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NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

FINE ART PRINT

BODY MODIFICATION

by

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SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF HISTORY OF ART AND DESIGN
AND COMPLEMENTARY STUDIES

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

BA FINE ART

1997

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank both Gerry Walker and Kevin McCarthy for their much appreciated help and assistance throughout the writing of this thesis.



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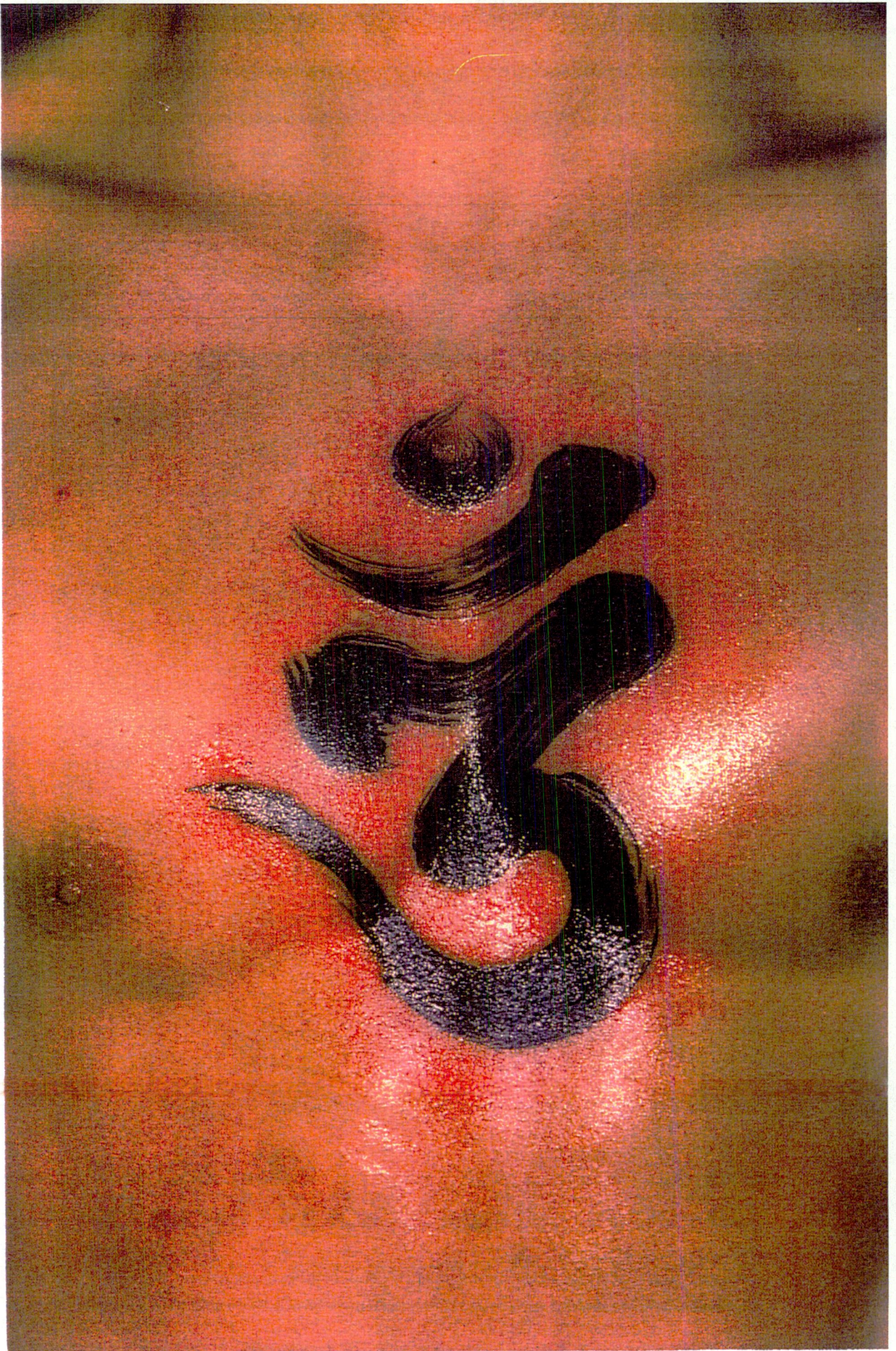


PLATE 1 San Francisco, Tattoo by Fred Corbin



INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I shall attempt to examine the changing role of various methods of permanent body modification. In order to understand the logic behind such modifications, it is necessary to analyse their use among primitive cultures, where modifying the body has been a significant part of their tradition.

I have restricted my focus to four methods of modification:

- tattooing;
- piercing;
- scarification;
- and cosmetic surgery.

Such modifications attract a lot of critical opinion. I shall attempt to explain their relevance within primitive cultures and their consequent necessary interpretation into modern society.

While cosmetic surgery is a relatively new form of body modification, tattooing, piercing and scarification are traditional forms of body art. However, I do not intend to discuss their relevance in terms of aesthetic value. Rather, my priority will be to examine the reasoning behind these body manipulations.

Why do people wish to change their appearance ?

Is it a natural instinct; is the human race genetically programmed to want to change their bodies ?

Is it a rejection of self or a form of adornment ?



Every culture throughout history has customised and altered the natural state of the body. Until 1928, Chinese women had their feet bound in order to create the desired golden lotus feet which were three inches long. Such binding began when the girl was about five years of age, with much ritual and ceremony accompanying the procedure. A Chinese woman could not be considered beautiful unless she was crippled in this way to fit the ideal.

Head binding was practiced in ancient Egypt and also amongst the wealthy in ancient Greece and Rome. American Indians tied boards to the heads of babies to improve the shape of the cranium, and in Central Africa the Mangbettu women had their heads bound tightly at infancy with giraffe hide in order to create a cone shape.

Corsetry, make-up, circumcision, body-painting, hairdying, tooth-filing, neck stretching, body-building and dieting. In every society, people go to great lengths to change their physical appearance. Whether the changes are temporary or permanent, painful or not, the basic concept remains the same.

It is easy for us to look with a disapproving eye upon the practice of foot binding, pointing out the dangers and the cruelty involved in the tradition. However, in theory, it could be argued that it is not far off the idea of dieting, which too can carry serious risks. The Chinese ideal of beauty was to have small feet. The western ideal of beauty is to be slim.

Although the search for beauty and conformity are major factors behind the practices of modifying the body, there are several further underlying reasons which I intend to explore.

There are apparent contradictions within each procedure:-

- Body modification as a form of initiation and belonging within a tribe or main stream group and modification as a declaration of separation from any such group.



- Body modification as a means of controlling the body or as a rejection of that control.
- Body modification as a form of personal expression or as a universal symbol.

I have taken each method of modification separately, discussing the origins of, uses of, reasons behind, and development of each. Despite the differences between each method, I am sure that the similarities will become apparent.





PLATE 2 New Zealand, Maori Tattoo





PLATE 3 Egyptian female figure





PLATE 4 Egyptian Faience bowl - representation of a female musician marked with the Symbol of Bes on her thigh



Chapter 1

TATTOOING

Tattoos have been used as a method of ornamentation and symbolism throughout the ages. A tattoo is 'permanent marks or designs made on the body by the introduction of pigment through ruptures in the skin'. The word tattoo was introduced to the English language by the explorer Thomas Cook after his observation of the Moko in New Zealand in the 1730's. The word is a variation of tattow, tatau and tathaw which are derived from the Polynesian word for knocking or sticking.

The earliest known examples of tattooing date back as far as 4000 BC. Ancient Egyptian mummies, statuettes and other works of art have been discovered with tattoos which earlier Egyptologists, due to social attitudes towards tattooing, ignored as an important part of their culture. They appear to have been exclusively confined to women, in particular singers and dancers who were marked with the symbol of their divine protector Bes.

The methods of tattooing throughout the ages are varied. The Polynesian Moko is made by carving a low relief design into the skin with a chisel driven by a mallet and then rubbing pigment into the cuts. The Japanese 'irezumi' was created by the use of needles fastened to sticks, which through rapid jabs injected the pigments into the skin. The word irezumi translated means to insert (ire) pigment (zumi). Where the European tattooists pricked the skin with needles and then introduced the pigment manually, another method which they used involved placing gunpowder on the area where the image was to be traced, and then exploding it. Modern tattooing has developed from a combination of the various primitive methods. Today the electronic tattoo machine has shortened the procedure and also allows for any type design to be copied.

The reasons for getting a tattoo as well as the meanings behind them throughout the ages are a lot more complex however, depending on the social structure of the community involved. In primitive cultures with a tattooing tradition, such marks were used to indicate many different things. They were used to establish difference within tribes in relation to issues of kinship, age, sex, position to the heads of the tribe, achievements and seniority.



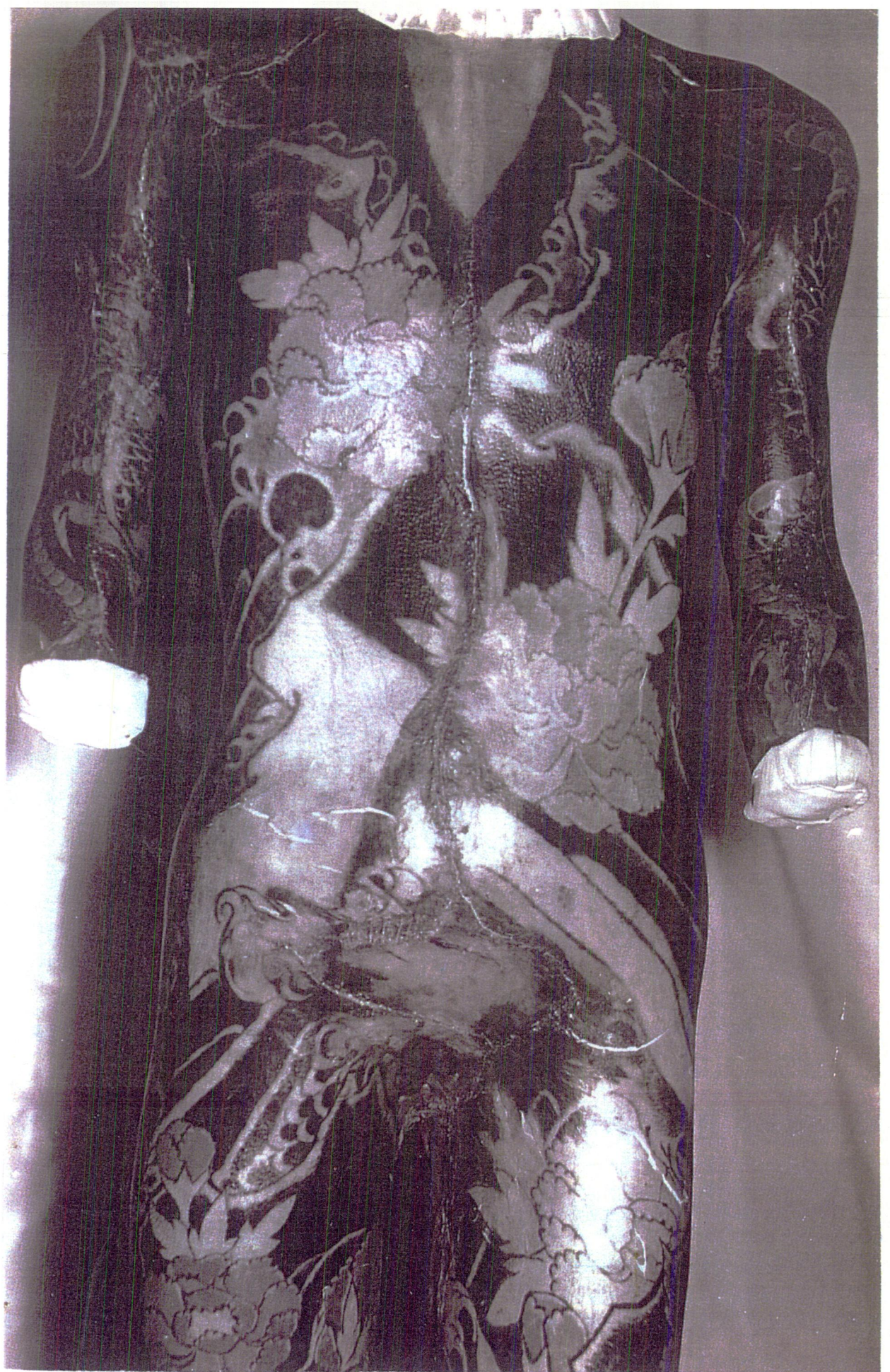


PLATE 5 Japanese skin, removed and mounted





PLATE 6 Japanese tattoo



This seems to be directly linked to the lack of economic difference between the members of the tribe, and so the tattoo became a form of social insignia. Tattoos were used also to achieve a group identity, differentiating themselves from all other tribes while at the same time creating a primitive social structure within the tribe. In Hawaii, the people wore a particular mark according to the district in which they lived, or according to which chief was their ruler. On the death of their chief they would get another tattoo to mark their grief and respect for the deceased. On the island of Bellona the more tattoos that a man had or was allowed to have, the more respect he could command and the higher the rank he could hold. The ritual of tattooing was carried out by a professional artist and his assistants who worked to the beat of music. The designs used signified social status, so his position in the community dictated the style of his tattoos. Primitive Japanese irezumi indicated differences of rank. By the 17th and 18th centuries it had become purely ornamental, but due to the intricate designs, the time that it took and the expense involved it also became a symbol of wealth. Abipoine girls from Paraguay also indicated their rank through their tattooed faces, the more markings they wore indicating their noble birth.

In Polynesian tattooing, the Maori tribes used the Moko as a symbol of rank as well as group identity. No two Moko were the same; changes in their status and role in the community were reflected in their intricate designs. The accumulation of such markings amounted to a biographical account of the subject. A man unmarked was regarded as an incomplete person and called papalea, meaning plainface. The designs they wore on their faces were so highly valued that during battles, the heads of the dead warriors would be removed and preserved - as a sign of respect and appreciation, as well as a type of trophy. On signing deeds of land sales to Europeans they drew their facial patterns instead of their names. The trade of Maori heads became very popular amongst the Europeans in the 18th century.

The Maoris, as with other cultures, used tattoo art as a form of beautification of the body. The women used to tattoo their chins in order to hide the signs of old age. Untattooed faces to them were considered ugly. The Japanese, for whom the naked body is not considered to be an object of beauty or desire, use the tattoo as a form of clothing, transforming the naked body into a fully dressed masterpiece. Tattooing in Japan is





PLATE 7 New Zealand, Maori facial tattoo, 1900





PLATE 8 New Zealand, Maori facial tattoo, 1900





PLATE 9 Newar tattoo - hand done



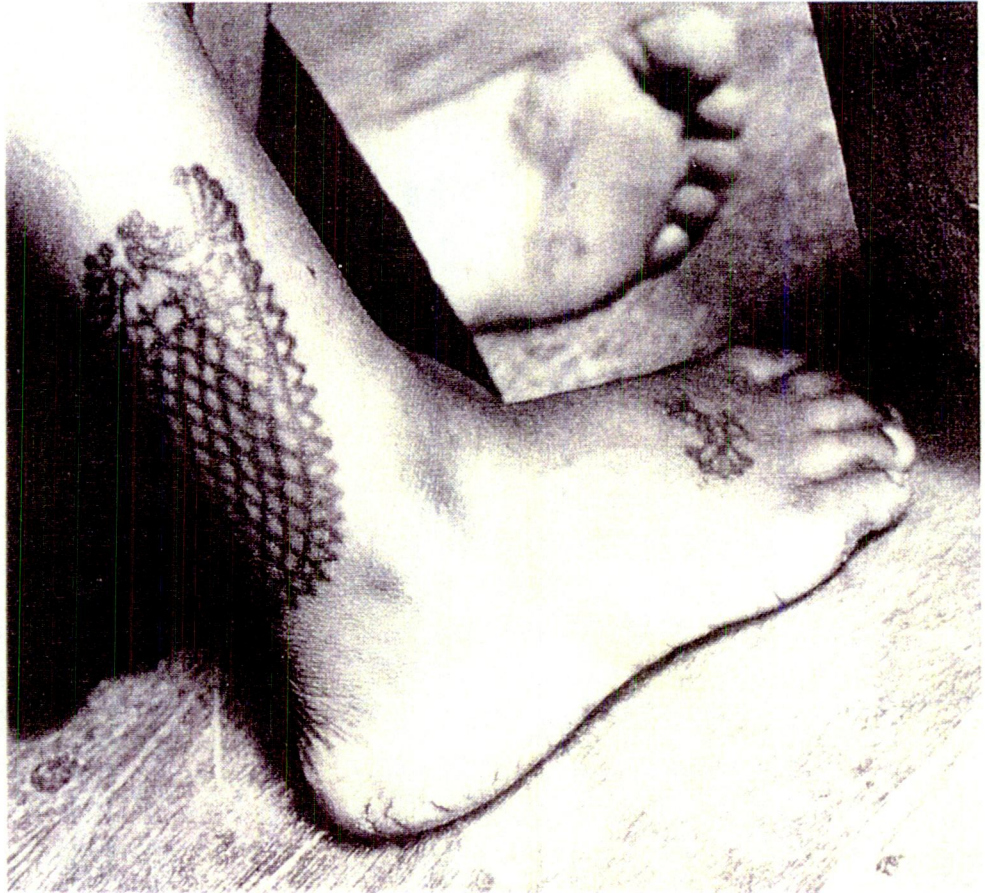
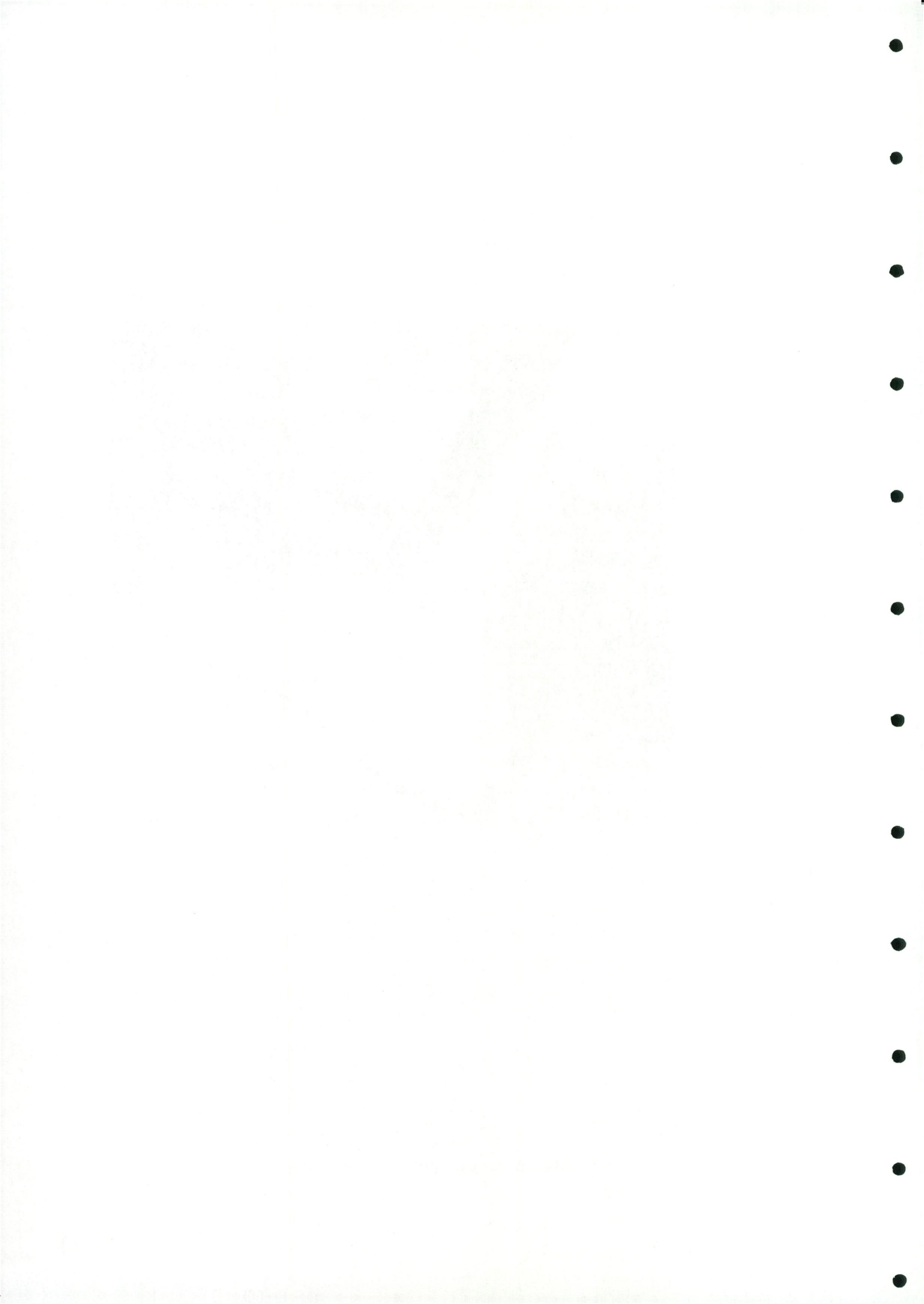


PLATE 10 Newar tattoo - machine done



directly associated with sexual arousal. Erotic designs are often tattooed on the erogenous zones; genital tattooing is very popular, as is the inner thigh and breasts for women. Most Japanese prostitutes today have very provocative tattoos to entice their customers. The tattooing of erotic designs in white is also very popular so that the designs can only be seen when the skin becomes flushed.

In Newar, tattoos which are always visible reveal to others the wearer's social position. Only people of low status wear tattoos but they signify self pride and love. They are a form of beautification in the same way as wearing jewellery is for the upper classes. More importantly however to the people of Newar is the idea that through the pain of the tattoo process and the beauty of the tattoos, usually images of the gods and goddesses, they will be able to move more swiftly after death to the next life. All their tattoos have a religious meaning and so are spiritually beautiful.

"It is beautiful and it is necessary to have a wound in this life because it will be good for the next life. Also tattoos will not fade and it is said that when one dies who has been tattooed, that person can sell their tattoos in the heavens". (Rubins, 1988, pg 139).

In Gujarat in India, girls of seven years old were tattooed to uphold the tradition of beauty. Their belief in the value of tattoos for safe passage to the after life also motivates their use of the medium as well as the fear of losing their identity in heaven.

"because the marks migrate to heaven with the soul" (Rubins, 1988, Pg 151)

The introduction of Christianity in Europe was responsible for the decline of tattoo art in the middle ages. Pope Hadrian I banned the practice in 787 AD, based on the ideology that man as created by God in his own image is sacred and should not be altered in any way.

"You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh on account of the dead, or tattoo any marks upon you" (Leviticus 19:28).





PLATE 11 Gujarat tattoo 1983



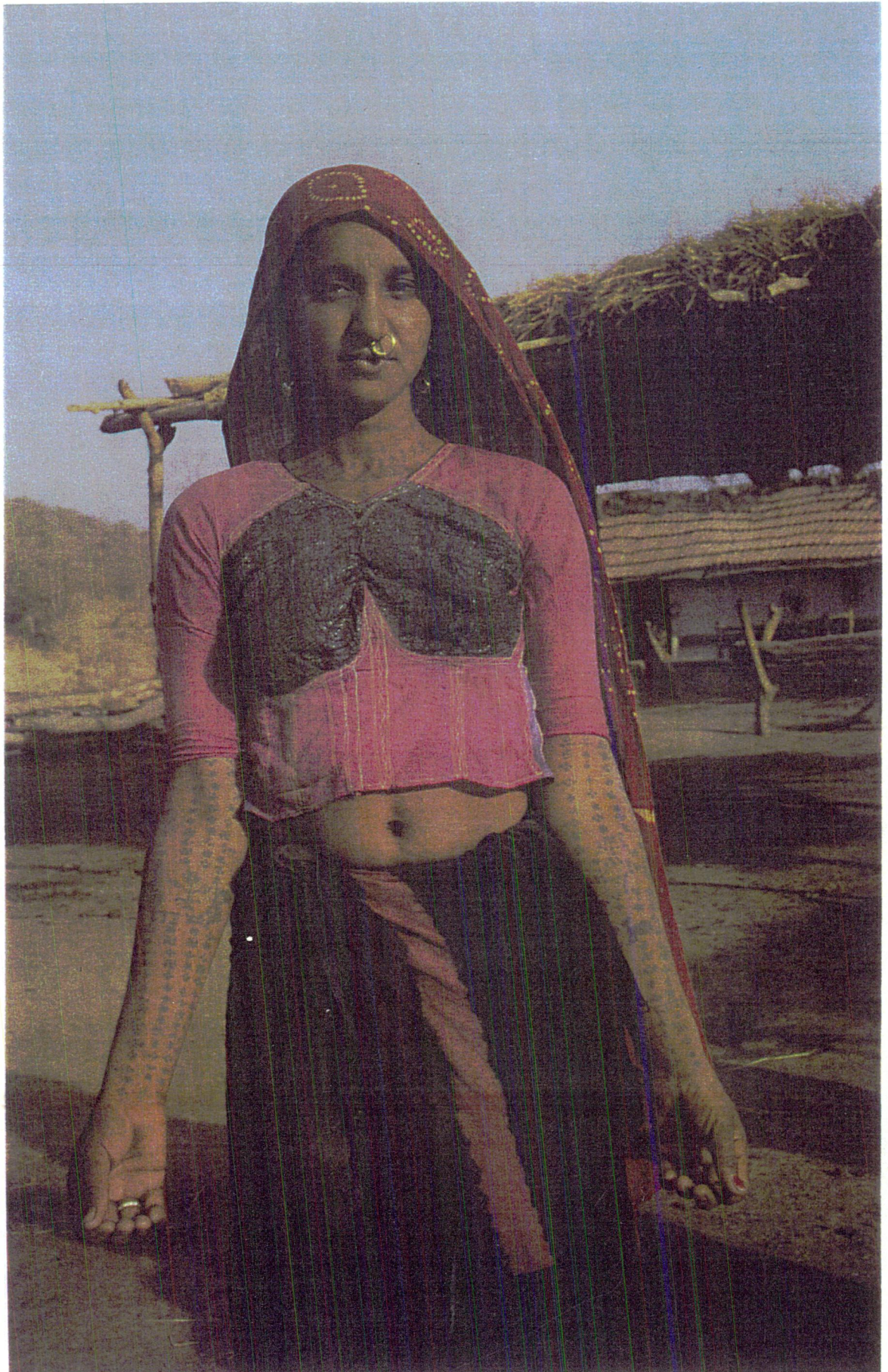


PLATE 12 Gujarat tattoo 1984



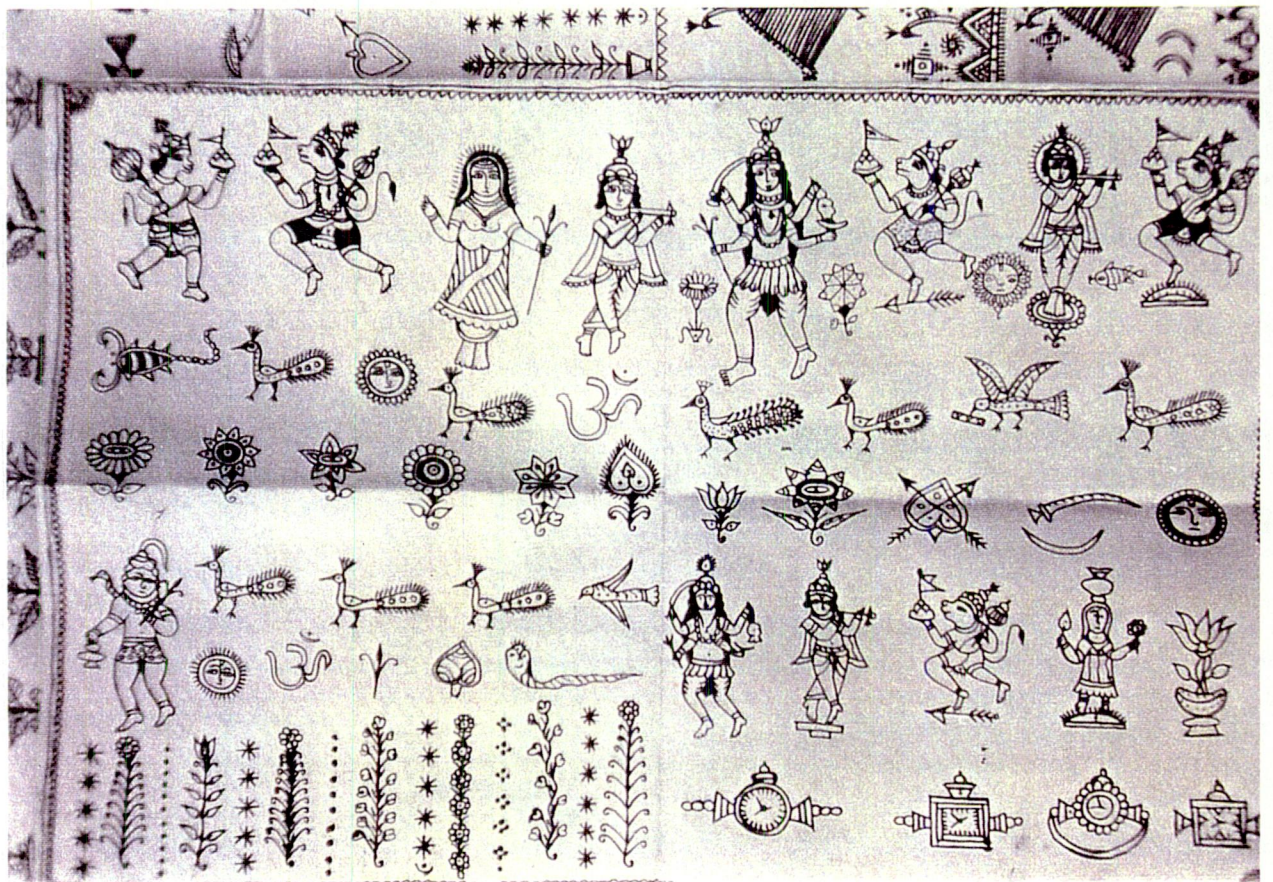


PLATE 13 Gujarat tattoo design sheet bearing symbols relevant to the Hindu religion



Primitive cultures believed in the spirits and magic and their use of tattoos had supernatural and religious origins. It marked their faith in and respect for their gods. A perfect example of religious symbolism can be seen amongst the Chicanos in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California. The Chicano's use of Christian imagery is extensive, with tattoos depicting various scenes from the birth, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, the Madonna, the Angels and praying hands. Tattoos are seen as a symbol of devotion and loyalty not only to their religion but to their community. Christian symbolism in tattooing dates back to 496 AD in the villages surrounding Jerusalem and upper Egypt.

"I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus" (Galatians 6:17)

The Catholic church's rejection of such devotion seems almost contradictory. In fact, it was the prevailing social opinion which considered tattoos as uncivilised or for the lower classes that led the Christian western world in general to reject its strength of meaning.

One of the main reasons for this stream of thought amongst civilised societies is in the use that tattoos have had during battles. The Maoris used their facial tattoos as one of their main weapons to terrorise the enemy by appearing to be completely barbaric, fearless and possessing a high pain threshold. The Celts and the Britons were also considered to be 'fearsome to behold on the field of battle'. The association of tattooing with savage behaviour was one of the main reasons why civilised society rejected it as part of their culture. But it is also the reason why subcultures within the mainstream have adopted it. Urban gangs today use it as an intimidation mechanism to incite fear amongst other gangs and in society in general.

Western society has for so long considered tattooing as deviant and a vice for criminals, sailors, drug abusers and the lower classes, that it is now being used as a weapon against them. The stigma attached to tattooing is now as powerful and as tribal as it was amongst primitive cultures.

The punk movement which emerged in the 1970s was of paramount importance to the revival of the tattooing tradition.

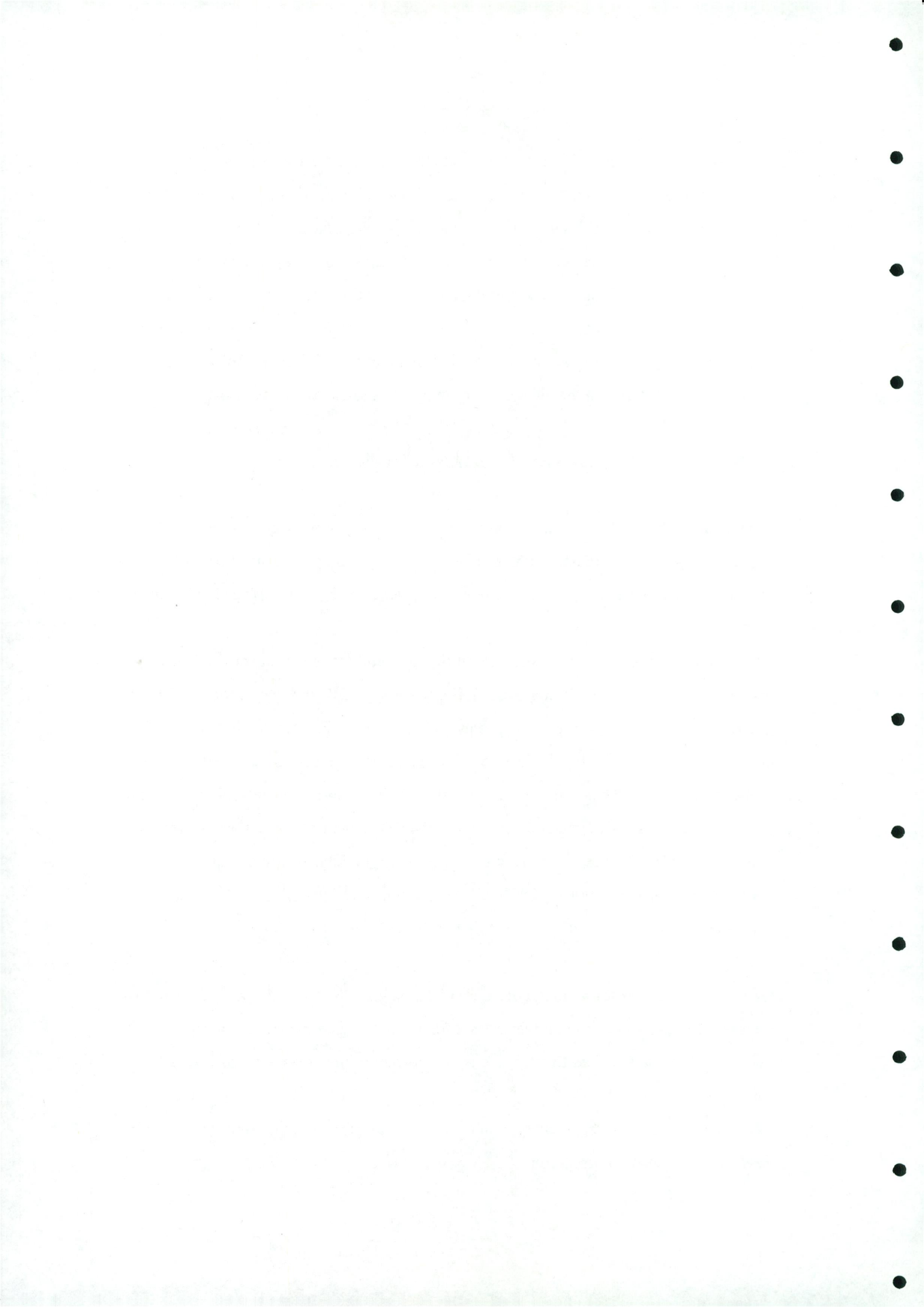




PLATE 14 New Mexico, Chicano Tattoo 1985



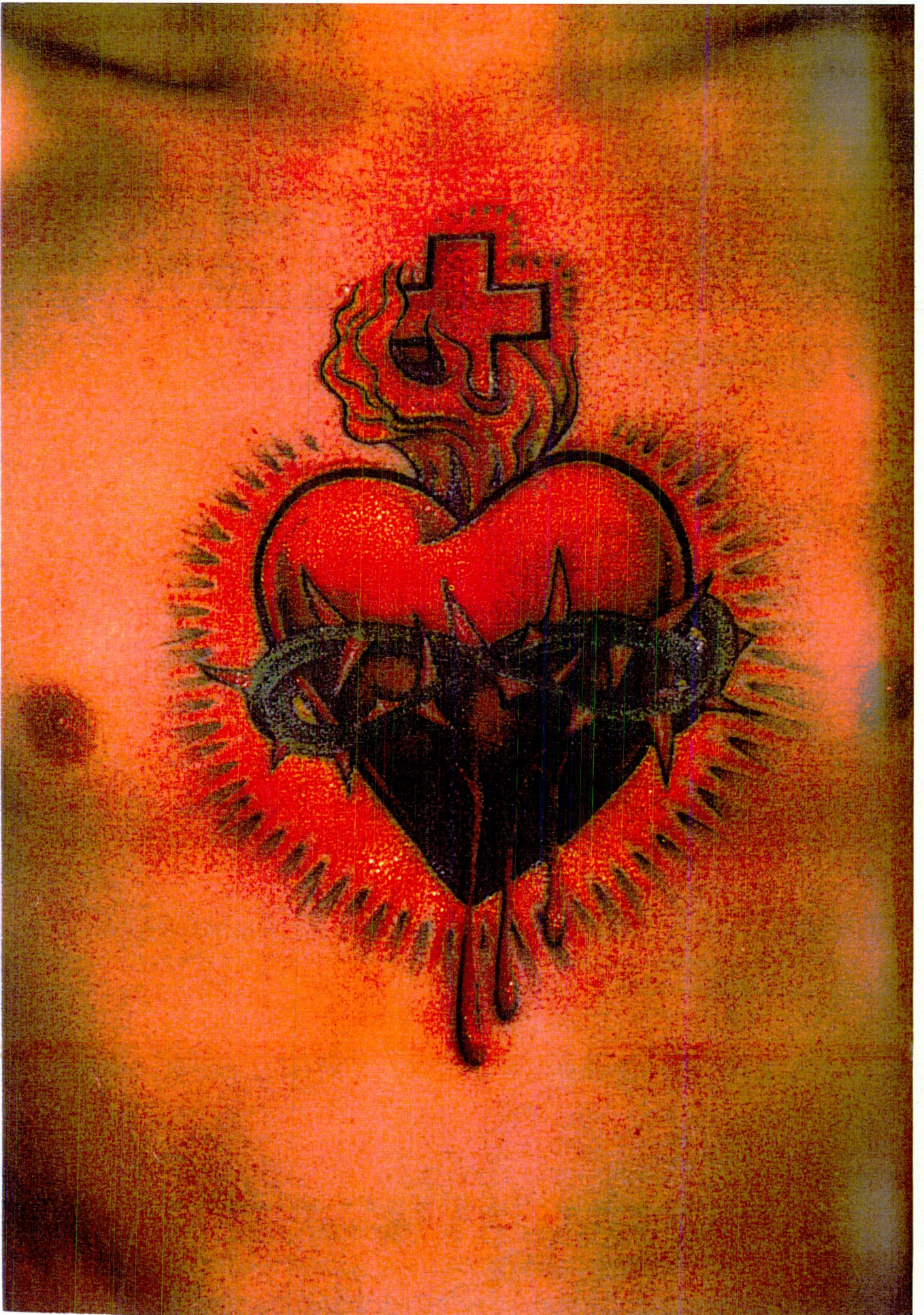


PLATE 15 San Francisco, Sacred Heart tattoo by Fred Corbin



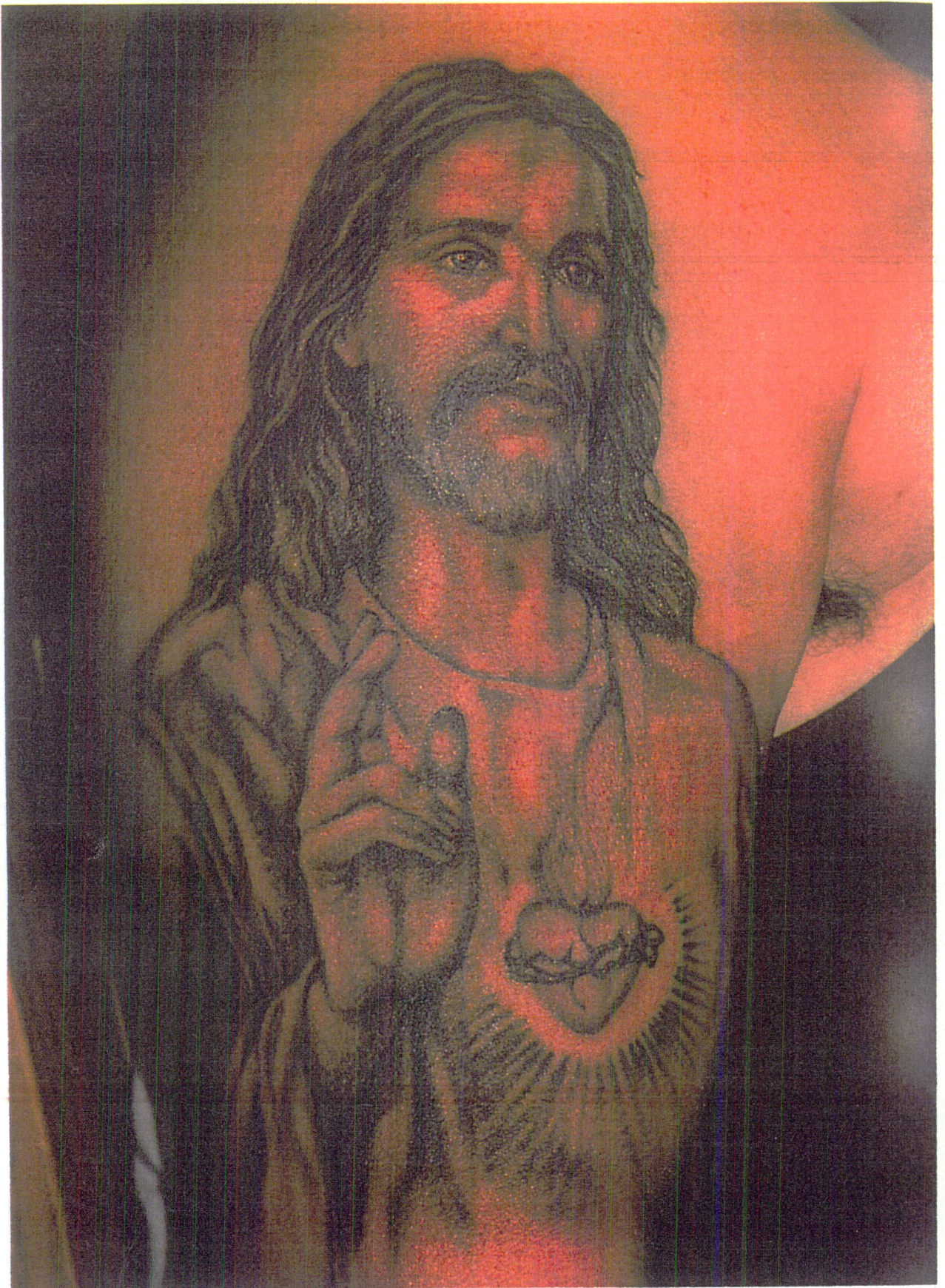


PLATE 16 New Mexico, Chicano Tattoo



"Punk is now being celebrated as a pivotal 'cultural movement' that has influenced contemporary music, fashion, design, literature, film and western aesthetic trends overall." (Wojcik, 1995, pg 5).

Punk culture still exists in varying forms today. Their belief in the futurelessness of their lives and their attitude of anarchism and nihilism was expressed most forcibly in their hair-styles, clothes, and tattoos.

"Punks displayed their disaffiliation and their subculture identity through such adornments, which was for them an accessible and direct channel of communication." (Wojcik, 1995, pg 11).

Their rejection of society's constraints made the punk culture almost self sufficient. They developed all the skills necessary to create works of art bearing symbols relevant to them on their clothes, with their hairstyles and with their tattoos.

"As they became trained in the art of tattooing punk tattoos became more sophisticated with the designs more complex and diversified" (Wojcik, 1995, pg 78).

They also borrowed imagery from the tribal tattoos of Borneo, Micronesia, and Polynesia. The images frequently used in punk tattooing were those of skulls, spiders, snakes, crosses and figures of death as well as political slogans and song lyrics.

Although tattooing can be used as a statement of individualism and separation from the mainstream it can also be an attempt to join or create a community or family within an urban environment that lacks family values and community spirit. The tattoos that they wear become a symbol of unity. This utilises the supposedly barbaric element of old tribal cultures to form new tribalism.

"Urbanised youths describe themselves increasingly through the grammar of body alterations, communicating to the rest of society through their tattoos, piercings,



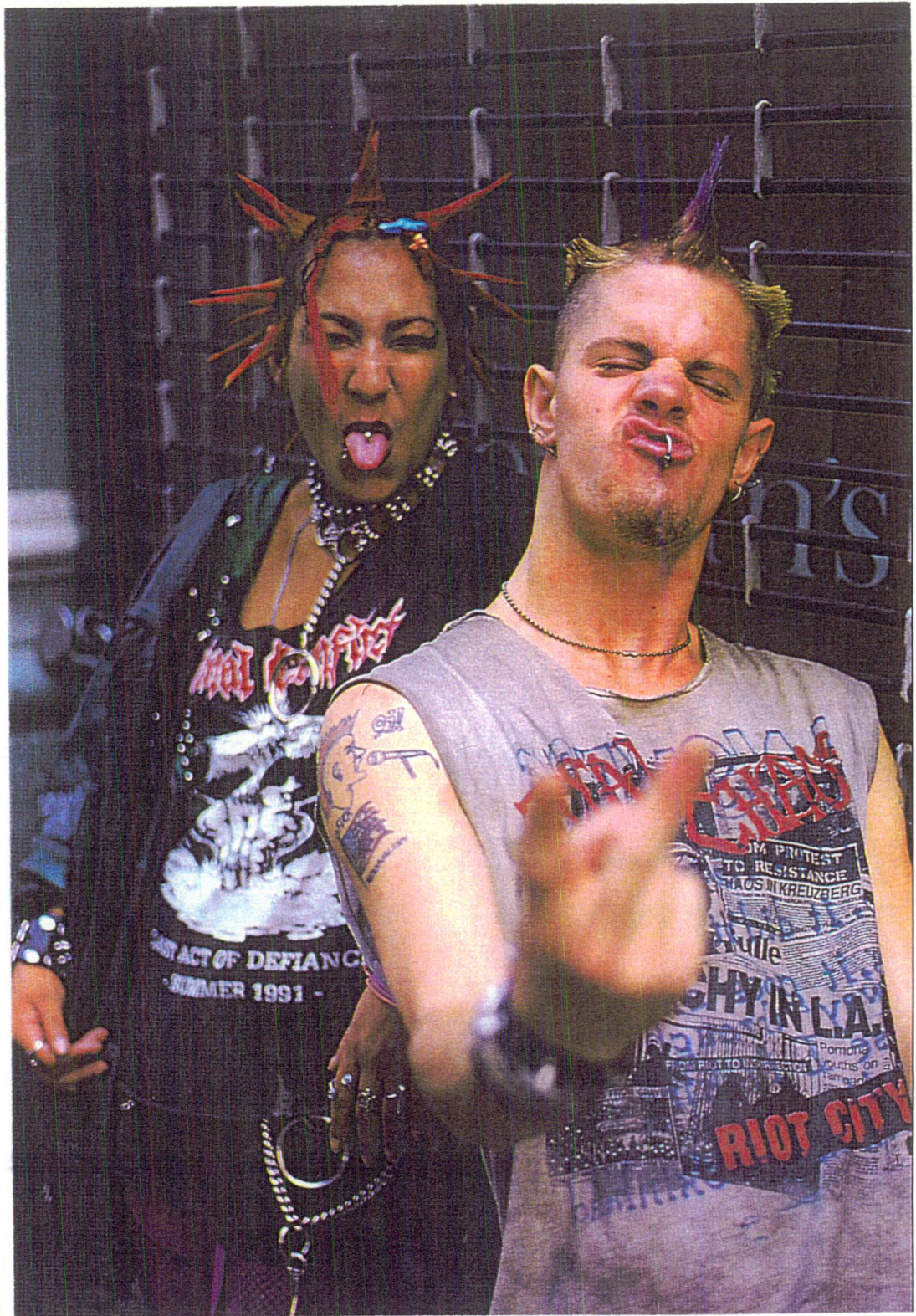


PLATE 17 New York, street punks



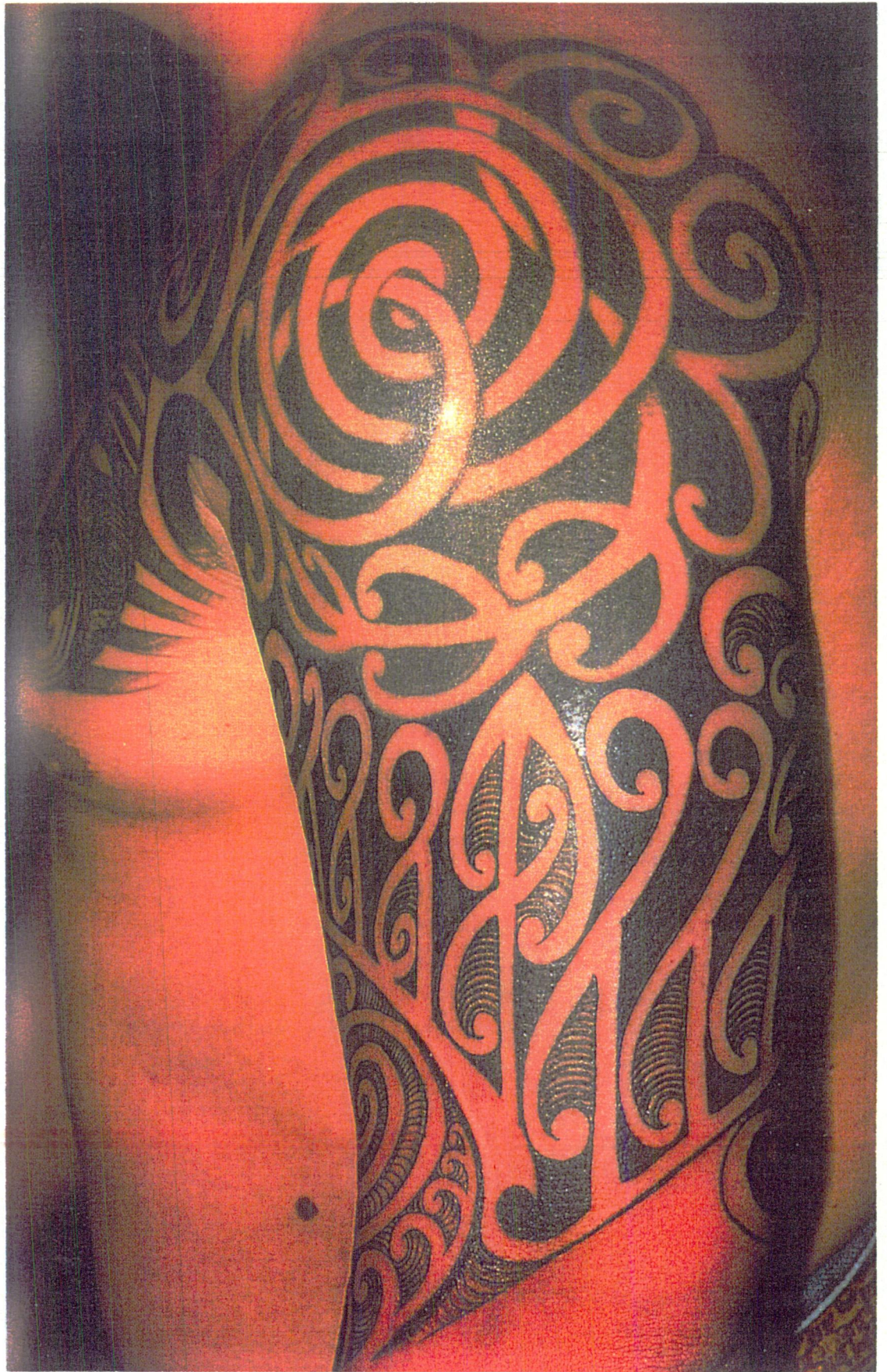


PLATE 18 New Zealand, New Tribalism tattoo



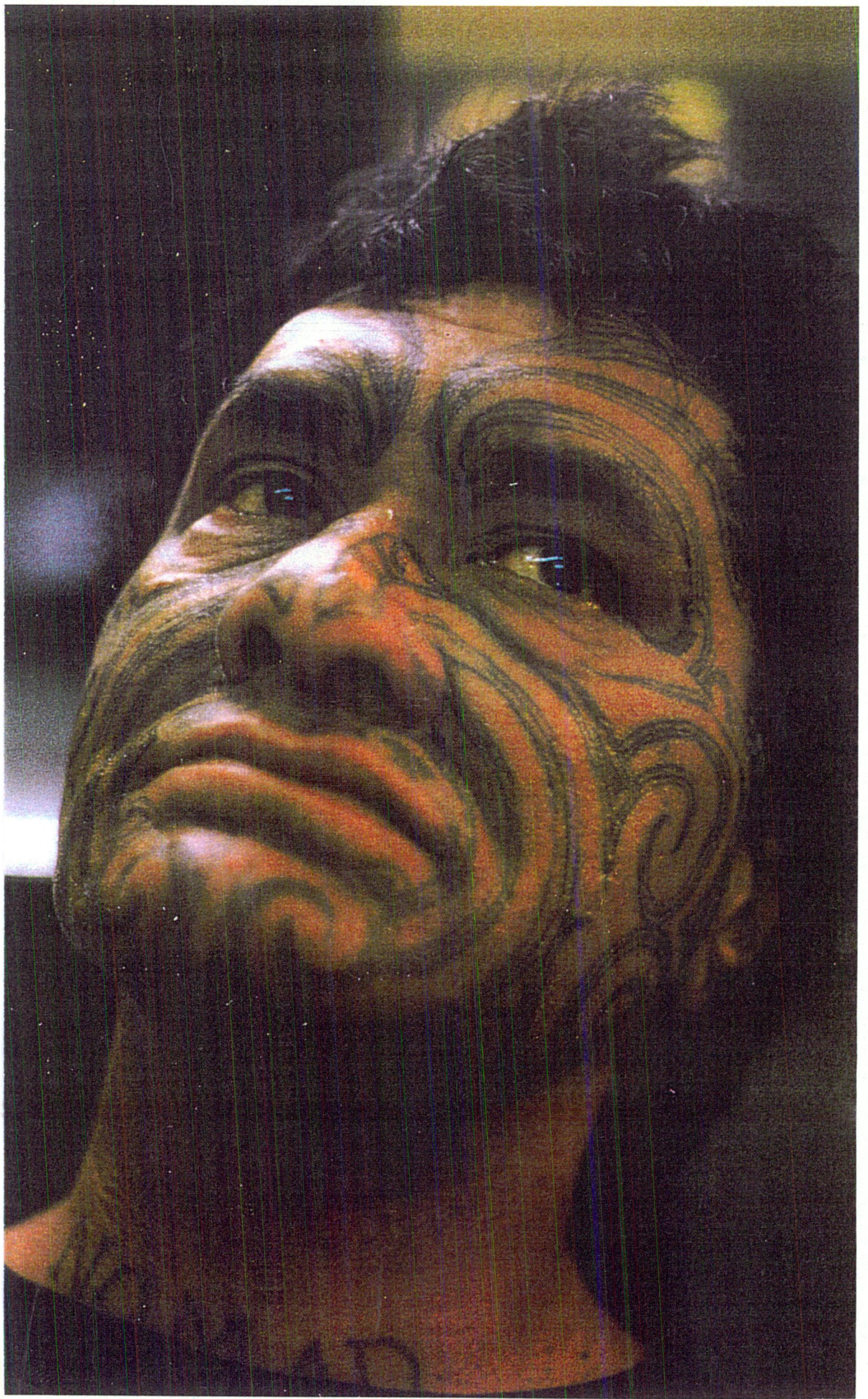


PLATE 19 New Zealand, New Tribalism facial tattoo



brandings and cosmetic stylisation, contemporary youths are borrowing from the tribal body mystique in their attempt to eclipse the hegemony of the status quo and make their world relevant” (McCabe, 1995, pg 2)

Contemporary urban gangs in New Zealand used the ancient Maori tribal markings to indicate solidarity within a gang, whilst distinguishing themselves from other gangs as well as attempting to reclaim their Maori identity which western society colonised. This topic was highlighted in the film ‘Once were Warriors’.

The tattoo was also used as a recognition of the coming of age and the changing role in a community. It is the marking of time. The permanence of its nature means that it will always be remembered as a significant period of transition, for example from boyhood to manhood.

The Samoan men were tattooed at puberty and in early manhood with intricate geometrical designs. The ritual was very painful and lengthy as a considerable area of body was covered from the waist to the knees. Samoan women did not get tattooed as it was considered that the pain of childbirth marked effectively enough the transition to adulthood.

“Men’s tattooing gave pain to them and joy to the women who glimpsed the artwork; childbirth gave pain to women and joy to the men who became fathers”. (Brain, 1979, pg 184)

In Melanesia and Africa the tattooing of women was primarily a ‘passage rite’ rather than a purely aesthetic exercise. It was to symbolise the future biological role she would take. It was usually the breasts and belly that were tattooed. In New Guinea the tattooing of girls began in childhood, with the arms and hands tattooed first. After a period of time had elapsed, the chest back and belly were decorated and when she was considered ready for marriage her buttocks, legs and face were tattooed followed by ceremonial rituals to announce her maturity.





PLATE 20 Samoan tattoo



In Indonesia the Kajang and Kenyah men were tattooed to symbolise their maturity which would have to be proved by their demonstrating their hunting and fighting skills. The full hand was tattooed if he had proven himself to be skillful - otherwise only one finger would be tattooed. This form of coming of age also created difference of rank within the tribe.

The Abipoine girls were also tattooed at intervals to mark their changing roles in the community and to prepare them for their future position. When the colonial explorers discovered these people they did their best to destroy their traditions.

"This vile custom was by our efforts abolished and the women now retain their natural appearance". (Brain, 1979, pg 51)

In mainstream society's disregard for the tattoo art and their attempts to destroy it, they used it as a form of branding for criminals. The Ancient Greeks were one of the first civilised societies who used it to mark offenders. The Japanese were marked with a cross when they were convicted of robbery; similar marks were added for additional crimes. The British Army until 1876 tattooed deserters on the wrist with the letter D and the letters BC were tattooed on those of bad character. The person's name along with a blue circle was tattooed onto the face of criminals in Burma. In this way the person was marked for life for the crimes he committed. This allowed other members of society to identify them and was a form of alienation and exclusion for the person involved. Because of it criminals were forced to form a sort of community of their own. Even today a survey in a French prison found that whereas only 10% were tattooed before they went to jail, on leaving the prison the majority were tattooed. The Borstal mark which prisoners wear as their personal uniform is a self inflicted tattoo dot on the face which also allows for easy identification of the criminal. However rather than achieving a separation from the mainstream from which they are already excluded, they are trying to belong. Borstal boys and girls are, similarly to new tribalism, creating a community amongst themselves.

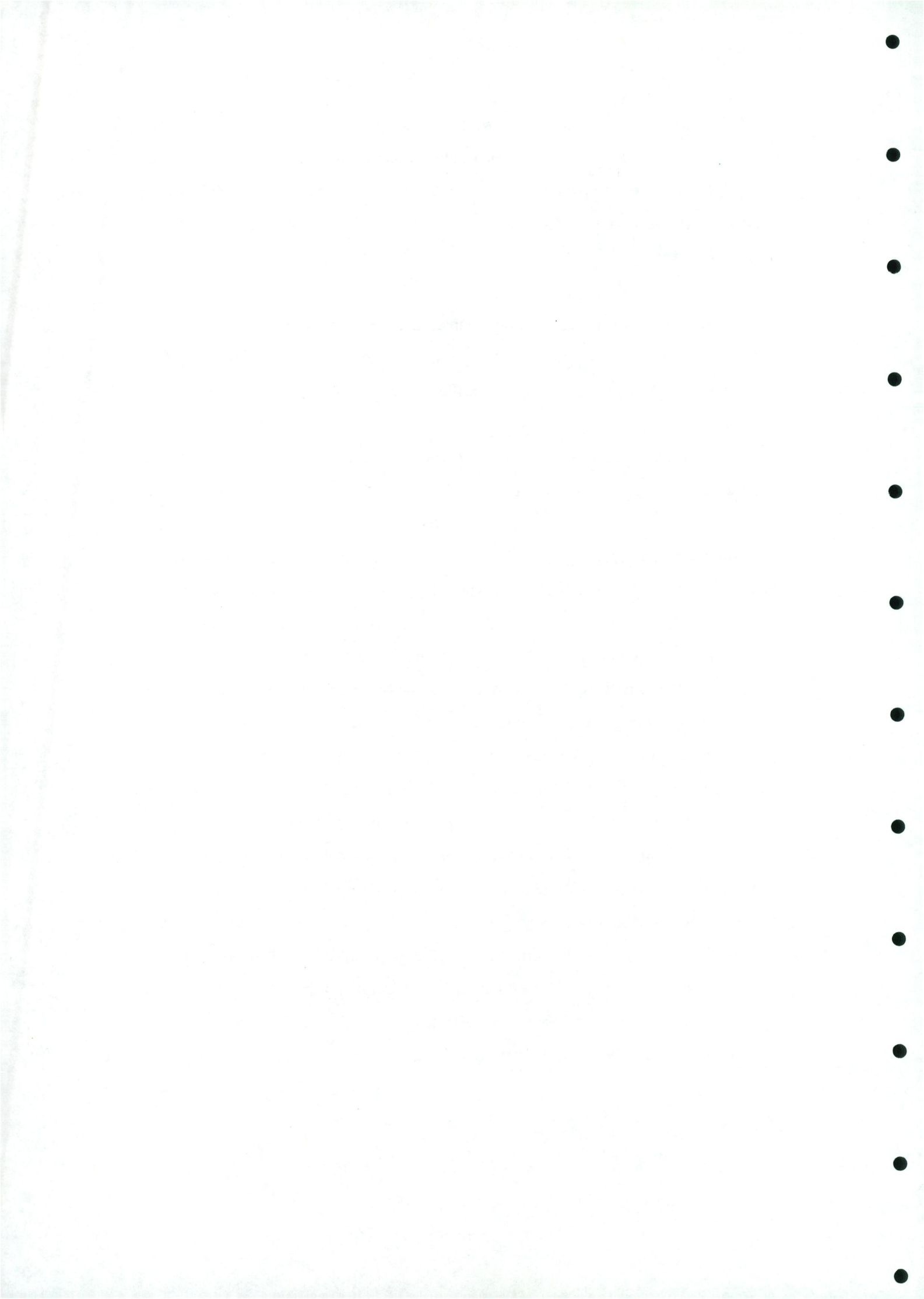




PLATE 21 Indonesia New Tribalism tattoo



It is considered in western society that tattoos are unnecessary, frivolous and deviant. However, as with primitive tribes' use of tattoos, there are complex motives behind modern man's use of the form. Just because it may not be considered appropriate in mainstream society doesn't necessarily mean it's a bad thing. The tattooing tradition today is just as relevant to our culture, with its various subcultures, as it was to the numerous tribal and primitive cultures.





PLATE 22 Tattoo of a Bra, 1950





PLATE 23 Tattoo of a barcode, Netherlands



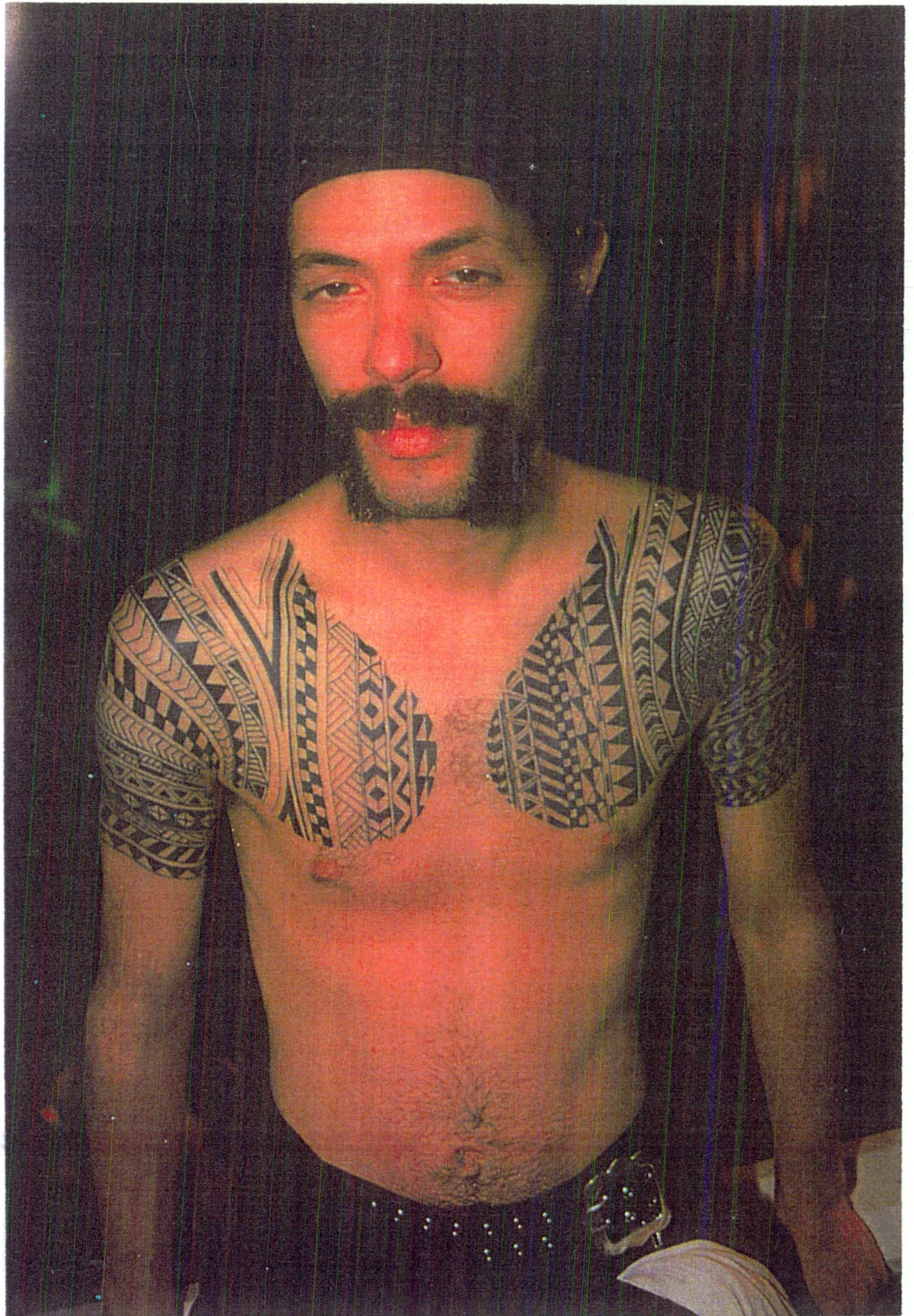


PLATE 24 Italy, New Tribalism tattoo, Maori design



Chapter 2 PIERCING

Body piercing can be defined as the transfixing of the flesh with a sharp pointed instrument. It has its origins in Asia, where it first began over 1000 years ago as a form of decoration for the human body. In India, nose rings were very common for both men and women, while in China, earpiercing was traditional for women. Body piercing was also extensively practiced among primitive tribes in Australia, Africa, New Guinea, Indonesia and America.

Today, both ear and nose piercing is perfectly acceptable within the mainstream of society; however, there remains a perceived barbarity associated with other body piercings. This is in spite of the fact that there is no logical explanation as to why the piercing of the lips, for instance, should be any more shocking than the piercing of the ear lobe. A new wave of body piercers and piercees has emerged over the last twenty years. Just as 'new tribalism' is borrowing the tattoo tradition of ancient cultures, so are the 'modern primitives' searching for an identity within the tribal origins of body piercing. They are interpreting an ancient beauty in a modern way.

In 1975 in Los Angeles, the first piercing studio was opened by the Gauntlet Corp. Until then body piercing was an under-the-counter service, considered undesirable, and inaccessible to the majority of people. From their modest and pioneering beginnings, the Gauntlet Corp. have grown today to having further chains in New York and San Francisco and performing over 20,000 piercings a year.

Fakir Musofar, the 67 year old exotic piercer, is the man responsible for reintroducing the piercing phenomenon to the US. Musofar (Roland Loomis), who worked as an advertising executive in California began experimenting with pain and body modification in his teens, after studying the ritualistic practices of different tribes. In the late 1970s he recreated the mandan Indian Oh-Kee-Pah rite passage ceremony by hanging from a tree with hooks in his chest for the documentary 'Dances Sacred and Profane'. He is currently the editor and publisher of the quarterly magazine 'BodyPlay'.



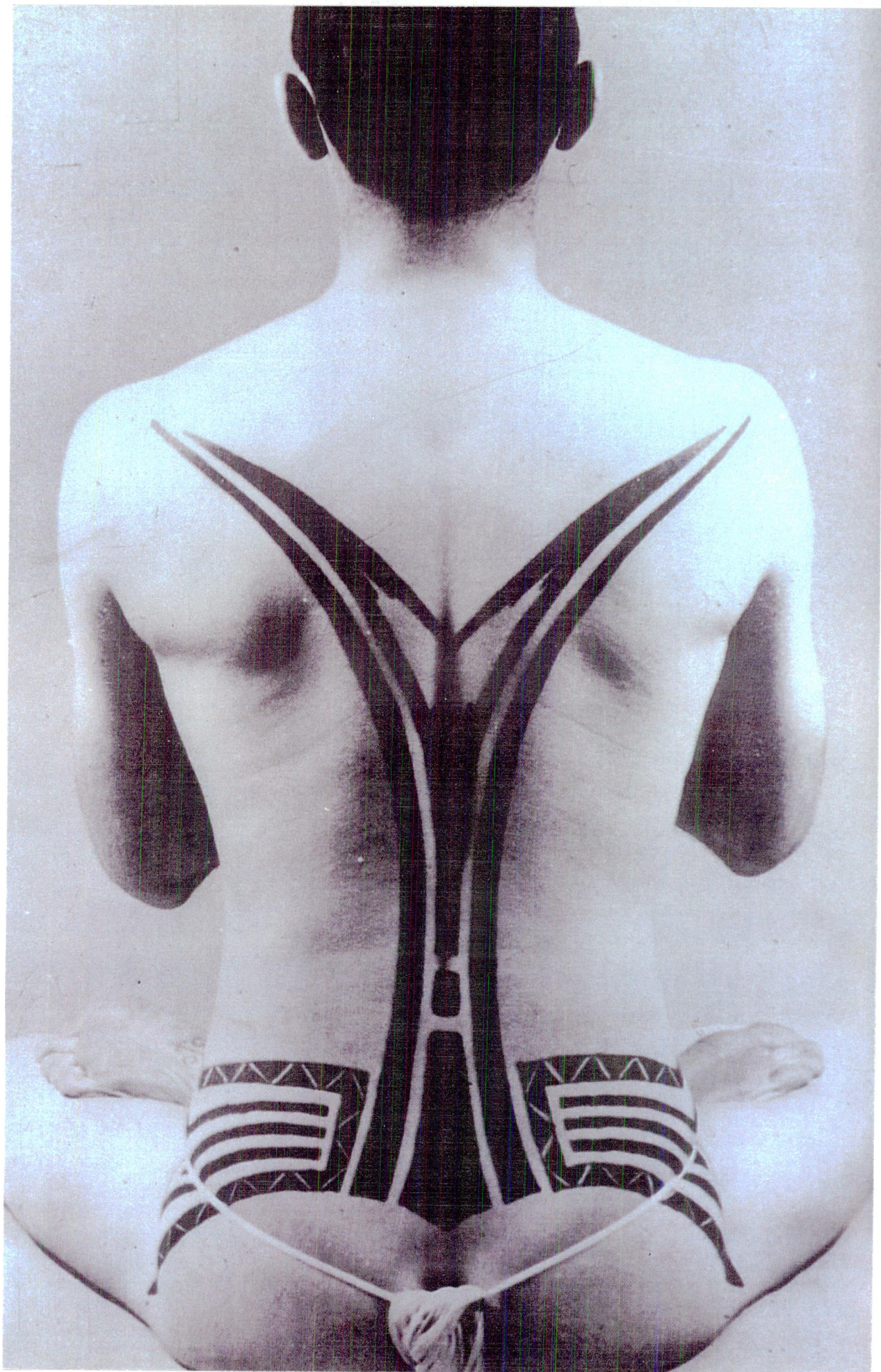
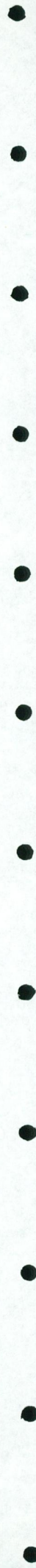


PLATE 25

Tattoos of Fakir Musofar



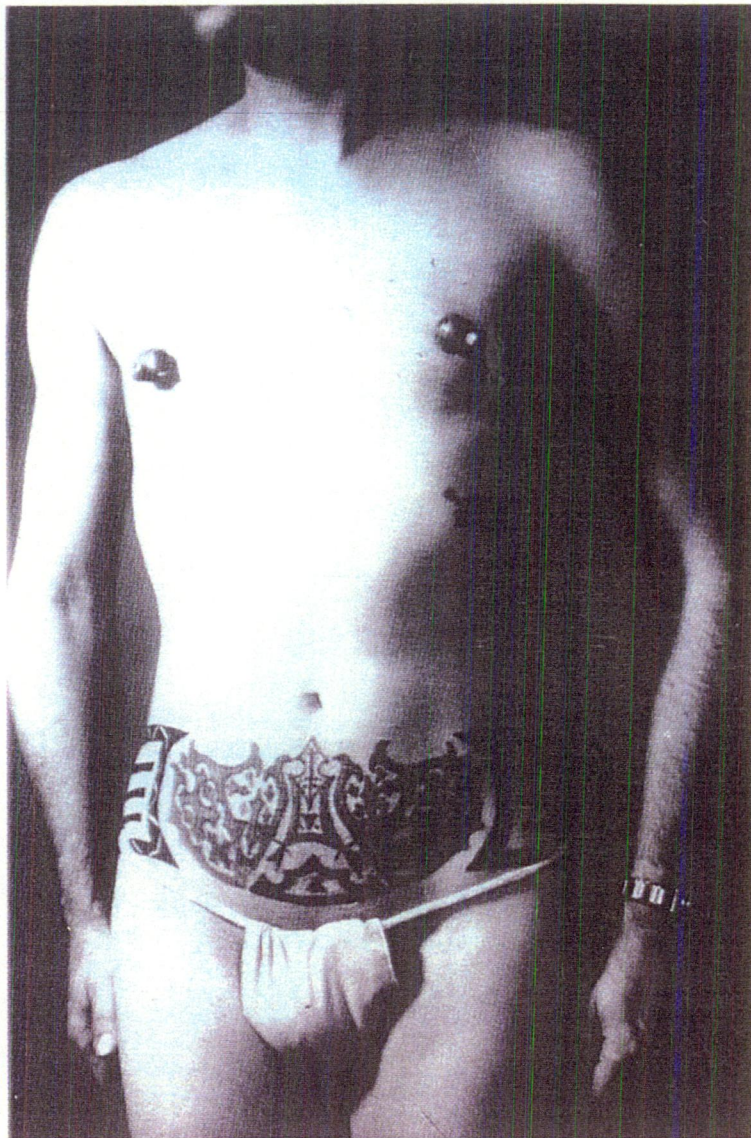


PLATE 26 Tattoos and piercings of Fakir Musofar



An India
woman with
pierced nose
and face
jewellery

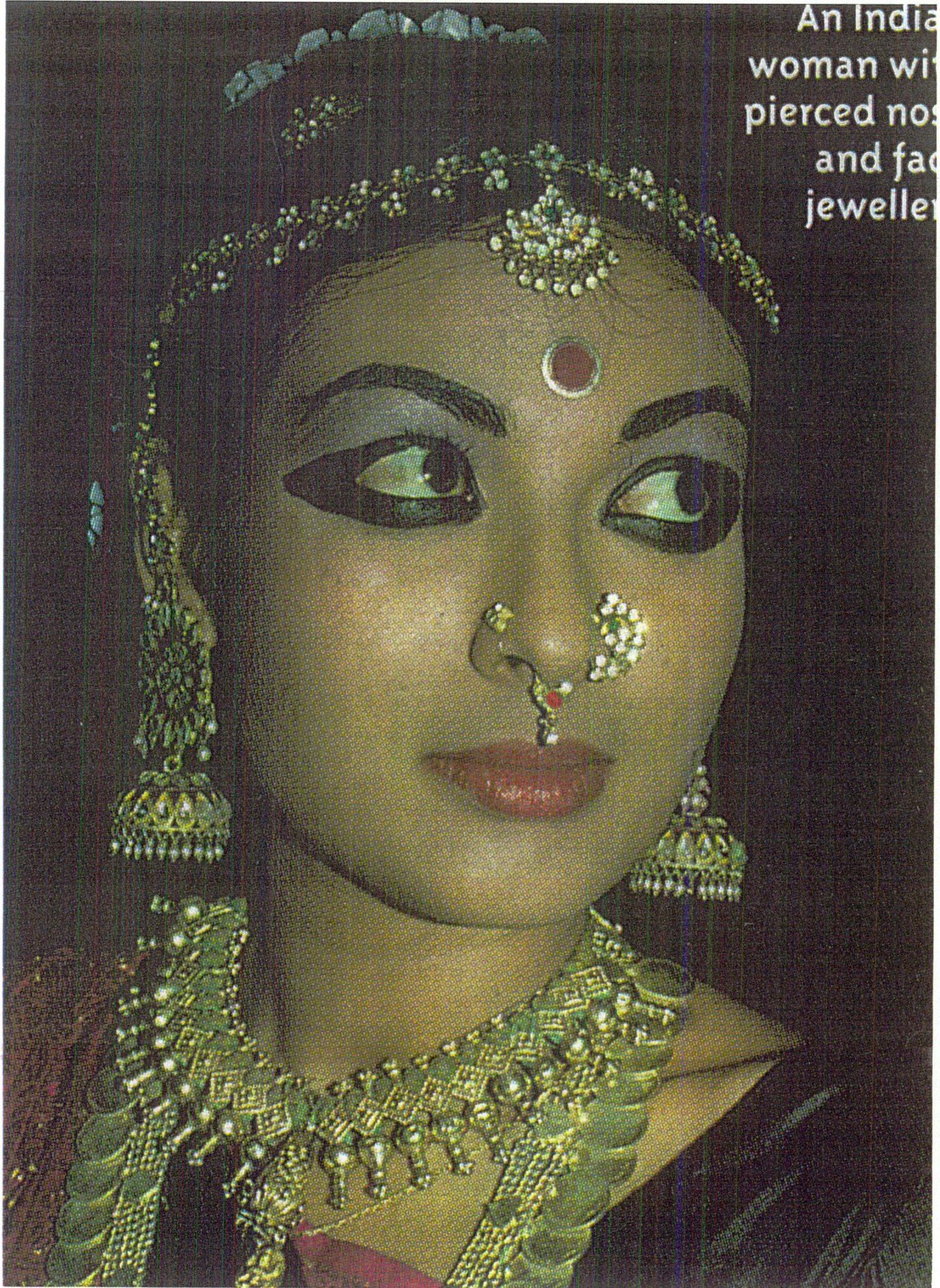
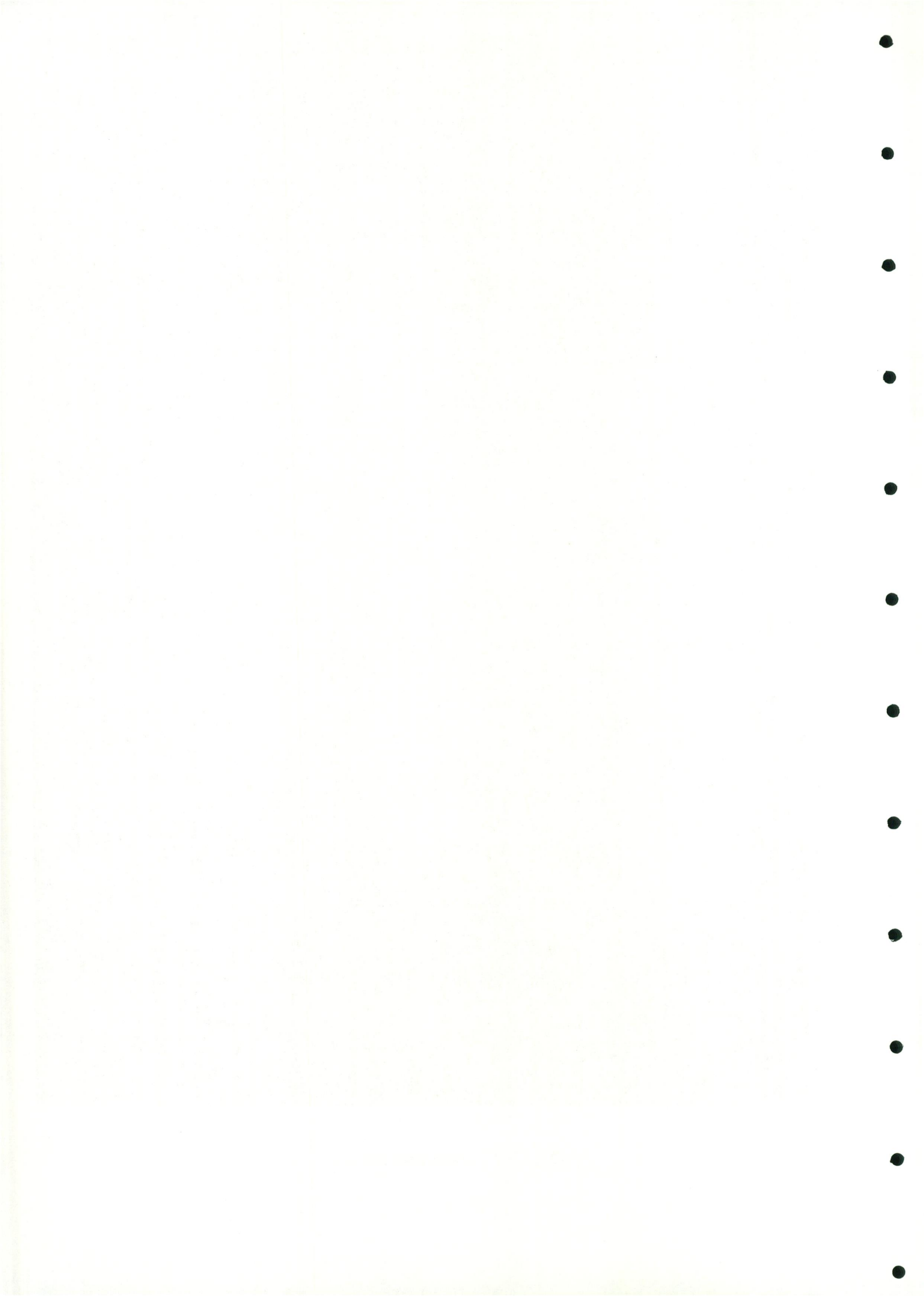


PLATE 27 Asia, nose piercing



Musofar refers to the tribal systems of India, Africa, and South America where piercing and scarification were rites of passage into adulthood. In Brazil, amongst the Tchikrin, the earlobes were pierced a few days after birth. Reddened cylindrical wood would be placed into the ear lobes, and replaced periodically for larger pieces so that the lobes would expand. In the case of boys, the lower lip was also pierced and beads inserted. The process of ear stretching was significant in marking the social progress from birth to old age.

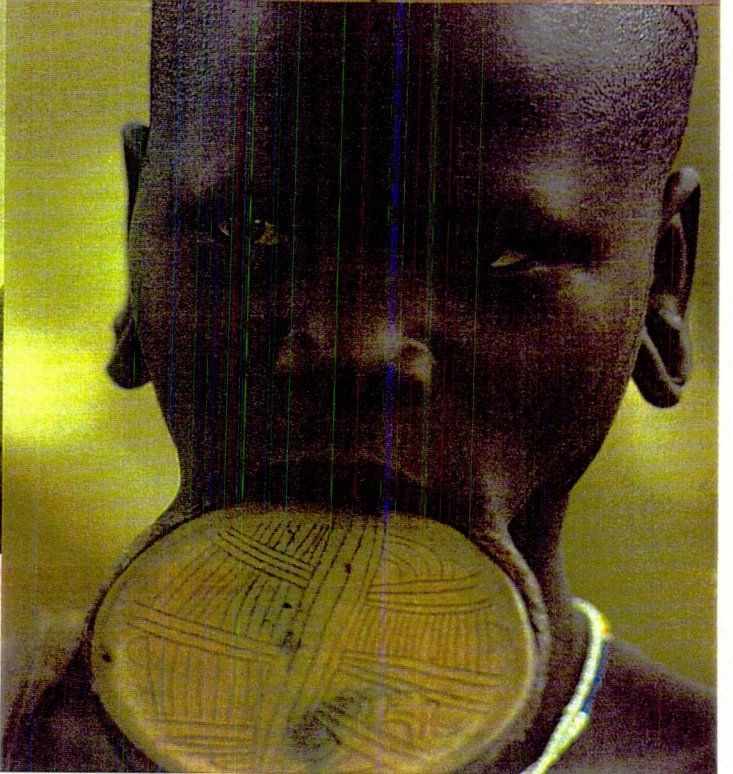
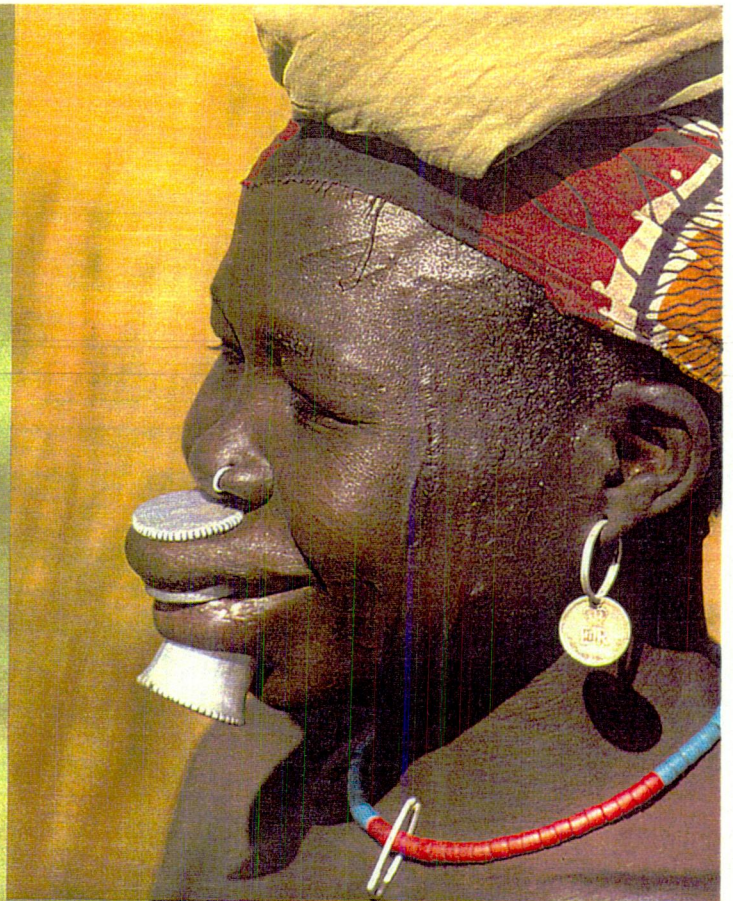
The Suyu people, also from Brazil, stressed the symbolic importance of the ear disc as an aid for achieving understanding and more acute hearing. The ears were not pierced until adolescence was reached, so children were not expected to have knowledge. The lips were pierced and had plugs inserted at adulthood by which time they were considered to be fully knowledgeable and so had reached the stage in life where they could chant. Nostril and septum piercing, widely practised among the people of Africa, India, Australia and North and South America, was not used by the Suyu as they considered the sense of smell to be associated with animals and therefore had no wish to enhance that sense.

The modern primitives create contemporary rituals and tribal community affiliations to bring spiritual meaning to the frenzy of modern urban life.

Certain body piercing has become more acceptable within the mainstream of society with the advent of many role models such as actors and musicians being seen to sport the latest in navel, nose and eyebrow rings. This has been instrumental in ensuring that it is not just those on the 'outer fringes' of society, such as punks, members of the gay community, skinheads, bikers, hippies, or drug addicts who are piercing their bodies. It is increasingly becoming an established part of contemporary fashion.

Despite the growing appeal of body piercings, most of those partaking would probably claim that it is not merely for surface, superficial, reasons that they are modifying their bodies. So what, then, is the attraction? Does it represent a subconscious reclaiming of the primitive, or is it a mere exercising of a fashion statement?





A B O V E : Ethiopian woman with lip
plate removed
A B O V E R I G H T : Woman from Chad
with lip plugs
R I G H T : Ethiopian girl with lip plugs



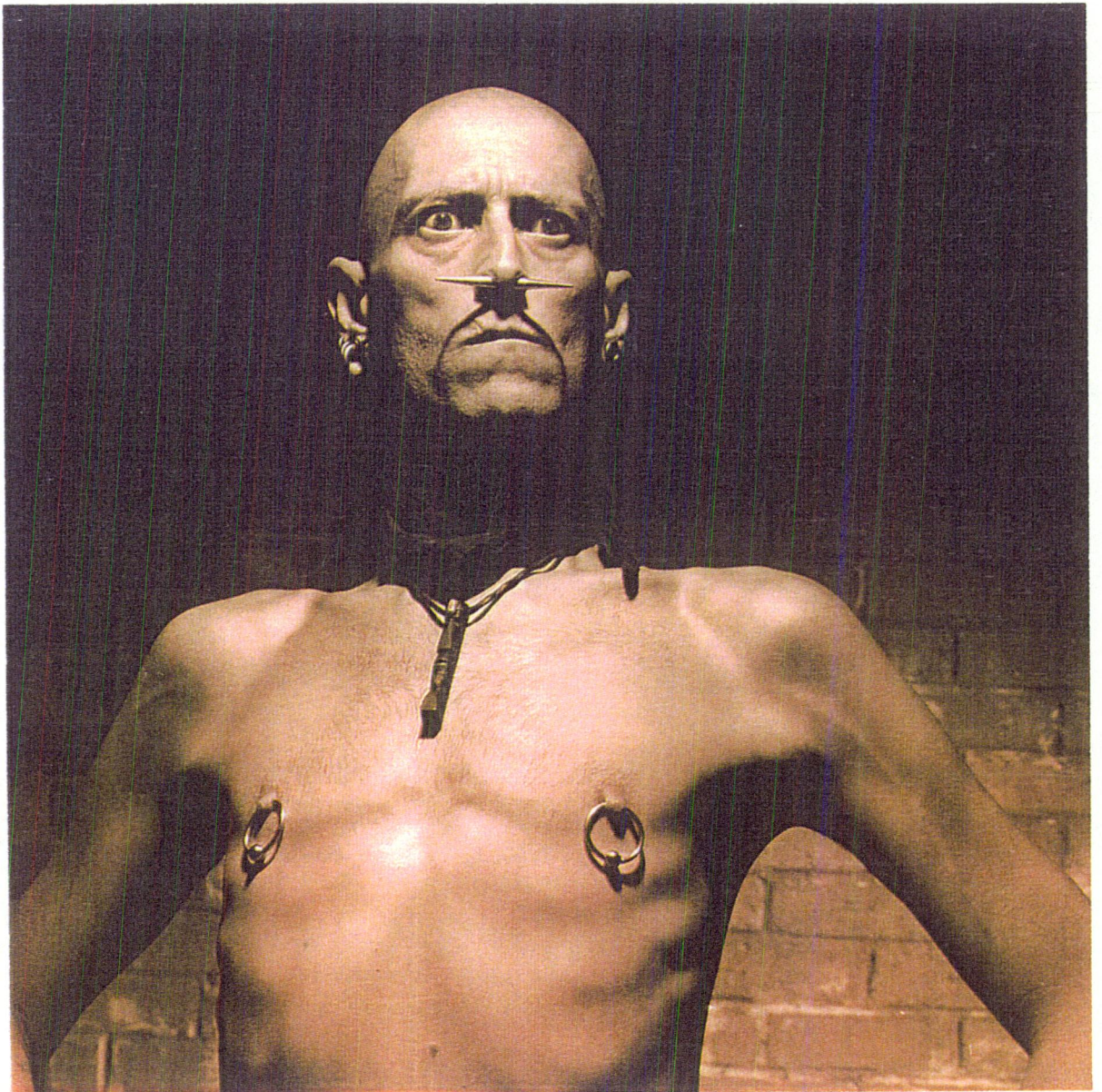


PLATE 29 London, septum and nipple piercings



There are a number of possible motives which I would proffer.

One theory which could be extended is that people are influenced by the control which body-piercing enables them to exert over their bodies: with this symbolic power compensating for their lack of control over other elements in their lives.

"The first tongue piercing marked six months after having been raped and symbolised my inability to speak about the event". (Holtham, pg 6, BME).

Body piercing alters the natural state of the body and as such it can be seen as either a rejection or adornment of one's self. Most people claim to feel a great bodily change after a piercing. This control and change which they experience is as much a part of the piercing as the actual process. They are reclaiming their bodies as theirs and theirs alone. It is an individual statement of who they are and what they want their bodies to look like.

"I love my piercings, they define me and the picture I want the world to see of me".
(Merriman, pg 2, superam)

The pleasure of pain is also a major factor in someone choosing to have a piercing done. Endorphins, the natural painkillers that the body manufactures, create a type of high which can last up to several hours. Pain is a very basic feeling which, when concentrated upon, gives a direct realisation of the nature of the body. It is the rush of being in pain, simultaneously being in control of that pain, and being responsible for it that constitutes the cocktail of pleasure.

"After it was over, I walked about 8 blocks to the car. I was so high on the endorphin rush that I didn't even feel it as pain.....it felt good". (Boyd, pg 4, BME).

As well as enjoying the thrill of the process, most people enjoy playing with the new extension of the body that the healed piercing represents. The aesthetics of the piercing jewellery is also a factor influencing the decision.



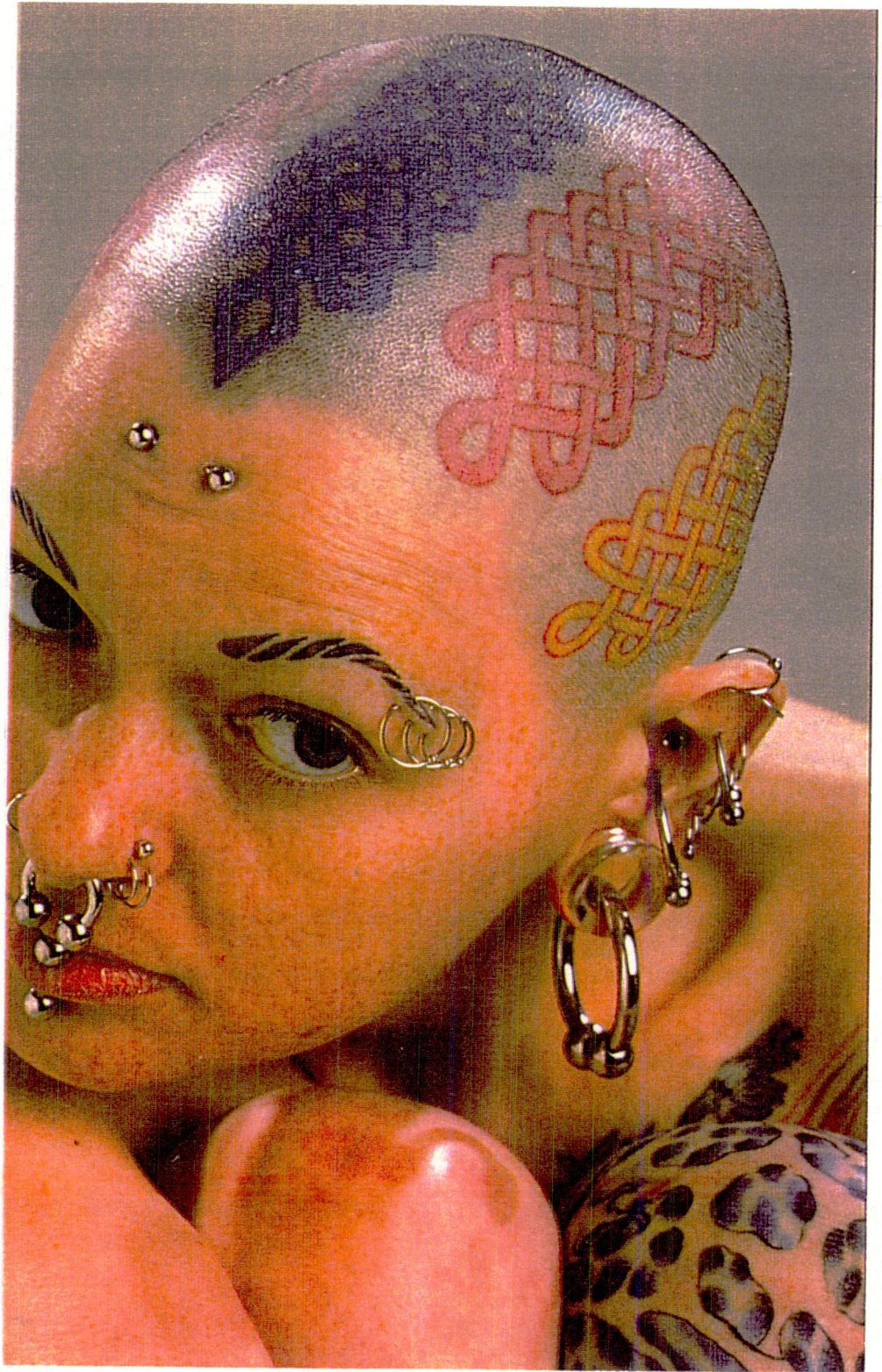
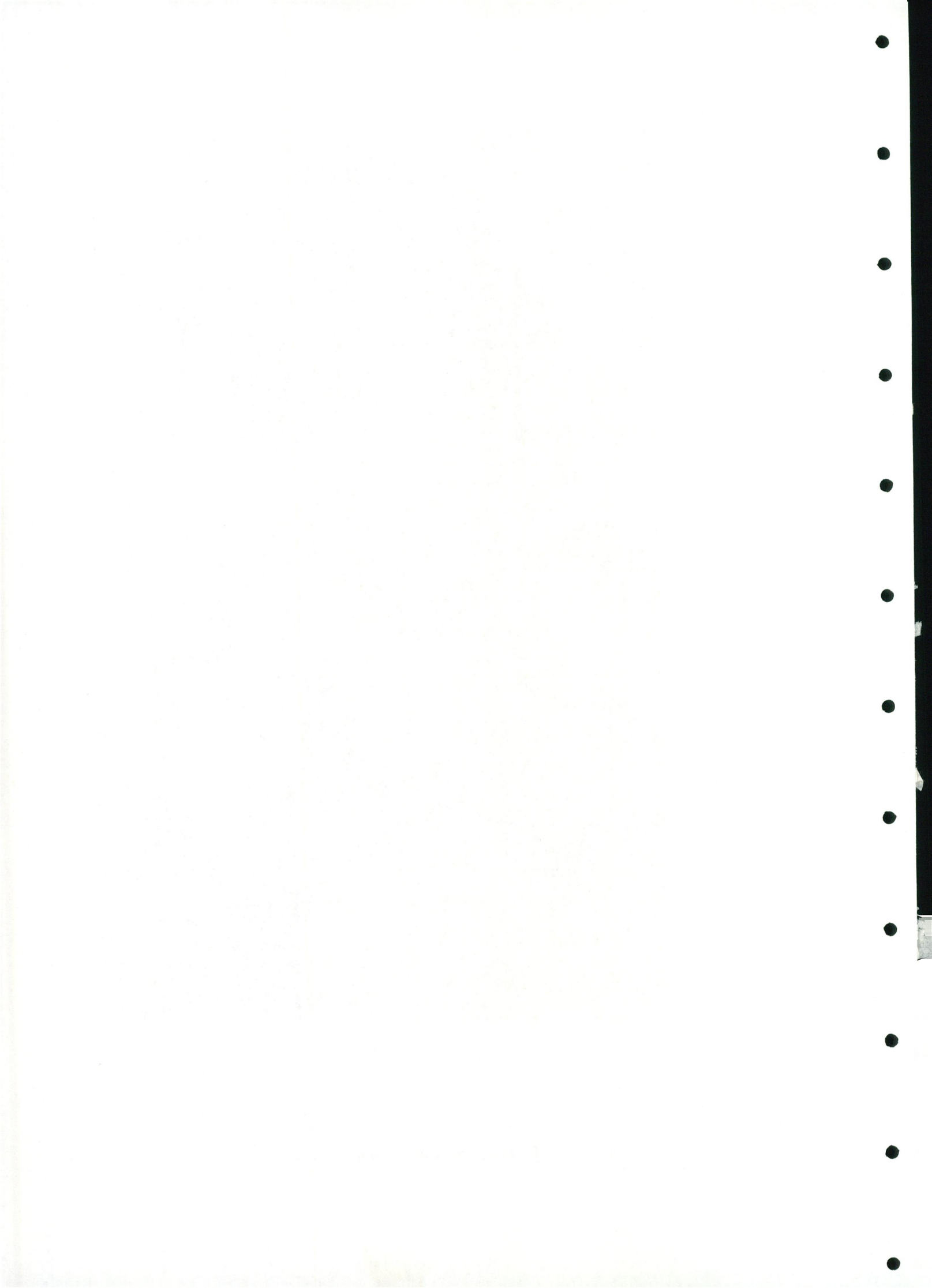


PLATE 30 Modern primitives - multiple facial piercings



In the case of tongue piercing, which was originally practised among the Mayan royalty and the Aborigines, its particular significance stems from being a silent symbol. It is a private and painful piercing which is only visible if the wearer so desires.

A further major reason for body piercings has been the associated capacity for sexual enhancement. This is not by any means a modern phenomenon, as many ancient cultures pierced solely for this reason. Dyak women would refuse to have intercourse with a man unless he had a palang, which was a rod or barbell that transected the glans of the penis, usually through the urethra. The palang originated in Borneo before spreading to Sulawesi and Sumatra. Over twenty tribal groups in South East Asia also used it. Tribal men wore their palang as badges of courage, status and virility. Indeed, Kayan chiefs in the 1800's wore up to three at a time.

Hafada, or scrotum piercing, originated in Arabia. It was a rite of passage to manhood which was performed at puberty. The Prince Albert originated in the 1840's in England where apparently a haberdashers dressing ring was inserted into the penis as a device to secure it during the Victorian fashions of crotch-cutting trousers. The piercing of the foreskin is believed to have originated in ancient Greece in 776 BC which evolved into a permanent form called fibula in Rome 200 to 400 AD where the prepuce was pierced with a metal ring that was welded closed. Athletes and slaves were ordered to wear them. In Polynesia, the Trukese women pierced their labia in order to attract men. In Bavaria in the mid-14th century, with the introduction of open front dresses nipple piercing became very popular, demonstrating the "*youthful resilience of the bosom*" (Rowan-childe, pg 2, BME).

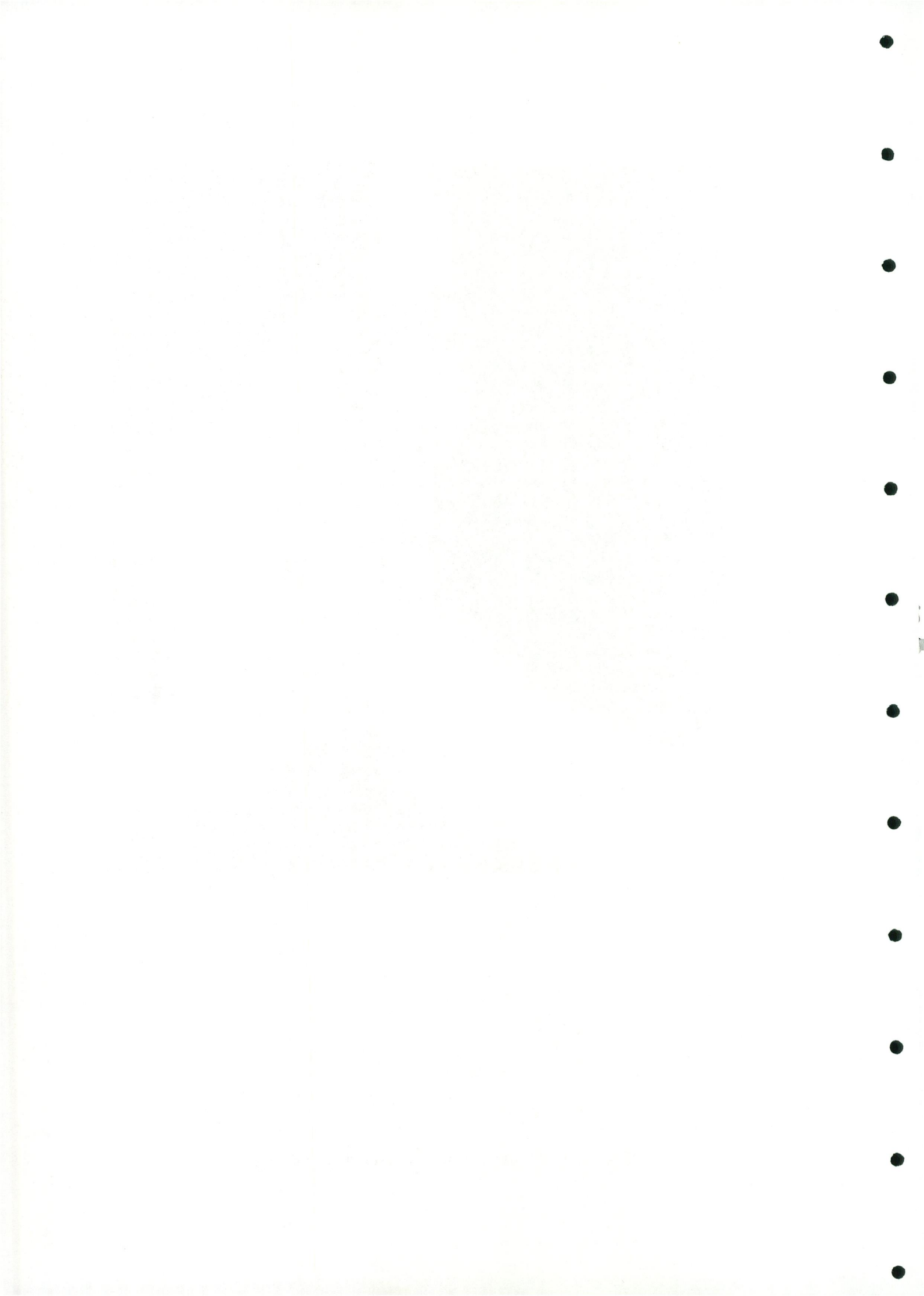
"Piercing the body to heighten the experience of sex is a common theme which fuels popular interest in the practice and is often the way in which piercing services are 'sold' to the public", (Holtham, pg5, BME).

The piercing of erogenous zones is considered to be one of the most liberating of all the types of piercings.





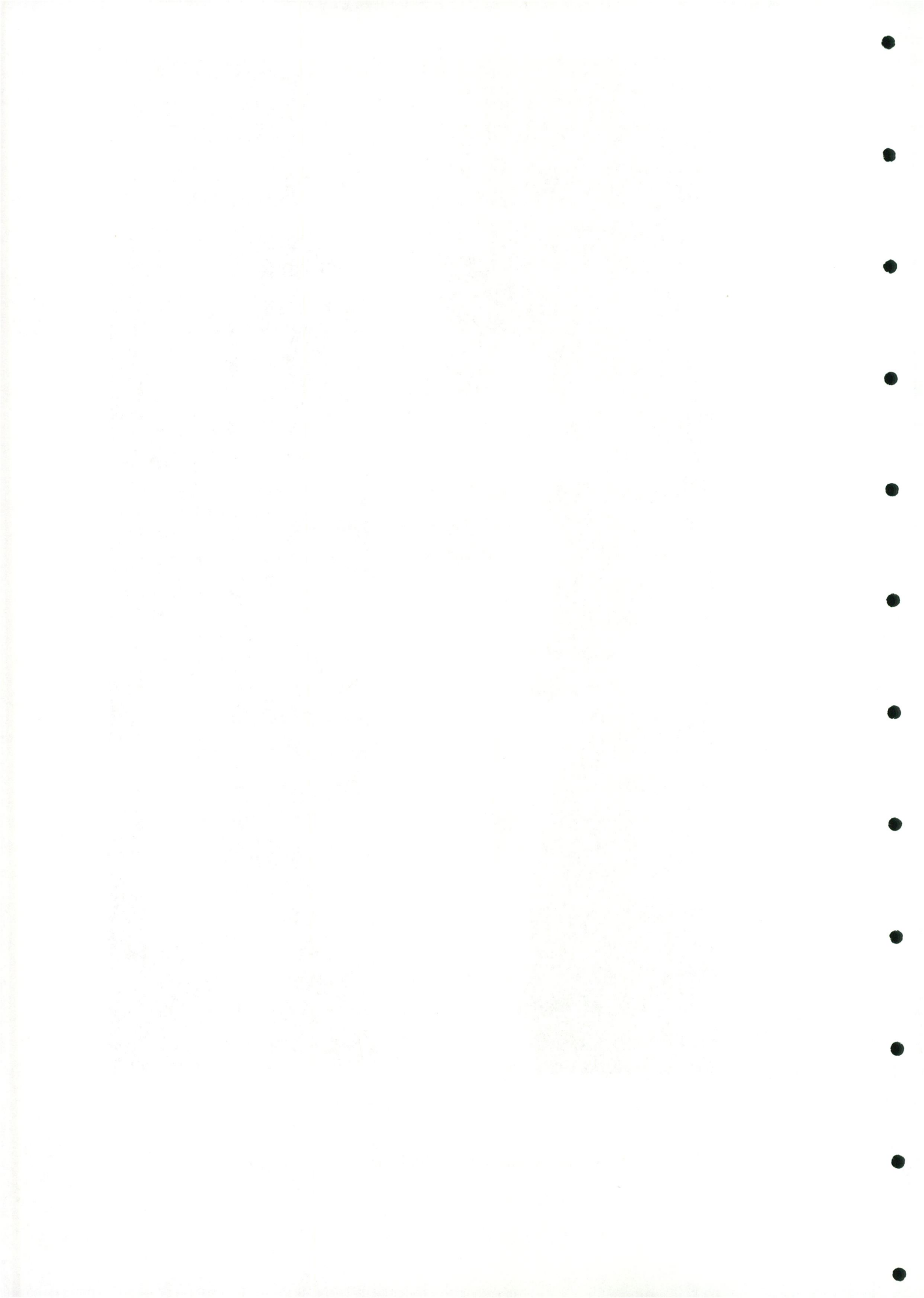
PLATE 31 Modern primitives - erogonous piercing





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PLATE 32 Modern primitives - multiple piercings, scars and tattoos



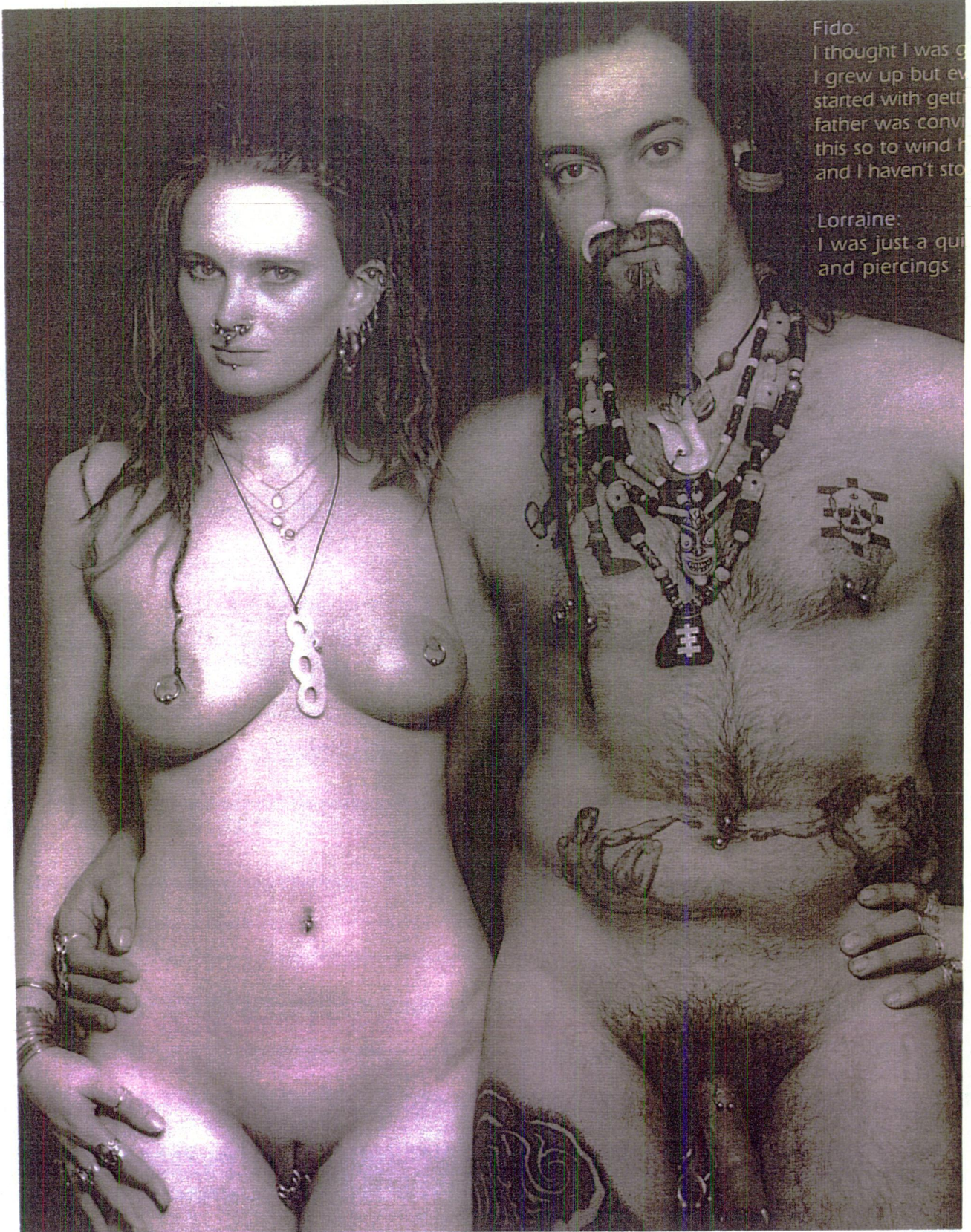
"I feel more attractive and self aware" "Invisible piercings give me an inner confidence" (Holtham, pg 5, BME).

In mainstream society erotic piercing however is considered to be 'immoral' or depraved. It is seen as a sexual deviance and associated with S & M practises, homosexuality and the barbarity of primitive tribes. However such piercings are a very private and personal form of expression and as such should not be categorised or criticised.

Non-conformity is another reason why many people decide to get visible piercings. Body piercing has created a subculture on the outskirts of the norm. By rejecting what is considered to be the standard appearance they are setting themselves aside and taking on a new identity and self image. In traditional societies, ritual body modification practises connect people and their bodies to the reproduction of long established social positions, whereas in the industrialised west, body piercing seems to serve the function of individuating the self from society. Kristian White, a tribal piercer who works in a New York studio, claims that he is *"here to teach people they can use their bodies to go beyond our society's narrow conceptions of beauty"* (Merriman, pg 2, Superam).

The rejuvenation of body piercing as an important entity is on a par with women's liberation and the gay community's demands for reform and change. Body piercing like many other forms of modification is not simply superficial, it is a major step towards liberation from society's constraints and forming a more open minded view of the body. In Musafar's magazine 'BodyPlay', he says in relation to body piercing that *"if it isn't sanctioned by society in general, then we'll make our own society and rituals and sanctions....our own subculture"* (Merriman, pg 3 Superam).





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PLATE 33 Modern primitives - multiple piercings and tattoos



Chapter 3 SCARIFICATION

Scarification, or cicatrization, is the method of decoration by which incisions are made on the skin with a blade or some such instrument. Ash or pigment is then rubbed into the fresh wound to promote scarring and make the scar more prominent. Scarification is common amongst dark skinned tribes as it is a lot more effective than the tattooing of designs. According to the treatment of the wound, the scars can be manipulated to be either hollow or raised. Raised scars, known as keloids, are created by lifting the skin up with a hooked instrument and slicing the raised skin with a blade.

Scarification has been a very important element of various primitive cultures. Just as there are various reasons for tattooing and piercing, scarification also holds particular significance as an indicator of many different things.

Some tribes link the scarification process closely to physiological development. In southern Sudan, the Nuba girls undergo 3 stages of scarring, beginning at puberty and completed after the birth of the girl's first child. The designs are very elaborate and cover extensive areas of the body. The completed series of marks signify the woman's development and her new role in the community.

In North-Eastern Nigeria, the Ga'anda women underwent a very lengthy process of scarification as a preparation for marriage, a tradition known as Hleeta . Hleeta began when the girl was six years old and it could take up to fifteen years to be completed until she was eligible for marriage. Hleeta was carried out in six stages with the final stage being the most extensive and painful. It was called hleengup, which means cicatrization all over, filling in all the areas that had not yet been marked. Hleeta was identical on all Ga'anda women - it was not used as a means of tribal identity. *"It plays a key role in the transmission and reinforcement of sociocultural values"* [Brain, 1979 pg 63].

The Yoruba people of Benin and Nigeria perform scarification known as Kolo at puberty as a test: it is not obligatory to be scarred, it is seen as a symbol of courage and endurance and so little respect is given to those who do not wear them. Women with Kolo are



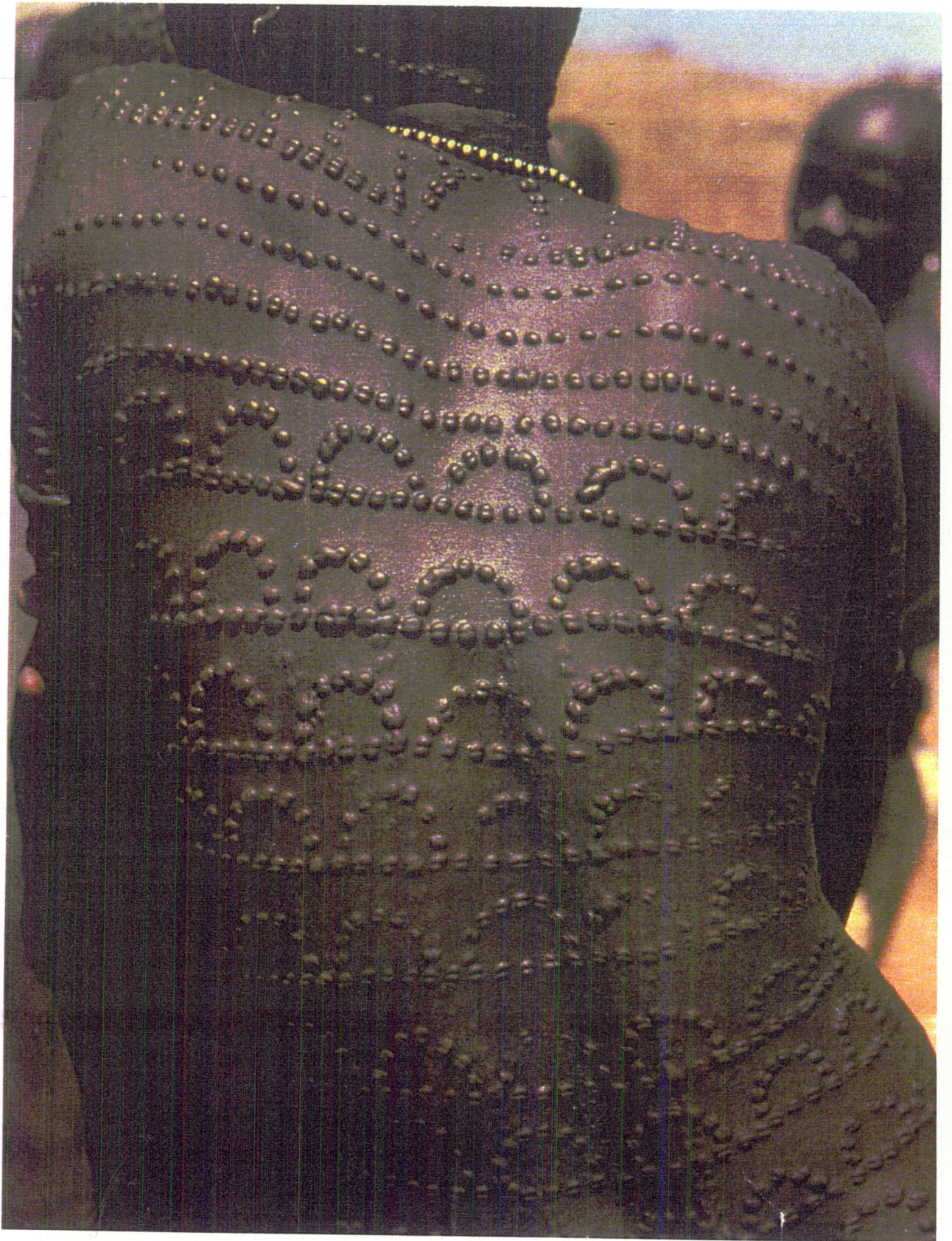


PLATE 34 Africa, Keloid back scar



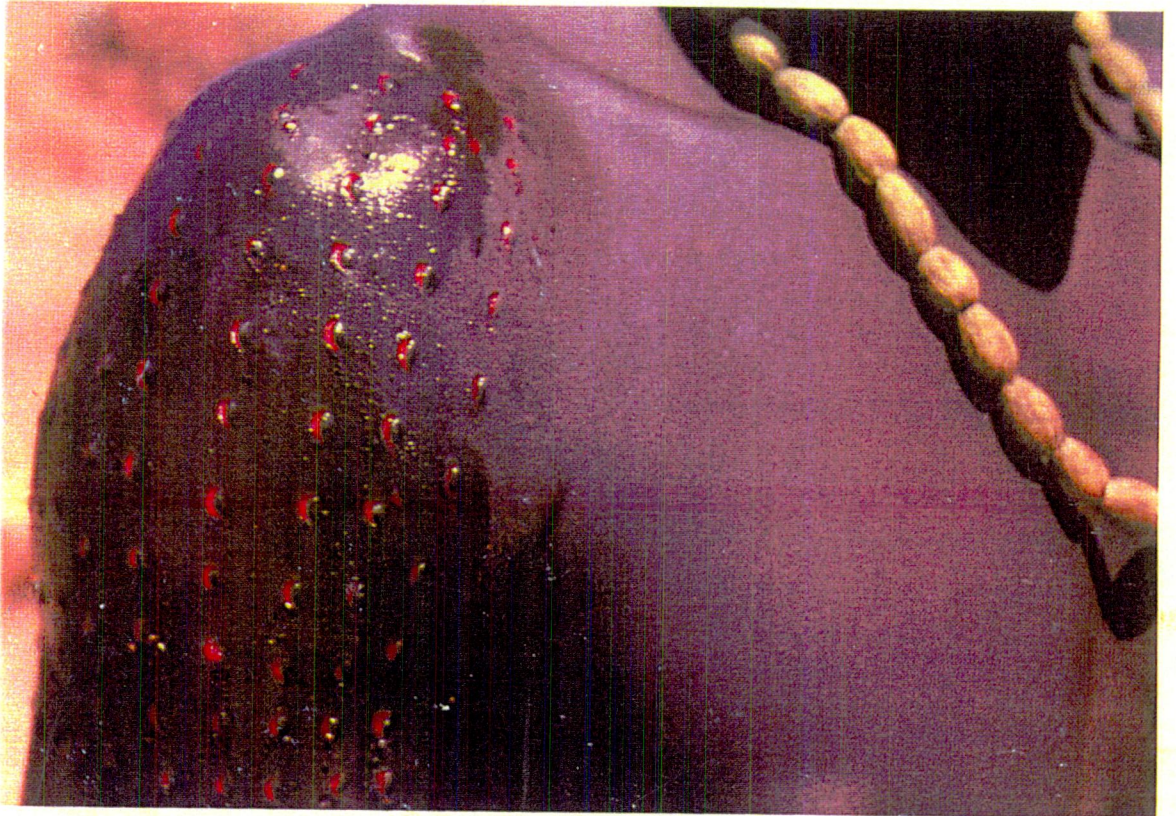


PLATE 35 Nuba, scarring in process



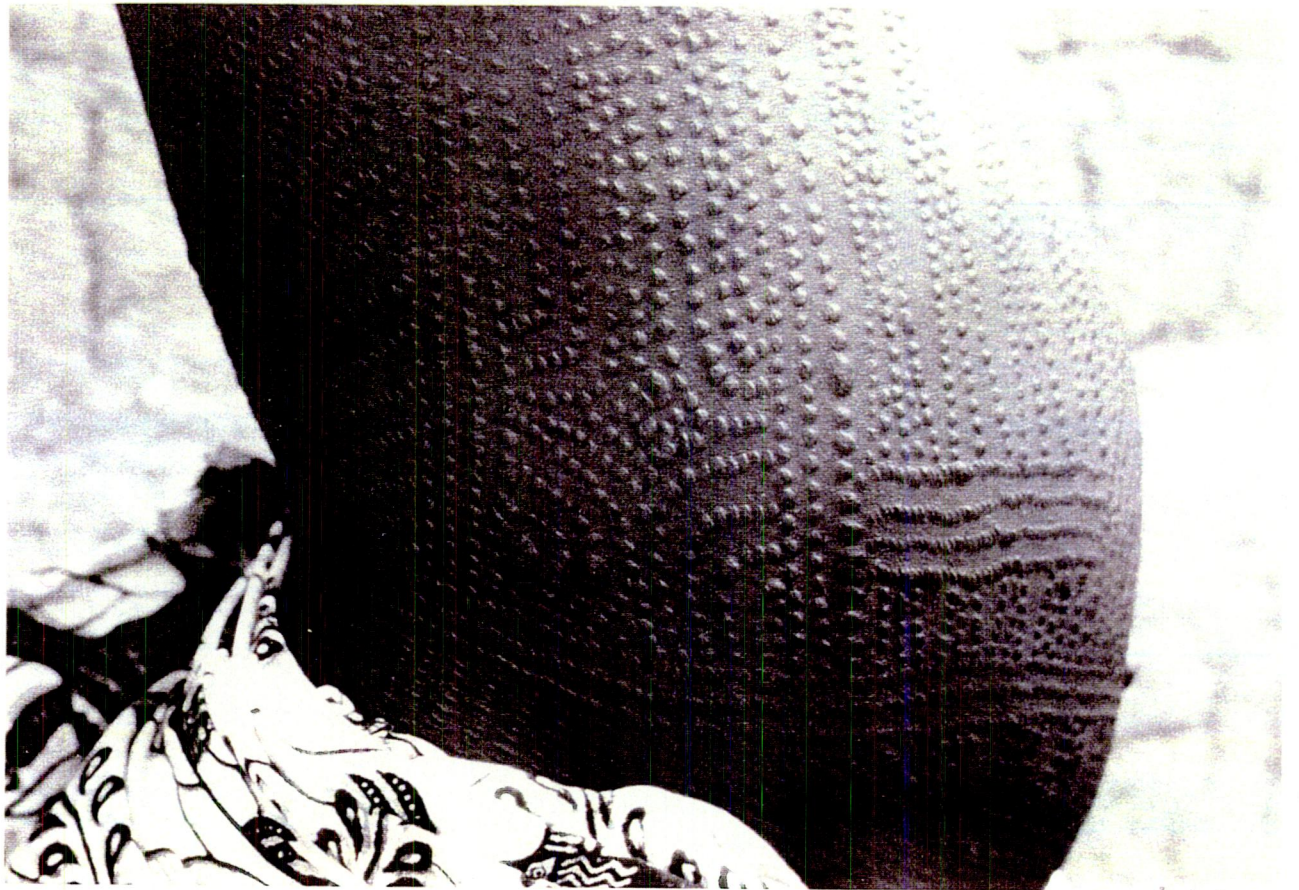
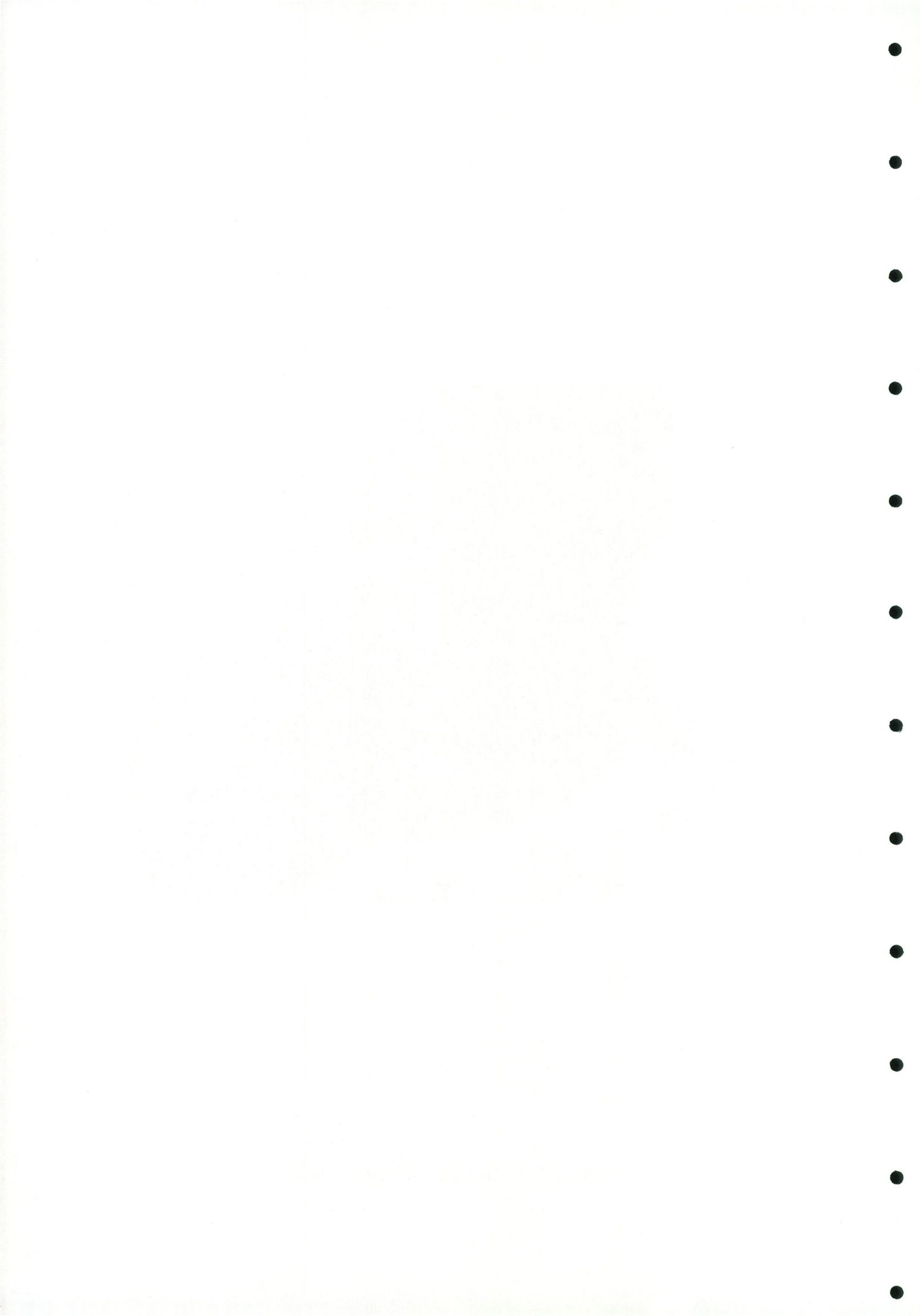


PLATE 36 Ga'anda scarification, Hleeta



considered to make good wives since they have already proved their willingness to endure pain and so are prepared to experience the pain of childbirth.

The pain of the scarring process and the bloodshed that it causes is another reason why it is so symbolic. Some cultures believe that the blood which is lost takes with it from the body evil spirits and imperfections, thus cleansing and rejuvenating it.

Scarification is also seen as a protection against disease. In the Baule tribes of the Ivory Coast, the use of scarring as a medical aid is very common. Medicines are rubbed into the cuts as a type of inoculation, known as Kanga. Three short scars on the chest is the most common form of protection used by the people. Marks on the wrist or upper arm are used to protect against poisonous snakes, and fan scars, which are linear marks radiating from the corners of the mouth are also widely used for general protection.

"Kanga marks are given to children born after the death of several children of the same mother; they are done in the belief that the child with these undesirable scars will not be so desirable to death" [Rubins, 1988, pg 103].

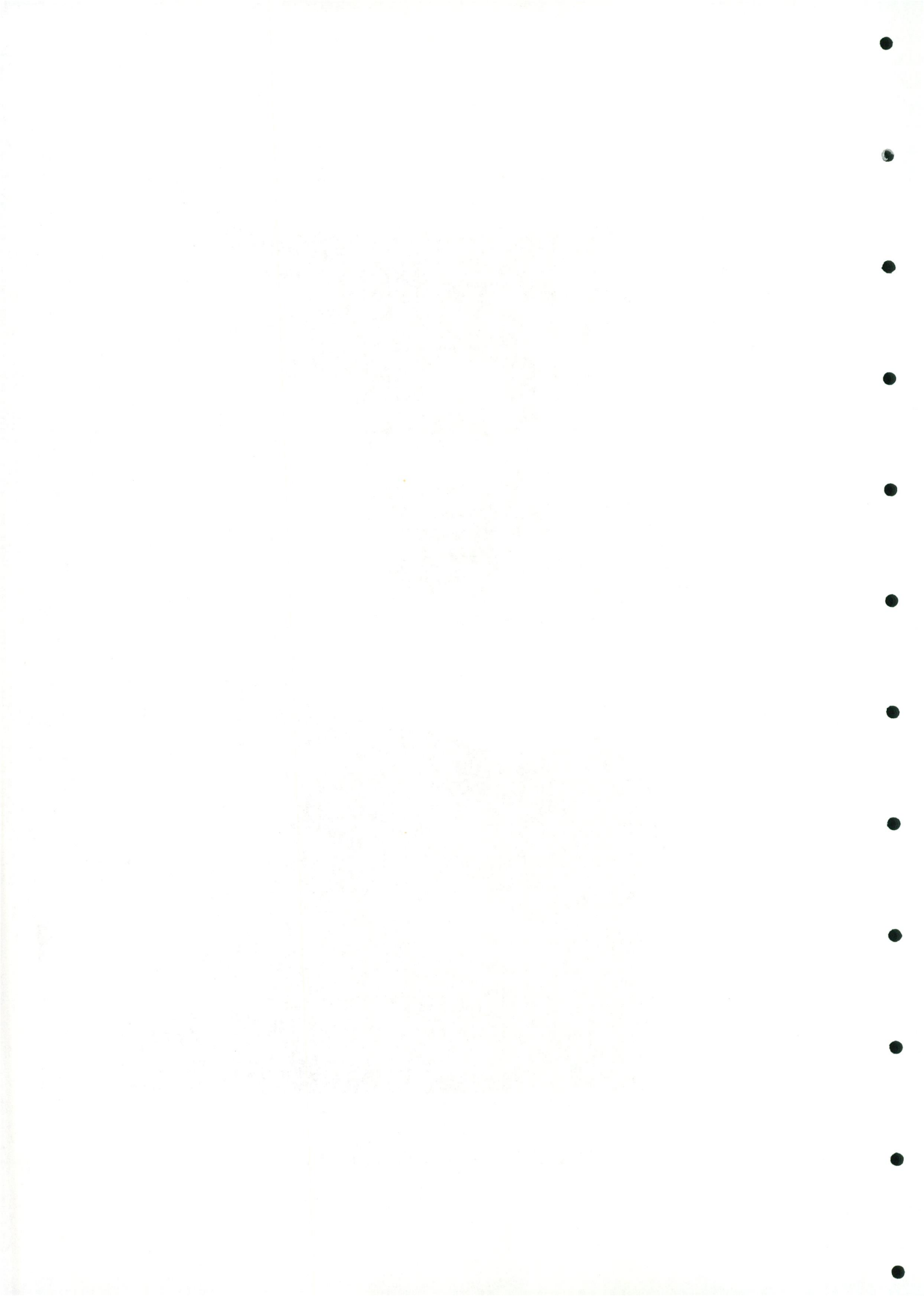
In Cameroon, among the Bangwa, a star shaped mark placed near the liver was believed to prevent hepatic infection, and in Southern Sudan the Nuba people believed that scars above the eyes aid and protect the eyesight and that headaches are relieved by scars on the temples.

Scarification is also seen as a symbol of strength and masculinity. The pain which is endured by the process is evident in the scars. In Germany, university students would scar themselves in duels called 'in der Mensur' [Brain, 1979, pg 73] and in order to exaggerate the effect they would pour wine onto the wounds. The North American Indians also considered their scars to be indicators of their courage. Punks, gang members and criminals have used facial scars as a means of demonstrating their strength as well as an intimidation mechanism.





PLATE 37 Yoruba scarification, Kolo



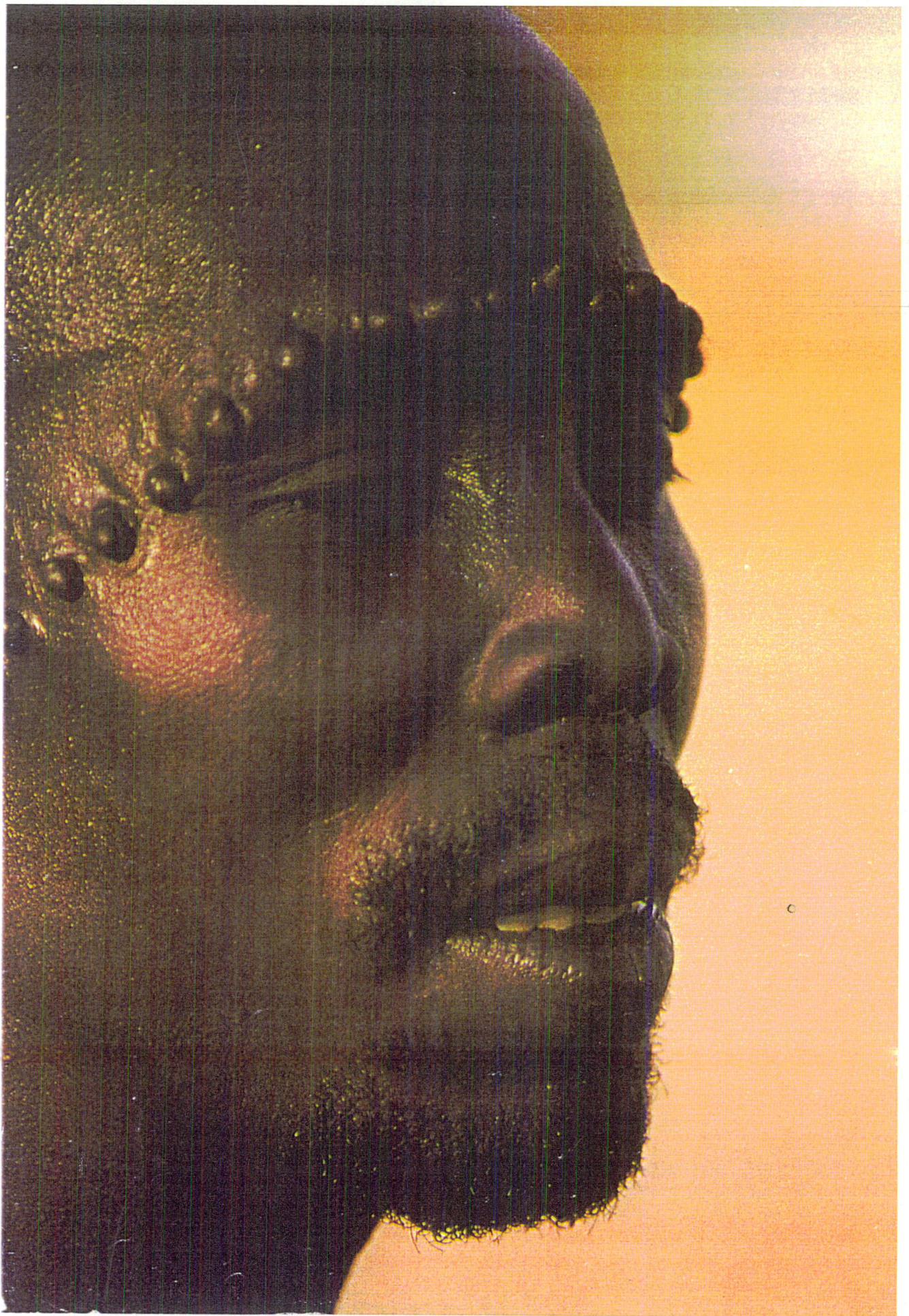


PLATE 38 Nuba scarification



Lord Arlington, chamberlain to Charles II said in reference to facial scars, that they *"give a man a fierce and martial air which sets him off to advantage"* [Liggett pg 90]. The anthropologist Paul Bohannan, when exploring the scarification traditions of the Tiv tribe in Nigeria, questioned the pain involved. The reply was that of course it was painful. *"What girl would look at a man if his scars had not cost him pain?"* [Liggett, 1989, pg 90].

Scarification is an important means of beautification of the body within many primitive cultures. In Nigeria, the Tiv people believe that beauty is only achieved if the body is adorned and decorated by means of scarring, oiling or colouring and dressing up. Facial scarification is of grave importance with ever changing fashions amongst the Tiv, in terms of the type of scars. There is a range of marks that can be made and so the face can be altered dramatically to accentuate good features or to hide ugly features. They insist that scarification is necessary to be attractive. Women wear 'mudfish' scars on their bellies. This symbol is believed to promote fertility. However, it is said that these scars make a woman more fertile, firstly because the woman becomes more attractive and so will receive more male attention, and secondly because the sensitivity of the scars make this an erogenous area for the woman, which in turn means that she will demand more sexual attention than a woman without these marks, hence making her more likely to have children. Many women within the Tiv tribe would, after the birth of their children, have their bellies re-scarred in order to keep the skin firm. Among the Yoruba people, also from Nigeria, the scarring of the woman's stomach is said to provoke an erotic response due to the tactile nature of the kolo.

"A woman with marks all over her body is very fine.....if we see the marks and glance at the body, the weather will change to another thing - we will become sexually aroused" [Rubins, 1988, pg 90]

Within the Baule scarification, although aesthetics is an important issue, the tradition of scarification as a means of civilisation is of utmost relevance within the culture. Their use of scarification is as a way of setting themselves apart from the animals. It represents *"mans order imposed on nature"* [Rubins, 1988, pg 99].





PLATE 39 African facial scarification



The colonial explorers and Christian missionaries did their utmost to destroy these primitive cultures' traditions of cicatrization as they considered it to be barbaric without considering how important and relevant it was within the structures of the tribes. The Ga'anda tradition of Hleeta was officially outlawed by the Gombi Local Government in 1978. Interference from the Church since the 1950's led to this ruling which has without a doubt weakened the customary pre-arranged marriage patterns, and will most likely lead to the loss of the social history of the Ga'anda which was inscribed in this important tradition.

Just as piercing and tattooing have found a place within modern society, scarification too has made its transition from the primitive to the urban, and is just as relevant to certain subcultures today as it was to those other societies. Scarring became popular in Britain among the Punk Generation in the 70's, where their objective was to shock and defy authority.

"Revelling in the pleasures of self-destruction, the early punk embodied the idea of negation and enacted in the flesh their sense of decay and apocalypse" [Wojcik, 1995, pg 3].

Similarly in Brazil it has been reported that the street children are scarring themselves *"as a gesture of defiance, directed at their harsh environment"* [Detour pg 100].

In San Francisco a huge revival of scarification techniques has emerged, with many piercers introducing scarring to their services. It is seen in some quarters as a logical progression from piercing and tattooing. Influenced by primitive cultures and the punk era's use of scarring, it has become an important element within certain communities. In San Francisco the phenomenon of cutting seems to have grown out of the S & M and Gay (particularly Lesbian) communities. Raelyn Gallina, one of the best known cutters in San Francisco is considered to be the *"master cutter and surrogate godmother to the scene"* [Detour pg 101]. She received her first cutting at an S & M scene and describes the scarification as a very spiritual and empowering experience. However she also expresses



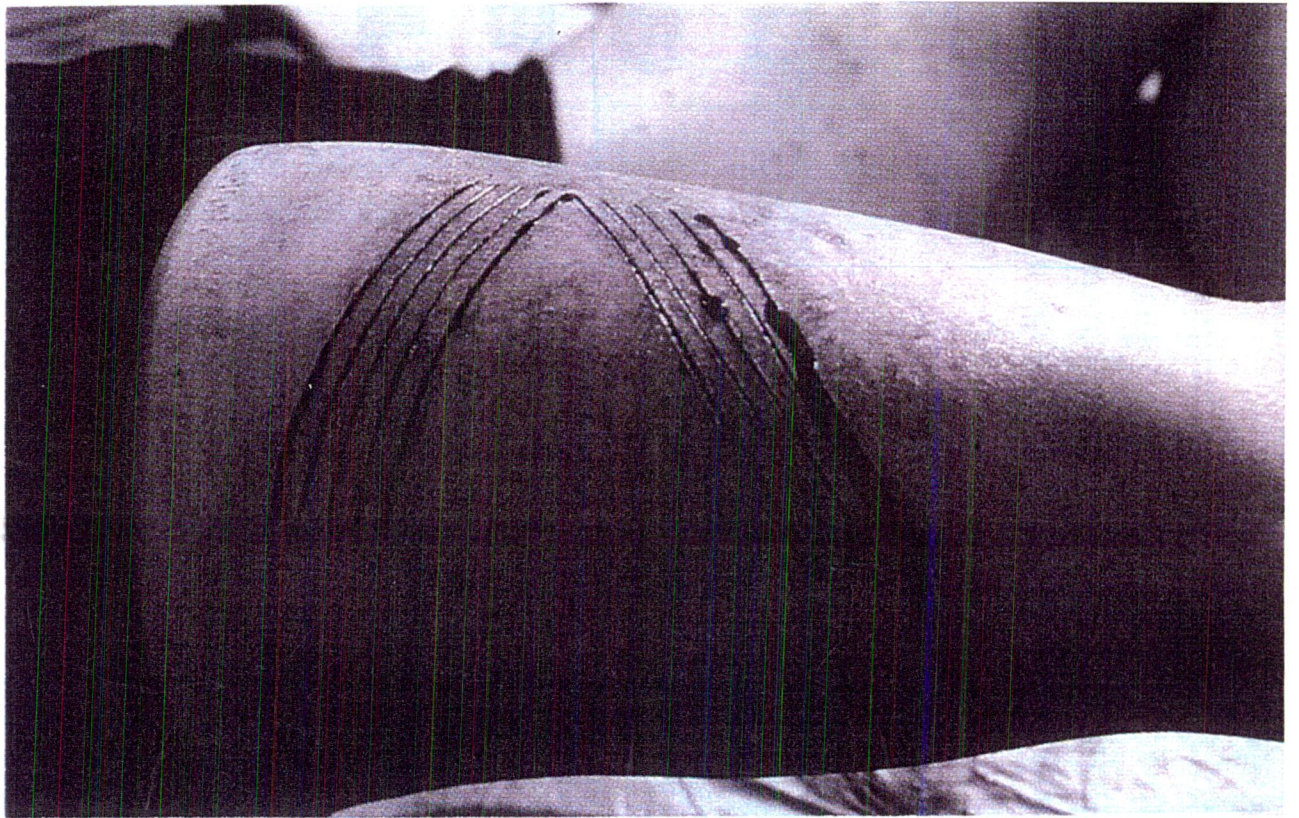
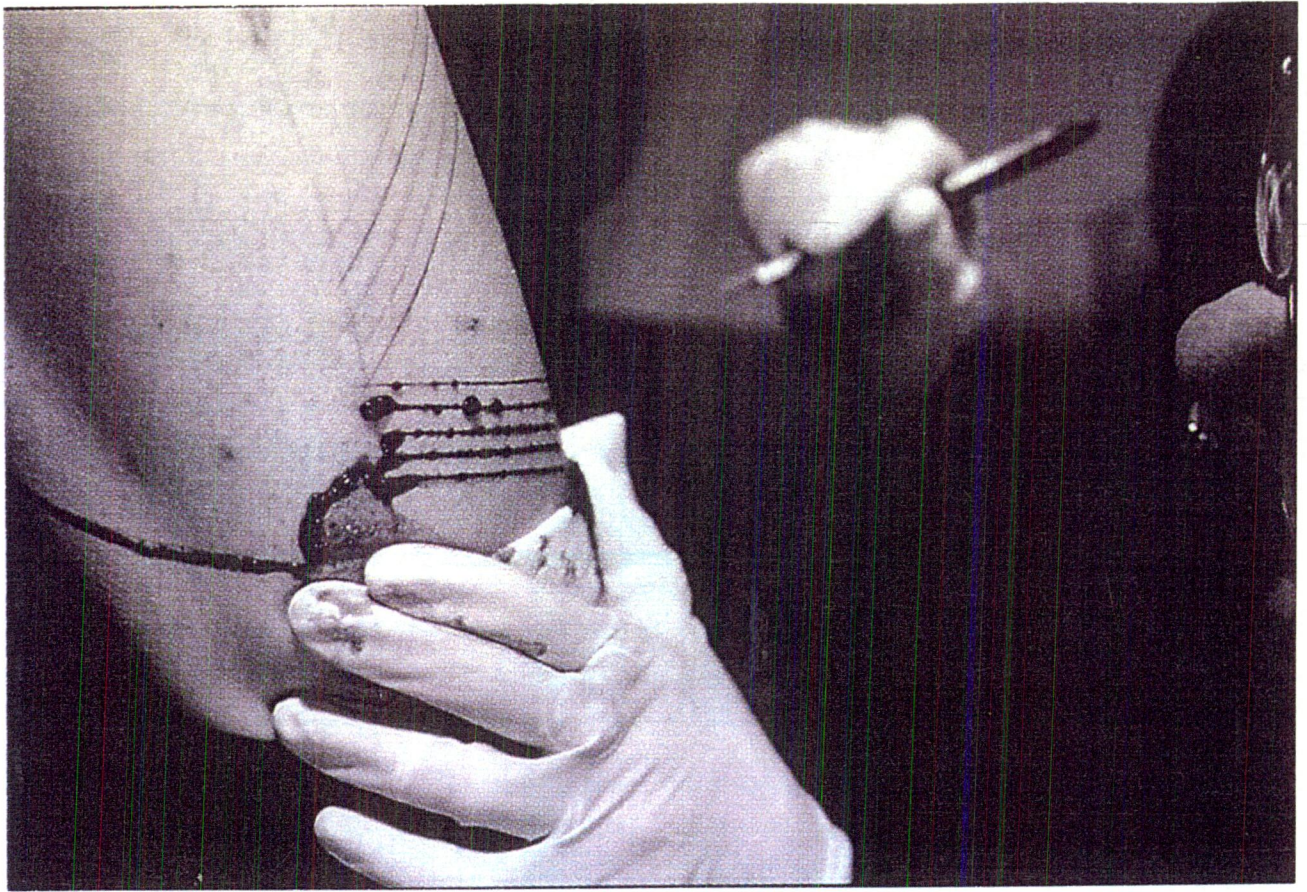


PLATE 40 San Francisco scarification process



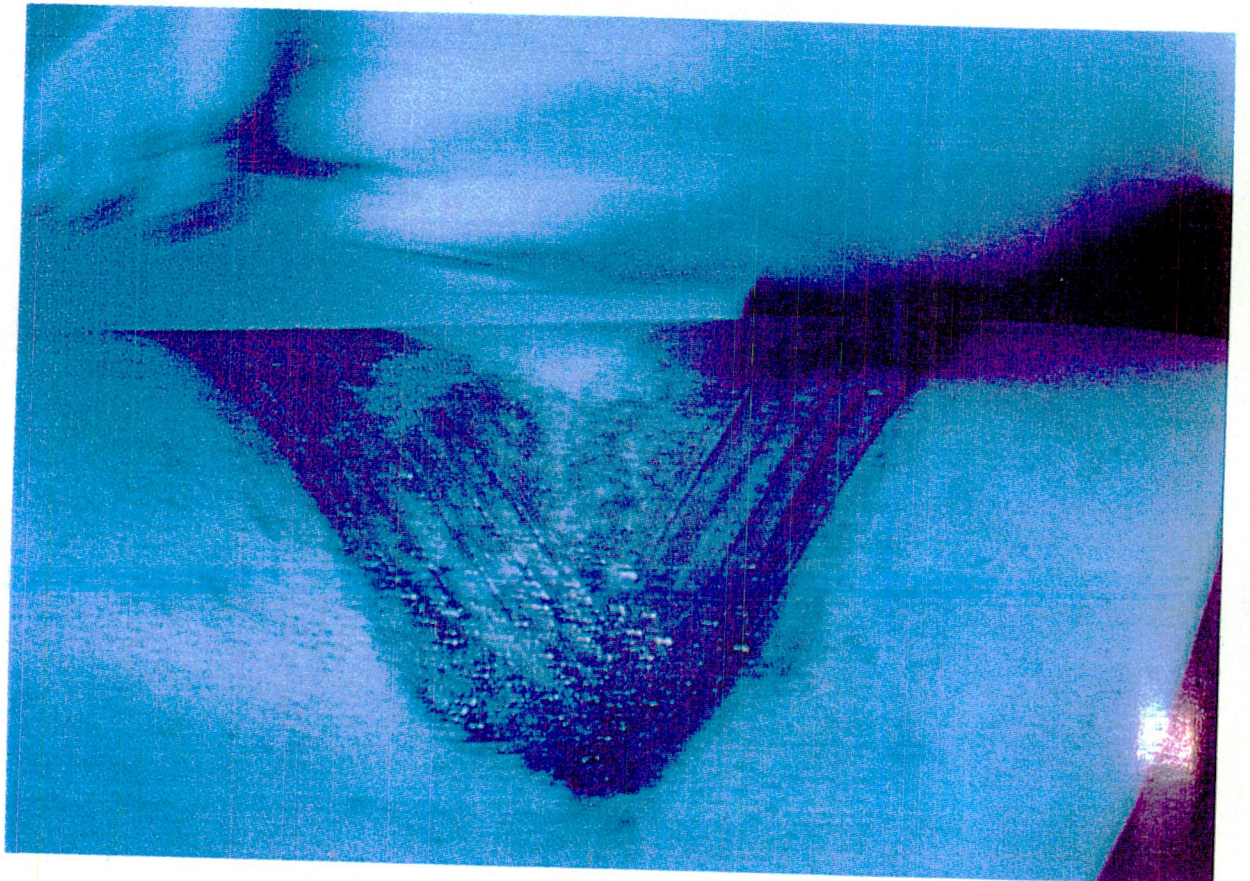
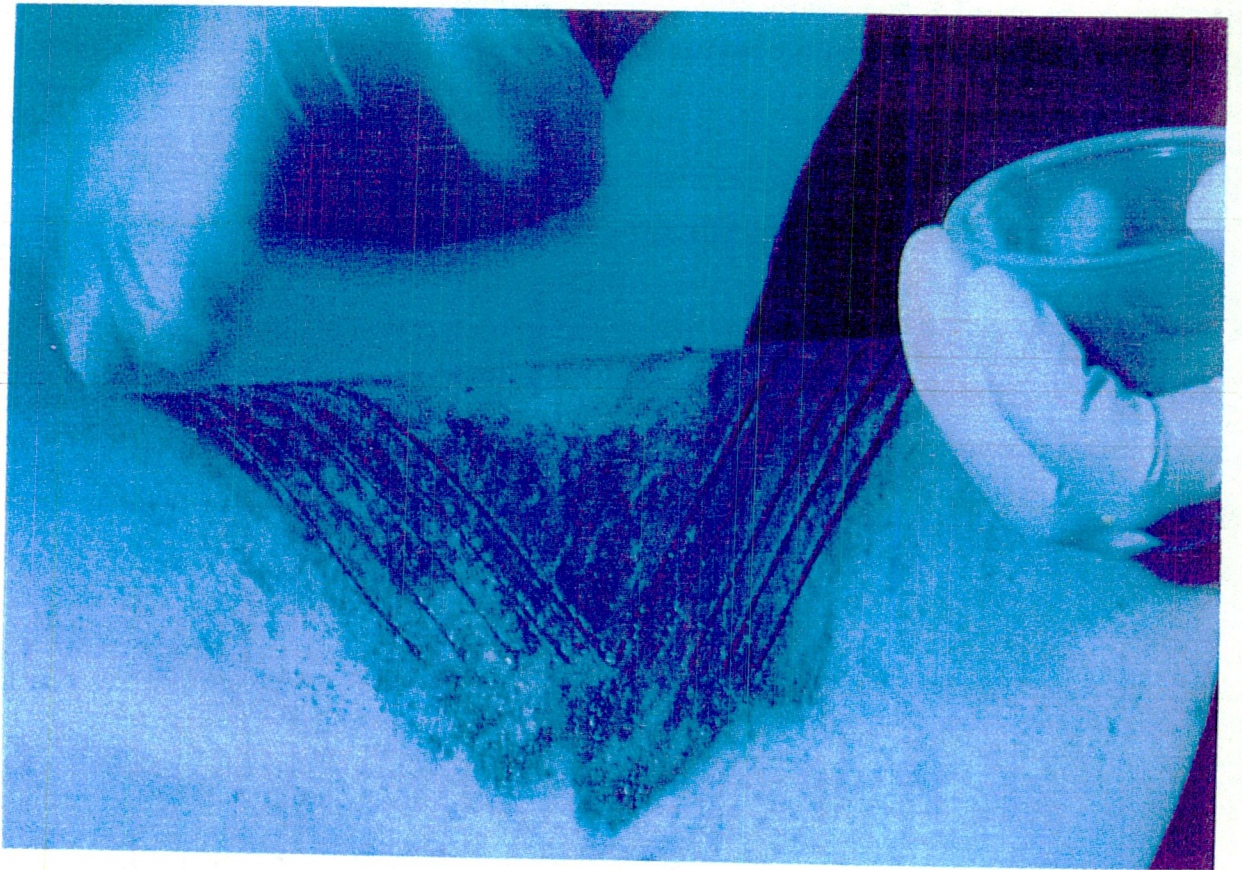


PLATE 41 San Francisco, scarification process



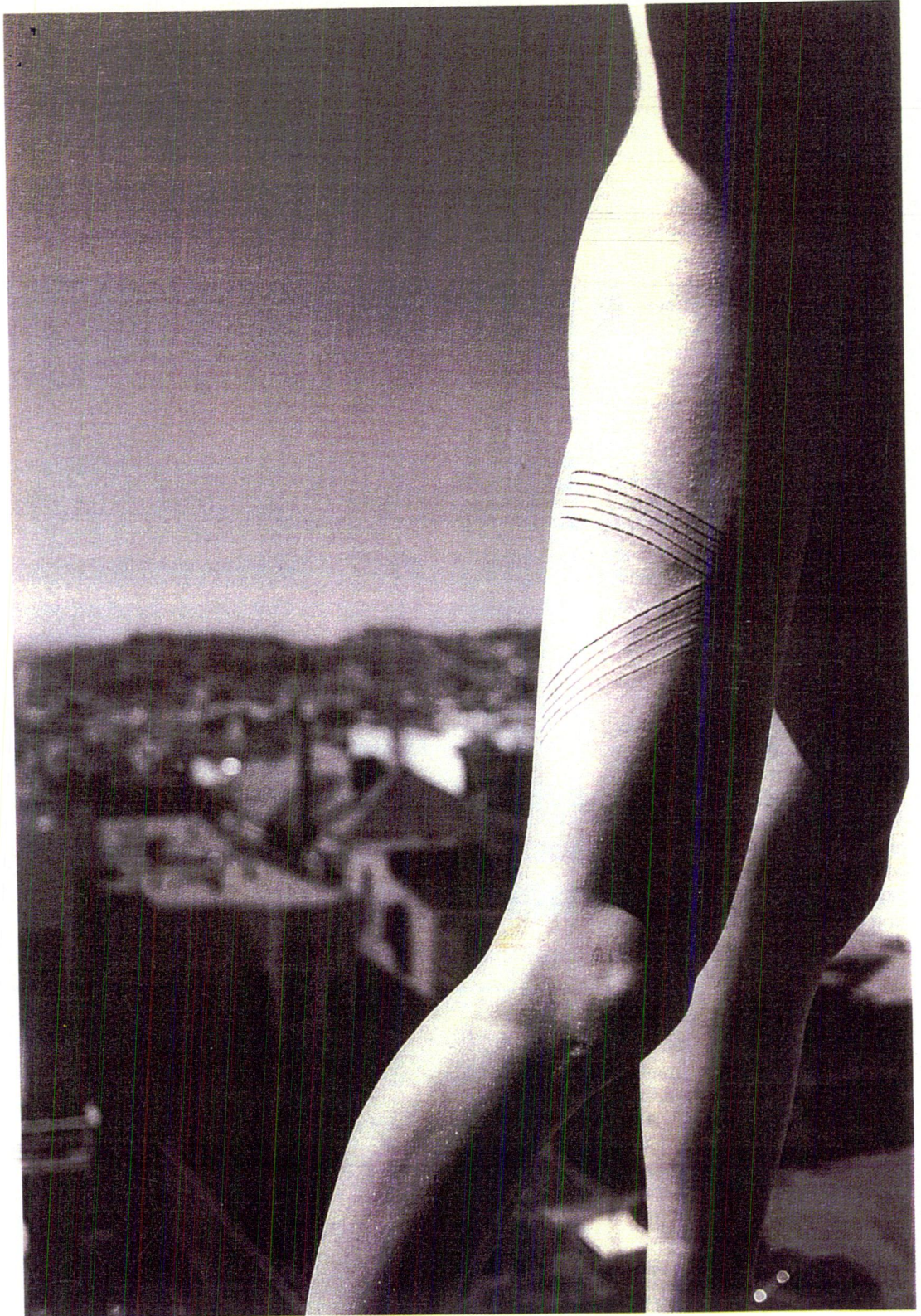


PLATE 42 San Francisco, scar



her concern for the recent lack of control over the practice of scarification "*I think it hit semi-fad proportions....you're getting people who are going crazy and not doing it for the deeper reasons*" [Detour pg 101]. In 1994, hospitals in San Francisco started to offer workshops on "safe 'bloodsports' sex techniques" due to the fear of Hepatitis and the Aids virus. Scarification, due to the blood letting, is seen as a danger, especially at S & M scenes. Body modification shops however preach the importance of safe procedure, hygiene and control. Self scarification within modern society is being seen as a psychiatric illness associated with anorexia and bulimia known as 'deliberate self harm syndrome'.

In 1987 in Manhattan a programme called Self Mutilators Anonymous was founded and in Chicago in 1984 the organisation SAFE (Self Abuse Finally Ends) was established. Modern Primitives however still claim that scarification is an important element in their exploration of spirituality through the body and is used thoughtfully as a rite of passage for the individual and a reclamation of the tribal self, rather than a means of destruction. It is a symbol of adornment.



Chapter 4 COSMETIC SURGERY

Cosmetic or plastic surgery is a means of improving the beauty of certain 'unattractive' or 'physically deformed' parts of the body by transplanting or removing living tissue or other substances like silicone to or from the particular area of attention. It is the fastest growing medical speciality in the United States grossing \$300 million approximately per annum, a figure which is increasing by 10% each year. According to the Womans Journal Guide to Cosmetic Surgery, 100,000 people this year will have some form of cosmetic surgery in Britain.

"New operations have developed rapidly over the last 10 years, techniques are constantly being refined and a mindboggling array of major and minor procedures are now available in many areas throughout the country" [Woman's Journal, 1997, pg 100].

According to Transform Ireland, a record number of Irish patients had cosmetic surgery in time for Christmas '96, the most popular treatment being fat removal and breast augmentation.

The objective of cosmetic surgery is *"to artificially enhance the 'natural body' without being seen to do so"* [Randall and Polhemus, 1996, pg 94].

Plastic surgery was first developed to deal with the horrific mutilations caused by World War 1, and has since been developed to deal with every possible cosmetic flaw. Just as primitive cultures used tattooing, scarring and piercing to beautify the body in accordance with their social norms, cosmetic surgery is how many in today's society achieve their ideal of beauty. Although the advanced technology of today is far beyond our predecessors' simple tools, the pain inflicted, as well as the concepts behind this form of modification, are just as primitive, and just as relative.

Our society seeks perfection. The media has created images of idealised beauty associated with wealth, happiness and desire; it has become a major influence on the creation of the unsatisfactory self-image. In order to fit the ideal of beauty, men and especially



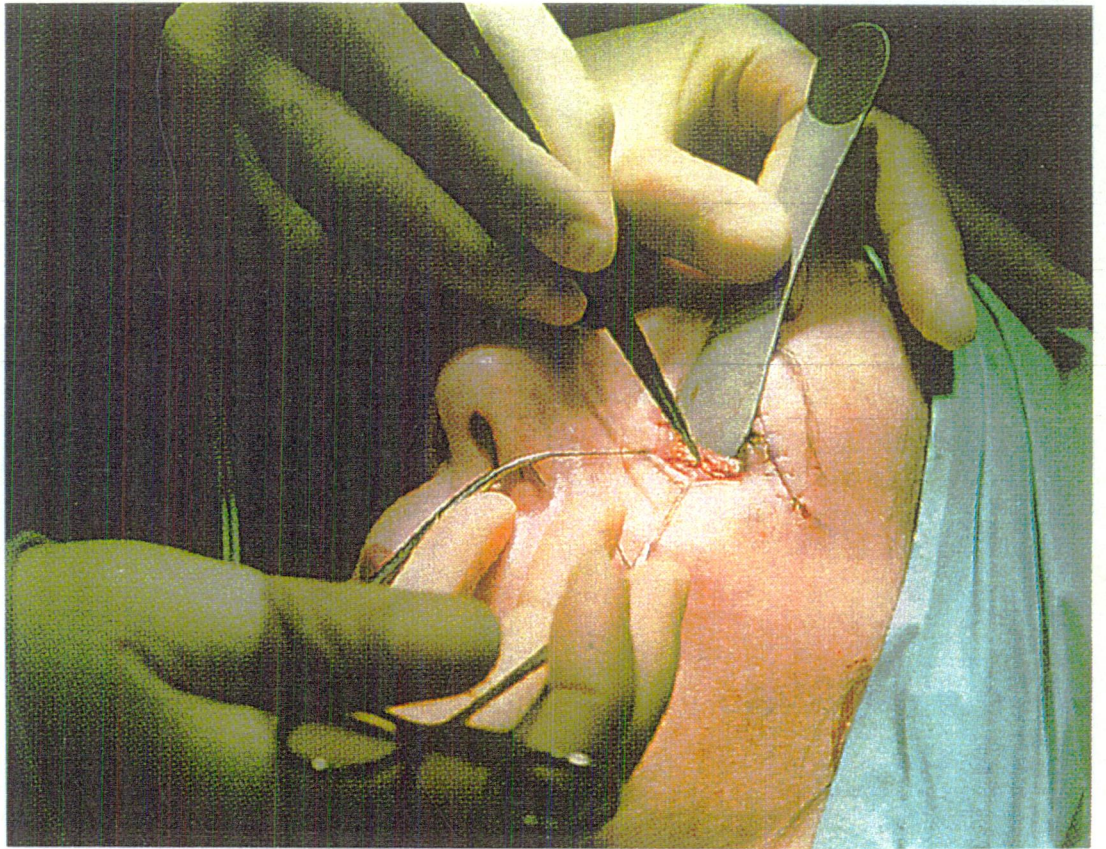


PLATE 43 Eyelid surgery



women are willing to undergo varying degrees of pain in order to emerge transformed. Surgeons are taking on the role of sculptors. They are changing people into works of art. Such beautification of the body claims to restore the confidence and sexual attraction of the individual.

"Improve your confidence with the bustline you've always wanted".

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Such advertisements do their best to convince the public that life will be easier and more fulfilling with the help of cosmetic surgery. According to the Pountney Clinic *"the figure is recontoured more pleasing through liposuction"*, it is the logical way to complete a *"trim figure"*. Preying on peoples' insecurities and offering 'simple' and expensive solutions is the way that surgeons sell their services. In Europe the use of cosmetic surgery is very low-key. In general, patients do their best to keep it a secret, whereas, by contrast, Americans display their scars proudly. It is seen as a symbol of wealth rather than vanity, *"cosmetic surgery is regarded as a badge of success"* [Womans Journal, 1997, pg 8].

This connotation of wealth is a reason why many people, particularly in the US, receive cosmetic surgery. It is a status symbol; an indication of rank within society. There is an ever growing community of people relying on cosmetic surgery. Just as modern primitives strive to create an identity for themselves through their body modifications, they too are forming a community of people with the same values and ideals of beauty. With the use of cosmetic surgery they are changing their identity and ultimately controlling their bodies, reclaiming what is theirs. Such modification is often condemned as a conformist reaction to the mainstream ideal of beauty. To some extent this is true, but it is also true that every individual has the right to re-invent their bodies and cosmetic surgery, despite the risks involved, allows almost any visual change to be made.

Unlike other forms of modification, the pain of the process is not considered to be a positive attribute in favour of undergoing cosmetic surgery. In fact, with surgery many drawbacks, such as scarring, bruising, numbness and infection, some of which may be





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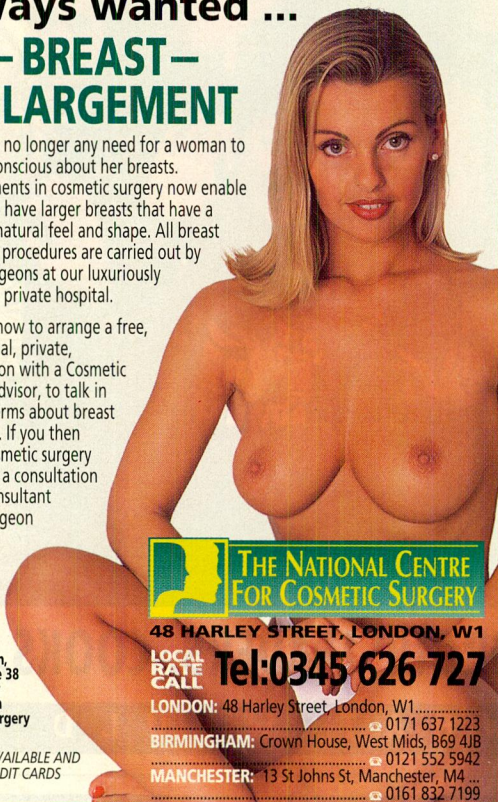
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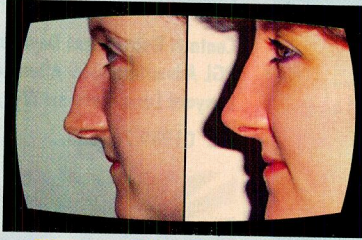


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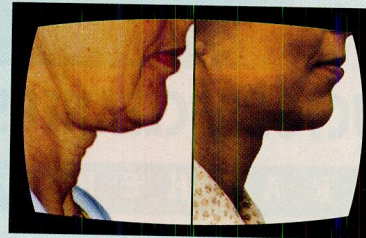
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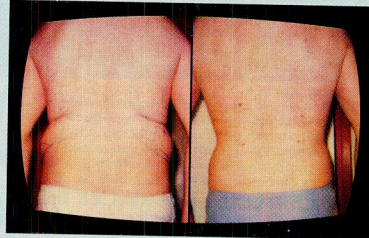


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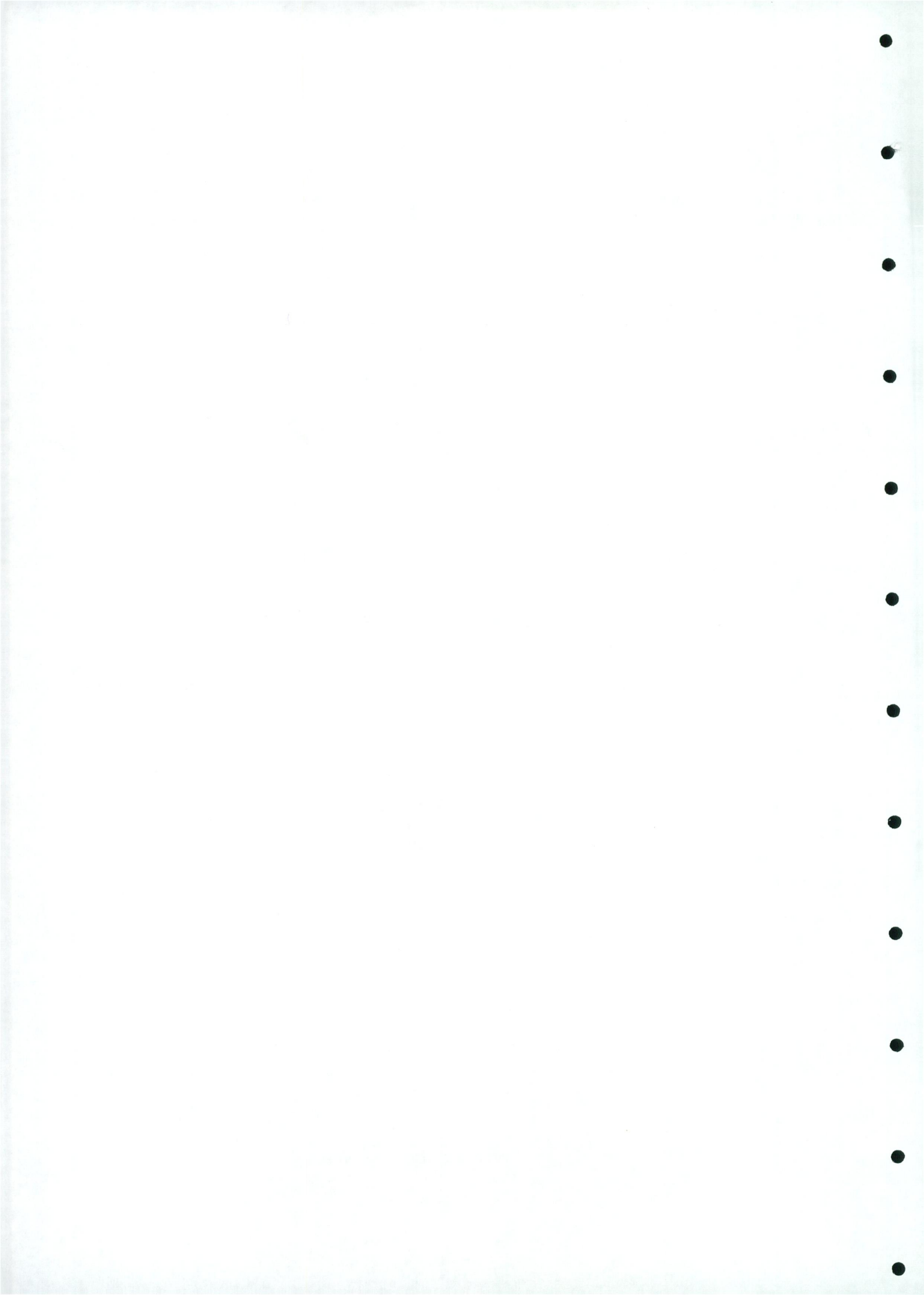
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permanent, are very likely to accompany any such procedure. If the surgery is badly performed it can be disfiguring or even life threatening.

Where scarring is concerned, the surgeon will do his best to hide them in the natural creases of the skin. It is impossible to predict the extent of scarring before the operation, as everyone's skin heals differently. Dark skinned patients are more prone to Keloid scars, whereas people with very pale skin can take a long time to heal and are more likely to bleed.

Most cosmetic procedures have the risk of side effects. In the case of an Abdominoplasty (tummy tuck) which removes the loose skin, excess fat and stretched muscles in the area, severe pain is often reported. There is also a high risk of chest infection after the surgery and patients can also suffer from nerve damage causing numbness.

In the case of breast augmentation and reduction most patients are very happy with the results even though there are many side effects. In the case of augmentation silicone gel or saline implants are inserted through a small cut at the arm pit. The disadvantages can include a lopsided result, loss of sensation in the nipples, the hardening of scar tissue surrounding the implant, implant rupture and interference with the early detection of breast cancer.

Breast reduction is a major operation where the surgeon cuts away part of the lower portion of the breast and repositions the nipple. Many women will be left with bad scarring, lopsided results and the inability to breast feed. Breast reduction is seen as a very necessary surgery for some women as very large breasts can cause physical or even psychological damage.

Eyelid surgery known as Blephanoplasty is the removal of excess skin and fat above and below the eyes. Bruising will usually occur but will fade within a week to ten days. Discolouration can last for several weeks however. There is also a risk of damage to the muscle which opens the eye, possibly leading to a drooping eye lid. If too much fat is removed it can lead to 'scleral show' where too much of the eyeball is revealed. Another

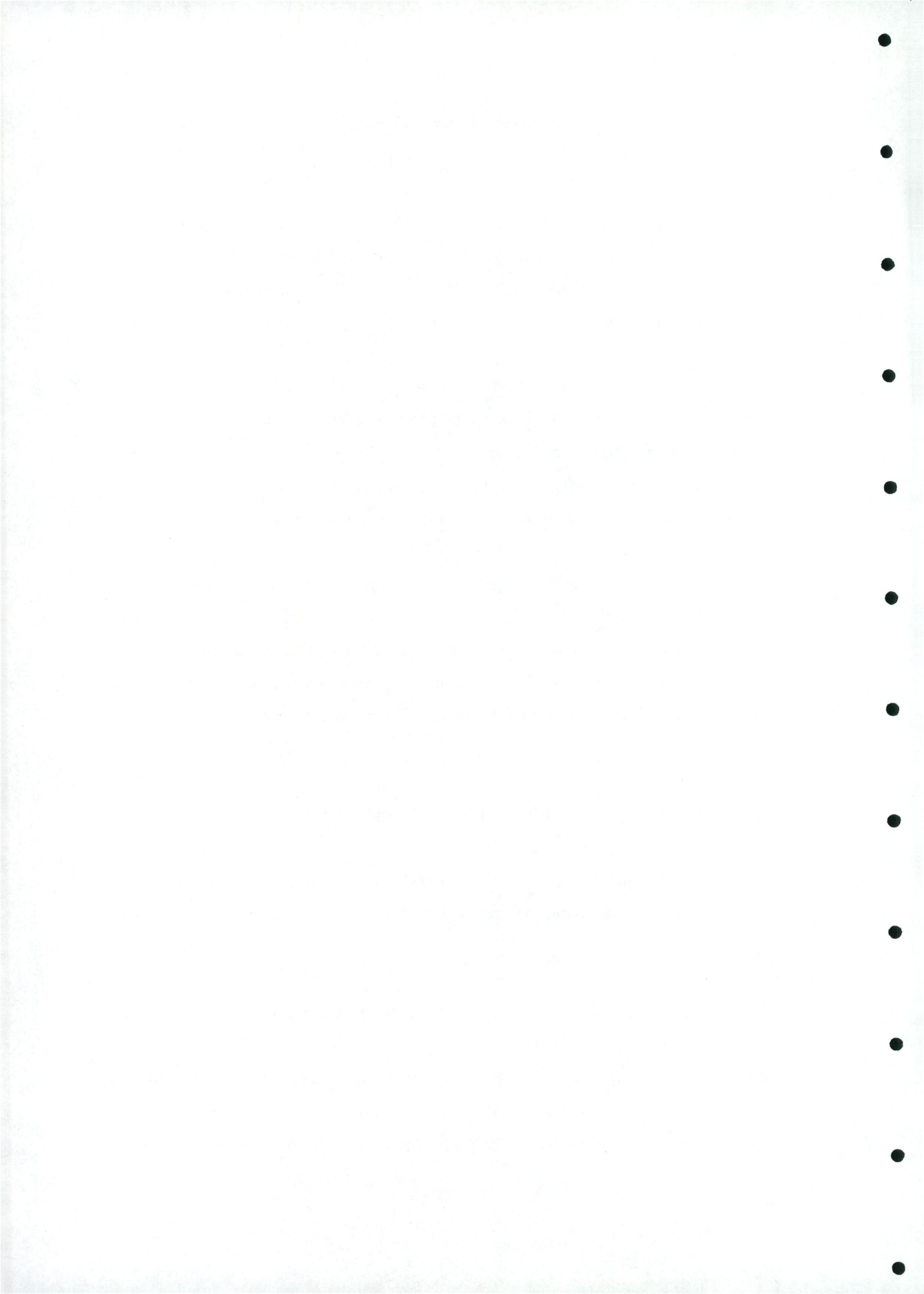
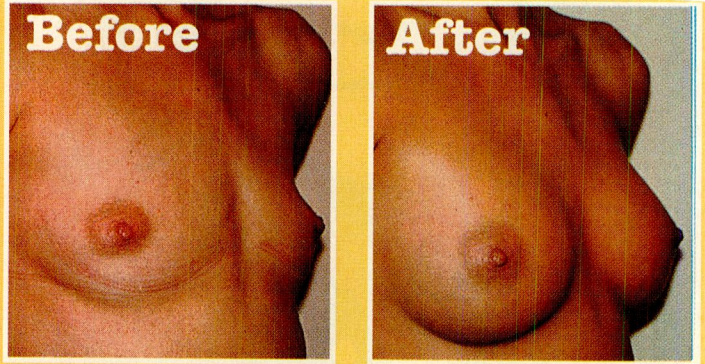




PLATE 46 Before and After: Tummy tuck





BREAST ENLARGEMENT Before and 12 weeks later—the implants are inserted through a small cut in the armpit. Every year around 5,000 women in Britain have breast augmentation operations





BREAST REDUCTION Part of each breast is cut away and the nipples are carefully repositioned. Ability to breast-feed is often affected by the operation and numbness around the nipple is common



risk, although rare, is dry eye syndrome, and scars may swell and redden for months after the procedure. Nerve damage is also a possibility.

It is very common for people in the public eye to undergo extensive surgery. The actress Cher has spent over \$24,000 on cosmetic surgery.

"When there's a bit of me I don't like, I change it" [Liggett, 1989, pg 128].

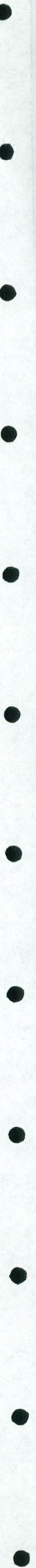
Cindy Jackson, an American living in Britain, has modelled herself on the 'Barbie doll', and at the age of 40 years she claims that she looks better than she did at 21. Cindy has spent the last eight years changing her appearance through the 20 different surgical procedures she underwent. She has become famous because of her new body. Another example is Pamela Anderson Lee who must attribute also her stardom to her silicone assets. Such surgery is used to further careers, not only in the media. To be young and attractive is often a requirement for any employer, it is sometimes considered that success and the body beautiful go hand in hand.

Orlan, the French performance artist has also undergone several plastic surgery operations. However, her reasons are not as simple. She is challenging the accepted definition of beauty in her ultimate masterpiece 'The Reincarnation of St. Orlan'. At 48 years of age, Orlan devised this work of art ten years ago. It is *"An on-going series of cosmetic surgery operations, the idea is to achieve total self-transformation using mythical female figures as inspiration"* [Art Review, 1996, pg 52]. Each operation was planned on a computer composite face, superimposing onto the image of her face the features of the various female icons. At present Orlan has received through the surgery the chin of Botticelli's 'Venus', the eyes of Fontaine d'leau's 'Diana', the forehead of Leonardo de Vinci's 'Mona Lisa', the lips of Gustave Moneau's 'Europa' and the nose of Gerards 'Psyche'. Each operation has been a performance, with her playing on the words operating 'theatre' and 'perform', dressing up for the occasion and reciting poetry. Her fifth operation involved the dressing up of the surgeons and assistants in black wet suits and a rap singer. For her seventh operation she had her performance live on close circuit television to fourteen galleries worldwide. At present Orlan has undergone nine facial





PLATE 49 Cindy Jackson after surgery



operations. Her idea of beauty 'is not superficial, its non-conformist'. Her use of female icons is very relevant because *"by using multiple elements of beauty she's denying that the ideal woman really exists"* [Art Review, 1996, pg 53]. Orlan is considered to be 'a true' modern primitive with the blending of *"Western science and ancient body art objectives - freeing the body from its biological inheritance and making it an expression of the human imagination"* [Randall and Polhemus, 1996, pg 94].

Although Orlan is challenging the conventions of beauty, the reasons behind her use of cosmetic surgery differ very little from those who mask, redefine and beautify their bodies through surgery. Orlan has a natural urge to alter her appearance. She is doing so as a statement of individuality and has received much criticism for her actions. It seems that society only allows for such mutilation of the body if it is a conformist reaction to the norm.

Where primitive cultures were divided into tribes, each with its own type of, and use for, body modifications, society today is divided into similar subcultures.





PLATE 50 Orlan



CONCLUSION

On the basis of the material I have presented, I think that it becomes clear that the four forms of body modification examined here have common threads. They are each a reaction to certain needs.

The search for perfection and pre-occupation with the physical form that body modification represents is clearly common to this generation and previous ages.

It becomes obvious, however, that, then and now, the motivations lying behind body modification run deeper than these superficial ones. Body modification represents a search for an identity, either through making a statement of individuality by reference to society in general by seeking to stand out or shock, or by searching for a sense of belonging within a social group, sub-culture or tribe. Hence, through body modification, punks could simultaneously find a common identity with others and set themselves apart from society in general in the same way that primitive tribes could mark out their own separate sub-cultures. In this way, body modification has fed off the profound need for belonging that exists within the human race. Parallels can be drawn between, for instance, tribal and neo-tribal initiation rituals and cosmetic surgery in modern western society. Each, although radically different on the face of it, is a process of seeking peer group acceptance through body modification.

Body modifications continue to be used as a process for defining one's rank or status within society in the same way as they did within tribes. In western society, the prevalence of tattoos among prisoners or people in lower socio-economic groups represent a statement of status on their part in the same way as affluent Americans would flaunt a 'nose-job' as a means of displaying their wealth. In Japan, tattoos would be seen as a symbol of wealth.

The achievement of a sense of control over one's body is another major factor behind the continuing use of body modification over the years. It is a basic physical assertion of one's individual right to choice and any alteration is a physical manifestation of a mental



decision. In this way, the individual permanently marks his or her own body, defying or celebrating the marks or scars that life invariably adds to the physical body.

The marking of time is also an important element. Any body modification relates to the time of its conception and is a subsequent reminder of the time in which it was made. The experience of body modification permanently changes the participant and for some people it is a transcendental experience. It is a type of metamorphosis: the emergence of a new skin and the shedding of the old self. In this way, body modification is a rite of passage whether it is done for this reason or not.

The use of body modification for sexual enhancement is also a common factor. Some piercings are used directly as sexual aids, while piercing, tattooing, scarification and cosmetic surgery can be used to make the body more attractive. Eroticism is closely related to all forms of modification, both within the primitive and the modern.

Linked with eroticism is the pleasure of pain. Scarification and piercing amongst modern primitives are often linked to S&M practices. All forms of modification represent a statement of ability to endure pain. Within tribal cultures especially, it was often used as a test. Today, the ordeal of cosmetic surgery is seen as real dedication to the ideal of beauty and tattooed men are often considered to be 'tough'.

Body modification is also a very powerful means of communication. All forms tell a lot about the wearer, and while unfortunately today this can be stereotypical, it has always been thus. It is a visible form of self expression used by the person to convey an impression of themselves or to make a statement about their status in society.

The relevance of and need for body modification in its various forms is common to this generation and generations past. The motivating factors underlying it and the propensity for undertaking it that has existed through the ages in a variety of cultural, social and religious settings, suggest that it is not a superficial medium of expression or a transient fad of a fashion statement. It is clearly an urge that comes from deep within the human psyche.



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