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**NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND
DESIGN.**

PRINTED TEXTILES.

**ANALYSIS OF PRIMITIVE AND
CONTEMPORARY BODY
MODIFICATION.**

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**SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
HISTORY OF ART AND DESIGN AND
COMPLEMENTARY STUDIES, IN
CANDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF TEXTILE
PRINT 1998.**

NATIONAL CENTER OF ART AND

DESIGN

STUDY OF THE

ARTS AND DESIGN

IN THE 21ST CENTURY

REPORT

ARTS AND DESIGN

REPORT TO THE

COMMISSION ON THE ARTS AND DESIGN

AND THE NATIONAL CENTER OF ART AND DESIGN

AND THE NATIONAL CENTER OF ART AND DESIGN

2001

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to Niamh O'Sullivan for her continuous help and support throughout the writing of this thesis.

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continuous help and support throughout the
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INTRODUCTION

Within this thesis I will analyse aspects of the changing roles of body modifications from the primitive through to contemporary. In recent years body adornment has become part of popular fashion. Furthermore I will investigate how fashion has borrowed from alternative street and sub cultures, and from where these have ultimately derived. To understand this, firstly the history of primitive body adornment must be investigated.

I will examine three groups of people: The Ga'anada from Nigeria, The Nuba from Southern Sudan and The Tiv Tribe from Nigeria. I will explore their individual body modifications and their motivations for doing so. As body piercing has become a popular fashion I will also examine its primitive background. In doing so the history of body modifications, both primitive and revival will thus be explored.

The focus of my thesis will be restricted mainly to two forms of body modifications: scarification and piercing. As an extension of these practices, this thesis will also consider the modern practices of body shaping in the form of cosmetic surgery and body building.

While exploring revivals of body art I aim to take a close look at "Modern Primitives", a group mainly regenerated by Doug Malloy who helped re-introduce body piercing into contemporary society. This group have freely interpreted primitive meanings and in so doing it will be argued have taken them out of context. While examining these phenomena the underlying concept of 'ideal beauty' and how our

conception of ideal beauty has changed from primitive cultures to that of today, will also be analyzed.

CHAPTER 1

PRIMITIVE BODY MODIFICATION

CHAPTER I

PROLOGUE: BODY AND MIND

CHAPTER 1 - PRIMITIVE BODY DECORATION

PRIMITIVE BODY MODIFICATIONS

As primitive societies are divided into tribes, each developed their own ideas of beauty. From these they developed their own body modifications.

As tattooing is not very effective on darker skins, a new method of permanent marking was born. The act of scarification or cicatrization is the cutting into the skin to form patterns and marks. These cuts can be raised and re-cut to form larger scars. This method of modification was very popular in Africa where the majority of people have dark skin.

Scarification in primitive cultures is revealing of social status and structures within those societies and plays a very important role in showing the continuing way of life within a group. There are two types of scars (1) hollow and (2) raised [Fig.1]. The raised scars are caused by lifting the skin with a hooked thorn, and then slicing the raised skin with a blade; after cutting, irritants like ash can be rubbed into the scar to impair healing and make the scar protrude into a welt or lump. Hollow scars are cut into the skin in the same way but no irritants are rubbed into it. These develop into open-style flat scars which look like a shiny snail trail.

The first example of body scarification is practised by the Ga'anada people from Nigeria. Both boys and girls go through a series of scarifying. For the girls it is called "Hleeta", for the boys "Sapta". This scarification is very important socially for



fig.1.1
example of (1)hollow scars.

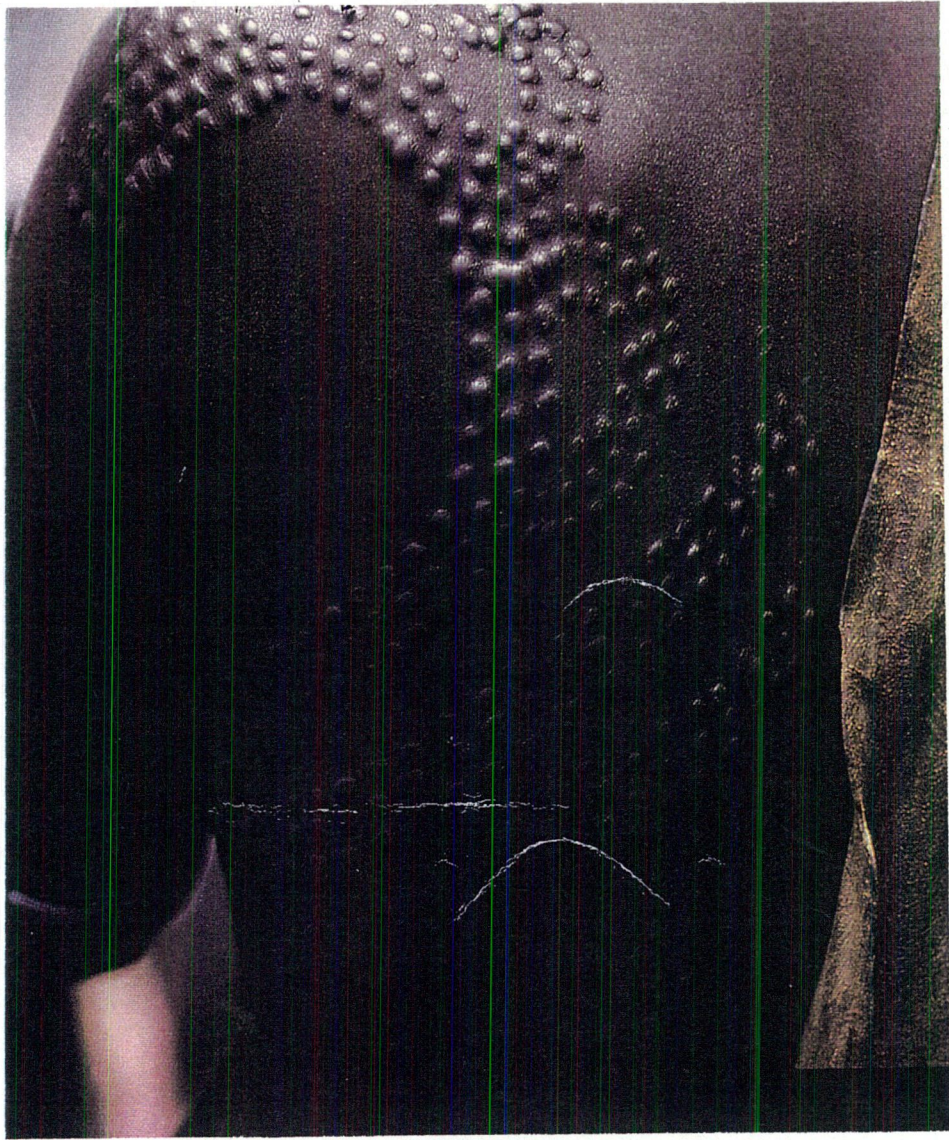


fig.1.2
example of (2) raised scars.

these people. From an early age in their lives marriages are arranged by older family members, and there are exchanges of goods from the family of the groom to the family of the bride-to-be. As marriage is the centre of this community, both the girls and boys who will enter into marriage are tested for their eligibility by undergoing a series of body and face scarification. Both the "Hleeta" and "Sapta" are thus carried out in stages.

Hleeta is carried out in six stages [Fig.2]. The first of these occurs usually when the girl is approximately five or six years old. She is taken to a quiet place outside the hamlet, usually in late March or April, is cut by an elderly woman from the hamlet who has been taught this skill, through the generations before her.

The scars that result from Hleeta can be characterized as 'dots'. In the first set of markings two bisected chevrons are cut just above the navel. These first cuts draw attention to the stomach, uterus and emphasize a girl's reproductive potential. In the second stage there are about four or five horizontal lines cut onto her forehead from ear to ear. After two years, more marking is applied, this time a pattern is cut into the forearm. The fourth stage is when the thighs, buttocks and base of neck are cut. The fifth stage is done when the girl is about thirteen. Now there are cuttings down the centre of the torso, the upper arms and shoulders.

Before the final scarification the girls have their ears and lips pierced. In March before they go through the final scarification, their thighs are cut. These cuts signify a contract of marriage and no other boy may step forward to ask for the girl's hand in marriage; before this last stage other suitors may do so.

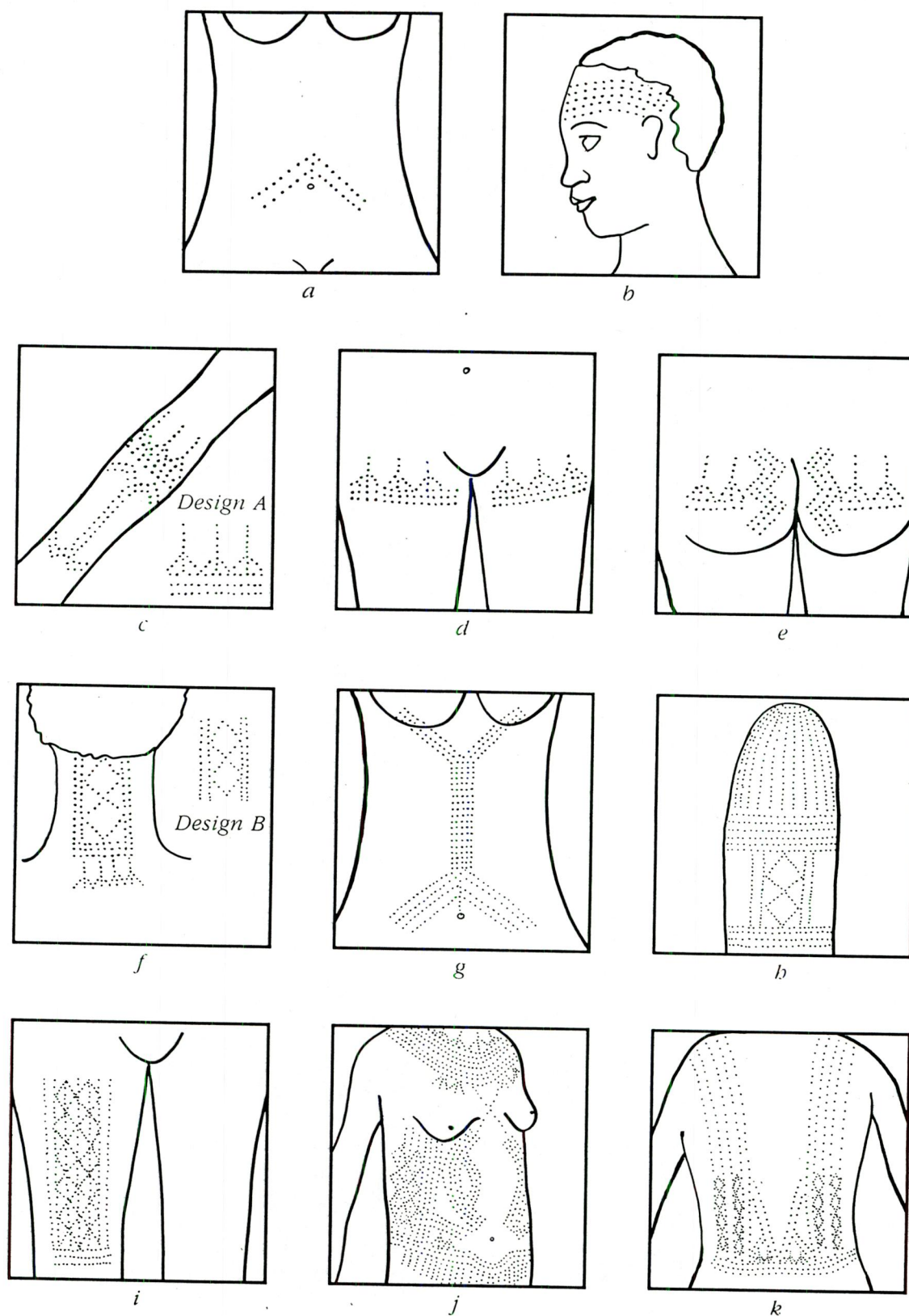


fig.2
designs which are used during HLEETA.

After two months the girl undergoes scarification all over. This is where the gaps are filled in. This last stage tests the emotional and physical strength of the girl and is meant to help prepare her for anything she will go through in a marriage.

Throughout these six stages, two families exchange gifts. Sometimes the strain on the family is so great and the expectation so high that they might postpone the last stage of Hleeta in order to gain more for themselves and their daughters.

The boys go through Sapta between six and sixteen. This is an initiation ordeal which lasts for three months, throughout this time they learn practical skills, like hunting, making tools and weapons, learning how to defend their forthcoming houses. They are not scarified but endure whippings (at least 3 times) and also go through physical and emotional abuses. These teach them how to deal with hardships that might fall on them during their marriages.

Hleeta and Sapta mark the transition from being single into being eligible for marriage. It is a permanent condition and is a rite of passage which is paid by both in pain. Over the years it takes to complete Hleeta, for example, in addition to their visual scars, the information they have been taught while acquiring them is equally valued. It is important to point out at this stage that this process is one of socialising. It also shows the great commitment that these boys and girls have toward their community, and their willingness to accept the traditions of their society.

The Nuba girls from Southern Sudan also undergo scarification (Fig.3]. Again this process is in parallel to their physiological development. For these girls the first set of marks take on the form of a pattern of scars which are cut onto each side of the

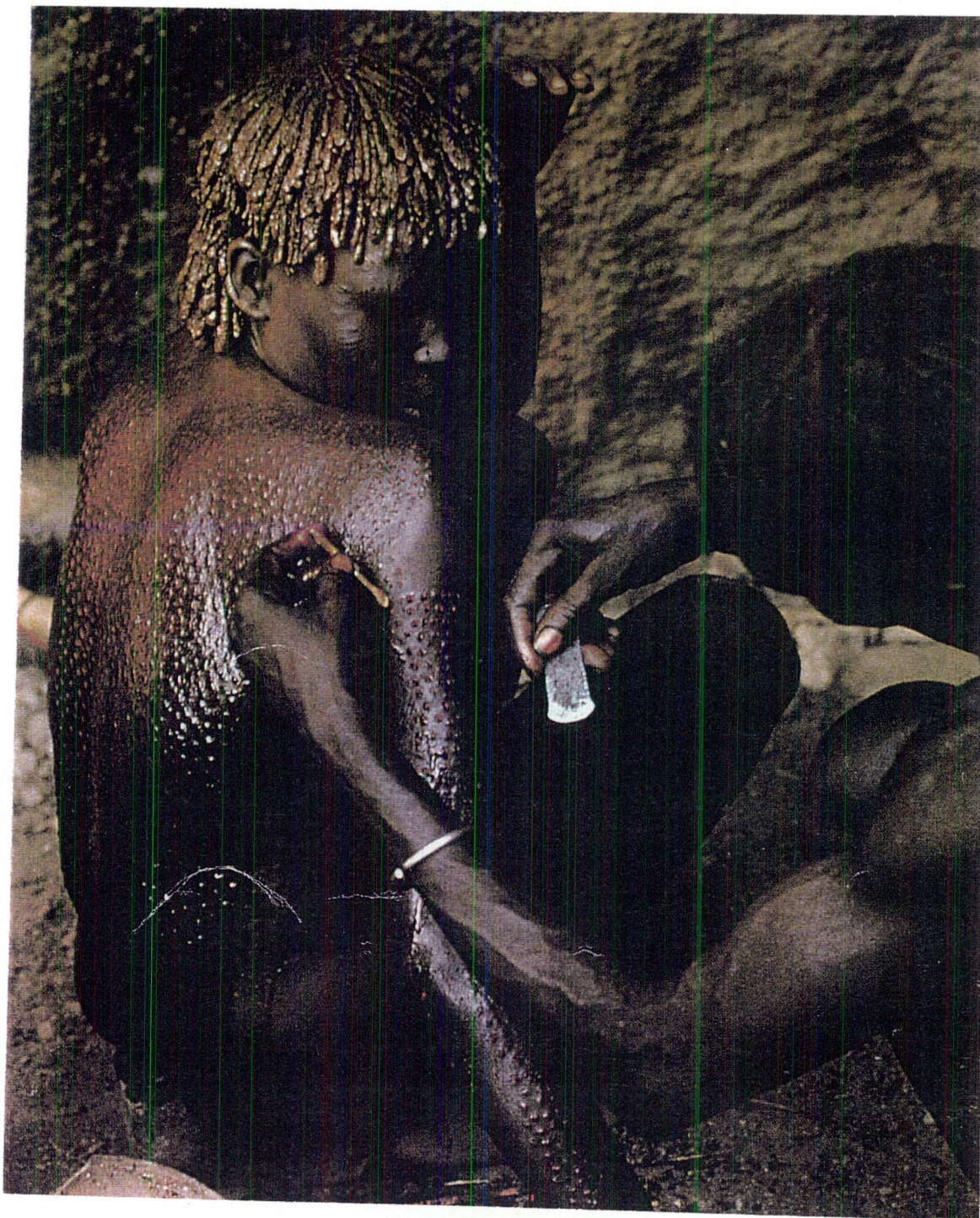


fig. 3.1

Nuba girl undergoing scarification.

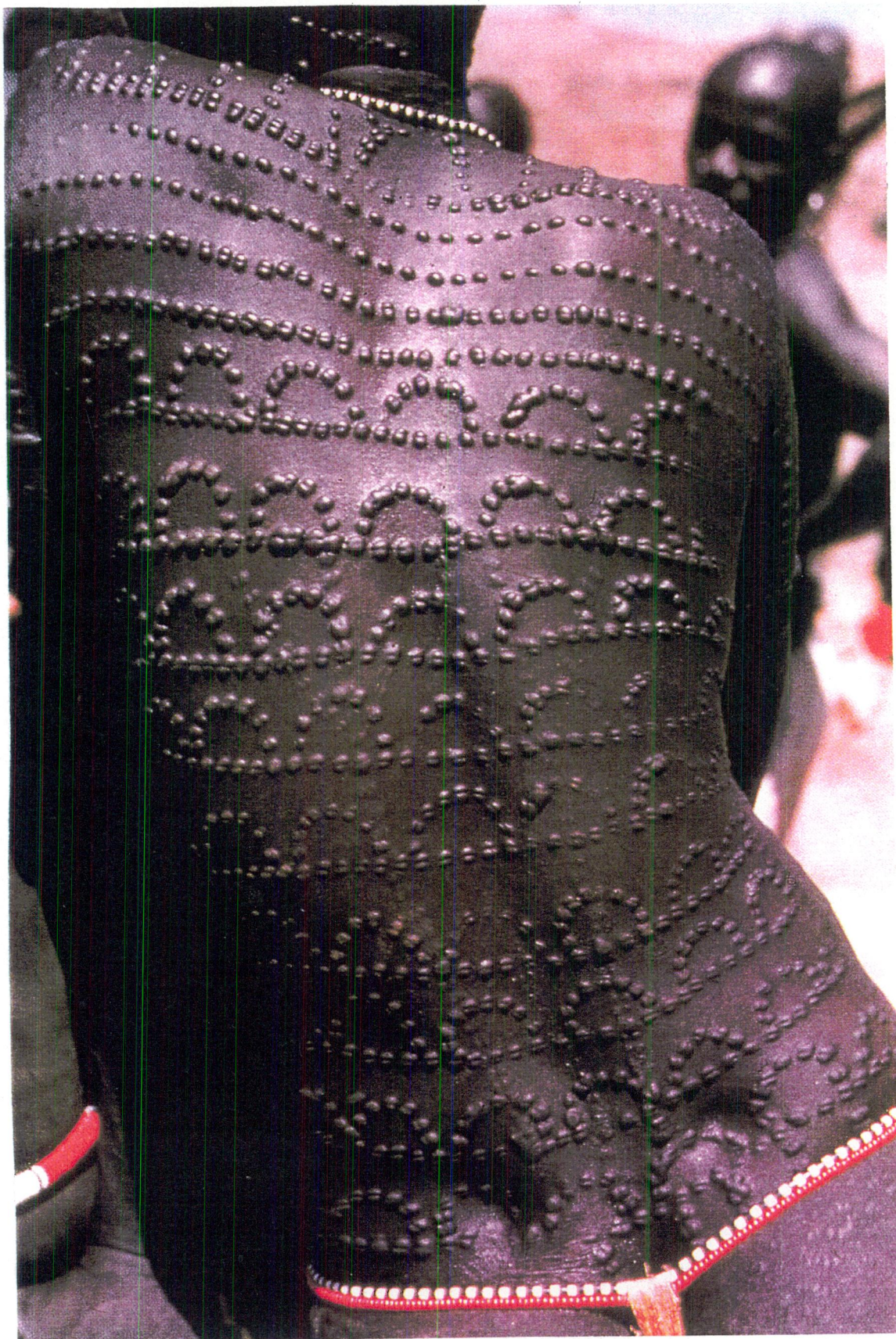


fig.3.2

example of completed scarification.

abdomen.

These join at the navel and move on up to a point between the breasts. When the girls reach puberty they are taken out of the village to a mountainside. They stay here with the elder until their scars heal. After the girls' first menstruation, a second set of cuts are applied. These form parallel rows below the breasts and around the back. Again more cutting takes place after childbirth, where the now woman is marked on all remaining places apart from the knees down.

In Nuba society both boys and girls are first marked on their faces after puberty. This is then repeated a few years later. For the most part, the impetus behind the scarification is for aesthetic reasons, as the Nuba believe that scarring enhances a person's beauty. In addition, they believe that scars over the eyes help sight and scars at the temples relieve headaches.

The Tiv

The Tiv, a pagan tribe from Nigeria, also engage in extensive scarification for purely aesthetic purposes. Tiv people believe that individuals should make themselves more attractive, they set out to achieve this in four ways: through colouring the skin, dressing up, cutting into the skin and chipping teeth.

The Tiv colour their skin or make it "glow", by rubbing different substances into it. Camwood is one such substance, a redwood ground down to make a cosmetic which is applied to the body. Newborn babies have Camwood on their heads, so too are brides and grooms painted with Camwood. In this context it is used in rituals where the sacred and profane worlds are joined together. After the first goal of "glowing"

is achieved the body is then "Dressed up". A part of this is done by painting designs on their faces - it is experimental when young, part of dressing involves the use of henna to colour nails and hands. Antimony mineral, which is a silvery white metallic element is used to paint eyes, lips and noses. Permanent forms of decoration like scarification are given a trial run by using a twig from a particular tree, (*Uapaca Guineensis*). When the skin is cut with this, its residue leaves a mark embedded under the skin. This lasts for approximately two to three months and gradually fades. The mark is white in colour and so complements dark skin tones. The natural progression from this is permanent scarification. Within the Tiv this does not show rank or social status, unlike that of a newly scarred Nuba girl, it is more like a free interpretation of marks. Although social status is not evident, it does reflect age, due to changing trends and methods of cutting, quite like fashion within Western society. There are four generations which are clearly signalled in Tiv scarification. The first and oldest is called Ishondu - these are flat shiny scars positioned on the backs and legs. These are only evident in the older generations. Abaji are lumps (like keloid) done by pulling or lifting the skin and then slicing into it. Irritants are rubbed into the open wound to enhance scarring. These second set of scars are found from the age 75 and upwards. Kusa are nail-like marks, flat and almost welt-like. These are commonly found around the face. The most recent form of scarification is Mkali which consist of very deep cuttings into the skin which are then coloured with charcoal. The above scars can be mixed (apart from Ishondu) to give individual patterns, but they still clearly indicate age differences. It is said that children of about five years old - the next generation up will also develop new patterns and ways of scarring. As the four types of scars are decorative, they change the appearance of the face, this is more noticeable in Abaji and Mkali marks. The Mkali which are deep-cut can create

shadows, enhancing and making features more prominent. As the Abaji protrude from the skin they too draw attention to certain areas of the face [Fig4], all enhancing the beauty of the individual. Ishondu, Abaji, Kusa and Mkali are all unisex. The most widely used are the nail-like scars of Kusa which are usually found on the chest and arms of men and the legs and backs of women. Both sexes draw attention to that they feel are their good features. If a Tiv girl has well-shaped legs, she will have them scarred, making them more prominent. Animals are commonly used as decorative patterns.

The aesthetic and tactile run parallel, and furthermore, there is an understanding that some scars enhance fertility. The Tiv girls explain this by saying that the scars are tender for a period of time after and are therefore more erogenous, so the woman with scars will be more sexually attentive and active, and consequently more likely to conceive. The freedom of expression associated with Tiv scarring is not mirrored in Nuba or Ga'anada scarification where each person is adorned with the same set of marks.

The last decoration which is now fading away is tooth chipping. This is said to be much more painful than scarification. The focal point is the face [Fig.5]. The four methods of beautifying the body are exclusive to the Tiv 'ideal of beauty' and are not the same in any other tribe. They strive to adorn their bodies, and the outcome must be evident of individuals having suffered in some way through pain and expense, showing a willingness to please both themselves and others.



fig.4

TIV tribesman decorated with ABAJI.



fig.5
TIV men displaying chipped teeth.

With the ongoing westernization of such countries, scarification is increasingly banned as many governments discourage the belief that cutting/scarring is acceptable. The bias inherent in such prohibition is typical of the imposition of views by one dominant culture on another. In Japan, for example, tattoos have a great history and the art of tattooing is highly respected in comparison to the U.K. where tattooing is still associated with what might be considered by some as undesirable groups, such as sailors/bikers etc. In western society scars are also sometimes seen as masculine and evidence of strength, a sign that the bearer has endured significant pain, and has the scar to tell the story. So in comparison, self-inflicted scarification applied as the bearer goes through a physical and physiological pain process resulting in a set of scars is common to both Eastern and Western cultures which will become more clear in Chapter 2.

In the examples I have discussed, the Ga'anda people from Nigeria and the Nuba girls from Southern Sudan, the aesthetics of the practice are highly significant. There is, however, another reason for cicatrization, and this is concerned with **Rites of Passage** [Fig.6]. Rites of passage exist to mark the major events in one's life, e.g. birth, puberty, marriage, parenthood and death. Within the Nuba the movement of a young girl from puberty into adulthood and hence to marriage is observed by scarification. In traditional societies, enormous emphasis is placed on the move from puberty into adulthood. This transformation is so important that it is marked stage-by-stage and then finally concluded as the individual reaches the new position of adulthood. The major events in a tribe member's life are thus connected to the rituals that they will endure during scarification, and the teachings they receive from elders on the way will strengthen them in order to help them deal better with their role and tasks in life.



fig.6
Rite of passage; this boy shows no signs of pain.

Most ceremonies comprise three parts, the first part being separation from the tribe, the second part is a transition stage which is usually accompanied by body mutilation (in the case of Australian Aboriginal boys this, for example, consists of circumcision or removing teeth). During this process, while isolated, the adolescent must learn the skills and traditions of the tribe. The last stage is when the adolescent returns to the village, no longer an adolescent but now adult.

In the case of the Nuba girls they are brought out of the village and isolated because the loss of blood. Blood is perceived as evil and dirty by the Nuba people, when induced, therefore, it is done so at a remove from the tribe so that any impurities in the girl's blood will not adversely affect the village. The pain the initiates undergo also shows that, in some way, they pay for their passage. It does not come easily to them and in bearing this pain they become stronger, both physically and mentally, and in doing so they become a more valued member of the tribe as they are likely to be able to undertake difficult tasks and resolve future problems.

In traditional tribes, rites of passage are mainly restricted to males, and mostly it is the penis that is mutilated, as this is the most sensitive part of the male's body and also the most outward sign of his sexuality. An example of this painful rite would occur among the Gisu people of Uganda. The male must sit still and show no pain while the foreskin is cut from the penis, so that he must deal with pain and fear like a warrior.

In a westernized world it is easy to understand why we do not partake in such rituals. Conversely, since the influence of western ideas into such tribes, some have stopped rites of passage like these, with the result that the bonding and tribal awareness development that took place during these acts is breaking down. When rites of passage are discouraged the affiliation with the tribe, it is observed, starts to waver. While we might view the rituals as "barbaric" or "primitive", within tribal cultures they indicate status and heighten identity within a tribe/culture.

Some rites of passage like that of the Tchikrin of South America do not involve the amount of pain and mutilation that traditional tribes such as the Nuba girls go through. Rather than being scarred the Tchikrin girls are adorned with jewellery and also their bodies are painted and their hair is changed. When a girl from the Tchikrin reaches puberty she is painted with black stripes on her upper arms, breasts and thighs. After she has had her third child her hair is worn long to signify maturity. As with most passage rites they coincide with psychological changes of an individual's personality, so marking the body as a projection to outwardly mark these changes. Some rites of passage still occur today, when Jewish boys are born they are circumcised, and then when they reach between ages 10-13 they go through Bar Mitzvah - a religious ceremony which welcomes them into the Jewish community as adults. This can be compared to Confirmation in the Catholic Church, which after First Holy Communion is the second stage in preparing to enter into the religion as an adult, understanding the responsibilities of doing so maturely.

Body piercing was also practised by primitive tribes, indeed, there is evidence of piercings going back to prehistoric times. Labrets, for example, were worn by Eskimos of Alaska [Fig.7]. These ornaments were worn on the nose, cheeks and ears. Discouraged by missionaries, this form of adornment is now almost obsolete. Some remaining examples of labrets, however, can be seen in the accompanying photograph.

In more recent times piercing continues as a tribal adornment in some cultures. In Northern Cameroon, for instance, women wear lip pieces. The tradition behind the lip piece is handed down from women to girls when their lips are pierced at puberty.

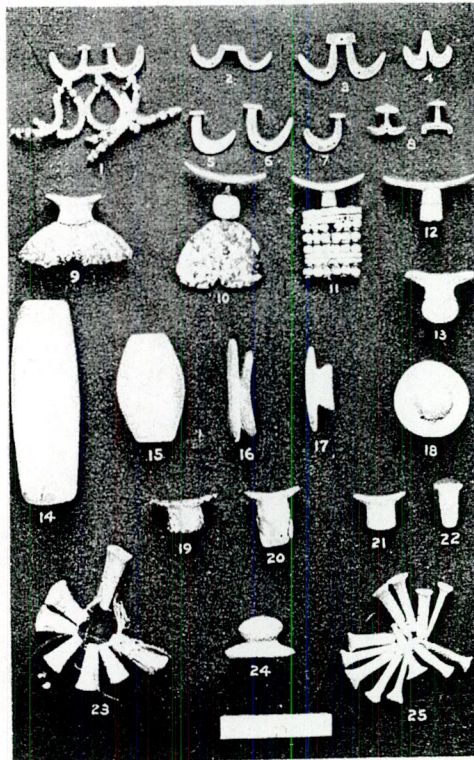


fig.7.1

Labrets worn by Eskimos.

The women explain the facts of life to the girls. They also explain that those facts of life were told in ancient times by the society ancestors who in turn were told these facts by a frog. The lip piercings the girls receive are said to make them frog-like. In different cultures the different parts of the body that are pierced indicate the importance they are given in that society. An example of this would be in South America - the Ge speaking people from Brazil pierce the ears, lips, eyes, and penis; thus acknowledging the importance of hearing, speaking, seeing and sex. If the ears are pierced, therefore, but the lips are not, then it would suggest that it is considered more important in this culture to listen rather than speak. In the Suyá group women and men decorate the ears using large discs which are held in place by loops of earlobes.

Also the Suyá wear lip discs which they rarely remove from their lips. - Although they also stress the ears - for hearing - in their culture, the emphasis for the Suyá is on the mouth - meaning that speech is most important to them. Not unlike rites of passage, facial ornamentation is associated with different stages of a Suyá youth's life. When they are adolescent their ears are pierced - stressing the importance of hearing; when they reach adulthood their lips are pierced. As adults they are now considered mature and capable of hearing and speaking maturely. In the tribes I have discussed, it is important to note that all the rituals such as scarification and piercing, are requested by the youths. They undertake their rites of passage with honour and dignity, as part of their process of socializing them with their traditional culture.

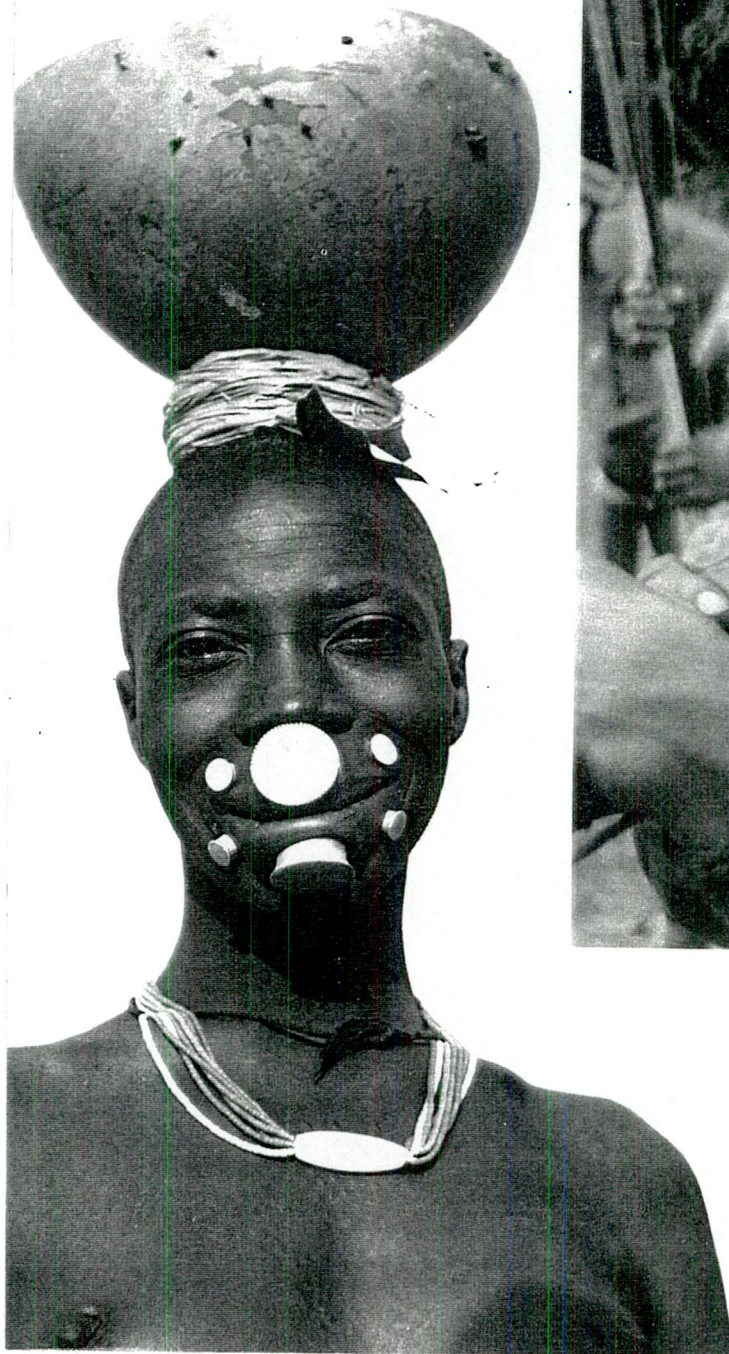


FIG 7-2
Lip ornaments worn by other tribespeople.

CHAPTER 2

CONTEMPORARY BODY MODIFICATIONS

CHAPTER 2

CONTENTS OF THE BOOK

The practice of body modification can be traced back to before 8,000 B.C. when the Tassili from the Sahara applied bodily marks that represent scarification. Dating to 3,000 B.C. an Egyptian mummy has been found with evidence of tattoos. From 1,500 B.C. scarification, piercing and tattooing is recorded among the Mesoamerican Culture and by 500 B.C., a hand is found in Siberia, again with evidence of tattoos. Other tattoos have been sourced on clay figures which date to c. 450 B.C. In the fifth century Romans displayed pierced nipples, and by the eighteenth century sailors helped to bring to the western world the practice of tattooing which they had viewed on their travels. Following the banning of tattooing in Japan in 1870 many Chinese and Japanese artists moved to Europe bringing with them body modification skills while in the 1950's Teddy Boys and Rockers again revived tattooing, as well as Mohawk hairstyles, which derived from a native American-Indian tribe. Following this, the subcultures of the 1960's through to the 1980's, including Punks, continued to practice tattooing, Mohawk, piercings and dying of hair, all borrowed from tribal practices. Around the same time in San Francisco the gay community revived piercing from tribal traditions. Doug Malloy, Jim Ward and Fakir Musafar were also responsible for making piercing popular by opening Gauntlet. The first shop selling jewellery for piercings. In 1989 the book 'Modern Primitives' was published, the name was devised by Fakir Musafar some twelve years earlier to group together people who were practising tribal-based body modification. In England they attempted to ban 'Modern Primitives' which subsequently made it more desirable. But it was with Punks that the re-invention of tribal practices was exploited, that body modifications effectively exploded on to the mainstream, propelled by its 'shock value'. In the 1970's there was a widespread perception that society had become stagnant; there was a lack of creativeness in art and music, and unemployment was

rising. The feeling was one of suppression among the youth, when the generation of hippies who had been so interested in 'free love' had now tried to control the younger generations.

In London at this time kids were hanging around in groups along the Kings Road, at the same time Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren ran a small clothes outlet. IN 1974 they started selling fetish clothes and following this, changed their name to Sex in 1975. At the same time, McLaren started up a band called 'The Sex Pistols', who took the music world by storm and elevated the Punks to a larger audience. Following this opportunity Punks formed their own small independent record labels, in reaction to 1970's commercial music. The do-it-yourself attitude was initiated and was applied to art, music and dress. Sex sold the opposite of hippie clothes - no bell bottoms or platforms, but fetish and bondage clothes, normally found in sex shops, consisting of whips, chains, masks and leathers [Fig.8]. Clothes were selected for their shock value, even bin bags were worn. Punks were aggressive and negative. They were different from other style cultures as they didn't have any one source, but borrowed from whatever aesthetically pleased them. Anything anti-fashion was utilized. The media played a large role in this, stereotyping Punks with leather jackets, Dr Martin boots, dog collars, safety pins, ripped t-shirts and drainpipes. Instead they invented elaborate styles, experimenting, especially with their hair, bright acid colours become particularly popular. Others had their hair mutilated or moulded into spikes and tufts. Most famous of the hairstyles is the Mohican style [Fig.9]. The head was shaved on both sides leaving a strip down the centre which was teased into spikes. The Mohican style was intended to suggest youths on the war path. By wearing fetish and S + M gear punks broke traditional barriers, and fuelled sexual



Fig. 8

Clothes suggesting bondage and d/m (Dominance and Submission)

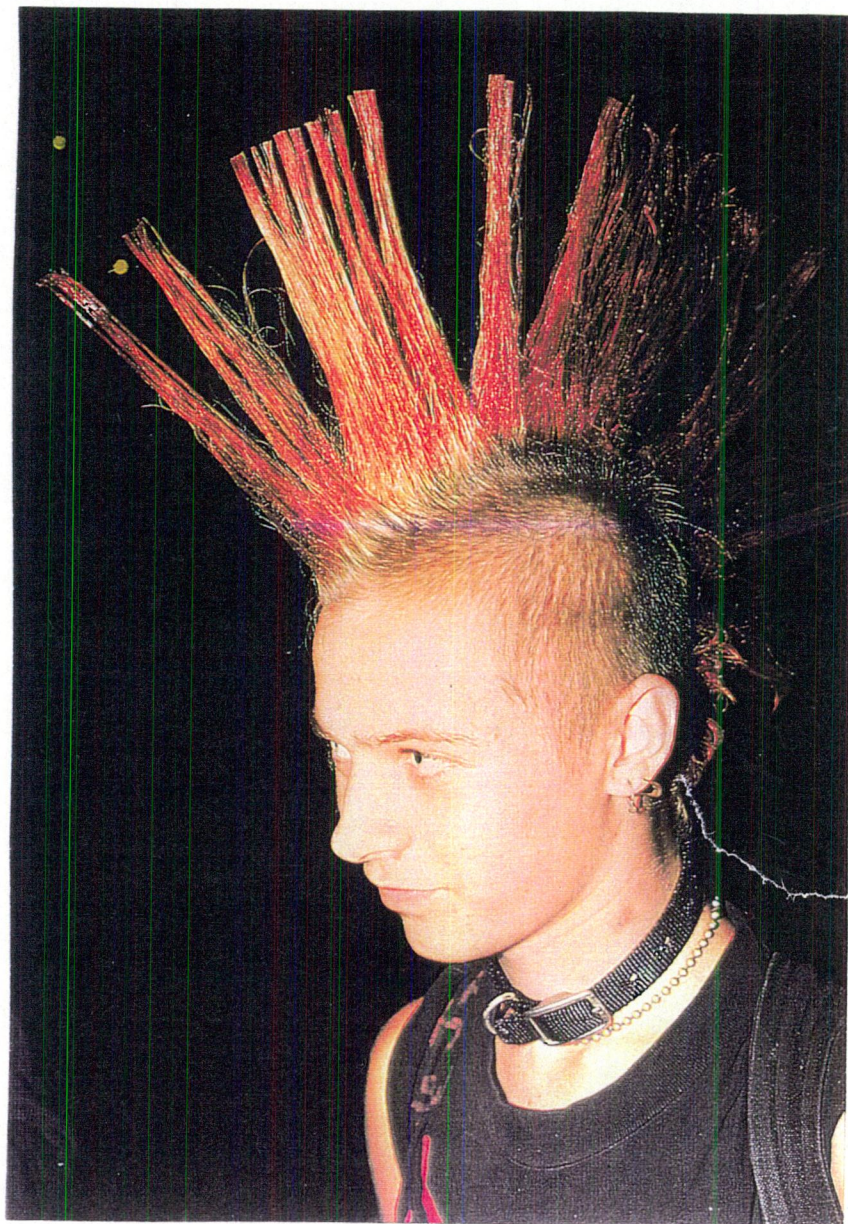


Fig.9

Punk sporting a Mohawk, dyed brightly

taboos. Women rejected the previous ideals of femininity and in this way gender boundaries were challenged. When piercing and tattooing of bodies was introduced, they confronted issues concerning acceptable appearances for the body. Piercing, however, upset mainstream society considerably, indeed it was viewed as a form of mutilation. The piercings were decorated with everyday items such as razor blades and safety pins [Fig10]. Like many subcultures, Punks ostracized themselves with their unique forms of adornment, and their anti-fashion, anti-commercialism attitude. With time, Punks lost their ability to shock when fashion picked up on the trend and calmed it down, making it possible for mainstream consumption.

At the same time as Punks the Gay community of San Francisco were experimenting with body piercing. Modern Primitives is the name given to a group of people who have sought to revive primitive body modifications. They explain that in the world in which we live today people experience a sense of powerlessness, and as they cannot control what is happening around them, they seek control over what they can - their own bodies. Believing that these changes come from within the person. They maintain that transforming their bodies is not only an aesthetic act but a spiritual one too.

"All sensual experience functions to free us from 'normal' social restraints, to awaken our deadened bodies to life. All such activity points towards a goal: the creation of the 'complete' or 'integrated' man and woman, and in this we are yet prisoners digging an imaginary tunnel to freedom. Our most inestimable resource, the unfettered imagination, continues to be grounded in the only truly precious possession we can ever have and know, and which is ours to do with what we will: the human body."

(V. Vale and Andrea Juno)
Research Modern Primitives



Fig.10

Piercing with safety pins

From the above statement it is clear that the Modern Primitives are seeking to break with 'normal' society. They are emphasising their individuality and disassociating themselves from what normal society claims to believe in .

One such Modern Primitive is Fakir Musafar. Musafar grew up in South Dakota. When he was very young he saw a man being tattooed in a carnival. He studied primitive body decoration in the National Geographic magazines, and encyclopedias. When he was only 13 he pierced his penis, using a clamp and a sharp point, explaining that the piercing was very slow and took nearly a day. Fakir says that this was a spiritual experience during which he surrendered to the pain and sublimated it. Fakir has strong American-Indian connections and as a result has taken part in many rituals. In his earlier years he pushed needles through his body, pierced his nose and ears, and clipped clothes pegs on to his chest. He says that from these experiences, he learned to deal with pain on a separate level, that he achieved a kind of altered state. Some of these early body plays were to prepare him for acts like hanging from flesh hooks and taking part in a form of Indian O-Kee-Pa Ceremony (Sun Dance). As Fakir is not a blood Indian he could not take part in the Sun Dance as practised by the Sioux Indians, so along with a friend Jim Ward they decided they would hold their own version of the Sun Dance [Fig.11]. They went to a remote place and prepared by fasting. The O-Kee-Pa consists of having hooks put into piercings on the chest, and then the person is lifted up by these flesh hooks. They are suspended in mid-air for up to twenty minutes. The reasoning behind the Sun Dance was so that the Indian Warriors could meet the Great White Spirit, in the form of an altered state of mind. The person behind the rebirth of piercing was Doug Malloy. Malloy grew up in Washington and by the age of 23 was, through other investments, a millionaire.

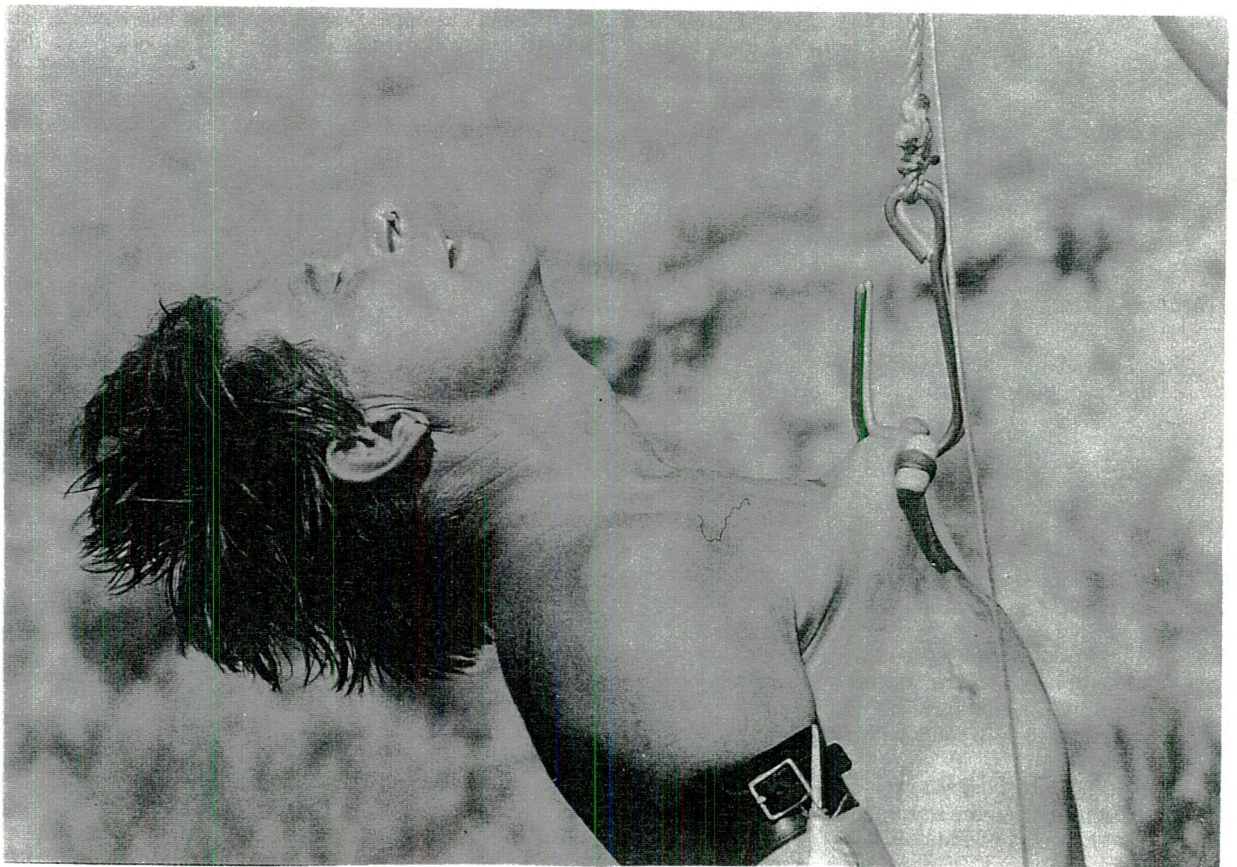
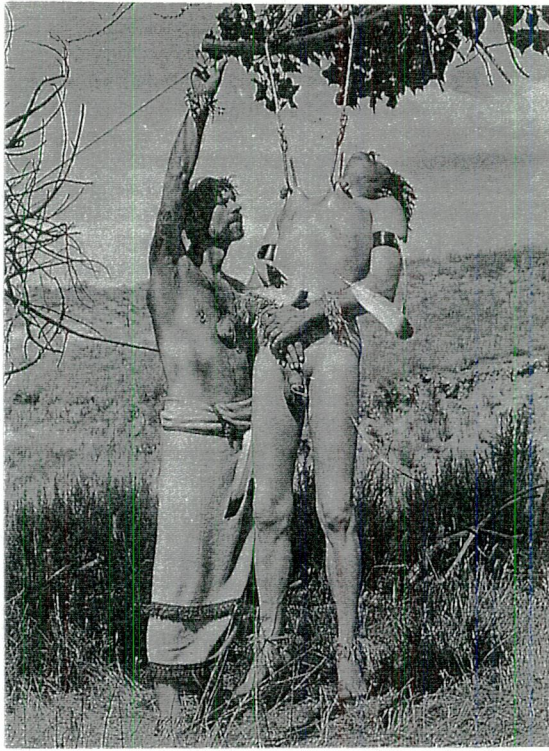


fig.11

Musafar hanging from tree during Sun Dance.

He retired at this age and sometimes held piercing and tattooing parties at a time when such activities were considered deeply subversive. As these people discussed their tattoos, piercings and found they were using unsuitable jewellery such as ladies earrings and nails, their first ambition was to produce a suitable jewellery collection for this purpose. At this time Jim Ward was training in jewellery making. Doug Malloy provided financial backing for Ward to design and produce jewellery specially for body piercing. While working together, Ward studied the technique of piercing and set up a mail order catalogue from his home. Following this in 1975 he set up the first shop, Gauntlet in Los Angeles. It was the first of a chain of shops introducing piercing into mainstream society [Fig12].

There are two main reasons for getting pierced:

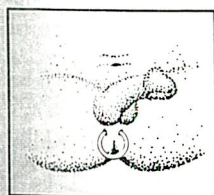
- (1) Aesthetic, and
- (2) Sexual; to enhance or prevent sex.

(1) Aesthetic:

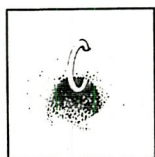
Aesthetic piercing includes the navel, eyebrow and lips. Navel piercing [Fig.] was used by ancient Egyptians as a sign of Royalty and is now one of the more popular piercings. It has become something of a fashion accessory with top models such as Naomi Campbell sporting one on the catwalks.

(2) Sexual:

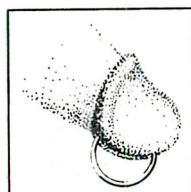
Sexual piercing is performed to enhance or prevent sex. These include the Prince



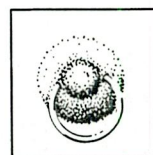
GUICHE



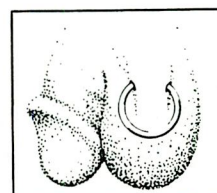
NAVEL



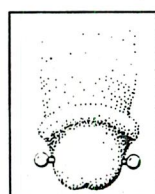
PRINCE ALBERT



NIPPLE



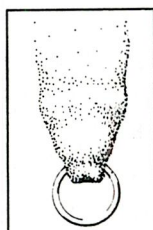
HAFADA



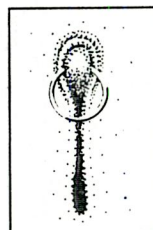
AMPALLANG



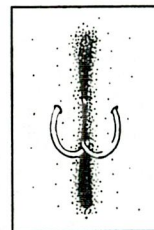
DYDOE ✓



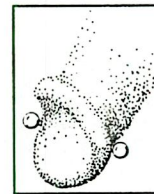
FORESKIN



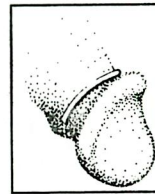
CLITORIS



LABIA



APADRAVYA



FRENUM

fig.12.1
various piercings.



Fig.12.2

Examples of aesthetic piercings

Albert, Dydoe, Ampallang, Foreskin, Clitoris, Labia, Frenum, Guicne, Hafada, Tongue and Nipple. The Prince Albert which is a piercing through the base of the penis head is said to have been used by Victorian dressmakers (when the fashion demanded men in tight trousers) to hold the genitalia in place, therefore creating a smoother line in the trousers. Nipple piercing was apparently originally used by Caesar's bodyguards as a dress accessory to hold their capes in place.

It is clear that approximately 90% of piercings are undertaken for sexual reasons. Paradoxically, some genital piercings now conducted for sexual pleasure were used many years ago to deter sexual activity. This act was called 'infibulation'. It was common for Greeks and Romans to have their male slaves penis pierced and a lock fitted in order to ensure they would not be sexually active.

The big interest in sexual piercings is connected to the Gay S + M communities. Sado-masochism has entered mainstream society over recent years via the Gay communities, where it has been reclaimed by other subcultures after the sexual revolution. Designers like Gianni Versace with his 1992 spring collection of whip bearing ladies and pop stars like Madonna with videos of 'Express Yourself' and 'Human Nature' have all helped S + M and fetishism go from shocking to acceptable behaviour. The growing number of people practising body piercing claim that they modify their bodies for more than superficial reasons. The piercing of erogenous zones is by its practitioners considered to be extremely liberating, yet is still viewed by society to be immoral or distasteful. On balance, this form of body adornment is the most private and person and should only be viewed by one's partner [Fig13].



Fig.13

Erotic Piercing

It is hard to ignore such sexual piercings as they appear again and again with the Modern Primitives group. Raelyn Gallina is a lesbian jewellery-maker and piercer. She also does cuttings and performs scarification [Fig14]. She got into these 'blood sports' after a year of emotion pain when friends of hers died. The immediate sensation of piercing pleased her, she also, like Fakir, talks of an altered state. Gallina cuts patterns into people's skins rather like tattooing. Because she is a lesbian she tends to work more in that community. Raelyn Gallina talks of cutting as a strengthening experience for people who have been in an abusive situation. Being cut, bleeding and then healing is connected to the idea of scarification in a tribal ritual where blood is seen as evil and contaminated and where the cutting process released the undesirable and makes the person physically and mentally stronger.

IN contemporary society, due to the threat of AIDS and other blood related diseases, some hospitals in San Francisco are holding classes informing of the dangers, and how to practice safely, this can be affiliated today with the need for hospitals to give out needles to drug users to stop spreading disease. Self-scarification is seen as an illness. It is usually associated with people suffering from Anorexia or Bulimia. When they cut themselves, they temporarily release anger and frustration. This illness is called 'Deliberate Self-Harm Syndrome'. Blood-letting is thought to affect less than 1% of Bulimics although the actual number is not known. Self-Harm Syndrome has only surfaced within recent years. Releasing blood from the body, for example, is considered a cleaning and calming experience, which eases tension that vomiting can no longer do for Bulimics.

The S + M situation in scarification is significant as the cutter is thought to be in a

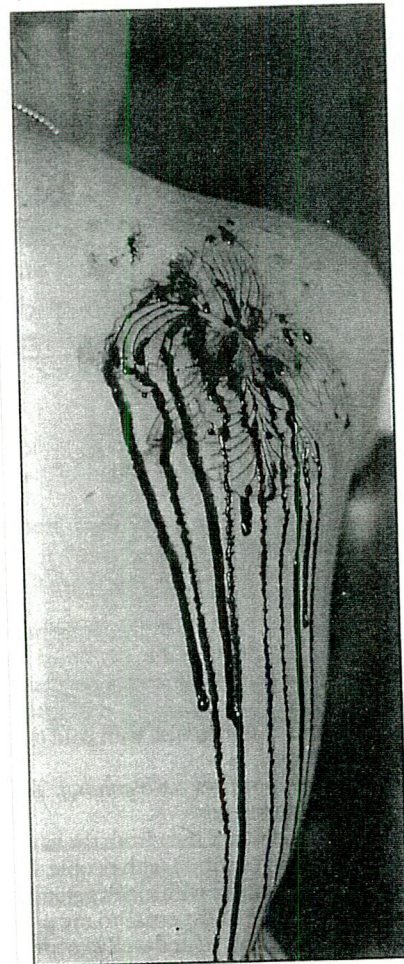


fig14
Raelyn Gallina performing scarification.

powerful situation, while the other person is in the submissive position. In all areas of body modifications there are extreme suggestions of deep sexual anxiety, which may be described as fetishism.

Fetishism has been defined as substituting a non-sexual object (usually inanimate) and making it the focal point of desire. Freud's explanation was that of a fetish being a substitute for when the male child discovers that their mother has no penis. This reasoning explains how the object of desire is affiliated with the female genitals. While Michael Leivis says:

"The personal nature of the concept of the sacred whose origin is in childhood memories. Their presence of the sacred is conjured up by objects, places or occasions that provoke simultaneous feelings of fear and attachment, that are attractive and dangerous, prestigious and outcast the combination of respect, desire and terror that we take as the psychological sign of the sacred."

Michael Leivis, p. 88 -
The Chameleon Body -
The Sacred being the Fetish object of Desire.

20th Century fetishism expresses the erotic stimulation of the sexual imagination. The fact that is across sexual boundaries and conjures up what some people find perverse, could be linked to the notion that there are two types of sex, the first being for reproduction, the second being sexual gratification. The early missionaries and later Christian church teachings preach that our bodies are temples, and the only form of sex appropriate is that for procreation. The corresponding disapproval of eroticism is based on it being non-functional and therefore not important leading to the suppression of the sexual erotic side of our nature. [FIG.15-1+15-2]



Fig.15.1

Example of a contemporary fetishist.

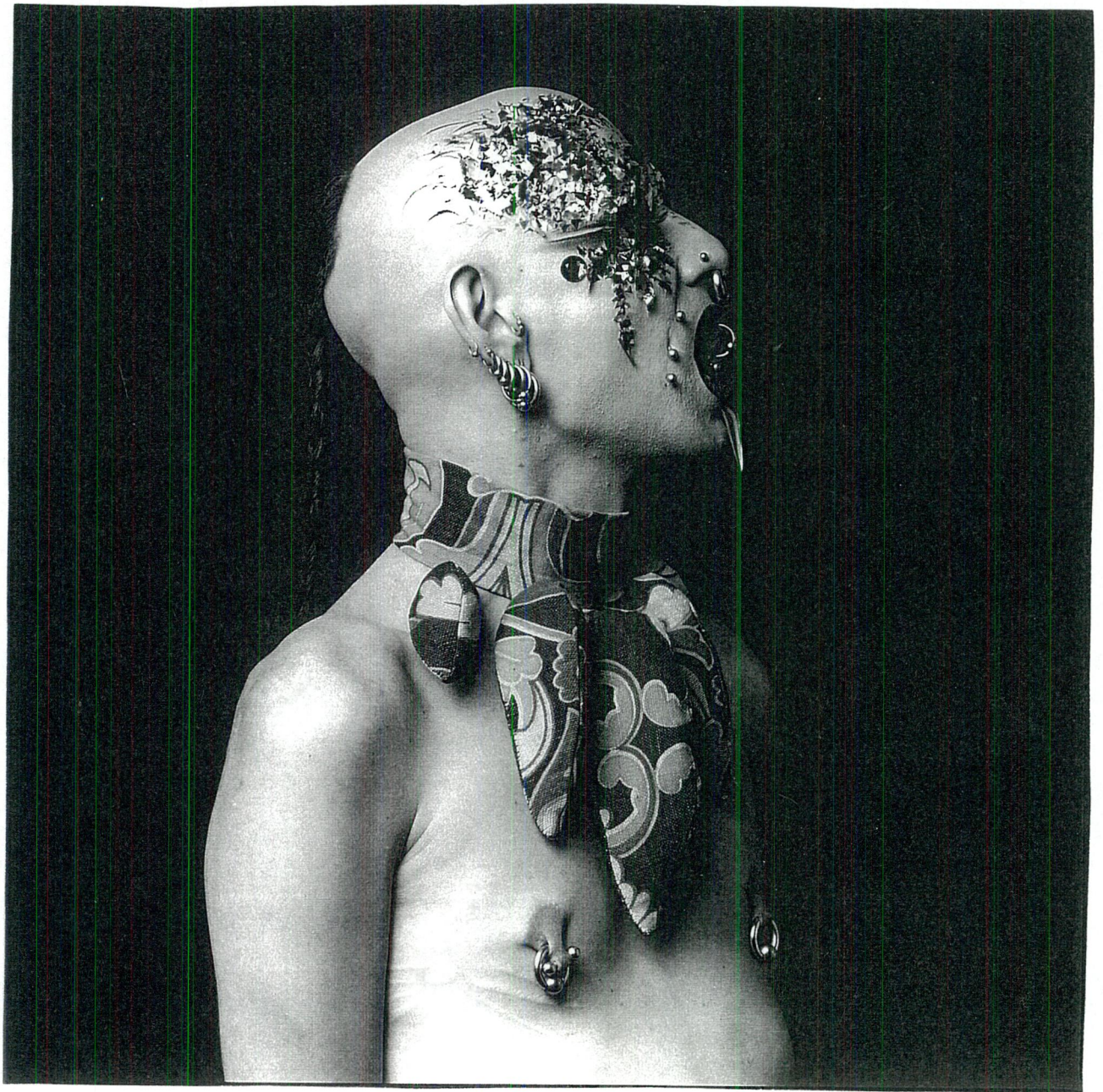


Fig.15.2

Contemporary Fetishist with multiple body piercings, scarification, make-up and mask.

An example of fetish behaviour would be that of 'Noni'. She grew up in Canada and at a young age found books showing pictures of African women with elongated labia [Fig. 16]. As a reaction to this she began to stretch her own labia, and has now had these pierced to enhance her sexuality and sexual practices. 'Noni' has featured many times in 'Body Play' magazine.

'Becky' also featured in 'Body Play' , has had her breast scarred and talks of reclaiming her body. She had a history of bad sexual experiences and could not come to terms with her sexuality. The first body modification Becky endured was to have her genitals pierced, after which she pierced her nipples and tongue. She then had a branding done by Raelyn Gallina. Going further into body modifications, she had her breasts cut [Fig. 17]. The cuttings were carried out by her friend; in order for the cuttings to scar the way she wanted, they were cut to form keloid scars. In a way, Becky's experience could be compared with that involved in a rite of passage. She committed herself physically and emotionally to the body modifications after which she believed she would become a changed person.

Cosmetic surgery by which is meant "To artificially enhance the 'natural body' without being seen to do so" (The Customized Body - Randall & Polmemus, p. 94) can arguably be viewed as a body modification as science and technology have given us the choices where people can alter themselves to a form which is "recognisable as normal" in our culture. Plastic surgery is the medium through which we can control the changes we desire and eliminate our imperfections. It is the only body modification that tries to remain invisible.

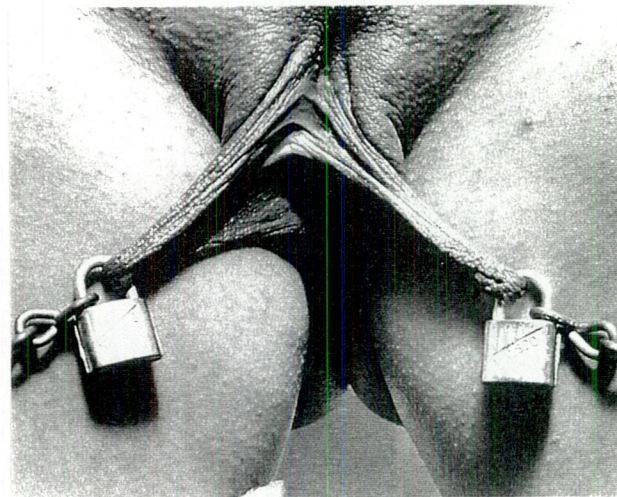
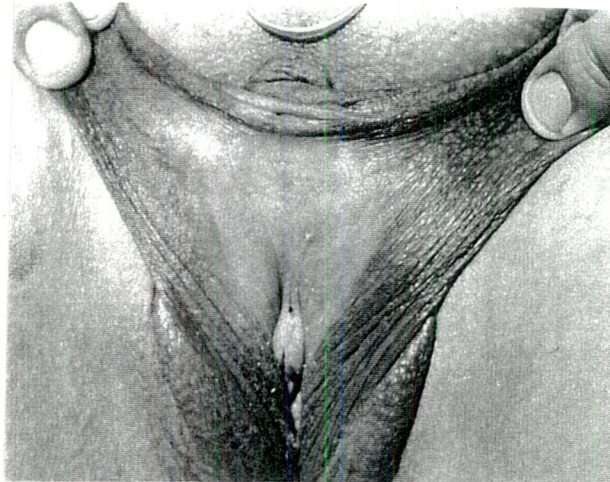


fig.16
Noni with streached labia.

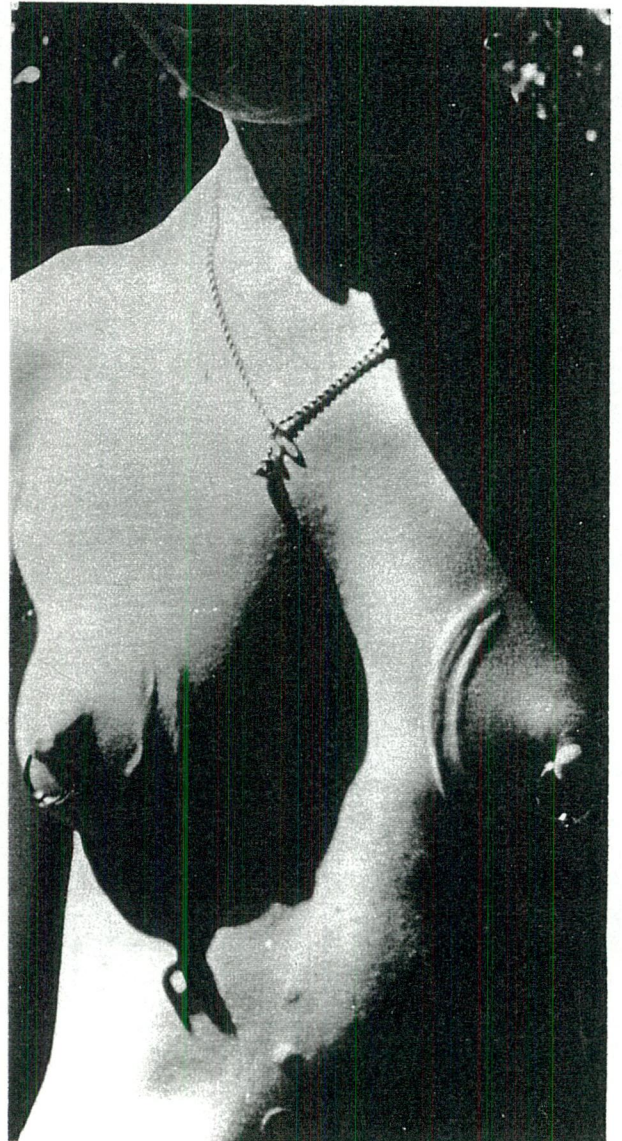


fig.17
Becky's breast scarification.

Cosmetic surgery contradicts the idea of the natural as it is a personal extension of what is thought to be beautiful. The "ideal natural body" depending on how fashion dictates it can be a totally unnatural product. Ultimately fashion followers want to conform to the new ideal.

Each society according to its values, determines how its members should behave, how to eat, dress and decorate themselves appropriately. When society favours thinness some people, in order to conform, adopt drastic measures, such as dieting or totally changing the shape of their bodies through weight training. In western society we view fatness as unattractive and unhealthy. This is fuelled by constant media coverage of slim models and television personalities from Twiggy in the 1960's to Kate Moss today. These imply that happiness can be achieved only when slim. This ideal has caused many serious problems where dieting has been carried to the extreme. Anorexia and Bulimia, as previously discussed, are now common diseases. In order to achieve the "natural look" in fashion others will endure some extremely painful operations.

As early as 200 B.C. plastic surgery was performed on women in India. But up until World War II the full potential of surgery went unrecognised. It was during the war that veterans suffering from extensive injuries tested the inventiveness of the early surgeons as they had never been challenged before.

Plastic surgery was primarily developed to correct deformities, and certain impaired functions of the human body, an example being a "hare" lip. It also helped immensely with correcting scars from burns and was also used for skin grafting. The

development of new materials such as silicone and polyurethane have now made it possible to implant plastics into the body.

Following World War II new techniques were developed and exploited, making procedures like micro and laser surgery possible, creating new possibilities for cosmetic surgery. In addition to changing one's birth appearance, ageing and its effects on tissues can now be addressed by cosmetic surgery. Hereditary factors are important in showing us how we will age. Within this area the more common surgeries to create younger appearances are eyelid surgery and forehead lifts. Large ears can be made smaller by pinning them to the head. Implants inserted to achieve larger breasts. Hair implants can also be introduced into the body [Fig18]. "Tummy tucks" can produce a smaller stomach while liposuction can remove fat cells which are immune to dieting, in problem areas like the hips and bottom. The nose [Fig19] can be reshaped by firstly breaking the bone and then resetting it in the desired position. In western societies the facial features are commonly changed by surgery, as the face is the focal point of the body and usually left unclothed.

Cosmetic surgery is a branch of plastic surgery designed to improve appearance, and in some countries is carried out on the health service as it is viewed as therapeutic on the basis that a person's appearance can inhibit normal social interactions. Changing the body like this seems to restore confidence and sexual attraction in individuals. The same can be said of keloid scarification where the aesthetic and tactile qualities of the body are changed in accordance with the ideals of a particular society.



fig.18
A hair transplant in process.

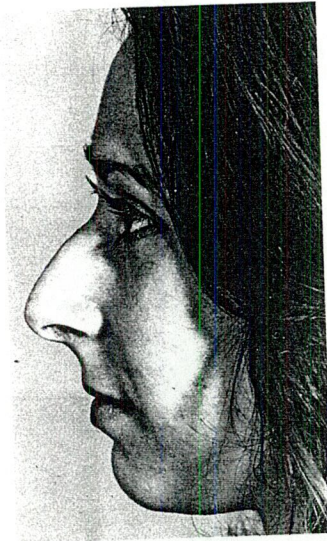


fig.19
Before and After of nose surgery.

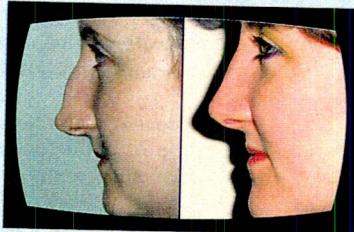
Good cosmetic surgery should enhance the looks of the body. A procedure is carried out under anaesthetic, general or local depending on the area being treated, and a person can be back to normal after approximately 14 days. As with other forms of body modifications, cosmetic surgery can be permanent or temporary. Surgery like breast reduction/implants or on the nose/chin are permanent whereas eyelid surgery or facelifts only offer temporary results maybe lasting 5 - 10 years.

Cosmetic surgery until recently remained a social status before being introduced onto the health service it was affordable only by the rich, ensuring that it was exclusive to the upper class. In more recent years surgery has become more available down the social scale and as a result can be seen advertised in most magazines [Fig. 20]. Within all areas of contemporary body modifications there are always extremists, this is true also of plastic surgery. A famous example of recent years would be Cindy Jackson who has undertaken over thirty operations in order to reach her ideal beauty; that of the Barbie Doll. Cindy believes she was an "ugly duckling" before setting out to re-invent her body. She has leaped from being unknown to instant stardom, being interviewed on international television many times. Although the "picture of beauty" now she has endured many operations that have been unsuccessful and as a result of this has undergone corrective surgery [Fig. 21]. Cindy is also an example of not knowing where to stop as she says "As I attain my goals I have to then go back and get earlier work done to match the latest ... it's never ending." (P. 98 Randall and Polhemus -The Customized Body).

Cosmetic Surgery for Women and for Men

The Pountney Clinic, Britain's famous hospital dedicated exclusively to cosmetic surgery for men and women. Consultations are held only with highly experienced, caring surgeons - Fellows of the Royal College of Surgeons - who themselves specialise in this very important and highly visual aspect of surgery. **CONSULTATIONS ARE FREE.**

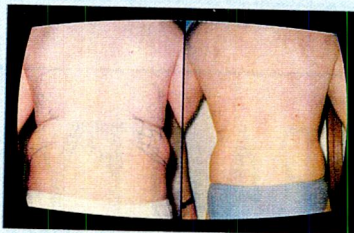
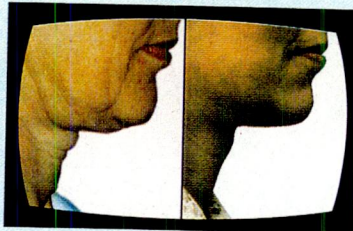
Men and women of all ages benefit from Cosmetic Surgery. There is a wide range of improvement procedures - including operations to refine the shape of **the nose**. Each nose is different and the experienced surgeon achieves an harmonious balance with all facial features. Of course, it is at The Pountney Clinic that **you could see on screen** what improvement surgery could do for you.



See yourself change on screen!

Time and weather take their toll on even the most beautiful and carefully nurtured face. The natural elasticity and suppleness of the skin are gradually lost by us all.

The Classical Facelift restores a firm jaw line, smoothes the cheeks and revives a pleasing younger appearance.



Stubborn areas of fat that refuse to respond to diet or exercise can be removed through **liposuction**. The figure is recontoured more pleasingly and the improvements are often quite dramatic. It is the logical way to complete a "trim" figure and has been performed with great success, over many years, on men and women.

Some of the most requested improvement procedures:

**NOSE IMPROVEMENT AND REFINEMENT • FACELIFTS
EYEBAG & EYELID IMPROVEMENT • CHIN TUCKS • NECK LIFTS
LIP IMPROVEMENT • SPOT FAT REDUCTION
BREAST ENLARGEMENTS, UPLIFTS AND REDUCTIONS
INVERTED NIPPLE IMPROVEMENT • SCAR REFINEMENT
WRINKLE IMPROVEMENT • 'BAT EAR' CORRECTION
RECEDING CHIN CORRECTION
'TUMMY TUCKS' • MOLE AND TATTOO REMOVAL**

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The Pountney Clinic

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magazine advertisement.

Fig.20.1


ALL COSMETIC SURGERY CARRIED OUT BY OUR EXPERIENCED SURGEONS


BREAST ENHANCEMENT

"We didn't trust our breast enlargements to just anybody"

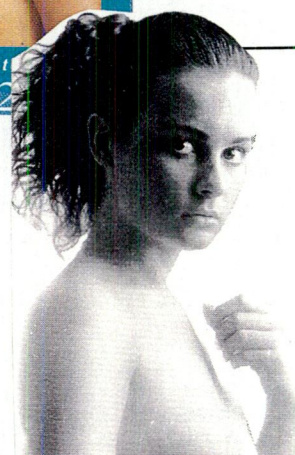
TOTAL CARE IN A FULLY REGISTERED HOSPITAL

When you decide to have your breasts enhanced, you may feel a little nervous - however, the staff at Imperial Medical Group will put your mind at rest. At our hospital we use **TRILUCENT** implants, **McGHAN COHESIVE GEL** and textured **SILTEX** implants. Quite simply they'll make you feel and look like a new person.

PARKFIELD HOSPITAL part of 
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Medical Group



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BEAUTY Forever Yours

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All our treatments are suitable for men and women and include *Skin Lightening, Collagen Therapy and Cosmetic Surgery*. They are conducted under full medical supervision, developed exclusively by one of the country's leading consultant skin physicians.

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BIRMINGHAM NUNEATON BRISTOL NEWCASTLE WOLVERHAMPTON	0121 643 1077 01203 327887 0117 922 5023 0191 261 7271 01902 713400		

Fig. 20.2
advertisements from MARIE CLAIRE Magazine.



Fig.21

Cindy jackson.

For those unwilling to undertake surgery there is another form of body modification, body building. During the 19th century the appearance of the masculine body shifted and became infatuated with the need to train the human form. In the beginning of the 20th century, the first "fitness and health" magazines, health clubs, and gyms were opened. The new health craze focused on strength [Fig22].

Body building was given the status of a sport in 1940. The media played a big role in helping body building move from a minority interest to a mainstream one in the 1970's and 1980's, highlighted when Arnold Schwarzenegger crossed over into films and became a successful movie star. The effect of this can be seen today as over the past twenty years in media the images of male bodies have become leaner and more defined. Body building starts when a conscious decision is made to improve the body, making it bigger. The body mass is inflated by isolating muscle groups and exercising them accordingly. The required effect is a well defined "shredded" appearance, hair is also removed to create a sleeker effect. When body building goes this far the result is purely aesthetic, its use simply for others to admire. Over the past twenty years body builders bodies have become bigger. This can be achieved by diet and exercising for hours, sometimes 60 and over which has been helped along by better developed equipment and by increased usage of steroids, which consequently can cause sterility. This is quite a contradiction when the ultimate goal of gaining the 'perfect body', runs parallel to the appearance of being perceived as masculine.

Masculinity is also something which women bodybuilders identify with, as one says: "I want to look athletic and strong, I like looking powerful." (P. 149 Kathryn Woodward - Identity and Difference).



Jason:

What you see here is achieved purely through hard work and diet... no steroids. I get really angry that I might not win any major competitions just because I refuse to take something that would ultimately damage me.

Fig.22
Contemporary body builder.

Women body builders raise the question of what is an acceptable image, so that they don't lose their femininity [Fig**23** The focus being taken away from the sexual organs, breasts and the face and instead placed on the body mass. With these barriers between male and female bodies being challenged it seems apparent that society is uneasy with the images of female strength, and is so more apprehensive about accepting female body builders as readily as the male.



Fig.23

Female body builder.

CHAPTER 3

ANALYSIS OF PRIMITIVE AND CONTEMPORARY BODY MODIFICATION.

CHAPTER 1

THE HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES
FROM 1776 TO 1876

CHAPTER 3

In order to gain a clearer understanding of contemporary body modifications we must answer some questions. Why is there a need to change the 'natural' body; is this an in-built reaction, or taught one, and why have so many thousands of generations aspired to this 'ideal of beauty', no matter how much pain or money it costs?

To answer these we must look at what influences us, and how this could be a factor in the above questions.

When we are born we all enter into an existing social system, so as we grow, parts of our personalities and identities are formed within this group. We are influenced first by the people closest to us, family and friends, and then schools and churches. We are taught when young according to whether we are female or male, how to behave within each of these boundaries. In this way many ideas pass on to us. This system is called socialization. The identities thus forming must have a social basis, and these will be reinforced within the social settings. Within these groups, individuals can be overcome and influenced by social pressures. Secondary socialisation occurs when individuals leave this community and, for example, go to college. In this new environment they will be subjected to new communities made up of mixed race, gender, nationalities and class, this can add new dimensions to an individual's already formed identity.

With these new experiences also comes the problem of contradicting identities through

too many different combinations. The identity which we use to give us a place in society and ultimately the world can therefore become unstable. Sometimes this can be explained by drastic cultural changes, maybe a war or simply high unemployment, these are factors which challenge the way in which people have to adapt to new circumstances. Other factors significant in the formation of identities lie within this solid base. For example, when a marriage breaks down the children are undeniable affected, they are more vulnerable, and the family structure becomes less stable. This could account for the problem that the influence once held by such social groups has now become less effective, and therefore individuals look elsewhere to various lifestyles in order to accommodate this vacuum.

All human groups have a sense of 'other'. This is the basis on which they define their own boundaries and identities. The 'other' is always different, enabling a society to form around this, in this instance this 'other' is seen as primitive. These primitive cultures seem to hold a balance between nature and man, such a statement cannot be said of modern society, as theorists have described our society as being full of anxieties and risks. The move away from nature seems greater as science has increased the control we hold over our own bodies, we now can manipulate the 'perfect body', as we see fit, and do not have to settle with our 'birth' bodies. With this new technology comes the problem that somewhere we have lost the ability to judge just how far we can take things; our ideals have become destabilized, leaving room for disasters. The continuing merge between technology, nature and the body, means boundaries will be pushed further and thus become less defined.

"Body projects provide individuals with a means of expression and a

way of feeling good and increasing control over their flesh. If one feels unable to exert influence over a complex society at least one can have some effect on one's body."

(Identity and difference, p. 71.)

This statement underlines the fact that many people view their bodies as an object which they can gain control over, when the rest of the world remains uncontrollable.

When a natural disaster occurs, we tend to take individual responsibility in controlling our own bodies; an example of this would be the global warming and breakdown of the ozone layer; people suddenly became pre-occupied with healthy bodies. Changing our bodies is not new, although the technology and lengths to which we are now going are. Unlike the primitive form, however, the contemporary body modifications undertaken are not connected to rituals and community. In attempting to address the question - why have so many thousands of generations aspire to this 'ideal of beauty' no matter how much pain or money involved, David Hume's suggestion that,

"Beauty is not a quality in things themselves, it exists merely in the mind that contemplates them, and each mind perceived a different beauty."

(Liggett, Arline & John, Tyranny of Beauty, p. 168.)

may provide the key. I have already established how our primary socialization helps us form identities and how each society has different sets of deals which they follow. These 'ideals of beauty' are separate and many to each society. Again these standards of beauty are introduced to us when young, and vary dramatically depending on the location of birth. Evidence of this is clear when we compare primitive scarification to

contemporary cosmetic surgery. When we set about changing the body we tend to concentrate on the areas which reflect our society's image of beauty. This is also susceptible to changes through time, an example being the change in attitude towards the body shape. It is also true that we tend to find ways of making connections with other individuals, going to great efforts to impress them. Because we put great emphasis on appearance, our attitudes tend to surround this, creating a positive self-image, evidently our emotions then relay on this appearance to make us happy. Expression through the body seems natural, problems of confusion arise when within our visually obsessed society we lose the primary motivations to what we are trying to express; is it who we are, or who we really want to be?

The media bombards us with images of 'perfection', in doing so showing us famous faces as examples, this is a form of persuasion, of what to aspire towards. Changing the body has a dramatic effect on an individual's self-image, and this is what drives some people to extreme lengths to achieve this ideal. This is evident in the anorexic who will eat the minimum required by the body to survive, or the bulimic who has internal damage, due to excessive vomiting and the abuse of laxatives, which stretch the limits of what the body can withstand. We continue to reach for the impossible and are considerably abetted by modern technology to this effect. Being able to clone ourselves in future years, and choosing the sex of our children are now possibilities in this sphere. Even sex change, from female to male and vice versa have become relatively common place. These sexual boundaries were first challenged by the Punks in the '70's who had an interest in Androgyny; this has grown immensely over the past twenty years, becoming more accepted as we emphasise the importance of appearance with that of psychological well-being. In parallel, the freedom of

movement throughout different countries can account for some liberations in style; we no longer tolerate such restricted backgrounds and so are more open to change.

I have discussed the lengths that individuals go to to conform to the 'ideal beauty', in opposition to this what are the reasons behind non-conformity? These can be narrowed down to two possibilities (a) a destabilized social setting; (b) a combination of fragmented identities, or just borrowing from different societies.

To emphasize this we can again look to Punks, who turned against everything in which their society believed in order to demonstrate their feelings of helplessness among the rising unemployment of the 1970's. They expressed themselves through their appearance. These expressions in appearance were deliberately not the same as that of mainstream society. In this fact we can then conclude that in some cases, and in that of Modern Primitives, when individuals do not conform with the 'ideal beauty', considered by their society at that time, they are then considered undesirable and therefore 'outcasts'.

If we define modern as 'of relating to the present or recent time, not ancient, old fashioned or obsolete', and we define primitive as 'of or relating to the beginning or the earliest periods, early, ancient, original, primary, crude, uncivilized', we can see the inappropriateness of the term 'Modern Primitives'. Modern Primitives are obviously neither of the above, and in talking this title they create the misleading impression that they subscribe to the same traditions as involved in tribal rituals. Although they are aware of what went 'before', they are not modern in the sense that they are not producing new ideas for piercing and scarification. The fact that they merely

look back into primitive communities and borrow ideas is arguable a harmless use of historical body adornment, albeit out of context. Problematically however, the Modern Primitives say that there are sexual and spiritual reasons behind their acts and they describe these as being 'rites of passage'. A rite of passage only gains full meaning in a community. In the case of Modern Primitives, however, instead of using such practices to facilitate the socialization into the community environment, they set themselves apart and rebel against the norm. If primitive scarification, for example, is an integral part of rites of passage, its motivation is wholly integrative and communal. The motivations of those described as Modern Primitives is on the other hand segregative and personal as they argue that the use of such practices is to regain control of their own bodies, as they have no control over the surrounding world. In some respects, Modern Primitives could be described as the Punks of the '90's, in pursuit of shock value. Punks used body adornment and alternative clothes to express their estrangement from their society, in the same way that Modern Primitives shock us with their extreme body modifications. The practice of body modification is, thus, evidently connected to one's quest for a sense of identity.

We no longer know our neighbours, or the people that surround us everyday, as we once did. In this way we are increasingly alienated. IN a tribal system, however, when a child is born it enters into the community. Throughout their lives the community members act as a support system. This helps to form the child's development as not only an individual but as a tribe member. From this it is easier to see that a person's identify is formed by her/his social background (or in some cases the lack of it). In this way when a child goes through a rite of passage he/she strengthens his/her place in the community. Parallel to this in contemporary society,

perhaps, is the community relationship within an organised religion - such as the Catholic Church. The new child is welcomed into the church through baptism, again this is a public celebration, and is guided, through their most formative years, in a community manner. The next stage is Holy Communion - this being the first stage when the child is expected to continue in the religion in a more mature way. The next stage being Confirmation when the now adult, is responsible for their own education and lives within the religion.

In contemporary society, it could be argued that forms of body piercing have become more acceptable helped by the fashion industry which borrowed from sub-cultures like that of Punk in the '70's and Modern Primitives in the '80's. Fashion re-invented the body modifications of these groups and used them in a more socially acceptable manner. This was inevitably accelerated when famous designers like John Paul Gaultier used tattoos and piercing as inspiration for one of his shows. Following this, top models could be seen sporting piercings and tattoos [Fig24]. Again this was echoed in the music world with The Prodigy and The Spice Girls. These factors glorified piercing to a degree and introduced it to a group of people who might not otherwise have been interested. Instead of staying with S/M, Gay and so called 'outer fringes' communities, it became a fashion feature. Ironically, the underlying meaning of such body modifications in primitive tribes is to express affiliation to that group; in addition body modifications are a sign of commitment for a lifetime as they themselves are permanent. Body modifications, on the other hand, purely undertaken for fashion will soon become undesirable when fashion moves elsewhere, leaving the 'fashion victim' with permanent marks.

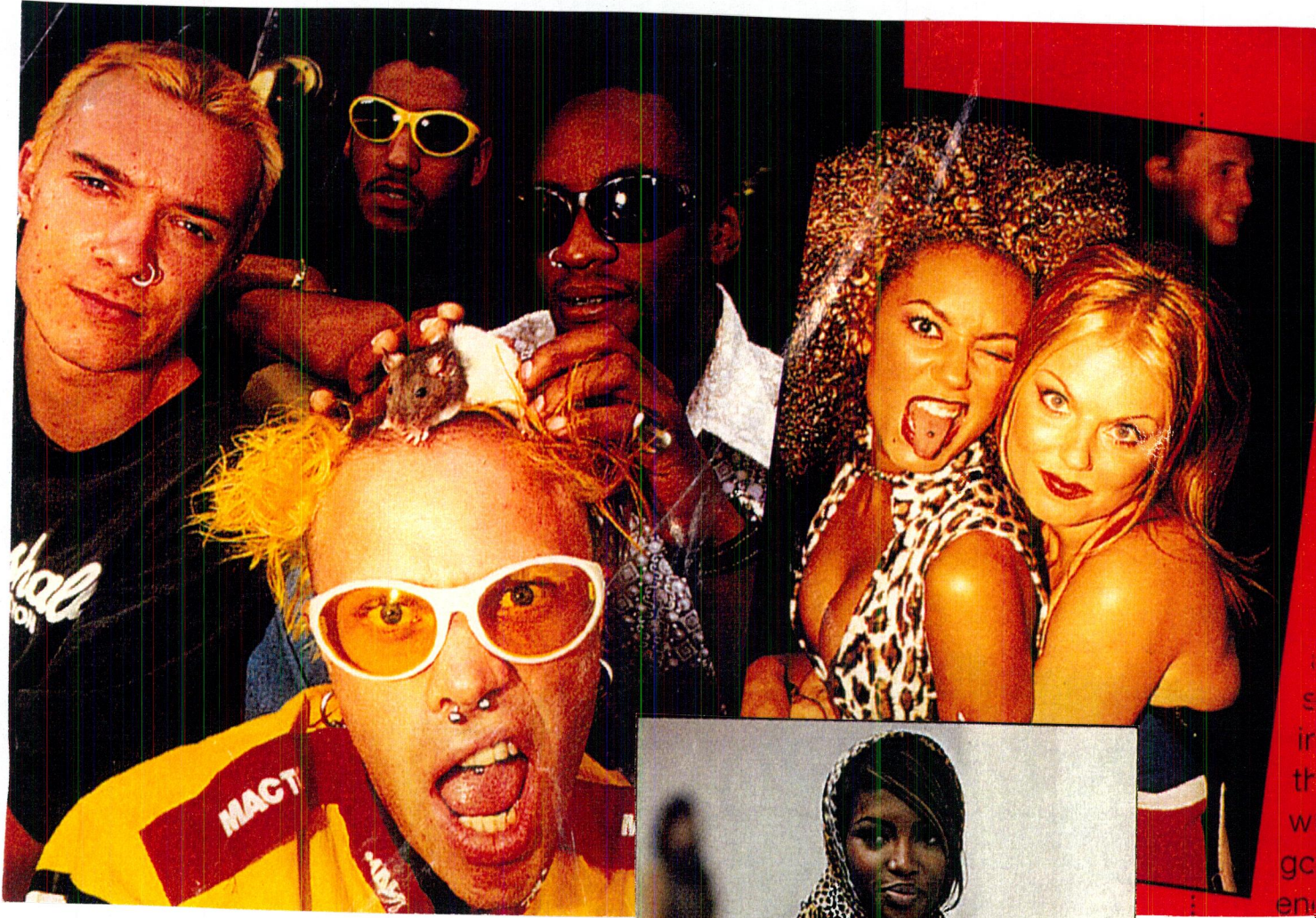


Fig.24

Some famous faces sporting piercings.

Modern Primitives and some fetishist (Becky) practitioners have talked about their 'rites of passage' in reclaiming their bodies. I think the reasoning behind this is that the individual will remember the place and time of body modification. These are private experiences and therefore the same could be said for many events that take place within our own lives. The difference between primitive and modern primitive body modifications is that in primitive societies they are carried out around a social event where the community comes together to celebrate and strengthen the social and cultural bond. It is not possible to make the same claims for contemporary body modifications, and they, therefore, cannot be viewed as rites of passage in the same way.

CONCLUSION

From the examples I have discussed in this thesis, the most evident factor remains that there is an intolerance towards individuals who we believe do not conform to the norms established by our society. Nonetheless, common threads pertain; the fact that from primitive through to contemporary societies we all strive to decorate and better the bodies we were born with (the difference between the two cultures being the choice involved). Similarities between primitive and contemporary forms of modification include the modification of the body for sexual reasons. This is fast becoming the most popular reason for piercing in contemporary society. Similar too, is the emphasis on aesthetic beauty relating to the 'well being' of an individual, perhaps mostly evident in cosmetic surgery.

Forms of body modification serve as a visual communication, like that of body language, they are unspoken and in some ways connect different people to certain groups. These are most evident in alternative sub-cultures who develop their own 'dress codes' as means of identifying one another.

The consistent revivals throughout the years are proof that body modification is not just a 'fashion phase', but continues to help individuals to re-invent their bodies, to become beautiful in the context of what that particular society has taught them. Contemporary body practices like plastic surgery emphasise the imbalance between nature and modern society. Although this practice is evidently different from the others as it tries to be natural, changing the body without seeming to do so. Body modifications will predictably be used for years to come as a means of

confirming to and rebelling from society.

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