

Cultural spirituality makes a comeback

By Mark Baldridge
Divisions Editor

It took me a long time to decide to get a tattoo: several years.

But once I decided, the rest was easy. I designed it myself over a couple of months and had it done this August.

It means a lot to me, but when people ask me what it symbolizes, I say "nothing." It's not that I don't want to say, but that there's too much to say. Its significance is more than skin deep.

After I got it I went through a couple of days of shock; I'm not used to permanence. Today it seems like something I'll be glad of even when I'm 80 years old.

And I'm in pretty good company, college-aged people are going in for body modification in whole new ways these days. Some of the possibilities you'll see here, in photos. Others we can't show you.

Suffice it to say the possibilities are becoming more endless every day.

In Colorado this summer I saw many young people that could only be described as "tribalistic." Some of them wore earrings through their eyebrows. Nose and lip piercings were also popular. And, of course, there were tattoos.

I spend a lot of time trying to decide what's happening to our culture and the trend toward body modification seems like an interesting, if puzzling, clue.

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I know tattooed young men and women who want to be teachers, lawyers or doctors. What will it mean to our society when a tattooed defendant stands before a tattooed judge hoping in the effectiveness of her tattooed attorney and the sympathy of her tattooed peers?

Obviously, body modification doesn't signify the kinds of things it once did.

I can remember a time when a bearded

Possibilities for body modification increasing steadily as changing world demands return to connectedness



Robin Trimarchi/DN

young man with long hair was virtually unemployable. Today it's the boss who wears the ponytail behind his thinning dome.

The world is changing.

Some have said that it is the spiritual poverty of our times that leads people into tribalism. It's an attempt to feel connected to others and, mystically, to the universe.

So we go in for things like the Men's Movement retreats, which give us a chance to realign ourselves with our own spiritual nature.

We make strange and personally meaningful marks on our bodies.

We turn to vegetarianism, wiccan magic and tantric yoga.

I have to admit my skepticism. Are we truly more spiritually impoverished now than we were in the heat of the industrial revolution? It's hard to imagine.

If anything, it seems that our culture is undergoing a spiritual reawakening; that we have moved toward the spiritual rather than away from it.

I realize this may not be a popular opinion, but I think the world may be becoming a more spiritual place.

Let me illustrate by way of some unorthodox examples what I mean:

Spirituality sells.

I know that's not a very positive image, but hear me out. Ad companies know what people want. They don't know any better than we do why we want things, but they have a clearer idea just what those things are.

In the music world, the immense economic success of rock bands like U2, who carefully package their spiritual image, has set the industry on its ear. It caught a lot of people by surprise at first but the market was quick to respond.

Another unpopular idea I have is that, socially, experimentation with drugs is a sign of increased spiritual awareness. The point is that spirituality is a fundamentally inward journey. Drugs serve as entry points, even if regrettable ones, to the inner world.

And drug influence shows up everywhere.

Look at MTV. New technologies like computer animation and "morphing" have created an image context that makes the so-called "psychedelic" art of the '70s seem faint. This is drug-induced and mind-expanding art as our culture has never seen it.

There are other indications that "caring" is becoming increasingly lucrative. United Colors of Benetton sells us on the idea that we are all siblings. And anything stamped "recyclable" can be sure of its place on the shelf.

If the ad people know anything, it's that we are a society becoming increasingly aware of our personal connectedness.

The fact that we are still living in a consumer society means that everything will be cannibalized to sell everything else.

Spiritual and connectedness issues are showing up more and more in pop culture, which indicates that there is more concern in the "true" culture for those same issues.

Remember, even "Give Peace a Chance" made a couple of dollars in its day.

If I'm right, what's next?

I think the current of spiritual awakening that began in Europe and America 30 years

ago is still flowing. There is no way of knowing where it will take us and some of its manifestations will be ugly, even terrible.

There's no reason for us to think that the inward journey is going to be sweetness and light. We're likely to discover some of the dark secrets of our inner selves: things we've kept hidden, even from ourselves, for too long.

But the trip must be taken and I think our feet are already on the path.

The future is uncertain, but one thing I know:

The soul is still a human soul after all. And human beings are capable of anything.

A brief list of some of the possible modifications of the human form:

Suntanning
Working out
Pierced ears
Makeup
Circumcision
Liposuction
Plastic surgery
Tattoos
Shaving
Neck lengthening
Earlobe stretching
Scarification
Braces
Clitoridectomy
Foot binding
Body painting
Hair coloring
Hairdos
Fingernail polish
Trusses

Hairstyling ...

- Free Parking
- 7 Stylists
- Appointments or Walk-ins
- Perms and Colors

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1. 4:20 - 5:00 p.m. Chinese Painting.
2. 5:20 - 5:50 p.m. Chinese Instrumental.
3. 6:20 - 6:50 p.m. Bamboo Performances.
4. 7:20 - 7:50 p.m. Lion Dance.

All students are welcome.