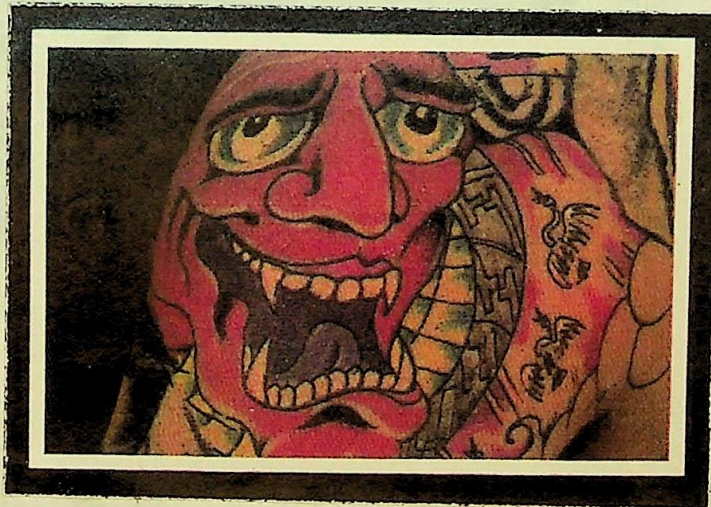

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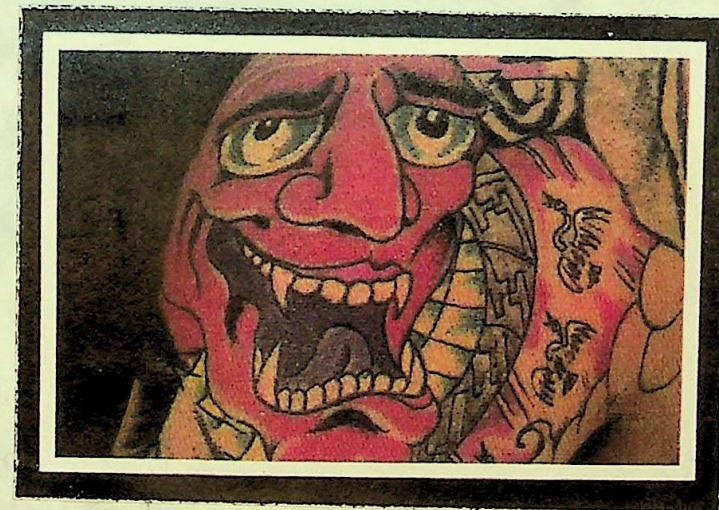
M U R R A Y S C A L L O N

4th YEAR THESIS

FOR

DR. NICOLA GORDON BOWE

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A CONSIDERATION OF THE EVOLUTION OF SYMBOLISM OF TATTOO,
WITH PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO ITS SOCIAL RELEVANCE.

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TATTOOED

by William Planner

On his arm he wears
Diagrams he chose,
A snake inside a shield,
A dagger in a rose,

And the muscle playing
Under the skin
Makes rose writhe
and skull grin.

He is one who acts his dreams
And these emblems are a clue
To the wishes in his blood
And what they make him do.

These signs are truer
than the wearer knows;
the blade vibrates
In the vulnerable rose,

Anthems bend and carmine curly
petals kiss the plunging steel,
Dusty with essential gold,
Close in upon the thing they feel,

Mostly once in body sockets
Eyeballs hinted at a soul,
In the deaths head now a livehead,
fills a different role;

Venomous resilience sliding
In the empty cave of thought,
Call it instinct ousting reason,
or a reptile's indoor sport.

The flower's pangs, the snake exploring
The skull, the violating knife,
Owe the active and the passive
Aspects of his life

Who is at home with death.
More than he guesses;
The rose will die, and a skull
gives back no caresses.



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INTRODUCTION

I think we all more or less know what exactly a tattoo is, but even still let the necessary definition be stated:

"Permanent marks or designs made on the body by the introduction of pigment through ruptures in the skin".

Page 841 - Encyclopaedia Britannica inc. 1978.

The ritual of tattooing, for that is what it is, has been part of human behaviour for many hundreds of years; however, the motivations for having a tattoo done are enigmatic and, like so many aspects of human behavior, may be vested in the subconscious; besides which motivations have changed over the centuries along with social customs and pressures.

To draw up a list of some of the possible motives for tattooing might help us to realise the complexity of influences that may have been operating in any individual case at any given time:

1. To camouflage the body when hunting.
2. To ensure an easy passage through difficult phases in life, such as puberty.
3. To prevent disease and injury and acquire fertility.
4. To terrorise the enemy in the field of battle.
5. To make the body sexually interesting.
6. To achieve personal or group identity.
7. To express sentiment.
8. To make money.

With the passage of time, different motives for tattooing and indeed social attitudes towards tattooing take hold, each leaving its own indelible mark on the history of tattoo itself. It is this very story that I wish to highlight in this written work; to try and trace the story through the past in order to evaluate its position in the present.



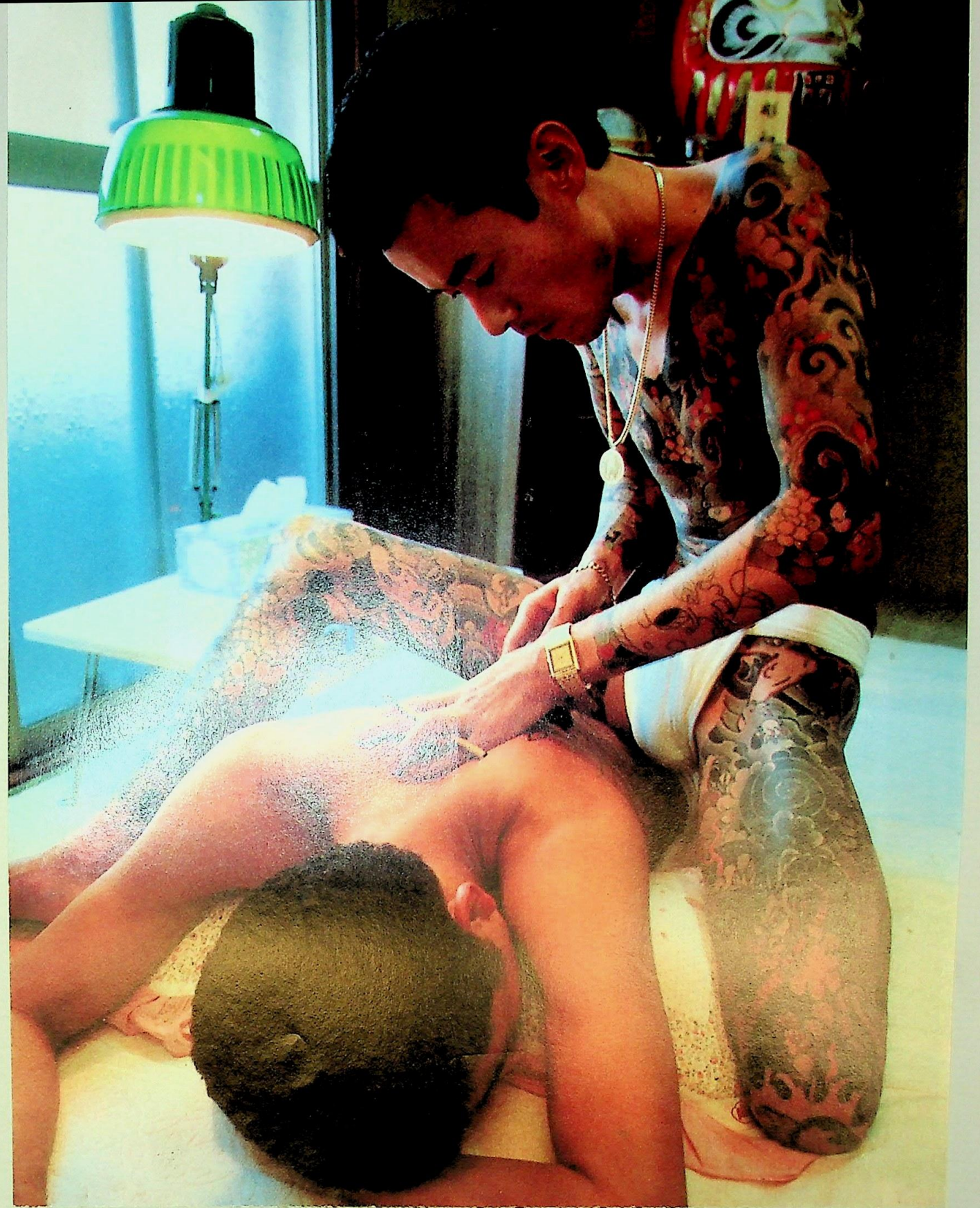
Techniques naturally have varied in the past and still do, but to a much lesser extent, for as society becomes international, so tattooing is increasingly becoming standardised the world over, despite reluctance to abandon traditional methods amongst some of the more primitive societies.

"The early European tattooists used either a single needle or a group of needles fastened to a piece of wood, and the pigment was then pricked into the skin manually. The Japanese used needles fastened to sticks and injected the pigment by a series of rapid jabs. In the South Seas tattoos were made with small adzes, chisels or serrated combs which were struck with a stick or mallet, while the Maoris incised their tattoos into the skin. The technique changed once they obtained needles from Europeans".

Richter. S. - "Tattoo" 1985 London Quartet Books Ltd, P.P. 14

Originally there were four basic types of primitive cutting or pricking manoeuvres followed by the rubbing in of the chosen dye. Burning was also used, whereby the instrument used to introduce the pigment was fired to red heat. This method was certainly used by the Greeks for the branding of criminals.

A more bizarre European practice of this nature involved the use of explosive where a small quantity of gunpowder was positioned on the spot where the design was to be traced and was then exploded. It is hardly unreasonable to assume that a very accurate design would have been difficult to achieve using this technique. The two other major techniques were the drawing of soot-covered threads through the skin with needles,



Some of the Japanese Tattooists still practice the more traditional methods of tattooing.
(National Geographic - Vol. 170, No. 5, November 1986).

as used by Greenland Eskimos and, finally, the use of sharp-pointed instruments dipped in a selected dye and then driven below the upper surface of the skin. Various types of sharp objects were used and indeed various types of dyes but this particular technique seems to have been the most widespread method and moreover it is from this technique that modern tattooing methods have developed.

Pigments have varied over the centuries along with the inevitable development of more vibrant colours and more permanent qualities. Among the ancients, however, as Michel Thezov mentions in his book, "The Painted Body", colour seems to have been always, or nearly always, black, which is perhaps surprising when one considers that red ochre was used so much in body painting. The black colouring matter has nearly always been carbon in some form or other. It isn't known exactly when colours first began to be used, but what is known is that this side of the Art seems to have been largely developed by the Japanese over the past two hundred years. Now, every part of the spectrum can be reproduced in the skin.

The actual process of tattooing can be easily divided into two main stages, those of outline and infill. First, with a single needle if the design is complicated, the tattooist dips the tip of the needles into the required pigment, which in Western countries is usually black; the current activator is switched on and the needle is run over the skin, replenishing the ink from time to time. In this manner an outline of the proposed finished work is established.



Artist, George Bone of London, tattoos the outline of a Japanese style design on the back of Peter Mead, Harrow Weald. (Ritcher, Stephen, 1985) P.P. 55

"With the introduction of the electric tattoo machine the art of tattooing has reached a new level, raised the aesthetic standard, shortened the procedure for the customer and facilitated the work of the tattooist. In the hands of a skilled practitioner, it is possible to tattoo almost any design; different needle clusters allow for different thickness of line and various types of shading to be carried out, thus making it possible for today's artists to carry out works of art that had not previously been considered possible."

Richter S., 1985. Quarter Books Ltd - London. P.P. 14-15

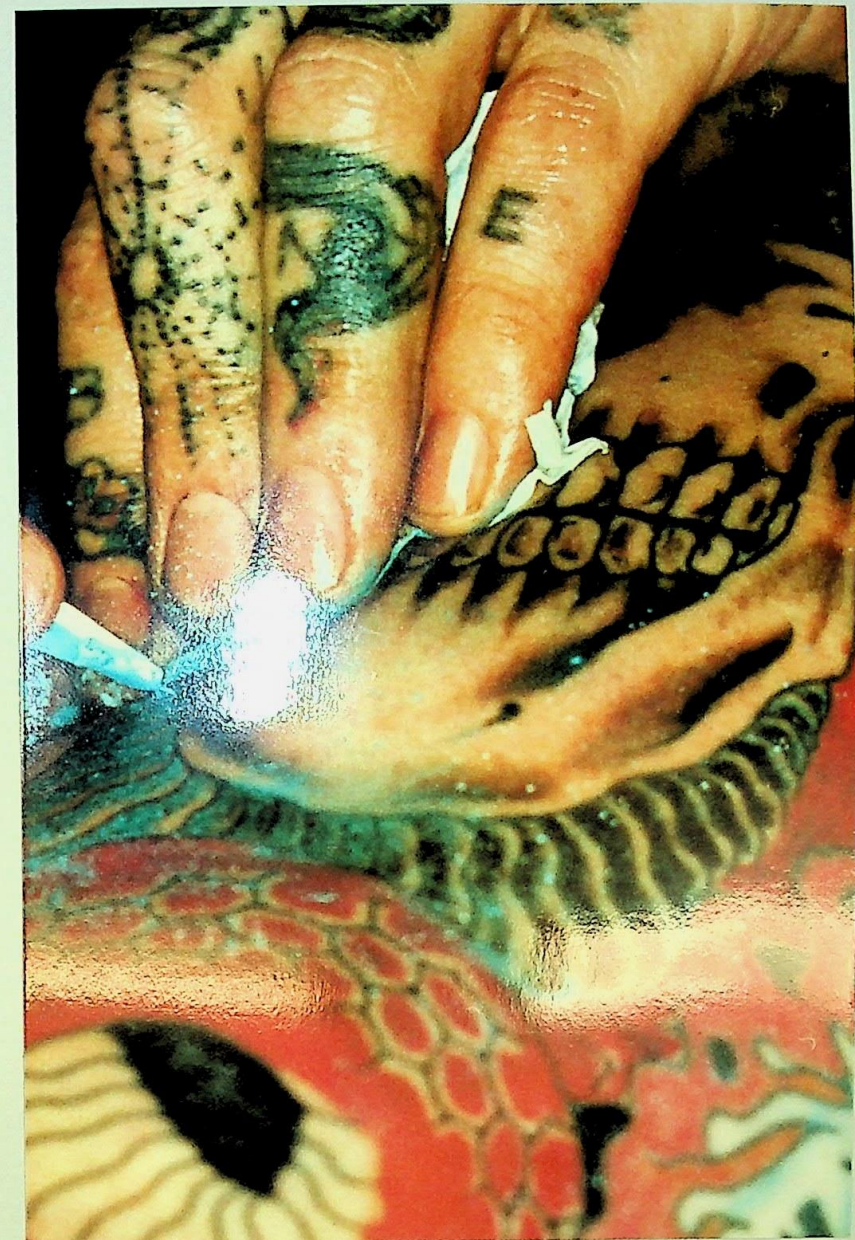
The traditional Japanese tattooist abhors the electric needle which to him degrades the art, and persists with the age old technique handed down over the years. A bamboo stick with two very fine needles attached is used for the initial outline, but then for the infill in colour, a thirty-needle stick is employed. This is jabbed in and out of the skin at a rate of between 90 and 120 strokes per minute, with an angle of entry of approximately 25 degrees from the vertical. Excess pigment is wiped away from time to time with a damp cloth before more is applied with a small brush.

The reaction to the tattooing process varies greatly from person to person, depending on the degree of bone in proximity to the area being tattooed and the sensitivity of the skin surface in that region. As in massage, reaction varies tremendously from individual to individual, from bland acceptance of same, to contorted grimaces from others; from others still, jerks and wriggles of anguish, the latter hardly calculated to ease the tattooists task.

During the first stage of tattooing great skill must be exercised since the tattooist, for most of the operation, can

not actually see the area of skin that he is working on; the reason for this being, that as the artist is working, the pigment, which is only lying on the needles and not enclosed in the shaft of the instrument, spreads over the skin's surface, tending to obliterate the design ahead of the needles. It is here that the skill of the tattooist is all important.

The first stage completed, the second stage commences; that of filling in with various chosen colours. For this, multiple needles are use, anything up to a dozen. Curiously, if tattooing is painful, then this is the least painful stage. Maybe the principle of the bed of nails could be applied here. Once the filling-in process is completed, the tattooed area is treated with an antiseptic cream and dressed. By now the area is distinctly sore and sensitive to touch; however this sensation lessens daily until the area is totally recovered.



The infill process in progress; note the tattooists own hand.
(Ritcher, Stephen, 1985) P.P. 57

CHAPTER NO. 2

THE SPREAD OF TATTOO

There is some evidence that tattooing was carried out at least as long ago as the Ice Age, ie. prior to 8000 B.C. In caves and rock strata and many parts of the world, including France, Portugal, Romania and Scandinavia, bowls have been discovered which show traces of black and red pigments together with sharp pointed flints and needles, along with statuettes bearing marks strongly suggestive of tattoos.

Whether tattooing developed independently at different scattered points over the globe, or was spread by a migration of culture, as many anthropologists maintain, remains to be seen. However, it can be said that one of the main reasons why concrete evidence of tattooing can not be found lies in the fact that preserved skins are not scattered around the globe for all to see. Fortunately, the Egyptians, through their excellent techniques of mummification, have provided direct evidence that tattooing was undoubtedly carried out four thousand years ago. In all likelihood, the practice then spread from Egypt to the countries bordering it and the Mediterranean, as did other customs and other factors of culture.

The discovery in 1949 of the preserved tattooed body of a Scythian chief in the Pasyryk mound at Altai in the Soviet Union, has been an immense help in piecing together the jigsaw. The body is believed to be about two thousand years old, and its preservation was due not to mummification but to the very low temperature of the soil in which it was buried. The complex designs representing animals, birds and fish bear no resemblance to the simple marks on the Egyptian mummies.

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Did the practice gradually spread eastwards? As early as 2000 B.C. it existed in Southern Asia, where it was adopted

first by the Shans in Eastern Burma, and later by the Burmese and finally by the Indians, who made elaborate use of tattooing in their rituals.

Tattooing undoubtedly existed in China in the early Chan Dynasty (100-300 B.C.) for there are references to "tattooed Barbarians" in 842 B.C. South of the Yangtse where the Wu tribes indulged in the practice on the bizarre excuse of frightening off dangerous fish with their polychromatic decorations. Yet the art gradually died out in China. By the thirteenth century A.D. it seems that tattooing was confined to the branding of criminals.

A flourishing tradition of tattooing existed in Polynesia, while in New Zealand there developed the unique and specialised art known as Moko. Tattooing was certainly practised by the Incas, Mayas and Aztecs in Central and South America. Peru has also come up with evidence of tattooing due to excavations which unearthed pieces of skin tattooed with lines, dots and symbols representing sums and stars.

The Ancient Britons were known to have coloured their skin with woad which resulted in a blue colouring. Some idea of the effect can be gained from the sixteenth century paintings by John White. Not only the Britons but also the Iberians, Gauls, Goths, Teutons and Scots were all addicted to this practice; Germanic and Icelandic cultures, on the other hand, seem to have been excluded from the practices of tattooing, but this may simply be as a result of the lack of any reference to it in the literature of either culture.

The early Christians were also known to have indulged quite frequently in this Eastern Mediterranean cult and were known to have tattooed emblems in much the same way as today's teenagers, to show that they belonged to the same gang.

CHAPTER NO. 1
Surprised as the Romans were at first by the cult of tattooing, it appealed to the legionaries and the fashion spread so rapidly as to force the authorities to impose a curb. Nevertheless, despite official disfavour, the craze caught on and tattooing flourished in the centuries that followed. Emperor Constantine, who declared Christianity as the official religion of the Empire, forbade facial tattooing on the grounds that it disfigured 'that fashioned in God's image'. (Ref. no 1)

Centuries later, in 787 A.D., Pope Hadrian I specifically banned the practice altogether, and his successors continued to pronounce against it. This probably accounts for the gradual discontinuation of ornamental tattooing in Europe in the Middle Ages.

One of the few reports of tattooing in the Middle Ages emanates from Asia via the pen of Marco Polo (1250-1324), as he was obviously fascinated by the Yuman men with dark bands around their arms and legs. (Ref. no 2)

His description of how the marks were made is probably the earliest account of tattooing technique and shows that, apart from the development of the electric needle, the method has not changed radically since the thirteenth century. Furthermore, he noted that the men and women who exhibited the greatest profusion of tattoos were regarded as the most handsome.

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Following the discovery of America by Columbus in 1492, various recordings of the strange things to be seen in the New World flooded back to Europe. However the actual development of the practice of tattooing in the New World itself since our discovery of it is unclear. The relative importance of native tattooing in the development of the American practice, as compared with the Oriental influences imported by a century of sailors, is not discernible to any great extent.

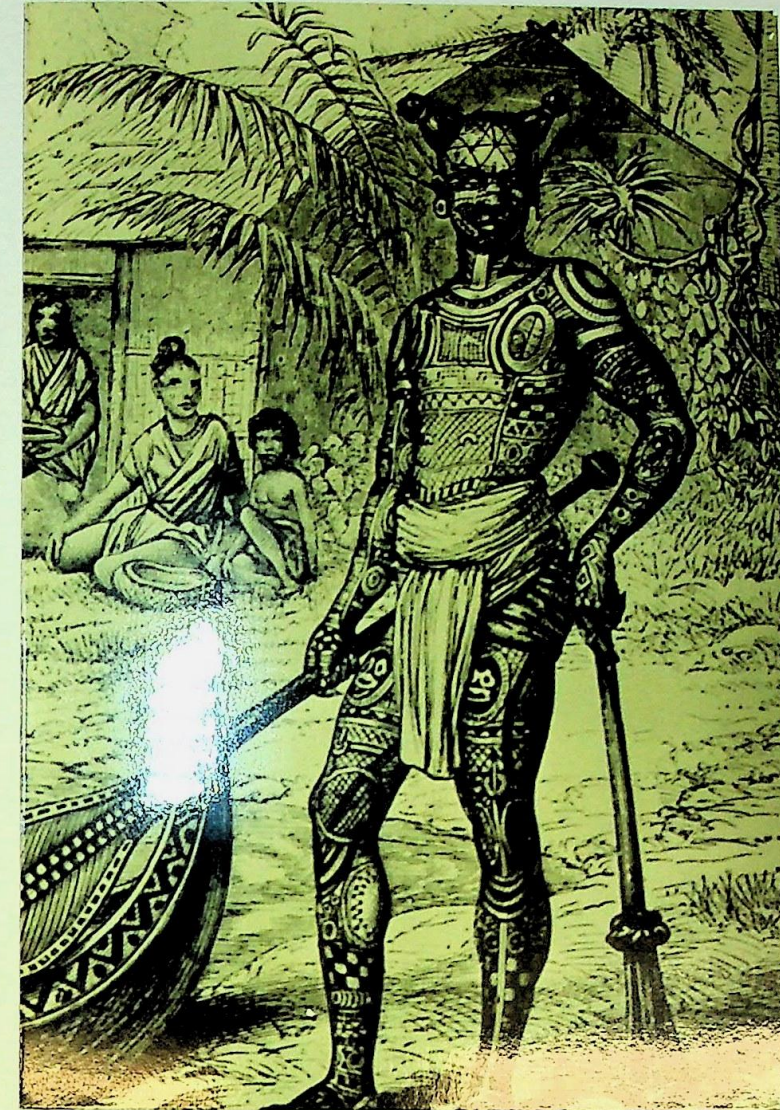
Ironically, it was their Lordships of the Admiralty Board who were responsible for the spectacular popularity of tattooing in the navies of the world and for its gradual adoption by Western Society. By commissioning the voyages of Captain Cook in the mid-eighteenth century they unwittingly fostered that trend that has now become so traditional to sailors. Thus the year 1769 and Captain James Cook can be hailed as all important factors in the history of the Art of tattooing.

It is through the constant writings and drawings of Joseph Banks, appointed naturalist and historian to The Endeavour in 1769, that we learn the most about Cook's voyages, with reports of the types and frequency of tattoo markings that they experienced on their voyage. Throughout his accounts, Banks reiterates the obvious levels of pain endured during a ritual tattooing, and he was mystified by whatever induced these people to suffer such pain, for the marking was common to all.

Both Cook and Banks returned to the South Pacific and as well as providing further written material on the subject, actually brought home with them in 1774 a tattooed native called Omai, who was exhibited throughout England. Banks seemed to have made no attempt to discern the motives behind tattooing in the



A 1493 Italian woodcut shows Columbus reaching the New World.
(National Geographic, VOL- 107, No. 5 November 1986).



This is the type of spectacle which greeted Captain Cook and Joseph Banks on their voyages of discovery.
(The Body Decorated - Ebin. V.)

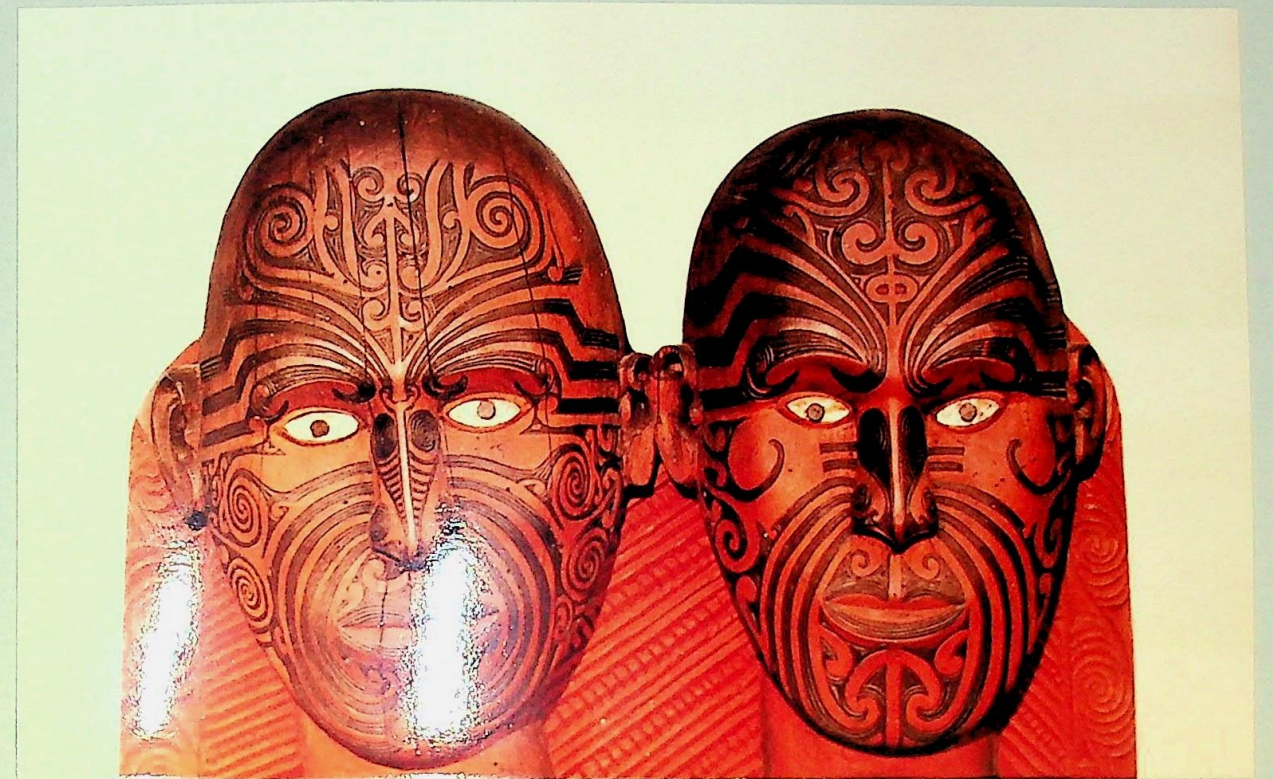
South Seas. He was obviously baffled by the apparent stupidity of the practice. He was told that some of the marks had significations, but what these were Banks never discovered.

One specific area of tattoo which I mentioned earlier and which needs special attention is that known as "Moko". Its origins, particularly as facial decoration, remain obscure but visual evidence is still to be found amongst the Maori Indians who practiced Moko to a great extent. The motives for Moko remains unclear, although it is thought that the marks rendered a sort of agelessness to the bearer, and also indicated the badge of distinction between chief and slave.

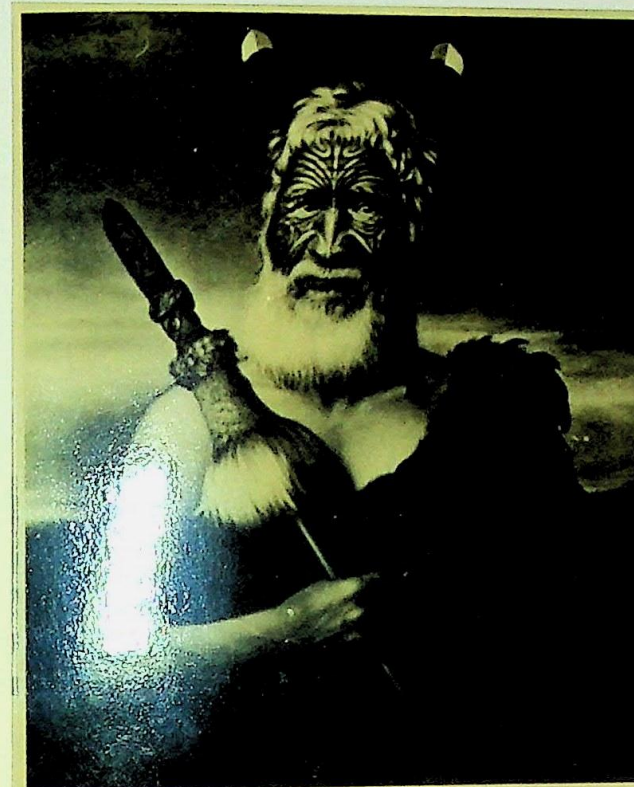
The difference between Moko and other types of tattoo lies in its linear quality consisting of a series of spirals and dots which comprise an abstract pattern symbolising various personal and cultural attributes of the wearer. Generally some of the other forms of tattoo were merely pictorial and didn't contain the same level of social commentary that Moko did. It is in this very abstraction that we find its fascination today.

Indeed Moko might well have been an extension of battle paint, as it was noted that chiefs were delighted to show off their body tattooing. It was also noted that to have a fine tattooed face was the great ambition among Maori men both to render themselves more attractive to women and conspicuous at war.

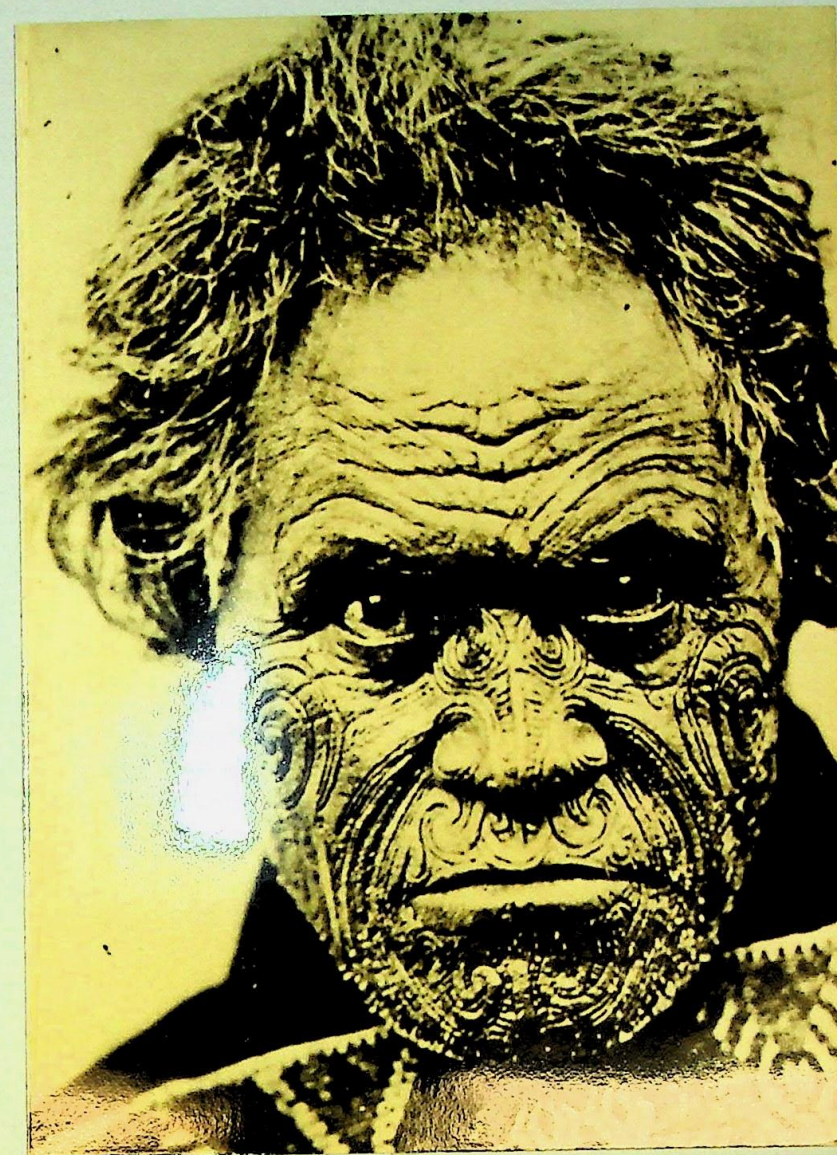
Amongst the Maori, if killed by the enemy, the heads of the untattooed were treated with indignity and kicked to one side, while those conspicuous with their beautiful Moko were carefully cut off and preserved, all of which was highly gratifying to the survivors and the spirits of their late possessor. What's more, a man unmarked with Moko was regarded as a nobody and often called papatea, meaning "plain-face".



High relief wood carving depicted the heads of two Maori Chiefs, decorated with Moko, carved in 1899 by Ratoiti. (Thezov, Michel, 1984) P.P. 57



Painting of a Maori Chief with Moko facial decoration.
(Skin Deep; R. Scutt, C. Gotch) P.P. 35



It is only with the aid of photography that we appreciate the texture that Moko created on the skin, unlike ordinary tattoo. This Maori leader was call Ranperaha.
(The body decorated - Ebin. V.) Fig. 91

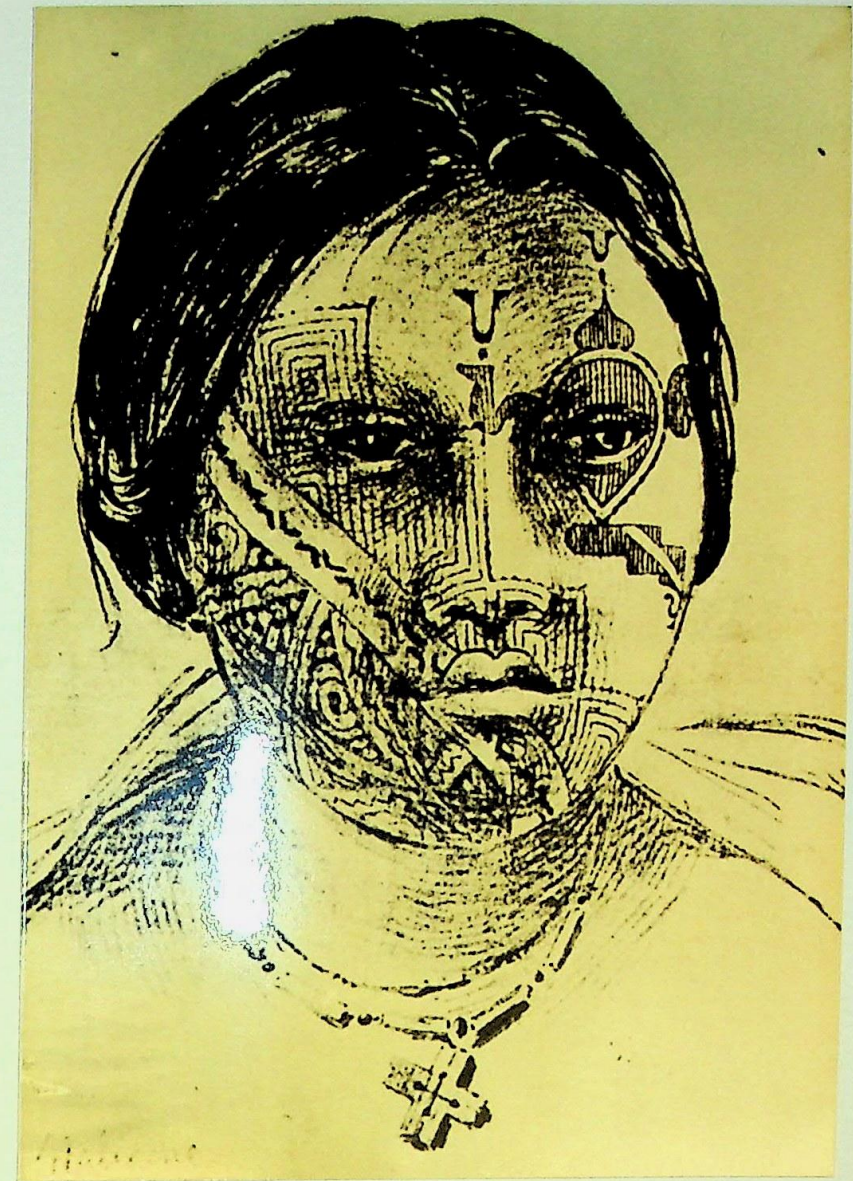
Generally, in women, Moko was mainly restricted to the lips and chin area, and as the Moko tradition died out amongst men, the women clung on to this facial make-up at least into the early part of this century.

The taking of tattooed heads was a practice which emanated from times of war when the head would be dried and preserved after death by enbalming - a practice maintained not only by the family in an attempt to keep alive the memory of the dead, but also by the conquerer in times of war.

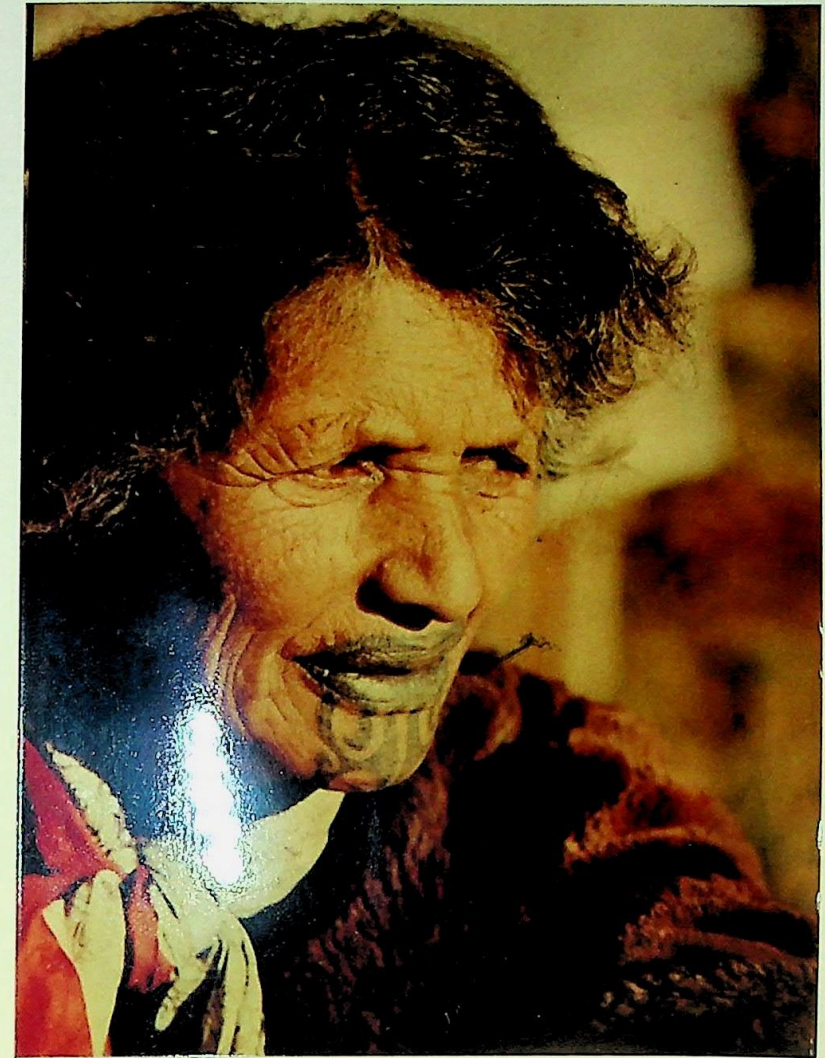
It wasn't long before the European Market placed quite a high financial price on Moko heads and it was in 1770 that the first head was bought by Sir Joseph Banks, much to the reluctance of the natives who could not be induced to part with another at the time. This resistance disappeared all too soon when traders found that there was a demand at home for tattooed heads, and museums and private collectors were prepared to pay a high price for good specimens.

Soon dealers began to look for good heads on living specimens, stating that the standard of Moko on the dried heads on offer didn't reflect the skill of the artists involved. Once it became evident that the trade of heads had reached horrific proportions, an act was passed which made such dealings illegal.

Once a tattooed head had lost its commercial value, and with the arrival of the missionaries, Moko started to decline. It was soon appreciated that any person coming to live at a Mission no longer submitted themselves to the operation; and when the Maori King, Tawhiao, died in 1894 at the age of seventy the last really fine example of Moko was lost to the world.

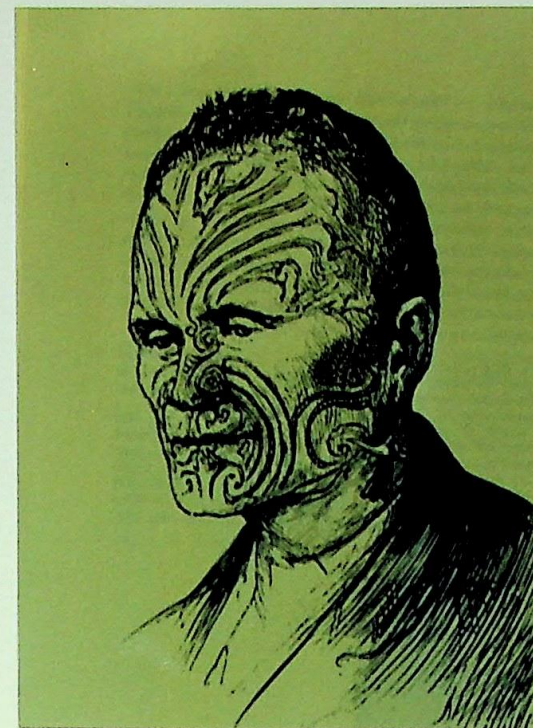


Engraving of an intricately tattooed Cadaveo woman from Brazil.
The asymmetrical design heightens the elements of the
mysterious in the tattoo pattern.
(The Body Decorated - (Ebin. V) Fig. 86



Despite interference from missionaries, some Maori women still retain a tattoo around their mouths, they believe it keeps them young and prevents the skin from shrivelling.
(The Body Redecorated - Ebin, V) Fig. 83

1



2



Figure 1

The Maori King King, Tawhiao.

Maori facial tattoos were so distinctive and varied that chiefs would draw them at the foot of European Treaties in place of their signatures.

(Skin deep, R. Scutt and C. Gotch) P.P. 36

Figure 2

Two examples of the preserved heads, decorated with Moko tattooing which were of such value to traders and collectors alike.

(Skin deep, R. Scutt and C. Gotch) P.P. 33

"George Weale was a boy of twelve in 1829 and was forcibly tattooed on the face by two young London medical students called Godwin and Callous. This outrage was committed shortly after the arrival in Britain of John Rutherford, complete with his Moko markings. The two students thought it would be rather amusing to pretend to to their friends that Weale was one of those "Maori Savages". They were fined 5.S. (25p) for the assault and ordered to pay the boy £5 in compensation".

Burchett - Memoirs of a tattooist - P.19.

INFLUENCES OF THE ORIENT

Neither the reasons for the persistence of the practice nor the motives for being tattooed are clear. Tattooing appears to have a connection with headhunting for the Ibans, in that boys were tattooed with tribal patterns on neck and shoulders as soon as they were old enough to go marauding, yet only those Ibans who had brought back a head were allowed to be tattooed on the hands. These were objects of admiration even after headhunting was officially discouraged around 1930.

Today, however, hand tattoos are rare and exist only as the prerogative of the ancients. Apart from the common throat tattoo, originally a battle ornamentation acquired as part of a puberty initiation, each Iban group displays its own conventional design, each different yet limited in variety, these may well have been tribal identification marks.

Other arguments about these tattoos are that they were purely fanciful and were probably conjured up by an Iban with an acute sense of humour, the odds being that if an Iban were to leave the country they would return with other styles of tattoos characteristic of where they were, and invest them with a significance derived from tribal belief or custom.

The location of a tattoo often indicated a time element, in that a small band or vertical stripe on the fingers of a pre-pubescent girl signified the intention to complete a design when her limbs were mature in size. The feet are next to be so treated but the full design was always delayed until after menstruation commenced and even then would take months to complete, due to interruptions for Communal duties. The tattooing of women was done strictly by women. The art is not necessarily hereditary, but tended to be so because the

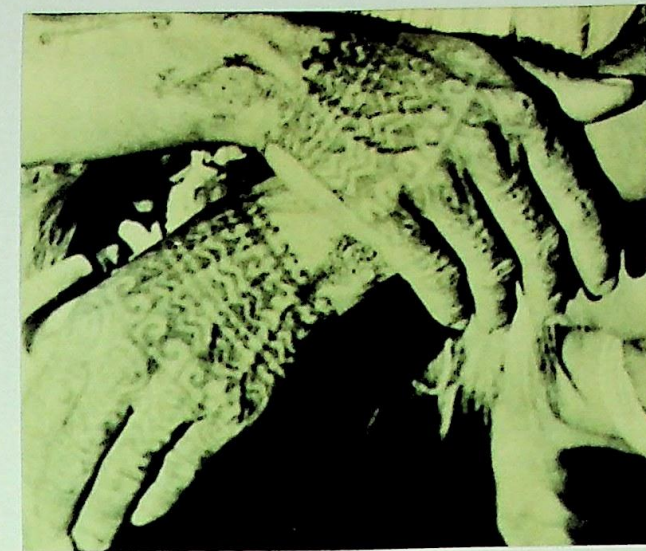
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1



2



Figure 1

Iban indian hand tattoos. In the Iban tribe, hand tattoos were worn by those warriors who were particularly valliant in battle.

(Skin Deep - R. Scutt and C. Gotch) P.P. 43

Figure 2

Iban leg tattoos. Rajang River, Sarawak, Borneo.

(Ritual and Seduction) Charles and Jasette Cenors) P.P. 33



Tattooed Shorts, Samoa Islands
(Ritual and Seduction) Charles and Jasette Cenars) P.P. 35

daughter of the artist usually inherited her mother's equipment.

Just as Western art has been vitally affected and influenced since the first Japanese prints were reproduced towards the end of the last century, so to a lesser degree Japanese tattooing had injected Western practice, or so one would like to think, with a delicacy of line and curvilinear grace lacking hitherto.

In Japan girls alone were tattooed, usually around the mouth or the back of the hands, carried out in three stages between puberty and nubility, the final stage involved more elaborate designs added on the upper back or arms. Superstition was the primary motive for being tattooed and it was thought that untattooed women would be forcibly marked after death by the devil with a vast sword. So firm were these beliefs that untattooed women were even excluded from attending formal banquets.

Tattoos were deemed to ward off the demons of menstruation, to ensure good health in this life, and a happy sojourn in the one hereafter. Faded tattoos were considered the cause of incipient blindness in old age and thus were refreshed from time to time.

In due course superstition was superseded as a motive by the desire for ornament, much as make-up is used today.

The precise historical sequence leading up to contemporary tattooing in Japan is far from clear, although it was probably imported by the Chinese. Although the Chinese had regarded the practice of tattoo as a barbarous custom, evidence of early tattooing has, as in other countries, been found on clay dolls that have been dug up in various parts of the country. Although Japanese nobility was known to have had tattoos, it is known that a certain element of denial prevailed; maintaining



Japanese style tattooing - Sandi Fellman - 1983.
(The hidden image) Peter Weirmair P.O. 158

that they were not in fact tattoos but hereditary birthmarks; the inference being that they were supernatural. There is little question in fact that they were tattoos. Why the pretence?

The clue lies in the association of tattoos with brand marks on criminals for, in the fifth century A.D., Emperor Ritschu condemned two traitors to death, but commuted the sentence to one to having face and arms tattooed, thus the initiation of the Custom of Mesaku. Two centuries later this punishment was abolished, only to be reinstated in the thirteenth century, and by the Seventeenth it was widely practised. It largely replaced a common sentence of the loss of a nose or ear, and, whilst more humane, obviously did great disservice to tattooing as decoration. The greater the number of convictions the more tattoos, but they were of the simplest form, often being merely a black line, usually on the upper limbs, certain variations, however, indicated precisely the nature of the offence. Small wonder then that the temptation to confuse, embellish or cover the stigma with more ornate patterns arose. Consequently tattooing became synonymous with the under-world fraternity and, to many, still is.

Likewise, from the seventeenth century onwards in Japan, prostitutes took to acquiring specific tattoos, and these can still be seen today. These markings took on many different forms, some little more than simple amateur effects. Sometimes sexual symbolism was employed as with a peach for feminine genitalia, or gun, boot or banana for the male equivalent.

Even when these aspects of Japanese tattoo are taken into account, it still cannot be too strongly stressed that traditional Japanese tattooing differs from any other modern tattooing in that the whole pattern is decided before the start of the operation, so that the end product covers the canvas as a harmonious work of Art; very different from the disconnected

graffiti adorning the limbs or trunk of the average sailor or Westerner. Whether one is appalled by the use of the skin for this type of artistry or not, one cannot but marvel at the workmanship involved. In all societies who have produced high levels of imagination and workmanship in tattoo the Nipple or Navel, for example, provide not so much an opportunity for humour, as with Western sailors, but are used as an essential part of design. Thus these provide emphasis for the centre of a flower, the eye of a dragon, or even the genitals of a female nude.

Due to the aura of criminality already mentioned, tattooed men belong mostly, but not exclusively, to the lower strata of society. But, as standards improved, the practice assumed a mantle of respectability. In due course the fashion spread to the aristocracy, a sequence of events to be repeated shortly after in the Western world.

Soon after the Emperor Meiji took power in 1868, new regulations made tattooing illegal, partly on the grounds that defacement of the body was against the teachings of Confucius, much the same as in papal edicts and bible teachings,

"Ye shall not shave the corners of your beard round, neither shall you mutilate the corners of your beard. And cuttings for a dead person (for a soul) shall ye not make in your flesh, nor put any tattoo writing upon you".

(Liviticus; 19 : 27-28).

and partly because it was considered a barbaric custom which humiliated Japan in the eyes of Europe. This law applied only to the Japanese themselves, and not to visitors from other lands. But tattoo artists were concerned for their trade until Europe came to the rescue in the shape of two young English

princes who visited Japan in 1881, and who, learning that globe trotters had sometimes managed to engage a tattooist's services, did the like with excellent effect. George V, as Prince George, Duke of York together with his brother Prince Albert, Prince of Clarence both had dragons tattooed on their arms, much to their later embarrassment. From that time forward, no serious effort has been made to interfere with the Japanese tattooer's art.

CHAPTER NO. 5

TATTOO AND COMMERCE

If Cook's voyages were the tinder that sparked off interest in tattooing in the West, the United States, by penetrating Japan during the war, forcing the latter to participate in world affairs, actuated the wind that fanned the flame. Since both events were effected by navies it is not unfair to maintain that tattooing in the Western world has been, so to speak, sponsored by the sailor. The very mobility of the sailor provided the impetus required for habit and tradition for form, and it is ironic that the modern Briton, Pict and Scot should have been principally responsible for the resuscitation of body decoration. Contact with the Orient provided the combustible element to stimulate interest in tattoos and tattooing.

But, it was in America, rather than Europe, that this interest grew to such an extent that it became clear that there was a living to be made in the pricking business. Around 1880, in New York, Samuel O'Reilly designed the first electric tattooing machine, later to be patented in Britain in 1891 by his cousin, Tom Riley. O'Reilly cultivated a business in New York, opening shops on Broadway and the Bowery.

Parallel with the rise of the tattoo practitioners was the heyday of the Circus. Once again it was in America that the commercial possibilities of tattoos were exploited to the full. They soon proved to be a sure box office draw and this in turn created business for the professional tattooist. There can be little or no doubt that the American tattooist flourished largely because of war and show business.

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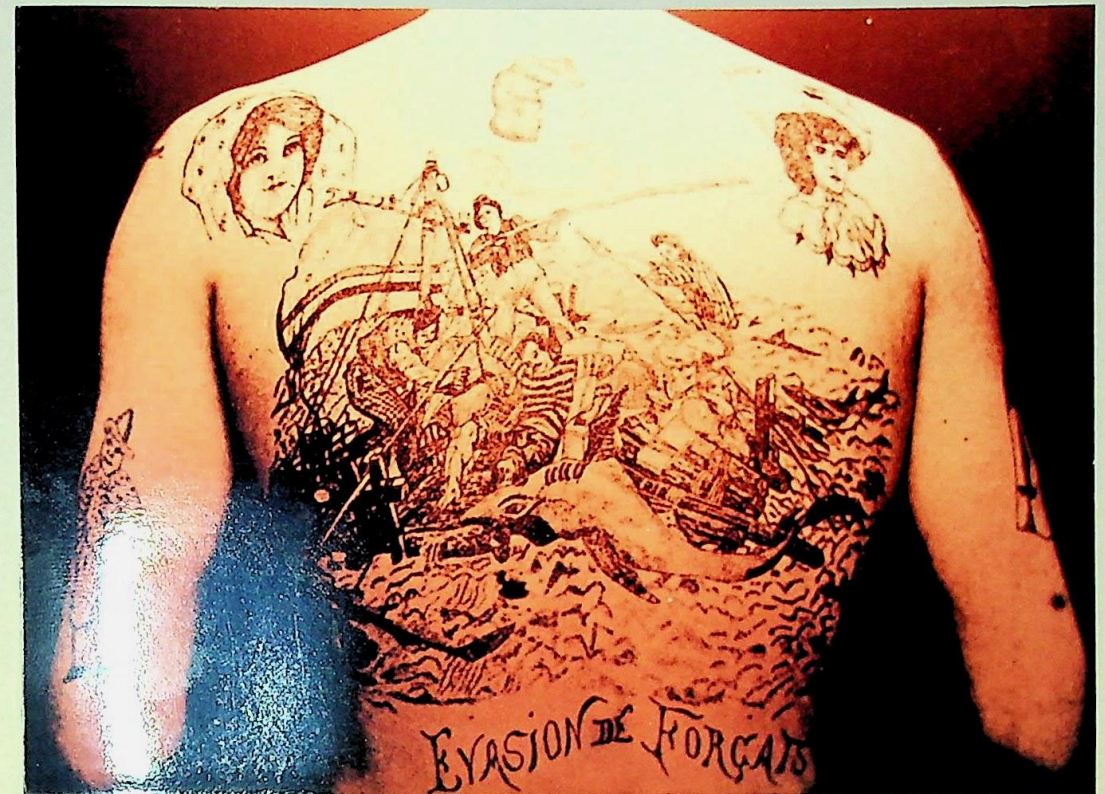
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work of the Hori. Wealthy English men indulged in cruises to the Far East where they, together with officers and ratings from Her Majesty's ships, fell prey to the more delicate designs that had been developed since the seventeenth century in Japan.

By 1870 the fashion for skin decoration was at its height in all walks of life. Over the next half century a man called George Burchett created one of the largest practices in the world, and was at one time running three separate establishments in different parts of London alone.

Although tattooing in Northern Europe (Scandinavia, Holland and Germany) had followed much the same pattern as Britain to a great extent, centered of course on seaports and sailors, it is not true to say that the rest of Europe held the same attitudes towards tattoos. Indeed, elsewhere, on the Continent, tattooing was none too popular. This was largely due to the influence of the Catholic Church in France, Italy and Spain. More important, however, as a discouraging factor, were the mid-nineteenth century reports of the medical hazards, which resulted in the custom being made illegal in the French navy in 1860. Without sailors, no professionals existed. Such tattoos as could be found were amateurish or lacking in artistic skill, but possessed a certain folk-Art charm. These were often acquired during spells in prison and so tattoos became yet again associated with the underworld, as in the East.

In any case, except when it became briefly fashionable, tattooing has rarely, if ever, been considered wholly respectable. But if tattooing has never wholly been accepted by Society, who is to blame? Perhaps the tattooists themselves, largely the Burchetts of this world, succeeded in creating a superficial air of respectability to mesmerize their upper-class clientele. But, by the early thirties suspicion and disapproval returned, with accounts of dirty and small



It was mainly men who travelled a lot who first introduced
tattooing to the West. This is an early photograph of a french
sailors back. *1840*

(The Painted Body - Michel Thezov)

studios in disreputable parts of town frequented by sailors and the Army. Levels of hygiene were brought under attack. Even a couple of decades ago, the standards were none too hygienic, and whilst there had been improvements, many tattoo parlours left much to be desired.

In the 1860's, professional tattooing ceased in France because of the apparent medical hazards. Almost exactly a hundred years later, the same thing nearly happened in the U.S.A. following an epidemic of Jaundice. In the long run, the New York hepatitis scare probably did the tattooing profession more good than harm, by drawing attention to the growing issues of hygiene and required safety levels.

"The tattooist is almost a fairy-tale figure, hovering in his gloomy, weirdly-decorated and mysterious little shop like some grotesque but bewitching hermit or necromancer out of the pages of an almost forgotten romance".

Ebensten, H. - Pierced Hearts of True Love 1953
London - Verschoyle. P. 69.



Tattooist Les Skuse and some members of the Bristol tattooing Club.

(Skin Deep - R. Scutt and C. Gotch) P.P. 59



The facade of Alan Foster's studio in Dublin, clean but even still somewhat shabby. (Dublin 1989)

MOTIVATION FOR TATTOO

Motives for being tattooed, varied as they may be, can be confined to three primary or main factors; superstition, status and attraction.

Superstition, being an irrational fear, has from the genesis of mankind been a powerful force, both in primitive as well as in modern societies, especially so since it embraces magic as well as religion. Given time, superstition becomes permanent belief, and the non-believer, the heretic or nonconformist. The Irony of tattooing lies in its applicability to both conformer and deviate.

Status demands recognition, a reward, a prize for acceptability or perhaps conformity. Attraction too has its conformist element. Clashes in particular, create an allure provided they are in fashion, even because they are deliberately startling, either so new as to be riveting or so odd as to be shocking. But again, attraction generally speaking follows a line of predetermination or acceptability. Thus the motive for body-marking is above all else one of conformity.

To return to superstition, primitive tribes were certainly convinced that the spirit, having escaped from the body at death, retained a replica of its earthly tenement. They therefore used tattoo marks as a means of identification in the next world and a passport to future happiness. Some went so far as to believe that if an untattooed woman were to die she would immediately be struck down by the Souls of her own sex and without further ado, served up as food to the Gods.

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in his letter to the Galatians is considered by many to refer to tattooing:

"I bear in my body the Marks of the Lord Jesus"
(Galatians 6 : 17).

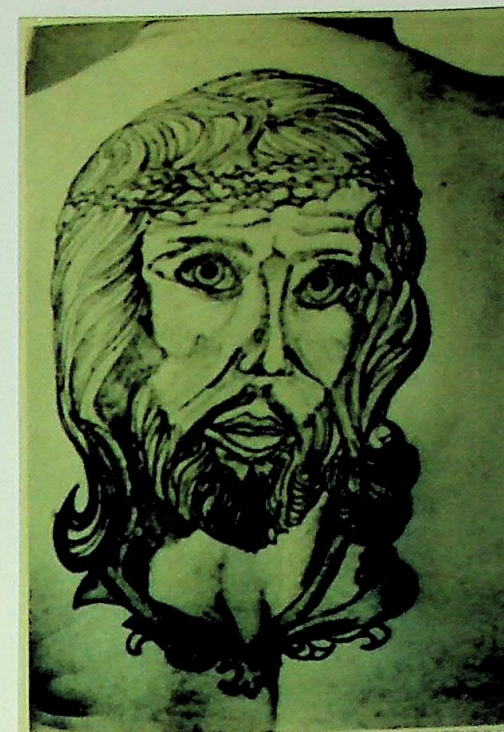
This could of course be a reference to his torture by the Romans. At a later date European criminal reports of the last century revealed that about thirty percent of men bore religious marks (Ref no 3). Most of these were, again, Catholics. The Sacred Symbol may in itself have been used as a charm to ward off punishment for misdemeanours and a device for gaining magical protection from Spiritual forces.

Throughout many parts of the world tattooing has in the past been considered to provide the panacea for immortality or at least the preservation of youth and also as the prevention if not the cure of diseases.

Superstition probably plays quite a large part in the tattooing of sailors even today, in the belief that it will guard them against the elements, disease or enemy. To American sailors, pigs or coons on their feet were once regarded as a charm against drowning, similar to the importance land-lovers give to black cats, horse shoes and four leaf clovers.

Furthermore the whole area of status, as with superstition, dictated a strength of image and symbolism which was every bit as important as those applied because of superstition.

As families combined to form groups or tribes, so body marking and tattooing became allied to the awakening and growth of Social Conscience. Tribal marking and tattooing developed, it is thought, primarily to allow identification with a group. Although due to the fact that eventually all communities have become civilised to a degree, and the need for tribal tattooing



In many cases of tattooing, religious subjects are chosen, maybe to act as a good omen to ward off misfortune. This is particularly ironic since the majority of religious tattoos are to be found on convicts and other individuals already living on the fringe of society.

(Skin Deep - R. Scutt and C. Gotch) P.P. 65 and 107

thus greatly reduced, it is not often realised that tribal tattoos still exist to denote regional or national minorities in the U.S.A. and Britain, particularly among Servicemen. Allegiance to specific states is quite commonplace and sometimes, quite boldly displayed.

Equally popular is the family tie or loyalty to a particular parent or even grandparent, this is especially so among sailors, of whom as many as thirty per cent choose the mother or father emblem for their first tattoo. The period before Mother's day is always busy for the naval port tattooist. Furthermore nineteenth century prison surveys revealed that about two-thirds of the tattooed examined carried military or professional trade emblems.

All initiation rites are based on the necessity for the individual to be accepted in the group to which he belongs. It was in bearing the pain of initiation that was and still is the important element of these rituals, marking more often than not the passage from childhood to manhood or womanhood. There is certainly an analogy here with the ritual of circumcision, which in most races, apart from Jews, was originally performed at puberty.

Inevitably initiation rites exist today wherever society mobilizes specialized groups or pressurizes people into competitive hierarchies. Thus school children, adolescent gangs, armed services, prisons and other institutions invariably formulate a species of initiation ceremony, and tattooing seems to be a favourite choice of such groups in that with a modicum of pain a conformity can be achieved.

Pubertal initiation, the portal of manhood for which one must have the key - hence the similarity to the twenty-first birthday, now almost an anachronism- is, of course, equivalent



The old favourites are perpetual although in the case of this "Dad", a certain level of disrespect, or could it be humour, is exercised.

(Skin Deep - R. Scutt and C. Gotch)

to conformity and most societies pressurize youngsters into harbouring an acute desire to becoming fully fledged adults.

Early indulgence in smoking, drinking and fornication are but instances of translating the desire for adulthood into reality.

Being tattooed is yet another and its link with initiation as an ordeal is obvious. It could be said that such rites confer social status, for tattooing has long been utilised to this end. Besides this however, tattooing has also been employed to emphasise, venerate or simply classify the elderly, for societies have varied, and still do vary radically in their attitudes towards the ancients. Some kill them off dispassionately and other worship them like Gods, so it can be easily seen how important these workings can be, if not to the society in question as a whole, certainly to the elderly individuals whom it affects directly.



Sometimes the religious and the more traditional elements combine as can be seen from this memorial tattoo.
(Skin Deep - R. Scutt and C. Gotch) P.P. 105

CHAPTER NO. 7
THE SEXUAL CONNECTION

Not surprisingly, tattoos and tattooing are considered by many to have strong sexual connotations. Sexual reasons for being tattooed are, to say the least, difficult to determine, for people are rarely honest with themselves, let alone ready to confess publicly to such motives.

The act of being tattooed used to be the equivalent of circumcision, libia mutilation and other puberty initiation rites. In due course, it was to become in many primitive societies a substitution for rites. Certainly tattooing provided the same elements of suffering, though to a less drastic degree.

Quite apart from this aspect and perhaps originally accidentally and then, perpetuated by superstition, several tribal groups genuinely believed that tattooing enhanced the human figure. The fact that our own society fails to share this view is no reason for regarding the practice with intolerance or even disfavour, for, cliché though it may be, beauty is indeed in the eye of the beholder. Thus tattoos may appear to some as mere disfigurement, whilst to others the same designs may not only be beautiful, but also sexually attractive.

Cook, reflecting on the prudery of his own society, was puzzled that those parts of the body which his society were anxious to conceal, were in the societies he discovered, decorated. However, with the advent of the European and the loss of innocence concerning nudity, once the fig-leaf or loin cloth was accepted, decoration of what then became the 'Private Parts' must have assumed an even more significant rate in attraction and fascination to the few permitted the ultimate intimacy.

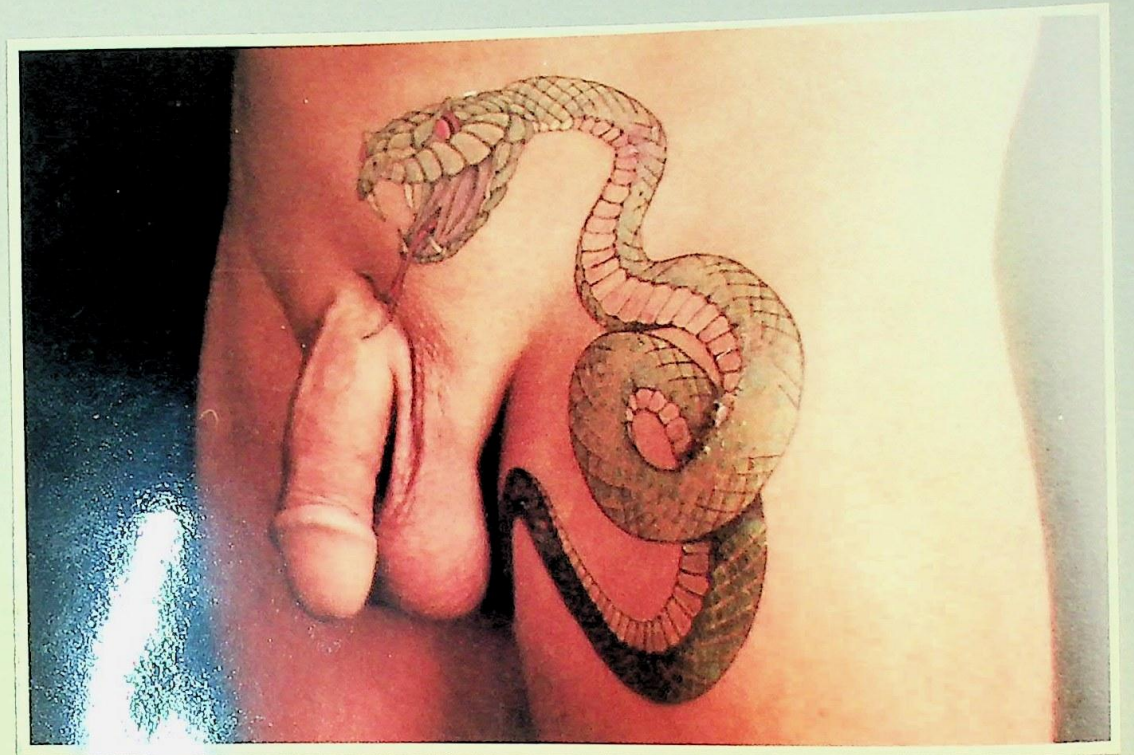
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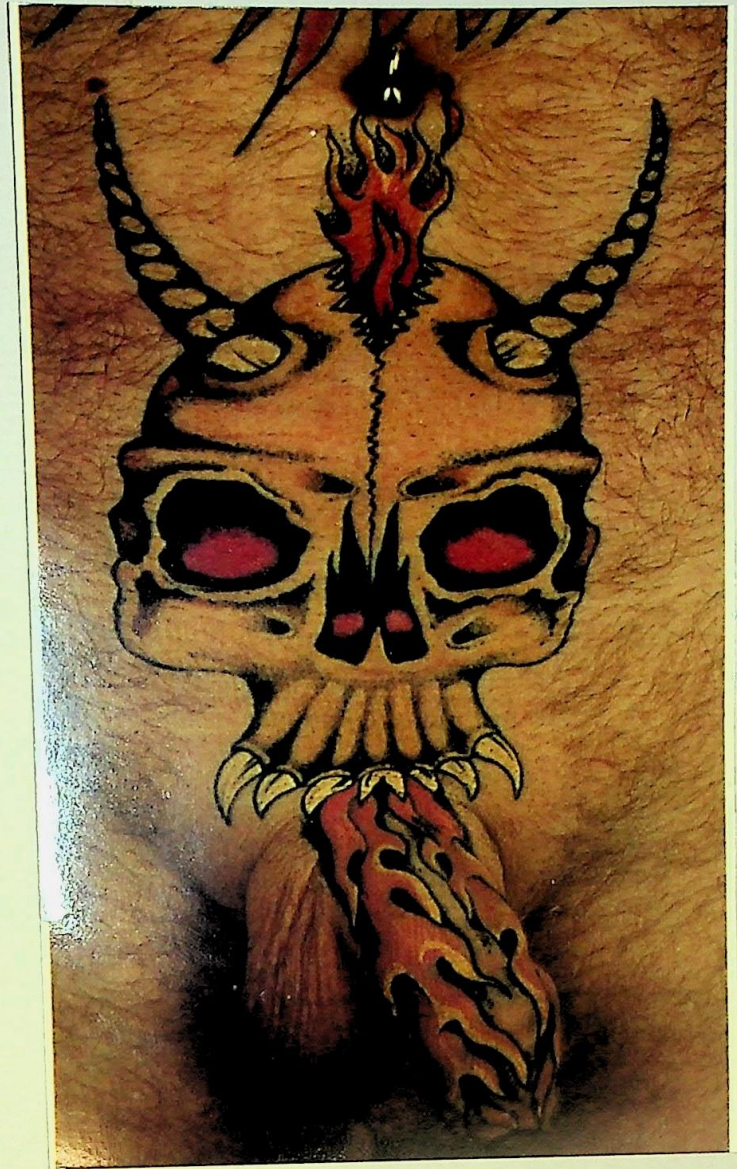
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Artist Alan Oversby of London on Ray Bond of Tun Bridge Wells.
(Ritcher, Stephen, 1985) P.P. 94



(Ritcher, Stephen, 1985) P.P. 141

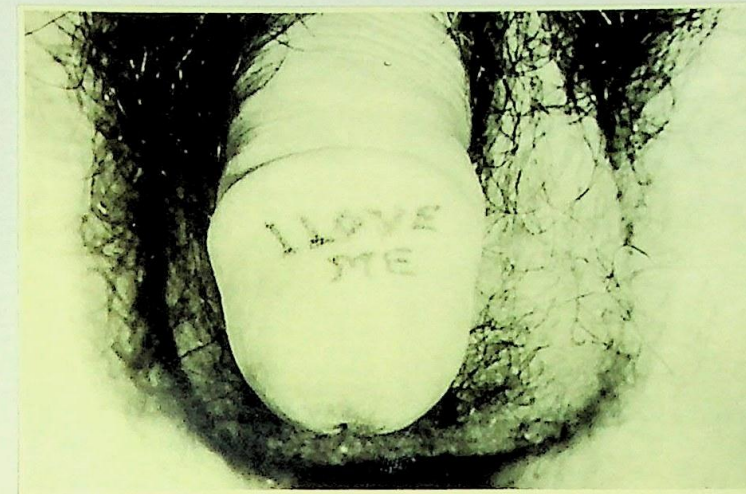
The post-Freudian investigators of human behavior have tended to invest the actual tattooing operation with sexual motives whether conscious or otherwise. Ebensten promotes this view very strongly indeed:

"The young Mans first experience at the tattooist and with the sexual act resemble each other closely. Around both clings an Aura of having committed something dirty and common. Both are acts upon completion of which he considers himself to have attained manhood. Both embrace a strange sensation of pain with unfathomed pleasure. Both are experiences which he may keep hidden from his parents but about which he brags with his companions.

(Ebensten. H. 1953 London - Verschoyle PP 73)

Ebensten was probably echoing Parry (A. Parry 1933 New York PP 33-36) who found sexuality rampant in all aspects of tattooing the long sharp needles, the fluid injected into the 'Pricked' skin, the two participants, one active and sadistic, and the other passive and masochistic, and so forth. Even the intimacy of simple tattooing as an act performed by men is often construed as possessing an element of homosexuality to compensate for an apparent lack of a heterosexual outlet.

Sooner or later, all tattooists are asked by a client, usually one already heavily tattooed, to execute a design on the buttock, groin or genitals. The act of tattooing the penis lays itself open to the inference of homosexuality if, both tattooist and client are male. Yet tattooing of the female parts is not unknown. It should also be stressed that amongst those clients who, for reasons best known to themselves, choose to have their penis tattooed, if not the majority, would prefer it to be done by a woman. (Ref no 4)



"Narcissism", to an extreme.
(Skin Deep - R. Scutt and C. Gotch) P.P. 84

Acceptable or not as the sexual implications of tattooing may be, there is no denying the effects of passion, love and eroticism on skin decoration. According to a New York practitioner, "Love fever" was the motive responsible for 80 percent of tattoos on men. Ebensten's choice of title for his book "Pierced Hearts and true Love" I think emphasises this point. (Ref no 5)

The name of the current girlfriend, or declarations of undenyng love to the wife are common enough and if by chance passions are transferred, common enough also, then the embarrassing or offending name is metamorphosed into a stock design by over-tattooing. Conversely lovesick girls were also struck with naming their loved ones especially during times of war, but one devotee clung to names, that of her current lover being always on display, the previous ones having simply been deleted by a thin red line.

Sometimes tattooists are asked to copy photos of a wife or girlfriend, but rarely are these anything but decent, nudity being reserved for the anonymous girlfriend - the "Girl of my dreams".

Not all tattooists will agree to lewdness burgeoning from their skills and Burchett remarked primly that only on rare occasions would he con-cent to allow a Venus to emerge from his needles and then only those copied from famous paintings, so censorship extended even to one's own body.

The counterpart to some of the more blatant tattoos may be seen amongst prostitutes. As tattooing in Ancient Egypt appears to have been confined to "dancing girls", and in 1847 more than 25 percent of Copenhagen's registered "professionals" were found to be tattooed, many authorities have regarded girls tattooed in their teens as prostitutes in Embryo.



"The Girl of My Dreams", very much so, the fantasy woman.
(Ritcher, Stephen - 1985) P.P. 86

Here again superstition is purported to be a motive for being tattooed. Part of the fascination of the subject lies so very deep that casual questioning reveals next to nothing tangible. That it is also inextricably allied to something sexual there is little doubt. Motives among prostitutes range widely from superstition, as an evocation of magic, or a sacrificial gesture to ward off lover's unfaithfulness, to advertisement for monetary gain, etc.

As with sailors, so prostitutes possess a cynical bawdiness which, expressed by tattoos, is usually confirmed to the borders of the erogenous zones. "Keep of the grass", "No admittance except on business" and "Danger zone" are obvious enough. It was recently suggested that in Japan only a prostitute would flaunt elaborate decoration and that such a design was almost a flag of her profession. The suggestion that the Japanese have adopted tattoo as a means of expressing the femininity of a woman of easy virtue has been regarded as a very sweeping statement and one which is totally unacceptable.

Since tattooed people, both men and women, represent a minority and since tattooing itself is in Catholic eyes and Anglo-Saxon societies, viewed with suspicion, if not active disfavour, it comes as no surprise to find that the fear and contempt held by these societies for another minority, that of the homosexual, has been transferred in part to include tattooed folk. Just as the motives for being tattooed, are as yet unexplicable, except in very general terms, so is the behavior of homosexuals still usually regarded as unnatural, disgusting and anti-social. It is hardly strange therefore to find that many hold the view that many homosexuals are more likely to be tattooed than heterosexuals.

The psychiatrist stands to be challenged when it is claimed, as has been, that certain tattoo designs reflect homosexual tendencies. These include "True love" and "Love-hate" on the

fingers, and perhaps more understandably, clasped hands, "True friendship" and "Pals for ever". If such claims be fractionally true, then the degree of homosexuality in the Services must be sensational.

Firmer ground is trodden with tattoos that highlight or draw attention to the anus. 'For Sale', 'Pay as you enter' and 'Open all Night', are examples. Such tattoos are odd, even allowing for average bawdness.

Allowing for the puritanical assertion that genitals are the sinful area of the body and are therefore ugly and dirty and so, should be hidden, there must be some who attempt to redress the aesthetic balance by adding decoration to their own.

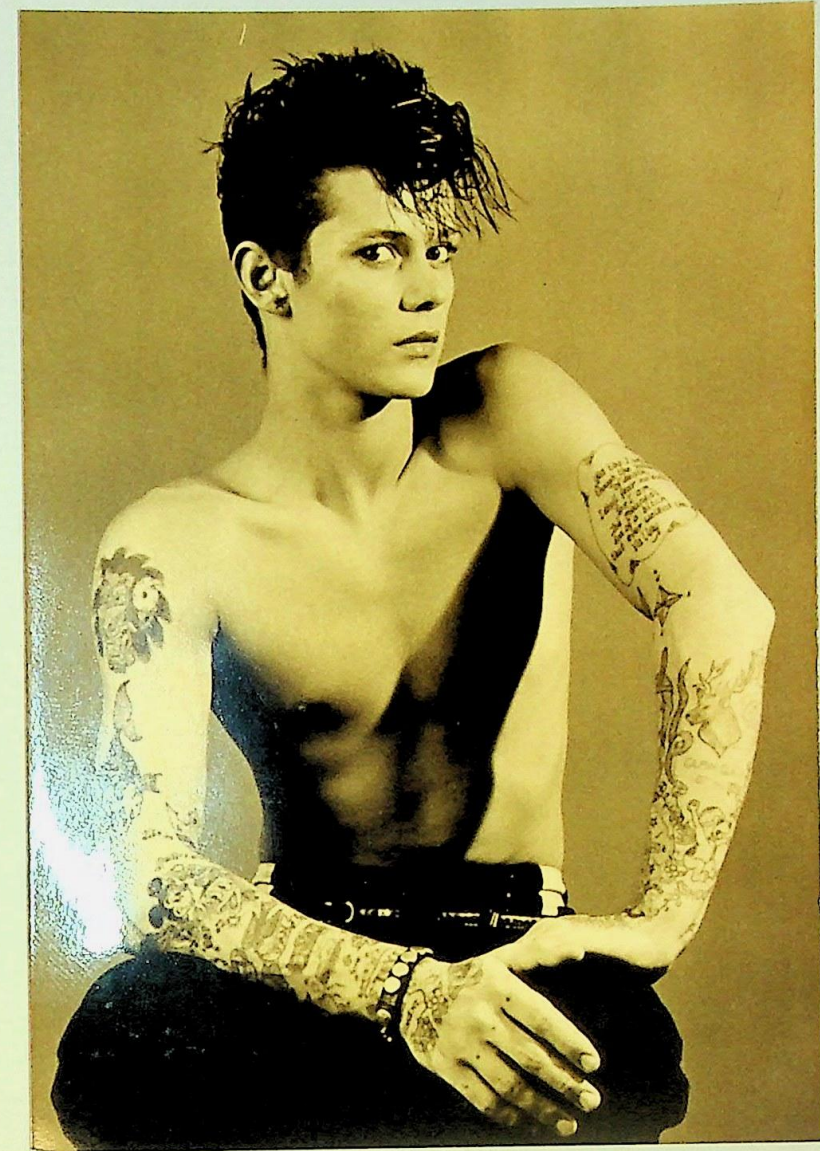
Genital tattooing is certainly a curious phenomenon which is not as rare as might be expected and provides a rich crop of quixotic humour confined in the main, not unsurprisingly, to males. The tattooing of female genitals is less common and appears to be restricted to pattern designs rather than lewdness tinged with hilarity. This in itself could provide a rather pictorial illustration of the basic differences in the attitudes towards sex of both men and women.

I personally consider that a modicum of sexual element, in whatever form, is present in all tattooing wherever it is placed and particularly so in the genital areas, but to a degree far less than is suggested by psychiatrists. The motive may be more exhibitionistic, or an expression of a wry sense of humour, than an indication of sexuality. Much more research is required to comment with any accuracy on the connection between tattoos, tattooers and sexual inclinations.



Sexual Deviation has long been regarded as motivation for tattoo, especially amongst homosexuals, this has yet to be established.

Richard and Chris - London. Artist, Alan Oversby, London.
(Ritcher, Stephen - 1985) P.P. 69



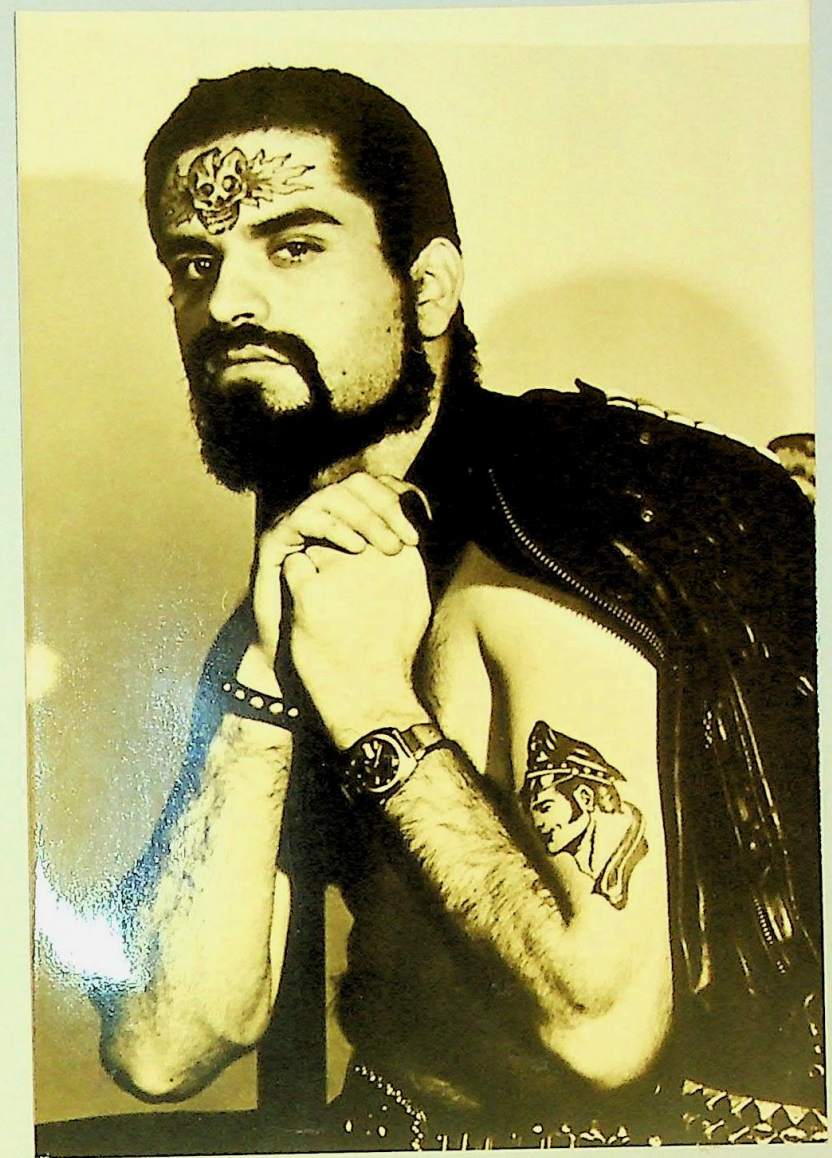
"Smutty" - 1980

Tattooed subjects figure quite heavily in the work of the gay photographer, Robert Mapplethorpe, /is this a reflection on his sexuality?

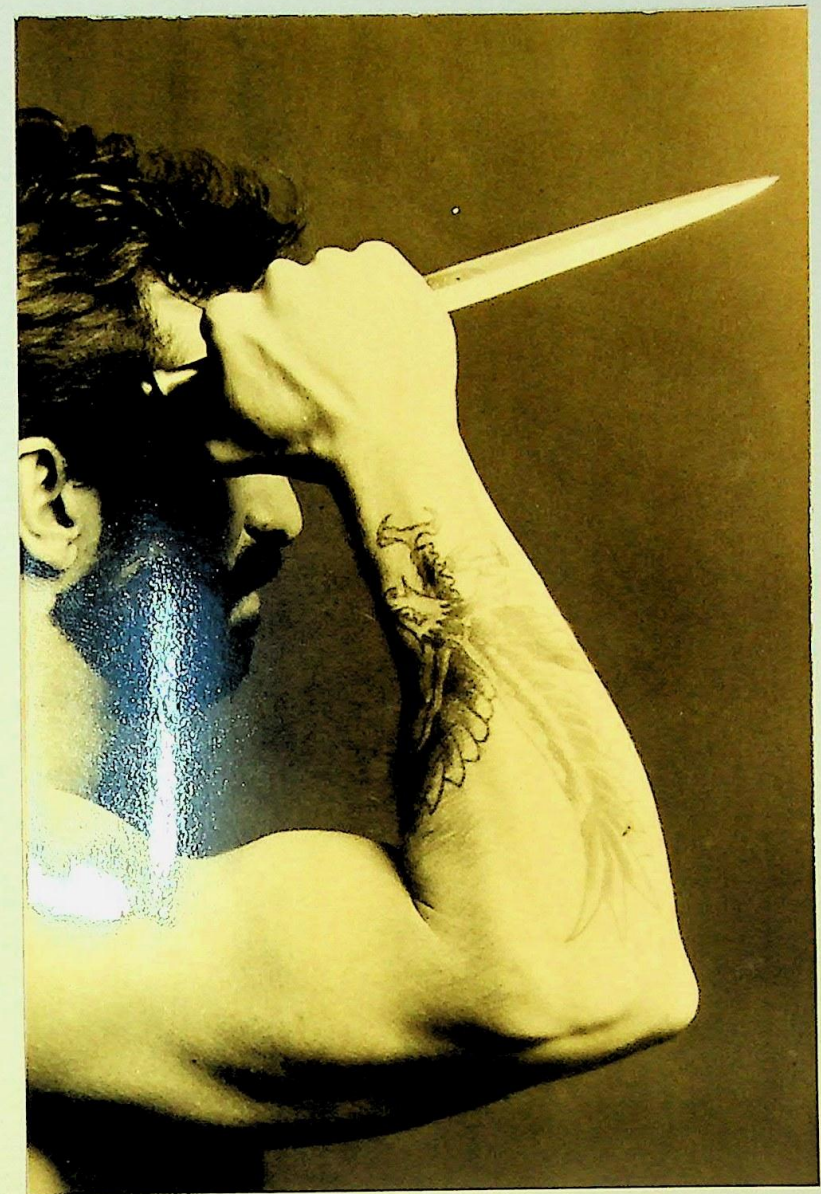
(Robert Mapplethorpe - 1985)



"Nick Biens and Lyle Heeter"
(Robert Mapplethorpe - 1985)



"Nick Bians 1977" - A Tattooed homosexual.
(Robert Mapplethorpe - 1985)



Frank Diaz - 1979
(Robert Mapplethorpe - 1985)

THE NAVAL STORY

To date, the majority of information and evidence - relating to tattooing, its popularity, its problems, its motivations and treatment, has been gleaned from either the navies of the world or penal or similar institutions. Furthermore it is important to realise that, not surprisingly, sailors have often been the first to be influenced by novel fashions from faraway places, and the reintroduction of tattooing into the Western World was undoubtedly largely due to the eighteenth century voyages of exploration.

From being a mere fashion, in Europe, tattooing, by being invested by superstition, in due course became a tradition among all or most seafarers. Hence, it is not surprising to find more and more references to the practice in tales of the Sea.

It was not long before the new fashion attracted its own practitioners, some skilled, others less so. No longer has the sailor to contain his impatience until the new passage to the Orient or even the next port of call. Nor, as is commonly accepted, is tattooing restricted only to seamen of mean intelligence for, whilst less widespread, many an officer has succumbed to the notion, usually confessing later to having yielded to the urge when still in his salad days. Yet since several Royal Sailors acquired tattoos, it is not surprising that some lesser mortals followed suit.

So accepted as part of naval life did tattooing become, that shipboard pricksters gave way to permanent tattoo parlours. Though the former continued to ply their dubious skill, many indeed learning sufficient proficiency to enable them to retire and set up practice ashore, the latter became established in

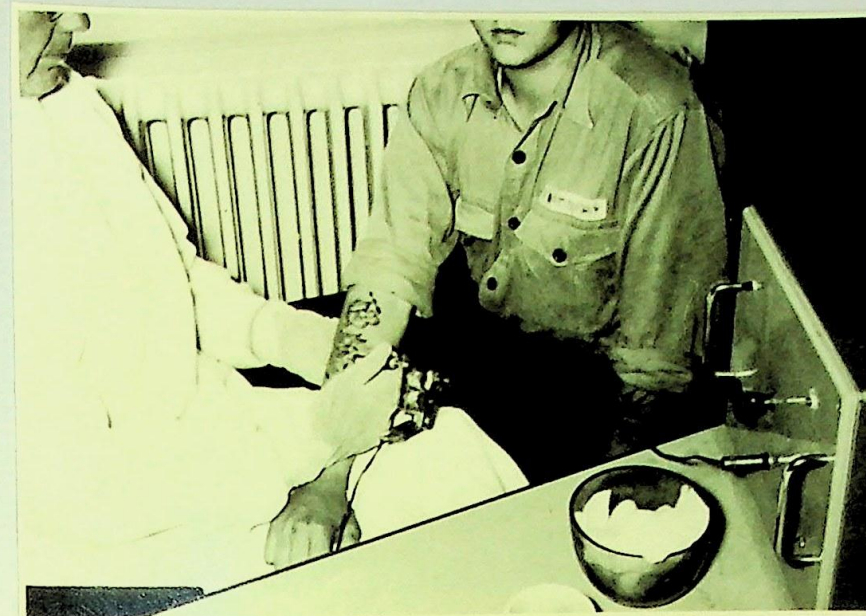
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A young sailor gets yet another addition to his forearm.
(Skin Deep - R. Scutt and G. Gotch) P.P. 137

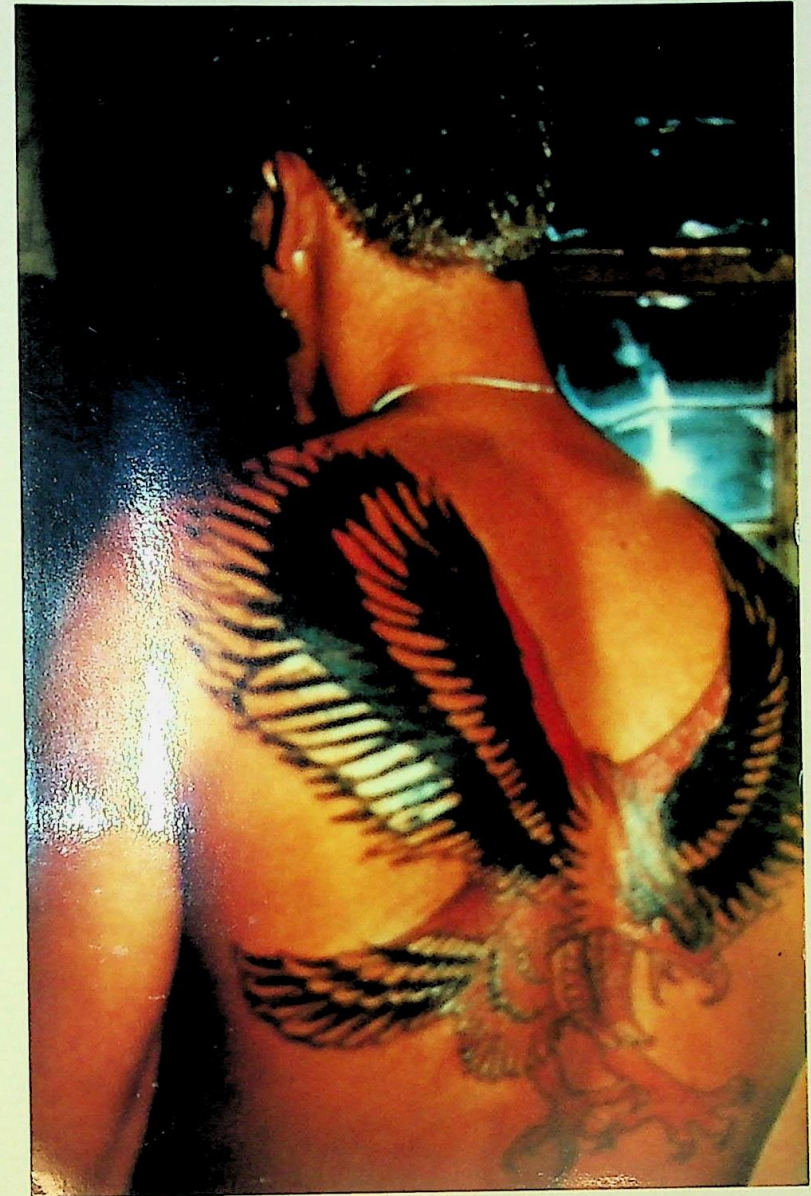
ports the world over and were forerunners of today's tattooists.

In 1919, a U.S. Naval spokesman maintained that fewer sailors were tattooed due to a reduction in superstition resulting from better education. This view was refuted however, in the light of the fact that, despite a temporary diminution during the depression, World War II revitalised the popularity of tattooing in the Services of all combatant nations. This seems to indicate the curious role that fear of death played and still plays in tempting the sailor, soldier or even Airman to acquire a tattoo.

Naval tattoos, often so dull, repetitive, mawkish and mundane, are occasionally injected with a tawdy humour which can be refreshing although often ridiculous. The buttocks provide sailors with the greatest opportunity for humour, yielding up a host of mild and sometimes not so mild obscenities, while presenting the most fruitful for psychological interpretations.

Buttock tattoos certainly seem to stir the somewhat flaccid imaginations of the sailor and reflect the stag atmosphere of life afloat. It is questionable, however, whether the motive for such ludicrous designs is anything other than bawdiness meant to amuse not just shipmates but girlfriends as well. On the other hand, although few would go so far as to inscribe themselves with their permanent address, a blood group mark is sensible and practical. The same however cannot be said of "Cut here" tattooed around the neck which, if nothing else, shows an unconscious sense of history, for this was a traditional motif stemming from the Napoleonic wars and the French Revolution.

The vast amount of Naval tattoos have a personal significance as, no less than a third of all sailors dedicate their first tattoo to Mum and Dad; no doubt in the hope that the act of



Sailors back - Hong Kong.
(Ritual and Seduction, Charles and Jasette Cenors) P.P. 36



The more comical side of Naval tattooing; sometimes greatly regreted but entertaining nonetheless.
(Skin Deep - R. Scutt and C. Gotch) P.P. 102 and 105



The "Bum" area, down through the years has also leant itself to decoration with some very effective results.
(Thezov, Michel 1984)

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Figure 1
An American Naval bum tattoo, note the motos.
(Thezov, Michel 1984)

Figure 2
"Eyes only for you"
(Ritcher, Stephen 1985) P.P. 87

bravado, associated with a modicum of guilt, will thus be parentally accepted. Avowals of "True Love" or "My Darling Wife", with or without a scroll, which is a derivation from the fifteenth Century Love Knot, still around. Overt representatives of the sex act are rare. The nearest approach is suggestive rather than blatant.

The sailor's world of tattoo is, in short, a microcosm of the world of tattooing at large; other than the in-jokes, virtually all designs can be found outside the navy, but available studies are confined in the main to sailors, and until a wider survey is undertaken the major source of information has a distinct naval flavour.



"A Rather Devilish Display".
Lal Hardy of London, on Dave Baby of London
(Ritcher, Stephen 1985) P.P. 21

OUTLAWED AND INSTITUTIONALISED

The whole area of the social implications of tattooing is something which lends itself to various interpretations, revealing many conflicting view points. What emerges from studies of tattooing, however, is that society with its particular codes of conduct and taboos, together with the personality of the individual, are important factors in determining not only why a person gets tattooed but also the type of tattoo chosen. These two factors invariably go hand in hand. Which then is the more important?

It has been stressed that of all motives for tattooing, by far the most common is that of conformity. But conformity to what? Conforming to a minority can be excessively anti-social and just as all tattoos may be said to belong to a minority, some of them are more anti-social than others. Hence the logical separation of naval from prison tattooing.

Secret and tyrannical organisations have flourished in almost all societies, and primitive ones were no exception. In many of these, as in their modern counterparts, new members underwent initiations, often of an unpleasant nature involving a cicatrical or tattooing rite. Outlawed or not, as the case may be, it seems obligatory for any member of the Hells Angel gang, and most other gangs as well, to be tattooed and the greater the accumulation of tattoos, the better the admiration and acceptance.

"An Angel without his colours feels naked and vulnerable like a knight without his armour. , nobody bugs me as long as I'm flying the Colours".

(Thompson. H.S. Hell's Angels 1967 Penguin Books, Page 82)

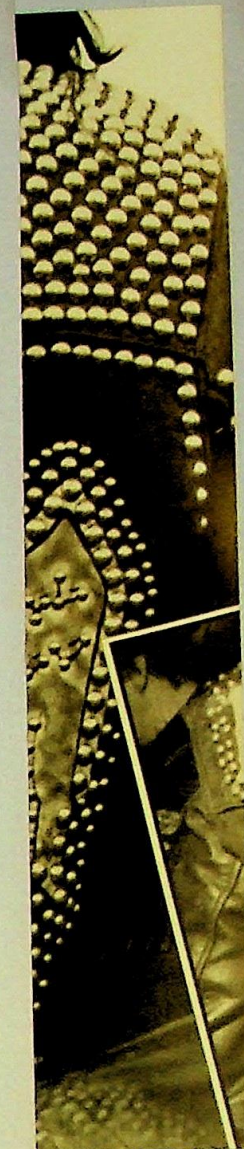
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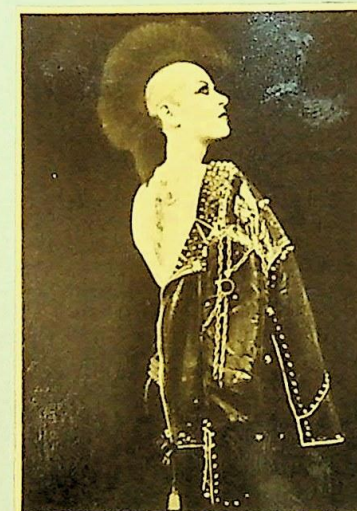
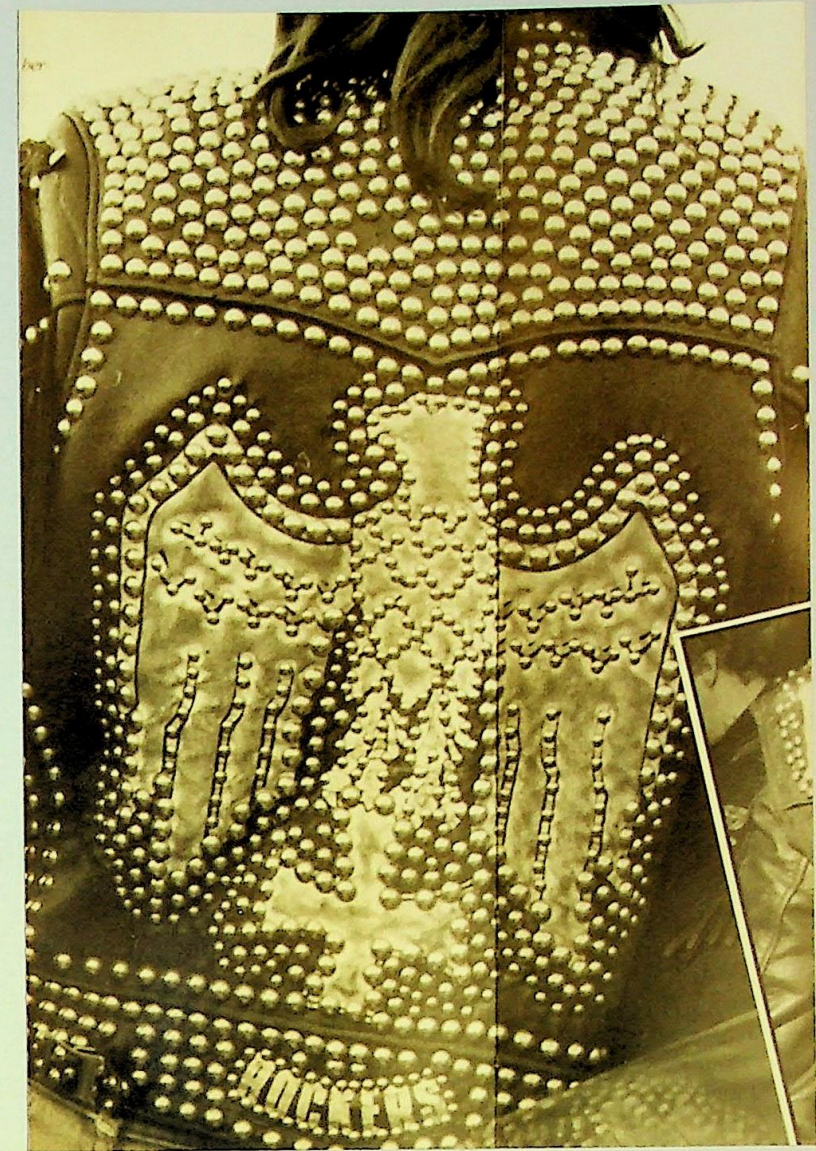
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Hells Angels display their allegiance to gang through their dress and a high level of participation in the retrieval of tattoo.

(Farren, M. - Plexus) P.P. 54 and 55



Figure 1
(Farren. M. - Plexus) P.P. 72

Figure 2
(Skin Deep - R. Scutt and C. Gotch) P.P. 110

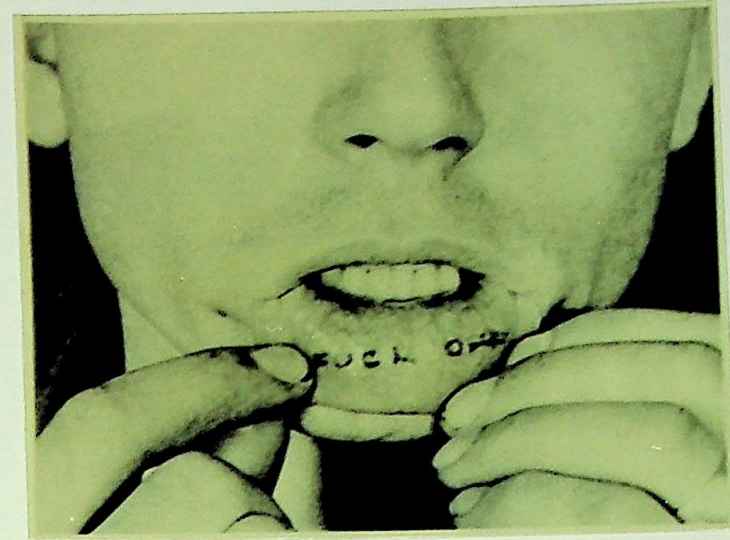
It is none too difficult to discern that a uniform, pseudo or otherwise, is synonymous with pride and aggression; the rig-out, the totem symbols, the armour are all forms of security against being "bugged", all protection against a wounded ego, a badge of Unity for the outcast, the outlaw, the minority. The nonconformist needs a bolster for his lack of confidence, a common symbol to show that he does, ironically, conform. Yet these symbols are chosen deliberately in order to shock or outrage society from which the victim feels estranged.

Hell's Angels do not confine themselves just to tattooing apparently, but include a thorough dousing with a disgusting mixture of dung, urine and vomit as part of the initiation.

A study of young offenders on the West Coast of America concluded that delinquents tattoo themselves significantly more often than non-delinquents, and that the inclination develops at an early age without any thought of the future. In Borstal institutions it has been estimated that the incidence of tattooing can be as high as 75 per cent.

One influence which accounts for such a high prevalence in these establishments is the fact that tattooing is usually prohibited, and to acquire a mark in such an environment is therefore an aggressive gesture. Therefore, many authorities link tattooing with aggression; ie. anti-authoritarianism, and it cannot be disputed that gangs and delinquents, juvenile or otherwise, display massive evidence of aggression.

Safer ground is reached in the area of drug addiction. With a group of fifty men and women treated in America for narcotic addiction, special identifying signs were commonly seen, including dots on the hands, arrows and syringes pointing to venous channels, spiders and other dark insects covering the telltale scarred areas.



The effect of institutions such as prisons or borstals sometimes pushes people to display their anger at the world through the medium of tattoo.
 (Skin Deep, R. Scutt and C. Gotch) P.P. 94 and 144

However, there is no real evidence to associate tattooing with the drug scene. It would be a totally false assumption to conclude that isolated examples of tattooing linked to other aspects are in any way significant evidence of general practice. The only common factor which emerges is the curious paradox that tattooing appeals to the outsider and provides him with proof, visible and tangible, to himself and others that he belongs to a group, albeit a minority.

Likewise, assumptions concerning the sexual symbolism of the tattooing act together with the choice of site can be equally unclear. Attempts have been made to link tattooing to personality disorders as well. This is particularly so with prostitutes and that rather exclusive group of men who flaunt genital tattoos. With the latter, not aggression but masochism is said to be the overriding motive.

The happy acceptance by 'authority', i.e. the police in particular, that many or most tattooed people are sexually "abnormal" is suspect in itself, but has arisen from studies based on examinations of small numbers of homosexuals and others attending psychiatric units. Surely, no one suggests that homosexuals as a group are more likely to be tattooed than their heterosexual counterparts? This question remains unanswered.

There can be little dispute that the basic factor behind tattooing is the interaction of society and personality, or that the majority of tattoos are acquired when young, that is, when youthful exuberance obliterates any consideration of future regret for permanent disfigurement. Both factors may well be termed immaturity. But, just as maturity is usually acquired with age, and many a mature man will probably proudly exhibit his tattoos as mementos of his youth, so persistent immaturity may stem from personality disorders, mental deficiency or even psychosis. Here tattooing, and especially

multiple tattooing, is often a concomitant. Undoubtedly immaturity can be held responsible for the choice of infantile designs. And it is probably the latter which have caused the denigration of tattooing and reduced the practice to a level where it is regarded by society with appobrium.

CHAPTER NO. 10

THE FAIRER SEX

The fair sex, generally, is not prone to acquiring tattoos. There are, of course, exceptions to this and plenty of them. Japanese wives and girls, being perhaps more dutiful, succumb more frequently than do their counterparts in the Western world. For, other than those who have been institutionalized, few women approve of tattooing, let alone indulge in it. It would be fair to state that most women who possess tattoos gained them under or through the influence of their men folk. This, however is not always so, for let it be remembered that Maori women were tattooed facially to avoid the ugliness of old age. The Missionaries at the same time however, caused consternation by trying to end the practice.

It was the same sort of religious disapproval that prevented women in Europe and America from experimenting with tattoos, until, that is, society women flaunted such disapproval and turned to tattooing as a fashionable kick. For some thirty or forty years from 1880 on, dainty little butterflies, roses, bluebirds and other embellishments graced the shoulders of society's fashionable ladies.

Recent investigation of feminine tattooing, has found it to be remarkable for its rarity. However that is not to say that it doesn't exist. It is thought that many women have tattoos, of which not even their immediate friends are aware. Most of these prefer to remain anonymous, because of the peculiar world in which we live, where a female tattoo isn't acceptable. Certainly most girls today regard the practice with distaste, in spite of the fact that small tattoos in the right site can be quite decorative and sexually attractive.

If girls with one tattoo are few and far between, what of the heavily tattooed "beauty"?; few of these exist, and of those

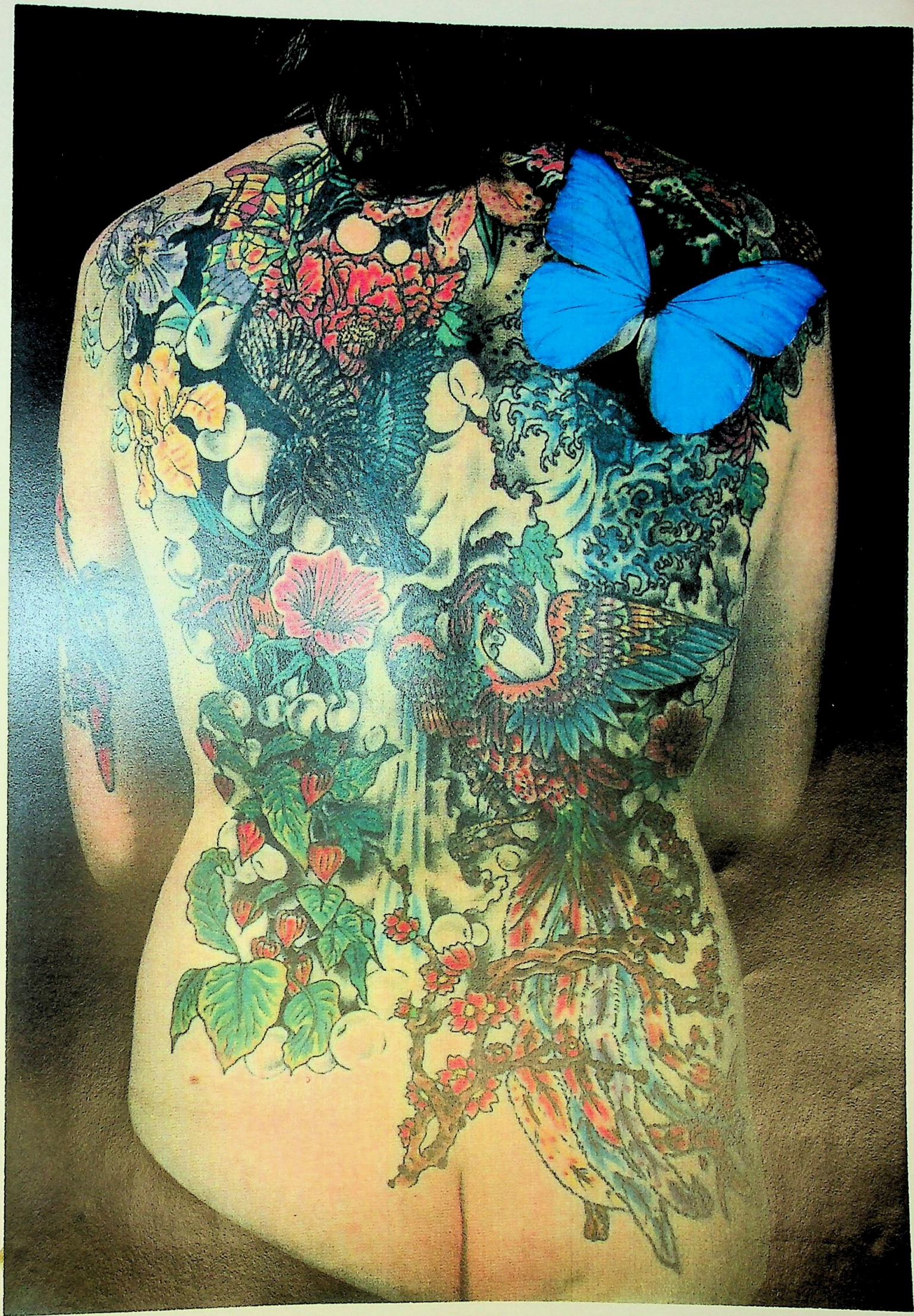
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that do the majority could well be tattooists themselves or more plausibly, married to one. To most eyes, a heavily tattooed woman looks even more odd than a man with the same treatment. This is probably due mainly to feminine fashion in clothing. Short sleeves and short skirts certainly reveal and emphasize the designs for better or worse, and the effect can be curious to say the least. But to suggest that all tattooed ladies are peculiar, because the practice in the West is unnatural, is going too far.

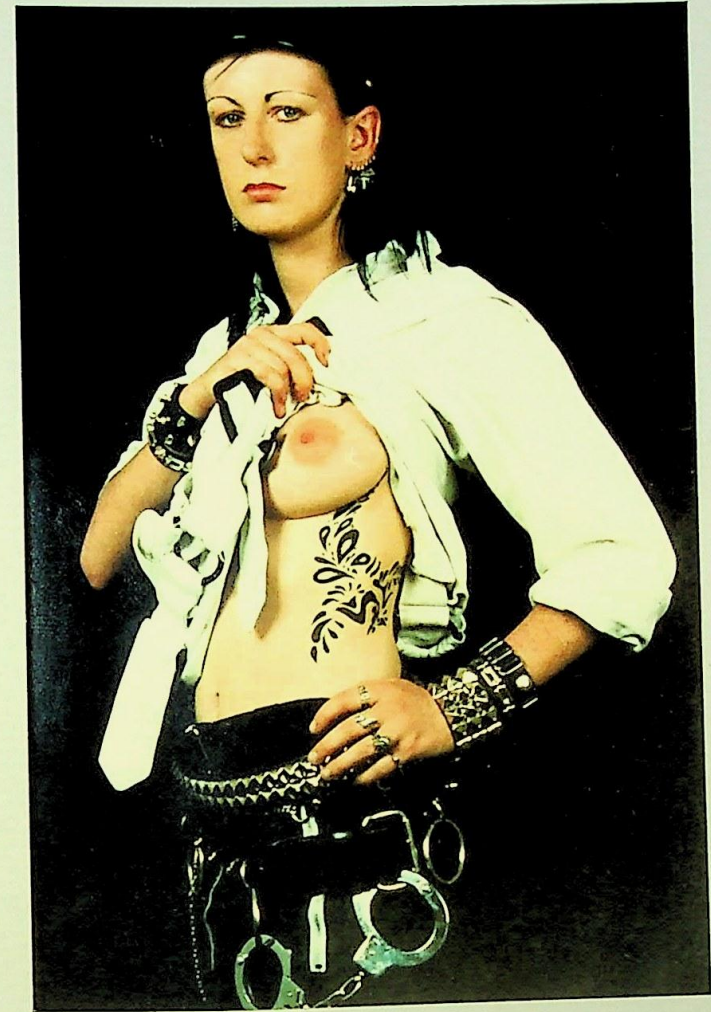
Whatever second thoughts there may be, the permanence of tattooed designs forces enthusiasm upon the owner; for the moment the idea that one is a psychedelic monster obtrudes, manic depression must follow. To prevent this the human mind forges the escape mechanism, the most common of which amongst tattooers, especially women, is that each and every tattoo enhances their natural beauty. This, indeed, may well be true, yet few are confident enough to face the scorners and scoffers by exhibiting their adornments to the world at large.

Whilst much early tattooing fulfilled the purpose of ineradicable make-up, girls today prefer more temporary aids to beauty. However, it was quite fashionable in the last century, to be the proud possessor of permanently rosy cheeks. This then extended to rosy lips also. It wasn't long before this beauty treatment extended to eyebrow shaping and lip-tinting.

On a more up-to-date level, however, there is still a potential place for tattooing in cosmetic work, as carried out by plastic surgeons. It is possible thus to add colour to skin flaps used for the red margin of the lips, and for the stubble area of the chin of men, and occasionally to match up other skin grafts. One blemish, the "port wine stain", can often be partially camouflaged by the over tattooing of skin coloured pigments.



Adee Grimmer and Nikki Johnson, London.
Artist: Lal Hardy: London
(Ritcher, Stephen 1985) P.P. 103



Tina Robinson: London
Artist: Lal Hardy: London
(Ritcher, Stephen 1985) P.P. 29

On a more superficial level the use of tattoo has already been put to use by pop star Michael Jackson, who now has permanent eyeliner on his eye lids.

CHAPTER NO. 11

FREAKS AND SIDE SHOWS

Freaks have been described as the *raison d'être* of the Circus; they provided the necessary escape from the humdrum; they were the people who deliberately displayed their deformities to the public gaze. So, by the mid-nineteenth century, it was clear that money was to be made by exhibiting heavily-tattooed people in circuses. Throughout the Western world, this became commonplace.

The exploits and exploitation of one of the most spectacular examples of male tattooing, Prince Constantine; who was repeated to have earned no less than £1,000 per week, sowed the seeds of exhibitionism in the minds of other heavily tattooed men, who then proceeded to go further so as to secure circus contracts. Then it was the turn of the women who gladiatorially entered the act. Needless to say they proved to be an even greater attraction than the men.

Some of these ladies, it was said, were not averse to cheating by resorting to stencilled decorations renewed at the start of each week's appearance. However, despite the frauds, there were more than enough genuine cases.

Concurrently with this the genuine Red Indian who claimed that he was, after all, the originator of the craft in the Americas, made his presence felt and proceeded to cash in on the bonanza. More and more Indians had, by the close of the century, jumped on the band-wagon of the Circus Act. Many were advertised as "The Real, the Genuine" perfect example, when in fact they had achieved status by the hand of the ubiquitous white professors.

Probably the most famous of all English circus freaks was "The Great Omi", who surprisingly enough came from a high, respectable and comparatively affluent middle-class background,

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Probably the most famous of all English circus freaks was "The Great Omi", who surprisingly enough came from a highly respectable and comparatively affluent middle-class background,



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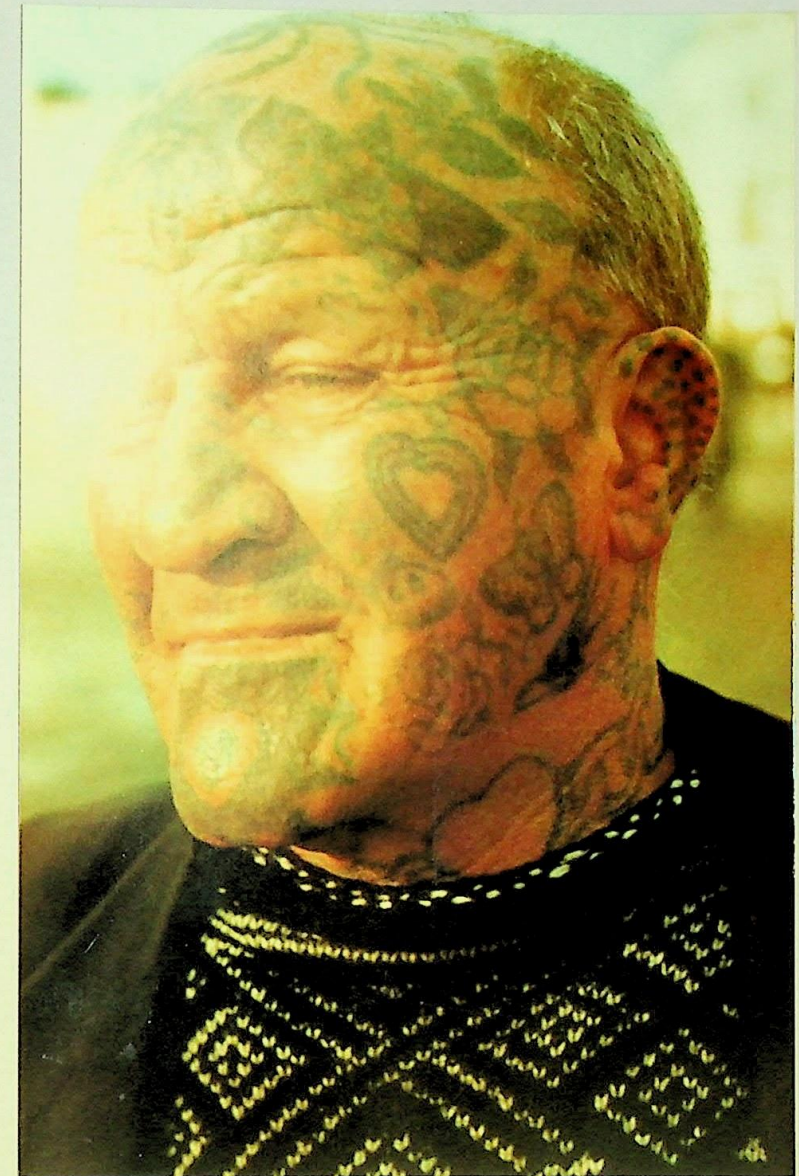
The financial attraction proved too strong for some with the growing demand for tattooed Circus freaks.

Figure 1 "The Great Omi"

(Skin Deep, R. Scutt and C. Gotch) P.P. 156

Other tattooed Circus men followed but none were quite as effective as the Great Omi.

(Skin Deep, R. Scutt and C. Gotch) P.P. 158



The aging face of a former British Circus attraction; now
somewhat out of context.

(Ritual and Seduction: Charles and Jasette Cenars) P.P. 37

and, after a formal school education, joined the Army. At the end of the First World War he was demobilized as a Major, but restless and incapable of keeping a job he decided to get tattooed in order to go into show business. His own design covered his body with symmetrical inch-wide blue-black bands, which were intended to suggest a zebra. Before this could be done, the hair bearing skin of his head and face had to be removed surgically and replaced by grafts. Burchett, mentioned earlier, then set to work on him at a rate of about six inches per week. Consequently the whole operation took years to complete.

His true identity was kept a secret, and the Great Omi proved to be one of the few really successful financial gambles in the world of tattooing. The final tragic outcome is not, however, surprising. There is no future for elderly Zebra Men outside the circus, and mental breakdown was eventually inevitable.

Heavily tattooed men and women, although not the Circus attractioin today that they were fifty years ago, do still exist. One man is said to have had an entire novel tattooed on his skin. Cindy Ray, who is probably one of the best known female tattooers, relates in her book "The story of a tattooed Girl", how she was advertised as "Miss Technicolour" and "The Classy lassie with the tattooed Chassis". It seems odd to her that many of the public should regard her as a freak.

With the demise of the Circus, publicity given to tattooing has all but vanished and contemporary tales are few and far between. They are also, rather tawdy. For example some American businessmen have advertised by means of back tattoos, such as that for a car hire firm sported by a Beach boy.



Cindy Ray - "The Tattooed Lady"
(Skin Deep - R. Scutt and C. Gotch) P.P. 159

CONCLUSION

It has become a significant factor in the attitudes of many tattooers that there is a very high incidence of regrets. Comments such as "if God meant you to have pictures you'd be born with them" and "they look dirty" crop up quite regularly amongst many tattooers. But why? (Ref. no 4)

Unquestionably tattoos are socially unacceptable. "they look dirty"! the point at issue is social pressure. But why should tattoos be subject to this social condemnation?

The morals of Western society are so imbued by biblical interpretations of what is natural and unnatural that "if God meant you to have pictures, you'd be born with them" is a common enough viewpoint. In a society which considers nudity as dirty, indecent and subversive of morality - a slowly decreasing belief, it is true, but still powerful - it is not surprising that decorations to the body are allocated to the same category. That "they are ridiculous" is only too true in the majority of cases and that "they don't improve the look of my body" is a further unarguable point against tattoos.

However, this need not be so; on average designs for tattoos are so incredibly banal, naive and sentimental that they preclude serious consideration, and are, thus, the butt of ridicule. Mum, Dad, Yogi Bear, daggers and skulls may seem apt to the adolescent, but become increasingly less so to the adult married man, particularly to his wife to whom they represent a part of her husband's life from which she is excluded.

If good tattoos could be elevated possibly to a standard pertaining to Art, the possessor would then be unashamed. Nor would they be socially embarrassing. The fact that the traditional location sites do not lend themselves easily to

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concealment requires, above all, a design which is mature rather than ridiculous. One might even go so far as to say that hand tattoos, which are all too commonly universally regretted, should be totally discontinued.

In short, the very permanence of a tattoo together with its intimacy in being linked with the naked body precludes, or should preclude, treating such decoration lightly. Sadly, due to its permanence it must not be regarded as a mere fashion, such as hairstyle or clothes, to be altered at will, but a deep commitment taken after careful and mature consideration.

The prohibition of tattooing for the under-eighteens should reduce the size of the problem, perhaps by drawing the attention of the public to the fact that the problem of under age tattooing exists. But it doesn't solve the question of amateur tattoos among juveniles. Such marks are usually evidence of an anti-social outlook, membership of teenage gangs, or a term in a corrective establishment. What so few realise, tragically, is that such a mark becomes the albatross around the neck for all time. With the mark goes the tag - Society deems it so. This is one of the problems behind prison rehabilitation. Hence the reason why some plastic surgeons associated with prison service are prepared to spend an enormous amount of time removing tattoos, especially those on exposed areas. They believe that for a man to go straight, he must look straight.

Since our society allows, from laziness or convenience, snap judgements based on appearances to be the rule rather than the exception, it is to be expected that tattoos, like long hair, casual dress, or trivia such as an ear-ring or other eccentricity, are misconstrued without hesitation.

Tattoos, like so many other human social activities, must always be an individual matter. The Psychologist will

indoubtedly murmur the accusing word "Narcissis". Those with the biggest paunches will speak the loudest. Fair enough, nobody is forced to look at him or herself in a mirror. The main argument against tattoos is their permanence. Do people really want to go through life watching the same old decoration slowly fading away on their ageing bodies? For some, the answer is, quite clearly, "Yes". What in heaven's name is wrong with it, provided shame is not the aftermath?

As for the actual practice of tattooing, it is absolutely clear that it is not a decaying nor dying skill, nor, is it necessarily a decadent custom. That much improvement is needed before tolerance is feasible cannot be denied; that problems need urgent solutions is obvious. Just as the sexual behavior of mankind demands patience, humour and understanding, so tattooing requires a sympathetic and responsible attitude to allow for a fuller appreciation of tattoo in its social and, more important, personal contexts.

That varying levels of intellect and consideration are exercised by each individual tattooed, is undeniable. Thus, we cannot allow ourselves to generalise about tattoo: for in doing so, we run the risk of offending those who have given their participation in this ritual full consideration; as opposed to those whose levels of evaluation extend no further than ... "wishing to be one of the gang". (Ref. no 4)

That the future of tattoo remains as undefined as its past, is yet another undeniable fact; the hope being, however, that before long it will be relieved of the previous decades of ostracism and elevated to the status of Artform, which in many cases it truly deserves.



"Society Looks on"
(Ritcher, Stephen, 1985) P.P. 21

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(George Platt Lynes - Photographs 1931-1955 - Woody. Jack)
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