



Veils, nudity, and tattoos: the new feminine aesthetic

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been added by her confessor. Nothing in the *Visions of Ermine de Reims* actually indicates Ermine could not herself have had knowledge of the basic tenets of the faith she becomes the defender of.

This monograph provides the first full-length treatment of Ermine of Reims and offers, through the case study of Ermine, an invaluable contextual background for any student of late medieval female mystics in particular. It is a very enjoyable read for accomplished academics and beginners alike. Both will further appreciate the appendix, which offers in translation most of the passages from the *Visions* discussed in the book, as well as a very useful index.

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Veils, nudity, and tattoos: the new feminine aesthetic, by Thorsten Botz-Bornstein, London, Lexington Books, 2015, 189 pp., £52.95 (hardback), ISBN: 978-1-4985-0046-3

In *Veils, nudity, and tattoos: the new feminine aesthetics*, Thorsten Botz-Bornstein examines the histories (personal, political) and the use (public, private) of three apparently unrelated phenomena. What do tattoos, nudity and veils have in common? At first glance the reader might assume that the author will only play one off against the other, contrasting rather than attempting to trace points of similarity. However, his aim is to show that veiling is part of a new script of body culture, one that is similar to that of nudity and tattoos, all of which are aesthetic devices which developed in parallel to each other, and which relate to the same arguments and discourse. Botz-Bornstein's approach is that we should not look for either/or, that is, we cannot expect one to be authentic and traditional and the other to be the contrary. In fact, he argues that all three use 'semantic inversion' to signal emancipation and confidence, and awareness of cultural heritage: all three, not just veiling. He notes that 'all three are private and public, humiliating and empowering, as well as backward and progressive' (p. x). The author wishes therefore to ask whether nudity and veiling – at opposite ends of the perceived spectrum, with tattoos somewhere in the middle – advance towards or away from civilisation.

In Chapter 1 Botz-Bornstein discusses veiling, sunglasses and 'coolness'. For example, he argues that the move by Saudi Arabian clerics to cover the 'tempting' eyes of veiling women did not allow for them to wear sunglasses instead, as they would be too 'cool'. Coolness is a concept he returns to throughout the book, tracing the cool-ness and relevance of each of his three phenomena to prevailing trends and concerns. The author states that 'pro-veiling positions can be much better understood when being read through Third Wave feminist thought' (p. 22). In Chapter 2 he acknowledges that

it cannot be denied that many veiled women are oppressed and that others see their veil as neither a symbol of oppression or liberation but as a symbol of religious or traditional conformity ... I want to reflect upon those women who see their veiling as an act of resistance and liberation bearing a link with feminist strategies in general. (p. 22)

In Chapter 3 Botz-Bornstein asks if the veil can be cool, and what that might mean for the women, especially young women, who wear it. In Chapter 7, he expands his ideas, placing tattoos as a space to create identity, and he emphasises how the veil serves the same purpose.

Some of the issues in the book are thorny ones and currently in debate. For example, the author coins the term 'pro-veiling feminism' but he notes that 'the Middle Eastern world has created its own

feminisms without merely deriving its ideologies from Western models. In principle, Western and Middle Eastern feminists are confronted with very different social contexts' (p. 27). He is careful to point out that pro-veiling feminism is not the same as Islamic feminism.

From Chapter 5 onwards, the author examines the meanings of tattoos, starting with their spatial function. As he notes, despite their long and varied history, 'tattoos are not just for bikers and sailors but have become [more generally] acceptable' (p. 119). Botz-Borstein explores the 'spectacularly rising popularity of tattoos' (p. 120) through discussion of the tattoo as an identifying function, of the website Suicide Girls and other tattoo-related blogs, and of feminist geographies. On page 121 the author lists work on female tattoos and notes that none of them talk about how tattoos use space to create new identities. This, I would imagine, would be a surprise to those authors he lists. Botz-Borstein considers the difference between male and female tattoos (or does he mean men's and women's?), and whether they look different and have different motives, and disrupt different (fewer for men) cultural norms and desires. He goes on to compare both the Veil and the tattoo and their potential to fetishize the wearer.

In Chapter 8, the penultimate chapter, the author develops his arguments, asking if the mainstreaming of tattoos has led to a shift in social or moral values. To answer the question, he compares tattoos with nudity, taking in shame, nudism, art, and how nudity has been a move from 'nature' to 'civilisation' over the centuries.

Botz-Bornstein's central argument is that tattoos and veils recuperate the political body: in the context of protests, of challenge, and creating their own space and agency (p. 138). The veil is his starting point, and in comparing it to tattoos and nudity, and at other points to Slut Walks and male chastity belts, he interrogates the success of the phenomenon despite the paradoxes: 'respect, modesty, sexuality, female power, female non-power' (p. 167). The Conclusion is unfortunately quite short and ends suddenly, and slightly oddly, with a quotation from another author.

Overall, this is an entertaining, informative, unusual, current and well-written book, and it is refreshing that an author has so thoughtfully discussed the issues and how they do, and do not, connect. In many ways this book shouldn't work, but it does.

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The hyper(in)visible fat woman: weight and gender discourse in contemporary society, by Jeannine A. Gailey, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, 228 pp., £59.50 (hardback), ISBN: 978-1-137-40716-0

Jeannine Gailey's book has been published at a time when the western world seems universally concerned with bodily appearance. We cannot go a day without an advert for a miracle weight-loss solution advertised somewhere, whether on the internet or pasted high upon a billboard along busy streets. In this digitally and technologically driven age, and with the ever-increasing popularity of fitness regimes, 'clean eating' routines and sales of various fitness apps and activity trackers, we are becoming more and more aware of our personal expectation to maintain a fit, healthy and aesthetically desirable body. *The hyper(in)visible fat woman* explores some of these concepts and expectations, relating particularly to the field of fat studies. The term central to the book is one created by the author; 'a seemingly paradoxical social position termed *hyper(in)visibility*' (p. 6) is used to demonstrate the state of being a fat woman; one who is 'sometimes paid exceptional attention' (p. 7) – physically taking up