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“Hair : From the West to the Middle East through the Mediterranean. (The 2007 AFS Mediterranean Studies Section Address)”

Un document produit en version numérique par Jean-Marie Tremblay, bénévole,
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Abstract

From shaving to curling, from the concealment of hair to its ostentatious display, hair lends itself to a wide assortment of arrangements. It is uniquely suited for expressing status difference, relations among kin, group membership, and both the submission to and refusal of predominant social, political, and religious norms. Its fashioning entails, among other things, a striking aesthetic affinity with gardening and home decoration. From the West to the Middle East through the Mediterranean, this article explores the symbolic significances that societies attribute to this hotly debated physical characteristic and, more broadly, the interplay between voluntary social practices and culturally imposed rules of conduct.

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Why the interest in hair? Over the course of a scholar's life, research topics and areas of interest change. I have studied such issues as soccer in southern Europe, the identity of a province in northern Iran, and a variety of Mediterranean issues, and with each shift I have found that some topics begged my attention even though I initially had little interest in them. Ticked by such coincidences, I decided one day to focus my research on one of those subjects and was soon terrified to realize that it would take over several years of my life. From soccer to Iran, to the Mediterranean, how did I ever stumble on the issue of hair? Before I explore the subject in more detail, let me first recall how I came to be interested in it.

From a "Samson Complex" among Soccer Players to the Eyebrow Revolution in Iran

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For a long period of time, I was interested in soccer (see Bromberger 2004 ; Bromberger, Hayot, and Mariottini 1995). Stadiums are wonderful places for observing hair fashion. Long hair and sideburns, the style popular among players in the 1970s, was followed by the "mullet" hairstyle—which in Europe is also called the "footballers' cut" : very short in the front, and long and layered in the back—and by dreadlocks, ponytails, and a budding trend, favored by black, Maghreban, or Japanese players, of shaved heads embellished with mini-braids, bunches, and bleached hair. Never have [380] teams displayed such an assortment of hairstyles or expressed such strong preferences in the shaping of their looks. Recent years have seen a striking increase in individuation—we are a far cry from the uniform cut worn by players in the 1960s—as well as ethnicization and an ostentatious, sometimes humorous mélange of codes. Wasn't blond hair the very symbol of Aryan descent ? Wasn't it the stereotype of feminine beauty throughout Western history ? As for the moustache, icon of masculinity praised by Guy de Maupassant, magnificently flaunted by Clark Gable, and adorning the face of many a soccer player until the 1970s, it has now completely vanished from the faces of our champions.

Over time, my attention was drawn to a hair ritual widely practiced by soccer players in the 1980s and 1990s. Before major competitions, the players would stop shaving, as if to express, through collective unsociability, the unity and confrontational power of the group. Physiological arguments were often advanced to justify the routine. Indeed, it was maintained that shaving reduces the "nerve impulse" and makes one "limp." This practice, debunked by endocrinological science but vigorously maintained by the players, is in fact a reflection of the "Samson Complex," a compelling example of hair as a symbol of virile energy. As we know from the sixteenth chapter of the Book of Judges, our biblical hero Samson, lulled to sleep on Delilah's lap, lost his strength when she had his hair cut and then recovered as it grew

back. Psychoanalysts have had a field day with this story, which some have used to illustrate a link between shaving and symbolic castration. In a pioneering study, Charles Berg (1951) cited clinical and ethnographic examples to show that hair is a visible and metaphorical substitute for unseen genitals. He believed—as did his followers, including the more moderate Edmund Leach (1980 : 321–61)—that long hair signified unconstrained sexuality, short or tied-up hair meant controlled sexuality, and a close shave indicated abstinence. "Woman with hair / come if you wish," the old proverb says ; further, avowed abstinence is expressed through the tonsure or the shaving of the head, as among novice nuns upon the rite of consecration.

No one will argue that one's hairstyle is not a dependable indicator of one's socio-sexual status or specific moral values. In fact, the same sign can have opposite meanings depending on cultures or contexts : a hermit's unkempt hair and beard are as much a sign of sexual abstinence as is a shaven head, and a widow's untied hair (a common practice in many societies) can be a mark of grief and withdrawal from the world. A Western intellectual's long hair and beard are relatively free of erotic significance, while in the Jewish tradition the shaving of the bride's hair marks her initiation to, not withdrawal from, sexual life. ¹ Such contradictory examples underscore the difficulty in establishing a general "hairology" where each hair sign could have a set meaning. Such signs make up a system of differences within a given cultural structure and only make sense through the position that they occupy in that structure. No doubt some gestures and shapes tend toward specific representations (cutting suggests deprivation ; untied hair, erotic suggestion), yet we must take into account the subtle play of differences that upsets such an out-of-the-box symbolic system. All hairological systems are based on multiple interacting dimensions, and this prohibits any univocal interpretation. In the ethnic border areas of Mexico, women of Spanish origin make it a point in principle to refrain from shaving their legs in order to dissociate themselves from their naturally [381] smooth-skinned and hairless Indian counterparts (Obregon 1989 : 164). Their expression of ethnicity through unshaven legs overcomes a broader cultural imperative to express femininity by showing smooth legs. Skinheads, for their part, do not shave their

¹ For a critique of Berg's Freudian theory, see Hallpike (1987 : 154).

heads to give up sexuality but do so out of a conscious desire to be provocative, to imitate convicts and prisoners, and to mark a difference from the unkempt hair of hippies. Let us be grateful, however, to soccer players, Samson, and Charles Berg for reminding us persistently that sexuality—and more generally gender—are major referents in the language of hair.

The Iranian Middle East—another area with which I am familiar (see, most recently, [Bromberger 2003](#))—offers a choice observatory for the study of codes and hairy controversies. Must we underscore the contrast, particularly evident in the Muslim world, between the status of facial hair exhibited by males and the females' hidden hair, between the display of masculine virility and the enforced decency of women whose hair may lead to temptation? According to Shi'ite beliefs in Iran, the apocalypse and the coming of the Twelfth Imam will be announced by a doubly insufferable transgression: a bearded woman will go up on the pulpit of the Grand Mosque of Gowharshad in Mashhad, the large holy city in the eastern part of the country. Such a double reversal in the order of things established by God—a woman who wears a beard and who usurps the traditionally male leadership role in the community of believers—can only bring about "the end of the world" (*axâr-e zamân*). According to a widespread rumor, the Grand Ayatollah Behjat recently experienced a similar though even more tragic vision, as he was leading Friday prayers. During a fainting spell, he received a revelation of the birth of a girl who would wear a beard and murder the Twelfth Imam.

Out of respect for *fitrah* (healthy nature), men are required, at least in the most rigorous Islamic traditions, to eliminate pubic and underarm hair, which are considered to be impure, and to grow beards and moustaches, considered to be natural and characteristic features of virility.² When the Taliban came to power in Kabul in 1996, one the first measures they took was to impose strict hairstyle standards by force. Beards were to be large enough to be held by all five fingers, hair on the head could not be too long, and armpits and pubis were to be hairless. Radio Shariah (Islamic Law Radio) occasionally reported

² The Quran does not require cultivation of the beard, even though numerous *hadith* (oral traditions attributed to the Prophet) refer to beards. Regarding the various schools of thought on the subject, see Benkheira (1997 : 80–124).

that individuals had been whipped, even imprisoned, for failing to respect such principles. One had to comply with beard and hair rules to reach a position of responsibility. Yet, the Taliban were not the first in the region to standardize grooming. The contemporary political history of the Middle East could be written with reports of dictatorial measures taken to standardize hair displays, the controversies engendered, and the tricks used to get around them. The decision by "modern-state" regimes to ban veils and beards, such as in modern Turkey under Mustafa Kemal or in Iran under Reza Shah, led to disagreements, revolts, and protests. In Afghanistan, Mohammed Daoud, the founder of the republic in 1973, required all state employees to keep their faces clean-shaven. But never in this culture, where showing off virility through facial hair is gratifying, were moustaches outlawed. Every revolution has found expressivity in hair, just as every government imprints its mark and imposes its standards on the bodies of its subjects and citizens. In the Middle East, where one is perhaps more sensitive to facial hair than in other areas of [382] the world, differing ways of wearing beards and moustaches have particular ideological significance.

A perfect example of this type of coding can be seen in Turkey (Fliche 2000). In that country, devout adults who have performed their pilgrimage to Mecca wear wide, thick, and well-kept beards and moustaches that do not spill over their upper lips, as is required by *fitrah*. Young adepts of radical Islam grow carefully designed and well-trimmed chin curtains. The nationalist followers of Pan-Turkism do not wear beards but rather pointy Genghis Khan-style moustaches, which cannot be suspected of any Arab or Persian influence. As for left-wing militant extremists, they, the Alevis, and the Kurds (which are, as Benoît Fliche explains, "three concepts that maintain close relations between them" [2000 :161]), may be distinguished by their full moustaches, which are reminiscent of Stalin's.

When it comes to writing history, the hairstyle of a hero is also subject for debate. At the time of World War I, Iran had its own Robin Hood, who led a rural revolution in the northern part of the country. Mirzâ Kouchek Khân, for such was his name, was one of those revolutionary heroes with untamed hair and a bushy beard, a hairstyle reflecting his position as a rebel against the established order and his harmonious relationship with the brush environment of his guerrilla

movement. His movement was called *jangali*, which means "forest." ³ Just as Fidel Castro's *Barbudos* did half a century later, Mirzâ and his companions vowed not to shave their beards until they reached their goals, which included the expulsion of foreign forces from the country, the restoration of Iran's independence, and the advent of a social revolution. History, however, did not grant Mirzâ and his fellow revolutionaries the opportunity to fulfill their wishes. Some sixty years later, the Islamic Republic did not really know what to make of the image of this persistently popular and cumbersome hero, whose heritage was claimed by several left-wing political movements. In an effort to appropriate the hero, local authorities emphasized that Mirzâ had studied theology and was a true Muslim, portraying him as a Mullah and thus wearing a turban and sporting a well-trimmed beard. But the representation did not match the well-rooted image of the rebel, which was still alive in people's minds and popular songs. Therefore, authorities had to resign themselves to show an authentic portrait of Mirzâ and promulgate contentious versions making him an ancestor of the Islamic revolution. Statues and murals in northern Iran offer a compromise between order and disorder : the hero's beard is no longer unkempt. (See Figure 1.)

The use of various stratagems to get around or challenge the rules of the hair code is very widespread in the Islamic Republic of Iran today. While women must, at a minimum, wear scarves to hide their hair (as must plastic mannequins in shop windows), the wearing of a hood (*maghna' e*) firmly secured by an elastic strap wrapped around the head and over the shoulders is mandatory for schoolgirls, students, and state employees. The most mischievous and astute among them are very creative when it comes to getting around the regulations. In the more prosperous urban areas, one may catch a glimpse of bleached hair or ponytails deliberately emerging from the folds of scarves and even from the tightness of hoods. (See Figure 2.) Committee members and "volunteers" in charge of law and order periodically wave sticks as reminders of one's obligations to obey the strict rules. The number of times women [383] were stopped on the street in Tehran by the

³ For more on the *Jangali* movement and its representations, see Afary (1995) and Bromberger (in press).

gasht-e ershâd (guidance patrols) was estimated at 150,000 during June and July of 2007. ⁴

Figure 1.



Varying representations of the beard of Mirzâ Kouchek Khân. On the poster and the banner above, there are three representations of Mirzâ. On the left of the poster, he appears as the revolutionary hero with a bushy beard, which can be found in most photographs of him. Above the banner, the hero is wearing a skullcap with a more disciplined beard, a characterization of Mirzâ popular in the late 1980s and commonly featured on stamps, posters of the guardians of the revolution, and mural paintings. On the right, there is a portrait of Mirzâ as a *mollâh*, wearing a regular beard in the shape of a necklace. Painted by Hajizadeh and based on a photo of the hero in his youth, this image is held in high regard by the Iranian regime. The poster and the banner thus gather three images of a hero and his beard, which the Islamic authorities have linked together.

⁴ Not all women who are stopped on the street are taken to prison. Depending on the circumstances, a woman might merely be admonished by the patrol, or she may be brought to the patrol's office.

At the center of the poster, volunteer soldiers are depicted engaging in battle in the war against Iraq (1980–1988). The legend reads, "May 11 azar—the anniversary day of the fighting cleric of the general martyr Mirzâ Kouchek Jangali and the martyred clerics of the province of Gilân—be cherished." (Note that the word *khân* (chief, lord), connoting the old regime, has been suppressed.) To the left, there is a portrait of the âyatollâh Khomeyni with a long and regular beard. On the left at the bottom, two mollâhs are shown sitting, each wearing a regular beard resembling the shape of a necklace.

This photograph was taken by the author in Rasht, the capital of Gilân, on December 2, 2007 (11 azar 1386 in the Iranian calendar) at the official commemoration of the martyr Mirzâ Kouchek Khân.

At the margin of such weighty restrictions, another revolutionary trend has developed—the eyebrow revolution—and it continues to grow at rates that vary according to social background. In Iran, as in most Muslim countries, young girls traditionally [384] do not remove their body hair until they get married. On the day before the wedding, the *bandandâz* (hair remover or cosmetician) uses cotton thread, limebase depilatory paste, a razor, and wax to skillfully transform the girl's hairy body into a woman's perfectly smooth body. There is no lack of this kind of work in Iran, which is part of what Jeffrey Eugenides calls, in *Middlesex* (2002 : 308), the "Hair Belt" running from Portugal to Afghanistan.⁵ The cosmetician will carefully shape the eyebrows like fine bows, or perhaps, according to the latest trend, like circumflex accents. (The Persians say that such eyebrows are "shaped like eights" since the Arabic character for the number eight looks like a circumflex accent.) A teenager's bulky eyebrows, often called "goat legs" (*pâche-bozi*), are thus replaced by graceful geometric designs. In everyday life, the shape of the eyebrows will traditionally reveal a female's status and instantly inform any interlocutor as to the proper terms of address. However, daring young women, impa-

⁵ "Like the Sun Belt or the Bible Belt, there exists, on this multifarious earth of ours, a Hair Belt. It begins in southern Spain, congruent with Moorish influence. It extends over the dark-eyed regions of Italy, almost all of Greece, and absolutely all of Turkey. It dips south to include Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, and Egypt. Continuing on (and darkening in colors as maps do to indicate ocean depth) it blankets Syria, Iran, and Afghanistan, before lightening gradually in India" (Eugenides 2002 : 308).

tient for emancipation, will frequently blur identification codes ; preempting the rite of passage and eager to follow the beauty rules of the young in the Western world, they pluck their eyebrows, which leads to disapproval and sometimes even to exclusion from educational institutions.

Figure 2.



A young woman in a restaurant in Tehran with dyed hair emerging from the fold of her scarf. Photograph by the author, November 2007.

Hairstyling, whether Mirzâ Kouчек Khân's bushy style or a young Tehranese girl's bleached ponytail, implies, each in its own way, a will to be different. Everywhere, hairstyles mark the limit between submission and disobedience. As for our daring young ladies who remove their hair before their time, they are insolent reminders that many rites of passage come with a metamorphosis in hair and body styles.

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The Religions of the Book, Face to Face

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A further issue in the field of hairology goaded my curiosity. As I tried to visualize the uniqueness of the Mediterranean world, I deviated from, but did not entirely dismiss, the two paths that one usually follows : conceiving the Mediterranean as a space of meeting and exchange (that is, of *convivenza*) or understanding it as a collection of societies that all share a family resemblance shaped by shared values (honor, shame, and so forth ; see Albera, Blok, and Bromberger 2001 ; Bromberger 2006). Truthfully, what makes the world coherent in the long run is not so much identified similarities as it is the differences that make up a system. And it is without doubt that such complementary differences set in a reciprocal field allow us to speak of a Mediterranean system. Each is defined, perhaps more so here than elsewhere, in a play of mirrors between neighbors. For example, how could we understand the food behaviors of various Mediterranean cultures if not through a relational system of reciprocal oppositions ? Alcohol and pork are the basic elements in the differentiation triangle between Jews, Muslims, and Christians. Behaviors toward body hair, facial hair, and hair on the head likewise express a will for differentiation and emerge in symmetrical and opposite distribution patterns from one religious tradition to another. In the First Corinthians, Saint Paul reiterates the obligation of male believers to pray with their heads uncovered : "Any man who prays or prophesizes with something on his head disgraces his head" (11 : 4, New Revised Standard Edition). This custom is opposed to that of the Jews and Romans (whose pontificates covered their heads during sacrifices). The church fathers insisted on the requirement to mark difference with regard not only to the Jews but also to the Egyptians and "barbarians." In the fifth century, Saint Jerome prescribed that "we should neither shave our heads like the priests of Isis and Serapis, nor let our hair grow, for that is the mark of the debauched and the barbarian" (quoted in [Migne 1863 : 801](#)). Even the great schism within the Christian church included the dimension of hair, with the oriental clerics wearing long hair,

beards, and moustaches, which were contrary to those of the Roman church. As Marie-France Auzépy writes, "The Byzantine clergy claimed the beard as a fundamental element of their church tradition, unlike the Latins, who upheld the opposite practice. Hair, which was defended by the Greeks and detested by the Latins, was in fact an essential argument in the schism between East and West" (2002 : 9). The same concern for distinction seems to have affected the way appearance was fashioned in Islam : "Distinguish yourselves from the Magi," or "Imitate neither the Jews, nor the Christians," as the Prophet might have said, according to three hadiths (quoted in [Benkheira 1997 : 97](#)). The strictly codified wearing of the beard and moustache, as well as the practice of corporal hair removal, are among the strongest and most nuanced markers of adherence to the Islamic community. As Bernard Lewis reminds us, the medieval rigor of this oppositional play has lost none of its virulence in our time : Harun ibn Yahya, a prisoner in Rome during the ninth century, remarked that the inhabitants of the city "young and old, shave their beards completely, down to the last hair. 'The costume of a man,' I tell them, 'is his beard !'" And one of the Romans who were approached by another Arab on the same subject responded : "Hair is superfluous. If, you others, you remove it from the natural parts, why should we leave it on the face ?" (1990 :265). This desire for communitarian demarcation is explained by a [386] contemporary exegete, the Shaykh Ibâdite Bayyudh, an ardent proponent of the religious obligation of wearing a beard : "it is asked of, and even ordained to Muslims to acquire a specific personality in order to differentiate oneself from those who don't share their confession and to be recognizable for others and among one's own. This personality must be their coat of arms and the mark that singularizes them" ([Benkheira 1997 : 92](#)). Must we emphasize, in this system of differences, the place held by the Jews according to the prescriptions of Leviticus (19 : 27) not to shave the corners of the beard ? Like the wearing of a beard, this interdiction likely had its origin in a desire among the Jews to distinguish themselves from the glabrous faces of the Egyptians, as well as from the Babylonians and the Persians with their intricately curled beards.

The history of relations among Jews, Christians, and Muslims, and among the various groups within each religion, reminds us eloquently that practices relating to hair are indeed used as distinctive signs to

emphasize the gap between neighboring associations or groups, or as an essential element to identify oneself or to caricature others.⁶ In the same way that a person's name is a clear mark of belonging (to a lineage, an area, a nation, or a religion), hairstyle variants, genetically inherited and socially built, are, together with the skin, the eyes, and the nose, our main visible identifying features. As Anthony Synnott quite appropriately observes, "the body physical and the body social are symbolically one" (1987 : 409). The symbolic force of this phenotypical marker appears clearly in exercises of control, submission, or humiliation, as was the case when Jews were constrained to remain unshaven for fear that their appearance would become too similar to that of Christians and that the social gap between these groups would lessen, as was the case for Sicilian Jews under Frederick II, or in Spain during the *Reconquista*, or under Marie Thérèse of Austria (Horowitz 1994). In other situations, persons are denied their identity and condemned on the basis of their name and their hair. Head shaving or haircuts, together with the attribution of a number, are commonly associated with a person's subjection to imprisonment, labor camps, or deportation. "Destruction begins with a shearing," as Joseph Bialot wrote in a gripping description of Auschwitz, "when a civilized human being, with a last name, a first name, and a status expires in the eyes of his fellow human beings" (2002 : 132). In many societies (in Egypt, in Rome, among Germanic peoples, in China, in Burma, in most African societies, and among Native American northwestern tribes), slavery resulted in the same hair restrictions, a "social death" that also came with the attribution of a new name (Patterson 1983 : 60).

⁶ On the use of hair to caricature others, consider the various images of the Wandering Jew in iconography from the Middle Ages to contemporary times, discussed in *Le Juif errant* (Brailion-Philippe and Golstenne 2001).

The Keys to a Flexible Language

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From gender to ethnic identity, from rebellion to submission, hairways provide scores of clues to social and symbolic meanings. The very nature of hairiness is largely responsible for its expressiveness. Contrary to permanent body mutilations (such as circumcision and excision), changes in head and body hairstyles—with a few exceptions made possible by modern technologies such as electric or laser epilation—are temporary and reversible. Hair can be cut or shaved or given shape and volume by creating one or more lines and by curling, straightening, backcombing, spiking, braiding, or weaving ; by forming it into a crest ; by anointing it and sculpting it with the [387] help of greasy substances, pomades, and even clay ; by lengthening it with vegetable fibers or human hair extensions ; or by hiding it under a wig. Hair can also be dyed, bleached, graced with pearls, cowries, combs, or feathers. Both strong and flexible, its fibers lend themselves to scores of ephemeral arrangements and changes with no physiological effect. But what do hairstyles express in differing times and places ?

Whatever the context, several types of information that I briefly mentioned earlier are either hampered or distilled through hair fashions : information about gender, status (age, generation, rank, community), one's attitudes towards rules and standards (what Charles Hallpike [1969] refers to as the "ins" and the "outs"), and fashion trends. Further we have to consider that individual variations and the choices of minority groups express a standpoint with reference to established codes.

Gender and Hair

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An obvious characteristic of sexual dimorphism, the beginning growth of particular kinds of facial and body hair often marks a boy's "entry into gender" and is comparable to a girl's first period. Many societies celebrate biological and social puberty, either at the time when it occurs or a little later, with a hair ritual. In Rome, the shaving of the first beard (the *depositio barbae*), which was dedicated to the gods of the hearth, to Lares, or to Jupiter, occurred simultaneously with the ritual of the *toga virilis* (the toga of the grown man, which was worn on formal occasions by Roman men of legal age). In most places, teenage boys eagerly await the sprouting of their first mature hair, the transformation of vellus hair into a moustache, while young girls watch for hair on their legs and faces in order to make it disappear. Persians play on words to stress the importance of this transition: the word for "moustache" is *sibil*; *si* also means "thirty," so when a young boy watches for the beginning growth of his hair, he is called a *bist o no* (a twenty-nine). Indeed, feminine smoothness and masculine roughness, with a few remarkable exceptions that I will return to below, make up the paradigm of beauty and normality in the history of Mediterranean societies. These societies—and society in general—have tended to exaggerate hairiness in characterizing gender differences. The founding religious texts of the culture, which tend to prohibit intermingling and widen the dimorphism artificially, are not at all ambiguous on the subject. "Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering," said Saint Paul in his First Epistle to the Corinthians (11 : 14–5), as he emphasized, in no uncertain terms, the submissive role of women and their obligation to cover their heads when "they pray or prophesy" (11 : 5). With the same energy, the church fathers also insisted on the need to maintain the natural limits traced by God. At the end of the second century, Clement of Alexandria railed at the riffraff who would abolish such limits through epilation. Clement wrote: "Shops are erected and opened everywhere, and adepts at this meretricious

fornication make a deal of money openly" (1970, vol. 3 : 45). He continues :

God wished women to be smooth, to rejoice in their natural locks as a horse would rejoice in her mane. But God made bearded man like a lion and endowed him, as an [388] attribute of his manhood, with a shaggy breast—a sign of his strength and rule. The cock who will fight to defend his hens is crowned with a comb like a helmet ; males have more heat and hair than females, uncastrated males are more perfect than castrated, and adults warmer than those whose growth is incomplete. It is therefore impious to desecrate the symbol of manhood, hairiness. (1970, vol. 3 : 47) ⁷

Obedience to the natural order of things was brutally visited by the church and imperial authorities upon the first monastic communities who preached poverty, equality between men and women, and indistinctness in external appearance. The members of these communities all wore the same clothes (a plain *pallium*), and women shaved their heads, which made their "natural veil" disappear and sparked protests from bishops (Brown 1988). Well-groomed hair, covered in public and loosed only during marital intimacy, has been the accepted image of femininity in the history of Mediterranean societies. Molly Myerowitz Levine writes appropriately that "Men with visible hair and married women with invisible hair form the normative landscape of the ancient Mediterranean" (1995 : 106). The ostentatious display of hirsute virility (beards, moustaches, chest hair) are in keeping with the covering of female hair, associated with—need I repeat it?—seduction. The word "nuptial" comes from the Latin *nuptiae*, which refers to the act of covering the hair. In the orthodox Jewish tradition, married women must cover their heads with scarves, turbans, or wigs. ⁸ The wigs, however, cannot be made from non-Jews' hair, according to an ultraconservative rabbi's ruling that they must be burned if such is the case, as the July 5, 2004, *Maariv International* reports. Current debates on the Islamic veil are a reminder of the Muslim tradition's fervor about hair, which resembles the long-standing custom

⁷ On the theory of bodily humors, which is the basis for the distinction between "hot" and "cold" that Clement makes in this passage, see Lloyd (1971).

⁸ For a treatment of feminine hair in Greece, Rome, and the Jewish tradition, see Levine (1995).

in southern Europe. In early-twentieth-century France, decency required that women cover their heads after tying up their hair in high or low chignons before showing themselves in public.

Anthony Synnott has clearly shown that in an effort to emphasize sexual differences in contemporary Western societies, normative behaviors of both sexes toward head, facial, and body hair were systematically set in opposition: "What is beautiful for one gender is ugly for the opposite sex: the young man's glory is the woman's shame." He added that men "minimize their head hair and face hair, but they maximize their body hair," while women "minimize their body hair and maximize their head hair" through styling, color, length, and volume (1987: 390). One might be tempted to identify a sort of normative invariant that, from antiquity to the emergence of protest movements such as hippies, punks, and feminists in the 1960s, controlled the shaping of hair trends according to sex. Such a theory, however, would underestimate the sudden and unexpected variability of cultural sensibilities.

Actually, as I discussed earlier, there is a clear contrast in the Mediterranean world between the Christian and Muslim treatments of body hair. Christianity has preached the respect of nature created by God and valued the virtues of hair hiding the "shameful parts." In Islamic societies, the removal of pubic and underarm hair is standard for both sexes, as hair retains secretions (blood, urine, sweat, feces) regarded as impure. Under these conditions, one may not reasonably perform one's religious obligations while covered with hair, and the fact that depilatory paste is called *vâjebi* in Persian (which literally means "mandatory") is very meaningful.

[389]

In addition, in the course of history, aesthetic standards have evolved and either accentuated or attenuated the differences between genders. In France, from the Middle Ages to the sixteenth century, wealthy women underwent whole body depilation, a practice discovered by Crusaders in the Middle East. The practice later vanished and did not reappear until the beginning of the twentieth century, when long dresses were replaced by low necklines and when the progressive baring of bodies at summertime precipitated the return, even the tyranny, of hairlessness, which was understood as a sign of cleanliness,

hygiene, and odorlessness. This was a far cry from the sentiment expressed by artist Emile Bayard and author Joris Karl Huysmans at the end of the nineteenth century. The former wrote to one of his friends : "Do you remember the scandalous sight of those actresses with shaven armpits ? Oh ! How embarrassing the absence of that tuft of hair, laughing like a nest under their arms ! How deplorable, almost obscene, the absence of this dot on the i !" As for the latter, in his *Parisian Sketches* he praised "the smell of the gusset" : "No fragrance has more nuances, on a scale touching all the keys of smell, suggesting the heady scents of mock orange and elder trees, sometimes reminiscent of the soft perfume generated when rubbing a finger that held the cigarette one smoked. Daring and at times wearisome for brunettes and black women, acute and wild for redheads, the gusset is sometimes as heady as some sweet wines when displayed by blondes" (quoted in Perrot 1984 : 153).

The recent neutralization of differences in hair practices between genders, which appears to be a contemporary attribute of so-called metrosexuals, has antecedents that compel us to refute simplistic and unidirectional visions of history. One example is the absence of the beard and the moustache in the Western world's amazing eighteenth century. Another example, a little further from the contemporary West but somehow more stunning, is the representation of lovers in paintings from the *ghâjâr* period (nineteenth century) in Iran, where men can hardly be distinguished from women : both have the same curls, the same uninterrupted eyebrows. As Afsaneh Najmabadi (2005) points out, male and female beauties were basically undifferentiated at that time. The aesthetic and erotic ideal was the teenage boy (*amrad*) whose upper lip was covered with a fine fuzz. Metaphorically named *mihrgiyâh* (love plant), this fuzz was seen as akin to plant hair, as opposed to the animal hair of beards and moustaches (*muh*, a term that also translates as "animal fleece"). Up until the 1920s, women continued to cultivate peach fuzz reminiscent of an *amrad*. Then, according to Najmabadi, "heterosocial European cultural practices heteronormalized Iran's men sensibilities" (2005 : 54), and the female "peach fuzz" became an object of stigmatization, "a troubling sign of undesirability" (2005 : 232).

Renouncement and Sexual Humiliation

Any variation from sexuality's hair standards, however varied such standards might be, is a sign of rupture, whether it is chosen freely, suffered, or imposed. When studying appearances, it is always important to know who gives the orders, directly or indirectly.

In Christian societies, renouncement of sexual life results in the suppression of its symbol, as exemplified by the monk's tonsure or, at one time, the shaving of the head [390] among female religious orders upon confirmation of vows. (Saint Theresa of Lisieux even shed a tear when her sister, herself a nun, cut off her full blond hair before she took her vows.) A long-standing tradition warrants that the punishment for adultery is to eliminate the tools of seduction. "Cutting off the braid" (*gis boridan*) was one of the traditional sanctions for adulteresses in Iran, and promiscuous women or shameless girls were frequently referred to as *gis boride* (cut braids). In most cases, such practices were not so much about shaving—which applies to human hairiness—but could more accurately be described as shearing, as one would an animal, in order to stigmatize the transgressive position. (It is perhaps interesting to note that we in France "shear" our lawns, which we call "pelouse," itself derived from the Latin *pilus*.) From 1943 through the days following liberation, thousands of French women were shorn in public—exhibited, "uncrowned, disfigured," to use the words of Paul Eluard—for committing crimes of "horizontal collaboration" (that is to say, "sleeping with the enemy").⁹ It was not enough to punish; femininity itself was condemned through the desexualization of the tantalizing body.

Such humiliating desexualization can also be caused by disease, or in cancer treatment, by chemotherapy. As it emerges from my conversations with female patients in a hospital, the loss of head and body hair from chemotherapy is all the more difficult to accept when it is

⁹ See Virgili (2000). According to the statistics reported by this author, 42 percent of sheared women were punished for "horizontal collaboration," the remainder for political collaboration, black-marketeering, betrayal, or other crimes.

accompanied by the ablation of a breast, another symbol of femininity. Moreover, the effects of chemotherapy are felt differently by younger women than by older ones. For the former, the disappearance of the pubic hair is the most difficult experience, felt like a regression into a recent childhood. For the latter, pre- or postmenopausal women over forty, it is the loss of the head hair, a tangible and visible sign of critical change. In all cases, the mirror test is unbearable : "I" become "someone else" while hospital hairdressers, who help in this critical transition, endeavor to trim the fraying hair in successive stages, placing the patient's back to the mirror. After the treatment, when the hair has grown back, the first "outing" to the hairdresser's salon is lived as a re-integration into gender.

Hairy Figures of the Rebellion

The assertion of a new form of femininity can be expressed in a variety of ways, as either a shortening or a displaying of hair, depending on pre-established contexts and codes. Let us examine a few examples.

Consider first the "revolution" and the scandal of *la garçonne* (the tomboy), the heroine of a novel by Victor Marguerite, published in France in 1922. On the eve of World War I, the craze for chignons built up with false braids to look like gigantic tarts adorned with tortoiseshell combs was replaced by short hair, symbolizing the women's will to emancipation, which neutralized sexual differences. In response to this show of independence and rejection of the sexual order during the war, the church, as well as some conservative doctors, was particularly caustic. They saw, in the new fashion that transgressed the rules set by Saint Paul, the specter of androgyny and the threat of the paganization of Christian women. Cutting women's hair short, they said, could cause them to become bald and grow hair on their faces. Two different conceptions of nature were opposed. The "garçonnes" emerged as natural against "the fake feelings" symbolized [391] by the chignons "false hair" ; in response, the guardians of law and order emphasized Saint Paul's requirement of a "natural veil." There were

debates about the inherent meaning of this massive metamorphosis.¹⁰ Those who cut their hair did not necessarily embrace the "garçonne" ideal but were following a fairly widespread fashion. The movement—together with the emergence of female fashion designers (such as Jeanne Lanvin, Madeleine Vionnet, and Gabrielle Chanel) who took center stage—was indeed a significant step for women. However the 1930s, and the new fashion of finger waves pressed against the face, signaled the end of the movement.

Based on a different point of view—of short hair as restricted and hidden—a number of (principally Jewish) feminists used as the emblem of their revolt a figure of biblical mythology with untied waving hair: Lilith.¹¹ A close look at Genesis reveals two differing creation stories. In the first story we are told that "God created humankind in his image... male and female created he them" (1 : 27). In the second chapter, the story reads, "And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man" (2 : 22). If Eve were created out of Adam's rib, what happened to the first woman created by God? Such a question has not been neglected in the talmudic and kabbalistic traditions. In the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*, a collection of legends written in the tenth century to which the contemporary feminist movement refers, the first creation appears as a sort of failed first draft, in which male and female could not get along. "They immediately began to fight. She said, 'I will not lie below,' and he said, 'I will not lie beneath you, but only on top.' She said, 'We are equal to each other inasmuch as we were both created from the earth.' But they would not listen to one another. When Lilith saw this, she . . . flew away into the air" (quoted in Bitton 1990 : 119). She joined the demons, while God, after his first failure, created a woman derived from man and thus in compliance with patriarchal order. In Jewish folk tradition, Lilith appears as a femme fatale with untied waving hair, a redhead, a seducer seeking to take the place of legitimate wives, a figure that causes men to have wet dreams in order to generate child-demons. Easy women are often said to "let their hair grow like Lilith," whose looks contrast with Eve's persistently tidy hairstyle.

¹⁰ See Zdatny (1996) and the somewhat clumsy "Débat" by Roberts (1996), which followed that article.

¹¹ Concerning Lilith, see Bitton (1990), Brill (1981), Dame, Rivlin, and Wenkart (1998), and Dottin Orsini (2002).

Seduction personified, such wild hair blowing in the wind was represented in suggestive ways by then-contemporary artists (Dante Gabriel Rossetti, around 1870 ; John Collier, in 1905), and it became the feminist movement's emblem of freedom and rebellion against the established sexual order. As Lilith was, in Michèle Bitton's felicitous expression, promoted to the rank of "most senior member of the Women's Liberation movement" (1990 : 119), her long waving hair became a special symbol for Jewish feminists rebelling against the tradition of "oppressed hair" that "puts a ceiling on the brain." "It's the wild hair which draws me to you. ... Lilith, I always hoped my daughter would be like you !" one feminist said (Lynn Saul, quoted in Dame, Rivlin, and Wenkart 1998 : 283–284).

A Battlefield between Generations and Ideologies

The move away from the conventional canons of femininity and masculinity is prevalent in modern times, where codes become confused and dusky, and where the logic of choice seems to prevail over normative logic. Influenced by Western fashion and by the new concepts of gender that they convey, hairiness has become a highly polemical [392] subject in Mediterranean and Middle Eastern societies. In Iran, neatly arranged hairdos, such as the well-trimmed or several-day-old beards worn by traditionalists, have been replaced by young boys' gelled spikes, glabrous faces, and even plucked eyebrows—an unacceptable transgression in the eyes of many and a reputed sign of the end of times. In October 2005, the Iranian Football Federation ordered their players to respect "Islamic values" ; refrain from wearing body-hugging clothes, earrings, rings, or necklaces ; and maintain a proper grooming. Uneven beards, ponytails, and long curly hair—in short, anything reminiscent of the Western look—were proscribed. As for young women, I mentioned earlier the fate that awaits those who let locks of hair emerge from their scarves, that scarves are meant to hide the tools of seduction.

In European society and in the Westernized milieus of the Arab-Muslim world, expressions of sexual differences through hair tend to be neutered : smooth bodies and short- or medium-length haircuts are usually the rule. And yet, can such uncertain boundaries signal an in-

controvertible step towards androgyny? This neutralization of appearances, in hair and in dress fashions as well, is paradoxical. Men's hairlessness is as much a symbol of modernity as a sign of femininity. It is part of a general process of de-animalization and deodorization of the body, personified with some exaggeration by futuristic cartoon and science-fiction heroes. Hairlessness is also a means of showing off sculpted and muscular bodies, a different emblem of virility. Furthermore, while trends that emphasize facial hair have become less popular, they have not entirely disappeared. Untidy shaving in the 1990s, goatees "à la mouche," and thin moustaches in the 2000s: all are light expressions of masculinity. Men who have their hair removed, stripping off a deeply rooted emblem of traditional masculine identity, may be accused of homosexuality. Such hair metamorphoses are, indeed, a central element in the practice of transvestism and transsexualism. Concerning women in the Western world, numerous reports in the French press have observed a dramatic increase in the use of body hair removal services in the last thirty years; however, pubic hairiness remains controversial, as it suggests the images of the little girl or the "porn star." "One must keep a minimum" (a fringe on the upper part of the pubis), often women say, in an effort to dissociate themselves from either of these two extremes.

In spite of a tendency to standardize clothing, female hair remains vested with a primary differentiating power. But here, too, where hair arrangements are a popular focus of attention and concern, a contradiction emerges.¹² The difference between female and male hairstyles has undoubtedly diminished, except among children and teenagers, where long hair and short hair continue to be representational opposites. Braids, once the hallmark of young, sexually inhibited girls, have gradually disappeared. Among adults, short- or medium-length haircuts prevail, and changes in hairstyle usually coincide with changes in status, such as a first job, marriage, the birth of the first child (in which case, the choice of a short haircut cannot be justified by practical or physiological arguments alone), or an appointment to high office. For example, women ministers who had long hair before taking

¹² Hair products (shampoo, gels, hair sprays, styling lotions, specific fragrances, hair mascaras, and so forth) represent an important market segment, as one may gather from the numerous advertising campaigns where actresses and top models praise a product's vaunted merits.

office often quickly change to short hairstyles. This practice can be seen as a simplification and masculinization of one's hairstyle and is reminiscent of the "garçonne." Although new means of differentiation are emerging (emphasizing hair enhancements, highlighting, straightening and shining, dying, or the display of jewelry revealed by short haircuts), the women who choose [393] these haircuts tend to be fully confident in their femininity, while those who are less confident (teenagers, some postmenopausal women) let their hair grow.

Social and Ethnic Boundaries

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Beyond what I have already illustrated, I will not dwell on the ways in which forms of social identity such as age, generation, marital status, social rank, profession, or regional or national group are recorded and expressed through hair-related fashions. As I have suggested, most rites of passage coincide with hair traditions ; body and facial hair are status markers and privileged guides in popular writings about culture.

The importance of such signs can be proportional to their owner's status, and their shape is intrinsically related to their meaning. In the history of the Christian West, the ecclesiastical tonsure had the dual status of both a proportional sign (the dimension of which indicated the rank of the clerk) and a symbol.¹³ As a sign, it distinguished the clergy from laymen. In the seventeenth century, ecclesiastical authorities required that *perruquet* abbots (wigged abbots) leave an opening in their wigs to plainly display their tonsure. Further, the tonsure was a proportional sign, inasmuch as the tonsure covered broader areas of the wearer's head according to the position that he occupied in the church hierarchy. The 1579 Council of Milan established tonsure sizes at four inches for priests, three inches for deacons, and two for those from minor orders. The tonsure is a symbol that had multiple, often contradictory meanings in the course of church history. It was sometimes presented as emblematic of the renunciation of the flesh, of lust

¹³ For more on the history of the ecclesiastic tonsure, see Trichet (1990).

and seduction, of excess, and of the "musing heart." ¹⁴ On other occasions, the crown of hair remaining after the rest of the head was shaven was a reminder of the crown of Saint Peter, prince of the apostles, and of the crown of thorns worn by Jesus on the cross. At times, the clerical tonsure was seen even as an allegory of power, of the royal priesthood and celestial glory.

Like food, language, the color of the skin, and the shape of the nose, hairstyle practices are a distinctive and often stigmatized marker of otherness. The Romans referred to the inhabitants of Gaul as *comata* (hairy), Native Americans were dubbed *Coronados* (crowned) by the Spaniards, and for a long time the Germans were known to the French as *Frisés* (curly-haired). Popular etymologies (and scholarly ones in olden times), such as those found in myths, often derive the origin of a people's name from their characteristic hairstyles. In antiquity and the Middle Ages, the ethnonym "Lombard" was said to originate with the long beard worn by the men of this war-loving people. "Langobardos vulgo fertur nominatos prolixa barba et nunquam tonsa" (It is said that "Lombards" were so named because of their long and never-shaved beard), wrote Saint Isidore of Sevilla in the seventh century (quoted in Constable 1985 : 88 n. 195). According to a Bulgarian myth, the origin of the word "Valaque" may be the word *vlas* (hairy ; see Mesnil and Popova 1993 :187). "They did not cut their hair and did not shave, so their bodies, the myth says, were covered with hair, like animals" (*Sbornik za narodni umotvorenija*, quoted in Mesnil and Popova 1993 : 189). Only when the Bulgarian tsar tamed and baptized them did they recover a semblance of humanity.

Independent of such fanciful representations, hairstyling practices can be considered as classifying and distinguishing between "naturophiles" (those who like nature) [394] and "naturophobes" (those who dislike it). The Greeks and the Romans hated furs, which they associated with "ignorance" and cruelty, and considered them to be inconsistent with the civilization of *polis* and *urbs*. "Goatherders, who live in isolation with only their flocks, ordinary slaves and northern barbarians may wear furlined coats, but upper classes despise them" (Lavergne 2006 : 240). In the long course of history, the oppo-

¹⁴ All of this is according to Saint Gregory who, in the sixth century, is our earliest witness and recorder of the practice. See Constable (1985 : 70).

sition between "naturophiles" and "naturophobes" dissociates the Germanic and Slavic world, on the one hand, from the Mediterranean world, on the other. The hairless bodies of Mediterranean women contrast with hairy northern women, whose hairiness is associated with the respect of nature and with youth.

World Order and Exclusions

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Within all societies, conventional, inconspicuous hairdos are opposed to the styles of those who have excluded themselves or who have been excluded from mainstream society. Such improper hairiness may signal a rejection or an imposed withdrawal from the social and political order : rebels and dissenters, the banished, the imprisoned, and the excluded are all characterized by their marginal looks. It may also symbolize a spiritual experience or a singular relation with the sacred : ascetics, hermits, the possessed, shamans, and magicians differ from most religious men by letting their hair grow wild or by shaving their heads completely. It can also signal a disproportionate affinity with the natural world, even a return to animality : wild men of the woods, obsessive hunters, the insane, fallen sinners, barbarians, or cavemen are all generally represented as hairy and shaggy beings. Such marginalization may be final or temporary, marking a transition in the course of life (such as the shaved heads or shaggy hairdos found in mourning) or part of an annual cycle (such as that of the traditional carnival revelry, which is characterized by an explosion of what is in French called "phanères," the wearing of animal hair, feathers, claws, or horns)—as if the passage from savageness to humanity was periodically re-enacted.

Compared to conventional hairstyles, which vary in tidiness from society to society, totally shaved heads and shaggy hairdos exemplify the two extremes that symbolize radically marginalized positions. In *L'homme et le sacré* (Man and the sacred ; 1966), Roger Caillois identified three worlds : the profane, the sacred right, and the sacred left. In exploring the difference between the two types of sacred, he drew on and refined the theory of opposition expressed by Robert Hertz (1970, reed.) in his "Study in Religious Polarity." Commenting on

these studies, Daniel Fabre explains that, in Caillois's opinion, the sacred right "is an institutional elevation, expressed through dogmatic and liturgical fixity, through hierarchical construction," while the sacred left is in fact a dissolution leaving room for fusional experiences, trance, and ecstasy (1996 : 128). It is this direct contact with the divine, free of convention and ritual, that is expressed in the shaved heads and the unkempt hair of the possessed, dervishes, God's madmen, and hermits. Christianity, like the other religions of the Book, early on became suspicious of ecstasy and trance and undertook to fight these "deviances," in part by imposing discipline on the hairstyles of its followers. Early Christian hermits used to live in trees or to stand on pillars, as Saint Daniel and Saint Simeon, and have long hair and beards ; Saint Daniel, it is written, "wore his hair in twelve plaits [395] of four cubits in length and his beard in two plaits of three cubits in length" (*Life of Saint Daniel the Stylite*, quoted by Constable 1985 : 120). Since the fourth century, eremitism was gradually replaced by cenobitism (community life) with rules and hair codes. Under the watchful eye of the abbot, the monk's tonsure eclipsed the "shaggy beard" of the hermit, who remained only as a marginal figure.¹⁵ The order of the monastery triumphed over the disorder of the desert and of the forest. Between the tonsured clergy and the disheveled hermit, the lay brothers of the early monastic life had an intermediate status, symbolized by their hair ; they were in charge of agricultural work, and unlike monks, they were not tonsured but wore long beards. These beards, in contrast to those of the hermit, were carefully shaped and were often compared to meticulously arranged sheaves after a harvest.

In Islam, penitents, itinerant dervishes, *qalandarân*, and members of esoteric sects are all characterized by unconventional hairstyles. They can be expressed by total shaving (hair, eyebrows, beard, moustache), which removes any hairy obstacle that separates the believer and God, or by hirsutism, which confirms their disengagement from the world and their brushy fusion with the divine.

These gradations of hair practices—and of the spaces associated with them (wild forests, cultivated fields, human construction)—

¹⁵ "No one may shave their head without the knowledge of the abbot," says Saint Pacôme's Rule 39 (Lapierre 1982 : 32).

remind us, as if it were necessary, that the treatment of head and body hair, the animal attribute of man, is a move away from nature. The threat of a return to nature is portrayed by monsters, fantastic images of prehistoric men, and people suffering from hypertrichosis (excess hair growth)—those whose worrisome strangeness conveys an uncomfortable bemusement.¹⁶ Isn't the curse of hirsutism the ultimate divine punishment, a regression to a hair-covered animal body? It is the sanction visited by God upon Nebuchadnezzar as punishment for his excessive pride: "He was driven away from human society," the Book of Daniel says, and "ate grass like oxen, and his body was bathed with the dew of heaven, until his hair grew as long as eagles' feathers and his nails became like birds' claws" (4 : 33). Only after he had "blessed the Almighty" was his human form restored. According to a well-known medieval legend, the same punishment was inflicted by God on the man who was to become Saint Jean Chrysostome (Saint Jean Bouche d'Or) for committing a sin of the flesh.¹⁷ The taming of hair marks, in myth as well as in historical representation, a transition toward humanity and civilization.

Toward an Aesthetic

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I will conclude my hairological survey with a few passing remarks on aesthetic relativity in the art of accommodating one's hair to particular epochs or sensibilities. If we develop a typology of hairstyles by identifying the polarities of the natural and the artificial, the symmetric and the asymmetric, the smooth and the nappy, the long and the short, the woven or braided and the loose, the thin and the full, brilliant and coarse, light and dark, hairless or hirsute, and if we combine these categories with each other, we can produce a unique and singular syntax for each epoch. To the extravagant wigs of the eighteenth century are opposed the preromantic and romantic "natural"; consid-

¹⁶ Regarding representations of Paleolithic man, who, contrary to what is suggested by the archaeological record, is often depicted as covered in hair, see Berman (1999).

¹⁷ For more on this legend and its sources, see Williams (1925).

ering the current revulsion for women's underarm hair brings to mind their elevation, as I described earlier, in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. [396] There is also much to be said for trends and taste in color. From antiquity, with the exception of a time in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and in the romantic period, feminine beauty was seen to be blond by groups living on the northern shore of the Mediterranean. The goddesses of Olympus were portrayed as blonds, medieval heroines (such as Iseult and Nicolette) were *crine sor* (golden blonds) or *ghaume* (brilliant blonds), and Venetian blond was the epitome of beauty in the sixteenth century (Pitman 2003). One of the most striking examples of such glorification is a fresco by Veronese that adorns one of the rooms of the Villa Barbaro in Treviso, in which a fair-skinned blond girl appears on a balcony with her olive-skinned, dark-haired servant girl. We could also mention the success of hair bleaching with hydrogen peroxide (invented in 1872), platinum blond hair coloring (introduced in 1931), and the required parade of blond movie stars that continued without end until recent years, when blonds fell in disgrace and became the butt of jokes in the West—even as the color became the style of choice on the southern and eastern banks of the Mediterranean.

And what can be said about redheads ? Throughout Western history, this hybrid color has been cursed as a symbol of treachery (foxes), of betrayal (Judas), of lust and female debauchery : Saint Louis ordered that prostitutes' hair be dyed red so that they would not be confused with honorable women. Maria-Magdalena, the sinner, was portrayed with long red hair ; Zola's Nana, Rosa la Rouge (who was immortalized by Toulouse-Lautrec), and Julie, who "ministered to the extra-republican libido" and whose praise was sung by Frenchman René-Louis Lafforgue, were all redheads. ¹⁸ Today's success of red or reddish hair dyes signals a de-coordination of standards in terms of looks, as well as the touch of provocation and self-derision typical of today's spirit.

The analysis of hairstyle practices should not, however, be limited to the descriptive inventory of the successive trends, but should be integrated into the broader field of the history of aesthetic tendencies. There are strong similarities between hairstyles and the practices of

¹⁸ Concerning the status of redness, see Fauche (1997).

grooming and cultivating one's garden or decorating one's home. The exuberance of baroque gardens in the eighteenth century, the prolific ornamentation of chapels, and the extraordinary wigs of the same period, which were adorned with feathers, ribbons, and other accessories, are all part of the same aesthetic scheme. The Western world of the 1980s was characterized by a stylistic minimalism, where the hairless, the "clean," and the boys' crew-cut matches the cold gray of the computer, the smooth simplicity of modern furniture, and the nakedness of the façades of skyscrapers. Since then we have seen the timid return of the "baroque," the fuzzy, and the fluffy in furniture and clothing, and, in 1999, Julia Roberts proudly exhibiting her armpits showing new tufts of hair. However improbable it may seem, could this signal a return to the mainstream of "flabby and hairy aesthetics," an expression that Salvador Dali (1989 : 35) used to characterize the architecture of Gaudi ?

A study of society according to its hairy details may *a priori* appear quite futile. But such games of appearance, which seem to distract from more serious issues, brutally remind us of their importance when we consider the passions, the polemics, the taboos, and the violence that they can arouse (within families, or even more intensely, in cities like Tehran or Kabul). As is often the case (see Bromberger [1998] 2002 : 7–38), the ancillary is a privileged window to test the time and observe the movements of history. Society reveals much by its locks.

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