

Don Austin /

the trimming of the hair, nails and teeth

this constant pruning is becoming tedious. no sooner are they cut than bristling, outlaw length, by just that much, again. it is an affront to my civilized demeanor. i want to be neat. and so, too soon, i gather my instruments: clippers of two sizes, scissors, a razor and blade, shaving cream and, of course, a mirror. soon, everything is normal once again. nature has been shown her place. her barbaric intrusions along the periphery of my empire have been subdued once more. the vacant temples crumble their mathematics all over the ground and tourists steal the smaller pieces, but the idea lives: we are the gardeners of the jungle that encroaches upon every inch given to its desire which is everywhere, munificent with ensnaring vines and life.

some institutions demand it in the name of hygiene and have expert measurements of its calculated subservience. the world's standard sideburn kept on a platinum slab at sea level in france.

the nails are another matter. when they are longer, i argue more, i am descended from a weasel with hooks on each paw, i scratch myself during sleep and wake up attacked. friends question me about my wounds and i lie to cover for the fugitive beast who holds me hostage. but i have lost the wonderful clippers and scissors leave my nails hexagonal and sharp and i'm not at all ambidextrous.

the teeth are much more of a problem. the one known instrument of their subjugation is not so easily obtained. however, one day, quite by accident, i came across one in an old german barbershop on queens street, four tram car stops past the last main intersection. it looks like eyelash curlers, my lady friends say, and i pretend not to hear.

and now, finally, i have managed to suppress the last visible remnant of my true character. now i can walk about the streets indistinguishable from the other two million killers (by action or consent). now the cut armour of the hands, the tiny beard hairs small as hyphens, and the little obtuse bits of bone called teeth are buried or flushed or hidden, like my desire.