARER, SO IT WOULD SEEM, LOVES TO FEEL THE BIRD'S TALONS.

### ARTISTIC HAND

MIXING A TRIBAL DESIGN (ON THE WRIST) WITH PLAYFUL FANTASY, THIS ALMOST FEMALE-LOOKING HAND IS, IN FACT, THE HAND OF A BALINESE MAN.





## BODY ART GOES MAINSTREAM



RECENT 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 IS BECOMING AS ACCEPTABLE AS USING LIPSTICK OR HAVING A FACE-LIFT.

## SYMBOLIC HEALING



AUTHOR DEENA METZGER, HERE PHOTOGRAPHED BY HELLA HAMMID, HAS HAD HER MASTECTOMY SCAR COVERED WITH THE DESIGN OF A LIVING BRANCH.

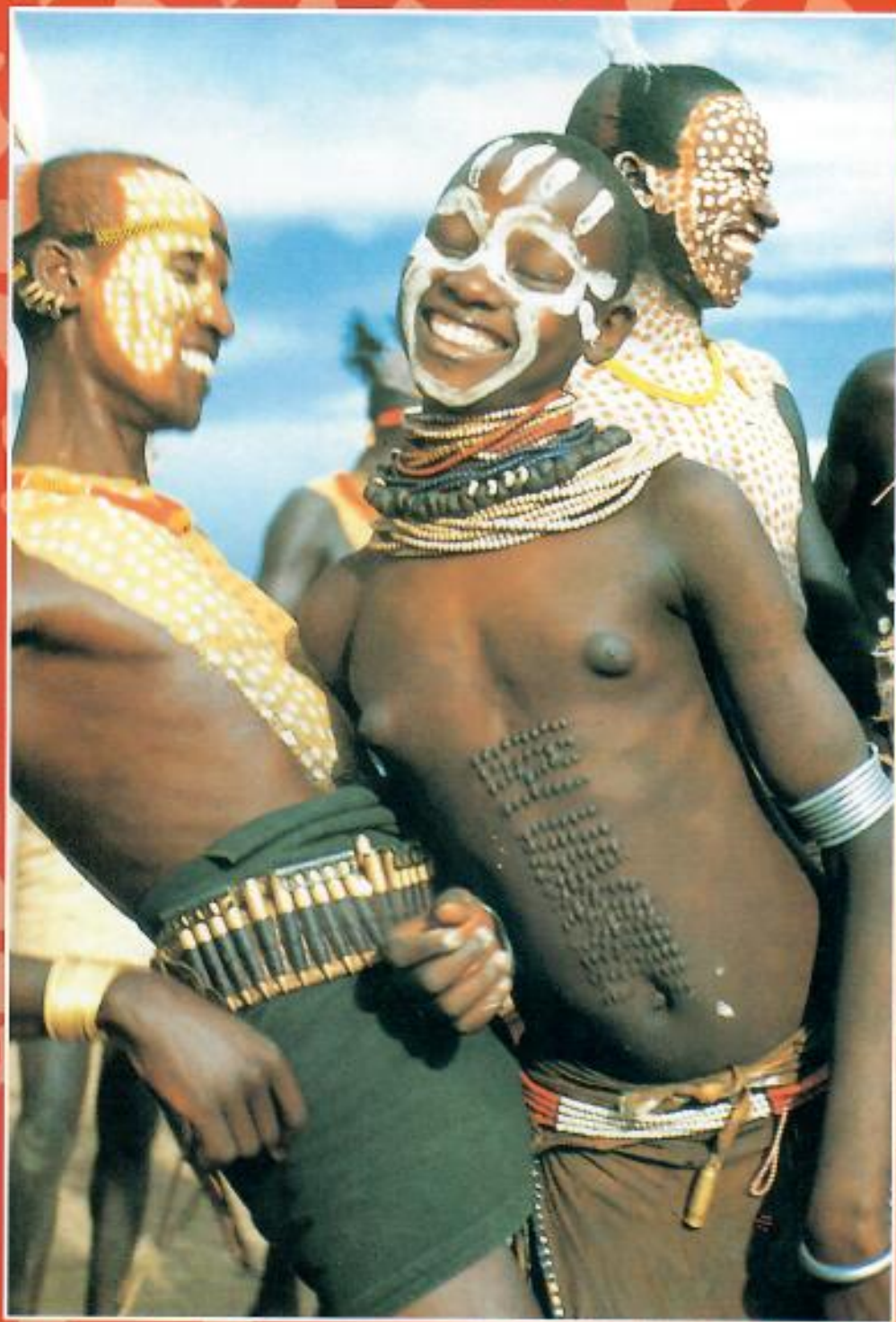


**SISCA  
XOX**

BY HIS OWN ADMISSION, THE YOUNG BALINESE MAN IN THIS PHOTOGRAPH IS SUSPECT TO VANITY AND LOVES TO SHOW OFF HIS MULTIPLE TATTOOS. WHEREAS HIS MOST PAINFUL EXPERIENCES TO DATE WERE THE TATTOOS OF HIS EAR AND EYEBROWS (SEE PAGE 1), THE MOST EXPENSIVE AND TIME-CONSUMING ONE WAS ON HIS BACK. SISCA, AN EX-TRANSVESTITE NOW SELLING GARMENTS ON BALI'S LOVINA BEACH, IS ONE OF THOSE NEOTRIBAL PEOPLE WHO SPEND MOST OF THEIR SPARE CHANGE ON ACQUIRING MORE AND MORE TATTOOS. AS WITH MANY OTHER SUCH PEOPLE, HIS MOTIVATION IS NOT MERE VANITY OR EXHIBITIONISM BUT AN ATTEMPT TO COMBAT OLD PSYCHIC PAINS WITH NEW PHYSICAL ONES AND TO LEARN ONCE MORE TO TRUST A STRANGER (THE TATTOO ARTIST) AFTER HAVING BEEN DISAPPOINTED BY TOO MANY OTHERS.



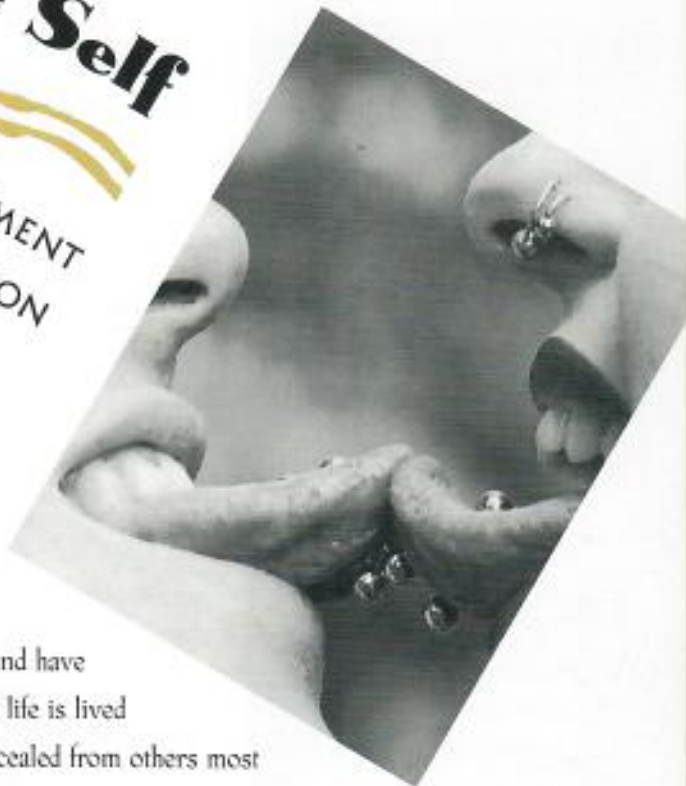




# J

## The Invisible Self

EROTIC ADORNMENT  
AND MODIFICATION



**M**OST READERS of this book live in contemporary Western or Westernized societies and have become entirely accustomed to the convention that life is lived within clothes. Hence, most of our bodies are concealed from others most of the time.

To many tribal peoples, however, and especially to the great number of those who live in tropical and subtropical regions, such a dichotomy between visible and invisible has never existed. Whereas the body adornments of the man and woman shown on page 72 are visible to everyone all the time, even though they are of an erotic nature, the equally elaborately adorned woman on page 75 would be seen as she is here only by her lover were it not for such publications as this and for other developments we shall discuss later on and in chapter 6.

So the moment any type of adornment, decoration, or enhancement goes

## FLIRTING IN ETHIOPIA

PAGE 72

FACIAL PAINTING BY MEN  
AND WOMEN, MULTIPLE  
EARRINGS WORN BY MEN,  
AND BODY SCARIFICATION  
UNDERTAKEN BY WOMEN  
ARE THE INGREDIENTS  
EVERY KARO COUPLE  
ENCOUNTERS IN POTENTIAL  
LOVED ONES.

## THE SOUND OF TONGUES MEETING

PAGE 73

WOULD YOU EVER HAVE  
THOUGHT THAT A FRENCH  
KISS COULD MAKE A  
VARIETY OF METALLIC,  
CLICKING SOUNDS? IF NOT,  
YOU'VE NOT BEEN TOLD ALL  
THERE IS TO KNOW. THE  
TWO IN THIS PHOTO DO  
KNOW, AND OBVIOUSLY  
ENJOY IT.

beyond the face and limbs, it involves full or partial nudity, both when it is acquired and when it is shown to others or to the camera. Although nudity in itself is not necessarily erotic or sexual, except to true religious fundamentalists, most invisible adornments are motivated specifically by the erotic-sexual impulse. They include the piercing of nipples and navels, tattooing the pubic region, scarification done for tactile reasons, and branding as a sign of possession or submission in the BDSM (bondage/domination, submissive/master) setting.

Even more clearly sexual is the adornment or enhancement that involves piercing and/or restyling the genitals. Apart from the nipples, in fact, these most delicate parts of the invisible self seem to be the sites primarily chosen for such adornments and enhancements.

With few exceptions, this focus on the genitals is not gleaned from tribal peoples. Although there are hints in literature that Indian women used to pierce their inner or outer labia and that both Indian and Polynesian women tattooed their pubic areas, no photographic material seems to exist to document these facts.

What is clearly known is that the female labia minora—the small, inner genital labia—have been adorned and/or enlarged in some cultures. Among the Hottentot people, a woman was judged beautiful and powerful if she had large inner labia extending far beyond the outer ones. They were purposely elongated with weights and by daily manipulation and have been reported to be very large indeed. Early ethnologists called this modification the Hottentot apron. Other African tribes, such as the Basuto, Dahomey, Tonga, Urua, and Venda people, have followed the same practice, as have contemporary women in both the East and West. Considering that recently modern women have also begun to modify their labia (see *labia lift* and *labia removal* in the Glossary), we should recognize this as a clear return of the tribal, a shaking off of two thousand years of the Christian teaching that one may not tamper with either one's body or one's life.

## FULLY ADORNED

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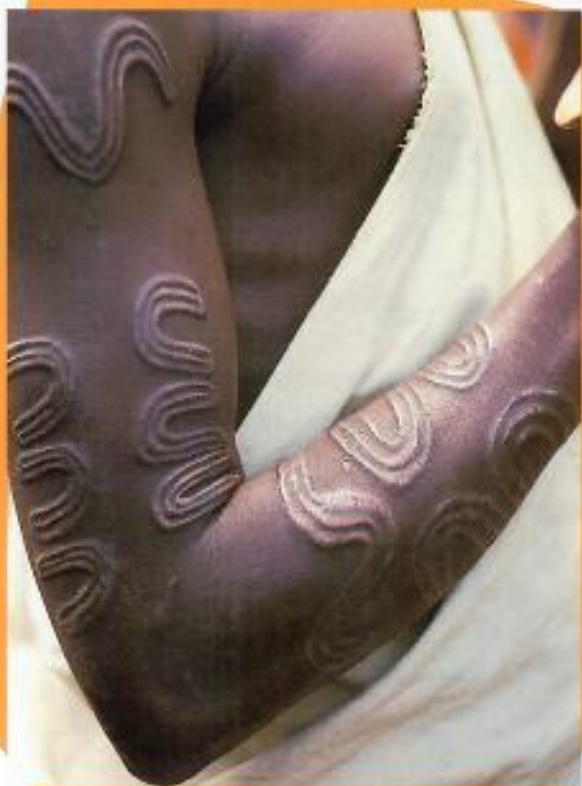
AMONG CONTEMPORARY OR MODERN PRIMITIVES, AND ALSO AMONG PEOPLE NOT FITTING THIS CATEGORY BUT WHO ARE AESTHETICALLY ADVENTUROUS, THE PRACTICES OF TATTOOING AND PIERCING ARE OFTEN COMBINED. THE RESULT IS NOT ALWAYS AS TASTEFUL AS THAT SHOWN HERE, WHERE A PIERCED NAVEL, NIPPLES, AND GENITALS ARE COMBINED WITH A TATTOO TRULY BEFITTING THE BODY OF ITS WEARER.



## MURSI MAN

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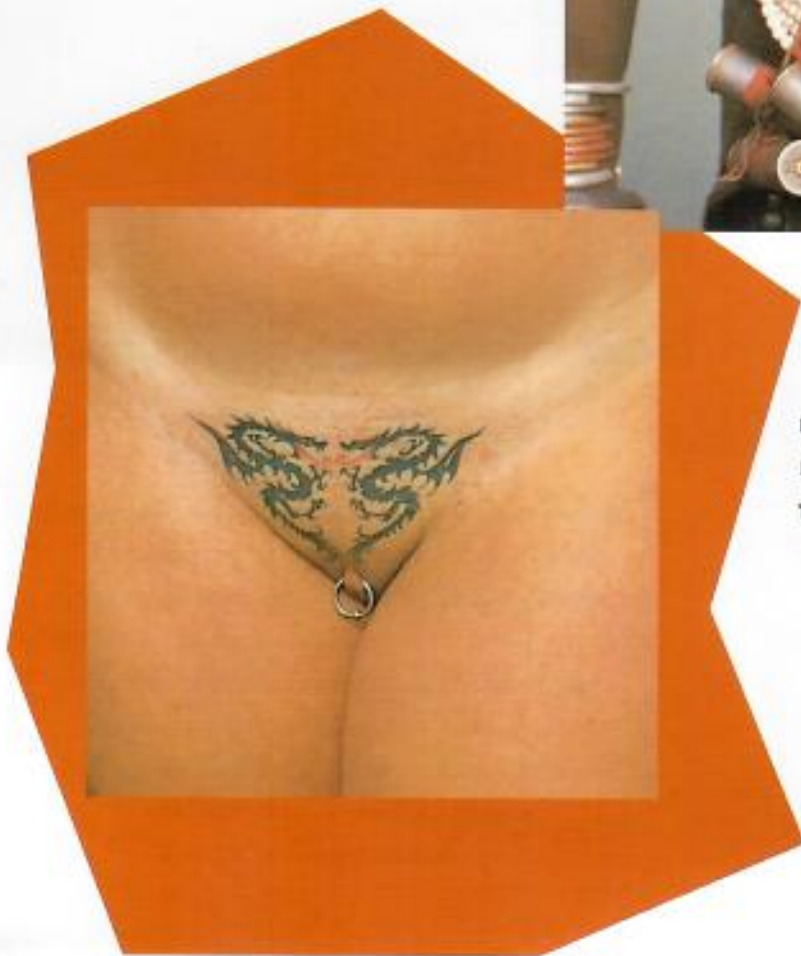
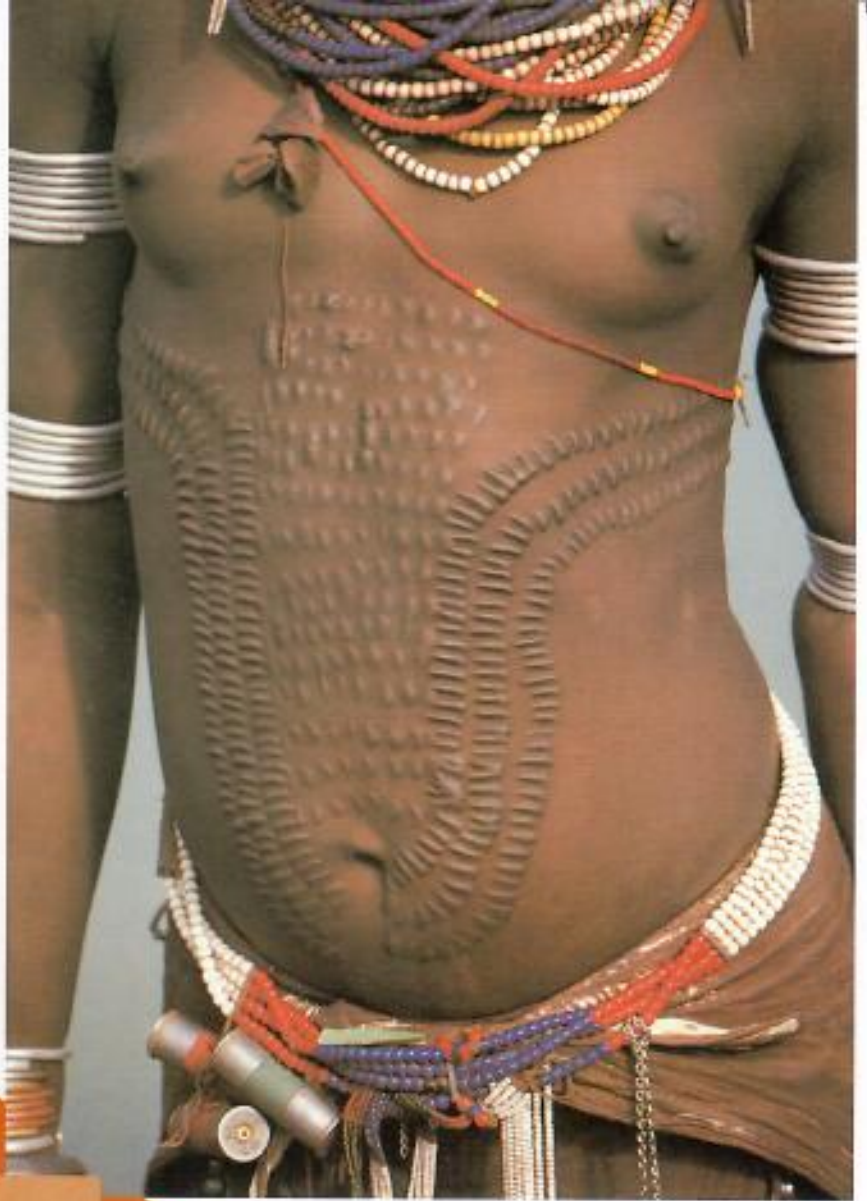
AMONG THE MURSI OF ETHIOPIA, SCARIFIED FACES AS WELL AS BODIES ARE COMMON IN BOTH GENDERS. THESE MEN AND WOMEN SEE THE PRACTICE AS AN EROTIC ART RATHER THAN AS A MEANS OF SHOWING TRIBAL IDENTITY OR PERSONAL HISTORY, AS AMONG OTHER TRIBES. TO THE MURSI, THEIR SCARS ARE MEANT TO ATTRACT THE OPPOSITE SEX AND ACT AS A TACTILE ENHANCEMENT OF THE SKIN DURING SEXUAL PLAY.



## **KARO SCARIFICATIONS**



AMONG THE KARO OF  
ETHIOPIA, THE WELTS RAISED  
BY BODY SCARIFICATION NOT  
ONLY ARE REGARDED AS  
VISUAL ENHANCEMENT OF  
BEAUTY BUT ALSO ARE VAL-  
UED FOR THEIR TACTILE  
EROTIC QUALITY.



## **PUBIC TATTOO**



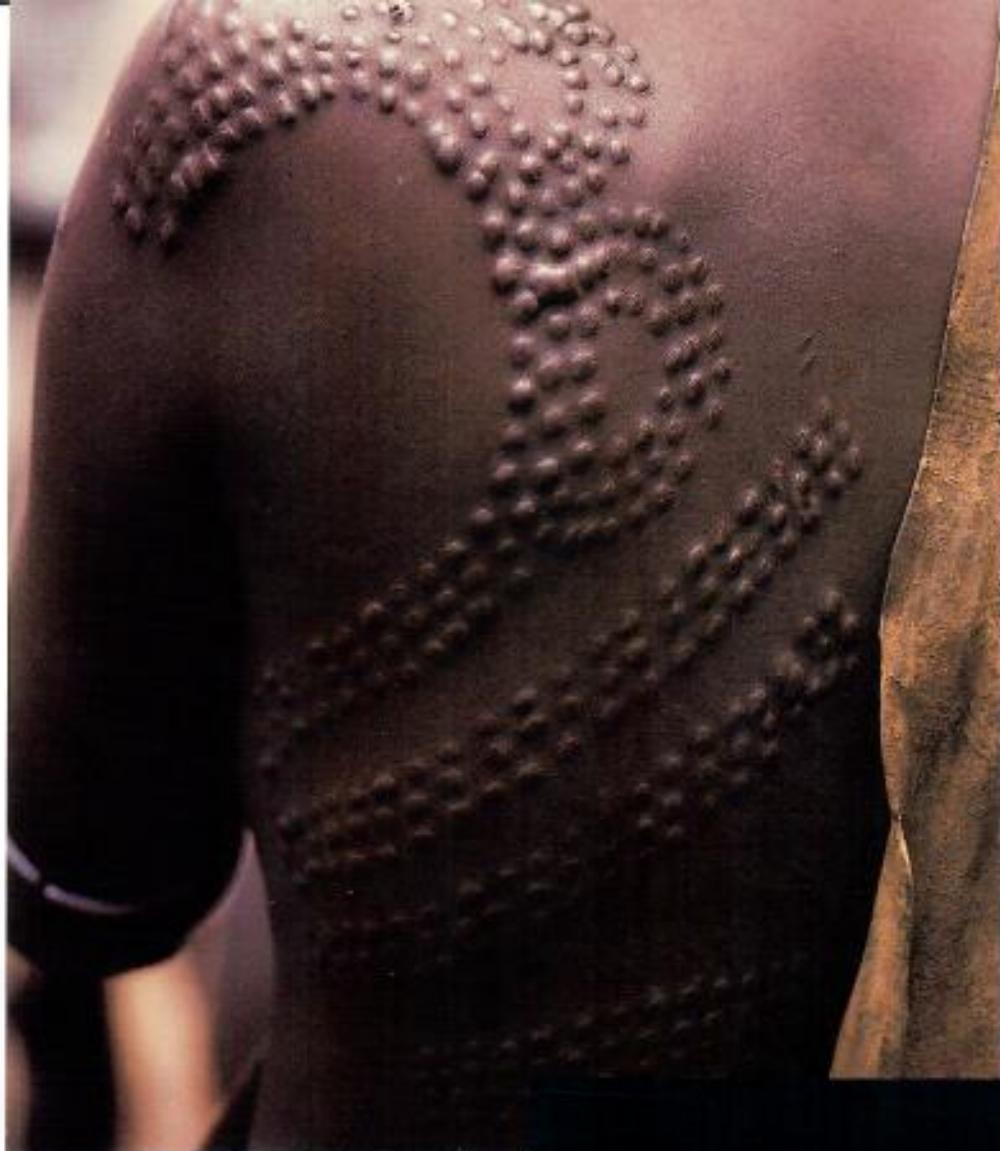
PUBIC TATTOOS ARE RARELY SEEN, YET—ACCORD-  
ING TO TATTOO ARTISTS—ARE DONE MORE OFTEN  
THAN WE IMAGINE. THIS WOMAN HAS TWO DRAG-  
ONS GUARDING HER MOST INTIMATE OPENING.  
ALTHOUGH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO JUDGE  
CORRECTLY, IT ALSO SEEMS THAT SHE WEARS A  
RING THROUGH HER CLITORIS—A PIERCING  
THAT IS LESS COMMON BUT IS SAID  
TO BE VERY STIMULATING.

Concerning tribal men, the best known and most interesting example of genital modification comes from the Dayak of Borneo, in both the Indonesian and Malaysian parts of the island. Here, a man would not be able to find a woman for love or life if he were to omit the piercing known as ampallang, the local name for a small metal shaft that is inserted in a hole bored through the penile glans. Although in scientific literature this form of piercing is often wrongly discussed with male circumcision, it has nothing to do with it. The ampallang is clearly a genital adornment and, according to those who really know, a means of genital enhancement. The practice is known not only in Borneo but also in other areas of Oceania, and it results in a phallus not only adorned but apparently more stimulating to a man's sexual partners. The local women equate making love to a man without an ampallang with the taste of plain rice, whereas sexual union with a man wearing one is seen as much more exciting; in their words, like rice with salt.\* A visit to the Sarawak Museum in Kuching, Borneo, proved very enlightening. It was shown here that the ampallang practice originated as a means, both magical and practical, of acquiring the stamina and strength—perhaps even the size—of a rhinoceros. The two-horned rhinoceros (*Diceros sumatrensis*) of Sumatra and Borneo has, a clearly visible, a small diagonal bone in his member, more or less like that of the neotribal on page 80. During maturity, by way of calcification through urine, this natural ampallang even grows in size—something that also happens to men who never take the metal shaft out of the flesh. Ampallang wearers—and here the invisible is made visible after all—announce their status by having a special mark tattooed on the shoulder.

To those practices that are both a visual adornment and a sexual enhancement belong also the various piercings shown on pages 78 and 80. Women with such piercings of the labia, clitoral hood, or clitoris itself very often report that the sensitivity of these parts is very much enhanced. In addition to this and the visual effect in general, piercings in the nipples and genitals—of both women and men—give rise to a whole new set of possibilities for playing with one's own body or

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\*A contemporary ampallang user, the American Fakir Musafar (b. 1950) discusses his experience with this implement in the book *Modern Primitives* by Vale and Junc.



### **AFRICAN WOMAN**

THE IMAGE AT LEFT SHOWS THE SCARIFICATION DESIGNS FOR A MURSI WOMAN FROM ETHIOPIA. ALTHOUGH DIFFERENT THAN THE MALE DESIGN SHOWN ON PAGE 75, THE AIM OF EROTIC ATTRACTIVENESS IS THE SAME IN BOTH CASES.

### **AMERICAN WOMAN**

RATHER THAN USING SCARIFICATION FOR VISUAL AND TACTILE ENHANCEMENT OF THE BODY, CONTEMPORARY WESTERN WOMEN AND MEN MORE FREQUENTLY RESORT TO TATTOOING OR PIERCING, OR TO BOTH AS IN THIS IMAGE. NOTICE THE RIGHT NIPPLE WHICH IS PIERCED BOTH HORIZONTALLY AND VERTICALLY.



that of a partner. The least common of all yoni piercings is that of the clitoris; yet, as an experienced piercer once said, "the women who have them love them." Piercings of both the clitoris and the skin of the hood are enhancements that not only amplify sensation but create new ones never before felt.

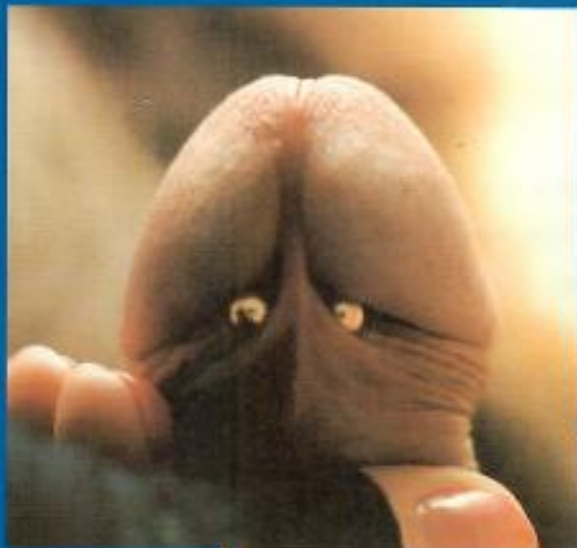
A practice that has—to my knowledge—not yet reappeared on the contemporary scene is the type of scarification done by several African tribes. Whereas most scarifications, as discussed previously, are merely visual, marking age and/or initiations undergone, some honest tribals and researchers have clearly stated that the actual scars are meant to attract the opposite sex. The Karo, especially (see page 76), regard the raised welts as a tactile enhancement of the skin during sexual play (see also pages 75 and 78).

So to many people what seem to be "mutilations" of the body, and especially of the genitals, are seen by the practitioners and often their consorts as adornments and even actual, practical enhancements. Lesser known than the examples given here—or at least not often spoken of—are many men's attempts at phallus elongation. Scrotal stretching, encasement, and constriction techniques are practiced by only a few men with a taste for radical adventure and experimentation.

In conclusion, let me focus on an often overlooked fact. Whereas some of the techniques and practices described here have been shown to have tribal antecedents, this is not the major issue. What is, to me, a clearer indication of the present return to tribal practices and consciousness lies in the fact that the invisible self is becoming more visible. Although many erotic, sexual, genital tattoos and piercings are done in privacy, behind the curtains of a piercing studio, many other neotribals choose to have them done in a semipublic situation. Often recreating a sense of ritual, such people lay bare to the group not only their skin but also their experience of both intense pain and intense pleasure. Whether or not the onlookers chant during the operation or welcome the newly adorned with applause and hugs afterwards, what we see in essence is a new member joining the tribe in a bond that is beyond family or nation or race or gender. Once more, and unlike the practices imposed by truly tribal people, it is the personal choice that differentiates the neotribal from all other peoples we usually designate by the term *tribal*.

During the growing number of conventions for the adorned, whether tattooed





### PIERCED FRENUM



LESS FAMOUS THAN OTHER PENILE PIERCINGS, SUCH AS THE AMPALLANG OR THE PRINCE ALBERT, A PIERCING OF THE FRENUM IS EASY AND NOT VERY PAINFUL. APART FROM SERVING THE AIM OF BEAUTIFICATION, MANY GENITAL PIERCINGS PROVIDE ADDITIONAL TACTILE STIMULATION FOR BOTH PARTNERS DURING SEXUAL PLAY.

### INTIMATE JEWELRY



IN THIS DRAWING, ARTIST CHRISTINA CAMPHAUSEN SHOWS HOW THE DELICATE INNER LABIA CAN LOOK ONCE THEY ARE PIERCED AND ELONGATED BY TINY WEIGHTS.



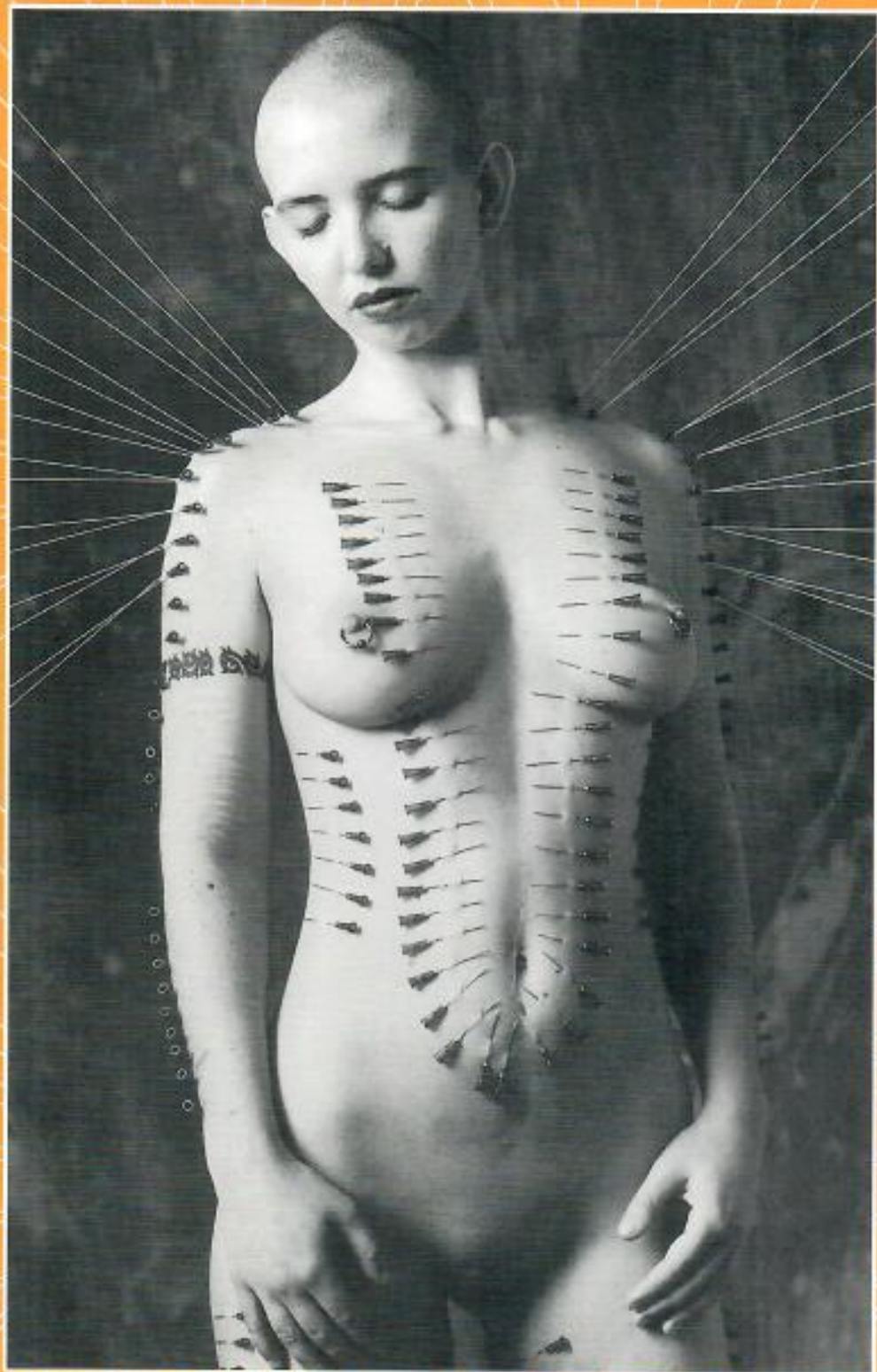
### CAUCASIAN NEOTRIBAL MAN



REMINISCENT OF PAPUA WARRIORS WITH BONES INSERTED THROUGH THE NASAL SEPTUM, THIS PRESENT-DAY RADICAL HAS CHOSEN A LESS CONSPICUOUS PLACEMENT FOR HIS PERSONAL TOTEM. ONE LESSON TO BE DRAWN FROM THE MANY CONTEMPORARY PUBLICATIONS ON THE TOPIC OF BODY DECORATION AND RADICAL SEXUALITY IS THIS: THERE IS NO SINGLE SOCIAL STRATUM TO WHICH THE PRACTITIONERS BELONG. THIS MAN COULD BE YOUR NEIGHBOR, THE BANK MANAGER DECIDING WHETHER OR NOT YOU GET YOUR CREDIT, OR THE GROCER AT THE CORNER.



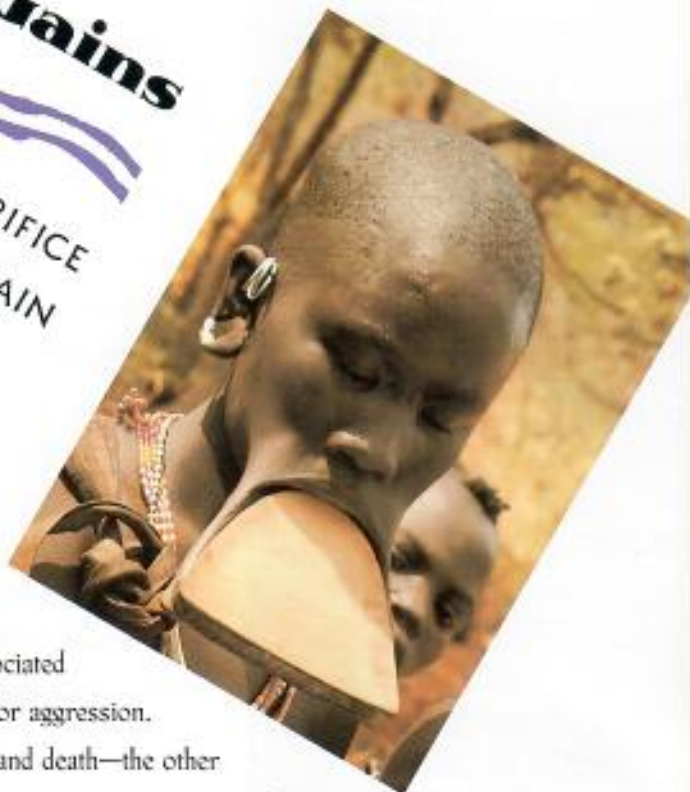
or pierced, as well as at thousands of discos and private parties, more and more people go beyond mainstream conventions of dress and behavior to show more of themselves—especially more of their usually hidden and invisible selves. In extension—and if done with maturity and self-knowledge—the person actually *becomes* herself or himself more truly than is usually possible and allowed by society in general. What we witness, in fact, is a new phase in coming out, but one unrelated to gender or issues of gender-oriented sexual preference.





# Losses and Gains

ATONEMENT BY SACRIFICE  
AND ATTUNEMENT BY PAIN



**I**N MOST PRESENT-DAY SOCIETIES, the concept of pain is purely negative: pain is associated with suffering the consequences of either disease or aggression. As has been done with the realities of birth, sex, and death—the other “wet” and “dirty” truths that belong to human life—pain has been banned from discussion and experimentation and from everyday discourse. It is seen almost exclusively as something unwanted, as something to get rid of by all means and as soon as possible. Similarly, the concept of sacrifice has become mainly a material and/or psychological one. One may perhaps sacrifice one’s career for a loved one or for a political cause, or one may sacrifice at the altar of a deity by giving flowers or some money, but hardly anyone now thinks it sane to sacrifice one’s life or a part of one’s body.

Although most of us perceive this concept as normal or even natural, this is by

**MEDITATIONS ON  
PAIN**



PAGE 82

LIKE THE ECSTATIC  
KAVANDI-BEARERS OF INDIA  
AND MALAYSIA, THIS  
WOMAN HAS TURNED HER  
GAZE INWARD, BEARING  
THE PAIN OF HER MULTIPLE  
SKIN INSERTIONS WITH A  
REMARKABLY CALM GRACE.

**TRADITIONAL  
KICHEPO LIP-PLATE**



PAGE 83

TRIBAL TRADITIONS  
CHANGE WITH TIME.  
WHEREAS KICHEPO WOMEN  
FROM SOUTHEASTERN  
SUDAN WORE THESE HUGE  
LIP-PLATES FOR CENTURIES,  
THE PRESENT GENERATION  
OF YOUNG WOMEN OFTEN  
RESIST FOLLOWING THE  
EXAMPLE OF THEIR ELDERS.  
INSTEAD, THEY HAVE  
ADOPTED MUCH SMALLER  
PLUGS, RATHER THAN  
PLATES.

no means universally true. Other societies and cultures—historical, contemporary tribal, or even as modern as Japanese—have had very different attitudes toward both suffering and pain.

Although the practice is losing ground, it can still happen in contemporary Japan that a man who has made a truly grievous mistake and caused deep suffering to another will atone by cutting off a part of his finger. Hailing from the Samurai period with its strong views concerning allegiance and duty, this practice has survived among members of the Yakuza. Although it is in fact a criminal organization, the Yakuza has influenced most aspects of Japanese society so strongly as hardly to be a subculture. Yakuza members (who, by the way, love and promote the full-body tattoo), are known to be otherwise very conservative members of society with mainstream opinions and lifestyle.

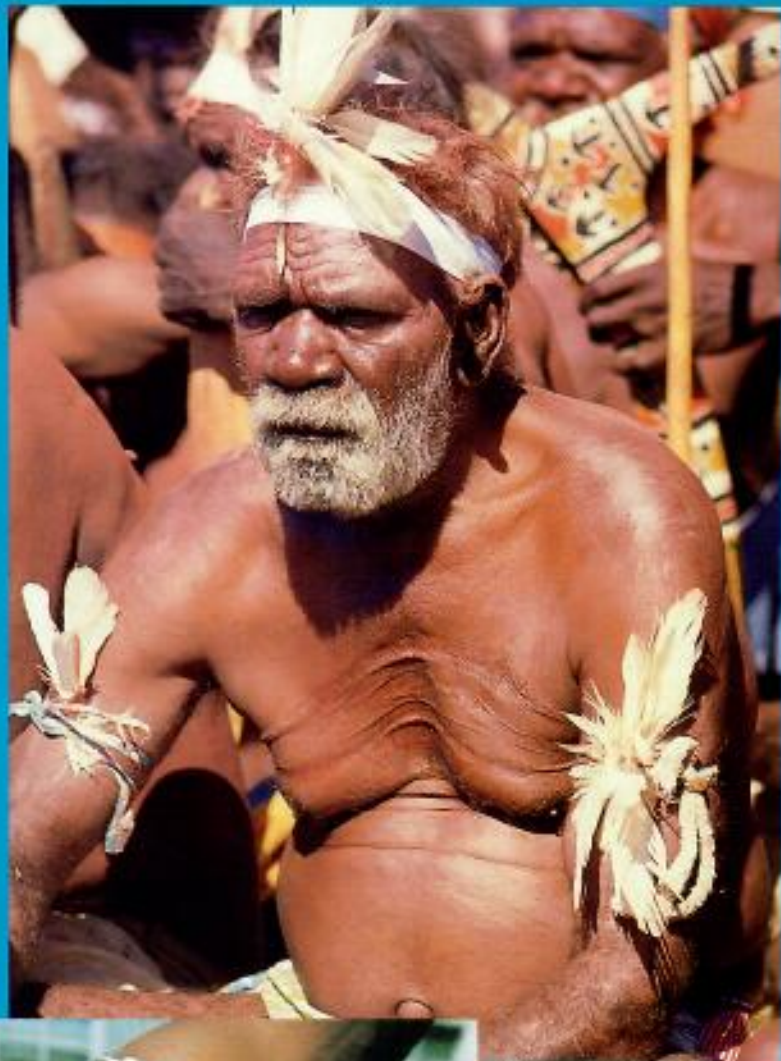
Although the act of presenting the sacrificed part of one's finger to the person one is indebted to seems to indicate an act of symbolic compensation, it does not really compare with the financial compensation someone else may receive for the loss of a loved one through the actions of a third party. In the case of physical sacrifice, one must not overlook the dimension of atonement it carries for the giver himself. If fully human, someone who has caused great calamity, or even loss of life, needs to battle the demons of guilt. Physical pain, as is borne out by countless volumes of psychoanalytical literature and many novels, can be a great ally in such a battle, which often takes years until the person in question achieves a sense of atonement. In such a process, then, outwardly perceived as a mere loss, we can also perceive a gain.

Similar, although with a different motivation, is the practice employed by Australian Aborigines to deal with their pain at losing a loved one. Even when there is no personal guilt, but rather to alleviate grief over the loss, Aborigines may inflict deep wounds on themselves. Such thigh slashing is not the only pain-related practice among these peoples. Here, among perhaps the most ancient culture

## SCARIFIED ABORIGINE



TRIBAL AUSTRALIANS OFTEN USE RITUAL SCARIFICATION, AS ON THIS MAN'S CHEST, TO TRANSCEND ORDINARY CONSCIOUSNESS. IN LEARNING TO ENDURE AND ABSORB PAIN WILLINGLY AND CONSCIOUSLY, THEY RISE ABOVE IT AND BECOME "REBORN" AS DIFFERENT BEINGS.



## SCARIFICATION NOW!



WHEREAS THE SCARIFICATION OF TRIBAL PEOPLE OFTEN SHOWS THEIR AGE GROUP OR MARITAL STATUS, THIS "URBAN TRIBAL" IN SAN FRANCISCO SIMPLY DISPLAYS WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO HIM. HE HAS A WESTERN INFINITY SYMBOL INSCRIBED BELOW A SPIRAL THAT IS TYPICAL OF THE FAR EAST. TO HIM, BOTH THESE DEEPLY PHILOSOPHICAL AND MORE OR LESS FEMALE SYMBOLS DO NOT CONFLICT AT ALL WITH THE RATHER "MACHO" POWER DISPLAY APPARENT IN THE HEAVY CHAINS AND THE ALL-TOO-MALE DISPLAY OF DEVELOPED BICEPS AND A GENERALLY WELL-HONED BODY.



that has somewhat survived into the twentieth century, a person uses pain as a means of transcending ordinary consciousness, of opening the heart and mind to realities beyond everyday life. The extensive scars remaining from such rituals, as shown on page 85, will then forever mark that person as an experienced and adult member of the tribe—someone who can endure and possesses great self-discipline.

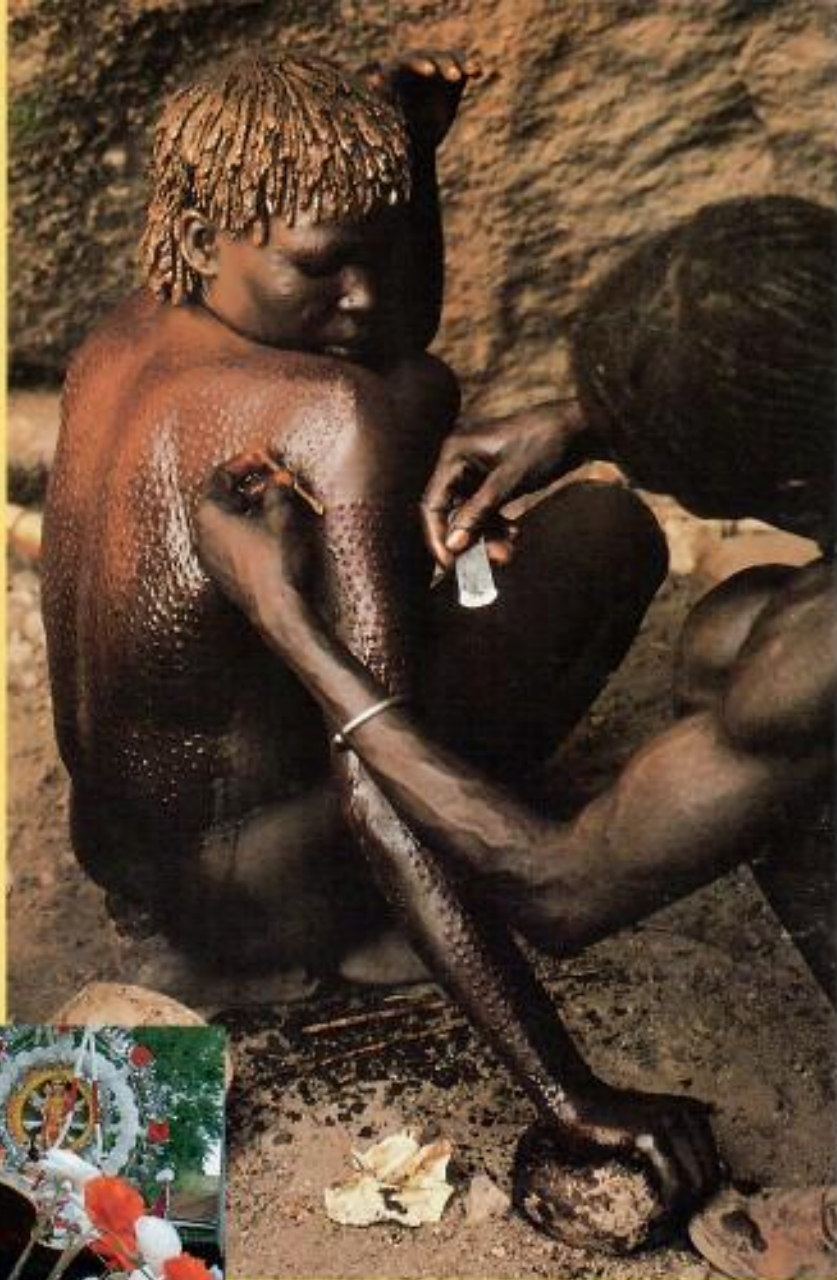
Strength, discipline, endurance, and bravery are often tested in those tribal societies, whose members often had to fight for survival either in a difficult climate or against neighboring peoples. Famous in this connection is the Sioux sun dance in which a young man had to prove his manhood by enduring the pain of hanging from eagle claws pierced through his chest muscles. Similar pains are suffered—not self-inflicted, but certainly voluntarily—by the men taking part in the yearly processions that occur in India and Malaysia, in Penang—the Kavandi-bearers. Kavandi is an Indian term based on *kavaca* (a metal corselet and/or a coat of arms) and *kavadi* (a vow to make a pilgrimage). Kavandi-bearers undergo the most impossible looking tortures for this one day a year. They walk through the streets carrying heavy weights on their shoulders, their chests and backs often covered by flesh-hooks with weights attached. Others have knives or spears that puncture their cheeks or tongues. Yet, these people are not yogis, the "professionals" in renunciation of the body and transcendence of physical limits. On the day of the processions, one sees the shopkeeper from next door twisting through the street with his eyeballs rolling madly—asking the gods for better business—or the son of the old lady from across the street who hopes, by this suffering, to attract divine attention to his diseased mother by his physical prayer of pain. Trance-consciousness is so powerful that once the procession is over and the deities, in form of the priest, have accepted the offering, the wounds of the practitioners heal in a day and become simply invisible.

Less elaborate, more elegant, and perhaps with a different motivation (though unknown to me) is the exercise undergone by the women on page 82. Here too, she must be in a special state of mind in order to bear the pain of the insertion of multiple needles into her skin. Today, more and more urban and neotribal people have discovered new and old uses of pain, even beyond the S/M scene, both gay and straight, that have sprung up during the last years in most greater cities. In many of the recent publications concerning piercing and tattooing, modifying, or

**CAN YOU FEEL  
IT?**

**XOX**

**A RARE PHOTOGRAPH  
SHOWING THE ACTUAL PROCESS  
OF SCARIFICATION  
AMONG THE NUBA, IN SUDAN.**



**KAVANDI BEARER**

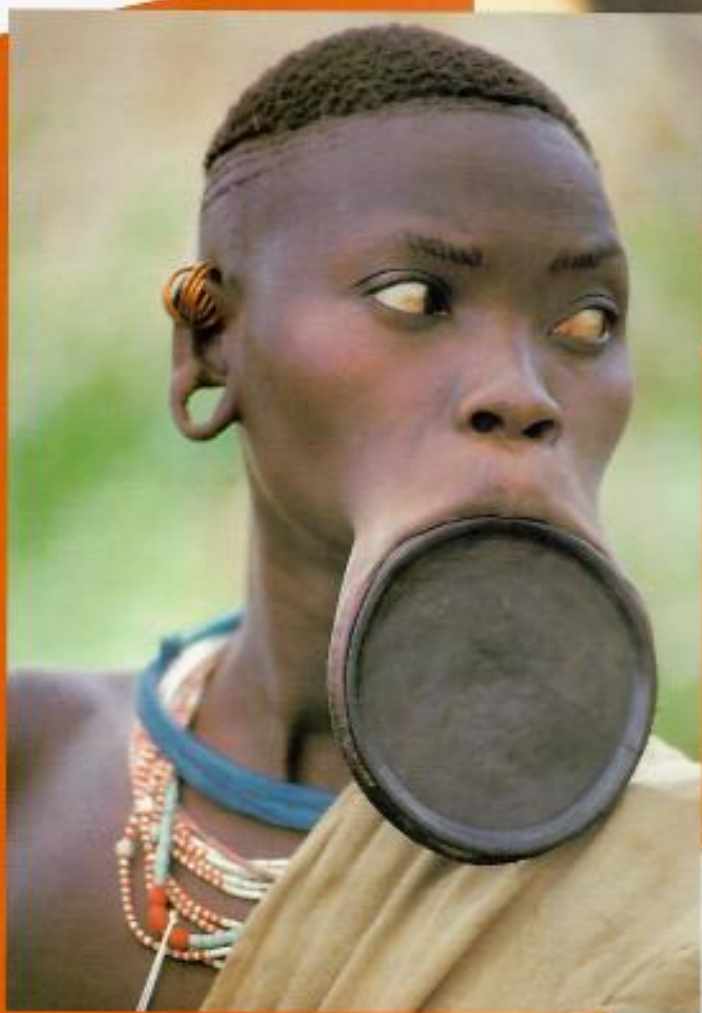
**XOX**

**DURING THE ANNUAL TAIPURAM  
FESTIVAL, SOME OF THE YOUNG MEN  
CARRY ELABORATE AND HEAVY CON-  
TRAPTIONS DURING A PROCESSION TO  
THE TEMPLE. THE MANY METAL SPIKES  
ALL PIERCE THIS KAVANDI-BEARER'S  
SKIN DURING THE LONG TRIP  
THROUGH THE HEAT.**



**PIERCING AS  
MAGICAL  
PROTECTION**

IN ADDITION TO THEIR  
LIP-PLUGS, KIRDI  
WOMEN OFTEN WEAR  
LONG INSERTS IN THEIR  
PIERCED EARS THAT ARE  
BELIEVED TO PROTECT  
THEM FROM "EVIL  
EXHALATIONS" OF  
SUPERNATURAL FORCES.



**CLAY LIP-PLATE**

AMONG THE SURI OF SOUTHWEST  
ETHIOPIA, IT IS THE WOMEN WHO  
WEAR LARGE LIP-PLATES. IN A  
PROCESS STARTING SIX MONTHS  
BEFORE MARRIAGE, A LIP-PIERCING  
IS CONTINUOUSLY ENLARGED, AND  
ITS FINAL SIZE AT MARRIAGE  
DETERMINES THE BRIDAL PRICE TO  
BE PAID BY THE FUTURE HUSBAND  
AND HIS FAMILY.

even customizing the human body, one finds statements concerning the conscious and mainly positive use of pain. In recent years, more and more people have attended the "ball dances" organized in various cities across the United States. Here, in the tradition of the Indian Taipusham festivals (see page 92) the more daring participants have balls hooked into their flesh and then dance until, as they say, the "flesh rips." Most who have undergone this new ritual of the "modern primitives movement" enthusiastically report on the liberating and transforming effects of the pain thus created and transcended.

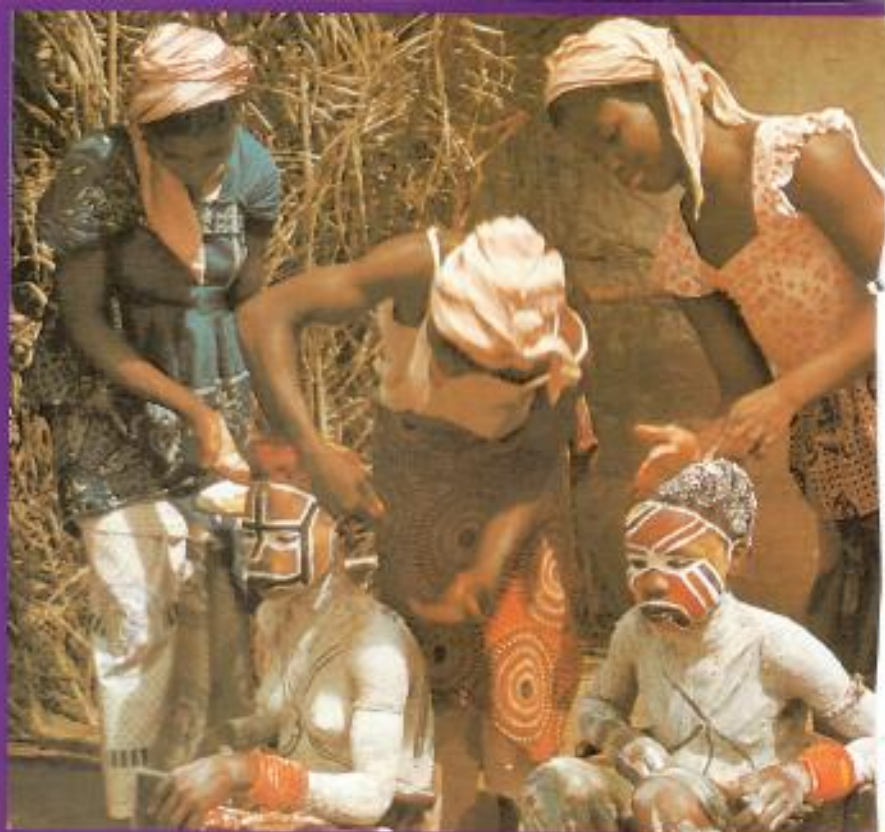
Other gains, in the context of enduring pain and/or discomfort, come in many different and often surprising ways. Whereas the Padang girl on page 90 gains, with a certain loss of comfort and mobility, a safer economic future through tourists and their donations, the painful piercing of the upper ear on page 88 gains the bearer magical protection against evil. Where the women on pages 8, 85, and 88 lose their ability to speak and eat while wearing these huge lip-plates whenever they are in public situations, they gain in social status and command a higher bridal price at marriage. Similarly, the unfortunate girls on page 90 who are prepared for the loss of part of their genitals—I say unfortunate because I'm fully opposed to this practice—do, in fact, only then gain full membership in their particular society, and full status as marriageable woman.

Most surprising, however, are the indications that a certain piercing—namely that of the nasal septum—may have a very different rationale than a desire to look fierce or show off one's ability and willingness to endure the pain it entails. Widely practiced in Australia and Papua New Guinea, the nasal septum piercings seem to enhance or lead to the ability to have cross-sensual perception. What happens with this type of perception, often regarded as magical and/or paranormal, is that one or more of the five major senses expands into the realm of others. The widely traveled author Lyall Watson has described this phenomenon very adequately after a trip to some of the more remote Indonesian islands.<sup>19</sup> Here he encountered people who were able to see spoken words in the form of colored bubbles in the air. With nasal septum piercings, it seems that the sense of vision gets crossed with the sense of smell, once more leading to an ability that is usually either disbelieved fully or regarded as supernatural.

## CLITORIDECTOMY



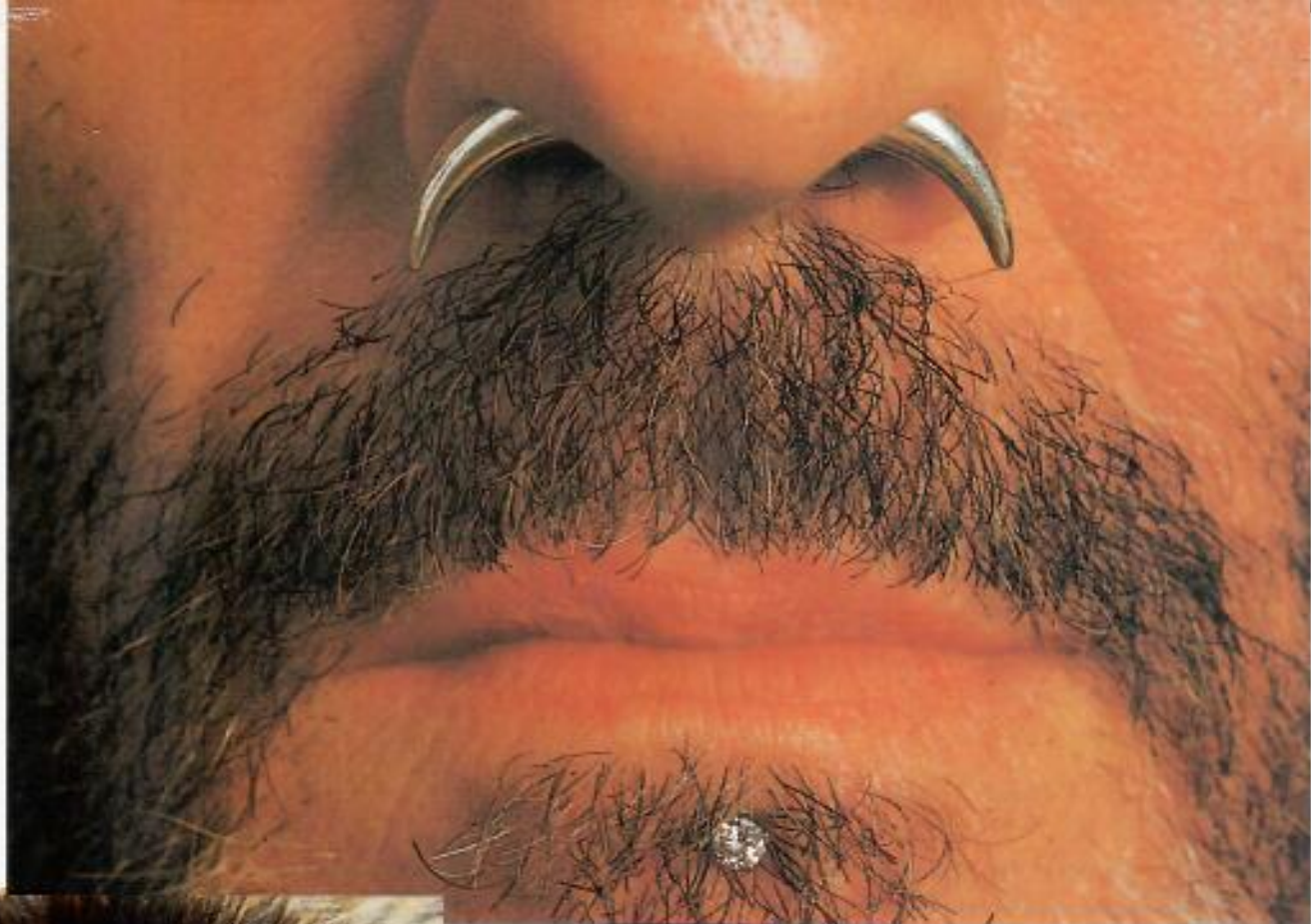
THESE TWO YOUNG GIRLS FROM THE IVORY COAST ARE BEING PAINTED IN PREPARATION FOR THE NOW CONTROVERSIAL CEREMONY OF CLITORIDECTOMY. NOT BEING INFORMED OF THE CONSEQUENCES, THEY ARE LED TO BELIEVE THAT THIS "INITIATION" TRANSFORMS THEM FROM GIRLS INTO WOMEN.



## FROM GIRLHOOD TO WOMANHOOD



AT THE AGE OF TWELVE OR FOURTEEN, A PADANG GIRL'S NECK-RINGS ARE EXCHANGED FOR BIGGER AND HEAVIER COILS, WHICH MAKE HER A WOMAN. FROM THAT MOMENT ON, THE RINGS WILL NEVER BE TAKEN OFF AGAIN.



### NEOTRIBAL



ONLY A FEW CONTEMPORARY WESTERNERS FOLLOW THE TRIBAL PRACTICE OF PIERCING THE NASAL SEPTUM, WHEREAS NOSTRILS, LIPS, EYEBROWS, AND OF COURSE THE EARS ARE VERY COMMONLY PIERCED.

### NEW GUINEAN WARRIOR



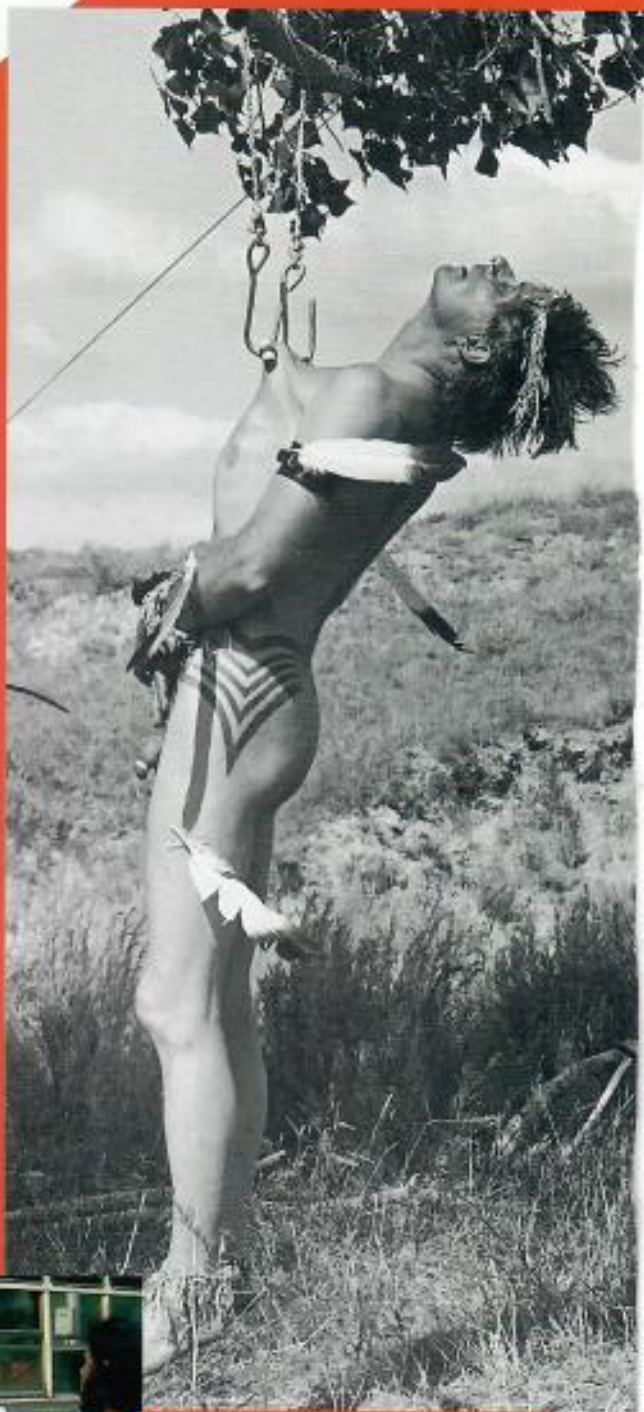
THE NASAL SEPTUM PIERCING, A FAVORITE AMONG THE TRIBAL PAPUA OF NEW GUINEA, IS WIDESPREAD AMONG THE MEN. JUST AS DIFFERENT INDIVIDUALS USE DIFFERENT STYLES OF BODY PAINTING, SO DO THE NASAL INSERTS VARY WIDELY, RANGING FROM BOAR TUSKS TO TWIGS, FERN LEAVES, AND RINGS MADE FROM MOTHER OF PEARL.

## SELF-INITIATION—THE RADICAL PRIMITIVE

FAKIR MUSAFAR REENACTS HIS PERSONAL VERSION OF AN ANCIENT NATIVE AMERICAN RITUAL, THE "SUN DANCE." ALTHOUGH MANY NATIVE AMERICANS REGARD THIS AS A COMMERCIAL PROFANATION OF A SACRED PRACTICE, FAKIR'S VARIOUS PERFORMANCES, LECTURES, AND WRITINGS HAVE DONE MUCH TO AWAKEN PEOPLE'S INTEREST IN TRIBAL PRACTICES AND TO MAKE THEM AWARE OF THE TRANSFORMATIVE VALUE OF FEELING AND ENDURING PHYSICAL DISCOMFORT AND PAIN.

## TAIPURAM FESTIVAL PROCESSION

ANNUALLY ONE CAN ENCOUNTER THIS FESTIVAL IN SEVERAL CITIES OF INDIA AND SOUTHEAST ASIA. HERE YOUNG HINDU MEN FROM PENANG, MALAYSIA, HAVE WEIGHTS HOOKED INTO THE SKIN OF THEIR CHEST AND ARE LED BY REIGNS ATTACHED TO THEIR BACK WITH FLESH-HOOKS IN ORDER TO ATTRACT DIVINE ATTENTION.

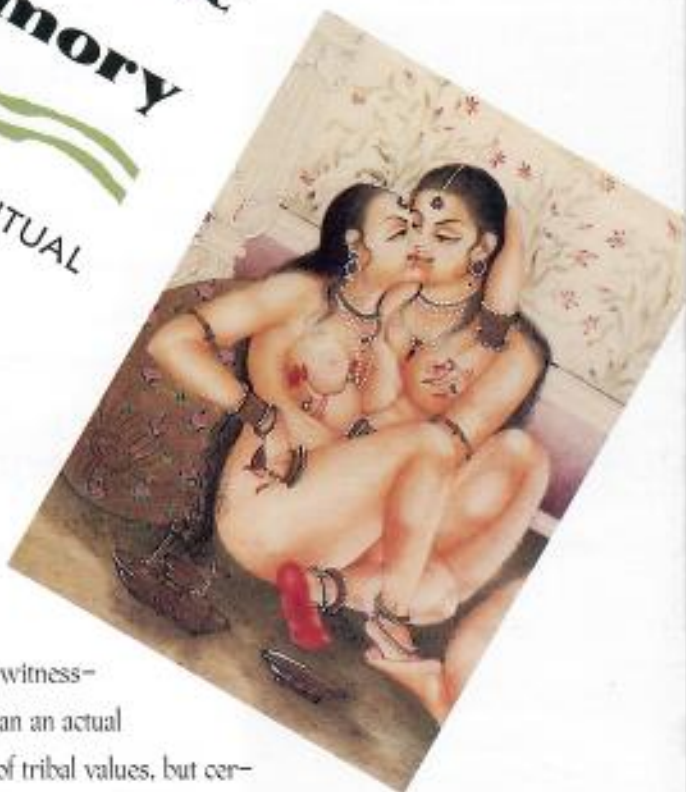


Perhaps future research will be able to locate the limits of both human perception and human endurance—if there are any limits at all. The current interest in, and return to, many tribal practices can only aid that process of learning to understand the human primate more fully than has been thought possible.



# Our Genetic Memory

SEX AND DRUGS AND RITUAL



**N**OT ONLY IN THE REALM of body adornment do we find indications that what we are witnessing today is a return to the tribal. This does not mean an actual return to a fully tribal lifestyle or to a complete set of tribal values, but certainly to many tribal activities and sometimes to tribal ways of looking at the world.

Some visionaries have seen this coming, though they could not envision just how, in detail, this tribalization would come about and how it would express itself. Thirty years ago, in 1967, media sociologist Marshall McLuhan predicted that the new media (which then still meant radio and TV) and the new music (then rock 'n' roll and its psychedelic offsprings) would reawaken tribelike ritual, acted out in discos and festivals—the temples of the 1960s. No one, however, could have foreseen the force and inventiveness with which the ancient—against all odds—would find itself pathways into the present.



**LOVE IS THE GAME**

PAGE 94

AS MORE AND MORE INDIVIDUALS FULLY RECLAIM CONTROL OVER THEIR BODIES, A BASIC HUMAN RIGHT OFTEN USURPED BY POLITICAL OR RELIGIOUS GROUPS, THEY REVIVE NOT ONLY ANCIENT ARTS SUCH AS TATTOOING AND PIERCING BUT ALSO THE FREE EXPRESSION OF SEXUALITY IN ALL ITS MANY FORMS. WHEREAS "DEFIANT" WAS A LABEL OF PRIDE IN THE 1960S, THE 1990S ALSO INTRODUCED THE SPELLING "DEVIANT." TOGETHER, IN THE DEFINITION OF PAT CALIFIA, THESE TWO SPELLINGS ADD UP TO "SEX RADICAL."

**THERE PROCEEDS SUPREME JOY**

PAGE 96

ANCIENT CULTURES IN INDIA AND CHINA WERE LESS ASHAMED OF THE BODY AND SEXUALITY THAN WE ARE TODAY. THE ART OF THESE CULTURES DEPICTS MANY FORMS OF EROTIC PLAY, INCLUDING HOMOSEXUALITY AND MULTIPLE PARTNERING.

Today, as the year 2000 approaches, sex, drugs, ritual, and rock 'n' roll play an even greater part in the social landscape than ever before in the industrialized world. Wherever we look for it, in almost every country—except those with no civil liberties at all—there are groups and workshops and gatherings in which, similarly to most tribal peoples, contemporary youths and adults experiment with altered states of consciousness. These practices are not very different from shamanism, which used to refer only to the religious, magical, and trance-inducing practices of Siberian tribal peoples. However, since comparative religion has established that equivalent techniques were known and used in tribal cultures across the globe, shamanism has become a generic term for all the techniques described here. Very much in its tradition, such expanded states are often induced by one or more of the well-known and ancient techniques to induce trance: music, dance, sensory deprivation or overload, drugs, sexuality, or most often a combination of two or more of these separate pathways that lead beyond the ego and beyond the socially programmed masks most of us wear.

An equally unforeseen reemergence of the tribal spirit, and of tribal values, can be detected when we look at the many expressions of what is often called the ecological movement. Whether individuals and groups spend much of their lives, love, and energy for whales or dolphins, or whether they return to ways of farming without the modern aids of poisonous fertilizers, knowingly or not they are guided by the tribal spirit.

I feel that we must preserve the ecology, but that we must go beyond the mere preservation of mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms—we must at any cost preserve the natural caretakers of these kingdoms and thus ourselves—we must preserve and relearn from the indigenous people and their ways. We must look to the primitive [primal/first], the so-called savages, pagans, or heathens of the world if we are

going to survive the environmental catastrophe we have set in motion with our greed, technological and industrial interests fed by a total lack of appreciation and respect for the basic principles of life.

We are . . . the greatest embodiment of the One Spirit of Life. The growing Neo-Primitive consciousness in occidental society is evidence of a positive return to the primal and divine nature of that unique life in each human being. Further, this is expressive of our latent but inherent primitivity, i.e. the tribal animism and totemism inspired by our primitive foreparents for our survival.

Baaba, Neo-primitive researcher and educator<sup>20</sup>

The same principle applies to many things and groups that have reemerged during the last decades: religion and ritual centered on the goddess, the newly awakened concern for whole and healthy food, the rediscovery of herbal medicines that have been used by tribal peoples from Siberia to Australia and from Canaan to China.

In the wake of herbal rediscoveries, the last two generations of Western youths and adults have also rediscovered the great variety of consciousness-altering plant substances. Although there is most certainly a widespread ignorance of how to use these substances wisely, it has also become very clear—sometimes through the guidance of tribal initiates—that the informed and conscious use of such psychopharmacologic agents can be very beneficent, both to the individual and to the group partaking in the ceremonial use of these “drugs.” Other than the major legal drugs today, such as alcohol, nicotine, coffee, and chocolate, “tribal” drugs made from mushrooms, herbs, and vines are not ingested for self-gratification. Rather, their value lies in their ability to sensitize the body and mind, heighten perception, and help the user gain insights into self and others. Used with intelligence and wisdom, they even open certain doors on the path to spiritual awakening. It is for this very reason that, try as one might, the use of these substances—as of all the tribal ways and techniques—has prevailed throughout history and will prevail into the future.

It is no coincidence that often one specific expression of this return to the tribal comes as part and parcel of a whole group of originally tribal techniques, though outwardly—at first glance—they may not seem related: ritually ordered celebrations, the use of trance-inducing music (especially drumming and chanting) whether or



## **PUBLIC NUDITY**



A YOUNG WOMAN IS  
CARRIED AWAY ON THE  
WAVES OF MUSIC IN SAN  
FRANCISCO'S  
GOLDEN GATE PARK  
(CIRCA 1970).

## **RITUAL NUDITY**



HARKING BACK TO  
ANCIENT PRACTICES,  
THE EIGHT MEN AND  
WOMEN IN THIS IMAGE  
PERFORM A DANCE THAT  
IS EQUALLY A CELEBRA-  
TION OF LIFE AS IT IS A  
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UNION WITH NATURE  
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NUDITY WITHOUT  
SHAME, THE FORMING OF  
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FOR EXPERIENCING THE  
JOY OF BEING ALIVE AND  
HUMAN.





## **PUBLIC NUILITY**

»»»»»»»»»»  
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## **RITUAL NUILITY**

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*Our Genetic Memory*

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It is no coincidence that often one specific expression of this return to the tribal comes as part and parcel of a whole group of originally tribal techniques, though outwardly—at first glance—they may not seem related: ritually ordered celebrations, the use of trance-inducing music (especially drumming and chanting) whether or

not accompanied by the ingestion of psychotropic substances, ecstatic forms of dance, deep meditation, visualization techniques, nudity (possibly with body painting), fasting, ritual sexuality.

Although only a small group of people actually do try *all* of these things, the expression of the same tribal impulse can also be found outside of that circle and among people who do not even recognize their participation in this revival. One only needs to take a look at the beaches of Europe, the United States, and elsewhere to see how hundreds and thousands of contemporaries gratefully glory in their natural state—nudity—just as many tribal peoples around the world have done (and still do) whenever and wherever the climate allowed for it. One only needs to listen to contemporary popular music to find trance-inducing rhythms and beats that simply “make” people move. One only needs to look at the dance forms developed during the last decades—truly a far cry from the stiff and formal ways of dance that were fashionable in the times of our grandparents.

These days, many forms of dance and music come close to being trance-inducing. One of the subdivisions of house music has even been given the name “Trance.” In addition, it is not simply the style of dancing that approaches or revives the nature of tribal dancing, but also another dimension. In those places and at those moments where all the elements are just right—the crowd, the music, the ambiance, the moon—something happens that goes beyond the merely individual experience. Suddenly, in the way of synergy, the participating individuals actually disappear and a concerted, coherent, and merged group is born, for however short a time. In those very moments, the tribal spirit is truly manifest and, just as in tribal societies, the dance becomes a release and a catharsis for the entire community.

Just as the new appreciation of nudity is winning ground from the idea that the body has to be hidden, and just as the new dances encourage people to shake all their flesh and bones rather than their legs only, so also have forgotten forms of sexuality arisen. Rather than copulating half dressed, with shame and the lights out, many women and men have learned that sexuality is the most beautiful and powerful expression of the life force—a knowledge that had been suppressed and almost forgotten during the last two millennia.

This particular expression of the tribal impulse started manifesting itself in what

is now known as the sexual revolution of the 1960s but which, in fact, had already begun in the 1950s among members of the so-called Beat generation. The 1960s, however, aided by the new music and the influx of Eastern teachings, brought the first large-scale breakthrough in which the then prevailing culture of shame gave way to the then radical liberation in terms of human sexuality and gender-relationships. Although there is no reason at all to glorify this decade, because much in it was as immature as it was passionate and heartfelt, all subsequent developments are indebted to those who then started to experiment with what they thought of as "new" forms of sexual expression. Extended families, communes, multiple partner relationships, orgies: a long list of liberations from earlier dos and don'ts concerning homosexuality and promiscuity.

Considering that sexuality, next to the survival instinct, is the strongest of energies in all that is alive, it should come as no surprise that the tribal impulse manifests itself most strongly—and to many perhaps most shockingly—on this level. The very development in this area that started in the 1960s is still continuing. When we look at the social landscape with open and nonjudgmental eyes, we see today no less of a revolution; in fact, future sociologists may know it as the second sexual revolution, set in the explosive 1990s.

From the hundreds of Tantra workshops to the infamous dark rooms of party centers and nightclubs from Paris to New York to Amsterdam, people are rediscovering human sexuality as something altogether different than we have been led to think. The sexual impulse, as human history shows us abundantly, has little care for monogamous love relationships merely centered on the creation of new life. What we see in most civilizations, societies, cultures, or tribal groups of the non-Christian or pre-Christian past is the fact that sexuality was used not only for creating children but in other ways as well: relationships and lifestyles involving many lovers and also types of sexuality not based in relationships at all.

Whereas nude, erotic, or outright sexual encounters in the context of more than two people are often regarded today as strange or—depending on the interpreter—even perverse expressions of an over-sexed hedonism, past generations often held a different view. What is and has been almost forgotten and/or suppressed is the fact that sexual activity with more than one partner, in the presence

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Our Genetic Memory

of others, or in mutual sharing, is a deep-rooted experience of humanity.

From caveman to late *Homo sapiens sapiens*, during a history of little change but the introduction of more and more technology and urban agglomeration, we have lived in close touch and in very close proximity to members of tribe, clan, and family; in caves, tents, brick houses, and tiny apartments; and often with promiscuity as a most usual and fully accepted behavioral standard.

In our genes as well as in our collective unconscious we carry a racial memory of a million nights of listening to—and often seeing—others make love, and of being watched and listened to ourselves. Consciously or unconsciously, we also remember the endless cycle of fertility festivals and other rites of life in which all of us—as our own ancestors—have taken part in hundreds or thousands of times. Our past lifestyles, at one time or another in many cultures and on all continents, have included situations in which three, four, ten, or hundreds of men and women have joined and mingled sexually and charged one another erotically, sharing love and desire, tension and trust, lust and pain, competition and friendship, existential aloneness and the warm sense of belonging.

Part of the motivation that makes some people want to be with others while erotically and sexually active is the wish to share—not necessarily one's partners but the very sense of love, pleasure, excitement, love, lust, trust, and abandon. The motivational and emotional spectrum of making love in the presence of others, and seeing others making love nearby, is wide. It contains elements of exhibitionism and voyeurism, but it also harks back to the deep memory of our species, which remembers and occasionally dreams up sexual group activities. Today, the many advertisements in which "couple seeks couple for erotic adventures" testify to a genetic memory that proves to be much stronger than any contemporary attempt at reprogramming humanity in the guise of so-called moral education.

Today's apparently new sexual practices, so beloved by tabloids thriving on the scandalous, range from sex with an unknown partner to sharing and exchanging partners to loving and/or living with more than one partner to the dark-room practices of the trendy gay and/or BDSM scene, which may be anonymous and public. All these expressions of the sexual impulse were well known to the ancients, from Greece to China and from India to South America.



Most ancient civilizations, being more fully cognizant of human nature, made room for such multiple, anonymous, public sexual activity from time to time, at least for a few days once a year.

Among the Romans, such a celebration was known as Floralia, an annual festival dedicated to the goddess Flora, during which the participants liberally enjoyed wine and sexual union, very much like the original carnivals of Western Europe and South America. At another time of the year, during the month of December, they celebrated the Saturnalia, an occasion dedicated to the deities of the harvest and marked by much sexual revelry. During the seven consecutive days of this festival, all social norms, differences of class, and sexual restrictions were abandoned, and all participants surrendered to the joy of freedom and of life.

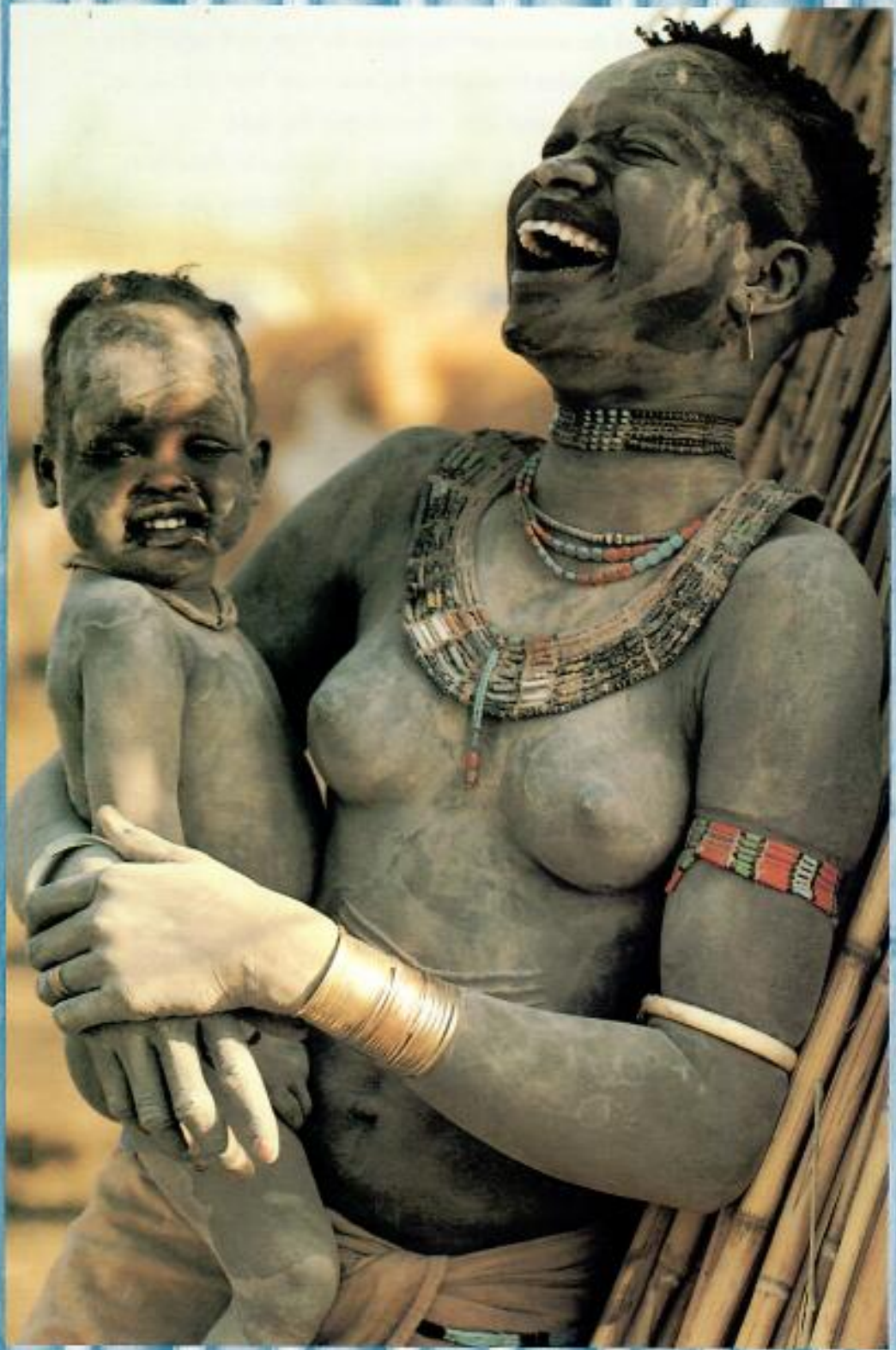
In China, something very similar was known as the Web of Heaven and Earth, a fertility-oriented celebration intended to bring about an abundant harvest and the fertility of livestock. An auspicious night would be chosen with the help of oracular priests, and hundreds of men and women would meet in the fields in a general orgy under the open sky.

In India, the mythology of Krishna and the gopis (cowgirls) gave rise to the practice in which five, six, or seven women joined in sexual play with a single man—a practice apparently common enough to warrant specific terms for it in the Indian language: *pancha chakra* (five women) or *gopi chakra* (more than five). Whereas this practice seems to be mainly directed at the man's pleasure and related to the idea of a harem, the Greek equivalent certainly shows the women to be the active partners and very much in charge. The poor man who fell victim to the drugged and frenzied Maenads, priestesses of the wine-god, would usually not survive the orgy they made him part of.

In both Tibetan and Indian Tantra, things are much more ordered and ritualized. Here, the clearly stated aim is to arouse sexual energy by the combined efforts of several people in order to transcend the ego and the limited vision of everyday consciousness. In the Tibetan practice known as *zap-lam*, one woman is aided by two men to achieve the state known, in Western sexual magic, as erotocomatose lucidity: lucidity brought on by total sexual exhaustion. Involving many more players, Tantric couples in India often gathered in large groups to celebrate what is

called *choli-marga*. With the women arriving before the men, each would drop a piece of her clothing into a basket from which the men would later pick one up, thus determining who would partner with whom during that night.

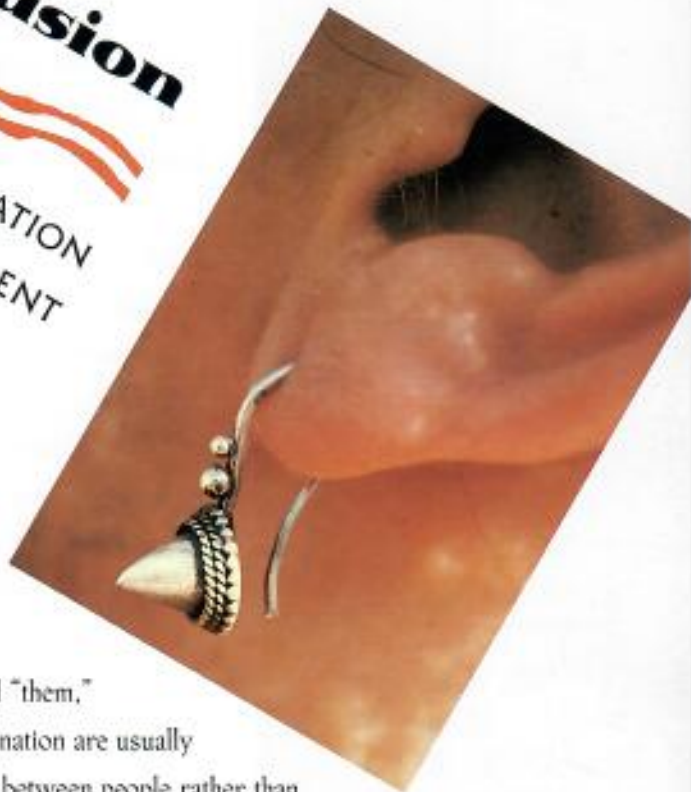
The above examples, selected from many more, will suffice to show how widespread and fully human such practices are, and they also show that such types of sexuality do not at all have to be at odds with religion and morals. It all depends on the set of morals employed and the degree of wisdom achieved by a given religion and society. Although it may seem that little can stop this trend toward more and more freedom of sexual expression, the opposition to it from the "moral majority" is understandably strong. What is strange about this opposition, a cynic might feel, is the fact that most of those moral people, whether Christian, Judaic, or Islamic, are the very ones who practice another very ancient and very tribal ritual and forcibly inflict it on every young boy: circumcision of the foreskin. By doing so, they in fact show themselves to celebrate pain and bloodletting rather than joy and sexuality.



# Conclusion

## THE IRRATIONAL TEMPTATION OF PASSING JUDGMENT

**S**CHOOLED AND TRAINED as most of us are in the ways of discriminating not only between self and other, but also between "us" and "them," members of whatever group, society, country, or nation are usually misled in looking for the few outward differences between people rather than for the many, less visible things all humans have in common. All too easily and quickly we are led to judge—and let ourselves judge—facets of behavior or appearance rather than taking the time to look, listen, and understand another person's own reasons for being or behaving as he or she does. General examples of prejudices and of what they can lead to are known to almost everyone. They range from teasing the poor boy with freckles and glasses at school to major historical catastrophes such as those that befell the Jews in ancient Egypt and twentieth-century Germany to very recent examples such as the Serbic/Bosnian conflict and the large-scale killings between Hutus and Tutsis. It almost seems as if humanity is



**THE BEAUTY OF  
HAPPINESS**

PAGE 104

A PAINTED AND PIERCED  
CONTEMPORARY WOMAN IN  
SUDAN.

**FROM BEGINNING  
TO END**

PAGE 105

ONCE THE PRESERVE OF  
WOMEN, AT LEAST IN THE  
WEST, AND NOT THOUGHT  
OF AS "PIERCING" AS THE  
TERM IS NOW UNDERSTOOD,  
THIS IMAGE SHOWS A MALE  
CAUCASIAN WITH  
BEAUTIFUL TRIBAL JEWELRY.  
YEARS LATER, TWICE  
TATTOOED AND WITH THE  
PIERCING ENLARGED SO IT  
CAN HOLD A CHOPSTICK,  
THIS SMALL EARRING WAS  
TRANSFERRED TO THE  
RIGHT EAR AND HE BEGAN  
WRITING THIS BOOK FOR  
YOU.

not able to learn from even the painful experiences.

To return to the topic of this book, I have collected here a few examples of people's irrational temptation to pass judgment without looking first at the facts. Read them with an open mind and recognize not only your neighbor in them but yourself.

By far the most common piercing is one that most people do not even perceive as a piercing. One can easily meet a woman wearing one or two earrings who thinks that piercing is truly strange and that she personally would *never* do it. Previously reserved for women only—at least in the Western world—earrings have become very popular among men as well—since the 1960s.

An African visitor to present-day urban Germany was surprised and apparently slightly dismayed at seeing so many people with piercings. Told that he comes from a continent with a long history of doing just that, he exclaimed, "But that's African!" It was quite difficult to explain to him that here and now, *tribal* has become a concept dependent not on kinship or bloodline but on shared values.

A woman with artificially enlarged breasts and a facelift, meeting someone who wears a few piercings in lip or eyebrow, may easily judge herself as normal, but her fellow human as deviant.

A young French teenager with metal inserted in her eyebrows, nose, and lips finds it "absolutely crazy" that someone else would undergo surgery in order to put hair back on his bald head.

A young American, habitually circumcised like most of his unfortunate compatriots, thinks that scarification of a young African woman is something "forced" upon her by her traditional society. He also believes that such practices should be banned and does not see any connection between this and his own mutilation. During earlier centuries when the Roman Catholic Church encouraged the practice of having young boys castrated simply in order to make them better singers in the church's choirs, they saw no reason to condone other, even less severe forms of body modification or adornment.

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Conclusion

Two contemporary men, one an army general and one the chief executive of a large banking corporation, call it "totally crazy" when seeing images of several tribal chiefs from Papua New Guinea in my collection. They refer to these men's type of dress, their painted bodies, and their elaborate headdresses prepared from bird feathers and bones stuck through their noses. They are completely unaware that others, looking at them, see an equally crazy sight. Fully dressed in dark colors, although it is high summer, and with their necks tightly tied by a tie and their feet sweating in boxes made from dead animals, they adhere equally to the local standard of their respective tribes: with his uniform and shining medals showing his valor in combat, and the executive with his false teeth and expensive watch shining brightly when he puts on a politician's smile.

Today, as we witness the widespread reemergence of the tribal impulses we've discussed in this book, the general tolerance for what people do with or to their own bodies is still lacking—but it is also slowly widening. To a large part, this process is aided by popular and thus influential artists, especially musicians, by other media stars such as fashion designers and photo models, and by the print and electronic media that carry their images and messages into the world. Combined, these artists and the media that cover them create what the artist formerly known as Prince once named a "sign of the times." Whereas he, finally and consequently, transformed himself into such a sign, becoming truly an icon, others created similar signs of their times in a more verbal manner.

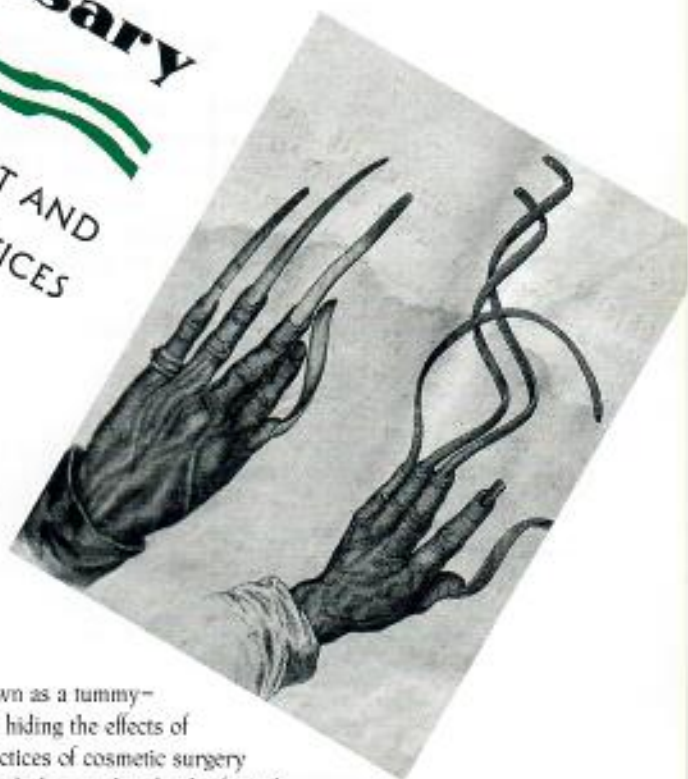
The Beatles created, knowingly or not, a sort of new first commandment to a whole generation in the short sentence "All you need is love," just as a currently appreciated commandment is Madonna's "Express yourself."

Notwithstanding how different these statements may be, and how different the personalities that created them, they share one basic human concept that is all too often overlooked in the heat of the moment. What we all need in order to live together on this small planet, and what we need to express, is something as seemingly simple as respect: respect for each other's tastes, choices, wants, and needs. This includes respect for each other's visions of beauty, each other's ways to be sexually active, and each other's manners of body adornment, whether invisible or visible.



# Glossary

## THE VARIETY OF ADORNMENT AND MODIFICATION PRACTICES



Note: words set in **bold** indicate further references within this glossary

### **ABDOMINOPLASTY**

Technical term in **cosmetic surgery** for what is better known as a tummy-tuck: a rather common form of body modification aimed at hiding the effects of aging and/or unhealthy habits. Although this and other practices of cosmetic surgery have nothing to do with a return to the tribal, but rather with the misplaced cult of youth, they do represent modern forms of body modification, of taking charge of one's own image.

### **ADHESIVE TATTOO**

The removable adhesive or decal tattoo is, in fact, not a **tattoo** at all. Rather, it is simply a type of mass-market adornment that could perhaps be classified as a form of **makeup**. The best and most honest name for it would be fake tattoo, but such a name would not be conducive to sales.

### **BEADING**

The insertion of small beads under the incised skin of the phallus, possibly as an attempt to make a small one bigger (or rather thicker) or to provide additional sensory stimulation to one's partner. The negative effect is that it looks much more like a dildo than the real thing.

### **BODY ADORNMENT**

A generic term for a variety of techniques aimed at adorning or decorating one or more parts of the body more or less temporarily, either habitually or for special occasions. Although some



## Return of the Tribal

techniques of body adornment involve a certain degree of **body modification**, the two terms are not synonyms. Typical examples of body adornment are **body painting**, **makeup**, and **henna designs** on hands or feet. But the **cosmetic tattoo**, wearing earrings (with a **piercing** or not), and such "normal" things as coloring, shaving, or cultivating facial or other hair also belong to this category. In short, one can rightfully state that almost every human on the planet, with very few exceptions, engages in body adornment of one kind or another. Concerning **tattooing**, there seems to be no general consensus about whether it is a decoration or a modification. Clearly, a small tattoo on the arm or buttocks is very different from a neck or skull reshaped in early childhood. On the other hand, except for the cosmetic tattoo, the regular tattoo represents a permanent change of that part of one's skin and of one's overall appearance.

**BODY DECORATION**

See **Body Adornment**.

**BODY MODIFICATION**

A generic term for a variety of techniques aimed at changing one or more parts of the body from the natural state into a consciously designed state. Although techniques of body modification are sometimes used as a means of **body adornment** or decoration, the two terms are not synonyms. Among the ancient forms of modification we find, for example,

**skull modeling**, **subincision**, **scarification**, and enlarged **piercings**, with some of these techniques being revived in the present among modern people in both East and West. Truly modern forms of body modification are found in the form of the innumerable face-lifts, breast enlargements, hair replacements, and other techniques of **cosmetic surgery**.

**Tattooing** is sometimes counted among the techniques of body modification, certainly in those cases where large parts of the body are thus made into a living work of art.

**BODY PAINTING**

In its most general sense, this term refers to all instances in which one or more parts of the body are artificially colored. Thus used, body painting embraces every kind of **makeup** from eyeliner, rouge, or henna designs for the hands and feet to the almost psychedelic look of a fully painted tribal chief from Papua New Guinea. During the last two or three decades, the term has become used in a more limited way. In this sense, which is also used in this book, body painting refers to coloring all or large portions of the nude human body.

**BRANDING**

A form of **scarification** usually achieved by burning the skin with heated metal. The practice has its roots in the branding of animals in order to mark them as property and, among humans, in slavery as it was known in Egypt, Rome, and elsewhere. Slaves were marked

**KARO WOMAN**

PAINTED AND RICHLY ADORNED WITH COWRIE SHELLS AND BEAD NECKLACES, THIS KARO BEAUTY ALSO WEARS A STICK OR PERHAPS A NAIL THROUGH HER PIERCED LOWER LIP. SIMILAR LIP INSERTS HAVE ALSO BEGUN TO APPEAR IN CONTEMPORARY CITIES, ALTHOUGH URBAN TRIBALS USUALLY WEAR SHORTER VERSIONS.

**ROYAL HANDS, IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY VIETNAM**

IN SEVERAL FAR EASTERN NATIONS, AMONG THEM CHINA AND THAILAND, IT WAS A WIDESPREAD CUSTOM AMONG WOMEN AND MEN TO GROW THE FINGERNAILS TO LENGTHS OF ABOUT FOUR CENTIMETERS—AT LEAST AMONG THOSE FOR WHOM MANUAL LABOR WAS NOT NECESSARY. HOWEVER, AS CAN BE SEEN IN THIS IMAGE FROM 1876, THE MOBILITY WENT MUCH FURTHER, WITH EACH CENTIMETER OF UNBROKEN NAIL GAINING THE WEARER A MORE EXALTED STATUS.

with nonremovable collars and often by branding them with a specific sign, for example, an *S* for *slave*. In other places, for example England and France, branding was used to mark criminals or heretics, a practice that continued up to the eighteenth century.

The same technique, fueled by a different motivation, has been applied in the United States in the twentieth century. Here, fraternity members, especially those with a predominantly black membership, have branded themselves in order to show their allegiance to the organization. As author Michelle Delio writes, "the practice continues to this day and many prominent figures, such as Chicago Bulls star Michael Jordan, Emmitt Smith of the Dallas Cowboys, and the Reverend Jesse Jackson, have the Greek letters of their fraternities indelibly emblazoned into their skins."<sup>21</sup>

In yet another context, branding is sometimes used as perhaps the most radical sign of sexual submission and possession. It has been described, for example, in the famous novel *The Story of O*.

In recent years, however, people have begun to use branding as a means of adornment, choosing it along with or instead of **tattooing**. In several countries, even in the usually rather enlightened Netherlands, the practice of branding is banned by law. So far, it is still the rarest form of body adornment, but it is definitely on the rise.

#### **CASTRATION**

The surgical removal of a man's testicles, resulting in the loss of fertility and a hormonal imbalance that weakens male and strengthens female physical traits. In the long history of castration we encounter a variety of motivations for this practice: self-chosen (and sometimes self-inflicted) castration in order not to "sin," self-castration in order to please a deity, the punishment of criminals, a job requirement for harem guards and administrators, and the retention of an outstanding singing voice in a boys' choir.

#### **CERVICOFACIAL RHYTIDECTOMY**

Technical term in **cosmetic surgery** for what is better known as a face-lift; now a very

common form of body modification.

#### **CIRCUMCISION**

By **circumcision** we usually understand the cutting away of all or a part of the foreskin usually surrounding the glans penis, regardless of the individual or cultural motivation cited for this **body modification** or, as some call it, **mutilation**. Although this practice is often believed to be specifically Jewish and/or Islamic, evidence put forward by one of the world's foremost anthropologists predates these religions and goes back to the Old Stone Age.<sup>22</sup> Circumcision is one of the few practices of **body modification** that I'd like to see outlawed and discontinued. Sometimes one also speaks of female circumcision. However, considering that the degree of the modification involved, the loss of physical substance, and the loss of functionality are much greater in these cases, the various surgical practices are much better referred to as **clitoridectomy**, **infibulation**, or **labia removal**.

#### **CLITORIDECTOMY**

The terrible practice—not only painful and harmful, but also usually done without consent of the female—in which the visible part of the clitoris and parts of the labia are cut away, resulting in the loss of erotic/sexual feeling during masturbation or sexual play. It is one of the few practices of **body modification** that I'd like to see outlawed and discontinued.

See also **Labia Removal**.

#### **COSMETIC SURGERY**

A subdivision of **plastic surgery** and a generic term for a variety of surgical procedures unrelated to disease or health and motivated by the simple personal desire to look different. Although **cosmetic surgery** has been used as an aid to change one's legal identity, most people undergo the discomfort and pay the price simply in order to be more beautiful or attractive in their own and/or others' eyes. The term **cosmetic surgery** is usually reserved for surgically achieved changes in the shape and/or size of the nose, chin, lips, breasts, belly, buttocks, genitals, or

other parts of the body. Although many people, including contemporary surgeons, may believe this practice to be a modern invention, the term could rightfully be used for several ancient and modern tribal practices as well, for example, **dental modification** or enlarged **piercings** into which lip-plates or ear-disks are then inserted. Such ancient tribal practices as **subincision** and **scarification** are also early forms of cosmetic surgery.

Among modern practices, the techniques most often applied are the face-lift, thigh lift, buttock lift, tummy tuck, liposuction, breast augmentation or reduction, eyelid surgery, rhinoplasty, and otoplasty. Although some of these procedures are called rejuvenative and are thus made to seem connected to health, they do not actually rejuvenate the body but simply make it appear rejuvenated. Although this and other practices of cosmetic surgery have nothing to do with a return to the tribal, but rather with the misplaced cult of youth, they do represent modern forms of body modification, of taking charge of one's own image.

#### **COSMETIC TATTOO**

Different from the usual **tattooing**, this relatively new technique inserts color into the outermost layer of the skin only, resulting in a temporary tattoo that lasts from three to five years on the face and four to six years on the body. Cosmetic tattoos are most often used to modify and enhance the size or direction of one's eyebrows or, for example, to add a "beauty spot." The technique is also known as **permanent makeup**.

#### **CUTTING**

A specific form of **scarification** that involves incising or slashing the skin. Sometimes the process is repeated over time in order to achieve deep and clearly visible marks; in other cases, the wound is kept open temporarily in order to create pronounced and visible scars.

Within the context of tribal cultures, such cutting was often performed as a therapeutic means of enabling one to come to terms with other, more psychic forms of pain, for

example the loss of a partner, friend, or relative. Although such usage and motivation are sometimes found among twentieth-century neotribals as well, the main reasons for being "cut" today seem to be **body adornment** and decoration (going a step further than tattooing) and/or the experience and endurance of the associated pain and the resulting respect one earns with that particular subculture. This latter motivation, again, is one known to tribal peoples around the world.

#### **DECAL TATTOO**

See **Adhesive Tattoo**.

#### **DENTAL MODIFICATION**

Various practices are known in which the hardest material of the human body is manipulated and modified. Whereas some tribal people simply color their teeth—a temporary decoration and simply a specialized form of makeup—others are much more radical in their approach. Practices include having the frontal teeth inlaid with gold and precious stones, filing or chipping the teeth until they become sharp points, and removing several or all teeth. A modern equivalent of these ancient forms of body modification are teeth visibly made from gold—a favorite practice in Turkey and other Near Eastern countries.

#### **FINGER SACRIFICE**

Whereas, among some peoples, one may slash one's arm, chest, or thigh (see **scarification**) in reaction to the death of a loved one—a pain never forgotten and a wound forever visible—other cultures and subcultures have resorted to the complete amputation of a finger in response to a personal failing the results of which one can never hope to set right. Among the Yakuza, members of Japan's centuries-old criminal underworld, the sacrifice of a finger is—short of ritual suicide—the only means of showing that one understands the true gravity of one's failing and that one takes full responsibility. Translated into modern European or American life, this would mean that a drunk driver who killed or maimed someone's child would call on the parents and, very formally

and in their presence, cut off his own pinky (if still available) and present it to his hosts as a token of his guilt and as a means of regaining his honor in their eyes.

#### **FOOT-MODELING**

Also known as foot-binding, this practice has been followed mainly in China and only on women. Although much has been made of the so-called golden lotus as a sign of beauty, it is ultimately an expression of male possessiveness. A woman with such deformed feet, stunted in their natural growth, is less likely to flee the possibly unsolicited advances of her husband, or at least is less able to take a strong physical stance.

#### **HENNA DESIGNS**

Somewhere between the practice of body adornment with ash, paint, or makeup (temporary) and the tattoo (permanent) are the designs created with henna. Usually applied to hands or feet, henna paste creates intricate, tattoo-like designs that stay visible for about two to four weeks.

#### **INFIBULATION**

Term for the terrible practice—not only painful and harmful, but also usually done without consent of the female—in which the labia are cut away and the edges of the wound are sewn together, simply in order to ensure that the girl/young woman may not engage in sexual intercourse. It is one of the few practices of body modification I'd like to see outlawed and discontinued.

#### **LABIA ENLARGEMENT**

The labia, especially the small, inner ones, not only are adorned by means of **piercing** but are also enlarged in some tribal cultures. Among the Hottentot people, a woman was judged beautiful and powerful if she had large inner labia extending far beyond the outer ones. They are purposely elongated and have been reported to be very large indeed. Early ethnologists called this the Hottentot apron. Other African tribes, such as the Urua of Central Africa, also practice(d) such artificial enlargement of the inner labia. As with all other practices of body modification, this one

has begun to return within certain modern subcultures.

#### **LABIA LIFT**

One of the newest practices to arrive is the labia lift. For the price of approximately \$5,000, cosmetic surgeons will perform **liposuction** on the outer labia. The aim of this reducing the fatty tissue is not merely to make the outer labia smaller but to render them more sensitive to stimulation. It seems, according to the first reports of women who have had this done, that orgasms not only are sweeter but occur more easily and frequently.

#### **LABIA REMOVAL**

Whereas more and more women have their labia or other parts of the genitals pierced and adorned, and others even enlarge their labia, there are again others—on the far side of the spectrum—who have these sensitive inner labia surgically removed because they are thought to be "too long," "too big," or otherwise "abnormal" rather than simply unique and special. However, at least in these cases the girl or woman in question does undergo such surgery at her own request. A quite different situation is found in some cultures, mainly in Africa, where **clitoridectomy** and/or **infibulation** are inflicted upon girls as a rule and often by force.

#### **LIPOSUCTION**

A technique of **cosmetic surgery** in which certain parts of the body are modified by the removal of "diet-resistant" fat. Most often applied to belly, buttocks, thighs, or neck.

#### **MAKEUP**

A general term for a variety of methods employed to change, highlight, or hide certain features of the body, most often the face. What is regarded as accepted and thus proper makeup changes from time to time, as fashion does, and certainly from society to society. Seen from a broad perspective, makeup is, in fact, a specialized form of body painting, ranging from applying rouge and lipstick to one's nipples (sixteenth-century France) to coloring one's fingernails (with nail polish or

henna) and covering one's lips, eyelids, and cheeks with colored powders or creams. Within the last decade, a mild form of **tattooing** has arrived in the beauty parlors of most contemporary societies. This **cosmetic tattoo** is also called **permanent makeup** in an attempt to avoid the stigma that has surrounded tattooing in most modern Western societies.

#### **MODERN PRIMITIVE(S)**

Modern primitive is a label applied to the recent revival of so-called primitive body modification practices. The term was coined in 1977 by Fakir Musafar, a modern Western experiential pioneer of many tribal modification techniques and commonly regarded as one of the major advocates and spokesmen of their revival, especially of the spiritual dimensions of the pain thus suffered. *Modern Primitives* is the title of a book, published in 1989, that contributed greatly to the further and widespread resurgence and acceptance of these tribal practices such as piercing, scarification, and tattooing.

#### **NECK-MODELING**

Rare among tribal people and not yet signaled among contemporary neotribals, neck modeling is a technique in which elongation of the neck is achieved by wearing metal rings around the neck, commencing in early childhood. The practice has been known in Africa as well but has survived only among the women of the Chin, a tribal people living in the border region between today's Myanmar (Burma) and Thailand. The longer one's neck, the higher one's status.

#### **OTOPLASTY**

Name for a technique of **cosmetic surgery** in which the ear is surgically remodeled and thus modified.

#### **PERMANENT MAKEUP**

See **Cosmetic Tattoo**.

#### **PIERCING**

Perforation of the skin and underlying tissue in order to create a small tunnel in one's skin and flesh, usually in a protruding portion of the earlobes, nostrils, nasal septum, lips,

eyebrows, nipples, genitals, etc. As long as such a piercing is not enlarged by a weight or other means of dilation, it is a rather temporary body modification in the sense that once the inserted object is removed, the skin usually closes with time. Once sufficient enlargement of the originally small piercing has taken place by the insertion of such objects as metal rings, tubes, sticks and/or successively heavier weights, the piercing then becomes permanent. The type of piercing meant for insertion of rings, into whatever part of the body, is sometimes called **ringing**.

#### **PLASTIC SURGERY**

Based on the Greek *plastica* ("to mold" or "to form"), the term refers to surgical techniques aimed at reconstructing lost parts of the body, restoring function, or correcting acquired and/or congenital deformities (or whatever is defined as such). By its very nature, the age of plastic surgery cannot be archaeologically proved, yet the first documents attesting to its use come from the Indian subcontinent of about 200 B.C.E. and from the Italy of the Renaissance (fourteenth to sixteenth century). The advanced medical insights and technologies of the twentieth century, in conjunction with the innumerable wounded victims of World Wars I and II, gave rise to the variety of techniques available today. In their wake arose the well-publicized subdivision of plastic surgery generally known as **cosmetic surgery**, a now widely used and accepted manner of body modification.

#### **RECONSTRUCTIVE SURGERY**

See **Plastic Surgery**.

#### **RHINOPLASTY**

Name for a technique of **cosmetic surgery** in which the nose is surgically remodeled and thus modified.

#### **RINGING**

See **Piercing**.

#### **SCARIFICATION**

In a scientific sense, this term refers to the creation, by whatever technique, of one or more permanent scars on any part of the skin

not by an accident or health-related surgery but by a conscious decision. Today, this decision is usually taken by the person to be thus decorated; yet, in centuries past the decision was often taken by someone in authority without the consent of the subject. In this sense, scarification includes several techniques, each of which leads to a different result or look: **branding**, simple **cutting**, and the types of cutting after which certain substances are introduced into the skin. In modern usage, within contemporary tattoo and piercing studios, the term *scarification* is often reserved for the latter method. In this sense, scarification involves cutting or incising the skin and then manipulating the cicatrization process by introducing ink, ashes, or other substances into the still open wound. Once these wounds heal, they leave more or less pronounced scars. The visual and tactile results achieved with this type of scarification are dependent on the cutting technique and the substance(s) introduced into the wound. Whether or not the wound results in a raised scar, a keloid, largely depends on the person's genetic heritage and on the amounts of melanocyte-stimulating hormone produced by the intermediate pituitary gland and of melatonin secreted by the pineal gland.

#### **SKULL-MODELING**

An ancient practice known in Egypt and China, especially within royal families and among the aristocracy, and also in Africa and Melanesia as well as among Native Americans such as the Chinook and the Kwakiutl. During the first few months of a child's life, his or her skull is artificially shaped so as to become elongated. Various peoples have used various means to achieve this but with similar motives. A high or long skull is meant to indicate heightened wisdom and/or intelligence, apart from showing the person's high-born status. Also known as *skull-shaping*.

#### **SUBINCISION**

A practice mainly known from the initiation ceremonies and puberty rites of Australian Aborigines. By slitting open the underside of the phallus along the whole length of the urethra, a man simulates having a vulva. The motivation seems to be a need to acquire some of the female magic of periodic bleeding, to which end a man will again and again reopen the wound during strictly guarded ceremonies that no woman may ever attend. The initiated and subincised men are called "possessors of a vulva," and they are known to have sexual relations with young men not yet incised this way. Interestingly, there is no form of genital modification or mutilation for women among Australia's tribal people; such practices seem to be the sole preserve of male-dominated societies.

#### **TATTOOING**

A widely practiced method of **body decoration** and/or **body modification** in which markings such as signs, symbols, and letters are applied to the body by puncturing the skin's outer layers and inserting color into it. Whether ancient or modern techniques are used, the skin is punctured with a sharp instrument, now usually an electric needle. In earlier times and other cultures, tattooing required one or more needles fixed to a stick and driven into the skin by slight hammering, the very process that has led to the term *tattoo* via the Polynesian sound-equivalent of the action: *tau tau*. The practice of tattooing is, and has always been, a worldwide phenomenon yet has been temporarily outlawed in a variety of societies, mainly those based on Judeo-Christian codes of behavior. Even today, where the tattoo has "gone mainstream" once more and tattooed people can be found in all walks of life, the practice is still illegal and/or restricted to persons over eighteen years of age in some states of the United States.

## Endnotes



1. Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium is the Massage*, p. 65.
2. Love, *Encyclopedia of Unusual Sexual Practices*, p. 61.
3. Campbell, *Primitive Mythology*, p. 423.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 211.
5. Martischning, *Tätowierung ostasiatischer Art*, p. 8.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
8. Lazi, *The Tattoo*, pp. 21–23.
9. Brain, *The Decorated Body*, p. 90.
10. Lazi, p. 24.
11. Califa, *Public Sex*, p. 232.
12. Levi-Strauss, Claude, *The Raw and the Cooked*.
13. In 1996, in the *Body Modification Enzine* (the "extreme" section with limited access).  
(<http://www.bme.freq.com>)
14. Lawlor, *Voices of the First Day*, p. 344.
15. Fraser, *The Golden Bough*, p. 180.
16. Schiffmacher, *1000 Tattoos*, p. 9.
17. From an interview of Tom and Shannon by Raven Rowanchilde.
18. Metzger, *The Woman Who Slept with Men to Keep the War Out of Them and Tree*,  
p. 219.
19. Watson, *Gifts of Unknown Things*, pp. 52–61.
20. From *PFIQ (Piercing Fans International Quarterly)* no. 47, pp. 30–32.
21. Michelle Delio, "Playing with Fire: Body Branding," originally published in *Tattoo Savage*  
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22. Ashley Montague, "Mutilated Humanity," *The Humanist*, vol. 55, July 1, 1995, p. 12.

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## VIDEOTAPES AND FILMS

- For information concerning videotapes of Cindy Jackson's transformation, send a self-addressed envelope to Cindy Jackson, P.O. Box 5410, Highgate, London N6 4EE, United Kingdom.
- The "Hole" Experience*. Prince of Pain Productions, Body Basics, 695 Briar, Dept. OB, Chicago, IL 60657.

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- Mistress of the Rings* (VHS). 95-minute video on the art of body piercing, featuring Mette Hintze of the Black Universe in Copenhagen, who talks about and demonstrates piercings, from earlobes to genitals. Det Dansk Filmvaerksted, Steen Shapiro and Anne Marie Kuerstein, Versterbragade 24, DK-1620 Copenhagen V, Denmark. (45) 3124-1624, fax: (45) 3124-4419.
- Piercing with a Pro Video Series* (VHS, PAL, BETA) 1: The 9 Traditional Male Piercings, \$69.95; 2: The Female and Unisex Piercings, \$49.95 plus postage. Available through Gauntlet catalog (see *PFIQ* entry below).
- Piercing Nipples* (VHS). Pleasurable Piercings, Inc., \$39.95 plus postage. Pleasurable Piercings, 7 Garfield Ave., Hawthorne, NJ 07506. (201) 779-2782. Navel, nostril, septum piercing. Videos available soon.
- Pierced and Painted* (VHS). 75 minutes of tattooing and piercing: "explicit scenes of body tattooing, full frontal nudity, and actual genital piercing." (800) 748-7855.
- Wildcat International Videos (PAL, VHS), 16 Preston St., Brighton, BN1 2HN England, (0275) 325758. Wildcat offers a very wide selection of videos, mostly "show-off" collections featuring heavily/uniquely pierced and inked men and women. Contact Wildcat for catalog and availability.

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- Body Play and Modern Primitives Quarterly*. Insight Books, P.O. Box 2575, Menlo Park, CA 94026-2575 U.S.A. This publication is produced by Fakir Musafar.
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- Intim-Schmuck*. Barnas Verlag Landrat von Laer Str. 17-19 D 47495 Rheinberg, Germany.
- Flesh Canvas*. Rodan Publishing, P.O. Box 130B, East Molesey, Surrey KT8 9YQ England. (081) 941-7580, fax (081) 941-7582. Equal coverage of tattoos and piercings, with photographs of the piercing process.
- In The Flesh*. Published semiannually by OB Enterprises, Inc., Suite 2305, 450 Seventh Ave., New York, NY 10123-0101, U.S.A.
- (*PFIQ*) *Piercing Fans International Quarterly*. Gauntlet, Inc., 2215-R Market St., Suite 801, San Francisco, CA 94114. Write for order form; signature and declaration of 21+ age required.
- Piercing World*. Published by P.A.U.K., 155 Tomkinson Rd., Nuneaton, Warwickshire, CV10 8DP, England. Quarterly, full-color publication. Annual subscription: pounds 16 UK, pounds 20 Europe, pounds 25 overseas. Subscription to *Piercing World* brings automatic membership in P.A.U.K. Detailed color and black-and-white photos of piercings and tattoos, unusual jewelry designs, multiple piercings, and piercing techniques, including all genital piercings. The magazine also includes a classified ads section and a list of EPPA-registered piercers. *Piercing World* is also available through Pleasurable Piercings, 7 Garfield Ave., Hawthorne, NJ 07506.
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# RETURN OF THE TRIBAL

RUFUS C. CAMPHAUSEN

"In the words of author Rufus C. Camphausen, body adornment—generally considered on the cutting edge of hip—is actually a renaissance of tribal practices. By juxtaposing photos of modern urban tribals against images of indigenous people, Camphausen effectively places this oh-so '90s practice firmly within a historical and global context. The results are fascinating."

*Publishers Weekly*



PARK STREET PRESS  
ROCHESTER, VERMONT

The modern revival of piercing, tattooing, scarification, and body painting has its origins in tribal culture and practices. Since earliest times, tribal cultures around the world have used body decoration and modification to indicate membership and rank within a group, to identify with spiritual totems, to express sacrifice and loss, and to enhance physical attraction and sexual enjoyment. Today we are witnessing a worldwide revival of body adornment that many interpret as a return to our tribal beginnings—a way to identify who we are in a world that has lost its sense of community.

With over 120 provocative, full-color photographs, *Return of the Tribal* takes us on a journey into the culture of body adornment and modification—from prehistoric and aboriginal techniques to those of modern urban tribals in cities such as London, New York, Tokyo, and Amsterdam. The author explores temporary changes such as body-painting and facial makeup; simple piercings of ears, noses, mouths, and nipples; genital adornment and enhancement; and cosmetic tattoos that last three to six years; as well as permanent modifications such as the elongation of earlobes and necks; the insertion of ear-disks or lip-plugs; scarification; and tooth filing or inlaying teeth with precious stones.

Once viewed as the domain of people at the fringe of society, tattooing and piercing are now at the vanguard of world culture, evidenced by the use of body adornments in major advertisements and the appearance of more and more tattooed heroes and heroines on the screen and in the sports and fashion worlds. This impulse to shape one's body in one's own self-image is as intrinsic to being human as is the need for all other forms of creative expression.

Rufus C. Camphausen has studied the religious and sociosexual mores of cultures throughout the world for more than twenty-five years. He is the author of *The Yoni*, *The Encyclopedia of Erotic Wisdom*, and *The Divine Library*, as well as numerous articles and essays on social anthropology, ethnology, comparative religion, and gender issues. He was first tattooed in 1974 and his first piercing was in 1983. He lives in Amsterdam.



**NEOTRIBAL FANTASY**

**A STRIKING EXAMPLE OF A TRULY PERSONAL TATTOO DESIGN, IN A RATHER UNUSUAL PLACE OF THE BODY. THIS FASHIONABLE NEOTRIBAL TATTOO—THE PART IN DARK BLUE INK—HAS BEEN ELEGANTLY ENHANCED BY THE TWO PARTS THAT LOOK LIKE GEMSTONES INLAID INTO THE SKIN.**