

THE EVOLUTION OF TATTOOS AS PERSONAL BRANDS

ANA-CĂTĂLINA CHIROȘCĂ*, OLGUȚA ANCA ORZAN*,**

Summary

This article proposes an analysis of tattoos, not only as body modification, but as a distinct expression of culture, social status and art. In a world of permanently changing trends, tattoos evolve, combining tradition with modern tendencies, reflecting one's identity, culture and creativity.

We will analyse, through history, the way in which tattoos have evolved aesthetically and through the modernization of the materials and tools used, while also focusing on the psychological impact tattoos might have on an individual. The article will also present the medical aspects of the tattoos, the immune processes involved in tattooing and potential complications of this practice. An important aspect the article will highlight is the social impact of tattoos in the modern society. We will present the way tattoos can influence the social perception of an individual and how the modern society is transitioning towards a better acceptance of this form of self expression.

In summary, this article offers a comprehensive look onto tattoos, highlighting them as complex ways of self expression, tradition and creativity, in an ever-changing world.

Key words: tattoos, tattooing techniques, post-tattoo complications

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History of Tattoos

The history of tattoos represent a complex concept through its variety, and the act of tattooing have evolved over the millenia in different cultures around the world. [1]

The first evidence of tattoos dates back around 5000 years ago in the Neolithic era, and was discovered on mummies. (Fig.1) It is considered to had served ceremonial purposes.[2] In Ancient Egypt tattoos were mostly used by women as a beauty care method.

In Polynesia, tattoos still represent an important part of the culture and are used to

mark an individual's social status, personal history and tribal identity. These tattoos are known as "tatau" and they hold a strong symbolistic meaning. The word "tatau" is also the etymologic origine of the word "tattoo".[3]

In Japan tattos have a long history that is tied to the Samurai traditions. Named „irezumi" [4] (Fig.2) Japanese tattoos are colorful and intricate designs meant to mark one's allegiance to a certain family or social class.[4] In modern times, tattoos are mostly associated with the Yakuza Group. However, members of this group only have tattos that can be fully covered by clothing,

* "Carol Davila", University of Pharmacy, Bucharest.

* "Elias" Emergency University Hospital, Dermatology Department, Bucharest.



Figure 1: Tattoos on the mummified right arm of a Scythian chieftain, c.500 BC (Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Russia).



Figure 2: Kusakabe Kimbei- Paysan Tatoue, circa 1875.

because in many areas of Japan, such as Shibuya, Tokyo, it is illegal to have visible tattoos.[4]

In Thailand, there is a religious form of tattooing known as “Sak Yant”. These tattoos are made by buddhist monks and have a profound spiritual meaning, associated with the religious and cultural practices of Thai Buddhism.

In Africa, tattoos are used by certain tribes as initiation rituals, specific symbols being associated with the affiliation to a social group, such as warriors. There is also an alternative practice to tattooing named scarification. This technique is based on the keloid cicatrization that forms a specific pattern and it is used by population groups with a Fitzpatrick VI phototype. [5] The colonization and spread of monotheistic Abrahamic religions led to a general stigmatization of tribal people by the urban African population. [6,7]

In Europe, tattoos had been used as a religious statement during times of socio-politic conflict. In countries such as Albani, Kosovo, Gibraltar or Malta, Christians used to tattoo the sign of the cross on their foreheads or their hands [8]. Later on, tattoos had been associated with felons, circus artists or certain subcultures such as the punk scene, which led to the heavy stigmatization of tattooed people. In the 21st century, tattoos gained more popularity, which led to the growth of the tattoo industry and the modernization of the tattooing process. [9]

In modern times, tattoos represent a diverse and popular form of art. Individuals choose to get tattooed for many different reasons, such as self expression, celebration of important events or important people in their lives. The modern technology improved significantly the tattooing

process, and therefore they can be created in a variety of different styles and colors.[9]

The Tattooing Technique

Historically, the techniques and tools used for tattooing have evolved considerably over time. In the past, tattoos were applied using primitive tools, such as sticks or sharp bone fragments (Fig.3), which were stuck into the skin to insert ink or pigment. These tools varied according to culture and geographic region. There is historical evidence indicating materials such as wood, glass, ivory, metal (fig. 4) To create tattoos, different substances were used for pigmentation. They ranged from coal to certain types of colored clay. The technique involves striking a sharp instrument loaded with pigment into the skin with the help of a hammer or a beat, or the cutaneous incision followed by saturation of the lesions in the pigment.

Since the 19th century and especially in the 20th century, more advanced techniques and specific tools for tattooing have been developed. The advent of tattoo machines revolutionized the process, giving tattooists better control over

details as well as safety. Today, tattoos are made using electric tattoo machines and use sterile needles. The ink used in tattoos is also more refined and safe, minimizing the risk of infections or allergic reactions.[10]

During the tattooing process, the tattooist uses a tattoo machine equipped with needles. These needles are inserted into the skin at a specific depth, passing the epidermis, to the dermis. As the needles enter the dermis, they inject ink droplets. Ink is introduced into the dermis in the form of small particles. The body reacts to this process of introducing foreign bodies (inks) into the dermis by activating the immune system.[11] Activated macrophages try to remove ink from the skin, but the ink is too large to be completely removed. Thus, part of the ink remains in the dermis. The skin reacts to ink by surrounding the particles by fibroblasts.[11] This process helps to keep the ink in the dermis and encapsulate it in a scar tissue matrix.

Chemically, modern tattoo ink is composed of pigments, solvent and stabilizers or fasteners. Pigments are the coloring substances that determine. Most tattoo ink uses organic pigments,



Figure 3: Two previously unearthed turkey leg bones with sharpened tips (top) are the oldest known tattooing tools. Two other turkey bones from the same site (bottom) may also have been used for tattooing but lack tips for analysis.



Figure 4: A set of tâtatau tools and instruments made by the late Tufuga tâtatau Su'a Sulu'ape Paulo II. Su'a Sulu'ape Paulo II, 1991. (Auckland War Memorial Museum).

which are considered less allergenic compared to inorganic pigments.[12] Organic pigments are often derived from natural sources or created synthetically to be less susceptible to the causes of allergies. The solvent is a liquid substance that suspends pigments and facilitates their injection and contributes to the homogenization and fluidization of the ink to uniform application in the skin. Stabilizers and fasteners are added to ensure that the tattoo is durable.

Complications after tattooing

From a medical point of view, there are multiple complications [13] that can occur after the tattooing process. Tattoos can represent entry gates for bacteria and other microorganisms. Infections can occur if hygiene is not respected, and can cause inflammation, erythema, pain, and purulent collections in the tattooed area. In more serious cases, infections may require antibiotic treatment. Some people may develop allergic reactions to ink or other substances used in tattooing. These reactions can cause pruritus, congestion or rash. Tattoos can cause changes in the texture or color of the skin, especially if they heal poorly. Keloid or hypertrophic scars may appear.

Modern indications suggest a medical consultation before tattooing, which involves informing about any potential risks or complications depending on the individual profile or anatomical peculiarities. Tattoo medicine also involves removing or covering existing tattoos. Techniques such as laser or surgical procedures can be used to remove tattoos.

Cosmetic tattoos are semi-permanent makeup techniques. The risks occur if they are carried out by unauthorized or untrained persons completely and correctly. Correcting incorrect cosmetic tattoos can represent a real challenge [10]. In the EU there are plenty of laws implemented with the purpose of regulating these procedures.

The psychological impact of tattooing

The psychological impact of tattoos can vary significantly from one individual to another and it depends on several factors. These factors include personality, motivation behind getting the tattoo, previous experiences and how the tattoo is perceived in the culture or community in which the individual lives. Thus, tattoos are generally seen as a form of expression of identity and individuality. They can help shape or assert a certain personal or social identity, helping to strengthen positive self-esteem. Many individuals choose to tattoo symbols that have deep personal significance for them. These symbols can represent important life events, values, or meaningful relationships.[14]

In some cultures, tattoos are used as a ritual of initiation by which an individual shows resilience and self-discipline. The tattooing process and the subsequent period of healing can contribute to the development of qualities such as patience and self-discipline. These aspects can have a positive impact on self-esteem and self-confidence.[15]

On the contrary, some people may experience feelings of regret or remorse after getting a tattoo, especially if the decision was made impulsively or if the original meaning of the tattoo changes over time. Thus, in the modern era, techniques have been developed by which permanent tattoos can be removed. The most common and effective of these techniques is lasertherapy[16]. The laser emits intense rays of concentrated light that are absorbed by the ink pigments in the tattoo. This energy absorption generates heat and induces the fragmentation of ink particles into microparticles. After the ink particles are fragmented, the body's lymphatic system contributes to their gradual elimination. The process can take weeks or even months, and multiple treatment sessions are required. Their effectiveness depends on various factors, such as the size and complexity of the tattoo, the type of ink used, the color of the tattoo-black ink is the

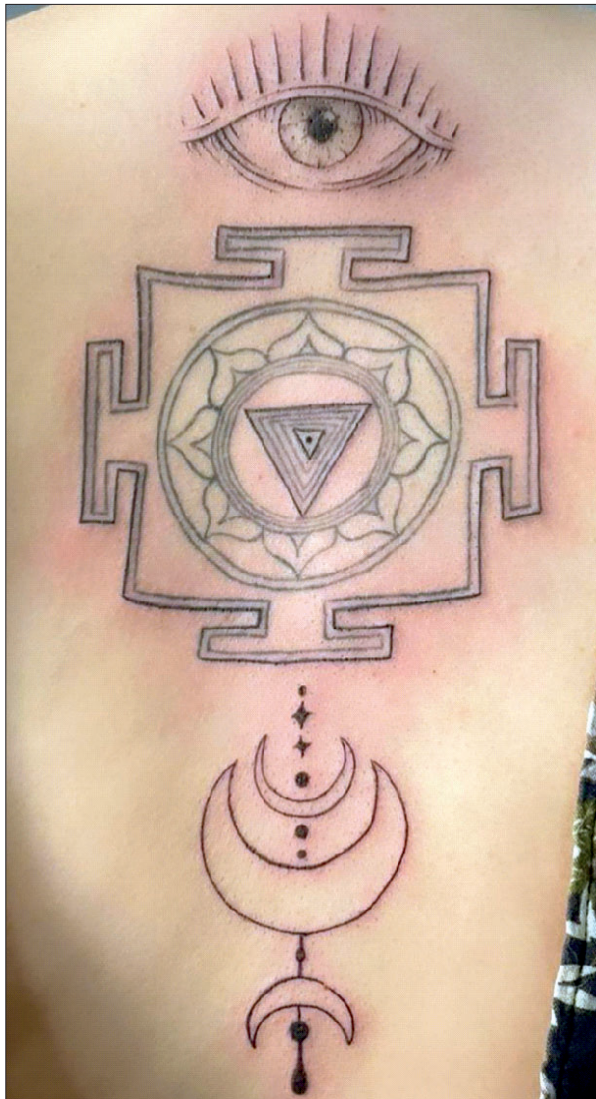


Figure 5: Tattoo made with the „fineline” technique, of Hindu symbols and Yantras representing the cycle of life (Personal archive).

easiest to remove, the, the type of skin of the person and the resistance of the tissue to trauma, as well as individual factors – age, general health, pain tolerance.[16]

Over the past 10 years, multiple organizations have developed that promote the preservation of the cultural traditions and customs of indigenous peoples in North America and Australia, thus militating for -integration into society of people with facial tattoos belonging to ethnic groups of Polynesian origin



Figure 6: Tattoos of Adinkra, Ghanaian symbols representing one's qualities- courage, loyalty, perseverance (Personal archive).

such as Samoa or Maori.[17] These actions were more successful in Australia compared to the United States.

Conclusions

There is currently a tendency towards changing the general perception of tattoos and abandoning the stigmata that associate tattoos with emotional instability or criminality. People in the West choose various tattoo designs, from

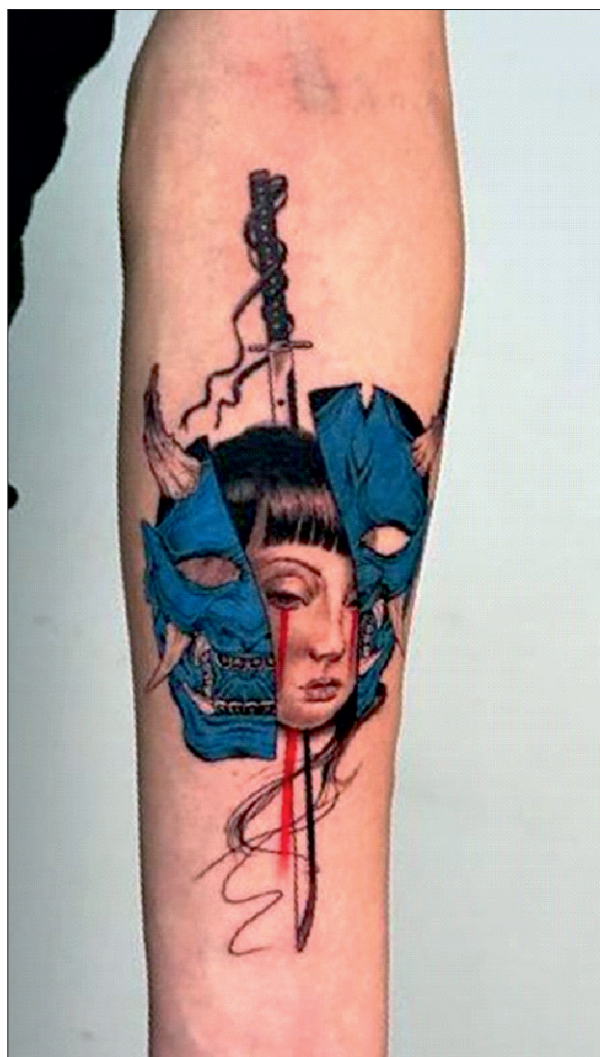


Figure 7: Tattoo of neo-Japanese inspiration mixed with white and black hyperrealism, representing facing the truth (Personal Archive).



Figure 8: Complex tattoo using colored surrealism, representing Norse symbols and deities (Personal Archive).

simple symbols or words (Fig. 5, Fig. 6), to abstract portraits (Fig. 7, Fig. 8) designed in modern artistic techniques. Due to the popularization of the subject through various forms of media such as magazines or TV shows, additio-

nally to the multiple legislative regulations that require strict qualifications and authorizations, tattoos are perceived by the younger generation as a form of self-expression or as fashion trends.

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Conflict of interest
NONE DECLARED

Correspondance address: olguta.orzan@umfcd.ro