



**TATTOOED MINDS:
EXPRESSING THE SELF THROUGH SHAPES AND LINES**

By

© Chris William Martin

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*In these bodies we will live
In these bodies we will die
Where you invest your Love
You invest your Life.*

Mumford and Sons, "Awake My Soul" (2010)

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the polysemic nature of contemporary tattoos by comparing interviewees' perceptions of the meanings of their tattoos with the meanings which can be imputed to them by a researcher studying cultural history. After systematically comparing the referencing and mapping of tattoos by interviewees in St. John's Newfoundland, this thesis argues that tattoos be viewed under a light that reflects the endless potential of human self-expression. Part of this statement is meant to address the structure-agency dichotomy which has long been reflected in the literature on sociological theories and tattooing/body literature. Another part is meant to give substantive evidence to the claim that regardless of motivations or meanings, the truth behind meaning and identity can only be found in complex and ephemeral moments which populate the life of the cultural and individual actor.

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INTRODUCTION

A common remark I hear when describing my Master's research to other people is a seemingly simple question — "Why Tattoos?" And every time I am asked, I feel I have only minutes to supply the inquisitor with a satisfying response giving both the scientific and everyday reasons why tattoos say so much about ourselves as creative human beings and how, at the same time, they also affect us as social beings. I ask that you imagine we have just met and you have asked me this question. I have had the advantage of clearly rehearsing my thoughts, a benefit we so often lack in everyday encounters. I wish to enter this dialogue with you so that I may demonstrate a part of my identity that has shaped me. I am also tattooed. While I plan to answer the imagined question of "why tattoos," my main goal is to explore two related ideas. First, I claim that against the backdrop of our late-modern world tattoos are becoming more complex symbols of our self and social identities. Second, I propose that tattoos need to be viewed with the same symbolic complexity that reflects their contemporary artistic designs. In this regard, I propose that we should acknowledge the increasing popularity of tattooing in Western cultures and thus their rise from the "shadows of deviance" (Frank 2003).

My primary aim in this thesis is to add to the literature on tattoos. I argue that my theoretical and methodological approaches allow for a focus on the meanings of tattoos themselves. I offer a deep focus on the tattoos which people don so that we may explore their deep meaning; and so we may understand how they reflect the complexities of the late-modern world. I will argue these points through the visual aid of my interviewees' art works, their own understanding of the meanings of their tattoos, and ideas about the

meanings of symbols from history and semiotics. I organize this information around concepts Stephen Harold Riggins (1990, 1994) introduced in material culture studies, referencing and mapping. We demonstrate cultural sophistication when we “reference” objects by talking about their aesthetics, history or customary use. When we use objects as a way of talking about people and personal experiences, we “map” objects. Conversations about domestic artifacts (for example, objects displayed in living rooms) consist primarily of mapping. I try to see if the same is true for tattoos. The fact that tattoos are more personal than domestic artifacts may result in even more talk classified as mapping. Referencing and mapping delineate multiple meanings as they fall in line with cultural/historical connections, on one hand; and personal/familial relations on the other. Perhaps the most original aspect of my thesis is the detailed biographical and aesthetic information I have gathered from my interviewees about their tattoos. Although this might seem an obvious topic to explore, it has rarely been done by sociologists studying tattoos.

Anthony Giddens writes in *Modernity and Self-identity* that “the self is seen as a reflexive project, for which the individual is responsible. We are, not what we are, but what we made ourselves.... The reflexivity of the self extends to the body, where the body is part of an action system rather than merely a passive object” (Giddens) 1991: 75-77). I believe the principles that Giddens describes as characterizing “high” or “late” modernity explain what it means to be human today, and importantly, how our bodies are so connected to the ongoing process of actualizing a self-identity. The principles of constant reproduction of self in social interaction, the influence of conscious individual intent (or agency) as well as enabling and constraining structures, and the search for ontological security are reflected in all of the chapters throughout this thesis.

My closest empirical model for the study of tattoos, Michael Atkinson's *Tattooed: The Sociogenesis of a Body Art* (2003), was influenced primarily by the figuration theory of Norbert Elias (1994, 1996). In contrast, I wish to use Anthony Giddens' structuration theory as my primary theoretical inspiration. The difference between the two suggests what I believe to be a useful application of both structure and agency in helping to define the constitution of social action. According to Atkinson (2003: 7), figuration theory (and therefore his theoretical intent) focuses on a "series of shifts in social interdependencies (which) have had a cumulative impact on social behaviors and individual personalities – such that social life has become more safe, rationalized, status-oriented, and predictable, while individual behaviors are more linked to the activities of others, responsive to others' needs, sensitive to socially aroused feelings of shame and guilt, and reflective of a common repugnance toward outwardly uncontrolled affect."

Giddens would consider this account of social action – influenced by static categories shifting over time and space – to be heavily focused on only half of the equation of social action. This is the influence structure exerts over time and space before it meets the sometimes unpredictable and expressive nature of individual conscious intent. Giddens (1985: 25) distinguishes between the explanatory value of the static and its relation to the emerging: "Structure, as recursively organized sets of rules and resources, is out of time and space, and is marked by an 'absence of the subject.' The social systems in which structure is recursively implicated, on the contrary, comprise the situated activities of human agents...." Readers will see in the next chapter which introduces the tattoo literature and in the following chapters which enter into a dialogue with a tool-kit of

theories that this issue of the “absence of the subject” continually appears in sociological theory and analysis.

This thesis is organized so that readers first learn to appreciate the tattoo literature. This is followed by a chapter which carefully depicts the methodology used in my study. Then I provide an in-depth and original analysis of my research participants’ tattoos followed by two chapters on general theoretical issues in sociology. In the analysis section (Chapter 3), readers will be introduced to three categories of tattoo enthusiasts who I propose allow for new understandings of the complexities tattoos can hold. These three categories of individuals who I have called the Social Peacocks, Familial Hearts, and Beauty and Art enthusiasts are not meant to represent all of the tattooed population. Instead they allow for an understanding of some motivations, meanings, and connections to identity that tattoos have. They also allow for an exploration of the concepts of referencing and mapping as they help in applying Anthony Giddens’ structuration theory to recognizing the social action of becoming tattooed as one that is complicated by both individual and cultural factors. In this sense, my goal is not unlike Emile Durkheim’s goal. While he was writing an early and pioneering study in sociology called *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Durkheim (1912: 447) noted that “what must be done is to try the hypothesis and submit it as methodically as possible to control the facts. This is what we have tried to do.” I approach this study as a social scientist aiming to explore a subject which is complex and elusive in its nature. This is why, like Durkheim, I realize the importance of method and modesty.

CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

The historically rich origins of tattooing in North America – which is no more creative than the designs indelibly marked on the surface of bodies everywhere – is said to have begun with the English exploration vessel *The Endeavor* and its Captain, James Cook (Sanders 1989; Pitts 2003; Atkinson 2003). Ten years after Cook and his crew finished plotting out the new British territory known as Newfoundland in 1759, they were sent to the South Pacific for further exploration. It is in the South Pacific that the *tatau* (a Tahitian word, meaning “to strike”) was observed, recorded, and eventually exported back to Europe. Now known as a “tattoo,” the practice travelled back on the arms of many sailors, as well as in the form of a living Tahitian prince named Omai. The practice has since been regarded in many different lights, and according to Michael Atkinson, has seen a “sociogenesis” (2003) ranging from associations with different social classes, as well as varying in the degree of consideration as deviant status. According to Atkinson (2003: 24, 30-50), “tattoos are best understood within generational moments” and can be divided into six distinct eras which reflect the differing *fields of cultural production*.¹ These eras are the colonist/pioneer, circus/carnival, working-class, rebel, new age, and finally supermarket era(s).

As Clinton Sanders points out in his text *Customizing the Body: The Art and Culture of Tattooing*, the journey from craft to art, or outlawed deviant activity to partially-respected social outlet, was long and quite difficult. Sanders appropriately notes in his

¹ This term is meant to signify what I imagine to be an influence from the historical-theoretical works of Pierre Bourdieu in defining art and art production which will be discussed later in the theoretical tool-kit analysis section of this chapter.

introduction that: “those who define tattooing as an artistic practice are deeply involved with a process of collective legitimation” and later, that “body alteration is culture; it is meaningful to the members of the society in which it occurs, and it is produced within complex webs of collective action” (Sanders 1989: 3, 21). Sanders backs the claim of the meaningfulness of tattooing by stating that “tattooing is being moved away from its roots as a widely devalued craft-like practice pursued by producers and consumers who are marginal to mainstream social groups. In turn, impelled by the purposive activities of a variety of committed individuals, it is coming to be defined as an art form...” (Sanders 1989: 21). Throughout Sanders’ text on the world of tattooing, he remains adamant about the fact that tattooing is important for social communication, for holding meaning, and as a cultural signifier.

While differentiating between “types” of tattooists and their reasons for interest in the occupation Sanders quotes a “fine art” tattooist who is (as is typical for this type of tattooed individual) in search of an “art form that offered a creative outlet.” The respondent remarks “the first female I ever saw with a tattoo was a friend of mine ... the whole image of it looked like a piece of art work instead of the idea we usually project onto a tattoo” (Sanders 1989: 67). While exploring what it means to “become a tattooed person,” Sanders, through use of Goffmanian concepts, aptly notes that “the tattoo becomes an item in the tattooee’s personal “identity-kit.” However varying and quite personal the reasons for getting tattoos or becoming a tattooist may be, Sanders’ final message that despite these deep lines of meaning which may permeate the inked skin, the tattoo remains (and will remain) – explicitly – a deviant activity, still existing on the fringes of culture but segregated to a subcultural status.

As discussed earlier, heavily influenced by the theory of figuration introduced by Norbert Elias, Atkinson carefully and empirically explores tattooing within historical contexts as it shifts through space and time. Notably, while making reference to past theories and avenues of thought concerning tattooing, Atkinson (2003: 23) claims that “the limited sociological analyses of tattooing have viewed the practice from a narrow viewpoint.” He also makes reference to what he calls a “cultural stereotype (that) has long held tattoos as marks of shame worn by outlaws, misfits, or those fallen from social grace.” What sets Atkinson apart from other academics, or social scientists studying the art of tattooing (despite the fact that he is heavily tattooed) is his concept of the practice “as a powerful form of human expression” that need not be outcast as deviant, especially by contemporary standards. For Atkinson (2003: 24), “tattoos are now considerably more open to interpretation and subject to situated definition.” Indeed, despite the potential for historical reductionism, one can still make the argument that some of the most valuable sociological contributions to the understanding of cultural and social phenomena are the result of a deep historical and contextual analysis of cultural practices or trends (Foucault 1978, 1982, 1984, 1986; Durkheim 1897, 1912) because it places action within specific social contexts and avoids generality.

As Atkinson argues, noting feminist scholars studying gender and identity politics is a very useful tool of inquiry. One can certainly appreciate the vested interest such intellectuals have in exploring implications of the practice of body modification in terms of gender and oppressive roles. Atkinson (2003: 15-16) notes how theories in this sense have viewed body modification practices from two polar and equally influential stances: “either the ongoing maintenance of hegemonic ideology about femininity or the conscious attempt

to subvert patriarchal ideology through bodily resistance.” Many have argued that bodies are an integral center point where the powers of society display their influence (Foucault 1977, 1978), but ultimately Atkinson seems to favor defining bodies as a tool for forming “an empowered self” or as a potential “vehicle of liberation.”

Importantly, Atkinson (2003: 56- 60) provides a useful summary of three popular categories of sociological analysis of tattooing in the past. These modes of study focus on “tattooing as social deviance; (as an) analysis of tattoo artists and their everyday experience in the business; and investigations of the tattoo as a form of political resistance.” Within each of these categories, we find cultural ethnographers digging deep into the practice of tattooing to look at the practice in a myriad of ways, sometimes richly employing forms of looking into the “polysemic nature of cultural understandings” (60; see Mifflin 1997). Other times they look at biopolitical resistance such as how enthusiasts attack outside control over their body, for example from the church, through the “urban primitive use of tattooing in Canada (which) is directly opposed to Christian-based codes of bodily display that are part of the hegemony of Western cultures” (Atkinson 2003: 46).

It must be noted that this thesis builds on the work of Atkinson and others but it also benefits from the current cultural climate of the practice of marking the flesh which is more popular than ever before. Whereas the focus in past theories and avenues of thought was inspired by the current state of the practice and the cultures or fields of cultural production at the time. This thesis falls in this same category but benefits from being part of a culture of tattooing that has never existed quite like it does now. However, this does not discount the stock of knowledge that is still relevant and useful from these inquiries. For example, Sanders (1989) concludes that tattoos are in fact deviant or marks of (partial)

marginality because of the era in which he completed his influential study. As Atkinson (57) notes, “he was one of the first sociologists to hold firm to the idea that tattooing is a practice subject to social constructions and definitions (deviant or otherwise), and influenced by the personal biographies of, collective world views held by, and contextual interpretations of individuals.”

In his text *Body and Social Theory* Chris Shilling introduces an influential concept and theoretical question called “the body-project.” This concept may best be understood by looking at Shilling’s definition which states that the “body is most profitably conceptualized as an unfinished biological and social phenomenon which is transformed, within certain limits, as a result of its entry into, and participation in, society. It is this biological and social quality that makes the body at once such an obvious, and yet elusive phenomenon” (Shilling 1993: 11). The body as a project is also meant to be reflective of the idea that in Western societies there is an obsession with changing and altering the body in the search for idealized beauty or perfection. Who is ultimately in control of crafting and evaluating the project is a major question that arises in texts related to the body project. The question will be addressed in the following chapters.

As the discussion progresses in Shilling’s text, advocates on both sides of the debate are represented. For an example of those who attribute the body project to individual agency, Shilling himself argues that through a micro-relationship lens these projects can work in forming one’s own self-identity or purposefully displaying this to others through the *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Shilling 1993: 72; Goffman 1959). From a feminist perspective, author Victoria Pitts notes how “some women have described their body art as a way to rebel against male dominance and to ‘reclaim’ power

over their own bodies. In creating scarred, branded, pierced, and heavily tattooed bodies, they aim to reject the pressures of beauty norms and roles of proper femininity” (Pitts 2003: 3).

Expanding upon Shilling’s body project, Atkinson notes (2003: 25), “body projects intended to camouflage the body (like plastic surgery or make-up) are seen or read by others as an everyday method of presenting favorable images of the self, and typically conform to cultural codes about bodies and norms governing personal representation as a means of communicating a person’s commitment to cultural body habits.” Atkinson’s transformation of the concept in relation to the practice of tattooing presents the idea that although Shilling often favors viewing the body project in a light which helps researchers understand how individual agency can contribute to self-identity, it is also of equal importance to be aware of the other brand of thinkers who will staunchly argue that these kinds of body modifications are actually doomed by the plight of aging, the inevitable breakdown of the body through life’s natural course, and the *insatiable thirst* for obtaining more physical capital by meeting beauty standards of class (see the discussion of Bourdieu in Shilling 1993: 113; Turner 1984). The idea of the never-ending chance of salvation from competitive and oppressive cultural norms is made perfectly evident with a quotation from Durkheim representing Giddens’ orthodox consensus discussed in the concluding chapters. While discussing the plight of anomic suicide, Durkheim poetically notes:

Irrespective of any external regulatory force, our capacity for feeling is in itself an insatiable and bottomless abyss. But if nothing external can restrain this capacity, it can only be a source of torment to itself. Unlimited desires are insatiable by definition and insatiability is rightly considered a sign of morbidity. Being unlimited, they constantly and infinitely surpass the means at their command; they cannot be quenched. Inextinguishable thirst is constantly renewed torture (Durkheim 1897: 247).

Reflections on the Literature

The literature examined above is some of the most influential texts in the sociological analysis of tattooing. It is my intent now to demonstrate how my research, although inspired and indebted by these studies, will differ from these texts. First, while each author ambitiously sets his or her sights on analyzing the practice and field of tattooing, I wish to focus instead more specifically on the meanings of the tattoos themselves. Second, in the literature presented it should be noted that readers will be taken on a trip back and forth, between what is considered as the primary ontological understanding for committing an action. Each time the author is attempting to commit the readers' sociological imagination to the idea that it is more a result of structures of control, or the power of individual agency, which is responsible for the crafting of our selves and our bodies in the late-modern world.² On the contrary, what I will argue is that our personal and social identity can never be fully a result of our own personal subjectivities, and for that matter can never be fully dictated by structures of influence or control. While choosing to become tattooed, and while also drawing lines of reference to our identities from these tattoos, we must understand the dynamic role social actors take with regards to the practical consciousness of everyday life. As we will see, Giddens (1985), Goffman (1959), and Garfinkel (1967) offer a remedy to the dichotomy of subject/object by allowing us to understand that we are always, at once, both. Despite convincing arguments toward either side, such as that from the ultra-articulate Durkheim who illuminates the strong will to power structures of influence have over the body and the social actor, we

² Although I believe Atkinson understands the dynamic complexity behind social action as a contribution of individual, intersubjective, and objective influence, I also believe that my approach of using Giddens' structuration theory offers a more thorough exploration of these themes than is the case through Atkinson's exploration of Elias' figurational sociology.

must be constantly reminded that actors are always conscious and knowledgeable about themselves in society. In line with Giddens' "duality of structure" (1985: 25) structure is always serving as both enabler and constrainer.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

The Sample

This research is qualitative and has been conducted through semi-structured interviews.³ My sample size is 15, with 11 female and 4 male respondents. I have focused primarily on persons who wear what I call “contemporary-style tattoo art.” These intricately designed tattoos are representative of recent trends toward the professionalization and growth of complex designs in the field of tattoo art (Atkinson 2003: 46; See also “neo-traditional”). My participants form a non-probability, convenience sample which has been chosen because they represent a small group of enthusiasts who are highly educated (all are university students) and who encompass a variety of modern tattoo designs. These tattooees allow me to make claims about the polysemic nature of tattoo designs because they live these multiple meanings every day. This includes the ability to hide or show their tattoos if need be.⁴

I first contacted tattooed persons I already knew. This turned out to be a rather unusual situation. These people, who are my friends or fellow local musicians in St. John’s, knew me not as an academic, but as a guitarist and sometimes eccentric stage-entertainer. I play guitar and sing in the band Two Oceans. We have just released a CD

³ See Appendix A for a copy of the consent form, Appendix B for a pre-interview brief, and Appendix C for a copy of the interview schedule. A and B had been e-mailed to potential participants who volunteered their e-mail addresses after being provisionally informed about the research.

⁴ Examples of these types of behavior are extracted from questions 5 and 6 in Appendix C. These discussions are also in line with concepts in symbolic interactionist theory, such as Goffman’s role distancing (Goffman 1961: 85-152).

titled “Always Searching.” I originally thought I would have all of my friends participate as interview respondents. When it became obvious from short discussions that they did not feel comfortable sharing deep feelings with me about their identities and the meanings of their tattoos, I decided to collect my sample in a different manner.

To avoid a situation where these people would not feel free to discuss their personal understandings of identity and meaning, I chose to search for potential research participants I did not already know.⁵ Through my job at the university as a graduate assistant, I opted to advertise primarily in sociology classes to anyone who had tattoos and who might be interested in sharing their stories with me. I made sure that all potential respondents were aware that their participation had nothing to do with their class work, and was thus completely voluntary. In the interest of providing a level of confidentiality, all of my respondents are referred to in the chapters to follow by pseudonyms (usually names they chose).

The Interviews

The interviews generally lasted about 30-40 minutes. The shortest interview was 21 minutes. The longest took just over an hour. The interviews were primarily conducted in an empty space in the Memorial University Sociology Department with the exception of two which occurred by the choice of the respondents (to which I reluctantly agreed) in the campus bar. Although my interviews were semi-structured, I generally opened up the interview with a question asking respondents to describe their tattoos. Several following

⁵ Two exceptions exist to this method, both Roger and Jerry discussed in the next chapter are fellow grad students who I consider friends.

questions on the interview schedule were often omitted later in the discussion because they would have been redundant.

The interviews were generally conducted with a relaxed attitude. My goal was to make my interview participants feel as though this was a chance for them to really reflect on their tattoos and speak whatever came to mind. Though I did record each interview and generally occupied myself with writing copious notes, I tried to make myself just a recorder of their thoughts. In a sense, I did my best to keep to the advice champion sociologist Robert E. Park gave to Nels Anderson while he was gathering the data which would become his text *The Hobo*. Anderson (1923: 25) writes, quoting Park: “Write down only what you see, hear, and know, like a newspaper reporter.”

After signing consent forms and proving they understand the research they were volunteering to be part of, my usual procedure before beginning to record the interview and read directly from my interview schedule was to discuss classes, the weather, professors, etcetera, with my respondents in the interest of building rapport and in creating a level of familiarity and friendship. Luckily, most respondents had read my pre-interview brief (see Appendix A) and had come prepared, often even excited, to discuss in detail these marks to which they have devoted so much of themselves. Others also seemed to be interested in just being part of sociological research as a way of reflecting on their choice of major.

A primary ethical concern while conducting human research, especially with a focus on personal issues, is harm. I found myself frequently being entrusted with discussions of family, love, death, loss, hate, etc. As such, I would generally allow respondents to say only what they felt like saying on such delicate subjects. Though my goal was to reach

behind the coded meanings of these ink marks, I decided early in the process that it would be best for my respondents if I never pushed or probed on emotionally difficult issues which were basically comprehensible with little information. An example of this will be seen in the next chapter with Elise's discussion around sorrow and death.

Contemporary-Style Tattooee

Narrowing my approach to studying contemporary-style tattooees has enabled me to discuss a sample population which is relatively articulate and culturally sophisticated. But what must be said about approaching a specific group of tattoo enthusiasts is that, although a primary interest in proving the shifting nature of cultural/social meanings of art has been tied to the goal of proving the usefulness of the term I have created, I do not wish to express this term as an authentically specific category used by tattoo enthusiasts. Rather, for the purposes of this research, the contemporary-style tattooee is someone who idealizes a broad variety of different time-sensitive designs that not only demonstrate a professional lineage in the art world of tattooing, but also necessarily demonstrate changing technologies and artistic professionalism in the field of tattoo design. According to Steve Gilbert who writes in a text titled *Tattoo History: A Source Book* (2000: 125):

The most popular designs in traditional American tattooing evolved from the efforts of many artists who traded, copied, swiped, and improved on each other's work. In this way they developed a set of stereotyped symbols which were inspired by the spirit of the times, and especially by the experiences of soldiers and sailors during the World Wars. Many of these designs represented courage, patriotism, defiance of death, and longing for family and loved ones left behind.

This remark parallels other studies which have noted so-called "stars" or "mavericks" in the tattoo art world who have contributed to the mass production and circulation of popular designs. Some popular examples include Lew "the Jew" Alberts (Atkinson 2003: 37;

DeMello 2000: 54) and more recently Don Ed Hardy (Sanders 1989: 34; Don Ed Hardy 1999). While these stars of the tattoo art world have contributed to what Frankfurt School social theorists among others — including contemporary artists who may favor traditional designs as the “authentic” North American tattoo — might typically devalue as inauthentic art, I wish to argue that authenticity is a useless category by itself or as a single determinate of social action, distinction, or acceptance.

I believe this is a valuable assertion primarily because of the shifting nature of meaning in tattoos, and also because from a structuration perspective we understand how authenticity should only be considered a reified system which influences tattoo enthusiasts’ decisions by way of presenting itself as an often constraining structure (much like the “rules of the game” in Bourdieu’s field), but is never the total reason for aesthetic choice or design. For an example of the types of discussion which devalue the contemporary-style tattoo design, we may turn to Adorno et al. who define art in a text called *Aesthetic Theory* by stating that: “art keeps itself alive through its social force of resistance; unless it reifies itself, it becomes a commodity. Its contribution to society is not communication with it but rather something extremely mediated: It is resistance in which, by virtue of inner-aesthetic development, social development is reproduced without being imitated” (Adorno et al. 2004: 296). My thesis argues that the productive use of defining art in such constraining ways serves only to contribute to Giddens’ concept of the orthodox consensus of classical social theory (see Chapter 4) which fails to understand the importance of the knowledgeable agent in contributing to social action. Art involves too many interpretations, opinions, and relevancies to be blanketed as inauthentic and

therefore non-artistic based upon disputes over the shifts between, for example, popular images which maintain both old school and new school sensibilities.

For an example of how my method aims to demonstrate the shifting nature of meaning in widely popular tattoo designs, readers should turn their attention to the three-part Question 17 (see Appendix C). Throughout the next chapter of this thesis which reflects on interviewees' perceptions, I wish for readers to keep in mind how designs, which may be typical, popular, or even derivative of the popular designs produced by the stars of the tattoo art world, have changed dramatically over time and how for my respondents they continue to change personally and socially. Authenticity is only a useful category of thought insofar as we realize its origin as a social construction, authored by subjective realities in negotiation with objective realities. We should thus recognize how authenticity undoubtedly manages to play the role of a constraining structure, but yet how it may be necessarily trampled and rebuilt, always, creating new systems and structures of influence.

My interview schedule has been crafted in a way which aims to have knowledgeable tattooed actors discuss the influence of structure as an enabler and constrainer, while still demonstrating their possessed levels of agency. Specifically I have been aiming to bring to life the "discursive consciousness (which) connotes those forms of recall the actor is able to express verbally (and) ... practical consciousness (which) involves recall to which the agent has access in the *durée* of action without being able to express what he or she thereby knows" (Giddens 1985: 49). For an example of a method in bringing the elusive practical consciousness to the forefront, readers may scan my interview schedule in Appendix C. Specifically noting questions 3-6 which focus on drawing out taken-for-

granted, everyday behaviors of tattooed individuals which allow them to productively and purposefully present themselves to others in the way which they may see as best fitting with their definition of social situations. As the next chapter's analysis will demonstrate, this may include perceived notions of proper femininity to family members, or the practical ability to hide tattoos in order to obtain employment.

Conclusions

Contemporary-style tattoos, practical consciousness, and discursive consciousness will be explored in more depth in the following pages, but what is important to remember is that this study was conducted with the highest regard to the tattooed people to whom I am so indebted. A sociological study which focuses on personal stories as one of the key forms of data is only made possible through the emotional human interactions that others allow the research to have. While I offered an open ear and some questions which might prove to be reflective for my study participants, what they have offered me is much more invaluable, this being themselves, their bodies, their stories, and sharing the moments that have made up their lives. The following chapter will provide an analysis of first-hand narratives.

After the tribulation of dark strife,
And all the ills of the earth, crying for my release.
Why is the truth so hidden and the land of dreams so far,
That the feet of the climber fail on the upward way; Although in the purple distance burns
a red-gold star,
There are briers on the mountain and the weary feet have bled.
The homesteads and the fireglow bid him stay;
And the burden of his body is like a burden of lead.

James Joyce (1991) "After the Tribulation of Dark Strife"
Poems and Shorter Writings.

Myths have no life of their own. They wait for us to give them body.

Albert Camus (1954) *Prometheus, L'Ete*. Paris: Gallimard.

I took a trip to somewhere safe
Between here and the pain
The summer was hot — the winter was not
And all I knew was every part of you

At least for a little while
But we all will change
That's true isn't it?
I guess it depends on the rain

When I could express myself to you
That's when I'd tell my friends I would do what I needed to
I watched the colors spread, from your toes to your head
And all I could do was sit and stare at you

At least for a little while
But we all will change
That's good isn't it?
I guess it depends on the rain

Chris William Martin (2011) *Rocket Love*

CHAPTER THREE: TATTOO TALK: THE MEANING IN THE DETAILS

Introduction

In this chapter I systematically discuss respondents' remarks and narratives and focus on a few of their tattoos. The number varies depending on the richness of their stories and how much their narratives vary from those of other interviewees. In this way I aim to substantiate the claims I have made of polysemy and complexity in meaning and identity. It is in the details of these indelible marks that "proof" will be offered supporting the idea that tattoos are complex mementos of the *wild passions* which have consumed our souls as individuals and as cultural actors. In these *wild passions* we see the influence of both structure and agency and therefore the need for a broad theoretical tool-kit from the social researcher in order to address tattoos in the context of the late-modern world. In discussing "wild passions," I am referring to Durkheim's description of the reasons why actors use their body to display marks of their totem in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1996: 232). But I transform the word to signify not just the heated impulses fed through group influence, but also the possibilities of human expression when tied with "true" emotions.

Part of my method will be borrowed from a study of material culture by Stephen Harold Riggins. Specifically I will be using concepts defined in the text "Fieldwork in the Living Room" as *referencing* and *mapping*. According to Riggins (1994: 109), the term referencing applies to an interviewee's remarks "about the history, aesthetics or customary uses of an object." Mapping refers to how actors use objects to plot "their social network, representing their cosmology and ideology, and projecting their history onto the world's map, its spatial spread so to speak." I believe these terms will prove a rich source for this

study as they represent the cultural/historical and personal meanings connected to self-identity. When asking respondents to discuss the meanings of their tattoos, I often heard remarks mostly about the social ties and personal occasions tattoos represented (mapping). While this is ideal for qualitative research into the body, art, and tattooing, it is also of equal importance for myself as the researcher to provide intellectual authority on the referencing attributes of the same symbol. "...It is essential for the ethnographer to exceed the informant's often rather minimal level of referencing" (Riggins 1994: 109).

This analysis will be divided into sections based on the emerging themes from each collection of tattooees. The first people to be discussed are those who I will call the "social peacocks." These are the individuals who use tattoos in such broad social ways that they typify the contemporary style tattooee – able to adapt to any situation and to look cool while doing so. Their tattoos are sophisticated designs, reflective of the complicated meanings which are attached to them. These tattoos easily demonstrate multiple meanings from both a mapping and referencing perspective once interviewees are given the chance to do so. The second group of tattooees is the people who display "true" emotions, especially related to family. I argue, as does Atkinson (2003: 212-213), that a large part of becoming tattooed, and choosing the location and designs of the tattoo, is fueled by deep familial relations and ties. This will be evident in just how much mapping will be present in each tattoo analyzed in this section. Lastly, I will be discussing a collection of tattooees who represent issues around the body, sexuality, and gender. In this section, the topics of structure and agency are viewed once more as they aid in drawing out meaning behind tattoos and tattooees who are interested in things like beauty, femininity, and social acceptance while at the same time wishing to set themselves apart artistically through their

body from constraints of their surrounding society. I believe these three themes of (1) social performance and knowledgeability of agents in crafting meaning; (2) deep and true emotions and the influence of family structures; and (3) the role of social and cultural aspects of gender, beauty, sexuality, and the body, are all ways of allowing my respondents to provide new discourses on what it means to be tattooed in the modern world. These themes will take readers into many different cultures, histories, and genres of thought. Tattoos are never about only one form of expression or social connection, but in fact are deeply human forms of social expression which have changed, and continue to record lives in multiple and complex ways.

The Social Peacocks

Figure 1.

Roger



Photo: Left arm from four angles.

Description

Gender: male

Location on body: left arm

Colours: blue, green, pink, yellow

Design: maneki neko with a lantern, 1960's inspired toy robot, flying saucers

Text: N/A

Visibility: can be hidden under long sleeve shirt

Style: new school, contemporary-style, Japanese

Symbolic Meanings: images represent favorite bands album covers (Flaming Lips and Pixies), deceased cat, kitschy art, 1960's toy

Social/cultural aspects: boy peacock, Kitsch

Roger has a large number of tattoos, although because of their connectedness, and engrossing nature, he refers to them as “two major pieces.” As seen in *Figure 1*, Roger’s two major pieces include the contemporary popular “tattoo sleeve” in which enthusiasts devote the entire landscape of flesh on their appendage(s) to being implanted with inks of various shadings. This inked devotion is most often linked with the goal of having a mural of artwork on an arm or leg which encompasses a primary style with a large number of different designs – all flowing together as a particular genre (Japanese, New School, Sailor Jerry, etc.). These tattoo sleeves represent an example of Lévi-Strauss’s metaphor of the bricolage paired with what Tania Zittoun (2006: 128) describes as a collection of “cultural elements without a clear intention” where the tattooee is left to fill in the voids or complete the sometimes scattered image with meanings and personal elements of culture. For this study, it is important to note that I propose multiple meanings can only be exemplified – and never truly exhausted – through a cultural, social, historical, and personal exploration by an external observer.

Roger’s Maneki Neko

Referencing

According to William E. Deal in *Handbook to Life in Medieval and Early Modern Japan*, the *maneki neko* or “‘welcoming cat’ (was traditionally) used to greet customers at Edo-period shops and (was) believed to bring prosperity to the merchant (Deal 2007: 113). This reputation for greeting customers has made the *maneki neko* a symbol of a beckoning cat whose paws can mean either more customers or more money, depending on which one is elevated. As Roger notes, “It is a *maneki neko*, a lucky cat or whatever, I believe if he has a right arm up he is trying to lure in money, and the left is about bringing luck. I have

the right arm up, but it is not about money.” Further analysis of the *maneki neko* in the context of the Edo period would identify the piece as a product of a “blossoming urban culture of extraordinary richness, diversity, and originality” (Guth 1996: 11). Because the *maneki neko* is often present in Chinese businesses, many people incorrectly assume it is Chinese in origin. This is most likely a result of the idea that China is often noted as “Japan’s cultural mentor” and because of the fact that “the intimate relationship between painting, poetry, and calligraphy that prevailed in China also characterized artistic expression in Japan” (Guth 1996: 11).

In the context of the art world of tattooing (or the field of cultural production), DeMello (2000: 72) places Japanese-style tattooing like the *maneki neko* in the hands of a few pioneering characters in American tattooing. “It was Sailor Jerry (Collins) who first introduced Japanese tattoo imagery and style to U.S. tattooists like Ed Hardy, thereby directly influencing American tattooing.” According to DeMello (2000: 73), Sailor Jerry had an ongoing “trade relationship with Japanese tattooist Horihide (Kazuo Oguri).” For Roger, it is interesting to note that he has developed a great deal of pride in asserting that his tattoos are often made to strike a balance between the elements of being conventional and being unique. It is apparently important to Roger to control the meanings behind his tattoos and the ways in which others interpret them.

All of mine have coded meaning, but the thing is people grab my arms all the time and say “tell me what this means?” Since these meanings are codified, it is not always about telling every one about them. The *maneki neko*, for example, has multiple meanings in that it represents a cat I had that died, but it also represents a Frank Black album called “Show Me Your Tears” which also features a *maneki neko* on the cover.

This type of contrast between traditional and personal influences is said to reflect the history of the Americanized Japanese tattooing style. According to DeMello, Sailor Jerry may have maintained a working relationship with Japanese artists, but he secretly held a grudge after the Second World War toward the Japanese. Because of this, he set out on a mission to use American imagery as a substitution for the focus images in traditional Japanese-style tattoos. DeMello (2000: 73) notes that Sailor Jerry believed "...what was exceptional about Japanese tattooing was not the center image but the background." This personal and cultural "give and take" is reflective of the power in the relationship between structure and agency as it serves as an intertwined precursor to social action. It is also a confirmation of the human complexities and contexts that exist on ink-marked skin.

The significance of the cat as the symbol in the *maneki neko* and in Roger's tattoo is in itself an interesting topic for discussion. As we will see in the mapping aspects of this tattoo, there are unique personal reasons why Roger chose the cat. But from a cultural aspect, it is worth noting Alger et al.'s *Cat Culture: The Social World of a Cat Shelter*. In this ethnography of a cat shelter, the social aspects of cats as members of cultures and groups of their own are discussed: "If cats can engage in such symbolic interaction, they will, given time, produce elements of culture or social organization such as norms, roles, and sanctions. That is, a group of cats over time in the same setting will produce a web of socially transmitted behaviors that constitute that group's solutions to its problems" (Alger et al. 2003: 48). If we assume that the connection humans have with pets will form another layer of symbolic interaction in itself, then we should imagine how humans can often become deeply connected with the same routines the pet has created for itself. This is significant in understanding both the human-pet relation and the deep connection humans

can share with their pets as they become integrated into their daily lives as a living member of a culture of their own.

Mapping

The love of a pet can be a strong precursor to getting a tattoo. In fact, one of my latest tattoos is the boldly written name “Maxx” representing my cat that died last year. For Roger, the *maneki neko* has been given a distinct look from its usual all-white furry appearance. “It also reminds me of high school and hanging out with my friends and shit like that. I also had a cat that died that was black and white, so I got the tattoo to match her. Of course, I am white, so the white looks more pink.” What seems to influence Roger most about his tattoos is their relation to his musical ambitions and obsessions. Music has played the role in his life that Riggins (1994: 113) calls a “social facilitator.” It means that music is the avenue by which Roger has been able to interact with others and create friendships. In this same spirit, the tattoos also work as “time indicators” in that they act as indelible hubs of memory that can represent specific people, attitudes, and feelings. When asked “why music?” Roger responded: “the only thing besides, like knowledge or thinking about what to do next that can keep me up at night, is the idea of just thinking about music. Like it holds in memory, emotion and it is part of your life.”

While we have seen the *maneki neko* serving the role of luring business customers, its cultural history does not give it the role Roger has intended for it. According to Roger, “I also got it so the cat was part of the destruction scene, where the robot is destroying the city and the cat is the light. Like the *maneki neko* saves the day.” Another reading is that the cat holds a lantern like a human and might thus suggest Diogenes the Cynic (or Diogenes of Sinope, died 323 BCE), who supposedly carried a lantern in daylight looking

for an “honest” man in Athens. Roger does not seem to be aware of this reference. The tattoo which forms a necessary part of Roger’s sleeve is a deeply seeded sign of love and loss for a pet while it also represents the musical side of his life. For this reason I believe the mapping aspects of this tattoo, although not as overt as the potential referencing aspects, are held in high esteem.

The Toy Robot

Referencing

So, with the robot tattoo, I don’t know why it is my favorite one. I think it’s because I really like kitschy 1950’s cultural things. The robot I have is based on a toy I had that was a reproduction of a 1950’s design.

I am not sure of the history. It is just a very iconic robot and I date it to the 50’s based on other original toys like this I have seen on E-bay.

After a search on E-bay, I discovered that Roger had been relatively accurate about his dating of the toy robot. I also discovered that original toys of this design sell for up to \$800.⁶ Peer-reviewed information on vintage toys is hard to find. Independent research conducted by collectors tends to be the basis of information for such topics. As such, both webpages “Doc Atomic’s Attic of Astounding Artifacts” and “AttackingMartialian” claim the original tin robot toy is a product of the “Yonezawa Toy Company” based in Japan.⁷ Its name is “Smoking Robot” and it is popularly considered to be a toy of the early 1960s. The following pictures are from a 1963 catalogue of toys produced by the “Yonezawa Toy Company” collected from the “AttackingMartialian” webpage. The close-up image is the toy purchased by the author of the blog “Doc Atomic’s Attic of Astounding Artifacts.”

⁶ A search on www.ebay.ca Item number 200736260292 conducted on April 2nd/2012 rendered these results.

⁷ <http://astoundingartifacts.blogspot.ca/2009/06/smoking-spaceman-yonezawa-1961.html>
http://www.attackingmartialian.com/yonezawa_1963_extra.html



Figure 1.A.

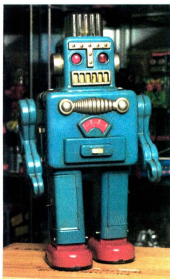


Figure 1.B.

According to James Allen Dator in *Social Foundations of Human Space Exploration*, at the time when space exploration was on the horizon (these toy robots were designed and manufactured), “space was an “alluring fantasy from the ever-expanding future” and it was “an arena for adventure and romance” (Dator 2012: 31). Over time, however, space travel would evolve into an arena for Cold War rivalry. “Since the days of the Cold War, the stern cultures of military, government, and military-aligned businesses have taken over, and wrung all the fun and fantasy out of enterprise. Space now is about

rockets, wars, and jobs, and not about visions and transcendence” (Dator 2012: 31). Roger shares an affinity for the romance and wonder of space. This can be noted in his tattoos of flying saucers. But instead of identifying with space travel, Roger explains his attraction to these types of images as a deep interest in “kitsch.” Whereas the mysteries of space may once have been a source for romance and science fiction, Roger (like many others) has now relegated such fantastic stories and speculative images such as the space robot to the world of kitsch. “So, with the robot tattoo, I don’t know why it is my favorite one. I think it’s because I really like kitschy 1950’s cultural things. A lot of this again is about the 1950’s kitschy art thing.”

Esther Leslie defines kitsch in her analysis of the philosopher Walter Benjamin by noting Benjamin’s understanding of this new form of “art” as a practice in the resiliency and commodification of capitalism. “Developed are new technologies of using the industrialized material – entertainment devices, cheap prints, ornaments and the rest. Novel objects, mass-produced kitsch commodities, force themselves on ‘the new person,’ jostling for attention in cluttered environments. Kitsch and clutter, abortions of industrial technological developments, demand the right to existence and love” (Leslie 2000: 11). A similar critique of kitschy art is found in Clement Greenberg’s essay for the *Partisan Review* titled “Avant-Garde and Kitsch.” In Greenberg’s critical cultural analysis we see his distaste for the kitschy as it takes its place at the cultural table as the antitheses of the avant-garde.

Where there is an avant-garde, generally we also find a rear-guard. True enough – simultaneously with the entrance of the avant-garde, a second new cultural phenomenon appeared in the industrial West: that thing to which the Germans give the wonderful name of *Kitsch*: popular, commercial art and literature with their chromeotypes, magazine covers, illustrations, ads, slick and pulp fiction, comics, Tin

Pan Alley music, tap dancing, Hollywood movies, etc., etc.
(Greenberg 1939: II Para 1).

Once readers have read my chapters 4 and 5 on theory, they will recognize the struggle for true authenticity in Greenberg and Benjamin's writings. Critical theory and cultural criticism which have Marxism as their foundation maintain that true emotion cannot exist in kitsch. The only exchange is that of cold, hard cash. These perspectives look at the impact of structural determinism on choices of social action and on the practice of art/tattooing. The personal meanings which counter these arguments can be found in the mapping aspects of the tattoo art.

Mapping:

The toy had been a gift from a girlfriend at the time and when I was getting the tattoo I gave the toy to my artist who had other toys in his shop anyway.... It is also my (current) girlfriend's favorite tattoo.... You know also she was doing a presentation one time recently and she was really nervous. So I ended up buying her a pen with the robot on it as a way of cheering her up.

The mapping aspects of this piece, as is the case with many other tattoos which will be discussed later, is the level of meaning which illustrates human agency as part of the act of getting a tattoo. The preceding quotation, which draws out the influence of multiple partners on Roger's choice of tattoo, conveys an impression of intrigue. An interest in kitsch is a choice to adore art which is not a fine art. In such a perspective we may include Roger's use of otherwise kitschy or disregarded art as a tool for personal expression as an example of the concept of "alien use" (Riggins 1994: 112). This is because the manufacturers of the toy robot, the countless reproductions of it, and the cultural fad of space travel have all contributed to the current social and personal meanings Roger attributes to the design, even if this was never meant to be the original purpose of the toy

robot. This shows the polysemy that is inherent in material artifacts and in inked artifacts. An even better example of alien use in this design can be found in the comparison between the enjoyment of this tattoo by Roger's partner and his description of the interaction of everyday life as a tattooed man. "Without a doubt ... there is no girl who I've been with who hasn't liked my tattoos. It's like you're a boy peacock and they like your feathers.... You can call it a sort of sexual insurance." The ability to use one's body as a form of expression is not limited by the authenticity of designs. For Roger, what may constitute inauthentic art to some people has now shifted to an interesting and exotic category of kitsch transformed into highly decorative tattoo art.

Figure 2.

Morris

Description



Photos: Top Left: Icarus with "Non Serviam" on chest, Top Right: Knuckles "Stay Good", Bottom Left: rose on left hand, Bottom Right: Phoenix (paleo) left arm.

Gender: male

Location on body: left and right forearm, left hand, chest, knuckles.

Colours: red, black,

Design: postmodern Icarus, knuckle lettering, phoenix, 7 roses

Text: non serviam, stay good

Visibility: tattoos span arms, chest, hands, and neck.

Style: old school, gang, Japanese

Symbolic Meanings: pushing the limits, anti-binary opposites, family, death and rebirth.

Social/cultural aspects: deviance, peacock, sexual attraction, interaction-specific meanings

My interview with Morris was one of the most interesting and challenging. This is partly because he is a graduate student studying English literature and philosophy, which means that he supplied an uneven mix of referencing and mapping perspectives on his tattoos. Although this may seem like a good thing, it is important to complete an interview with a large stock of examples of mapping. Unlike referencing, which can be obtained from books and the Internet, mapping comes from only one source, the interviewee. It was also difficult for me to see the significance of some of the comments I was given until I conducted further research. Morris is one of several examples of a person giving coded meanings for his art which reside in very specific and culturally sophisticated sources. Because of the variety of meanings and mapping/referencing aspects I was given by Morris, I am forced in this case to refer to Morris' tattoos more broadly rather than to specific tattoos at a time. In exploring the referencing aspects of his tattoos I will discuss Morris' Icarus and his four-leaf clover. In regards to the mapping aspects, I will focus on his mother-inspired tattoo and with his relations with others.

Morris' Postmodern Icarus, Four-Leaf Clover, and his Mom's Roses

Referencing

Well, the story of Icarus and Daedalus is about a father who builds wings for his son to escape the labyrinth but tells him not to fly too high because the sun will melt the wax. But we did Icarus in a postmodern pose because he looks like he is doing more of a Led Zeppelin pose rather than a traditional man with wings. It is also a reference to (James) Joyce, and his character Stephen Dedalus in his *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. It goes back to the idea of pushing it too far. Don't go too close to the sun, but he does it anyway. This is a symbol I associate with coming of age, with art. Take it too far, always take it too far. Fuck whatever instructions. This is the symbol for the artist. Don't follow instructions and at the end of the day you'll end up doing what you want to do.

There is a line in the book *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* which is Latin that says: “non serviam.” It means “I will not serve.” There is a famous idea of Joyce leaving the Church of Ireland and saying this. It is in the book and it is known to be the words Satan spoke when he left Heaven. And Joyce was never the one to shy away from pride.

I begin this section of referencing Morris’ Icarus tattoo with the above quotation because the idea of “pushing limits” placed on yourself and by others in society is without a doubt a theme that transcends all of Morris’ tattoos. It is a message that is represented in the Latin words that Morris has tattooed in script on his chest which says “Non Serviam” (I will not serve). It is characterized in Morris’ admiration for the idea of the artist as someone who slips into a life of questioning that which has been laid out before him or her and that which is virtuous and necessary in creating art.

In James Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as Young Man*, a book that has influenced Morris’ opinions and tattoos, the protagonist Stephen Dedalus writes of a life contemplated by the influences of structures of control and the possibilities of structures influenced through epiphanies.⁸ For Dedalus, the journey to consider himself an artist leads to the claim “I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland or my church; and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or as art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defense the only arms I allow myself to use, silence, exile and cunning” (Joyce 1928: 291). These words are powerful because as Morris noted “I will not serve” has a strong connotation for a person willing to abandon a religious upbringing in the pursuit of art. It is also popularly associated with the devil and deviance. As Joyce noted earlier in the text before his

⁸ Stan Gebler Davies (1975: 34) writes in *James Joyce: A Portrait of an Artist* that Joyce considered the epiphany to be “those moments in life transfiguration when life becomes art and art grants truth.”

epiphany of watching a beautiful girl “paddling in a stream with her skirt hiked up” (Joyce 1928: 108):

Lucifer, we are told, was a son of the morning, a radiant and mighty angel; yet he fell: he fell and there fell with him a third part of the host of heaven: he fell and was hurled with his rebellious angels to hell. What his sin was we cannot say. Theologians consider that it was the sin of pride, the sinful thought conceived in an instant: *non serviam*: I will not serve.

Throughout this thesis, particularly in the theory chapters to follow, I have been stressing the importance of structure and agency as dual antecedents to any social action, including becoming tattooed. This is because, in line with Giddens’ duality of structure, there is always a consequence to action which affects and is affected by structure. Structure is the means and end to an action. I refer to these theoretical ideas here because there is always a reaction to any action and thus pushing limits in the pursuit of art or otherwise will surely have an affect and this may not be the ideal outcome of the conscious intent. While listening to Morris’ description of his tattoos, I felt I had to ask how his neck and hand tattoos might affect his ability of getting by and performing different roles in everyday life. Like Joyce, Morris displayed a certain and intentional, although bittersweet, satisfaction in having pushed the limits he set on himself, including where to get tattooed.

This four-leaf clover on my hand I got after coming home from Las Vegas when I won some money and I was on a rush. I went down to my artist and told him and he was like cool, but are you sure? People say get them, but avoid your hands, neck, that kind of stuff. But I got this anyway and 2 years later I have my neck and both my hands tattooed. It was a big one to get for breaking the barrier.

This idea of the consequences of action is also important in the cultural and historical significance of the classical Greek myth of Icarus. This is because Icarus is not always seen as a symbol for the virtue of pushing the limits. It is important because there is a

contradictory nature in Morris' cavalier attitude toward rules and structure "I see the value in structure, but I don't think it has any transcending or guiding principle."

In Wallace and Hirsch's *Contemporary Art and Classical Myth*, Sharon Sliwinski (2011: 199) draws a powerful comparison between the image of *The Falling Man* on 9/11 and Icarus. The photograph of the man jumping from the World Trade Centre in New York City on September 11, 2001, has become an image which is implanted in the minds of those who have experienced it. I say "experienced it" because as Sliwinski notes "Drew's picture is certainly mesmerizing – the calm, arrow-straight position of the figure's body, the uniformity of the background, the overwhelming sense of negative space."⁹ But the perturbation one feels when gazing upon the photograph comes from elsewhere. And it is considerably harder to speak of this perturbation than it is to speak of the picture's formal properties" (Sliwinski 2011: 201). Although the image and the myth of Daedalus and Icarus have been reproduced countless times, Sliwinski notes the 1606 woodcut by Antonio Tempesta titled *The Fall of Icarus* as the most notable and striking comparison with *The Falling Man*. According to Sliwinski (2011: 208), who recites the classical myth: "Icarus disobeyed his father's instructions and began to soar to greater and greater heights, rejoicing on the lift of his great wings ... spectators of this image once again find themselves witness to a horrifying plunge. Icarus' face is turned away from us, his robes flap helplessly in the wind, his arms and fingers stretch outwards in that unmistakable gesture of one who is falling a long, long way." Our mortality, our ambitions, and our connectedness are all evident in these images. This comparison may be a stretch in some regards, but the images which define human history are those which often lead to the same

⁹ Richard Drew, a professional photographer for the Associated Press, took the photograph (Sliwinski 2011: 199).

themes and messages. For Morris, it is curious to wonder about both the virtues and the potential negative consequences he may experience in “pushing the limits.”



Richard Drew (2001), “The Falling Man” http://www.esquire.com/features/ESQ0903-SEP_FALLINGMAN

Antonio Tempesta (1699), “Daedalus Icaro alto nimis ambiens orbat (The Fall of Icarus).”
<http://popartmachine.com/art/FASF-FASF.58478/function.pg-connect>

Mapping

I began my interview with Morris who is heavily tattooed with a novel approach which occurred to me by trial and error through interviews with other tattooees. I asked him to tell me his favorite, and from there I circled around his skin canvas to explore others. To my surprise, Morris had an answer right away to my question of his favorite. His response was: “Ah my mom, I got a tattoo a couple of years ago for my mom. Just the story around it makes me think of it as having the most meaning. I enjoy my tattoos, but this one sticks out most.” He gives this tattoo the most significance of any his tattoos. The meaning is an example of mapping. It is a tattoo which we can understand through what Riggins’ (1994: 112) terms an “esteem object” as it represents a perceived gratified feeling and respect for both his parents and what they represent.

It's her name and seven roses. It comes from a story my dad explained to me when I was younger. He told me that when he first met my mom he was trying to court or woo her, or some crap. Anyway, he was trying to buy a dozen roses but he couldn't afford them. So he thought of buying six but decided that it would be too clichéd, so he waited and saved enough money to buy the seventh one. Now every year, on their anniversary, he still gives her seven roses. It's like going more than what you think you should do and making something your own. It's like, "fuck the status quo."

The importance of meaning was very evident in Morris' description of both family and of social interaction. In regard to interaction with others in everyday life, Morris maps out the relation he has with others who have not necessarily been reflective of the original meaning he intended for his tattoos but those who have been involved in the renegotiation of what his tattoos mean to him over time.

I go with traditional styles of the rose but it is not as much about the image as it is about the symbolism and the way you arrange them. And maybe it is because I am a nerd or an English student but I feel that the meaning kind of improves as you grow. Maybe the meaning I had when I first got the tattoo is different now. On the other side of the coin, how easy it is to make up a story when you are in a bar and you don't want to talk to someone about your tattoos. I've come up with some pretty fun stories.

The chance to hear a story of meaning, one which was made up to suit a social interaction and one which has had Morris reflect upon it as a necessary part of further social interaction as a heavily tattooed individual was an opportunity I could not pass up. This story is an example of Garfinkel's ethnomethodology of interaction discussed in the following theory section and of Riggins' (1994: 113) concept of social facilitators.

Well, I don't know exactly what I said, but the situation was a lady in a bar that was far too drunk and I am not sure if she was hitting on me or whatever but she was fascinated by my tattoos. I was uncomfortable and she was touching me, so basically I told her I got these in prison. "This one is for time served," you know, whatever.

Morris' tattoos have pushed the limits on my knowledge of contemporary art and classical myths. For this reason, I count his tattoos to be some of the most complex designs, irrelevant of their actual detail which, as can be noted in *Figure 2*, is also quite extensive.

Morris and Social Theory

Morris, who considers himself to be an anti-Structuralist and even used this perspective to plan out his ink art, discusses his opposite tattoos like the grim reaper on his left forearm and the phoenix on his right forearm by saying: "And I kind of like how they are opposites but not exactly. In my academic life I am always hearing about binaries. I don't know, if that's an influence of Derrida in there. But it is nice to not have exact opposites." The same sentiment is shared about his knuckle tattoos, which are another example of crossing a line of limits. "A lot of people get opposites on their fingers, but I didn't want to. I was like fuck that." These statements, coupled with the stories of interaction and the role his tattoos have in everyday life are important points in understanding Morris' tattoos and their meaning, especially if we substantiate the point through similar perspectives emphasized by Anthony Giddens and structuration theory. This is because like Morris' ideas about the meaning behind his "anti-binary opposites," Giddens' idea of meaning production is also an anti-Structuralist perspective. Kenneth Tucker (1998: 79) notes that "according to Giddens, social meaning does not simply derive from differences in enclosed linguistic systems, as many in the Saussurean tradition argue. Like Goffman, Giddens contends that meaning is bound up with practical activity in the real world. Giddens states that an adequate understanding of meaning must be tied to the ethnomethodological 'use of methods' embedded in practical consciousness."

Familial Hearts and Ink Marks:

If their Stories are True, their Truth is a Story

It is important to note that while I will discuss “true” emotion in this collection of tattooees, the word truth is not meant in a traditional sense – if such a sense can really exist – denoting a true value as opposed to false or incorrect lesser values. In fact, I use the word to illustrate the polysemic nature words, symbols, and phrases possess. In my interviews I aimed to see, listen, and record what I know to be honest emotion. These feelings like love, hope, loss, and redemption come attached to the ink marks on my respondents. These feelings form stories which encompass a part of my interviewees’ lives and embody memories which have been, and continue to be, influenced by the shifting nature of identity, meaning, and time.

Family is one of the powerful reasons given by tattoo respondents as a motivation for becoming tattooed and in choosing where to get tattooed. One hundred percent (15) of my participants listed family as part of the mapping aspects of at least one of their tattoos. The following respondents literally embody a love and kinship for family that was so strong it needed to be made permanent and part of their cultural repertoire. Tattoos are so often about being in dialogue with one’s self and with others. Thus these family-inspired tattoos effect social interactions and the looking-glass self (Cooley 1998) aspects of these tattooed peoples’ lives in an infinite number of ways.

Figure 3.

Élise



Description

Gender: female

Location on body: left torso, back, left thigh (not pictured)

Colours: black and white, blue

Design: seraphim (fallen angel)

Text: this too shall pass

Visibility: can be hidden with a t-shirt

Style: gothic, portrait, detailed shading.

Symbolic Meanings: burning away the darkness, eternal sorrow, family and death

Social/cultural aspects: deep family devotion, artistic, religious

An example of this blend of raw emotion and ink-marked skin comes from the next research participant who I call Élise. Élise has the entire left portion of her torso stretching right down to her thigh and up towards her shoulders marked by what she sometimes calls a “fallen angel” and at other times a “seraphim” (Figure 1).

Referencing

According to the classic theological text *Celestial Hierarchy* by Dionysian, a seraphim “destroys and dispels every kind of obscure darkness.” In Élise’s case, the seraphim whose task is to dispel darkness through light, and the profane through the sacred, has been made permanent on her skin with an array of mostly black and white

shading with an artistic, and emotional splash of richly coloured blue ink. The piece, which was drawn partly free-hand and partly stenciled, is a very intricate example of a contemporary-style tattoo because it beautifully blends traditional and new designs while also demonstrating an increased professionalism in artistry, depth, shading, and close attention to details. For Élise, the primary meaning of this tattoo is not its aesthetics but its symbolism.

Mapping

In line with the mapping aspects of her conversation, Élise tells me how the angel is meant to be a memorial to two siblings who passed away at young ages and are evidently deeply missed.

The wings are tattered and broken. Her face is in anguish and the flowers are blue because it was my brother's favorite color. It is the only color in the tattoo. I have script running down my thigh that says "this too shall pass".... I took my brother's goalie mask and asked the artist to have the mask rest on the angel's lap. She is weeping over it.

For Élise, this piece is a container of memory, a painful display of emotion, a sign of love, and a representative of her artistic side. The tattoo takes on multiple meanings and gives other people a different image of her, which will indefinitely influence the way they view her body, and in turn, the way she views herself. Thus I tend to view Élise's seraphim as completing the ingredients of a structuration perspective on understanding the role a social actor plays in being both enabled and constrained by social structures while, at the same time, knowingly conveying a specific personal meaning that is not fully evident by looking at her tattoo. She has to explain the autobiographical dimensions. Élise is creating new meanings for herself and her family while still being influenced and shaped by others,

namely through social definitions of art, beauty, love, and the capabilities of the institution of tattooing.

Figure 4.

Jerry



Description

Gender: male

Location on body: left torso, back, left thigh (not pictured)

Colours: blue, orange, grey, red, yellow

Design: underwater whale scene, St. John's, NL imagery, Cabot Tower, "jelly-bean" row houses.

Text: N/A

Visibility: can be hidden with 3/4 length sleeve

Style: new school, Japanese style (finger) waves

Symbolic Meanings: home, family, parental relationships, pride

Social/cultural aspects: the importance of place, home, divorce

Figure 4 shows about half of the tattoos on "Jerry's" body. The rest runs down his thigh and ends on his calf. The blend of styles, colours, motivations, meanings, and their relation to his identity has led me to count Jerry as one of the Newfoundland enthusiasts proving the complexities tattoos can carry, especially related to the way he connects them to his home and family.

Referencing

What is visible in this picture are famous images from the vicinity of St. John's, Newfoundland, which reflect the referencing aspects of Jerry's talk. The tattoos depict the Cabot Tower, "jellybean" coloured row houses, a hump-back whale, and the fickle twilight sky. These tattoos represent ideas that have long been considered a source of intrigue to cultural scholars interested in Newfoundland (Overton 1988, 1996; Sider 1980; Pocius 1988). This is Newfoundland's eclectic cultural and social history and its role in providing a source of pride and a burden of responsibility to Newfoundlanders as they function as gatekeepers of the province's tradition and heritage. James Overton (1988: 6) writes that "a number of intellectual patriots have been involved in cultural regeneration, claiming to be articulators of the collective unconscious of Newfoundland. They have attempted to come home to Newfoundland's distinct culture, searching for it, discovering it, surrendering to it, recording it, defending it, preserving it, promoting it, reviving it, and drawing inspiration from its artistic work." Overton writes so detailed and succinctly about the ongoing process of culture building and maintaining that Newfoundlanders' employ as a way of stressing the importance place can have for those involved with collective negotiations of self, culture, and belonging. In fact, Overton (1988: 6) also notes how "culture is on the march in Newfoundland.... References to tradition, culture, way of life, identity, lifestyle, and heritage liberally sprinkle the newspaper columns, the pages of various small magazines, the speeches and slogans of politicians of all stripes, and the lyrics of popular songs." Readers may note the large number and subject matter of Jerry's tattoos relating specifically to Newfoundland as a useful illustration of this type of patriotism and task in maintaining Newfoundland culture and spirit in a permanent way.

Mapping

What is not visible in the image is the way Jerry maps his family, his childhood, and his views on the socialness of tattoos. Here is what Jerry says, while referring to the underwater scene on his stomach which can partly be seen in this image: “I love whales, so I got some whales.... I got some lobsters, you know, cause it reminds me of home. You know my dad [who divorced my mother] was a fisherman. So I’d get lobsters as a form of child support. The whales and lobsters were also ways to make my underwater scene unique, and the whales make it like even more of a fucking St. John’s scene.”

Repeatedly and voluntarily, Jerry talked about his family in relation to his tattoos. When asked if others like his tattoos, his comments gravitate toward family rather than art history. When asked if he thinks tattoos are becoming more popular, he discusses his mom’s unexpected desire to get a tattoo. Despite all of this talk of family, his father was only mentioned once and then only with a sarcastic remark about his inability to provide for his child. All of these remarks contribute to Jerry’s identity, his pride in Newfoundland (specifically his small home community), his pride in family, and his wish to be unique. All provide an in-depth look at his self-identity as it has been recursively affected by others. Importantly it also describes how Jerry views his body as a vehicle to display such complex sentiments: “I was like, fuck it. I’ll just use my entire body. I can’t just get one tattoo.”

Beauty and Art: Gender, the Body, and Self-expression

To recap, the *social peacocks* have allowed us to see the creative and expressive nature of human agency in conversation with others. The *familial hearts in ink marks*

demonstrate the enabling aspect of group or structural influence. Now it is time to view another category of tattooees who fully demonstrate both the enabling and the constraining aspects of structure which effect their ability to commit themselves and their bodies to becoming tattooed. To be clear, this means that although tattoos are representations of both our *wild passions* which define us and mementos of ephemeral moments which populate our lives – they are also influenced by the cultures which we live in / live through and by *Fine Lines* (Zerubavel 1991) which are drawn as objective realities in culture and come to form real consequences in our lives.

These *Fine Lines*, as Eviatar Zerubavel points out in cognitive sociology, are the lines social actors draw in their minds in order to interpret the world from different objective realities. Where we – as a social collective or culture – place the line, influences and begins a cycle of acceptance, repetition, and finally the construction of a new reality which forms “real” consequences of its own. “Seperarting one island of meaning from another entails the introduction of some mental void between them. As we carve discrete mental chunks out of continuous streams of experience, we normally visualize substantial gaps separating them from one another” (Zerubavel 1991: 21). In other words, “the lines drawn in the sand” by the cultures we live in come to form boundaries and levels of acceptance for social phenomena. This is the experience of the tattooed individual. While the line is constantly withdrawn and constructed again, tattooed individuals can often be subject to real consequences from *social laws* (Tarde, as referenced in Ruitensbeek 1963) that do not really exist.¹⁰ These concepts will become more clear when we focus on the

¹⁰ Gabriel Tarde, a contemporary of Durkheim, and his work *Social Laws* is mentioned here because the epistemological description of science and the resulting creation of social laws that Tarde explores in this pivotal work, I suggest, are mirroring processes to the development of Zerubavel’s fine lines. As Tarde notes: “thus science consists in viewing any fact whatsoever under three aspects, corresponding, respectively,

tattooed individuals who will be discussed in the final category of analysis of this thesis. These tattooees are the people who openly shared their feelings with me about what has affected and continues to affect their roles as social actors in deciding to become tattooed, where to get tattooed, and the appearance of their tattoos.

Not everyone can get tattooed. It is costly. It is painful. It is increasingly regulated by age and by shop practice.¹¹ And it is also a permanent corporeal commitment which can impact the life not only of tattooees but also the people they will interact with in the future. As 73% of my sample (11) is female, gender is a good starting point in discussing the constraining aspects of structure. Sociologists from the symbolic interactionist tradition (Blumer 1969, Goffman 1959) make it perfectly clear that the desire to look favourable while interacting with others is an inherent part of what it means to be social. Anthony Giddens (1991: 100) provides an interactionist-influenced perspective on the reflexive self which focuses on society's constraints on bodies: "Not only must an individual be prepared to interact with others in public places, where demeanour is expected to meet certain generalized criteria (fine lines) of everyday competence, but he or she must be able to maintain appropriate behaviour in a variety of settings or locales. Naturally, individuals adjust both appearance and demeanour somewhat according to the perceived demands of the particular setting." Similarly, the ideas of Michel Foucault are of key importance in understanding biopolitical influences on our bodies. While discussing discourses on medicine and proper *care of the self*, Foucault (1986: 100-101) notes "... whether we are walking or sitting, whether we are oiling our body or taking a bath, whether we are eating,

to the repetitions, oppositions, and adaptations which it contains and which are obscured by a mass of variations, dissymmetries, and disharmonies" (Tarde, as quoted in Ruitensbeek 1963: 101).

¹¹ The news report discussing the regulation of the tattoo industry came only days before I wrote this part of my thesis. See: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/story/2012/06/07/nl-tanning-tattoo-legislation-607.html>

drinking – in a word, whatever we may do, during the whole course of life and in the midst of life's diverse occupations, we have need of advice for an employment of this life that is worthwhile and free of inconvenience." These remarks, contextualized later in Chapter 5 in the *art worlds* and *fields of cultural production* which define artistic practices like tattooing, put the following narratives under a lens which clarifies not only the expressive human agency in getting a tattoo, but also the world of structural influences which constrain and enable our decisions and how we live with the consequences of these fine lines or social laws. Although I believe it is always important to see the subject in the constitution of social action like getting tattooed, it would also be irresponsible to ignore all the men, and particularly woman, I talked with and who provided stories about outside influences on their body and their concept of gender.

Figure 5.

Rachael



Description

Gender: female.
Location on Body: right-upper bicep, right forearm
Colours: blue, white, red, green.
Design: Salvador Dali- Meditative Rose.
Text: just like autumn leaves, we're in for change
Visibility: can be hidden with 3/4 length sleeve
Style: surrealism, reproduction art

Symbolic Meanings: love and personal connection with art, change.
Social/Cultural Aspects: femininity, beauty, art, ownership of the body, divorce, family

While discussing her family's reactions to her tattoos, Rachael adds a gendered perspective on her tattoos. And although it is clear from her words and non-verbal expressions that her family's opinions about her tattoos are important to her in many ways, it is also clear that Rachael has a certain desire to break the gender barrier and in the words of Betty Friedan in the pivotal *Feminine Mystique* (1963: 73) "(provide) an act of rebellion, a violent denial of the identity of women as it (has) been defined ... to shatter, violently if necessary, the decorative Dresden figurine that represented the ideal woman of the last century." The language used in feminist scholarship is powerful and emotion-provoking because that is necessary to provoke change and new modes of thought.

Rachael counters the feminine images of the past, alluded to in Friedan's work, by noting:

I get some good and some bad (reactions to my tattoos). And the bad mostly come from my family. Like a lot of people are interested in the tattoos, but others not so much. My grandmother called me "damaged goods" when I was 18. She looked at me and said "who is going to marry you with your body like that?" My father also sighs every time I tell him I have another one. But I didn't need him. Around the time I started to get them my parents were getting divorced. I think he doesn't like them because he wasn't part of the discussions my mom and I had about getting them.

With my grandmother I could never really get a chance to tell her what they meant. It doesn't really even make any sense because I have male cousins who have tattoos and she doesn't really say anything to them. I am the damaged one. And I don't want to have to justify myself to anyone. These are for me.

With these remarks in mind, we may begin to reference and map two of Rachael's tattoos so we can come to appreciate how the social and personal are reflected in her tattoos. In their aesthetic, their placement, and their meanings, Rachael's tattoos say something about her desire to express her own interests and also the enabling and constraining structures limiting her options.

Rachael's tattoo of Salvador Dali's Meditative Rose

Referencing

Surrealism is a unique genre of painting, literature, and poetry that emphasizes the logic of the illogical, the “logic” of dreams, for example. According to *Modern Art 1900-1945: The Age of the Avant-Gardes*: “Given its anti-logical and irrational character, contrary to all codification and hostile to rules and hierarchies, the surrealist movement had no homogenous or unitary structure; it can be said that there were as many surrealisms as there were artists who, to a greater or lesser degree, made surrealist art” (Crepaldi 2007: 207). But a more precise definition of the art form can be taken from André Breton’s 1924 *Manifeste du Surréalisme* which defines surrealism as “psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express – verbally, by means of written word, or in any other manner – the actual functioning of thought. It is dictated by thought in the absence of any control being exercised by reason and is exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern” (Breton, as quoted in Crepaldi 2007: 206). Salvador Dali (1904-1989) was an eclectic and controversial artist who is commonly associated with surrealism. An example of how Dali’s work has been discussed as surrealist art can be taken from the book *Dali and Surrealism*:

Within a highly sophisticated and carefully structured pictorial mental landscape (Dali) used devices to create formal visual analogies for the experience of dreams and hallucinations.... Odd or apparently illogical connections are made between disparate objects or groups of objects, and people or things can metamorphose unexpectedly into something else, for no apparent reason (Ades 1982: 75).

Influenced by the work of Sigmund Freud, Dali used surrealism to explore one of the most potentially illogical forms of cognition: dreams. Moreover, a reason why Dali’s work is

considered surrealist can be drawn from the general cultural dissent and marginality he was said to have felt. According to Dali in the book *Dali by Dali* “I have always been an anarchist and a monarchist at the same time. Let us not forget the two founders of anarchism were Prince Kropotkin and princely Bakunin. I am, and have always been, against the bourgeoisie” (Dali 1970: 64-65). The spirit of surrealism is one which has far-reaching effects.

Surrealism has been quite influential in mid-twentieth-century French culture. Paul Bouissac, French intellectual and Structuralist – known for studying the unconscious logic which governs the culture of the circus (See Bouissac 1985, 2010) – candidly discusses the impact the surrealist movement had on his intellectual outlook: “... but at the same time, surrealism had already permeated the (French intellectual) culture. Through exhibitions, it was present in my cultural environment. And it was marked by a coefficient of value.” This coefficient of value describes “things which I would look at positively, if only because they were marked by a sign of marginality, subversion, cultural rebellion, and so on. I never felt mainstream. This was the general attractiveness or rebellious cultural movement in surrealism” (Bouissac, as quoted in Riggins 2003: 100).

Given the spontaneity surrealists idealized, it is an interesting juxtaposition to put Dali in the context of structures of control on the body and gender. But the motives behind surrealism no doubt parallel some of the practices of tattooing. Tattoos are very often a form of surrealist art in that they are marks of expression that can, and have been, tied to rebellion, cultural subversiveness, and social marginality. Tattoos can be just as much

about being different as they are about being the same. One aspect of getting tattooed is the topic of control, in Rachael's case the decision to hide her tattoos, if necessary:¹²

Well I actually started placing them in spots that made the tattoos nice but so they could also be hidden. You know if I have to get a job or anything it was a big concern for my mom on signing off on the first couple. At the end of the day, she wanted to make sure I could still get a job.

Nevertheless, a message that Rachael's tattoo embodies is that a tattoo can equally be a sign of personality and self-expression while doubling as a sign of cultural difference or rebellion. For example, Rachael's comment quoted earlier, which expresses the way she believes other people view her body as "damaged goods" shows how her tattoos are living examples of the constraining and enabling aspects of structure. The only way a tattooee can claim to be different is by first being the same. But this does not mean that the notions of surrealist art die when one chooses to adhere to certain "civilizing processes" (Atkinson 2004; Elias 2000).

Tattoos are, first and foremost, about self and social expression; and this means they can be a sign of adherence to culture while, at the same time, a mark of difference, personality, and uniqueness. As both are present, it is not intellectually sound to claim that tattoos are only an adherence to cultural repertoires of body projects suited strictly to prove the enthusiast is part of a collective. On the other hand, it is also not sound to claim that tattoos are only about being different, unique, and disconnected from the status quo. The expressive nature of tattoos becomes complicated when they bridge the relationship between individual and culture. This is why tattoos can be about being part of a culture, but they can also be part of a deeply personal story. "Like when I look at my arms,"

¹² All (100%) respondents indicated some form of concern for their tattoos when it came to employment. Although this is most likely a result of the fact that all respondents are students working toward a career, it is nonetheless very telling of the cultural misconceptions about tattoo enthusiasts that still exists and thus have real consequences.

Rachael says, “I felt they were always meant to be there – like a birthmark or something. I can’t even imagine myself without them at this point.... And for me, these are for me. I’m okay with not everyone being able to always see them all the time, they are also about being fun and representing growing up a little bit.”

In sum, Rachael’s Salvador Dali tattoo of a rose floating in air – illogical surrealist image and a symbol of traditional femininity – is yet another example of a tattoo’s “coefficient of value.” Even if surrealists aim to find the unconscious logic in the illogical, and soon end up with some standardized images, there is always the possibility of creativity in art and in interpretation. And even while feminist movements have fundamentally altered the way we view gender inequalities, influences still remain from structures of control which contend with structures of change and creative individuality. The structures of control are forces like *hegemonic masculinity* and *ideal body types* that continue to fuel the fight for equality among scholars in gender studies (Atkinson 2011; Kimbrell 1995) and feminism (MacKinnon 1989; Smith 1987).

Mapping: Rachael’s “T.V. on the Radio” Lyrics

As was the case with Roger, music plays a big part in Rachael’s life and functions as a *social facilitator* for friendships and relationships. During our interview Rachael spoke repeatedly about her boyfriend, an English Major, musician, and a tattooed person. When speaking about the popularity of text tattoos, Rachael mentions how she “had (her) boyfriend look over (her) tattoo a dozen times to assure the grammar would be correct, just in case.” The lyrics Rachael has tattooed on her left forearm are: “Just like autumn leaves we’re in for change.” The message comes from the song “Province” by the band T.V. on the Radio. The idea of change is something that this thesis broaches time and time again,

in reference to meanings, identity, emotions, expressions, etc. This is why I believe Rachael's tattoo about change is an insightful commonsense addition to my dataset.

Rachael describes the tattoo by saying "I think about that (changing). I think if I could always like a tattoo as specific as these lyrics. But even if I change, these are the things that are important to me in different times of my life. So I will never hate them." Tattoos form part of our social and cultural repertoires as enthusiasts. But they also form part of our body, our skin, our story. Tattoos represent how even the most permanent of things like body and mind change over time even while they remain the same. Rachael describes the liberating feeling when we understand change as both inevitable and enabling: "I spent the whole summer before coming to university planning out my next four years and I have figured out you can't plan everything. Things will change and this is not a bad thing." The chorus of "Province" by T.V. on the Radio says "all our memories are precious as gold." One lesson I have learned from my discussions with these enthusiasts and from myself is that tattoos are a powerful way humans have invented for preserving what is most precious in our lives. Memories fade more quickly than the ink of tattoos.

Figure 6.

Elle



Description

Gender: female

Location on body: right thigh, left torso

Colours: blue, green, orange

Design: 3 Lilies on a vine, peacock feather

Text: N/A

Visibility: can be hidden with shirt and shorts

Style: realism, new school

Symbolic Meanings: katimavik, women's shelter volunteer, sisters and family

Social/cultural aspects: feminism, gender equality, looking pretty

The Peacock Revisited

Referencing – Elle's Peacock Feather

Elle's peacock feather tattoo was influenced by the idea that "the really pretty (peacock feathers) actually belong to the male ... and although the feather belongs to the masculine, it can also be pretty." According to Elle, "I know women have always been marginalized by gendered assumptions, but I am also interested in the masculinity crisis." Elle's feelings about her tattoo are reflective of her opinions about the issues of gender, the body, and feminism in Western culture. For Elle, her tattoos represent an act of rebellion from gender stereotypes or assumptions; but they also represent her connection with her human desire to look and feel pretty and to be part of a collective.

Although the idea of feeling pretty is often equated with femininity, this thesis has shown – through the use of the peacock feather – that tattoos are about demonstrating a favorable aspect of self and social identity to others for both men and women. Thus, what Elle's tattoo says about the gender lines of society and the current state of feminist scholarship is entangled with notions of her human desires to be attractive, to fit in, and by the masculinity crisis. Just like the motivations for her tattoo, Elle's opinions on feminism demonstrate a popular new spin on gender studies (see Atkinson 2011; Faludi 1999; Farrell 2001). This is the connection between resisting or rebelling against the hegemony and patriarchy of Western culture (or perhaps world culture), while also understanding complicated identities and human emotions which obfuscate meta-narratives of an egalitarian society. Here is what Elle says about the discipline of feminism:

Well, you get into this whole grey area. Sometimes I hate what feminism has been equated with. I recognize that my female sisters have been wholly oppressed, but I have been given so many opportunities being female. Basically, I feel I would just be a lot happier if gender didn't exist.

Since Elle mentions the masculinity crisis and the notion of the pretty peacock, scholars writing in the field of gender and masculinity studies need to be discussed here. As I understand the topic, they allow for a new spin on scholarship which describes no gender as "safe" from the perils of mistaken and misattributed identities and confused states of belonging. The most valuable lesson of any study trying to explain gender is that a focus on the micro before attacking the macro is necessary for understanding the nuanced mistreatment of others based on gender for both men and women. In other words, although shattering glass ceilings may be on the agenda, those who live above and below should first be forewarned before their realities become shards of broken glass.

According to Atkinson (2011: 42), the principles of Bauman's *Liquid Modernity* (2001) and Giddens' high or late modernity (1991) can help us understand the ever-changing – interaction specific – gender performances of skilled social actors in everyday life: "The late modern man is powerful when he finally accepts and wields his ability to change the nature and performance of his masculinity when need be, when emergent situations demand him to enact gender in a variety of ways." Susan Faludi makes a similar observation of the complicated roles a man faces in contemporary culture in her influential book *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* (1999). While participating in ethnographic research at weekly-meetings of domestic violence groups, Faludi makes note of the men who had "lost their compass in the world. They had lost or were losing, jobs, homes, cars, and families. They had been labeled outlaws, but felt like castoffs. Their strongest desire was to be dutiful and to belong, to adhere with precision to the roles society has set for them as men... (and they had) nothing but the gender rule book to fall back on" (Faludi 1999: 9).

The peacock feather is a symbol for a new understanding of gender as an issue underscoring the life of men and women in the late-modern world. The tattoo is thus an act of rebellion in making note of this fact and purposefully mocking the gendered barriers of masculine/feminine, pretty/strong, male/female. But it is also representative of the confusion of roles felt by men and women in their desire to act out gender-appropriate roles in specific situations. In a sense the peacock is a confusing symbol of gender because most people will associate feathers with traditional femininity. Show girls used to wear feathers. A generation or so ago women often had feathers in their hats. Most people will overlook the fact that it is the male which has the brightest feathers in many species of

birds. Elle's contribution to our understanding of the importance of structure as an enabler and constrainer is contextualized through her unwavering desire to maintain attributes of pretty and nice, while also allowing her to play on these biopolitical principles as a motivation for artwork which mocks these very principles.

Elle says, "oh yeah, I wanted to look pretty. Everyone wants to look pretty. Boys want to look pretty too." The idea of wanting to look pretty was mentioned as important to 67% of my sample and of this percentage, 2 or 20% were males. I believe this is part of the performance and communicative aspect of tattoos. As art, tattoos are designed with shapes and lines that flow, look elegant, evoke feeling, and show emotion. In this way the artistic principles of tattoos (of which gender rules often apply) are often the ways in which tattoos can be most constrained and enabled by the structures that influence them.

Mapping

The peacock feather says a lot about very complicated socio-cultural issues. But Elle did not spend much time speaking about them. Instead, her experiences as a volunteer with Katimavik (Inuktitut for "meeting place") are what define this tattoo's meanings for Elle. Katimavik is a program that began in 1977 as a mission for Canadian youth volunteers to be exposed to other cultures, people, and to a much broader appreciation of Canada as civically engaged citizens (<http://www.katimavik.org/our-mission>). Elle describes her participation with the program as "life-changing" and says "I was a Katimavik participant during 2008-09 and I was a volunteer at a woman's shelter in Slave Lake in the nearby First Nations reserve in Blind River. Our main responsibility as volunteers was to decorate and run the charity gala. The centerpiece for the tables was

peacock feathers and as a parting gift they gave me an Inuksuk and two peacock feathers from the gala.”

The effect this program had on Elle’s life is very evident not only in her choice to make this symbol permanent on her body, but also in the way she describes the feelings of empowerment in helping women and coming to an understanding of what it means to be a woman and part of a team. Elle says her family does not generally support her tattoos, but “the tattoo on my leg has a lot of significance to me. So my family members seem to try and to understand a little when I tell them.”

Conclusions

Through the case studies of these six tattooees and the supporting knowledge and perspective given by the rest of my sample, this chapter has identified three categories of tattoo enthusiasts who embody and describe what it means to be tattooed in the modern world, and importantly what tattoos can mean to those who don them and to the culture and history of symbols which contextualize them. Every mark of self and culture that we make on the world is always influenced by a plethora of circumstances and principles. I have identified three categories of interviewees: (1). *Social Peacocks*, (2). *Familial Hearts*, (3). *Beauty and Art Enthusiasts*. This allows for an interpretation of Giddens’ structuration theory and thus corresponds to the following ingredients in the constitution of social action:

1. Those which allow us to see an example of the creative human agency.
2. Those which are inspired by the enabling aspects of structure (family).
3. Those which demonstrate both the enabling and constraining aspects of social structure.

In each category I have drawn out the multiple meanings existing in the ink through tools

introduced by Riggins (1994), referencing and mapping. The overall message is that tattoos are more than marks of culture or marks of individuality. They are something we make in order to be in contact with other people, but also to be in contact with ourselves.

A common remark heard when discussing tattoos with others is the question: "Are tattoos about rebellion?" My answer here is "maybe." Tattoos are about self and social expression and this means for some people that they may have a rebellious feel to them. They may be about setting yourself apart. But they are never about only one thing. Because they mean something different to us than to the people around us, some may consider our ink rebellious while we consider it artistic, beautiful, signs of love, or memento of where we've been. The cliché "don't judge a book by its cover" is a relevant conclusion to this research because as we have seen through an exploration of the genres of art (surrealism, avant-garde, Kitsch, Greek myths, contemporary photography, Japanese tattooing); and through references to feminism, the masculinity crisis, elite literature, Newfoundland culture, ancient theological texts, and works of cultural criticism, that tattoos are much more complicated than they are normally depicted.

Tattoos are symbolic of the places we have been, the people we have known and have been in conversation with, and even the intrigue we have as social beings with far-off places we have not, or may never, experience. To understand these ideas I wish to talk about another remark I hear from enquirers while I discuss the symbolism of tattoos. This time it is the question of people's desire to have symbols like Chinese characters, Latin phrases, or Japanese mythical images tattooed on their bodies when they are not fluent in either the language or the cultural nuances reflected in these "far-off" designs. To be clear, neither I, nor anyone else, will ever truly know every reason why people do what they do.

As sociologists we theorize about different ontological and epistemological understandings of why we do what we do and who and what has shaped these actions. But at the end of the day, these theories are really meant to be suggestions and clues and never answers or totalities. From this research, I wish to theorize the following: First, people get tattoos that may be in different languages or have obfuscated meanings in some way because this is part of the ability agents have in making meaning coded and controlled. We note this earlier with Roger and Morris who wish to have their tattoos sometimes be a secret to themselves or from the occasional onlooker. Second, tattoos are about art and this means enthusiasts and their tattoo artists often work together to create designs that are both personally and visually/socially appealing. This means people choose designs often because of aesthetics, capabilities of the art of tattooing, and its relevancies to their wishes and tastes. For example, Elle expressed these ideas while talking about the colors she had on peacock feather and how they were influenced by tattoo ink available and not necessarily a realistic depiction of bird feathers. Third and finally, one of the most exciting aspects of any form of art whether it be on a canvas, vinyl, string, or skin, is its mystery and its ability to foster a multiplicity of interpretations and personal and social relevancies. When I started to research this topic I found a book at a local bookstore that had connected some popular tattoo designs with a finite definition of the symbol across the page. This book gave me the motivation to do research that did the exact opposite. Readers should not leave this research with an understanding of what tattoos mean, but instead what tattoos can mean and how this meaning will change over time and space and from person to person.

The following chapters are a theoretical exploration of a tool-kit of sociological concepts and understandings that will further allow for a contextualization of the polysemic nature of identity and meaning. Chapter 4 will describe, in more detail, how sociological theories tied with Giddens' structuration theory allow for an understanding of the fluidity of personal and social identity and how this elusive character directly reflects on our social actions as they are a result of multiple motivations fed through both the individual and cultural. Chapter 5 explores how meaning is created in art, or rather how art is given meaning. This analysis situates the tattoo in between an art world and a field of cultural production and thus encourages an appreciation of the many contexts in which tattoos can exist artistically, culturally, and personally.

CHAPTER FOUR: WHO ARE WE?

THE SOCIOLOGY OF IDENTITY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

When men of an inferior culture share a common life, they are often led, almost instinctively, to paint themselves, or to imprint images on their bodies that remind them of their common life (Durkheim: 1995: 233).

Introduction

The many layers of analysis in this thesis through which I have attempted to discover the social and personal secrets of tattoos and tattooed individuals are derived primarily from sociological theories, specifically those influenced from the symbolic interactionist tradition (Garfinkel 1967, Giddens 1984, Goffman 1972). These theories act as tools rather than solutions with respect to our understanding of social practices. What I mean by these claims is that social theories are not meant as answers to a totality, but instead they are best used as tools for helping us understand parts of the many systems of practices and routines characterizing our day-to-day lives. The theories discussed in these next two chapters, when combined together in a tool-kit, form a more comprehensive look into our social actions and behaviors because they reflect multiple ontological perspectives. I believe the tool-kit of theories to be explicated rightfully represents some of the most important literature relevant to the topic of becoming tattooed because they allow for an understanding of the nuances of both structure and agency.

Thus, unlike the role of other scientists (the physicist, chemist, or biologist), the sociologist is supposed to provide suggestions and clues, and never definitive answers or laws. The task of the sociologist is to help us understand the ordinary, the routine, and the commonsensical, because as we will see, such things are in fact falsely given a sense of simplicity or universality. For within any action lies many different layers of analysis.

Indeed, any action can bring about numerous questions which draw our gaze to larger questions of existence and control; while still more questions may exist, they slip by our consciousness and become taken-for-granted understandings. As Bauman states (1990: 13), “rarely, if at all do we make an effort to lift ourselves above the level of our daily concerns to broaden our horizon of experience ... the overall result of such a broadening of horizons will be the discovery of the intimate link between individual biography and wide social processes the individual may be unaware of and surely unable to control.”

This chapter is an invitation to readers to “broaden their horizons” when it comes to a theoretical understanding of tattooed cultures. It is also an escape into a world of infinite meaning and identity signifiers. In some loosely connected ways, this chapter asks of readers that they submit themselves to a Husserlian-type epoché (Husserl 1931). That is, I wish to have readers bracket the “natural attitude” in a type of suspension to forget assumptions and experiment with theories on a transcendental level. With this said, before offering some of the best theoretical tools for understanding the tattoos I have explored in the previous chapters, I would first like to show the effectiveness of the tool-kit perspective.

The Tool-Kit

Ann Swidler proposes in her book *Talk of Love* that we should consider cultural practices as unique and pluralistic elements that form a cultural “tool-kit.” This kit, influenced by varying *cultural capacities*, will be used to form *strategies of action* which then, in turn, help negotiate choices and plans of action for an individual. Swidler (2001: 12) strongly urges a definition of culture not as an all-encompassing essence in which life biographies live, but as a “set of symbolic vehicles through which such sharing and

learning take place.” With these ideas as precedent it is my assertion that all genres of social thought are actually powerful contributors to a complimentary theoretical “tool-kit” best used in the ongoing inquiry into sociological questions such as the quest for understanding human body modification. Thus, it is my plan of “strategic action” for this chapter to dissect the process of becoming tattooed as a polysemic endeavor, which I will argue is enriched through an understanding of many different theoretical descriptions of a cultural and individual practice.

Swidler’s analysis and critique of Clifford Geertz in “Finding Culture,” the first chapter of *Talk of Love*, has also influenced my thinking throughout this thesis. According to Swidler, Geertz who is often praised for his analysis and distinctive look at the functioning and origins of cultural practices, especially around rituals and symbolism often falls short of understanding “what their culture means to them” and more explicitly often thinks of culture as if it were “unified around a shared sensibility” (Geertz 1973: 20, 22). Swidler, on the other hand, proposes that since culture is a tool kit, we may use it in very different ways and it can mean many different things at the same time. This is the key to dissecting meanings and cultural relevance.

Importantly, whether one were to study tattooing as if it were still an exotic cultural practice, following Geertz and his uniform structure of culture, one might conclude that tattoos have historically had universal meaning structures during varying eras. Furthermore, one might speculate that tattoos merely display a connection by which actors plug themselves into culture, hinting that tattoos are not in fact both personally and culturally negotiated. On the contrary, this thesis argues that any one explanation or historical understanding should not be taken as a meta-narrative for a social and cultural

practice. I believe that within each era of tattooing, however broadly we may wish to define them, exist a plethora of cultural and personal meanings tattoos have had for those individuals who devoted their bodies to it. This is the central idea in Swidler's notion of the complexities of culture(s) as being used in many ways at the same time. The theoretical tool-kit should be taken as a method of avoiding an attempt to find a single meaning, definition, or understanding of the social and personal practice of becoming tattooed during *any* historical era or in the future.

The Primary Tool in the Kit

As an over-arching theoretical framework, one which situates theoretical tools for the role they must perform, Anthony Giddens' structuration theory is of paramount importance to this thesis and to the understanding of the process of becoming tattooed and the meanings and motivations behind the marks. Whether studying the tattoo as artistic expression, body project, commodity, or vehicle for the self, some strikingly similar debates enter into the literature. I refer to these debates, like those previously discussed in the tattoo/body literature (see Chapter 1), which attempt to pinpoint body alterations as a result of structures of influence or expressions of individual control (e.g., Shilling 1993; Turner 1985; Foucault 1977, 1982; Sanders 1989, etc.). Giddens' structuration theory is unique because it offers divergent nodes of thought from these dichotomous loops. Allowing for an understanding of the potential for structure and agency to be in a symbiotic rather than dichotomous relationship, Giddens argues, is most productive to the pursuit of knowledge about cultural acts. This is primarily because cultural acts which involve the conscious action of an agent, as well as the systems of knowledge and practice which come to be socially created and signified, have all been processed in tandem rather

than separately from each other. In Giddens' (1985: 25) words: "analyzing the structuration of social systems means studying the modes in which such systems, grounded in the knowledgeable activities of situated actors who draw upon rules and resources in the diversity of action contexts, are produced and reproduced in interaction." This quotation allows for a useful summation of the ingredients in understanding structuration theory and further, to understanding all social/cultural acts. Acknowledging the role of knowledgeable actors as well as the importance of social systems/structures in making up the components of the social construction of reality is of key importance to understanding how it is that an act like indelibly marking the skin with ink must always be understood as both an individual and cultural affair. If we understand this to be the case, we must also realize how meaning and identity attributed to a social act like becoming tattooed will also have deep and varied interpretations and systems of significance. Before continuing with an in-depth look into understanding the importance of utilizing structuration theory, I propose that we should first consider why Giddens thought it necessary to create a theory which could bridge the chasm between the dichotomy of structure and agency. This will require us to understand "orthodox consensus," a term discussed in his book *Constitution of Society* (Giddens 1984: xx).

Orthodox consensus, discussed in detail in many of Giddens' influential works (e.g., 1979: 235-254; 1985: xv-xxxv), is his critique of generalizations classical social theorists have made while describing social phenomenon as a result of structures of control which exist independently of the agent. The agent in this sense is viewed somewhat like a pawn in a game in which people have little to no knowledge of their actions. This structure-centered approach is said to be typically adopted by structural functionalists. For

example, I offer quotations from Emile Durkheim to contextualize Giddens' criticism, while also advocating how we may come to appreciate the usefulness of these theoretical accounts if we suspend ontological bias. Durkheim's account of the totem in his text *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* claims that "when men of an inferior culture share a common life, they are often led, almost instinctively, to paint themselves, or to imprint images on their bodies that remind them of their common life" (Durkheim 1995: 233). Readers should recognize how this initial description paints a narrow picture of the totem and early sociological understandings of tattooing as void of a theory of individual action. With this in mind, readers should also note how Durkheim illustrates an understanding that marks on the skin and cultural practices of these individuals were, in fact, not always arbitrary or entirely instinctual reminders of group memberships, but "durable" symbols of cultural significance. Specifically referring to personal-cultural significance, Durkheim speaks of what the ink mark means to the person in an attempt to understand the meaning, or at least stressing the importance of noting its presence. "But we must know how to reach beneath the symbol to grasp the reality it represents and that gives the symbol its true meaning. The most bizarre or barbarous rites and the strangest myths translate some human need and aspect of life, whether social or individual" (Durkheim 1995: 2).

The way art can speak to us, and realities become objectified, is the same way symbols inherit and represent meaning and conceptions of the self. This is, of course, through the relationship of the individual and culture. As such, I believe the value in Durkheim's disquisition is that he consistently demonstrates his belief in the importance of the group and cultural relevance in shaping and crafting meaning. This is made especially evident when he poetically notes how "wild passions that could unleash themselves in the

midst of a crowd, cool and die down once the crowd has dispersed, and individuals wonder with amazement how they could let themselves be carried so far out of character. But if the movements by which these feelings have been expressed eventually become inscribed on things that are durable, then they too become durable" (1995: 232). Thus Durkheim's theoretical assertions which attempt to provide reason to early human practices of marking the skin with ink as influenced by elementary religious activities is very useful for understanding the role culture(s) has always had in shaping action; however, it is also evident that these theories ultimately suffer from Giddens' "orthodox consensus."

Although Durkheim hinted at the significance of these marks as durable reminders of memory, the ultimate reasoning shared for committing the practice is solely attributed to group or cultural influence and not the necessary other side of the relationship which is led by individual, human desires. While we gain useful insight into the power of group influence, we remain impoverished from a perspective which acknowledges the agent as a thinking and doing subject who enters into necessary contracts with culture to create new things. Giddens (1984: 173) makes this point by stating "Durkheim's sociology, in fact, may be seen as irredeemably flawed in respect of the absence of a conception of power distinguished from the generalized constraining properties of 'social facts.'" To speak more to the unique cultural understanding (however far removed from the perspective of the subject) Durkheim possesses, I draw readers to another remark by Durkheim who states that "real man – the man we all know and whom we all are – is complex in a different way: he is of a time, of a country; he has a family, a city, a fatherland, a religious and political faith; and all these factors and many others merge and combine in a thousand ways..." (Durkheim 1978[1888]: 49-50).

This seems indeed the best time to contextualize how it is that Giddens' structuration theory can lay claim to maximizing the output of understanding that social theories can deliver by situating them in the context of a socially constructed world that has been created through what is known as *the duality of structure* (Giddens 1984: 25). The duality of structure is of utmost importance in understanding structuration theory and to studying other theories because it offers a view of structure as both the "medium and outcome of the practices it recursively organizes." It also stresses that "structure is not to be equated with constraint but is always both constraining and enabling" (Giddens 1984: 25). Therefore, agents who knowingly construct their world through layers of consciousness and unconsciousness do so only through, and with the goal of, the recreation or maintenance of structures. We may already begin to acknowledge how Durkheim's account of the totem may be enriched while being supplemented with assertions of the necessary role agents play in reproducing and creating new designs, meanings, and identity to the marks of the totem.

What all this means for tattooed individuals is that we may stop speculating on the meaning of the tattoo as influenced by structure or agency, as it has always been both. And what this means for my thesis is that this theory chapter can provide a number of useful theories for understanding many different facets of a social practice and of social and personal identity while ignoring stubborn ontological debates – which arguably disable more than they enable. If we understand the tattoo as a polysemic design with infinite meanings, then the semiotic reference to the artwork may have many meanings which coincide with a structural relation (such as a group logo, brand name, etc.) while also having meanings which coincide with personal associations (connections to kin, indelible

representation of a memory, etc)¹³. Accordingly, we may best understand these meanings by first altering our own beliefs about what kinds of meaning a tattoo can have. Meaning and identity are indeed elusive and constantly shifting phenomena. This means that they are susceptible to frequent changes and function in our daily lives in very different capacities. Erving Goffman and other Chicago School theorists have perhaps best demonstrated the importance of understanding the many roles social actors portray in everyday life and how each is not a shallow performance of selfhood, but in fact how these roles come to play a meaningful representation of our own social and personal identities. Two quotations from Goffman's early influential text *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) contextualize this idea. The first is actually from Robert E. Park. It is an example of Goffman's intellectual heritage and a reference to the broader influence of the First Chicago School of sociology in symbolic interactionist theories. The second quotation is from the same text but is directly from Goffman and is made in the context of a discussion of patients in a mental health institution who are undergoing a therapeutic technique known as "psychodrama."

It is probably no mere historical accident that the word person, in its first meaning, is a mask. It is rather a recognition of the fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role.... It is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves (Park 1950: 249, in Goffman 1959: 19).

Apparently a part once played honestly and in earnest leaves the performer in a position to contrive a showing of it later. Further, the parts that significant others played to him in the past also seem to be available, allowing him to switch from being the person that he was to being the persons that other people were to him (Goffman 1959: 72).

¹³ Much like Elise's seraphim tattoo because while referenced, it is part of theological hierarchy of angels and thus a sign of a religious social structure. But while mapped, the "fallen angel" is a sign of love, death, and kinship toward siblings who have died.

The Tool-Kit: Identity

We may now focus upon the theoretical offerings of Goffman as contributing a theoretical tool in the kit to be used in understanding one of two major themes of enquiry for tattooed individuals: identity. Goffman, as influenced by symbolic interactionists, offers much in the way of understanding what Giddens calls “practical consciousness” as an ingredient in the constitution of social actions. This level of consciousness, which is most involved with the reflexive monitoring of day-to-day actions organized as a continuous flow – what Giddens calls the *durée* – is the domain for functioning agents; and in Goffman’s dramaturgical sense, the stage which plays host to convincing actors. Perhaps influenced by ideas like Shakespeare’s “all the world is a stage,” Goffman (1974: 25) theorizes that the social world may be divided into “frames,” “encounters,” and “designs/fabrications,” among other spheres. Although “during any one moment of activity, an individual is likely to apply several frameworks,” we can often understand the rational performance of actors in Goffman’s framework as always an effort in “saving face.”¹⁴ Similarly, according to Giddens (1984: 3) “the reflexive monitoring of action depends upon rationalization, understood here as a process rather than a state and as inherently involved in the competence of agents.” Thus agents require a great deal of skill in being able to “frame” the situation while, at the same time, reflexively monitoring their actions as they continue at a consistent rate. As Goffman (1974: 247) states, “given their understanding of what it is that is going on, individuals fit their actions to this understanding and ordinarily find that the ongoing world supports this fitting. These organizational premises – sustained both in the mind and in activity – I call the frame of

¹⁴ “The term *face* may be defined as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes” (Goffman 1955: 213).

the activity.” The frame is a useful term when juxtaposed with the social peacocks who use frames to appear favorable in different situations which arrive in their daily experiences. For example, Roger who can use his tattoo sleeve as “sexual insurance,” or Morris who pretends he got a specific tattoo “while serving time” to fend off unfavorable onlookers fascinated by what they perceive as an attractive form of social deviance.

Framing the tattoo as a mark of group membership requires first that agents position themselves in ways so that they can amend the structure of the current organization, not to mention alter their own identities in the interest of personal and group meaning. In order to best get at instances of acting and positioning in practical consciousness, I assert that we must make an attempt to see tattooed individuals in everyday life and make note of how and what ways the tattoo may be presented to others, or else hidden from certain eyes. Of course, it is not sufficient to merely observe tattooed individuals. Accordingly, in Chapter 3 readers were given responses from tattooed individuals who have been questioned on the topic of their multiple presentations of self in order to understand how some typical tattooed individuals have positioned themselves to best fall in line with a perceived definition of the situation. One prevalent example was quoted from Rachael who, with her mother, worried about tattoo placement so that she would not scare off potential future employers.

Since so much of Goffman’s theoretical insights rely on an acceptance of the orderliness of interaction and the frames of the activity as given categories, many social theorists believe Goffman’s theories need to be supplemented with other viewpoints or theoretical explorations (see the contributors in Riggins 1990). These Goffmanian-influenced perspectives function to help sort through the ambiguities, or as some call them,

“perspective by incongruity” (Smith 2006), of how actors can fluently navigate everyday encounters while dealing with the frames of the activity which may be acting as a stipulating definer of genre or atmosphere. Here is evidence of the possible rigidity of the term “frame,” on which Goffman has built much of his own theoretical grounding.

These frameworks are not merely a matter of mind but correspond in some sense to the way in which an aspect of the activity itself is organized ... (frames) are something cognition somehow arrives at, not something cognition creates or generates (Goffman 1974: 247).

While I have proposed that readers wishing to understand identity gain insight from an application of Goffmanian theory interwoven with Giddens’ insight into the performance of actors as convincing individuals who display the ability to use, create, and be constrained by structure, we will now see how Harold Garfinkel’s ethnomethodological research tool is, in some ways, a useful supplement. This is because ethnomethodology demonstrates the importance of structure and agency in shaping both social definitions and personal identity at the same time. As we will see, this is primarily because, as Giddens (1976: 36) notes in his boldly titled definitive text of contemporary social theory *New Rules of Sociological Method*, for Garfinkel “social life, as lived by actors, is thus not to be seen as a series of feeble attempts to match up to standards of rationality as specified by the ‘scientific attitude,’ but quite on the contrary as a series of dazzling performances to which these standards are essentially irrelevant.” This idea is especially relevant to understanding identity-formation and its relation to the constitution of social actions because it begins to allude to a much more dynamic relationship between the subject and object and how this relationship must be studied under the auspices of a new form of social science enquiry.

To travel further into Lewis Carroll's rabbit hole (so to speak) readers should take note of how Garfinkel and the sub-discipline of sociology known as ethnomethodology both gained notoriety and intrigue through the case study of Agnes. Agnes, an "intersexed person," maintained herself in the view of all others as a "bona fide female" (Heritage 2006: 182). She did so through the practice of being a skillful "ethnographer of gender." Through a believed necessity, Agnes mastered the art of reflexively monitoring practical consciousness, so much so that while being screened for suitability for a sex-change operation at UCLA – where she first encountered Garfinkel – she was able to convince health professionals that she was "all along and in the first place a natural female despite the incongruous anatomical, physiological, psychological, and biological facts which might be amassed by this claim, and, on the basis, to urge the surgeons to remedy her condition in the direction 'intended by nature'" (Heritage 2006: 187). By using norms of femininity while skillfully playing off norms of naturalness or morality, Agnes controlled her identity beyond the deductive powers of natural and social scientists. Despite skillfully fooling those around her and having her secret eventually exposed, Agnes' lesson to Garfinkel and other ethnomethodologists in the future – and for that matter, to any sociologist, especially those studying the body and identity – was invaluable in that it stressed that while aiming to understand the necessary elements in successfully socializing for the skilled actor, one should not ignore both the power of individual agency and the importance of understanding the duality of structure. "Members know, require, count on, and make use of the reflexivity to produce, accomplish, recognize, or demonstrate rational-adequacy-for-all-practical-purposes of their procedures and findings" (Garfinkel 1967: 8). For this very reason, Giddens (1984: 23) stresses that "there is no doubt that Garfinkel has

helped to disclose a remarkably rich field of study – performing the ‘sociologist’s alchemy.’”

In “Ethnomethodology’s Problem,” Garfinkel reflects on the responsibility of the ethnomethodologist in illuminating what may otherwise be lacking in the sociologist’s lexicon. “What more?” is the phrase Garfinkel (1996: 8) feverishly repeats to prove that he has given due reflection to the question “What is ethnomethodology?” Garfinkel claims to have been asked in passing in an elevator encounter with another sociologist, we can observe a generously explicated response given by Garfinkel which states that “ethnomethodology’s fundamental phenomenon and its standing technical preoccupation in its studies is to find, collect, specify, and make instructably observable the local endogenous production and natural accountability of immortal familiar society’s most ordinary organizational things in the world, and to provide for them both and simultaneously as objects and procedurally, as alternate methodologies” (Garfinkel 1996: 6). What Garfinkel is referring to when he says the “immortal familiar society” becomes clear as a companion term to Giddens’ “orthodox consensus” when we are provided with a statement from Garfinkel (1996: 10) that “Durkheim’s aphorism is taught to graduate students from the first day of graduate work: ‘the objective reality of social facts is sociology’s fundamental principle.’” This phrase is not meant as a critique. Rather it is an aid in understanding the importance of alternate methodologies for studying what may have appeared to be an organization of social facts as objective reality. Ethnomethodology is of utmost importance as an item in the theoretical tool-kit for understanding identity. It allows for an appreciation of classical theories which emphasizes structures hidden in objective realities, simultaneously allowing for an appreciation of the importance of

knowledgeable agents managing their identities in the affairs of their own subjective realities.

Identity is acted, framed, and must be convincing to onlookers if one hopes to be a successful social actor. Just like Agnes, tattooees must be able to use their tattoos — like Agnes uses traditional forms of femininity — to act out specific and desired roles. Although tattooees have often been portrayed as social deviants or perpetrators of marginality in sociological literature (Sanders 1989; Vail 1999), this research has aimed to demonstrate that tattooees actually use tattoos to connect and fit in with others. For example, Jerry demonstrates his pride and heritage for Newfoundland with a tattoo spanning half his body with famous Newfoundland imagery. His tattoo is a cultural repertoire that Jerry uses to represent his connection and personal commitment as a member of an ethnic group and homeland.

CHAPTER FIVE: WHY ARE WE?

THE SOCIOLOGY OF MEANING IN ART AND CULTURE

We might speak of people being in dialogue with objects in the sense that it is difficult to construct one's self and to present that self to others in the absence of objects ... through objects we keep alive the collective memory of societies and families which would otherwise be forgotten ... just as language is polysemic, open to multiple interpretations, so are material artifacts (Riggins 1994: 2-3).

The second part of this theory review explores the contemporary meanings attributed to tattoo art through comparisons with the sociology of art. If we take the above quotation as typical of material culture studies, we may assert that tattoos are theoretically not too different and, in fact, may be substituted for "objects" in the above quotation while still allowing for these statements to remain relevant (see also Woodward 1997). The idea that the pluralistic facets of one's self and social identity are a result of a plethora of legitimate and situationally-functional identities is comparable to the role tangible "things" acquire as identity tools and signifiers. This state of mind where we can better understand that some "thing" (like meaning or identity) is never one "thing" (like deviant, normative) is what I have attempted to prove thus far while discussing identity and is what I wish to explore now while dealing with the polysemic nature of meanings that can be attributed to tattoo art. Readers should keep in mind our six case studies of the referencing and mapping aspects of tattoos in Chapter 3 while coming to appreciate the necessity for the following theories in a tool-kit. This is because these theories allow for a look into the symbolism of art and allow for an interpretive tool into understanding how art both attains meaning and can be defined as art in the first place. Tattoos and the practice of tattooing are very much influenced by structure as both a means and end to the social practice. This

is why I believe it is important to consider culture as always present in deciding where, what, and who, while enthusiasts become tattooed.

Thus, the following theories have been chosen to conclude the theoretical tool-kit for two reasons. First, they allow for an understanding of the relevance of structure and agency in the construction of meaning. In doing so, they show the value in understanding the relevance of how something can be defined as art and therefore how works of art earn meaning. I argue that this theorizing of traditional creations like painting and music is ubiquitously connected to the transformation of tattoos in our individual lives and culture. Second, these theories usefully demonstrate the business of tattooing, a world and field populated with artists and enthusiasts constantly being redefined and redesigned. These theories tie our identity theories to a world and field of meaning production while demonstrating the importance of eclectically combining seemingly disconnected genres of sociological thought.

A World of Meaning

The text *Art Worlds* (1982) by Howard Becker has a main objective to demonstrate how art is a part of the world of work. To prove this, Becker provides an explanation of his rationale early in his book by saying “all artistic work, like all human activity, involves the joint activity of a number, often a large number, of people” (Becker 1982: 1). Later, the concept of the “art worlds” is more narrowly defined as “all the people whose activities are necessary to the production of the characteristic works which that world, and perhaps others as well, define as art” (Becker 1982: 34). Thus, this theoretical perspective is a way of accounting for the ability art can have in bringing many people together in a social and

cooperative endeavor. Ultimately, it is definitive of how, through the same collective process necessary for any social interaction and for the constitution of society (in Giddens' terms), we may define both "the production and consumption of art" as an inherently cultural product and practice. To prove the connection of theories discussed so far to Becker's art worlds perspective, we can turn to Sanders (1989: 24) who says "artist-craftsmen, their products, and their conventions that surround them often come to be the center of 'minor art worlds.'"¹⁵ Or Atkinson (2003: 48) who draws a whole network of tattooing to the forefront by saying "In many ways, by pursuing tattooing body projects, individuals may be actively and purposefully shopping for culture through their corporeal alterations" and the shopping occurs through many venues as "people learn on-line about the tattooing process, find out about artists through magazines, and contact artists all over the world."

Indeed the world of tattooing has grown ever closer as a result of bustling technologies.¹⁶ For Becker, however, this is not the catalyst for conventionality in practice and style. This is instead a direct result of an art world surrounding body modification practices. For however varying the world of tattoo art would like to be, and where inspiration may come from, is not of key importance here, as we understand according to Becker (1982: 13): "each kind of person who participates in the making of art works, then has a specific bundle of tasks to do." If they want to change the process within the division of labor, they may be faced with some difficulty.

¹⁵ This is a reference to the changing definition between craft and art taken up by Becker (1982: 277) later in the text.

¹⁶ One may consider technology to simply be a tool in the distribution of art works, or the "impresarios" in Becker's terms (1982: 119).

The art world exists as a relationship between individuals, and its true value may be given by those who accept it, but as Becker (1982: 29) so aptly points out “people who cooperate to produce a work of art usually do not decide things afresh. Instead, they rely on earlier agreements now become customary, agreements that have become part of the conventional way of doing things in the art.” How we understand culture and its relation to art, or art and its relation to the individual then, is turned into a whole world of discovery by Becker. The art world perspective is a tool in understanding not only how art is created and accepted, but what it means to be a culturally existing being, part of a collective, producing by way of convention and past understanding. In connection to the over-arching theoretical framework provided by Giddens, the art world is an intricate and well thought out application of the idea of a knowledgeable agent who contends with the duality of structure in an effort to reconstitute, create, or carry on with an already existing structure. We must remember how the art for the tattoo is never created immaculately or without the use of previous structures and systems of influence. This is what enables and constrains us as artists; as tattoo enthusiasts; and as knowledgeable agents.

One of the most influential ideas emphasized in Becker’s work is his way of tearing down understandings of individuality and personal genius. “Works of art, from this point of view, are not products of individual makers, ‘artists’ who possess a rare and special gift. They are, rather, joint products of all the people who cooperate via an art world’s characteristic conventions to bring works like that into existence” (Becker 1982: 35). The art worlds, though “they do not have clear boundaries” work as the systems by which art may be produced and enjoyed, individuality remains only as a social ideal, especially emphasized in the contemporary Western world. This does not mean that art

does not have meaning, rather that it does not have meaning outside of culture or interaction. The tattoo will have multiple and incredibly deep definitions of self for the individual, but the process of becoming a “tattooed individual” (as Sanders calls it) is, in many ways, a result of a history of collective and cultural actions. The art world, in this sense, means that we may account for the structures (and the collective action of subjective individuals which constructed them) which made the agency possible in the art of the tattoo, now existing on the body of the individual. Popular designs and fashions remain as part of the “convention” of the art; meaning and relations bestowed onto the art work are influenced by cultural definitions of art and significance. But the feeling and process is no less real, and is ultimately a line of agency and structure by which the actor may display a mark or a multiplicity of shapes and lines on his/her body.

Art worlds thus allows for an understanding that the structures and conventions that allow choices to be made and facilitated are in this sense as enabling as the idealized individualism which we often find ourselves searching for (the duality of structure). This kind of negotiation between conventions and choice is evident in many artistic works. As Becker observes (1982: 73), “how much the conventional materials constrain an artist depends in part on how monopolistic the market is.” Or else, as others see it, how deep the scope and depth of the institutionalization has formed as an existing and naturalized, objective reality (Berger and Luckmann 1969). While reading works that seem to be directly, or at least partially influenced by Becker’s concepts, it becomes evident that this same interplay between structure and agency takes place and is quite evident in the

production of artistic endeavors.¹⁷ As Judith Adler points out in the introduction to *Artists in Offices*, an ethnography of the institutionalization of arts education.

I have sometimes thought of this work as a kind of dream analysis; the dream, however, whose production, content, and resolution it analyses was constructed by an occupational group rather than by an individual. In attending to this collective dream I have sought to show the manner in which the dreamer's phantasy was structured by the work worlds in which they made their way, the aspect of these worlds which their phantasy illuminates, the social processes which first lulled them into the dream and then forced them back into wakefulness (Adler 1979: XIV).

As a personal account of the strict interplay between varying viewpoints in the minds of artists, and the researcher who studies them, this is an exceptional account of the true cultural aspect of art. Whether one is a tattooist, musician, or painter, there is always a wrestling between convention and creation. This is a distinction which this thesis wishes to minimize because creative meanings can exist only because of, and with the goal of creating more conventions.

The Field of Meaning Production

In many respects this next theory called “field theory” will fit within Giddens’ orthodox consensus category, while as encountered before with Durkheim, Foucault, and Geertz, it still provides necessary insights into the constitution of meaning in society. Pierre Bourdieu, a French intellectual and social theorist, was widely known for many influential works, each one providing useful tools for understanding “the doings of actors who always have some practical knowledge about their world, even if they cannot

¹⁷ Though Adler’s study predates *Art Worlds*, Becker’s earlier work “Art as Collective Action” is cited as influence (Adler 1979: XV).

articulate that knowledge” (Calhoun et al. 2007: 260).¹⁸ Bourdieu’s three concepts of *habitus*, *capital*, and *field* have had a profound effect on social theory and on the quest for understanding different aspects of social life. As Calhoun et al. note (2007: 261), “to understand the dynamic relationship between structure and action, Bourdieu contended, is to enter into a relational analysis of social tastes and practices.” Though clearly inspired by French Structuralist theory and the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Bourdieu often determines “différence” not by class, but by what he calls *distinction*. According to Bourdieu, actors in society conduct an act of *prises de position* (position-taking) by merit of their distinctions, fed through *habitus* and differing amounts of the capital they possess, both economic and social/cultural. The area in which the positions take place, and therefore mediate future endeavors by way of the “rules of the game,” is known as the *field*.

Perhaps inspired by his rugby-playing past (Calhoun 2007: 262), Bourdieu saw the field as a useful way of understanding how people are structured and fit into hierarchies of social positions. It is in the field that their actions become patterned by structure as they follow an objective reality created from established “rules of the game.” The field of sociology, for example, requires someone like myself to have a strict regimen of past learned knowledge and understanding of proper academic style; this forms part of my *habitus*. It also contributes to my cultural capital, and though graduate students may not always have abundant economic capital (which is certainly true in my case), the social capital built and collected, strongly contributes to my placement within the field of the

¹⁸ Bourdieu was said to have had a distaste for being known as just a theorist and also, for what he called “theoretical theory” – that is, work that is more concerned with building abstract systems of categories and concepts than with using them to understand the world (Calhoun et al.: 2007: 260).

discipline. As Bourdieu (1991: 631) commented in his public lecture titled Physical Space, Social Space and Habitus: “agents are distributed in the first dimension according to the overall volume of the different kinds of capital they possess....”

In this same work, Bourdieu rejects the theoretical transformation of the concept of class proposed by Marx and others. “Social classes do not exist, what exists is a social space of differences, in which classes exist in some sense in a state of virtuality, not as something given, but as something to be done” (635). What is important about this statement, especially in terms of a field like art, is how people are organized; how art comes to be created and appreciated occurs not by merit of abstract theoretical categories, but by the way people remain distinctive from others. The position in the field is taken up by *habitus* as well as forms of capital, and thus is a social construction, not a pre-determined necessity.

How art is then produced and received differs dramatically in field theory from the art worlds perspective, and by extension, structuration theory. For Bourdieu, art is not so much a cooperative act of agents working with, and around conventions, but is stipulated almost entirely by a field of practice. Within the field, innovation can occur and new forms of expression can be generated, but this is usually occurring within the pre-existing diameters of allowance for the acceptance of difference; the field is the structure by which action may be performed. Within the field, we see art being produced and accepted by way of “meeting two histories: the history of the positions they (artists and audiences) occupy and the history of their dispositions” (Bourdieu, Calhoun et al. 2007: 299). Which works become known, or appreciated as art, depends also on conflict and differing dispositions by the players of the field.

The state of the power relations in this struggle depends on the overall degree of autonomy possessed by the field, i.e. the extent to which it manages to impose its own norms and sanctions on the whole set of producers, including those who are closest to the dominant pole of the field of power and therefore most responsive to external demands (i.e., the most heteronomous); this degree of autonomy varies considerably from one period and one national tradition to another, and affects the whole structure of the field (Bourdieu, Calhoun et al. 2007: 295).

Also of importance in this quotation is to note how many different fields exist, each one influencing the other and, therefore, influencing the actor's actions within the specific fields of cultural production. To borrow a trick from Bourdieu, art or culture is produced by a history of structures structuring structure, which then, in turn, influences or structures the ways in which art or culture influences the structure and field of art production.¹⁹ Art is indeed still very much a social process, but it is done so strictly within the parameters of the structure of the field, and any deviation from the principles or rules of the game may lead to a lack of recognition or acceptance of the work as art. Furthermore, one must note that as a prerequisite for the appreciation of art production, "high status in the field demands not just talent, or vision, but also a commitment to "art for art's sake" (265).

Place, time, and circumstance – otherwise known as the "setting" of the cultural production – matter quite dramatically in the production of art. The structure of the field can define how art is produced and received and this becomes evident when one looks to specific examples of the power of the field in the process of cultural production. In an article derived from his thesis *Institutional Change in Nineteenth-Century French Music*, Stephen Harold Riggins notes the shift in music institutions in 19th century France, and consequently looks to the structures of the field of influence upon which the shift takes

¹⁹ See the definition of *habitus* found in Calhoun et al.'s collections of Bourdieu's work. "Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures" (278).

place. "From approximately 1800 to 1870 a French composer was obliged to write operatic music if he hoped to have a financially successful career, after 1870 symphonic and chamber music gained social recognition that had previously lacked" (Riggins 1985: 244). Alluding to the same themes of distinction of taste and varying influence of differing fields, hierarchically placed by way of cultural capital, Riggins (1985: 247) notes that this new form of popular music posed a real threat to politicians who were "often obliged to be more involved with the management of lyric theaters than with symphonic and chamber music societies in order to guarantee public order" due to the amount of sensitive political information which can be found in opera librettos. Riggins goes as far as to note that many have viewed opera as an early form of mass media. To understand the importance field can then have, one must look to the fact that the institutionalization of an art form in the shape of symphonic music required much less state involvement and censorship as "instrumental music did not pose as great a threat to social subversiveness because of the vagueness of the message usually conveyed" (Riggins 1985: 247). The music may still be artistic, and beautifully unique but it remained very evidently shaped by differing fields and the rules of the game proposed in tandem between composers and businessmen who controlled the lyric theaters.

In this field perspective, one would note how the practice of tattooing, along with its history of dispositions and tastes has seen a transformation from aristocracy to deviant subcultures to an established capitalist business, but not necessarily in this same linear fashion.²⁰ Understanding the field of cultural production that has influenced the world of

²⁰ "Captain Cook's voyage, which brought tattooing from the South Pacific to England in the late eighteenth century, inaugurating the modern wave of western tattooing, and the tattoo in the west has signified a whole host of

tattooing would require a similar deep and empirical analysis of a rich history of many different opposing categories of influence (foreign-local, deviant-artistic, subordinate-expression, etc.). By using field theory, one may begin to note the true multiplicity of structures that influence the action of the individual in producing culture. Tattooists or tattooees are constantly shaped by the fields they come to inhabit and in which they act out their lives. Understanding why tattooing meant what it was said to have meant in different historical times may be best attributed to the relational attributes the practice had to other opposing fields. For example, Rachael in Chapter 3 who had tattooed a piece of Dali's surrealist art on her arm demonstrates a sign of cultural subversiveness in her ink as we contrast her opinions of the field of feminist literature and of the field of surrealist art. This connection is drawn out as we appreciate how Rachael's habitus, or her stock of personal and social understandings of the world she lives (in this case feminism) draws her to the meanings associated with another field, this time from art history, known as surrealism. Thus this theory, though in some ways directly opposed to the theory of art worlds, is also a useful companion in a theoretical tool-kit for understanding the sociology of tattooing as a unique culturally-influenced and creative art form.

meanings since then. Initially embraced not only by sailors, but also by some European aristocrats, the tattoo eventually became associated with working-class identity and, eventually, deviance and marginality" (Pitts 2003: 5).

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

It is becoming increasingly more likely that you have a tattoo. If this isn't true think about your friends, family members, spouse, or children and how they are, or will be, tattooed. Go out in public, to the mall, the cinema, the park, etc, and you will see ink, covering parts of skin all around you. So why tattoos? Because we learn from others. This is what makes us human. Social interaction is where we constantly negotiate and craft our identities. Tattoos, with their increased focus on professionalism, coded meanings, and almost limitless artistic complexities, have become powerful tools which definitely and permanently influence social interaction. They are indicative of the influence our bodies have on shaping who we are and how we express ourselves. This thesis has presented, explicated, and provided reasons for the necessity of a new understanding of what tattoos mean to the people who don them by positing how tattooing, just like culture and social theory, may be imagined as a historically and conceptually pluralistic endeavor upon which the self builds many different representations of itself.

The strict importance of all theoretical contributions (even those which are seemingly opposed like art world and field of cultural production) and all the deep explorations of tattoos and tattooed individuals, is their ability, when used together, to explain the true multiplicity of layers of meaning and identity any one social/personal practice can have on concepts of the social construction of reality, influencing identity and meaning, and allowing for an understanding of the influence of both structure and agency in creating art. I noted earlier that in Swidler's concept of culture as a tool-kit we may come to understand how people use culture in many different ways and how it can mean many different things at the same time. I quoted Bauman on the same theme who invited

us to “look over the (social) horizon.” I was alluding to what I see as the most valuable contribution sociological reasoning can have on the exploration of thought. It promotes looking at the world through an infinite amount of different layers of social, cultural, and individual production.

Roger and Morris: The Social Peacocks, Élise and Jerry: Familial Hearts and Ink Marks, Rachael and Elle: Gender and Beauty, and the nine other tattooees who have informed my thoughts and understandings, have shown us some of the best examples of the artistic turn for the contemporary-style tattoo. They have taken us to distant places historically, socially, culturally, and personally in their meanings, stories, referencing, and mapping. Theoretically, my sample has proven that whatever the cultural practice the tattoo represents, whatever situation it appears in, is not as important as understanding that its meaning and connection to identity is not a unified, one-dimensional whole. It is a deep construction of a history within a world and field of cultural production. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari urge us to stray from totalities in the process of intellectual inquiry by noting: “we no longer believe in the myth of the existence of fragments that, like pieces of an antique statue, are merely waiting for the last one to be turned up, so that they may all be glued back together to create a unity that is precisely the same as the original unity. We no longer believe in a primordial totality that once existed, or in a final totality that awaits us at some future date” (Deleuze and Guattari 1977: 42). In making use of differing social theories and the stories of my tattooed sample, I hope readers have been encouraged to dig deeper into complex personal/social practices – such as the process of indelibly marking the skin – and more importantly, into studying the uniquely dynamic people behind them. This is what I have tried to encourage in my thesis. The only process I feel that is left to do

is to tell one of my own tattoo stories in order to reflect on how the thesis has changed me and how I have been present in every word, interpretation, and conclusion.

My dad worked for 35 years as a paramedic. He loved to talk about it. He loved to wear his hat, his uniform, and put on his paramedic persona before every shift. He has recently retired and has decided to drive across Canada as a post-retirement adventure. He plans to visit my brother Robby (who I looked up to during all of my youth as the coolest guy I knew) in Ontario and eventually settle in with my sister Heather (who taught me how to write, to study, and helped me countless times with my homework growing up) in Alberta. My family that was once so connected, under the same roof, has now been scattered across a country as wide as Canada. My mom keeps me feeling I still have family close by as she is always so warm and loving, but there is still a constant feeling something is missing. Just before he left in June/2012 I had *the star of life* tattooed on my right arm. To reference and map one last tattoo seems appropriate to conclude this thesis that has become so much a part of me.

The star of life is the symbol for the paramedic and is normally in blue with a snake and saber. It is usually found on the back of the EMS jacket or the ambulance. It is a universal symbol for help, for health, and for the first responder who excels with professionalism, timeliness, and utmost care when it is needed most. I had thought about getting the tattoo for quite some time, deliberating when and where over and over again – a sentiment shared by 100% of my sample for at least one of their tattoos. The overwhelming feeling that I needed it on my skin would arise as I heard my dad continue to listen to his emergency radio scanner even after retired, just to feel still connected to the identity he had perfected over a life course. But what really pushed me to have the mark

etched under my skin was the realization he would be leaving in days and, for the first time in my life, he would be absent for an extended period of time. I am proud to wear this tattoo, I am proud to have studied tattooed people and to have heard their stories, their sorrow, their joy, and their precious memories.

This study was about being a social scientist, studying a population to delve deep into their stories to offer new discourses on tattoos and tattooees; but the “tattooed me” has been interspersed throughout this thesis. In many ways I am new to this world of academia, but I have tried my best to become a sociologist in the most productive way. My influences have come from many sources but the stories of tattooed individuals discussed in this thesis have provided me with a sense of accomplishment in being able to record their truth and proudly make it a part of my own story.

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APPENDIX A PRE-INTERVIEW BRIEF

Tattooed Minds: Expressing the Self through Shapes and Lines

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH

The aim of this research project is to explore the expression of meaning and self-identity through tattoos. The methodology is semi-structured interviews. Please note that there is no one right answer to my questions. I am trying to understand how tattoos may affect your identity. All that counts is your personal opinions, emotions, and experiences which may be varied and sometimes even inconsistent. I also ask questions about your perceptions of how other people react to your tattoos.

This research is undertaken to fulfill the requirements for a Master's degree in sociology at Memorial University. I hope to publish some of the results from this study in social science journals.

Your Participation

You have been asked to participate in this study because you have complex tattoos which I call "contemporary-style tattoos." For that reason I assume you are relatively informed about tattooing practices and meanings. At the end of interviews, I ask respondents to suggest other potential interviewees. Your name may have been given to me in this manner. Your name may also have been suggested by a local tattoo artist. For more information, please read the attached consent form.

Chris Martin

M.A. Candidate

Department of Sociology, Memorial University St. John's, NL, A1C 5S7

APPENDIX B

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW, MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY

Title: *Tattooed Minds: Expressing the Self through Shapes and Lines*

Contact information for the Researcher:

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Professor

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Purpose of the research. The purpose of the study is to help scholars and researchers better understand the experiences of becoming tattooed, and more importantly, provide a better understanding of the deep and varied meanings tattoos can have in contributing to self-identity and social identity.

What is involved in participating? I would like to ask you a series of open-ended questions. The interview may take about an hour to complete. Please note that your participation is completely voluntary. You may decline to answer any questions or terminate the interview at any time. Ideally, I would like to record the interview so that it can be transcribed. These recordings will be maintained in a secure environment. Digital interview data such as tape recordings and typed transcriptions will be password-protected

on my personal computer and will only be accessible by me. Any physical data created such as interview notes and printed interview data will be stored under lock and key in my personal filing cabinet. If, for any reason, you decide to terminate the interview/your participation as a respondent after our interview, your responses will automatically be erased and deleted and will not be used in my research project. All data recorded in this research will be kept for a maximum of five years in accordance with Memorial University's retention policy. After this time period all data will be destroyed. You may agree to answer my questions but refuse to have the interview recorded. As long as I can take notes during the interview, it is not absolutely necessary that the interview be recorded.

I will be using pseudonyms rather than names in the research. I do so in the interest of confidentiality and anonymity. I will also be sure to treat any sensitive material confidentially. If you desire to have any specific remarks, details, or stories kept out of the final study, I will honour your wishes.

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with the ethics policy of Memorial University. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at (709) 864-2861.

Consent: I have read Appendix A and B and agree to participate in this study.
I grant permission to record this interview: Yes _____ No _____

Interviewee's Name _____

Interviewee's Signature _____

Researcher's Name _____

Researcher's Signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX C

Interview Schedule

Question 1.

Could you please describe your tattoo(s) to me?

Question 1.a

What kind of meanings do you place on your tattoo(s)?

Question 2.

When and where did you get your first tattoo?

Question 3.

How often do you describe your tattoo(s) to other people?

Question 3.a

What kind of reactions to your tattoo(s) do you get from other people?

Question 3.b

Has this changed any of the ways you feel about your tattoo(s)?

Question 4.

Do you alter your descriptions while dealing with different people?

Question 5.

Have you ever hidden your tattoo(s) for any reason?

Question 6.

Have you ever purposefully displayed your tattoo(s) for any reason?

Question 7.

Do you often see yourself as a tattooed person?

Question 8.

Do you recall ever regretting the tattoo(s)?

Question 9.

Do you think you will always feel the same about your tattoo(s)?

Question 10.

Do you think that tattoos are becoming more accepted/popular in contemporary St. John's Culture?

Question 11.

Is it possible to describe a general reaction to your tattoo(s) which is basically the same for all groups of people?

Question 12.

Do you plan on getting any more tattoos in the future?

Question 13.

How would you describe the service while receiving your tattoo(s)?

Question 14.

Is your tattoo a unique design or a more conventional piece?

Question 15.

Was there a specific motivation for getting the piece?

Question 16.

Do you consider yourself artistic, or have any interest in the arts?

Question 17.

Could you please look at this picture (tattoo of a swallow bird) and describe what meanings it has?

Question 17.a

What kind of meanings does this picture have? (tattoo of a nautical star)

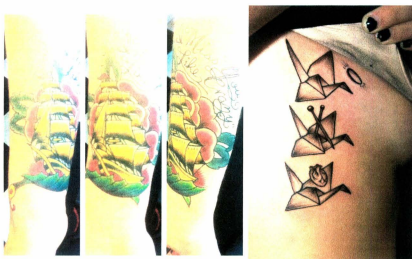
Question 17.b

And what about this one? (tattoo of a koi fish)

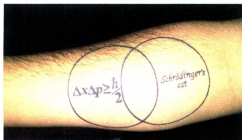
APPENDIX D

Selection of pictures of contemporary-style tattoos from other research participants not featured in case studies of Chapter 3.

Sadie



Karl



Crystal

