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BODY DECORATION IN PRIMITIVE SOCIETIES: A MULTIFUNCTIONAL PHENOMENON

by

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PREFACE

Man is distinguished from all other mammals by an existential prepossession at variance with his biological nature. He stands in a problematic relationship with his own image; the body as it exists - undecorated, untouched - is thought of as merely approximating the body as it ought to be. This results in a universal propensity to elaborate what nature has already provided, even in the most puritanical or the most simple society.

Man's body is the ultimate physical link between himself, his soul and the outside world. It is the medium through which he most directly projects himself in social life. His use and elaboration of it, therefore, can say precise things about the society in which he lives, the degree of integration within that society and the control society exerts over the inner man.

Man's natural body is a clay to be remodelled, a canvas to be decorated; it has the potential to become a wonderful work of art.

INTRODUCTION

Elaboration of the human body features in all known cultures and societies, the practice being older than recorded history itself.

Obvious tokens of body painting are found in the Sahara wall paintings (Illus. 1) which date back to the fifth millennium B.C., while figurines from South East European neolithic cultures show elaborate decorations of the face and hands. It seems that the decorative manipulation of the natural human body may well have been mankind's original work of art, an aesthetic spoken through painting, scarring, tattooing and accessorizing.

While the desire to alter one's natural appearance is universal, the motivation for such alteration varies from society to society; it can be either aesthetic, diacritic, or religious, or the result of any permutation of the three. A person may be both painted and tattooed and the motive for this may be simultaneously sexual, social, and magical.

Just as man possesses an inherent desire to alter his appearance, he also houses an inherent propensity to consider himself radically different from people of other cultures. It is common for people of a relatively self-contained community to think of those outside its confines as 'not quite human'. As a result, fantastic prejudices are encouraged about the physical condition or habits of these strangers. This is especially true of Western attitudes to body decoration in 'primitive' societies.

The use of the word 'primitive' during the course of this work is with a strictly circumscribed meaning - a 'primitive' society is one whose subsistence is provided by a relatively small, simple technology; it has a relatively sparse population and a relatively

limited degree of social, economic and political specialization. The use of the term 'primitive' in this context, does not mean that it is identical to those that existed in the distant past, nor does it mean that its members, institutions or cultural belongings - especially its art are simpler, less sophisticated, or less valuable than those of other non-primitive societies.

Western attitudes to the human body and its transformation have always been ambiguous. For many years, we have been blissfully blind to our own 'daubings' and mutilations (Illus. 2 & 3):

> He thinks the customs and his tribe and
> island are the laws of nature.
> (Bernard Shaw... Caesar & Cleopatra)

while looking on the manifestations of body decoration in primitive societies with much distaste and negativity, we consider them vulgar and barbaric - a 'disfigurement' as opposed to a figuration. In addition it has been common practice for many years among academics and ordinary folk alike, to liken the decorative forms of these primitive people to the artwork of psychotics and that of children, and to the bohemian and anti-establishmentarian products of Western society's stereotypical modern artists. More recently primitive body decoration has been likened to the body decorations of the Punk movement and similar western minority groups.

This dissertation examines the functions of body elaboration in primitive societies. It is an attempt, in part, to show that body decoration in primitive societies is not just 'decoration for decorations sake', that it is not just 'decoration for beauty's sake', that it is in fact 'decoration for life's sake': a practice basic to the primitive mans social and aesthetic outlook, and to his relationship with the natural and supernatural world. It is also an attempt to evaluate Western society's popular conceptions of body elaboration in such societies in order to dispel any

misconceptions it may uphold.

In the first chapter, the role of body decoration in the social structure of these primitive societies is examined. It delves into the many ways in which primitive body decorations help to maintain social solidarity and the status quo in the societies of their existence.

Chapter Two examines the aesthetic element of personal physical elaboration in these societies; body decoration in the pursuit of purely local ideals of beauty is discussed.

In the third and final chapter the pursuit of beauty in the modern western world is examined and subsequently compared with its primitive world equivalent.

Whilst making reference to many tribes during the course of this dissertation, I will look specifically at the body decoration in the South Eastern Sudanese Nuba. Their use of body decoration in the social and aesthetic contexts herein serve to exemplify the uses that body decoration may have in many other primitive societies. They represent a tribe whose art traditions as presented in this dissertation will undoubtedly be dead within a generation if Western society's attempt to bring them 'into line' with the rest of the world succeeds.

Illustration 1. Horned Goddess

Sahara Wall Painting

The famous Horned Goddess has unmistakable signs of body decorationon the shoulders, breasts, thighs and calves, which must correspond to scarifications

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Illustration 2. Advertisement for 19th Century 'daubings & mutilations'.

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Illustration 3. Advertisement for 20th Century 'daubings and mutilations'.

CHAPTER 1

'PRIMITIVE BODY DECORATION AND CULTURAL HOMEOSTATSIS'

The fact that primitive societies change much more slowly than western societies cannot be disputed. In most primitive societies, the amount of change that occurs during an individual's lifetime is minimal. Any changes that do occur tend towards the superficial rather than the structural. In effect, it is more likely for a society's political leader to be succeeded by another, than it is for the political system to change.

As time progresses, all systems, social or otherwise, tend toward chaos unless there is an input of energy directed towards system-maintenance. How is it then, that societies generally remain structurally stable for long periods of time? More specifically, what is it that allows societies, especially primitive ones, to remain so conservative?

The French sociologist, Emile Durkheim, and his companions suggest that social solidarity is maintained in two principal ways. Firstly, social life inevitably entails a certain degree of uniformity of belief and action, within the population. According to Richard L. Anderson, in his book on art in primitive societies,

> Through various institutionalized means, individuals in a particular society come to accept to a greater or lesser degree, the goals, value systems and styles of living in harmony with those of others in that society.
> (Anderson, 1979, p.36)

Secondly, the differences that do exist in a society tend to be complementary in nature.

> Specialization and independence create sectors of the population that are dependant upon each other's continued existence.
> (Anderson, 1979, p.36)

The forces of solidarity-maintenance operate through the established social institutions and cultural patterns of a society - its political and economic systems, its laws, religion and language and, of course, its art.

Primitive societies are devoid of that political, administrative, legal and coercive machinery, external to the individual, which distributes places, functions and tasks and is the guarantee of social stability within. In such societies religion, language and art all function as important components in the maintenance of structural stability within.

In this chapter, I will discuss how the specific art of 'body decoration' performs in all this; how it contributes to the social structure and more specifically to the structural status quo of primitive societies. In most of these societies, body decoration itself is a fundamental language; a channel of communication which through colour, styles and other aspects serves to mark social values including those of a religious nature.

The chapter itself will be divided into three sections, the first of which will discuss primitive body elaboration in relation to social status, while the second and third will discuss this same interest in relation to group affiliation and religion respectively.

BODY DECORATION AND SOCIAL STATUS

Social inequality is an ever-present characteristic of every known society and is an intrinsic part of the social structure therein. It can exist between male and female, between adults and children and between the politically influential and those who lack such influence.

When one person claims control over another, the claim may be ultimately founded on that individual's having a greater physical power at his/her command. Internecine fighting to establish and maintain dominance patterns is obviously not a practical endeavour, so instead, patterns of commanding influence may be maintained on a day-to-day basis through cultural precedent. If those with relatively less power are reluctant to accept the justice of their position, those with power can, and often do, use various techniques to symbolically display their power.

In most primitive societies, the human body is the field upon which the individual marks off his position in the social hierarchy - his position in the age scale, his achievements and his personal holdings of wealth and power. Characteristics of social status can be painted, carved or tattooed on the skin in a symbolic form. Status can also be represented by material adornments.

A major function of the body in any society is to portray in visible terms the person's advancement from infancy through puberty, to adulthood and old age. Natural outward signs of physiological development are not enough, they need to be accompanied by ritual acts, marking the progress of time and the passage of the individual through the cycle of life.

In Western society, the church with its ceremonies for baptism, confirmation, and marriage, mark these transitions in the individual's life, while the passage of time from season to season is marked by religious festivals.

Primitive societies mark the process of physiological development by ritual ceremonies, often reflecting the age groups around which many of them are structured. Distinctions between these groups are quite rigidly defined in terms of rights and duties and they are often indicated by body marks.

In many primitive societies, infants are decoratively marked at birth in order to seal their identities and signify their rights to share in a common heritage. Usually the mark is an ephemeral one where the infant is adorned with ochre and other clays and pigments and/or earrings and other accessories. Indelible marks such as scarring and tattooing are rare among the newly born.

In most non-Western societies, however, the onset of puberty is a far more dramatic event and is often marked with ritual. To merely reach physiological maturity does not alone entitle the adolescents to the rights and privileges due to the adult. To be officially accepted as such one must pass through a ceremony of which one significant element is the visible marking of the transition upon the body: the symbolic sanctioning of a natural event. The individual for example, may be sexually mature, but at the same time be prohibited from sexual activity until the appropriate ritual has been performed. In this way the marking of the body endows the person with a new social status with greater social entitlements.

Both male and female members of South-eastern Nuba society undergo a series of decorations in early adolescence which are closely related to the physiological changes taking place in their natural

bodies.

For male members, the onset of puberty is marked by the beginning of age organisation. Age organisation is the beginning of a series of diacritical stages marked by hair decoration and body painting. The age organisation, which commences at age eight, is peculiar to males and three grades broadly designate particular productive activities. More conspicuously the grades define tribal sports and organised competitive athletics. The initial grade 'lóer' for example, is characterised by wrestling; the middle grade 'kandundor' by bracelet and stick fighting; the final grade 'kadonga' by retirement from active tribal sports.

Each grade is subdivided into sets: the lōer and kandūndōr are divided into three and five sets respectively - each set status being three years in duration, while the kadōnga is divided into two sets, the first of which is four years in duration and the second, which lasts until death.

On becoming a member of the first set of the lōer grade, the boy takes a hairstyle resembling a small skull cap and he begins to maintain a 'tuft of hair' on the crown of his head, called the 'rūm'. At this stage, he is also entitled to begin simple decorations with red ochre and grey/white. As boys progress through the 'lōer' grade, the skull cap hairstyle becomes increasingly larger in circumference and they are allowed to use more elaborate and conspicuous designs.

Entry into the kandūndōr grade involves a change in hairstyle and the addition of colours for decoration. The skull cap arrangement of the lōer is abandoned, as hair is grown over a wider portion of the head, with two shaved strips running from the 'rūm' to the face at an ever-increasing width (Illus. 4 & 5). Upon entry into the second set of this grade, society's full range of colours is available for decoration though use of some is appropriate only at certain times.

The use of rich deep black (gumba), for instance is normally

> ...reserved for the bracelet fights as it makes the user look bigger to an opponent, or for the dance/praise songs where a young man prances and expresses himself on hearing his praises sung. (Faris, 1979,p.40)

Entry into the third and final grade, the kadōnga, marks the abandonment of the 'rūm' and after several years in this grade, the head is finally shaved. At this point also, secular body designing stops. It is believed when one becomes 'kadōnga', one's body is no longer pleasing to view - no longer firm and youthful - so why would anyone wish to call attention to it by decoration.

Females members of the society, who don't have an elaborate age organisation like males, begin a series of scarifications at the onset of puberty. The first of these is a series of scars 'tūratē', cut on either side of the abdomen below the navel, joining above the navel and continuing to a point between the breasts (see Illus. 5 |a|). These scars are made at the very first signs of puberty as the breasts begin to fill out.

A second set of scars 'karē' takes place at initial menses (Illus. 5 |b| & 6). This is a series of parallel rows of scars under the breasts to the back, across the entire length of the torso .

The next scarification or cicatrisation doesn't take place until after the weaning of the first child, when 'rūrōla' takes place all over the back of the neck, the backs of the arms, buttocks and backs of the legs, to the knees (Illus.7). Scarring generally involves two instruments - a needle or thorn and a sharp-edged razor or blade, often made out of sharpened stone. The operation consists of drawing the needle or thorn under the epidermis so as to lift up the skin (Illus. 8 & 9). The necessary length is then cut off using the second implement to produce a protruding scar.

The more the skin is pulled up before cutting, the higher the resulting keloid. In addition, irritants, e.g. ashes, charcoal and indigo can be added to the wound to make the resulting scars more prominent. In some societies people indulge in emphasizing these cicatrices later in life by cutting them deeper and deeper to produce larger and more permanent protrusions.

In Nuba society all scarrings save the final ones are carried out for free by the cicatrisation specialist of the village section, though it is expected that the girls will reciprocate with some aid, e.g. in grinding grain. All scarring takes place on the mountainside above each village section as blood is considered to be extremely polluting and must be kept at bay from productive apparatus, e.g. agricultural implements, cooking pots and weapons.

The final set of scars for young mothers is expensive and is usually paid for by her husband. Refusal by a husband to pay for his wife's final set of scars is tantamount to rejection and it is anticipated that she may be stolen by another man.

This final scarring, though also regarded as a beauty treatment, indicates a change of status for a post partum prohibition on sexual intercourse is observed until the child is weaned. This is explained logically as being necessary, for the birth of two or more children in a similar time span affords each infant with only a fraction of the milk regarded as sufficient.

> The final scarring coming as it does at the weaning of a woman's first child is then a poignant reintroduction to an active sexual life, with an added measure of beauty.
> (Faris, 1971, p.36).

A skirt taken at the onset of marriage also serves to mark physiological development. On menopause, e.g. the woman begins to wear dark blue skirts as opposed to the white or coloured skirts of women not yet past their childbearing years. At this point also, all women shave their heads and keep them this way until death.

In other primitive societies, the physiological developments of its members may be symbolically emphasized by body decorations other than those discussed in relation to the Nuba: teeth may be filed or extracted, lip and ear plugs or plates may be inserted, or the body may be tattooed or branded.

In the above context, body decoration act as a social insignia, symbolising the person's position in the life cycle, and his or her repudiation of previous personalities in order to achieve a new social status. They offer a means of intimately associating the body with this new status and imprinting on it the accompanying texts of law and morality.

In the case of permanent body marks especially, the symbolic death and rebirth have to be experienced intensely both in the mind and in the body in terms of physical pain. More than any other forms of body art, they mark social connection and solidarity and they represent the process of acculturation carried out on the human body.

> One might accordingly liken the markings of the body to the minting of a coin. Only thus stamped can the latter have currency in the process of cultural exchange.
> (Theroz, 1984, pp.44/45).

Age, however, is not the sole criterion by which status is judged - achievements and personal holdings of wealth and power are others. Just as body decoration has the potential to indicate rung position on the age ladder so too can it indicate a person's position on the ladders of achievement, wealth and power. A man's tattoo, for instance, might sometimes be used to proclaim his wealth and power: a poor man could only afford a few straight coarse marks, whereas a rich and powerful man could display an impressive array of fine, expressive lines.

In some societies members of the lower classes, slaves or retainers are forbidden to decorate themselves in certain ways. Often, these restrictions are rigidly enforced - one visitor to Raiatea in the early seventies reported that he had seen,

> a native woman of naturally agreeable features disfigured by an extensive patch of charcoal on her cheek - a punishment for having slightly scarred herself, a practice forbidden one of her lowly rank. (Liggett, 1974, p.35)

In Mangbettu, Central Africa, deliberate elongation of the cranium is practised by the upper class to differentiate them from the lesser classes. Soon after birth, a baby's head is either confined between two pieces of wood or bound tightly with strips of bark to produce the desired effect (Illus. 10). Often the deformation is further emphasized by putting the hair back into a high cylindrical chignon.

In other instances, body decoration is used to illustrate personal achievements of various kinds such as the number of elephants killed or even the number of human heads taken. In Indonesia, social maturity does not arrive automatically for male members of the Kajang and Kenyah tribes. The 'boy' becomes a 'man' when he has proved his powers in battle and acquired social rank through head hunting. A whole hand tattoo indicates a fully fledged head hunter; a single tattooed finger shows that he only had a share in the 'kill'.

But the meanings attached to body markings are purely local. In some societies, for instance, tattoo marks have even been used to record lack of achievement - or even disgrace. One island chief, who ran away from a fight, was deposed and branded with two square tattoos on his face.

Body decoration in primitive societies may serve a variety of uses but without doubt it serves extensively as an awe-inspiring

symbolic reference to the social status of their owners. It differentiates their situation and standing from other individuals in the same society and symbolizes the social entitlements or indeed prohibitions that accompany his/her rank. In doing this, marks themselves become an intricate part of the social structure indicating social connection and solidarity.

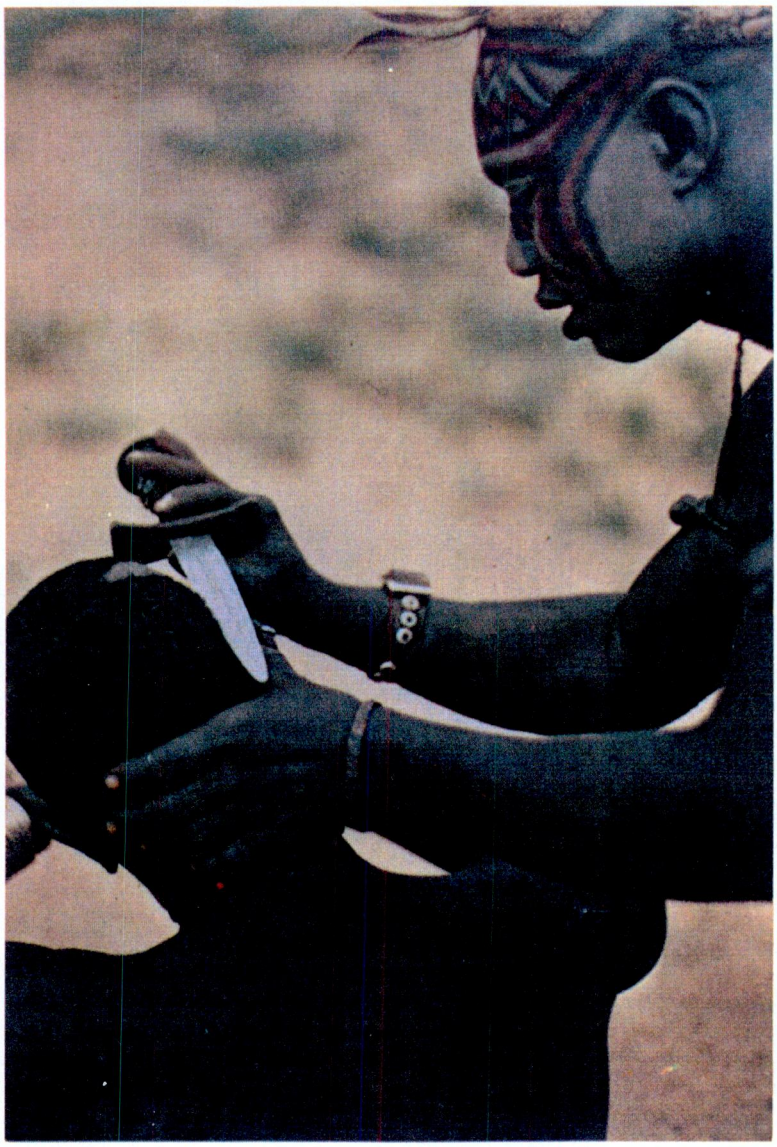
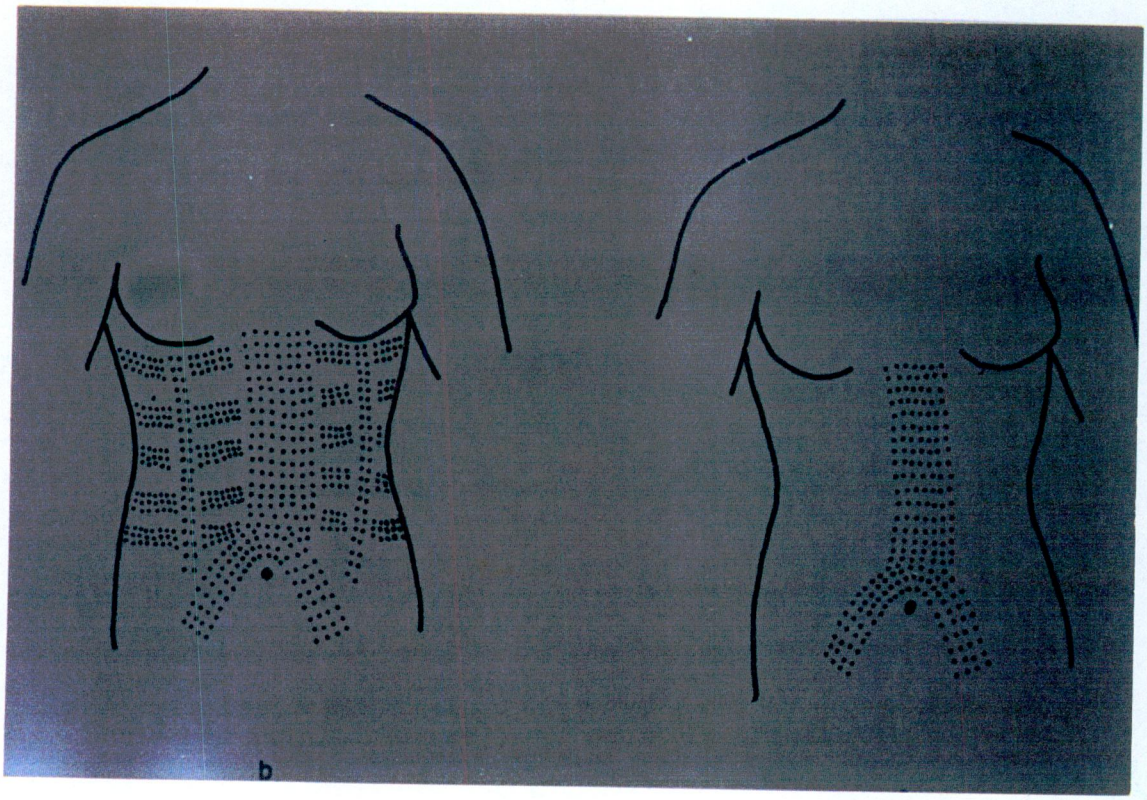


Illustration 4. Kadūndōr Hairstyle

The grooming of the two shaved strips that are characteristic of the Kadūndōr grade.



b. a.

Illustration 5. Nuba 'Turate' and 'Kare' Scarifications

Part a. 'Turate' scarification which takes place at the onset of puberty.

Part b. 'Kare' scarification which takes place at initial menses.

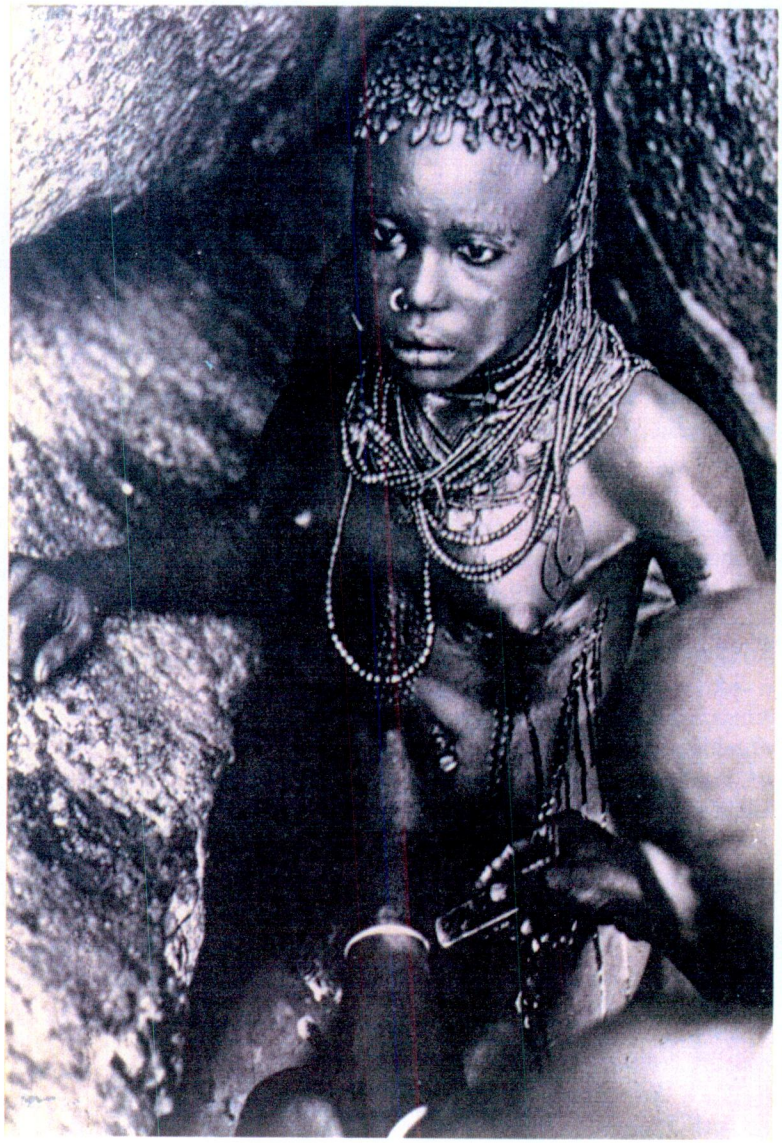


Illustration 6. Karē Scarification

Nuba

Girl receiving second scarification at initial menses.

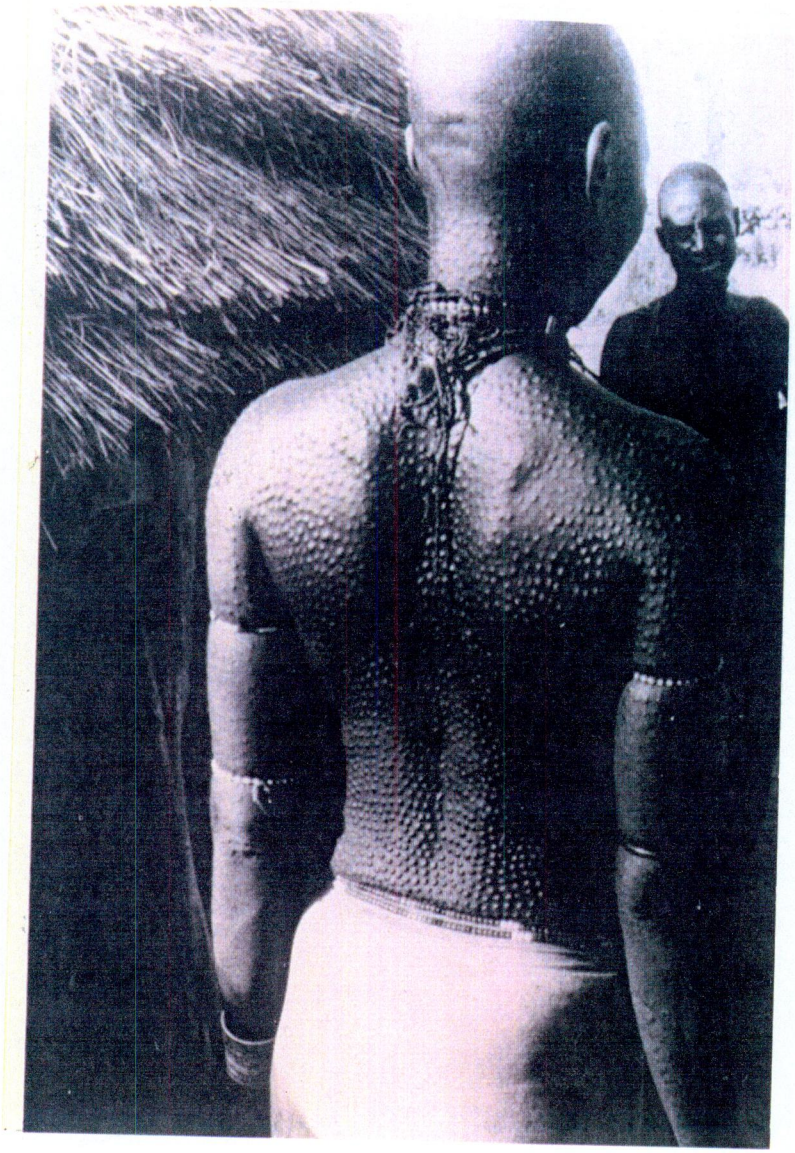


Illustration 7. Rūrōla Scarification

Nuba

Final set of scars given after the weaning of the first child.

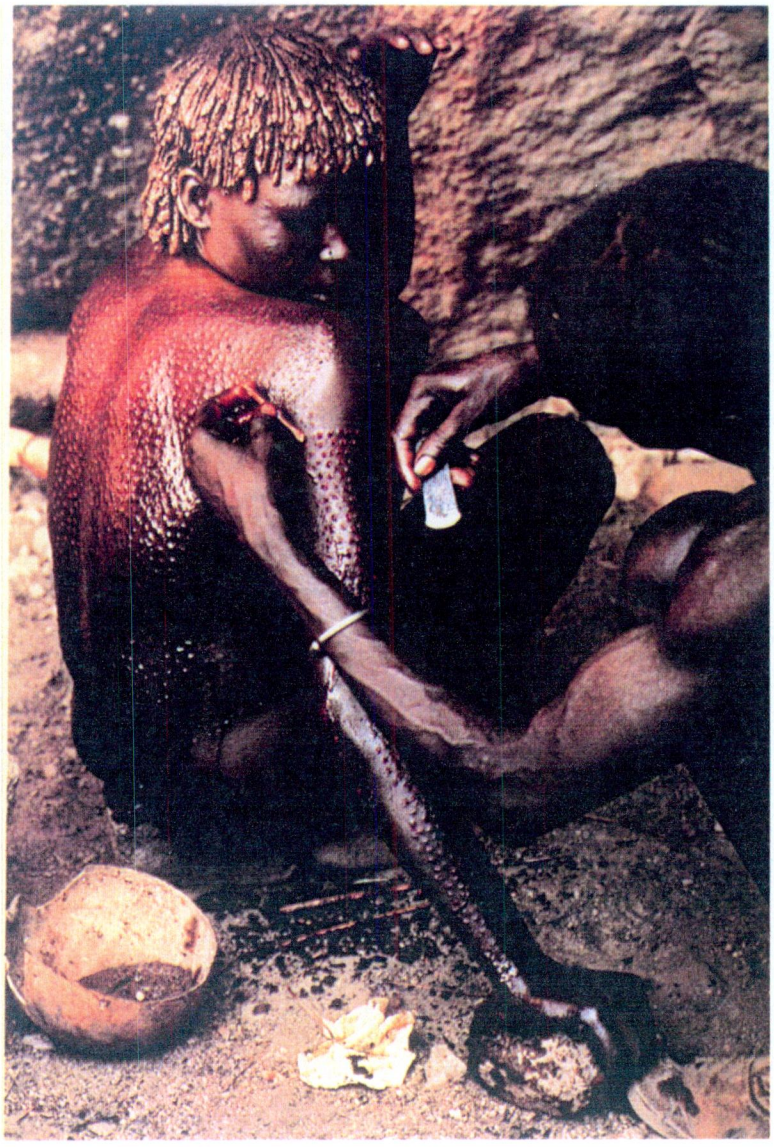


Illustration 8. The Execution of Scarifications

Scars are produced by lifting the skin up with a hooked thorn and slicing the raised skin with a sharpened razor or blade.

Illustration 9. Fresh Scarificaion Wounds

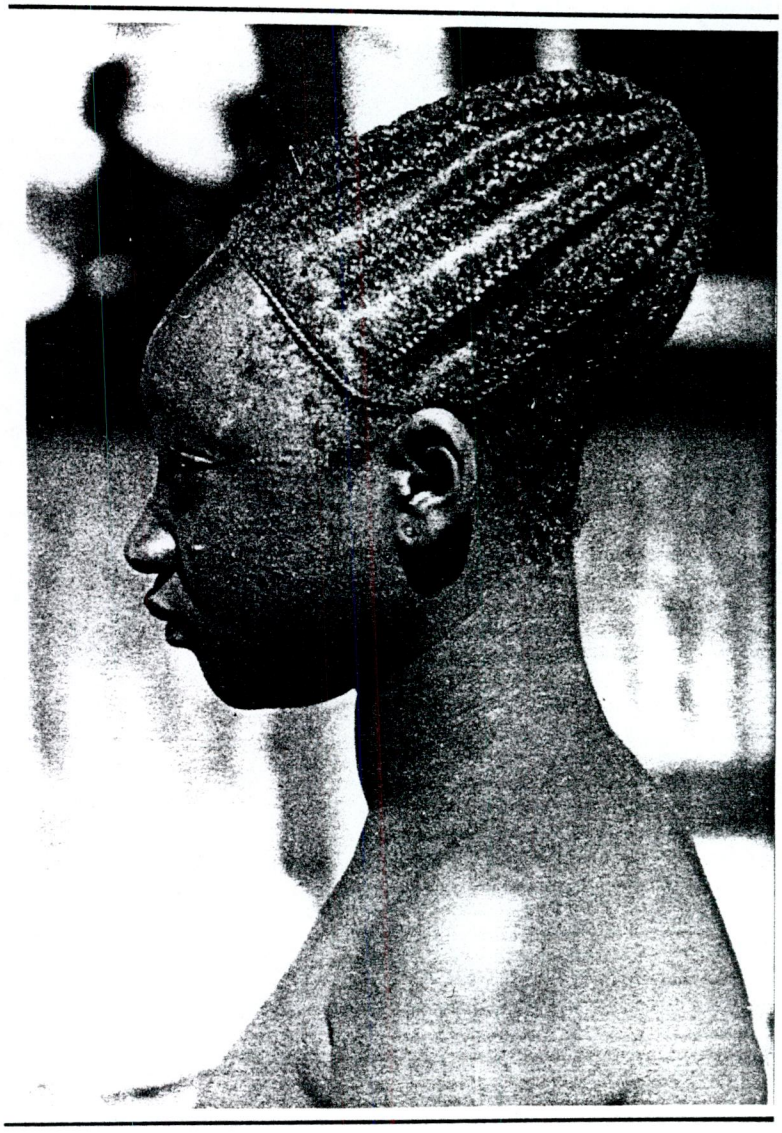


Illustration 10. Cranial Deformation

Mangbe+++u

BODY DECORATION AND GROUP AFFILIATION

Within any one group of people there are usually smaller groups based upon consanguinity, location or language. These allegiances form part of the structures of society which dictates marriage patterns, economic pursuits and certain privileges and prohibitions. In many primitive societies the decoration of the human body renders the distinction between individual groups highly visible. In doing so, the art of personal decoration itself makes a valuable contribution to the social structure and its upkeep from generation to generation.

Most primitive societies are characterised by 'clanship' organisation - clan membership being defined in terms of actual or purported descent from a common ancestor or ancestress. This descent is uni-lineal, i.e. derived either through the male (patriclan) or the female (matriclan).

The South-eastern Nuba constitute a society characterized by patriclan membership, wherein the younger members of the one patriclan section are distinguished from their equivalents in another, through the elaborations of their natural bodies.

At birth all newborn additions to the society are rubbed with oil, and either red or yellow ochre is placed on its head, around the area of the fontanelle and is maintained there until the child is weaned. Similarly, the mother covers her head and shoulders with this 'oil and ochre dressing' until weaning. The colour ochre used in both instances is peculiar to the infant's patriclan section.

About a month after birth, or as soon as it has sufficient hair, the infant receives a haircut which is again characteristic of its patriclan section (Illus. 11). This particular hairstyle is

maintained by males until the age of eight, while females begin to let these hairstyles grow out once they reach six years of age. At this age, the girl begins to cover herself from head to toe in oil and ochre, in a practice which continues until the beginning of her first pregnancy. All females are under sanction not to deviate from the colour of their patriclan section, or in the case of nursing mothers the patriclan section of their infant child.

Each patriclan section has its own characteristic colour. The colours are either red or yellow, but since each clan section has a separate place from which to gather its ochre, 'there are slight differences between the yellows and the reds which are ostensibly visible to member of the community', (Faris, 1972, p.9). All brother sections of the same clan have similar, (i.e. all red or all yellow), colours and different clans sometimes share similar colours. Frequently the latter situation indicates reciprocal friendship, mutual aid and ritual relationships.

The Arnhem Land Australians also demonstrate their membership of a kinship through body painting. In this instance, however, specific patterns incorporating group totems (animal or plant etc. adopted by a clan as their emblem) are painted on the bodies of individual group members (Illus. 12). The designs are commonly inherited from the father, but a person may gain the right to use the clan patterns of his mother's group, in which he has subsidiary rights. His hereditary clan design, however, is of the greatest importance and he is careful of the use made of it, for it represents part of his spirit. In addition, these Arnhem Land designs may be bartered, sold or exchanged and incorporated in the patterns of other clans during dances and ceremonies. The exchange of clan designs is a give and take arrangement so that an individual may secure a little of the spiritual force of the totems of all clans in his territory. The exchange both symbolizes the differences between the clans and at the same time emphasizes the fact that '... the people are all united in a larger group' (Brain, 1979, p.153).

Elsewhere, body signs in tattoos, scars or ornaments may serve as markers to separate groups or clans from each other. In the Congo, for example, children undergo the painful process of tattooing at a very early age so that 'individual members of one clan would be instantly recognisable from that of another'. (Liggett, 1974, p.54). The tattoo marks are made by puncturing the skin and inserting dark pigments such as charcoal mixed with walnut oil or pine resin. These prickings when clustered densely enough, assume the appearance of a specific linear pattern or may even extend over the surface like the unmodelled colour areas of a painting, depending on the required pattern, or in this case, the intended totemic design. Often, these body marks have a very practical recognition value. They may, for example, ensure that young members of a clan would not get lost among other clans, or indeed other tribes in a forest.

The marking of individual groups is something which is practised in every society and is a component of their individual social structures. There is in everyone a strong need to be recognised, received and accepted by one's group. Badges which proclaim group affiliation are, in consequence, proudly worn. In most primitive societies these badges take the form of body decoration - an aesthetic expression of 'esprit de corps' which perpetuates itself from generation to generation. In this context, body decoration not only contributes to the structure of many primitive societies, it also helps maintain the structural status quo within.

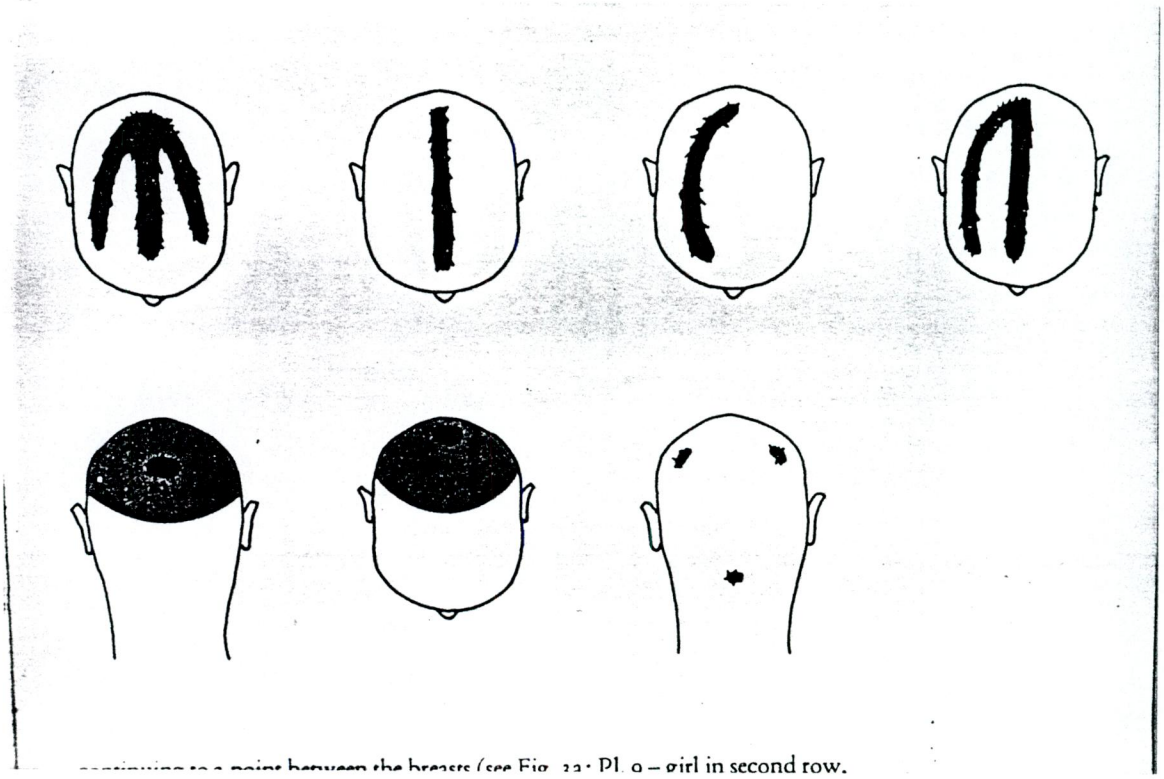


Illustration 11. A selection of Patriclan Section Hairstyles

Nuba Tribe.

Illustration 12. Clan Emblems

Arnhem Land Tribe

The designs painted on the bodies of the Arnhem Land Australians demonstrate their membership of a particular kinship.

BODY DECORATION AND RELIGION

All societies subscribe to some religious force - powers above and beyond the forces of nature - which provides a rationale for beliefs and behaviour within these societies. Religion also provides a basis for law and morality. It has the effect of maintaining the status quo through reference to divine wishes and to the social order of things.

In many primitive societies, just as body decoration acts to mark a person with social status, it also acts to encode religious beliefs and disseminate them from person to person, from generation to generation within that society.

Among the Sioux Indians of South America, decorative precautions are taken for a dead man's safe and comfortable journey to the after life. According to Robert Brain, in his book 'The Decorated Body',

> The ghost warrior mounts his ghostly steed and sets forth on his journey to the world of many lodges, with the confident feeling that he will arrive safely so long as he has the correct tattoos on his forehead, his wrist and the point of his chin. (Brain, 1979, p.78)

According to religious belief, any tribe member who departs from this world unmarked in these ways, will be bound for a place of suffering:

> .....he and his horse will be pushed from a cliff or cloud and will fall into purgatory where they will become homeless, aimless warriors. (Brain, 1979, p.179).

In a somewhat similar religious belief, upheld by members of the Nuba society, an 'Iru' ('hair of the dead') ceremony is held by the kinsmen of the deceased in order that his spirit be settled in the 'next world'.

The death commemoration ceremonies are held sometime after death - from three months to two years, and are a type of ritual 'hair grooming' necessary for the spirit of the deceased to

> stop wandering like an animal in the forest and be accepted properly groomed into the after-life community. (Faris, 1972, p.55)

The spirit of the deceased for whom this ritual has not been held, can become restless and troublesome, causing crop failure, unsuccessful hunts etc. - so that even though the ceremonies are extremely expensive (involving all night drumming and beer for participants and guests), kinsmen are under an obligation to perform them.

Supernatural associations with Nuban 'hair grooming' do not cease here. In their society 'loose hair' is considered dangerous and people are compelled to bury any hair cuttings or shavings just as they are compelled to dispose of blood resulting from a simple, everyday cut or scratch. If loose hair is accidentally stepped on, it is believed that misfortune may follow. Similarly, if an enemy acquires some of a person's hair, however, he may be able to effect various kinds of magic, to lose him in the forest or otherwise bring him misfortune.

Certain persons of the society are sufficiently 'powerful' themselves to keep the negative effects of witchcraft at bay, the only visible result being the cracking of their fingernails or the loss of hair. Hair is thus the most vulnerable and most easily attacked part of the body in Nuba society. Grooming represents control over this, it is the armament necessary to extend man's own

beyond the world he lives in. It is a cultural act and a manifestation of human nature just as supernatural attack, as mentioned above, is also control and a clear cultural manifestation.

> Hair is and yet not a part of humans and control, physically and supernaturally is a supremely, cultural act.
> (Faris, 1972, p.57).

Just as the supernatural controls hair grooming in Nuba society, it also controls, to a certain degree, the use of colour among both sexes and the scarification of its female members. As has already been mentioned - girls are under sanction not to change their colour - especially along the red/yellow axis. One of the reasons that this is strictly adhered to within the society is because of their strong belief that any unsanctioned deviation from the colour of their patriclan, (or in the case of a new mother, the patriclan of her infant child), will bring about a crippling disease, which particularly attacks the knees. Similarly, any male member of the society who uses a colour to which he is not entitled (under the system of age organisation) would also be seen to be courting this disease.

In the case of scarification, it is believed that if a woman dies without having been scarred, a spirit scarrer will do the job before she enters the after life and will use especially large and painful thorns.

The belief in the existence of powers beyond the forces of nature is a fundamental element of every primitive society. In many of these societies, decoration of the human body is seen as a means of controlling this force from person to person and from generation to generation. Body decoration is therefore a vital component of the social structure of these societies and a necessary patron of status quo maintenance.

Continuity and change are necessary components of every society. Primitive societies, however, typically exhibit more of the former than of the latter. Stability doesn't occur automatically but must be constantly maintained in the face of individual needs that are contrary to traditional patterns. What is needed is a means of encoding traditional norms, transferring them to the population at large and maintaining them for future generations. Body decoration in all the diverse ways discussed or mentioned in this chapter, may be called upon to do this and often does in a highly efficient way.

CHAPTER 2

BODY DECORATION AND AESTHETIC BEHAVIOUR

To date, body decoration as a fundamental contributor to the cultural homeostatsis of primitive societies has been discussed. In these societies, however, the decoration of the human body offers opportunities for the pursuit of beauty as well as having a deep symbolic significance.

The pursuit of 'beauty' is the pursuit of an extremely elusive quality, especially when viewed biologically. There are no universally acceptable standards; beauty is that which satisfies taste, and taste in the words of anthropologist Sumner is

> .....not an independent reality but is relative, local and highly personal. Standards of beauty differ widely and have very little in common. (Liggett, 1974, p.43).

Few people, in their natural unelaborated states, conform to the ideals of beauty as set up for them by their own societies. It follows, therefore, that for those who are of a mind to 'improve' themselves, an important part of becoming beautiful - of becoming attractive - would consist in enhancing and developing those special aspects of themselves, which their own society happens to admire. All peoples, therefore, seem prepared to go to great lengths in pursuit of the purely local ideals of their particular society. Beauty must be pursued at all costs because it confers upon its possessor profound social influence, power to respect.

In this chapter, the role of body decoration in the attainment of consonance with the local aesthetic ideals of many primitive societies, is discussed. In some examples given, the body is decorated for purely aesthetic reasons and devoid of any deep social or religious justifications. In other examples, it will become clear that where body decoration is involved in the social

structure and its upkeep in many primitive societies, it also conforms to the ideas of beauty upheld within them. There are instances, however, where body marks - though elaborately involved with certain social structures - are designed and executed to defy these ideals, e.g. the body marks of slaves and retainers and those which indicate disobedience.

The wearing of lip plates is a very valuable and age old tradition amongst the Surma of Ethiopia (Illus. 13). As has been mentioned earlier, lip plates and similar adornments are sometimes called upon to play a part in the social structure of primitive societies. The taking of lip plates by the female members of the Surma tribe, however, stems not from any great social need, but rather from a personal one - their prime function being to beautify their possessors.

At the age of about twenty, and before they are married, most female members of the society have their lower lips pierced. A very small disk is inserted and is gradually replaced by larger discs over the course of a year. Amongst the Surma the greatest example of feminine beauty is she who holds the largest plate. Members of society who conceive out of wedlock, '...suffer the humiliation of being forbidden to wear a lip plate' (Fisher,1987, p.56) and are hence considered ugly.

Paradoxically, lip plates of the Surma were not always intended to beautify the womenfolk. They were initially introduced to 'make them as repulsive as possible to slave traders'. (Liggett, 1989, p.103). But then the bizarre look of the stretched lip began to attract more and more attention and instead of putting people off, interest was aroused, and then admiration. After that it was but a short time until people began to consider the projecting lip beautiful.

The Aboriginal Australians also decorate themselves for purely aesthetic reasons. When they are not painting their bodies for

serious social and religious purposes, they indulge in the art of body painting to enhance their appearance and for the gratification that accompanies its execution.

A whole family may spend long leisure hours beautifying themselves or each other, painting ornate designs on different parts of the body, designs which have no prescribed form and no symbolic meaning (Illus.14). Longitudinal parallel bands of yellow and red ochre may, for example, extend up the legs, back and abdomen, with transverse lines in white pipe clay and charcoal on the chest, shoulders and on the outer surface of the thighs, connected here and there by lattice patterns and concentric circles. Discussing the significance of the designs, women stress that their designs are aimed at men, that they make their bodies appear fatter and their breasts larger. Men, too, paint to elevate their beauty in the eyes of women.

In addition to painting their bodies for beauty's sake, Aborigines also deliberately flatten the noses of their children by constantly pressing them with their hands or by laying them flat on the ground.

> Australian natives laugh at the sharp noses of Europeans because they are 'tomahawk noses'. (Liggett, 1974, p.43).

Later on they may continue their strenuous efforts by piercing the septum with a stick or bone to help spread the nose sideways and so bring about the squashed look so much desired (Illus.15).

Among the South-eastern Nuba, 'no design or artistic treatment must detract from the presentation of the physical form'. (Liggett, 1974, p.43). The scars of its female members(Illus. 5,6,&7), therefore, though largely instrumental in the social structure, also serve to beautify those who possess them. The scarification serves to embellish the body - reshaping it and adding sensitivity to areas locally considered to be the female erogenous zones: back, buttocks, stomach. It also serves to accentuate the

differences between the sexes - thus generating within male members of the society, a recognition of the women's 'sexual aptitude' - her adequacy for her natural and reproductive role. Similarly the scarification of the male member of many primitive societies serves to reflect his masculinity - his prowess and bravery.

According to Charles Darwin, any artificial device or embellishment, whether clothing, jewellery or cosmetic substance which exaggerates or merely creates the illusion of the natural differences between the sexes, will make women more beautiful in the eyes of men and vice versa.

Nuba women and girls may also adorn their hair and bodies with beads and other trinkets purely for aesthetic reasons. While age organisation dictates the hairstyles and the pigment colours that male members of the Nuba society may or may not be entitled to use, the designs themselves follow aesthetic and not social canons; the sole function of all designs being to complement and enhance the natural male body - rendering it more beautiful in the eyes of society.

The natural symmetry of the body, both its vertical bilateral symmetry and its horizontal arrangement of parts, are the most important variables in the style, form and aesthetics of male personal art. There are five basic design form types for all designs carried out (Table 1, Illus. 16) and these are all focused about all aspects of this natural symmetry and balance.

Following this, the designs may be representational, i.e. of plants or animals (though not in a totemic sense) or they may be non-representational.

In the case of representational designs, the plastic surface of the body may be used in creating the work of art. The shape of the jaw bone or curve of the forehead may form part of the overall design. A shoulder muscle may be the bulge of a tortoise shell;

the rise of a back muscle the rump of a giraffe; the eyes may become the centre of a bird's wing. Sometimes, the whole body may serve anatomically as the animal being represented, the animal shape being made appropriate to the human form. A man may become a giraffe (Illus. 17) or a wasp. Whenever possible the anatomical congruence is followed: thus, an antelope with stripes and the eyes will be represented by stripes over the artist's eyes.

Most of the designs, however, are abstract and give the artist more freedom to emphasize, enhance and beautify various parts of the body. Non-representational designs may emphasize various features, even rearranging the symmetry of the body to enhance large eyes and diminish the nose or alter the shape of the head in a pleasing way.

In Nuba society, the artists are the wearers, except in the case of designs on the back. Any individual of an age set senior to the artist can chastise, lecture and pass judgement on the artist's decorating effects and in many cases, demand its removal if it is inappropriate to display on the human body. There are two main reasons why a person's designs may be inappropriate: firstly, inadequate technique in the creation of a design that is congruent with accepted treatment of the body and, secondly, designs, however excellent in technique, which do not preserve balance and the culturally acceptable asymmetry.

But it isn't often that poor or unsuitable design are produced. Older boys and young men know the expectations in personal art and will attempt to maintain these or occupy themselves with less complicated 'Tōrē' designs (Table 1).

In terms of male hair design - while the decorative style itself is age/grade specific, the haircut itself may subsequently be decorated in order to add to the overall appeal of the decorated male body. To closely cropped hair, beeswax is often added. This results in a type of cake which is then stippled with a comb

or small stick and dusted by shaking on a colour appropriate to the age/grade system. Young men may then attach feathers or bits of coloured ribbons to this to further heighten the attractiveness of the hair style (Illus. 18).

In Nuba society, while the decorative treatment of the male body plays a major part in the social structure, it also serves to glorify the body itself. It does this in a highly effective way and may justly be termed a fine art.

All primitive peoples use body decoration as a means to conform to their particular society's ideas of beauty. Even where body decoration plays a fundamental part in the social structure of these socities it is nevertheless carried out with an aesthetic sensibility that acts to enhance the person's appearance in the eyes of his/her companions. Often, the objective is to make one's self more attractive to the opposite sex, though this is by no means the only motive. Humans are after all social animals and spend their lives finding ways to relate and to make contact with people, to influence them, to impress them, to make themselves attractive to them. They are prepared to go to a great deal of effort and if needs be, through a great deal of suffering to achieve these objectives.

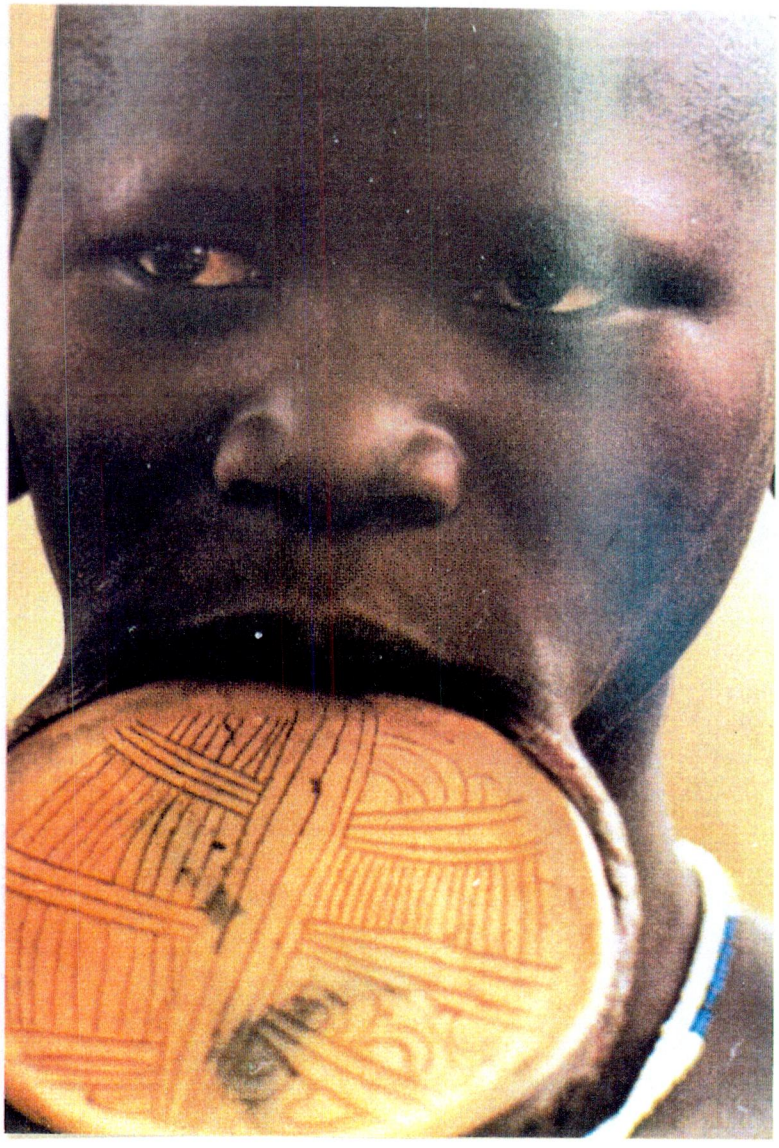


Illustration 13. Lip Plate

Surma Tribe

Illustration 14. Aboriginal Body Painting

Young aborigine boy being painted by older relative purely to enhance his appearance.

Illustration 15. Pierced Nose Septum

Aboriginal Australians.

Piercing the septum helps spread the nose sideways to bring about the 'squashed' look so desired.

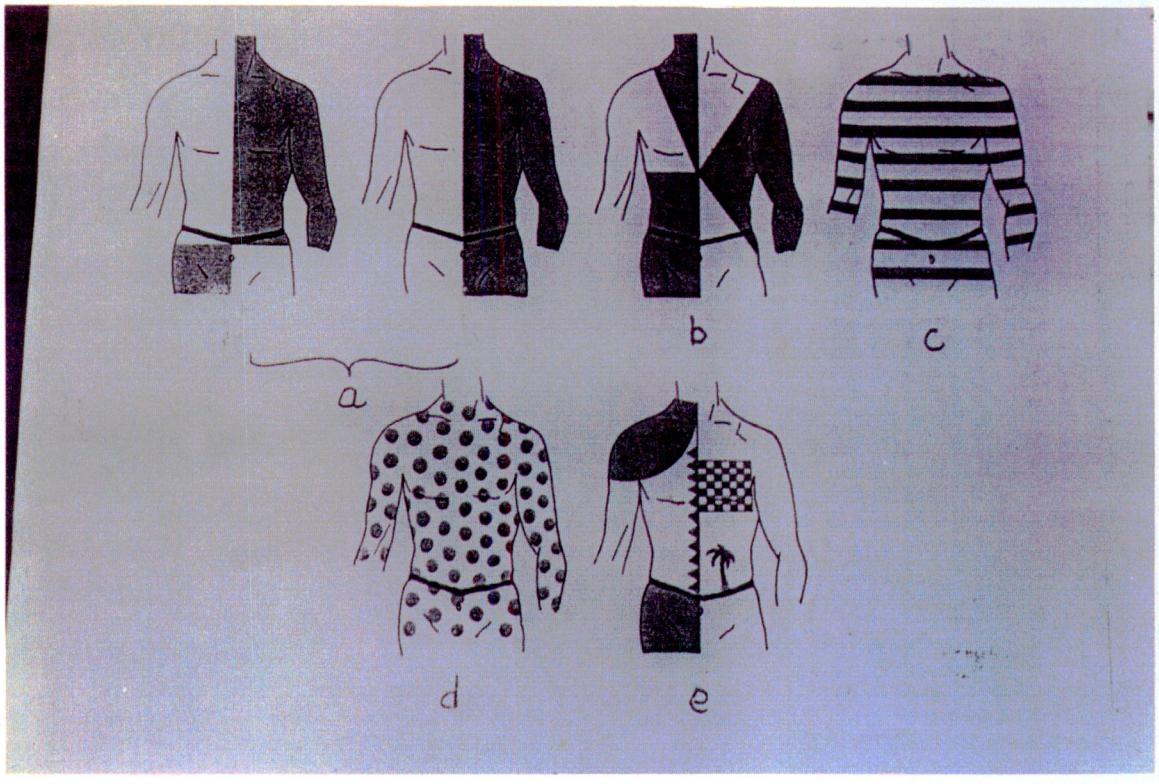


Illustration 16. Basic Design Types

Table 1. Design Form Types

a.	tōrē	Designs orientated about a vertical division along axis of bilateral symmetry.
b.	nitūlan	Designs which radiate from a single point along the axis of bilateral symmetry.
c.	pacōrē	Designs which divide the body (or face) into many parallel sections, vertically, horizontally or diagonally.
d.	tōmā	Uniformly distributed stamped or spotted designs.
e.	kōbera	Non uniform distribution of different individual designs, particularly panels of design.

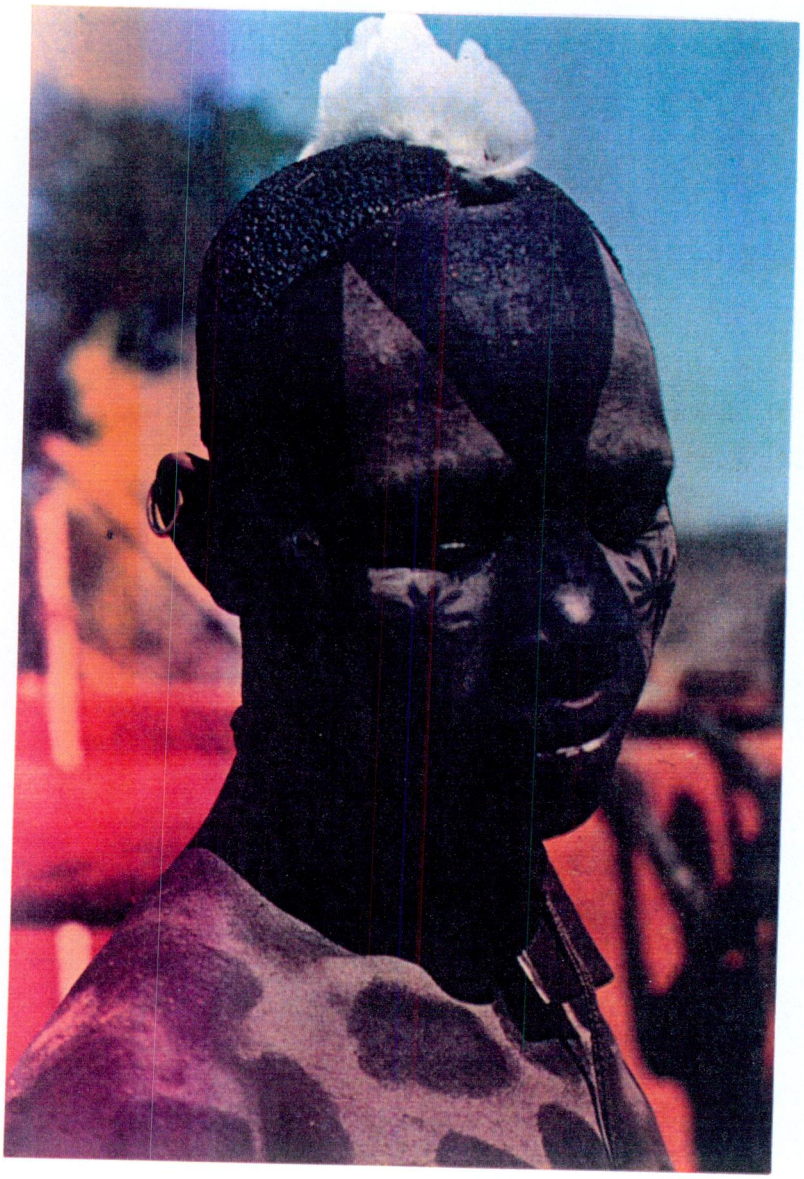


Illustration 17. Giraffe Body Design

Nuba Tribe

The body of a kadundor youth is painted with 'giraffe' body design. The animal morphology is adjusted to correspond to what it might be were it a man.

Illustration18. Decorated Kadūndōr Hairstyle

Nuba Tribe

Kadundor hairstyle, newly waxed, dusted and adorned with feathers.

CHAPTER 3

BODY ELABORATION IN WESTERN SOCIETY

Unlike primitive societies, Western society is characterized by political, administrative, legal and coercive machinery, external to the individual which distributes places, functions and tasks and guarantees social stability within. The decoration of the natural human body is therefore not called upon to perform any serious social function within Western society - its major function being to beautify.

The pursuit of beauty in Western society is dictated not, however, by traditional aesthetic ideals but by the ephemeral phenomenon fashion; the Western body ideal may vary greatly from generation to generation, from decade to decade, and from year to year. To accord with this, Western men and women learn ardently to desire what fashion desires: fat on the buttocks, fat on the breasts, broad shoulders, drooping shoulders, skin the colour of burnt apricots or peaches and cream. In some cases, the body approximates to the natural; in others, it is an entirely unnatural product, outside the grasp of the majority. Whatever the case, as soon as fashion changes, most people try to change with it. They will often go to extreme lengths in order to do so; the bigger the gap between what is aspired to and what is attainable, the greater the problems will be.

The temptations though are often very hard to resist. Westerners live in a chaos of a communications explosion. Commercial messages are hurled at them from all sides, telling them how they should and should not look. In addition, they tell them what they want to hear - that their whole appearance can be transformed if only they buy this product or that, follow this or that cult, theory or regime. Repetition after repetition eventually convinces them that beauty is what the media says it is, and achieving it is simple and straightforward. They are bombarded

with stereotypes and the trouble with these stereotypes is that whilst they may vary superficially they are always underpinned by two seemingly and mandatory fundamentals; that their faces must be beautiful and their bodies must not be fat. In addition, these stereotypes are, with few exceptions, always Caucasians.

In this chapter I will discuss the treatment of the Western body in the pursuit of beauty. As I progress, it will become clear that the 'grotesqueries' of primitive body decoration are matched and even outshone by the lengths to which Westerners go. I will also discuss the body decoration of the Punk generation in Britain in the 1970s in order to uncover the reasons behind their elaborations.

CHANGING THE COLOUR

All over the world people introduce colour to their skins in order to achieve consonance with purely local ideals of beauty. In primitive societies, male and female bodies are frequently glorified by the introduction of colour during painting and tattooing. In Western society, the use of 'make up' is the most common way of introducing colour to the skin for aesthetic purposes. Its use, however, is largely confined to the female section of the population who, from a very early age, are seduced into believing that without the use of paint or powder, they will never be beautiful, successful or loved.

Due to the emphasis placed upon the relationship between 'making-up', and beauty, success and desirability, many women have a psychological dependence on make-up, so much so - that without their mask of rouge, mascara, eyeshadow etc., many of these women feel naked and unsuitable to face the outside world. The ironic thing about contemporary make-up is, however, the fact that, ideally, it must presume naturalness; it has to appear as though a woman is wearing little or no make-up, even when shes wearing lots.

In effect, she is trying to pretend that she is better than she actually is. Such use of make-up avoids the possibility of expressing oneself through colour and design. In western society any excessive use of make-up is considered tasteless and even 'tarty' and the wearer is prey to constant ridicule therein.

Throughout the history of Western cosmetics, much make-up used to impart colour on the skin was extremely corrosive and toxic - indeed many substances which were used to cleanse or beautify the skin were extremely harmful. The 'ceruse' used by Queen Elizabeth 1, for example, to impart her 'ivory glow', contained lead which ate more and more deeply into her skin, bringing about the need for progressively denser and denser applications. In others, the use of ceruse often brought about not only deep surface scarring, but death.

In this century, however, cosmetics have become more and more 'user friendly' due to the introduction of legislation stating that products must always be tested and found safe before sale. The principal ways in which the safety of these products are tested, however, is through their callous introduction into the bodies of harmless and helpless animals. To determine the poisonous action of such products, these animals are force fed, often enormous quantities to cause death in 50% of the animals, in what is known as the LD.50 test, introduced in 1927. The LD.50 represents the single dose necessary to kill 50% of the animals used. A common form of the test is by dosing, using a tube inserted down the animal's throat. Other forms of dosing include injection, forced breathing of the vapour, and application of the substance to the animal's skin. The test is allowed to proceed for 14 days assuming, of course, that death does not intervene. Common signs of a toxicity include unusual vocalisation, tears, diarrhoea, discharge and bleeding from the conjunctiva or mouth, convulsions, discharge from the nostrils.

In order to determine the irritancy levels of cosmetics, a process called 'patching' is employed. This involved applying the cosmetic to be tested to a small area on the bodies of the animals and the monitoring of its reaction. To determine the possibility of eye damage in products likely to reach the eyes, the product is dropped into the eyes of conscious rabbits (Illus. 19). Rabbits are especially employed in this procedure due to their lack of tea duct - thus making the possibility of washing their eyes out impossible. In addition, their heads are restrained so they cannot rub the substances out. in Western society, the exploitation of animals in the cosmetic industry is an everyday occurrence; it is the murder and wrongful injuring of helpless and innocent animals so that selfish Westerners can continue their superficial pursuit of beauty.

In this day and age however, not only is it necessary for women to paint their faces - another part of becoming beautiful - of becoming attractive, involves the possession of an all-over 'healthy', sun-tanned look (for both male and female members of the society). In spite of the widely known dangers of developing cancer of the skin from the effects of the sun's rays, thousands still flock to shadeless beaches for their annual grilling. Lying row upon row in the blazing sun, they endure contorted postures, prickly heat, raw and peeling skin, mosquito bites, all in the pursuit of beauty. Those, who can't make it to the beach often turn to equally dangerous sun beds and sun lamps for the same end.

Ironically, though many Caucasians indulge in this 'ultra violet' treatment, to darken their skin pigment, many 'coloured' Westerners seek to lighten their skins in order to counteract social prejudices and conform to the Western ideal of beauty - that of light skin. One person who had his skin changed from black to white in the interests of beauty is Michael Jackson (Illus.20). In similar attempts at conforming many non-Caucasian Westerners change their Asian, Afro-Caribbean and Oriental noses or eyes to

the more accepted Caucasian type features. Jackson also committed himself to two nose 'bobs' - the only cosmetic surgery he will in fact admit to. He is also thought of as having his cheeks tattooed to give him a permanent rosy and natural look.

In Western society, tattooing as a means of imparting colour on the skin has never been held high in aesthetic esteem. Down through the years, tattooing in the West has been a convenient mode of branding criminals and slaves. It is still common among ex-convicts, Borstal boys and girls, prostitutes and other people 'on the fringe' of society. Tattoos are therefore considered anti-social since they symbolize individual allegiances to ideals outside the ideals of mass democratic society. They are marks of anti-authoritariansim and are reminders that the individuals have refused to conform. In fact, the only type of tattoos which are deemed in any way acceptable are those which, like the tattooing of Michael Jackson's cheeks, are natural looking: the tattooing of rouge, eyeliner, lip colour and even the tattooing of a beauty mark onto the human face fall into this category.

The Punk movement in Britain in the 1970's was a minority group which often used tattoos to express its views towards society. And not only were individual Punks (illus 26) characterised by tattoos, their cox-combs of coloured hair, painted faces, and trappings of leather and chain also made them easily recognisible. The dictionary suggests that 'Punks' are worthless foolish people who are miserable. In reality the may not always have been miserable, but it is true that the message of the Punks was a desperate one - one of no future. And there was little they felt they could do save make their protest against the society which they felt left them dowm - through their clothes, their tattoos, their make-up and their hair.

The colours used were of up most important because the Punks aimed to shock society - not to conform with the western idea of discrete

use of make-up colour. Pallid-white make-up - a frequent choice - was usually intensified by the contrast of heavy mascara and fearsome designs about the eyes. Names, and anti-authoritarian messages or symbols were tattooed, either in menacing plain black lines or in brilliant acidic colours, on necks, shaven skulls, cheekbones. Hair colours were also psychedelic and dazzling. The message of the Punk movement was one of non-conformity, and they purposely went out of their way to frighten, repel, and alienate society at large. Their body decorations represented a blatant deviation from the aesthetic ideals and social values of British society and those of the Western society as a whole.

CHANGING THE TEXTURE

Just as people everywhere change the colour of their skins, they also act to change its texture. In primitive societies people frequently add relief to the natural skin through scarification. In the Western world, however, naturally occurring surface marks, (especially of the face), such as acne scars, wrinkles and fine lines, are considered a disfigurement rather than a figuration and people constantly strive to eliminate them. Many therapeutic methods have been devised in an attempt to deal with the offending facial marks.

One such method is known as 'chemical peeling'. The aim of chemical peeling is the surgical destruction of the top layer of the skin in the hope that the underlying ones will heal more smoothly. With a chemical skinpeel, a solution is made up of phenol (carbolic acid) and other components, is painted onto the skin to be 'resurfaced'. This solution subsequently introduces second degree burns that remove the epidermis and the upper layer of the dermis. The face then swells up and after the swelling goes down, a crust forms on the skin. Once this crust falls off,

the new underlying surface is exposed. 'Chemical peeling will mean sitting up for a month to help the bruising'. (Liggett, 1974, p.124).

'Dermabrasion' does a similar job in precisely the way its name suggests - by abrading the offending epidermis in a kind of surgical 'sandpapering' or planing, using electrically powered instruments not unlike the wire brushes of a household tool. Depth of excavation is critical in dermabrasion as over-zealous penetration can leave very bad scarring and uneven patches of colour.

Another treatment which promises to eliminate or reduce the signs of ageing is a process called 'cell therapy' - the brainchild of Dr. Paul Niehans - patronised only by the famous and necessarily very rich. His idea is this: the replacement cells for millions we lose every second fall off in quality and quantity with age. So why not replace them with cells from unborn animals? Animals have the same biochemical structure as ourselves - sheep are particularly resistant to disease and, if foetus cells are used, they will be sterile and undamaged. So the wombs are cut from these creatures, the embryos chopped while alive and the tissue cells immediately syringed into the patient.

In addition to the above-mentioned processes, 'face lifts' and 'the injection of collagen implants to the skin structure' are also employed to counteract the ravaging effects of time. On a daily basis Westerners are prepared to massage cream after cream in similar efforts to promote smooth, wrinkle-free skin. It seems that throughout the Western world people seem to be prepared to go to extreme lengths to eliminate their 'disfigurements'. The cost in personal physical pain, monetary terms, or to the lives of born or unborn animals seems no obstacle.

CHANGING THE SHAPE

All over the world people change the shape of certain parts of their anatomies in an attempt to conform to local ideals of beauty. Previous chapters have given examples of the ways in which people in primitive societies change the shape of their noses, lips and even the skull in an attempt to accord with the traditional social and aesthetic values. In Western society, there is practically no end to the amount of changes that can be made to the shape of the natural body in the pursuit of beauty.

In everyday life, people's feet, for example, are altered in shape due to conformity to fashion. 'You must suffer if you want to be beautiful... better to lose a toe than a Queen's throne', says a Danish version of Cinderella. (Liggett, 1989, p.156). In Western society, fashion is the glass slipper which decided shape and style - and people's feet, especially those of women, must obediently fit the fashion.

Not surprising then that more than half the adults in the Western world have something wrong with their feet. Women deform their feet not only with poor footwear but also with nylon tights which cause their toes to hump and curl under. But more astonishing, as one chiropodist has pointed out In John and Arline Liggett's The Tyranny of Beauty, 'more than half of those who think that their shoes are the cause of their problems, say they wear them, knowingly, because of fashion'.

In addition to deforming their feet for fashion's sake, many Westerners set about changing the shapes of their bodies through dieting in order to conform to the unnaturally thin body types portrayed by the media as the 'ideal', (Illus. 21). Throughout the western world slimness is ceaselessly, almost monotonously, equated with beauty. In the fantasy world of magazine, film and popular news, the female form, which is identified with love,

wealth, success, sexuality and happiness, is almost always slim.

It is not surprising, therefore, that slimming has become part of international big business. Worldwide organisations such as Weight Watchers offer special diets and evangelical meetings in order to promote the cult of the slender. Diet plans and books on how to lose weight are produced ad nauseam and are snapped up by insatiable searchers of leanness.

In the Western world 'undernourished waifs' - fashion models, actors and actresses - have become role models for millions of young women who struggle to achieve an emaciated appearance at the cost of their health, for the thin ideal is an impossible one, at least for the majority of the population. One of the most talked about illnesses, where young women, and now, young men too, literally starve themselves in an obsessive struggle to achieve what they imagine is the current body ideal. The anorexia condemns him/herself to the torture of self starvation in the futile hope of 'deserving respect' and not being despised for being 'too fat'. For many women, the wasting disease of anorexia is a means of refusing to face the anxieties of womanhood in a society where the traditional, even universal, female ideas of sexuality are debased. The female anorexic physically prevents herself from developing the normal signs of a mature woman.

While some people starve themselves in the interests of beauty, others resort to surgery to deal with their actual or perceived weight problem. Lumps of fatty tissue can be removed from the buttocks, thighs, hips, abdomen, knees, calves, ankles, upper arms and beneath the chin through a process described as 'suction lipectomy', or 'liposuction' but more irreverently known as the 'slurp technique'. In addition, breasts can be reduced and the stomach itself can even be stapled in half to reduce the absorption and intake of food.

One woman, Shirley Rutherford, who once weighed 24 stone, has recently been whittled away to 8 stone (Illus.25), without dieting but with almost everything snipped: thighs, knees, tummy, navel, breasts. 'Even her intestine has been sliced almost away to prevent food lingering there long enough to become fat'. (Liggett, 1989, p.28).

But cosmetic surgery does not stop there; not only can breasts be reduced they can also be enlarged through the introduction of 'silicone' or 'hydroplitic' gels to the breast tissue. Overlarge lips can be altered by making a wedge-shaped incision in them and removing the centre. Hare lips can be corrected, ear lobes are cut down to 'normal' size and jaws make larger or smaller by building up the jawline or removing excess bone. Noses can be straightened, shortened, increased in size, hair can be transplanted using techniques which distribute a significant amount of hair from ageless hair-bearing areas to prematurely bald ones. In fact, the whole of the Western body can be reshaped through surgical intervention:

> Plastic forms are available to hide or reshape the body and there is no anatomical feature which cannot be made more perfect or at least conformist.
> (Pountney Clinic brochure)

One of the few constraints on cosmetic surgery in Western society is that, like make-up, it has to go unnoticed, it has to disengage the body from everything that might look artificial.

In the Western world, body elaboration is imprisoned by the Western phenomenon fashion. Paint and pattern do not celebrate in symbol the physical and social body, nor do they celebrate the sexual body; women cover themselves with make-up, wearing their masks even when their lovers declare a hatred of paint and powder. Husbands who adore their wives breasts often lose them to the cosmetic surgeon. Body decoration in the west demonstrates devotion to fashion.

If a Westerner wants success, money, sex and instant approval, he has to conform to fashion. Nobody will employ them if they are ungroomed, if their age shows with crowsfeet lines or if their bodies are too fat or the wrong tint. To be fashionable in the global village means avoiding as far as possible any unique character that springs from individual variations such as race, colour or ethnic background.

As a result millions of people wear the same skin: young and old are covered with make-up, hardened into a uniform expression. Millions of women have the same shaped breasts. Any deviation from the fashionable ideal is considered a disfigurement and everything is done to help the 'afflicted' individual to conform.

In Western society some of the most unpleasant operations are undertaken in the interests of conformity. Animals are slaughtered and humans submit themselves to extraordinary levels of physical pain in the pursuit of beauty. It is obvious that the 'grotesqueries' involved in the elaboration of the Western body, far outweighs those involved in primitive body elaboration.

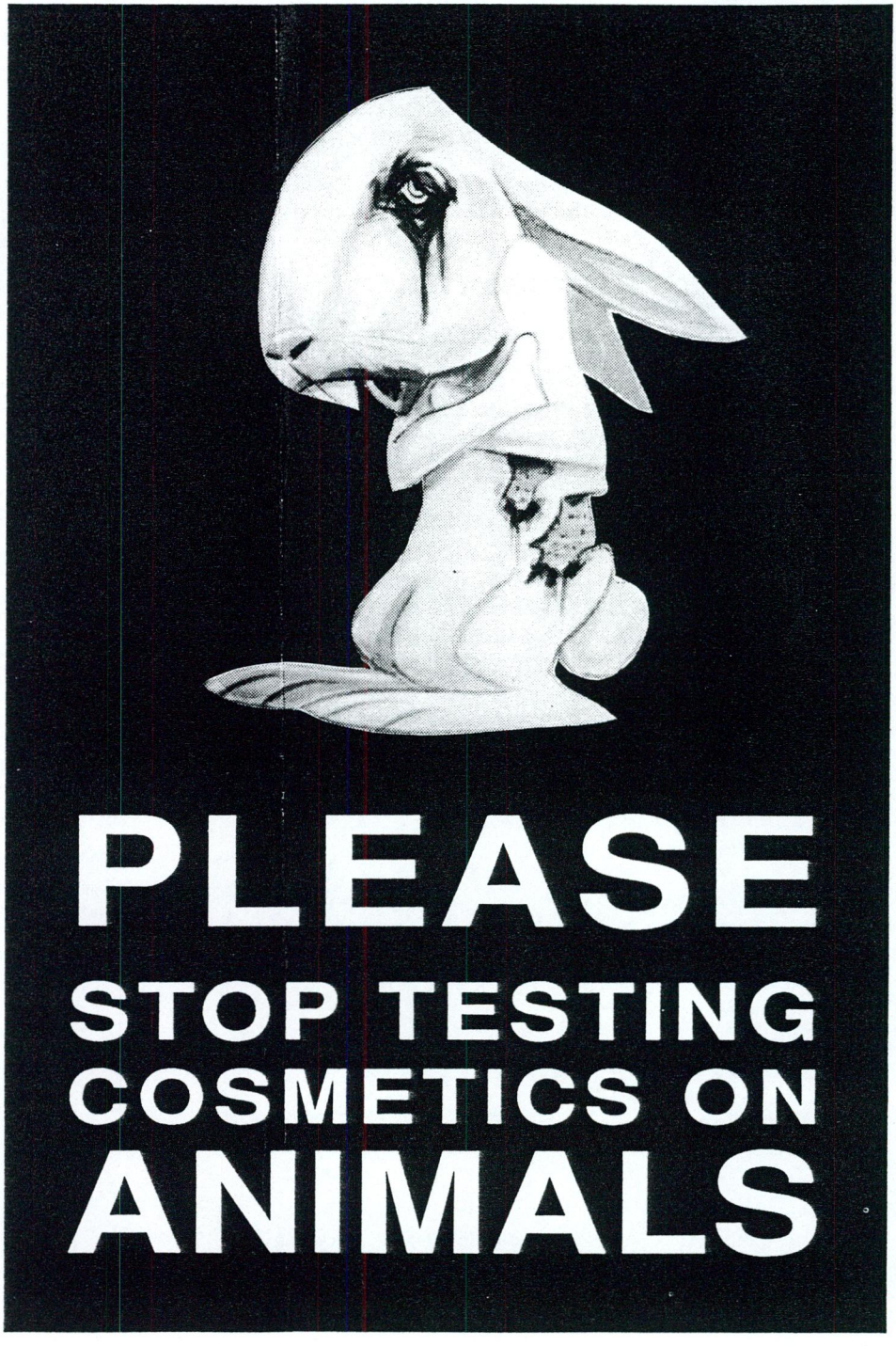


Illustration 19. The exploitation of animals in the cosmetics industry

Illustration 20. Michael Jackson: The Changing Face?

Illustration 21. The Ideal Female Body Shape: 'She' Magazine

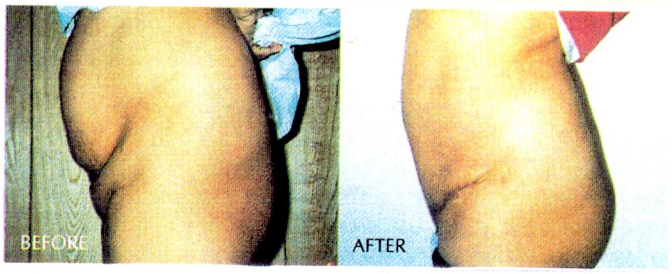


Illustration 22. Liposuction: The Abdomen

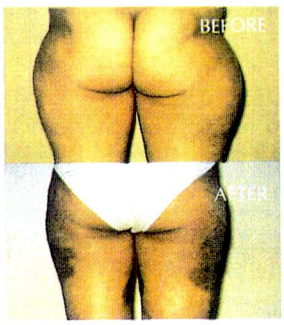


Illustration 23. Liposuction: The Buttocks and Thighs

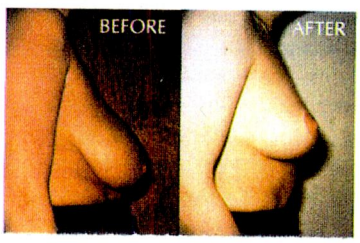


Illustration 24. Breast Reduction: Before and After

Before After

Illustration 25. Shirley Rutherford: The Body Transformed

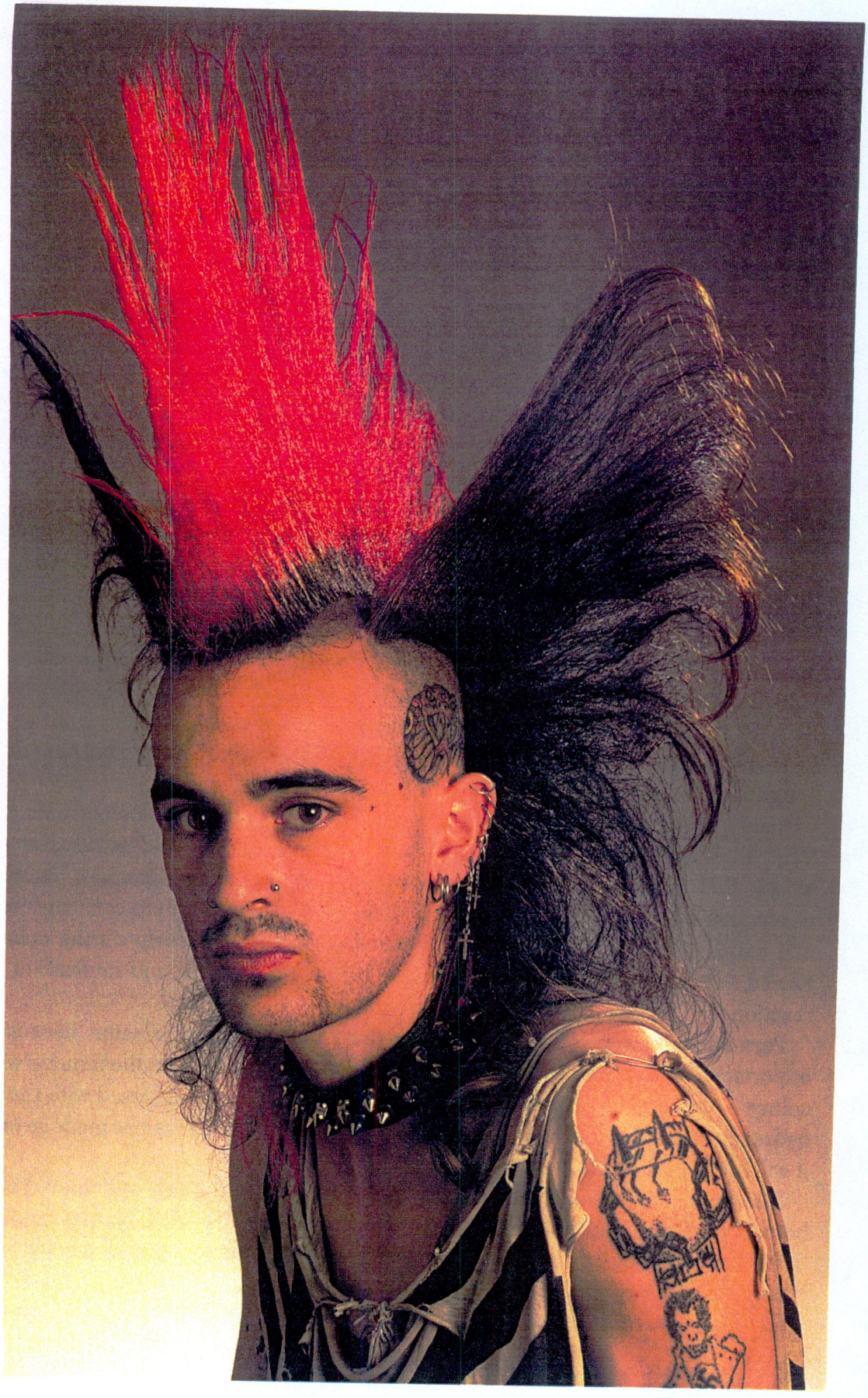


Illustration 26. Punk Expressionism: Britain, 1975

CONCLUSION

Body decoration in primitive societies serves to perform many different functions. In most of these societies, it functions as a major component in the social structure. As has already been pointed out, primitive societies are characterized by the lack of any state authority, by the absence of writing and by the fluctuations of a subsistence economy. This means that there is very little difference between the role of the producers, that in the Western sense of the term there is no division of labour for want of any such market as would regulate it. But even though it is not determined functionally by a political and economic power structure, the situation and standing of individuals are by no means undifferentiated: it is determined by relations of kinship, by the position of heads of family, by sex, age, seniority, achievements etc. This means that individuals are not interchangeable relatively to a codified socio-economic system; it is rather this system conforms to the social and family constellations, founded upon the irreplaceable identity of each of the members. In most primitive societies, the flesh of the individual is marked (in either a transient or permanent manner) according to criteria of identity, which may vary from one society to another. The individual is marked according to the position he holds in the social hierarchy, in the age scale, in the distribution of sexes and so on. The body mark or decoration, therefore, acts as a social insignia, differentiating the situation and standing of one person from that of another in the same society. It also serves to symbolize the social entitlements or indeed prohibitions that accompany the person's position in the social structure. It does this faithfully from generation to generation.

In addition, in many primitive societies body decoration is used as

a means of controlling religious forces which are traditionally considered a threat to people in both this life and the next. In this way, body decoration encodes religious beliefs and disseminates them from person to person within the society.

While body decoration plays a major part in the social structure of many primitive societies, it also greatly aids the maintenance of these social structures. Tribes people seem to accept body decoration for what it is: a tradition handed down by their ancestors that is an elemental part of their lives. They feel no great need to elaborate on it or to question it - they value it as it is. The tradition, therefore, remains largely unchanged from generation to generation and is a major patron of status quo maintenance.

In all primitive societies, the decoration of the human body serves to beautify it in the eyes of society. Even in cases where the particular body mark/decoration functions in the social structure and its upkeep, it it nevertheless usually carried out with the intention of beautifying its possessor. In this way body decoration makies a contribution to the mental well being because in the words of Leo Tolstoy in Childhood:

> Nothing has so marked an influence on the direction of a man's mind as his appearance, and not his appearance itself so much as his conviction that it is attractive or unattractive.

In situations where the artists are the wearers (i.e. where one paints one's own body, styles one's own hair etc.) the mental well-being of the artist is further enhanced, as the growing field of art therapy indicates an active involvement with art lessens life's anxieties.

While body decoration in primitive societies of often the major outlet for artistic expression, it is nowhere an untutored

outpouring of emotion on behalf of the artist. The society of which the artist is a part always has traditional aesthetic standards and the artist strives to meet these in his work.

The fact that primitive body decoration adheres to traditional aesthetic ideals and helps maintain the status quo is contrary to many Western conceptions about the art. It certainly proves that the 'supposed similarity' between the artwork of children and psychotics and the artwork of primitive people is totally spurious. While there may be slight visual similarities, the body decorations of primitive societies is nowhere the product of childish, untutored, disturbed or psychologically deranged minds. It is the product of a people whose cosmologies are, in their own way, just as advanced and as elaborate as those of Westerners.

The fact that body decoration in primitive societies follows social and aesthetic canons also is contrary to the Western conception that the art form is similar to the artwork of Western societies stereotypical modern artists. For most Westerners, artists are first and foremost innovators - bohemians and visionaries who would rather ignore or renovate their social milieu than produce works that support the status quo. It follows, therefore, that because our art often seems anti-establishmentarian, we cannot assume that it is thus everywhere.

Upon looking at some of the many ways in which Westerners elaborate their bodies, it becomes clear that the extreme lengths to which they often go often outweigh the lengths to which primitive people go. For Westerners to scorn and ridicule the self decorative practices of primitive man and to consider them 'vulgar' and 'barbaric' would be to ignore the practices of self decoration that are an elemental part of life in their society; for not only do Westerners mutilate their own bodies in the pursuit of beauty they also experiment with the lives of innocent and helpless animals.

On examining the self decorative work of the Punk Movement, it

becomes obvious that their body marks were ones of non-conformity, anti-establishment, anti-nature, anti-royalty - their body marks were meant to shock. Their decorations did not represent the aesthetic ideals of the democratic Western society, nor were they a major patron of the structural status quo of Western society. Their motives quite obviously oppose those of primitive man. It seems that only similarity between the body elaborations of the Punk Movement and those of the members of primitive society lies in their common use of bright colours. Even at that, the colours used by members of the Punk Movement were psychedelic, acidic and dazzling whereas the colours used in primitive societies are always far more muted.

Body decoration in primitive society is a multifunctional phenomenon. It is an entire language in which social and aesthetic values are expressed by colourful designs, intricate tattoos and hairstyles etc. By transforming the natural body into a cultural body, members of primitive societies subordinate themselves to the common social values of their particular society and may even become a kind of model of society, one which communicates customs and role relationships from individual to individual.

The self decorative practices of members of primitive society is more than just 'decoration for decoration's sake', it is in fact 'decoration for beauty's sake'. The body decorations of primitive man are not just a bland conformity to fashion. This is something which should be taken into serious consideration by Western industrialized society as they set about destroying the art traditions of their primitive counterparts.

Perhaps westerners can even learn from them; in a world becoming grey with fog ,cement and comformity, an adventurous approach to their bodies may provide them with a welcome sense of personal freedom, of creative impulse. For example, although cosmetics are dominated by fashion, they may provide the western woman with a

chance to reveal her inner feelings. Westerners should come to terms with their bodies using them for genuine aesthetic purposes in the same way that the Aborigines and the Nuba do.

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