

Tattoo: Stories of the body:
Transgression or transformation?

Thesis
in
the department
of
Art Education

Ph.D. Candidate: Theodora Boland

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
at

Faculty of Fine Art
Concordia University



National Library
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services

Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

ISBN: 0-612-90378-8

Our file Notre référence

ISBN: 0-612-90378-8

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this dissertation.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de ce manuscrit.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the dissertation.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.

Canada

**CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: **Theodora Boland**

Entitled: **Tattoo: Stories of the body: Transgression or Transformation?**

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (Art Education)

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the final examining committee:

Dr. C. Mullen

Chair

Dr. M. Richard

External Examiner

Dr. S. Weber

External to Program

Dr/ L. Blair

Examiner

Dr. D. Pariser

Examiner

Dr. P. Langdon

Thesis Supervisor

Approved by

~~Graduate Program Director~~

28 March 2004

Dean, Faculty of Fine Arts

Abstract

Tattoo: Stories of the body: Transgression or transformation?

This thesis explores contemporary customized tattoos in urban Montreal, through the creation of a video. The video data collection was based on detailed interviews with a group of nine participants of diverse racial, ethnic, class and gender, undertaken from an ethnographic perspective. This method, driven by the participants, revealed the world through their eyes and relied on interaction, subjectivity and personal history as a form of investigation. I also include observation of my own reflective processes. The emergent themes revealed a number of complex motives for tattoo engagement. The motivation to pursue tattoo involved decisions on life style choices, and the use of visual signifiers as records of a precise time. The images included all manner of daily activities and were embedded in popular culture. The recurring themes of death and devotion and their integration into horror and humorous motifs represented a strategy for dealing with personal trauma. The body's relationship with tattoo was a constant but dynamic relationship with the participants own history. The body's visceral nature indicated how tattoo creation is linked to both the bodies surface and internal workings. Tattoo sometimes reflected a quest for an ideal as the body was used as a site to display beliefs and affections while sometimes functioning as an arena for potential change and resolution. The study of tattoo culture offers a rich possibility for understanding the unique relationship people have with themselves: the body, its history and its ongoing transformation.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Paul Langdon for his enthusiasm, support and unconditional positive regard, throughout this research. I would also like to thank my husband Louis and children Julien, Elizabeth and Alexandre for their endless patience.

This thesis is dedicated with sincere gratitude and appreciation to the tattooed artists aficionados and participants who made this work possible.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1 Introduction	1
2. Tattoo: History and Contemporary Practice	7
2.1 Brief early history	7
2.2 Anthropology and criminology	12
2.3 Tattoo practice in contemporary Montreal.....	14
2.4 Pop culture	17
2.5 The tattoo procedure.....	18
2.6 Tattoo vocabulary	20
3. Research Methodology.....	23
3.1 Identifying an appropriate methodology.....	23
3.1.1 Areas of investigation.....	29
3.1.2 Video data collection	34
3.1.3 Validity of the interviewing process.....	34
3.2 Beginning the research	36
3.2.1 Selection of candidates	37
3.2.2 Method.....	38
3.2.3 Interview procedure.....	40
3.2.4 Analysis	42
3.2.5 Video-making, editing and final production	43
4. Presentation of Findings.....	48
4.1 Karen.....	48

4.2 Stephan	64
4.3 Sebastian	76
4.4 Catherine.....	84
4.5 Dima.....	104
4.6 Kurt	128
4.7 Eddie	146
4.8 Natalie	164
4.9 Glossary of tattoo vocabulary.....	185
 5. Tattoo Motivation.....	 188
5.1 Specific moments in time	188
5.2 Defiance and individuation.....	189
5.3 The function of humor	192
5.3.1 The function of horror.....	194
5.4 The gaze and the look	198
5.4.1 Eyes.....	199
5.4.2 Visual pleasure and pride in endurance	202
 6. Imagery and Symbolism.....	 203
6.1 Image, symbol, simulacrum and text	203
6.2 The content of the pictures	204
6.2.1 Text.....	205
6.2.2 Design	208
6.2.3 Death and devotion	211
6.2.4 Talismans	212
6.2.5 Pop culture devotion	213
6.2.6 Symbol or simulacrum.....	216

6.3 Appropriation and value	218
6.4 Carrying a culture forward	220
7. The Body.....	221
7.1 The body in art	221
7.2 Gender and the tattooed body	224
7.3 The visceral body	229
7.4 Tattoo location.....	231
7.5 Pain	234
7.5.1 Cuts, burns and brands.....	234
7.6 Personal history and the body.....	236
7.6.1 Group affiliation.....	237
7.6.2 Tattoo location as a sign of group membership	239
7.6.3 Tattoo as a transforming process.....	240
7.7 The carnal	246
8. Final reflections	248
8.1 Educational implications	248
8.2 Summary of findings	249
8.3 An aesthetic of the everyday	252
8.4. Alternative and resistant?	254
8.4.1 Community or difference?	255
8.5 Future research	257
Bibliography	259

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The obvious rise in the popularity of tattooing is evidenced by an increase in the number of new tattoo parlors in the trendy 'Plateau' areas of Montreal. There is also a definite tattoo fashion, as demonstrated by the number of rock stars, models and television personalities wearing them. When I recently visited the McCord Museum of Art, I was surprised to see traditional Native tattoo transfers being marketed next to art books. As the summer continued, I saw many different people with tattoos and began to reflect on the popularization of this artistic tradition. Returning to teach in the autumn, I noted that many students in my art education class were wearing brightly colored tattoos. I commented on this fashion and an animated discussion ensued.

Some students felt tattooing was just another fashion craze, while others said it was a form of self-expression and a legitimate art form. Later, one of the students approached me to say her tattoo had nothing to do with being fashionable but was instead a very special way to remember her childhood nickname. She then showed me a small, carefully drawn tattoo she had designed herself. This tattoo struck me as something quite different, both private and public, and imbued with personal significance. After this discussion, I was left with a real curiosity about the nature of tattoo. I found myself questioning why people had become attracted to this art form and how they had become initiated into tattoo. I wondered whether this tattoo manifestation was an example of passive

consumption, as people followed a fad, or youthful rebellion and defiance.

The emergence of new ways to differentiate oneself and express individuality is a common feature of contemporary Western art. Yet, I had understood that most tattoos were chosen from an existing repertoire of designs. Was the choice of motif simply a matter of selection from the tattoo parlor's photocopied, standard repertoire (popularly called "flash") or did it involve personal symbol making or the creation of drawings and patterns unique to the wearer? I also wondered what sorts of artistic considerations entered into the drawing of a particular tattoo and how, and what might be the sources of the various images that people chose to wear for life.

Thinking of permanence and the skin as a possible medium brought me to the realization that there might be a special relationship between the body and the tattoo process. The use of the body as a site for personal expression puzzled me. What, for example, was the function of the use of the body's surface as art to be shown in public? I wanted to try and understand the processes involved, yet felt somewhat squeamish at the idea of the pain associated with tattooing. I also felt excluded as a member of the as yet uninitiated and wondered whether I might ever be able to access this experience.

I began a short initial research project, the goal of which was to explore some of these issues. I interviewed a small number of tattooed people and recorded the interviews on video. Many of the findings proved a

complete surprise, due in part to my total ignorance of the topic and the candor of my first interviewees. I found a fascinating and diverse range of people, all with interesting stories to tell, none of which corresponded to the expectations I had formed based on my literature review. I was, however, left frustrated, partly due to the methodology, which paid scant attention to individual tattoo imagery. I was also impeded by the limited pilot project, with its short time scale, which did not allow me to develop the levels of trust and empathy required to draw out participants' thoughts and stories with any sensitivity or explore their reasons and motivations in detail.

This thesis represents an attempt to address these issues and to investigate the art of tattoo in greater depth. The objective is to develop a better understanding of this complex and fascinating phenomenon and to find better ways to integrate knowledge of and access to popular culture into my teaching practice.

I first approached the topic of tattoo through a review of the literature. I originally felt the need to ground my interviews in some sort of historical context. In chapter 2, "Tattoo: History and Contemporary Practice," I review tattoo's history from ancient times to contemporary Western practice. This proved essential in understanding the context of my research but inadequate for understanding motivations and practices in contemporary Montreal. After a brief review of other disciplines' approaches to tattoo—particularly anthropology and psychology, where theoretical speculation on the functions of tattoo can be found—I was quickly drawn to alternative sources of literature, such as tattoo web sites

and tattoo chat lines. I also read and began to follow tattoo magazines and then, most importantly, visited many Montreal tattoo shops. Much of this material I consider in a later chapter on popular culture.

Chapter 3, "Research Methodology," describes and introduces the major areas under investigation and my research approach. The details on the creation of the methodology are explained, including my role and personal observations. I interviewed nine participants with a serious commitment to tattoo, recording these interviews on video- and audiotape. The nine interviewees were a culturally and ethnically diverse group of individuals. I also took into account differences in gender, sexual orientation and social class. There follows an account of the video making and editing process.

Chapter 4, "Presentation of Findings," relays these interviews in an edited form with a brief introduction, personal reflection and a brief profile of each participant as an aid to contextualizing each person's account.

The next three chapters analyze the content of the interviews from the perspective of the various questions under investigation. This entails relating them to the literature when relevant and exploring new directions and emerging themes. This begins with chapter 5, "Tattoo Motivation," in which the initial contact with tattoo and motivations to become tattooed are analyzed. Many of my informants' tattoos operate under an alternative aesthetic, namely through defiance, often using the transgressive or resistant power of humor and horror. Here, I reflect on the

notion of the gaze. The recurring theme of a tattoo as mediating a visual summary of an event or moment in time is also demonstrated.

Chapter 6, "Imagery and Symbolism," analyzes the act of creating tattoo pictures, designs and texts. This chapter considers a number of recurring images, notably those related to death and commemoration but also including love, admiration and the use of talismans. Here the issues of collaboration and artistic process are discussed.

In chapter 7, "The Body," the issues that relate to the relationship between tattoo and the body are discussed. The chapter begins with the theme of decoration as the participants explore the notion of the history of the body in its most visceral form. Here, I also consider a significant aspect that arose from the participant data: the issue of defining ownership, reclamation and personal transformation. The use of the body as a sign of group membership and the exploration of gender issues are also investigated.

In chapter 8, "Final reflection," I summarize the findings and reflect on the interface with tattoo as an aspect of popular culture and personal resistance. The interplay between lived experience, everyday reality and the often negative view of popular culture is explored. I then reflect on the integration of an aesthetic of the everyday with the acknowledgement of difference and non-exclusion into curricular content. I also consider possible avenues for further research. I conclude with my observations that, despite the very real differences between the participants, there are a number of recurring themes. One is that tattoos

can be seen to operate as a variant of a photograph or visual record of an intensely lived experience. This offers some insight into the impact of popular culture in its many forms on all aspects of educational life, a circumstance that is not only valid but worthwhile.

Chapter 2

Tattoo: History and Contemporary Practice

2.1 Brief early history

It seems impossible to locate the precise origins of tattoo as its existence might best be described as non-linear—interrupted by bans and revived by fashions. There is evidence for its existence in many diverse cultures and at many different time periods. However, the actual process of tattoo seems to remain relatively unchanged. Tattoo is the piercing of the skin followed by the insertion of an indelible dye or pigment to create a design. The pigment may be various kinds of inks, for example, dyes made from burned material. The skin is punctured to a depth of about one to three millimeters with a sharp instrument, usually a needle but sometimes a shell in the past; today a sewing needle or a school compass are sometimes used.

Despite its abundant presence, the history or histories of tattoo have only recently received attention (Caplan, 2000). It is difficult to be sure of the early practice, which would appear to be complex, diverse and multifunctional. In antiquity, tattoo is described by Jones (1987) as existing well before Greek culture. Voluntary tattooing was known among the Thracians; however, the Greeks seem to have adopted tattooing from Persia. It also seems to have immediately taken on a punitive function as a means to mark runaway slaves. There are examples of early references to tattooed inscriptions on the foreheads of prisoners indicating the nature of their crimes. Tattooing of a decorative or religious nature, although present, seems to have been less frequently observed and documented;

however, Julius Caesar in 54 BC noted the old Briton custom of dying the skin blue (Cohen, 1999).

There are other examples of early tattoo practice. For example, the Ice Man, found in 1991 and dated to 3300–3200 BC, was found to have heavily tattooed skin. Artifacts found in Egyptian tombs also show figures with tattoos.

The history of tattoo in Europe is, however, a story of taboo and marginalization. Under the Roman Empire, tattoos continued to be used to mark slaves and prisoners; gladiators, for example, were frequently tattooed on the forehead. There are distinguishable variations in the tattoos applied in the Greco-Roman period depending on the nature of the crime, the ruler offended by the crime and the punishment (Gustafson, 2000). The practice of punitive tattooing continued into the Byzantine period, and indeed there is evidence that it remained in force into the ninth century.

Both the Koran and the Old Testament forbid marking the body and it has frequently been banned in Western societies, as it was during the period of Pope Hadrian (AD 787). Despite this, there is evidence that early Christians tattooed themselves voluntarily with religious emblems, particularly crosses. This might be explained as a deliberate challenge to and reversal of tattoo's punitive signification. Such an act would have transformed the widespread tradition—the tattoo operating as a sign of humiliation—into a positive group symbol or inverted stigma and mark of defiance (Gustafson, 2000). Indeed, the continued use of tattoo by early

Christians is well documented, despite being banned from the eighth to the tenth centuries; for example, crusaders and pilgrims tattooed themselves to record their pilgrimages. The early history of tattoo captures two recurring themes found in contemporary tattoo culture: its association with deviant behavior and its capacity to signal love and devotion.

As a decorative art form, the history of tattooing in Japan, New Zealand and the Polynesian Islands continues to have contemporary resonance. Ancient tattoo designs from these places remain a staple feature of current tattoo art practice. The long tradition of tattoo in Japan is evidenced by fifth-century artifacts. The practice was revived during the thirteenth century by various marginal groups and grew in popularity to include texts of religious and amorous devotion until its suppression in the seventeenth century. It appears that woodblock printers' (many of whom became tattoo artists) depiction of fully tattooed heroes, most notably those by Utagawa Kuniyoshi, were at the source of the tattoo art form called *irezumi*. This form of tattoo work includes complex designs of dragons, snakes and mythical figures drawn from folklore, which continued to be very popular until the nineteenth century, when tattoo was banned by the Meiji emperor. The practice of tattooing was later to become fairly marginalized, favored by the *yakuza* or organized crime world. However, skilled artists continued to tattoo Western sailors and visiting nobility. Highly valued by many of the participants in my research, many of whom had ornate Japanese-style tattoos, the style continues to have significant influence in tattoo shops and among flash collections.

Maori designs from New Zealand are often thought of as among the most complex. These designs, which involve blocks of nonrepresentational black swirls and complex geometric patterns, were made with sharpened shells and burned organic matter. They were associated with ritual (Mead, 1928) and social identity; the long and painful process was an indicator of transition to adult status (Sanders, 1994). Tribal tattoos which adapt and imitate ancient designs are among the most popular today. Many of these directly borrow or are adapted from ancient patterns; they are often available on specialized Internet sites.

Caplan (2000) indicates that there is evidence to suggest that tattooing remained largely on the fringes of society; given its marginal nature, it has been difficult to access historically. However, there is evidence of its continuation during the European Reformation (Flemming, 2000), well before the Pacific expeditions of James Cook and his sailors, who returned with examples on their bodies. The word *tattoo* is not thought to have existed in English until the early eighteenth century following Cook's return from Tahiti, where several examples of what was known as *tatua* were recorded. This Polynesian word is thought to have been the origin of the English word *tattoo* (Maescia-Lees and Sharpe, 1996).

Cabri, a French sailor, was one of the first of many men to try to earn a living by displaying his heavily worked tribal tattoos in circuses, at the beginning of the nineteenth century. By the middle of the century, there were numerous examples of traveling performers exhibiting themselves for money, many in Barnum's circus. Tattooing on sailors was probably well established before it became an object of historical record in late

nineteenth century. The sailors' choice of motifs is described as typical of folk art patterns, with numerous hearts, crucifixes, patriotic emblems or loved ones' names (Sanders, 1994). Data from the transportation ships taking prisoners from Britain to Australia also indicate a repertoire of motifs including initials, hearts, anchors and crosses. Burg (1995) finds that tattoo designs remained generally constant between the late eighteenth century and World War I.

In 1890, the American Association of Tattooing came into existence, heralding the beginning of the commercialization of the art form. It now has approximately one thousand registered professional artists. The tattoo rage of the late nineteenth century witnessed several members of royalty opting for tattoos, but this craze seems to have largely escaped the notice of the middle class. As Bradley (2000:148.) notes, there were always deep class divides in the practice and the perception of tattoo practice. Working-class usage is described as little more than a rough technique, compared to the sophisticated aesthetic preferred by the upper classes.

In 1891, the first electric tattooing machine was patented by a New Yorker, Samuel O'Reilly, and what had until then been an itinerant profession saw the first tattoo parlor appear in New York. This innovation reduced pain and required a good deal less skill on the part of the tattooist; indeed, these first professional tattooists were unlikely to have had any formal art training. Like early European tattoo shops, they served a local working-class population. Most tattoos were stencils or simple blue drawings. Lew Alberts, a wallpaper designer working with O'Reilly at the beginning of the century, is credited with being the source of many of the

copied flash designs still seen in old-style tattoo parlors today (Saunders, 1989).

2.2 Anthropology and criminology

Much of the research available on early twentieth-century tattoo practice comes from the work of anthropologists and criminologists. Early criminologist Lombroso (1896) was to write an influential paper on tattooing among over 6,000 criminals. His study reflects his own prejudice; he single-mindedly analyzed the content of tattoos as indicators of atavistic barbarism. Warning against the contemporary fashion for tattoo among the upper classes, he argued that any attempt to make tattoo respectable should only provoke feelings of disgust!

Much writing on the topic seeks to ascribe tattoo as belonging to the ethnic or deviant other. "Otherness" is a metaphysical idea meaning to be outside the mainstream and normal regulatory systems (De Beauvoir, 1963).

The anthropologist Gell (1993) has greatly influenced thinking on contemporary tattoo. Writing on Polynesian tattoo, he draws on psychoanalytical theory to describe the skin functioning as a type of social reproduction; this is the way in which the skin operates as a link between individuals' internal and external worlds. He describes the intrinsic function of Polynesian tattooing as producing a certain mind-set which is articulated in all aspects of the life cycle, perpetuating social and political relations. Tattoos in this culture therefore operate as a device, guided by collective representation. Gell sees no similar parallel with

dislocated Western societies. However, the notion of a relationship between the interior and exterior self occurs frequently in tattoo literature. This aspect of tattoo as a mediator between the outside or skin surface and the inside or psychological notion of self was manifested throughout my interviews with participants.

A review of tattoo literature reveals a subject that has continued to be marginalized and treated as part of a subculture that is either criminal or deviant. I have consistently found that tattoo history and its contemporary practice relate to the relationship between the body and accepted ideas on taste and power. Recent scholarship indicates that, although tattoo has been almost constantly present throughout European history, there is a distinct pathologizing of the topic (Wojcik, 1986). Literature searches in various databases revealed that tattoo was frequently mentioned in connection with deviant populations and the transmission of blood-borne diseases. This may in part be due to its disproportionate use by prisoners.

Tattoo's cultural status, however, has undergone something of a transformation in recent decades. This is sometimes referred to as the Tattoo Renaissance (Rubin, 1988) and stems from the 1960s. Wearing a tattoo has moved from the antisocial and marginal to the fashionably "in." This has happened due to a concatenation of events, not least the social changes in the 1970s and 1980s, including feminism and New Age movements, which have brought with them a new tattoo clientele (DeMello, 2000). Younger artists with art school backgrounds have encouraged artistic innovation and improved technical ability. Increased disposable income, effective marketing strategies and the creation of

new tattoo studios for customized pieces, presented as studios for the discerning customer, have all played a role in the emergence of a new, modern tattoo culture, reflecting its considerable increase in popularity in the last thirty years. Studies on the frequency of tattoo among the North American population suggest, perhaps surprisingly, that as many as seven to twenty million people are tattooed (Armstrong, & McConnell 1994).

2.3 Tattoo practice in contemporary Montreal

Tattoo practice is part of a wider culture that encompasses a whole variety of areas, from tattoo shops and conferences to magazines, Internet sites and its total involvement in many aspects of popular culture. My participants and other people with substantial tattoo work were often engaged in what appeared to be a lifestyle choice. Many participants have shops they regularly go to, and the local tattoo community is quite small.

There are 29 tattoo shops listed in the Montreal telephone directory. All were originally located in the heart of the downtown area. A number of new shops have opened in the last ten years, many of them in the popular Plateau Mont-Royal area of Montreal. There may be upwards of two or three artists working in each establishment, but this masks the actual number of tattoo artists as amateur artists often work from home with private clients, through personal contacts. Dima, one of my participants, remarked rather cynically that there were plenty of "amateurs, who sent off for the tattoo kit and then butchered themselves and then their friends."

Tattoo shops and studios often cater to a specific clientele depending on location and the artists' approach and background. These establishments tend to provide either low-cost traditional flash or the new high-end customized tattoos. Apprenticeships are difficult to obtain and Natalie informed me that she receives several requests per month from art students looking for work. A three-year apprenticeship under an established artist is a normal minimal requirement to be considered trained, but participants mentioned several examples of artists changing masters and leaving shops unexpectedly, much to the dismay and evident rancor of many shop owners. Since the tattoo community is relatively small and the artists know one another, rivalry and competition for work are inevitable.

In the past, most shops had a huge repertoire of drawings or "flash" available to be copied onto the body. The designs range from fine line drawings to very old traditional designs. Generally, some of the more traditional tattooists use stencils to outline drawings while the more "new-school/skool" artists draw freehand. There are also displays of ink colors and customers may peruse the books at their leisure. The photocopied images displayed on walls and panels may be supplied by mail order catalogs or free flash on the Internet but are usually the shops' own collections. These are supplemented by the artists' own work; each tattoo is usually photographed for display and kept in the artist's personal repertoire. In one shop on St. Catherine Street, I encountered over two hundred books or collections of flash. Each book is classified by subject area or genre. There have been some recent attempts to classify flash. Lautman (1994), for example, divides tattoos into five categories: tribal;

paintings, prints and portraits; imagination; neotribal; and all the rest. However, flash classification is complex; the collections change and typically range from animals to superheroes, cartoon characters, portraits of rock stars, cars and flowers to logos and advertising motifs. There are also sporting and military designs of the traditional and old-school variety, hearts and the omnipresent human skull in a thousand variations. Large panels of signed drawings of Chinese dragons and characters are common, as are Japanese traditional motifs including carp, dragons and geishas. Available on shop walls are wide-ranging sets of black borders, patterns and decorative designs. These are also classified by themes such as Celtic, Native, gothic or tribal, and often resemble a highly complex series of rhythmically interconnected bands and knots. The tribal class can be subdivided geographically or into tribal spiritual or abstract, for example.

There is also a completely different and more specialized kind of shop that deals in unique, unclassifiable pieces. In these more stylized establishments, similar in design to beauty parlors, there is little or no flash; instead, they feature collections of photographs from the private portfolios of the artists working there. Here each art piece is individually discussed and decided upon by client and artist. These works are often elaborate, highly stylized and described as unique; they are often photographed professionally and displayed as artworks. Many of the portfolios I saw held large collections of photographs of highly detailed representational portraits or complex, highly colored irezumi-style artwork.

2.4 Pop culture

Pop culture's symbiotic interface with tattoo appears in many aspects of popular life. From the tattooed rock stars dancing on MTV to the advertising industry's use of closeup shots of tattoos, tattoo has come to epitomize cool. A recent advertising campaign for a new music station describes being cool as having the right tattoo and the wrong attitude. This perfectly encapsulates the way in which tattoo is read as daring, bad or slightly mad. Films continue to promote the tattoo aficionado as a deviant "other."

Some of the earliest examples of tattooed characters on film include the fully tattooed sailor in Huston's *Moby Dick* (1956) and *The Tattooed Hitman* by Yamashita (1977) a story of gangland killing in Tokyo. More recent films, notably *Tattoo* by Brooks (1981), *The Pillow Book* by Greenaway (1996), based on Sei Shonagon's 1,000-year-old diaries, and Takabayashi's *Irezumi* (1983), have included the theme of sexual and emotional fixation. Most of these films have continued to treat the tattooed as aberrant and other. The most resonant is Nolan's *Memento* (2000), a thriller in which a deranged amnesiac writes reminders all over his body. Yet there were elements of truth in these films: the emotional intensity of the content of many of the tattoos and the use of tattoo as a tool for remembering.

Tattoo magazines, or "zines," including *International Tattoo* and *Skin and Ink*, have played a substantial role in popularizing tattoo as an art form, promoting its edgy alternative to mainstream culture while also photographing outstanding artists' work. Several of my participants had had examples of their own and friends' work published in these

magazines, and these photos were displayed in their shops and homes. Tattoo conferences represent another aspect of this culture where tattoo stars showcase work, competitions and demonstrations take place and ideas, techniques and business cards are exchanged. There are several local and international conferences in North America each year. In addition, thousands of web pages and chat lines cater to the very diverse tattoo culture worldwide. These range from sites that publicize tattoo supplies and shops, to showcases of individuals' work. Certain e-zines require payment or proof of tattoo to join. There are many highly specialized sites that, for example, only carry Christian tattoos and have substantial collections of images of angels, saints and Christ figures. Conversely, there are sites that specialize in police detection and reading and decoding tattoos as proof of gang membership. Tattoo culture represents a very complex array of different people engaging in tattoo for widely varying purposes.

2.5 The tattoo procedure

The actual process of obtaining a tattoo is somewhat akin to a medical intervention. The special chair and the range of specialized equipment including sterilizing steam autoclaves or dry heat sterilizers, rubber gloves, sterile pots of various liquids and needles are reminiscent of a dentist's office. The area of skin to be tattooed is disinfected and shaved before the stencil and image transfer solution are applied. If no stencil is used, sterile needles, which are soldered onto the needle bar, are dipped in the chosen pigment and pierce the skin to make the design. Some experienced and well-regarded artists tattoo freehand without preparatory drawings. The tattoo machine resembles a gun; the motor

frame is connected to an electric point by a clip cord, and sometimes more than one is used during the tattooing process. Blood and pigment must be wiped away during the process. The tattooed area swells slightly following completion and may leak fluids afterwards, appearing inflamed for up to two weeks. Aftercare includes the application of a dressing and antibacterial ointment, but the standard of care and information varies greatly between establishments.

All the materials to start a tattoo business can be cheaply and easily bought from tattoo supply outlets or over the Internet. The pigments, which have a food colorant base, are almost always purchased ready-made. Artists often mix pigments to create their own colors. Several participants described the importance of finding someone who could mix colors properly.

All participants considered the formal aspects of tattoo work to be integral if not the pre-eminent elements of the tattoo process. These include design and conceptualization, but shape, size, movement, location and the selection of colors were always given extensive consideration. Kurt described his striking turquoise and pink tattoos as part of an artist's secret repertoire of color recipes, mixed in blenders, that were unique to that artist. Dima's substantial, heavily blocked arm work required an artist who could distill ink to get "the best and darkest black."

Also somewhat reminiscent of the medical model tattoo evokes is the special relationship participants have with their artists. This relationship was often described by the participants as very close and highly collaborative.

Many participants called their tattoo artist a close friend, someone they respected and placed a high level of trust in. Karen and Dima described how their plans for tattoo designs and motifs were often discussed at length, drawn and redrawn, and sometimes perfected by the tattoo artist. Considerable discretion is often given to the artist once a relationship is established, with participants mapping out extensive drawings to be continued over a period of several months or even years.

The cost of a tattoo is determined by the caliber of the artist, the location of the shop and the time spent on the task. This can vary from a \$30 half-inch butterfly to a sleeve costing several thousand dollars. However, the cost of an individual tattoo is often the subject of negotiation. As work may be colored and worked on over a period of many months, participants described how informal lines of credit were sometimes established. This is not without difficulties; some participants described a trusted artist's sudden disappearance, which meant they were left with half-finished work. Finding another artist to complete these projects is considered somewhat unethical. Skills are also exchanged between friends and experienced artists on a pro rata basis. Kurt had avoided paying for much of the tattoo work on his arms, as local artists offered free work in return for the publicity gained by tattooing a well-known punk rock guitarist.

2.6 Tattoo vocabulary

The practice of tattooing has developed a vocabulary of its own. These words have changed over time and continue to do so. Jones (2000) lists a number of early words for tattoo deriving from the root *stig* meaning "to

prick." He shows how the word *stigma* has been used to mean "tattoo" and was later misinterpreted, sometimes obscuring tattoo's historical presence.

At the beginning of the research, many of these words escaped me. I noted that the street tattooing travelers I met referred to tattooing as "poking," "stick and poke" or "getting inked." Tattoo practice is often referred to as either "old-" or "new-school." Old-school broadly refers to traditional tattoo and flash motifs such as the hearts, wreaths, ships and rockabilly designs from the rock and roll heyday in the 1950s; in other words, what might also be referred to as the "old days." Associated with old school is the "tattooist," as opposed to the "artist," the use of stencils and the preference for copying existing flash, in contrast to original "creations" or "pieces." The term "old-school" sometimes carries a positive emotional connotation of a pioneering tradition and acknowledges the respect owed to the earlier, if less sophisticated, tattoo trade of the past. Conversely, in the context of the contemporary tattoo studio, "old-school" can also mean old-fashioned and unrefined. "New-school" is the modern approach to tattoo, including art school influence, new techniques, styles and skills, and the idea of tattoo as an original and creative artwork that conveys the unique artistry of an individual. Although most likely to refer to the tattoo work of the last decade, this encompasses an approach that has been developed over thirty years.

A "scratcher" is a derogatory term for an autonomous, untrained tattooist and carries the connotation of being unskilled. There are many other expressions that pepper all conversations about tattoo culture, including

the enthusiast as a keen follower to the collector who might wear many individual old-school pieces. Techniques and styles have many words and expressions from “crazy” to “fine line” to “realist,” and the current penchant for a hyperrealist style.

Other terms include styles borrowed from other artistic traditions such as “tribal” or “neotribal” and, most recently, “mystic tribal,” which seeks to incorporate motifs from popular New Age spirituality images, usually from Wicca or occult traditions. Haida patterns were in evidence in many shops and on two participants. *Irezumi* patterns refer to the Japanese traditional art forms. The *moko mokai*, or preserved tattooed head, appertains to traditional New Zealand tattoo design but a “moko” means a “facial” or a tattooed face. Tattoo vocabulary is not particularly exclusive; I found that many terms reflect tattoo culture’s assimilation into mainstream artistic practice. “Abstract,” “cubist,” “custom creations” and “unique pieces” are all words that parallel other forms of traditional art vocabulary. The participants confidently used the vocabulary of painting and drawing, from “washes,” “shading” and “tone” to “texture” and “dimension.” The tattoo participants spent a considerable amount of time discussing the formal aspects of their tattoo drawing and coloring techniques. Many of them demonstrated an extensive knowledge of tattoo’s history, referring to the well-known Japanese artists, Horiyoshi and Kuniyoshi. Catherine and Dima recommended the work of several established pioneering North American tattoo artists, notably Ed Hardy, Jack Ruby and Bernie Luther.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

3.1 Identifying an appropriate methodology

I was anxious to establish a methodological approach that could be tailored to exploring a subculture I knew little about. I decided on an approach influenced by ethnography. As a qualitative research method, it has a commitment to naturally occurring data (Silverman, 1993) and as such seems well suited to documenting contemporary tattoo practice. Not unlike a documentary orientation, ethnography originally positions itself as a method of folk description or the study of unknown or alien peoples (Popkewitz, 1984). Today it has come to designate qualitative and interpretive methods that see the world through the subject's eyes and rely on social construction and meaning (Jupp & Norris, 1993). As a qualitative methodology, it pays attention to interaction, subjectivity, motive and reason and will therefore suit my purpose as it responds to the need for a more emotional and personal form of investigation.

Relevant to any research approach are the issues of validity and reliability. I felt particularly concerned with these issues as I would be conducting interviews in a relatively unknown area. Added to that was my concern that unstructured interviews might lead to loose, unstructured dialogue of little value. Reliability and validity refer to the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions (Hammersley, 1993).

Authenticity is more often referred to in the context of qualitative research. Validity concerns how any story or account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers—in other words, the importance of rigor. As Silverman (1993) indicates, validity arises not from a preoccupation with sample or scientific method but from the thoroughness of analysis. I was especially keen to obtain authentic data and in many ways this became a major consideration of my research, underpinning all the content.

When I began my research, I wanted to consider the possibility of relating it to wider theoretical and practical concerns that might influence my future approach to teaching. I was worried that qualitative methods without a theory to ground them on might seem anecdotal and trivial. I found some consolation in Keith's (1997) summary of postmodernism's challenge to art theory, particularly poststructuralist theories, including feminist and postcolonial theories, that question truth and the problematic nature of knowledge. These theories have had an important impact on my research, as they question whether one can have access to truth outside one's own discursive context and whether objectivity is desirable or even possible. I knew that I was not embarking upon research that would reveal quantifiable or, necessarily, transferable data. However, I also knew that tattoo culture is still far from mainstream acceptance. With this backdrop, I proposed to adopt a critical approach to my research.

Critical theory has been linked to the protest movements of the 1960s and early 1970s (Reason, 1988). Critical theory, as its name implies, is critical of existing systems, stating that issues of knowledge, politics and cognitive

theory are embedded in research. The researcher must be seen in the cultural context of inquiry and the research as the work of people trying to understand and improve social conditions and institutions. This approach thereby sees itself as the antithesis of objectivity. The study of tattoo does not necessarily identify it as a problem but it certainly has been marginalized. With this approach, it becomes important to include the communal quality of inquiry and its social and cultural location. In this context, my role as the researcher is to expose, reformulate and verify ideas that have their foundation in real experience and in social and educational issues.

This raised the question of whether this research should or must be useful. What is its purpose and overall objective? Could it have real value if it ignored the culture and context behind it? The message inherent in several research models, including those favored by education such as action and ethnographic research, is that it must be meaningful and understood by participants. I felt this was important as this approach can demystify existing "temples" of accepted knowledge and place them in an alternative context.

Critical inquiry positions itself in opposition to the dominant culture and institutions of today. Its objective is to change the world, not merely to describe it. In this context, issues must be viewed prescriptively to advocate change. The model goes on to question how institutional structures can be accessed, perhaps by examining the dynamics of culture and motivating change. Research of this nature can, in theory, provide the means to change and, ideally, to empower people. I had an

opportunity to explore how and why certain art forms have historically been excluded. Mies (1993) sees the use value of critical research as being a dominant concern.

The exposure of the link between theory and practice is a common critical theoretic theme. I also hoped that, at a macro level, research set in this context could be perceived as a departure point for developing educational strategies (Finch, 1993).

I was aware that sensitive alternative strategies might be required for ethnographic and art educational research. This might involve considering non-sequential methods, oral history, diary and autobiography in order to establish techniques to identify how artists and minority or oppressed groups can be known and recorded (Reason, 1994). Specific interventions, no matter how ideologically sound, can be ruined by insensitive and invasive questioning (Lee, 1993). I also considered that the very specific nature of art may require interventions arising from the studio, as detailed by Herivel (1996) and may need to find strategies to express the relationship between self and artwork, as described by McGuire (1995). Mies's (1993) methodological guidelines make it clear that the qualitative methodology used must be congruent with the overall objective. In this instance, I needed to replace the usual, orthodox ideas of value-free research with partiality. I realized that I needed to be involved and committed, that hierarchical relationships must be avoided and, most importantly, that participants in the inquiry must be viewed as the experts. Considerable skill is required to record and

collect data on personal experience, and this inevitably meant prolonged preparation.

The problems that arise in qualitative research can be divided into theoretical versus practical kinds. The theoretical side includes ethical issues, including how data may be shared and the understanding of informed consent; these require careful exploration. However, I was to find that every aspect of the research process was inextricably linked to an overall theoretical approach to the methodology and to my own subjective processes. This included practical pitfalls such as the methods by which the data was to be gathered and managed, the selection criteria for research subjects, the procedure for recording data and, most importantly, its analysis. This brings me back to the questions of reliability and validity. Critics of traditional science may feel that validity and reliability are irrelevant to art educational research, where ethnographic models emphasize personal experience and accounts. Yet, this type of research must guard against selecting data to fit an existing preconception or a tendency to select the exotic over the representative (Silverman, 1993).

The notion of political praxis is integral to critical research, which is intended to act as a dynamic process that fosters change. This process can further be viewed as a consciousness-raising exercise. Here, individual stories and personal histories create research, which is then followed by a collectivizing or shared experience that enables the marginalized to overcome their historical isolation. Research, in this model, is perceived as a mechanism for emancipation, curriculum change and improved

educational practice. Techniques, such as the dynamic nature of investigation, can move participants toward a higher level of awareness. The use value of research may then be seen in both the process and in the outcome. This appealed to me and I felt sure that hearing individuals' accounts would be validating for them as well. Still, there may be difficulties with problem-oriented research if it assumes that the researcher has a higher level of consciousness (Joyappa and Self, 1996). This was a position I was anxious to avoid. Yet, inherent in good research practice is the need to look at the research methodology objectively. Many problems arise due to the temptation to accept data uncritically. Research methods must be seen to include due consideration of context, including history, cultural diversity, race and social class. Certainly, an open acknowledgment of a desired outcome helped me to offset some of the common conventions of the society in which the research was conducted.

Cunningham (1988) advocates a dynamic research designed without fixed process. This places particular emphasis on the need for a culturally grounded investigation, led by the participants. This dynamic approach, open to change, avoids cultural imperialism. It can also enable researchers to be mindful of the difference between "etic" analysis, that is, analysis based on the researcher's concepts, and "emic" analysis, which arises from the conceptual framework of those being studied (Hammersley, 1993). If this research was to be democratic and empowering, there might be a need to demystify language in the context of art and culture. This was to be facilitated by a more open, accessible and user-friendly approach to participants unfamiliar with research. I went

further than this, adapting my own language, mirroring the participants' language and reflecting it back to them. From both the educational and personal point of view, there was the need to be aware of myself as building culture, which required constant self-reflection and questioning, achieved via a number of techniques, including the use of detailed note taking (a diary), which operated as a record of the analysis of the entire research process. Video and film transcription also required specific techniques. The use of comparative analysis to alert one to similarities and differences between cases (Henwood and Pigeon, (1993) enabled the inclusion of negative case examples, including those that do not fit existing models or that present obvious differences. Finally, in preparing my methodology, the use of interventions that shared findings openly for review by the participants was clearly attractive to me, as were ideas on how research could be driven by the participants themselves (Hammersley,1993).

3.1.1 Areas of investigation

The first and most striking observation I had drawn from my pilot investigation involved how the participants had first become drawn to tattoo. As I was not among the tattooed, I saw accessing it as a problem. This seems to be linked to the obviously permanent nature of tattoo. My own feeling was that a permanent design must be grounded in profound, personal significance, which might arise from any number of experiences or belief systems. My first area of investigation was to therefore ask my participants to explain why they chose tattoo as an art form.

The second subject I wanted to investigate concerned the process involved in designing a specific tattoo, or how participants had conceptualized their particular designs. I also wished to explore aspects of the creative design process and the selection of an artist. There were many areas to cover here, including how tattoos may operate as an alternative aesthetic. Early impressions from the initial pilot research project seemed to indicate that a transgressive element might be present in the selection of certain designs. By this, I meant a deliberately provocative anti-societal or shocking motif. I further felt that truly radical and challenging alternative artworks that use the body, such as tattoo, might subversively employ alternative aesthetics. The images of the body in this context use humor and satire and overt sexual imagery to challenge existing conventions and undermine or shock (Isaak, 1996). There can be no doubt that tattoos are often shocking in their content, particularly in the case of designs that evoke horror and death or overt sexual representations, but I also observed humor as another possible strategy to disarm and even outrage.

The single feature unifying all tattoos is, of course, the use of the body. As a third avenue of investigation, I wanted to establish what particular significance the body has as an artistic medium. My initial response to seeing tattoos was that one is forced to look at the body in question, focusing on the tattooed body part and automatically objectifying it. I recalled a childhood prejudice: seeing heavily tattooed fairground workers and being warned by my mother of their predatory disposition! I was alerted even at an early age to the perceived notion of tattoo as a form of sexual code for wild or unorthodox behavior.

To investigate the specific significance, if any, of the location of a tattoo seemed valid. The relationship with the body and the permanence of tattooing were key considerations. To me, a non-tattooed person, the indelibility of the design provoked anxiety. I thought this might be an important obstacle to understanding the tattoo process that I would need to explore further.

Another question that seemed relevant focuses on the observation that the number of women wearing tattoos seems to have greatly increased. This perception was backed by anecdotal evidence from conversations with tattoo artists and recent publications that seek to register the increasing presence of women in this hitherto male-dominated world (Mifflin 1997). This might reflect a change in how such women wish their bodies to be perceived. I wondered whether there were other gender differences to be observed in the use of the body. I knew that theories of the body and ideas on aesthetics would inevitably lead me to a wider societal reflection and draw the research into other questions about values, power and contemporary visual culture.

Although I wanted the subjects to tell their personal stories and describe their own experiences, I pursued the specific areas under investigation, as outlined above and in relation to the literature. The interview questions therefore covered the following points:

1. Reflecting on the particular reasoning, thinking and associations behind the decision to become tattooed. Here I wanted to establish the source, possible function and attraction of tattoo.

2. Describing the processes involved in the selection and use of color, pattern and/or symbol; here I would want my interview subjects to talk through their tattoos, describing the process and the choices they made.
3. Commenting on and describing the specific use of the body and the location of the design as it operates on a moving, dynamic surface.

However, I wanted to keep my mind open to the possibility that other, quite different issues of tattoo practice might be revealed during the research. Perhaps a formal look at the specific designs and an analysis of their content would shed light on those as yet unknown areas.

There were two distinctly different areas to record and collate during the research procedure. These were, first, my own thoughts, observations and responses as they arose and impacted upon the investigation, and second, the process of interviewing my research subjects. These two ostensibly separate aspects were, in fact, closely linked. At the center of this investigation was myself. This research was inescapably subjective, being at least in part dependent on my selection of candidates, my questions and the interview process itself. In trying to find ways to be aware of myself as either building or obfuscating knowledge, I had to consider what this self is really made of and how it can be known. Neisser (1988) describes five types of self-knowledge: ecological, interpersonal, private, remembered and conceptual.

Our notion of the self is mediated by various environments, people, places and things. I needed to make myself conscious of myself in differing settings and I began by considering the ecology, or environment, I was researching in. This meant closely observing and noting each context. I also needed to monitor my own behavior and physical reactions. Consideration had to be given to how my actions affected the interpersonal dynamic created between the interview subject and myself. I was later to consider the ecology or environment and the relationship with our bodies and selves as not only key to the entire research process but fundamental in understanding tattoo.

Added to this complex array of selves is James's ((1890) 1978: 68) description of the unconscious as a continuous, unstoppable stream. This presents a number of difficulties for remembering, making associations, containing thoughts and holding onto fleeting concepts. I had to find ways to include these aspects of myself in the research process. I considered developing a first-person methodology drawn from these ideas on the self and

1. allowed time and space for personal introspection and reflection in the specific context of each aspect of the research, from reading the literature to undertaking interviews and making the video;
2. later recorded the processes of intuition, memories, associations and feelings as they arose in each setting;
3. as many thought processes and reactions were spontaneous and arose during the interviews, I openly revealed and discussed many of these thought and ideas with the participants.

I did this by monitoring and recording my reactions, responses and thought processes regularly, throughout the research process.

3.1.2 Video data collection

The context of ethnographic video-making, perhaps more than any other qualitative research technique, requires careful consideration of the interview process, questions and camera techniques. Video-making appears ideally suited to research on visual topics such as tattoo, since the simultaneous recording of sound and image allows the informants to point out their tattoos and speak directly about the designs, as the camera presents them. As tattoos are frequently worn in places where they can be publicly seen, described as the public aspect or the desire to be witnessed (Wojcik, 1986), the use of video would appear to further facilitate informants' self-expression: they should be comfortable showing their tattoos on camera. The verification and repeat playback that video-making allows for clearly supplement the text. Given that tattoos are on the dynamic surface of the body, video appears a more versatile medium than still photography.

3.1.3 Validity of the interviewing process

There can be no doubt that the camera operates as an "extension of the ethnographic gaze" (Hastrup, 1992: 10). It can also reveal individual and personal experience to "bring human subjects into thinking which is otherwise too easily dominated by abstract formal categories," as stated by Loizos (1993:7). Indeed, the topic of tattoo can be shown to have been denied serious artistic and critical consideration, as it has often been considered to fall outside the institutional art world (Saunders, 1994).

I was anxious to move away from the broad generalization that reduces individuals wearing tattoos to certain classes of people or complex human behaviors to abstract theories. In this respect, I am particularly interested in Loizos's (1993) idea that video, in the ethnographic context, has broken new ground in the coverage of previously hidden and marginalized subjects and the voices of people previously denied exposure. This may be due to the ways video adds another dimension to knowledge, being more immediate and practical than longer-established media, as well as being more accessible due to its low cost and relative ease. It is therefore ideally suited to my research methodology. My research method involved extended video interviews that included questions of a personal and sensitive nature; this gives rise to a range of issues, such as privacy and personal disclosure.

I was particularly sensitive to issues of power and judgment in relation to a subculture such as tattoo and I therefore concluded that my approach must be one of complete transparency. However, this was very difficult to convey. I openly explored issues such as power relations, confidentiality and the sharing of documentation with participants. The entire context of the research was explained to the interview candidates as was the eventual use of the data, which was also shared in pre-interview discussions; interviewees were also offered a copy of their transcribed text and changes were frequently made. This openness and candor facilitated the establishment of a relationship of trust and helped create valid, reliable and authentic research.

This is not to say that this approach was problem free and I encountered set backs and disappointments during the research process. On one occasion a promising encounter failed when the candidate found there was no television connection or publicity to be made from the interview. I also very reluctantly decided to withdraw one completed interview, despite many days work and fully completed transcripts and photographs. This was when a candidate asked for several late revisions, despite earlier substantial changes, meetings and discussions. The intention expressed was to adapt their text to exclude all third party reference. This left the transcript without context and internal coherence, which I ultimately felt invalidated the process.

3.2 Beginning the research

I began the research process feeling that I was a complete outsider who knew nothing of tattooing or tattoo art, culture and practice. My early pilot project experiences had helped me learn something of this unknown world. However, the experience of hearing myself on tape made me aware of how my limited knowledge of contemporary tattoo culture and practice was hampering the interview process. I could not always share in the discussion or respond appropriately. I began an investigation, reading everything I could find, surfing tattoo web sites and reading tattoo magazines such as *Tattoo International* and *Tattoo Monthly*. I visited eleven tattoo shops throughout the city of Montreal and it was there that I really began to understand the tattoo process, explored flash, gathered much informal information and engaged in many conversations with tattoo artists and their customers. I was universally greeted with an open

enthusiasm and a ready willingness to discuss the trade or art, as it is alternatively described, of tattoo.

3.2.1 Selection of candidates

From the mass of tattooed people, I was seeking persons with a serious and sustained interest in tattoo. By this, I mean persons who have undertaken substantial tattoo work and have made a commitment to having their body tattooed. I had several strategies for finding candidates: recommendations in tattoo shops, personal contacts and a small advertisement at a local college. Subjects were appropriate for interviews if they had personally designed their own tattoos and if they were interested in expressing themselves on the processes involved. In total, I interviewed fourteen subjects formally, eight of whom are presented in the chapter on findings. I wanted to present disparate voices and actively sought to include ethnically diverse subjects and to be sensitive to sexual orientation and social class.

Finding ethnically diverse participants was relatively unproblematic in cosmopolitan Montreal; however, including racial diversity was more difficult. Several attempts to locate Native women with substantial tattoo work drew a blank. Some Inuit women from Baffin Island indicated that they had older friends and family members with several tattoos done to ancient traditional designs at home but they had no friends here in Montreal who had anything similar. Attempts to recruit tattooed subjects from the Haitian community were also unsuccessful. Tattoo artists informed me that customers with very dark skin were less likely to opt for the sometimes difficult-to-see ink tattoos over other traditional African body

art, such as scarification. Through a local college, I was able to find some West Indian students with sports and fraternity tattoos but felt they were not personally created or substantial enough to include. I was specifically seeking to include female subjects, as women's voices are absent from much of tattoo literature, and this also proved difficult as women generally have less substantial work than men. I have therefore included two women tattoo artists among the participants.

3.2.2 Method

I began with the assumption that the interview was not a neutral arena but rather a possible site for the production of knowledge. My intention was therefore to create an interview model that was dynamic and flexible. Both the interview participants and I expressed feelings, created meaning and were active together in the assembly of knowledge. At the beginning, the questions for the interviews arose from my own informal observations and research during the pilot project and from the literature reviewed.

During some early interviews, I placed a sheet of paper with topic headings in front of my subjects and myself; this operated as a mental trigger and was a useful tool, which I discussed before the interview. These topics comprised a series of headings under the subject of aesthetics, including formal considerations on style and content, and also included suggestions on specific aspects of the use of the body such as the particular location of the design. Although the interview shaped the content of what is said, my participants and I constructed an understanding during the process, which was inevitably highly

collaborative. I made no attempt to strip the process of bias but rather invested in collaboration as a way of producing rich and dynamic data.

To achieve this, I drew on some counseling techniques, notably the person-centered approaches of Rodgers (1961). These include a high degree of sensitivity, empathy and acceptance. This kind of approach requires one to carefully listen to interviewees. Particular attention must be paid to the subject so that he or she will be conscious of being respected and believed (Kopp, 1977). I thought this was especially important given the continued prejudice and fantasy that is still directed toward tattooed people.

The interview process required visibly attending to the subjects' responses, asking open-ended questions and reflecting dialogue back. This meant following the subjects' cues throughout the interview, rather than proceeding with a preset series of questions. It was essential to create an atmosphere of empathy, with space for silence or disagreement. The objective was to delve for experience and meaning, to find out what the subject thought and felt, particularly when answers were not forthcoming or were entirely unexpected.

In attempting to create an engaging and valid interview, I had to avoid preset expectations or stereotypes and attend to a high level of self-awareness and self-reflection. Douglas (1985) suggests that, contrary to counseling orthodoxy, a dynamic interview is achieved through mutual disclosure and a willingness by the subject to show his or her own feelings. I frequently discussed and shared my opinions with the participants as I

was attempting to engage in an authentic exchange in the interview, creating a space for a reciprocal search for understanding and searching to elicit valid responses, optimize cooperation and work toward mutual openness. This was, I believed, the most effective way to probe issues and avoid superficial or possibly inauthentic replies.

3.2.3 Interview procedure

I had originally planned a pre-interview session with subjects to explain my objectives and allow for any questions. This often proved insufficient. I had not realized that I would require a considerable amount of time to interview each subject and consequently had to plan the interviews for two separate half-day sessions. After a brief introductory discussion, all of our conversations were recorded. As outlined above, it was important that the interview should be a positive and empowering experience for my subjects, so they were able to stop the process at any time, interrupt, add things and make suggestions. In the end, I hoped they would feel that the interview was designed to facilitate the expression of their thoughts.

I was constantly aware of the very particular manipulative power of electronic media as both an advantage and a hindrance. In this context, there is a complex interaction between people who have a story to tell and the impact of a visual medium. I tried to keep stylistic considerations and aesthetic variables to a minimum. Using the digital camcorder viewing screen, I played back the entire interview to some of the participants; even though some of them declined to watch, this facilitated any clarifications or changes they might wish to make.

Other early considerations included exposing the body in appropriate settings, allowing for privacy and creating an atmosphere of safety and respect. This led me to consider a sensitive and unintrusive video approach, ensuring that informants revealed no more, either verbally or physically, than they were entirely comfortable with. I considered a number of strategies to put my interview subjects at ease, including allowing them to use the camera and operate the recorder themselves. However, a lot of these plans were discarded as participants were usually more comfortable than I was about taking off their clothes in unlikely settings. I also invited subjects to choose the location they felt most comfortable in, for example, their own homes, cafes or restaurants.

This visual accompaniment to the verbal data enabled the obviously visual nature of the topic to be better described. Camcorder operation and video creation form a central part of the research method. The final video will assemble selected segments from each subject's recorded interviews. The edited selection will present the subjects talking about their tattoos, directly to the camera. In monitoring the research process, particularly in relation to editing the film and adding text, I have adapted the guidance of Bellman and Jules-Rosette (1977) and

1. transcribed the contents of the video-recorded interviews, describing the process;
2. briefly recorded the camera techniques, pauses, new locations and termination of interviews;

3. described the process involved in creating and editing the video, the computer program used and the final assembly of the different interviews.

3.2.4 Analysis

In the first phase of the analysis, I played back the videotaped interviews, listened to them and started formulating initial impressions and ideas from the recorded data. I wanted to review my own observations and the recorded information, and added comments about my initial reactions throughout the text.

From there, I proceeded with the interview analysis and began the process of matching written data to the significant areas under investigation. At times, this was difficult to see; there seemed to be many new themes that I had not expected. Other themes, such as the presence of references to death, were surprisingly constant.

It was then necessary to match the visual data to the images and sometimes to their location on the body. I also hoped to create a framework for the discussion as it arose, relating my informal impressions, as appropriate, and/or including themes from the literature review. This proved to be far more difficult than anticipated, as I had to rethink my literature search in the wake of unexpected findings. Eventually, though, it facilitated the third phase of the analysis: the development of specific headings or categories of recorded data and, most importantly, newly arising concepts and issues. This was done by sifting through the text for specific categories, for example, recurring words and themes for

consideration, matching or making new and discrete areas of analysis, both visual and verbal, and thereby constantly relating them to the original concepts under investigation. I did this by highlighting whole phrases and moving them under the original three areas of investigation and then worked through what was left.

To demonstrate themes, quotations are taken directly from the transcript. I also on occasion draw from informal encounters with other tattoo subjects and artists often waiting or working in tattoo shops. There was, of course, a great deal of material left, much of which related to other aspects of tattoo culture. These issues are addressed in detail as aspects of popular culture.

3.2.5 Video-making, editing and final production

There were two particular areas of concern when it came to creating a video; one involved the practical aspects of video filmmaking while the other was related to issues of content.

The content was dynamic and unexpected. Indeed, I found the whole process of creating a video as a visual aid in the context of a documentary, and from an ethnographic approach, immensely difficult to adhere to. The primary reason was that I had little control over either the presentation of the material or the locations of the filming. As I was working alone, I had to film, talk and move the procedure along. This was sometimes done in public spaces or with in presence of uninvited viewers ranging from the curious public, to friends and family members, to dogs. Quite often, I was taken entirely by surprise as people removed clothing or

showed another piece of art on their body. Consequently, I often found myself making the video in an ad hoc and spontaneous fashion, as I honestly admitted to my participants. Oddly and happily enough, I think this facilitated openness by making them less uncomfortable and rendering me an equal rather than an expert other. I frequently problem-solved with my participants and they were often instrumental in helping me position the camera or change its setting.

The video editing presented a completely different set of challenges. These related to the amount of recorded data I had accumulated and ultimately came down to disposing of lots of digital film. This was because the video recording was not always of the highest standard and there were many problems with poor light and sound quality.

Many issues arose from my review of the audiotapes including congruity and reliability, as I had to ensure I was presenting representations with their appropriate descriptions. My own voice was often an irritant to me; yet it was an essential element of the process, as were interruptions and diversions and breaks due to bad filming.

The editing continued with a long period of viewing with simultaneous note taking, which was tedious: a seemingly endless progression of stopping and starting. I then had to note editing sequences on the timeline for deletion on the computer and edit the film down to an eventual 37 minutes. This was done to respect the need for brevity while somehow showing as much tattoo work as possible.

I felt that the editing process often presented material as disjointed, since I considered that my presence in the video interviews needed to be minimized. I frequently felt I had veered off topic and on occasion sounded glib as transitions were deleted. In the interests of brevity, silences had to be ignored or deleted; on occasion, I had to refilm something, which always gave the impression of retelling a story.

The technical procedure was arduous for me, as I had to familiarize myself with both Adobe Premiere for the film processes and Photoshop for the brief use of text to introduce participants. Importing and exporting tape extracts entailed inevitable glitches and errors and lost material. Despite my delight at the completion of the film, I felt frustrated during my analysis, when I could not see the specific, individual tattoos, directly in front of me. Constantly replaying extracts or reloading individual taped sessions was time-consuming. This was particularly problematic during comparative analysis and when it came time to thematically arrange examples from the diverse interviews. It therefore occurred to me that it would be useful to have the images close at hand to verify my thinking and help me piece together emergent themes.

It was during this phase that I determined that visual-based research requires its own specific methodology and demands attention to form, composition and color, as well as issues of movement and location. I sometimes found that my own reactions were different or in sharp contrast to those outlined as the anticipated response or intention of the participants. Again and again, I found myself reflecting on issues of skill, judgment and what constitutes good and bad taste, against a sometimes

immediate emotional reaction. Some images stayed in my mind, replaying like video stills, while others passed by almost ignored.

During the video editing period, I realized how constantly looking at an image brings on an unceasing stream of associations, new thoughts and ideas. I reflected on how certain images had the power to alienate or consolidate existing ideas. Sometimes, I found questions occurring directly and retired to e-mail a participant for further explanation. The use of e-mail as a validating and clarifying tool was a constant and surprising feature of the research.

The final assembly required a transfer from digital tape to videocassette, which also involved issues of selection and presentation in deciding how to order the contents. I eventually decided to create digital photographs of the various participants. This was undertaken with the aid of a camcorder digital photographic memory chip. I worked through the various interviews to select and create a range of photographs that best illustrated the spoken analysis of each tattoo. I later included them with the text and, as in the video editing process, this involved issues related to prioritizing, selection and hierarchy.

Throughout the entire film process, I was made aware of my own processes and how they impacted on every aspect of the visual accompaniment. This not only led me to conclude that all aspects of research are mediated by the self but that constantly looking at a specifically selected tattoo image tends to bring to the fore many issues related to selection, association and reinforcement.

The next chapter presents the text of the individual participants interviews, in their own words, followed by an analysis of the thematic content. Also included are digital photographic stills taken from the final edited video interviews. However, a complete viewing of the video provides the full visual accompaniment and should ideally precede reading the interviews. Furthermore, in order to facilitate the understanding of unfamiliar tattoo jargon found throughout the interviews, a glossary is provided at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 4

Presentation of Findings

This chapter presents the participant interviews in a series of sub-chapters summarizing the transcribed conversations. Each participant is first introduced to provide a context on how and where we met, accompanied by a brief profile. Each interview is followed by a short reflective comment.

4.1 Karen

Karen was recommended to me by a tattoo artist as someone with a dedicated interest in tattoo and a substantial amount of ongoing tattoo work. It was quite difficult to arrange my first meeting with Karen as I had heard of her through an intermediary and she seemed dubious about being interviewed. We began by speaking on the phone and I tried to convince her of the validity of the research project. However, Karen canceled our interviews twice before we finally met. We discussed the nature of the research at some length as Karen had to be sure I would accurately record her words. I was particularly interested in speaking with tattooed women and wondered what her motivation might be, given the very substantial work she had undertaken.

When we finally met at a metro station for coffee and a preliminary discussion, Karen presented as younger than her 23 years, very slim and rather short. She was fashionably and androgynously dressed in bulky, skater-style clothes and back pack. None of her substantial tattoo work was visible. Karen suggested I would recognize her by her facial piercings

in her lip and brows and her colorfully dyed hair. Karen did not want to be interviewed in her home and after discussing in a café we conducted the four hours of interviewing in my home.

TB: I don't have a set of questions. As I said before, I'd prefer to just start talking and see what we come up with... but I do have some sort of general triggers... ideas if you like, which I will refer to as we go along.

K: Ha-ha, well, that's good 'cause I don't know anything!

TB: What do you mean... you know loads of things, things about tattoo and all about you... it's you I am interested in.

K: Hum, well, what shall I start with?

TB: So how did you get into tattoo?

K: Well, I got my first tattoo right after I turned fourteen.

TB: That's a long time ago.

K: Yeah, that's a long time ago but I don't have that one anymore.

TB: Go on... you had it changed?

K: Yeah, I covered it up when I was sixteen.

TB: Why? (At this juncture Karen removed several layers of clothing to reveal a small white vest and took me through her tattoos).

K: Well, it wasn't so good. It's underneath another tattoo, the abstract design I had done after.

TB: I didn't realize there was so many coverups done. One tattoo artist told me half of her work was covering up old work... some specialize in that, apparently. Quite a revelation.

K: Well, I didn't dislike what I had done but, like, I was only fourteen years old. I didn't want my parents to see what I'd had done so I got this tiny little tattoo... like of a scorpion, just a little line drawing outline... which from far looked like a weird little birthmark...

TB: Yeah, well, they change over time, don't they?

K: Yeah, yeah.

TB: Sort of line change and color, start fading.

K: Well, yeah, no one told me to keep it away from the sun like at the beginning.

TB: Oh.

K: So, that's why it faded and the black turned to blue... I didn't like that... but at fourteen I wanted to get my nose pierced but my mom said, "No way, when you graduate you can get a tattoo instead." So when I graduated, I called her to hold her to her word. So it was a graduation present.

TB: Aha.

K: I decided I might as well get a really nice tattoo, instead of a really weird one and, um, it's an abstract design... it's an abstract picture, it's black and bigger than the last one and a lot nicer... pretty much. Everyone who sees it says, "What is it?"... like I won't say or tell them and they like to guess at different kinds of things... "Is it a wheel, a wave, a shark?" The scorpion used to be right in there. "Is it a nipple? I see a sun, a shark..." People really see whatever they want and say different things like. Everything is open to different interpretations, everyone sees things in different ways and that's what I like.

TB: Did you draw it first or design it alone?



- K: Oh, I drew it myself (pointing to the precise upper arm area), well, I tried drawing it myself but I wasn't so happy with my sketches so when I went to the tattoo studio for my consultation, I told him what I wanted and showed him the work. I had told him I wasn't so happy with it and so they drew a couple of them for me over it a few times.
- TB: Oh, working on the basis of your drawing and coming up with something you liked... a sort of joint art project, ha-ha.
- K: Yeah, that's it, they showed me a few and together I picked the one I wanted, it was a kinda better version, a bit more together. And I got it done.
- TB: Can you remember why you picked the scorpion to begin with? Because it's quite unusual.
- K: Well, that's not a star sign, if that's what you mean. I'm not a Scorpio. I had these earrings that were scorpions... and I found them really different, but I just didn't want to get like a daisy or a dolphin or something on my ankle. I didn't want to do a girly, girly thing.
- TB: Yeah, ha! Because there is all sorts of gender divide about the choice of tattoo, aren't there?
- K: Yeah, absolutely, like all the girls I know, they have a tattoo like on their ankle or around their shoulder and it's a little thing like a daisy or a dolphin or a butterfly or a Chinese sign...
- TB: Yeah, they are so popular, aren't they?
- K: Yeah, and I really like them and I'd get them if they weren't so trendy and so tacky now because they've gotten very overused. Like half the people I meet who have a tattoo, they have a Chinese

symbol and like half of them don't even know what they mean.
How dumb is that...?

TB: Yeah...

K: Yeah, it's like if they're trying to be cool.

TB: Whatever that means...

K: Well, I suppose it is art and for some people with a certain aesthetic, it's only the visual aspect of it that counts. It's about creating a beautiful picture and having it put on your body... but not with me.

TB: Yeah, makeup, or jewelry, or something you want to decorate with.

K: It's like, and that's fine, it is a decoration, I think, for most people.

TB: But you want to go a bit farther than that.

K: Ha-ha, well, it's all about something beautiful, yeah, but it's gotta mean something.

TB: What happened to you then? Did you wait until you were a bit older, or what?

K: I wanted another tattoo right away.

TB: People told me there was an addictive aspect...

K: Yes, there is, I think, but maybe because I love it. Because when I look, well, when I look at a tattoo, at a beautiful tattoo, it is a piece of art and it is art put on skin. Like, hum... I'm happier with my body now that I have tattoos. Not to say that my body was off before or anything but...

TB: Looks perfectly fine to me!

K: Yeah, but, a tattoo er... I don't know... it's like changing myself to... in a way it's almost as if I'm a canvas, you know, and... it's something I can control... it's the body I chose. The way it will always be there is part of it.

TB: So you wouldn't have been tempted to paint these pictures and stick them up on your bedroom wall... or in your purse or whatever.

K: No, no, no. Not at all...

TB: So you're changing your body and it is forever. So are you maybe changing yourself or reinventing yourself?

K: Not as another self. But a lot of times, when you get a tattoo, it's almost as though, you can get it to symbolize a moment, that getting this tattoo is about this point in my life... every time when I look at one or other tattoo, I'm going to think of this moment or time. And a tattoo has a symbolic meaning; well, for me anyway... every time you look at that tattoo, you're going to remember whatever symbolism's there. When you get a tattoo, it's something that you want to be close to forever, you don't want to forget, you want it to be part of your life for as long as you're alive.

TB: So the permanent aspect is...?

K: ... It is, it... like people say, "Well, it's on you forever now, you might be sorry one day..." or "Aren't you worried now, you can't get rid of it?"

TB: Well, if it was a picture, you could change it.

K: Yeah, but I don't see why I would want to change it... it's beautiful, it's art. Like if something is beautiful it's not going to become ugly right...

TB: ... and your definition of beauty isn't gong to change.

K: Look... If there was a paintings that I absolutely loved and cost thousands of dollars that I went out and bought, no one would say, "Oh, now you've spent all that money, you're gonna have that forever..." It's like different standards.

TB: Yes, that's certainly true.

K: See, that's the whole point: there is so much prejudice about using the body, if you like.

TB: What's that about... tattoo being perceived as something controversial or really outrageous...?

K: I think, well, on a certain level all those prejudices are still around but tattoos that are mainstream don't upset anyone.

TB: Can you give me an example?

K: Like one or two little tattoos... like we said before, y'know, like getting one tattoo, it's OK, those butterflies and cutesy stuff but if someone gets a half sleeve or something like a really big piece on their back or if it can't be covered by clothing, that's so, so different, like people think you're weird. Or worse, crazy.

TB: How's that then?

K: There's a whole different view. The funny thing is that don't devalue it or make my body less sacred or something, um, it's the opposite really. I'm taking advantage of the fact I am a body. I am changing it, taking beautiful things and they'll be on me forever. I can use my skin to tell a story about who I am and to remember who I am and what I've been through.

TB: What do you mean, to remember?

K: Well, all the experiences I had.

T.: Can you say how that works?

K: Um, in the tattoo you catch the special things in a way... like here with the ladybug.

TB: So take me through what happened next.

- K: Well, I loved my tattoo so much. I still really love it, look at it in awe and think, wow! My tattoo makes me happy all the time.
- TB: So, it's not as if you become so familiar with it that you stop seeing it.
- K: No, no, no, absolutely not. I can relive it over and over.
- TB: I see. So the next tattoo is where?
- K: This piece... well, on my chest, between my breasts, I'll show you (Karen rather shyly exposed the entire breast area to reveal a very large tattoo). Well, I'd always wanted to get a tattoo right there, this great, totally flat area there... ha-ha-ha. I don't have much there, no big breasts or anything. There is this big space where the cleavage is supposed to be... only there isn't any. It's the perfect place.
- I didn't know what I wanted to get. I was thinking of chakra points, different ones you have in the body and the fourth one is your heart. They are also called lotus flower so I had a lotus flower tattooed right there. The lotus is associated with the color green, it is symbolic of love and compassion, and I am thinking of the immune system. The two hands represent touch, of the five senses. This one has the most significance for me: you can't lose your sense of touch, the most important one.
- TB: It's a series of private or at least not publicly visible work?
- K: My tattoos are and can be hidden. I like that lots of people know me and don't even know I have tattoos (Karen demonstrated this by covering and uncovering her upper arms with her t-shirt). I've known them for years and they don't know. They are for me, it's my body. The third one is this here on the inside of my forearm... it's...
- TB: Really beautiful! Tell me about it, why the ladybird?

K: Yes, thank you, it's a ladybug and it's for when I was little a child, er... I didn't have many or any friends when I was little, my parents were very protective too... they kept me in the house all the time. They didn't like me to leave the house. I played in the garden alone, or by myself a lot. So it was, I always remember ladybugs flying down in the grass, they would land so close and I would play with them. They would make me so happy. Ladybugs are my happy childhood memories. I have other friends who have special things and memories with ladybugs or who have been touched by them in some way. Like a friend, when it was the day of her grandmother's funeral, this ladybug flew by and just softly landed on her forehead, when she was lying out in the coffin... Like a ladybug omen.

TB: So how did you make the picture?

K: The colors are so vivid and I drew it myself many times before I took it to the artist to copy. I am very pleased with the color. This next piece is, um, well, I wanted to get a half sleeve, it's a lot of work and I wanted to sort of balance myself out as I had no work on this side.

TB: That's a serious commitment, complex design. You must have spent a long time on this.

K: Yes, a lot of time thinking and it's expensive, there's lots to do. Originally it was the dragon, cherry blossom trees and of course clouds. Obviously, it's Oriental and Japanese-based.

TB: The work is very detailed, not just the line drawing but the wash effect?

- K: Yes, he's a really good artist. The cherry blossom, um, reason for that is that in 1912 the Americans gave them 3,000 cherry trees, to the Japanese, so they were given all those blossom trees and then later... You know, the atom bomb and all that.
- TB: I see, that's rather disturbing.
- K: Yeah, but it's to remind me of the way things can change at any moment.
- TB: Why this art style, Japanese, I mean?
- K: The dragon and the mask, that's, Japanese theater is also about contradiction and paradoxes. Also the difference between Eastern and Western culture—you wouldn't have a European design like that. Different interpretations are part of my tattoos... I want them to be different.
- TB: It's not your cultural background.
- K: No. Mine is Lebanese and nonfigurative, you know, letters. The dragon part of it is they are mythical figures, they aren't real, dragons don't exist, you know, and I'm getting it tattooed on my arm, this thing that doesn't exist, it's almost as if I'm saying I believe in this and the symbolism—apart from it being really beautiful—is just the idea of believing in something even when you know and you don't have any proof that it exists. I am believing in it 'cause it's nice to believe, you know, I want to believe in dragons and fairies or whatever and fairy tales.
- TB: Is reality disappointing?
- K: Mostly. Ha-ha.
- TB: I see, what about financing the ongoing work?

K: I haven't worked on it in a little while. I finally got the money together, I only owe forty dollars.

TB: But what about going back to your artist if he's left the shop?

K: It's hard for these creative people working together. He will finish at his home.

TB: Your tattoos are about aspirations. What's next?

K: Oh yes, I have two pieces in my head I love for the next work. Although maybe not my whole body. Not my face. Like I wouldn't deliberately not use some area of the body but some parts of the body don't flow or fit with the picture.

TB: What about inside rather than outside and the interface with body?

K: The thing is, that plays a role, it's body hair, you have to think it through, like with the outside of the arm or mostly the leg you cannot receive the tattoo properly. Like and if you shave and then if the hair grows back over it. Think about it: if you had a painting, you wouldn't hide it with a load of hair! So the body and the things it does is always there. So I go for zones with no hair, that's the thing.

TB: And aging—will that matter?

K: Yes, I think my taste might change and my skin sag, I suppose, but I will still have beautiful things to look at for maybe thirty or forty years and I didn't get them for anyone else but me and I will still have those memories.

TB: And new work?

K: Ah yes, well, it's all worked out, I have the next thing planned, it's two fairies. Magical, fantastic scene, like the first one is flying and there it's a magical forest scene (here, after rolling up her trousers, Karen traced an invisible outline over her calf).

TB: You have it visualized, the whole magical theme or scene already?

K: Oh, yes!

TB: These pictures are quite unique then?

K: Yeah, yeah, so much and I'm not into that whole sexy babe bit.

TB: Didn't it hurt more over the ribcage?

K: Yes, it hurt a lot, so much! As the needle vibrates on the ribcage. Well, when you get a tattoo, if you tense up and stress about it, it's only gonna hurt more. Um, for me I just let my mind drift... I recite poetry in my head and I think about that and I think about colors and the pain sorta fades, well, not totally, but kinda recedes.

TB: But what about the pain aspect, is that part of the whole?

K: Well, yes, it's there, especially there on the ribs.

TB: So you feel able to handle the pain?

K: I am apparently easy to tattoo, they tell me, and I'm very proud of that. I don't ask for breaks all the time but I make jokes all the time and I flex! Like people see me, they see this tiny little woman and then freak out when they see the tattoos. That's good.

TB: What, for example?

K: There is this whole mentality that's about how much it might hurt and a fear of needles, like going in and out of your arm. Who would have needles stuck in them...? Only a guy would do that.

TB: What about women have, in the way of the quantity of work done?

K: Well, there were always the tattooed ladies in the circus and that. So it's been there, only it's been hidden.

TB: What about social class and tattoo? Do you think there is an issue of perceiving tattoo customers as working-class or a judgment about who has a tattoo?

K: I do think about how class, I think, still plays a role, I mean, I know all classes people, or people from many classes get tattooed and my background, well, I s'pose... the type of tattoo is different. Yes. My family is upper-middle-class but the type of tattoo would be different like, like poorer people will get ugly kinds of tattoos, they end up like blue marks or blue stains almost. They are especially badly done. It's what you can pay. Then my tattoos and my body are worth thousands of dollars but it is so expensive. There are pieces I want to get but I want it well done. It must be. For the kind of work I want. They are true artists and you pay more for that.

TB: How do you select an artist to copy your ideas?

K: Where I get my piercing done, the guy that I really trust recommended someone. I really trust him. I wouldn't do the whole drawing alone, well, completely; you need to be able to work together.

TB: A sort of collaborative process?

K: Oh, really, yes. They only do custom work there and they refuse to do the same tattoo piece twice. They are artists and not just picking stuff from a book with a bunch of stencils, solution, and just trace the lines. It's not the same thing anyway, a lot of my work has been done three times and a lot is drawn freehand straight on the skin.

TB: And what sort of stylistic considerations?

K: I see the work the artist has already done. I would see their portfolio. I would have to see that they are good. It might be differently done, color and the shading and the way they mix the inks. If you are planning a lot of work, you have to have a real close relationship and I like the way they let me pay in installments.

Reflective summary

At the time of our first interview, she was an English literature student, who lived independently and worked part-time for an artisan candle maker. She said she found the struggle of working full time and studying was quite exhausting and yet she was prepared to spend large sums of money, indeed, all her spare income on tattoo work. I felt her commitment to tattoo was total as large areas of work had been mapped out in outline only, ready for future financing.

Karen hopes to be a professional writer and was working on a novel. Despite her original skepticism, she was particularly easy to interview as her perspective on tattoo was of someone committed to an art form and her responses were always measured, precise and well considered and she often took a very long time to reply to questions. My only concern was to allow her to show her tattoos in a private and comfortable environment as I felt she was a deeply private person who had to be entirely convinced of my genuine interest.

My feeling about the images on her body was that they were complex—not easy to perceive but beautifully created. These images were born of long and careful reflection. Although the content of some of her tattoos were described as aesthetically driven, I felt they also reflected a number of psychological or personally defensive strategies against possible disappointment or betrayal. Karen clearly enjoyed the interview and was very keen to have a copy of her text. For our second contact, she was

vacationing in Montreal before returning to Thailand where she teaches English. She was still writing her novel and expecting her first child.

4.2 Stephan

I met Stephan through a friend. He is a visual artist who describes himself as a consummate performer and was a talkative and charismatic subject. He had recently finished an engagement as a drag artist in one of Montreal's downtown cabaret bars. I first met him in a temporary workplace and then later in his fashionable downtown home for an informal discussion about tattoo, which he was delighted to talk about. Stephan lives as an openly gay man in the Montreal Gay Village. He was in the process of redesigning his new apartment, carefully decorated with Art Deco furniture and full of his dramatic and brightly colored paintings sculpture and clothes.

For our second meeting, we met in a downtown gay bar. Stephan was approached frequently throughout the conversation and is clearly popular and well known in his community. This interview was immediately prior to his departure for a position managing a successful New York-based designer furniture store. This time, Stephan presented in quite conservative attire with no tattoo work visible.

Stephan is handsome with classic good looks and muscular body which he delighted in showing. For our first interview he was dressed in a very tight tank top and jeans with a blond high-lighted, faux-hawk hairstyle, jewelry, earrings and other facial piercing. His tattoos were in plain sight. My initial reaction to Stephan's tattoos was to read them as sexually evocative, inviting objectification.

- S: What shall I say?
- TB: Well we might begin with something like what do you think about all the new interest in tattoo? Or is there new interest?
- S: Definitely, but it's been around a long time so it's some other things to. Even my boss has a tattoo; he's in his fifties. The whole reason for doing it can be something serious or just because it's a vogue. I think there are many reasons but for lots of kids, it's trying to be different or way out, you know, imitating the cool ones? A way to make people notice.
- TB: Why did you chose this, tattoo, I mean?
- S: Hum... I think you really want to personalize, your body, I mean... even more... You want to take your body farther... bring out who you are farther and show it to everyone and say who you are.
- TB: Why via the body?
- S: Like for me, you can tell a lot about me just by looking at me, a lot more now even naked... Before, you could see people naked and you couldn't tell much about them, but today, you can tell a lot more. I think by appearance is how we try to find out about each other.
- TB: So why would that implicate the body?
- S: Just being you, you don't have to be dressed anymore, that's what's great. I don't have to worry about buying clothes... people can see who I am... even with a tank top, it's there forever... it's always there.
- TB: And the fact that it's permanent, is that part of it?

S: Oh, I hope so, especially for the price you pay and the pain and I am not into the pain. I know some people are.

TB: Well, I was wondering if you might change who you are, if you know what I mean.

S: No, no, I don't think so.

TB: But how do you know who you are?

S: When you ask me about permanence, you make me think about how as a gay man you question yourself a lot. You think this will this go away. I thought maybe it would go away.

TB: One of my gay friends told me he knew he was gay when he was five, quite suddenly one day, as all the other little boys were always looking at all the little girls and he realized he was looking at the boys.

S: I believe it. But I don't think it's genetic. I have been influenced by a book called *Père Manquant Fils Manqué*. Have you heard of it?

TB: Yes, by Guy Corneau? Tell me why.

S: Well, for me, coming out was quite a process. And made more difficult because my brother is gay too. When I think about it, and I was in therapy for four years to help me see these things, I found out that really many fathers don't talk to their children, maybe more so the sons. Of course, there is the physical absence and always fear of intimacy or to be close. They cannot, and my father does not know my life—he was not there. And he is still not.

TB: So all this stuff about who you are is underneath or sort of underpinning your tattoos?

S: Yes, well, that's what I think more now about everything I do with art and performance. But the first, the first one (here, Stephan got up



and turned his arm to show the long curve of the tattooed snake)...

No. Was it the peace sign or was it the snake? I will start with the snake. The snake, I got this because I hate them.

TB: What do you mean? Are you afraid of them?

S: This was the first one, I was sixteen. Um... I think... I thought that living with one all the time would make me like them, but no, I still hate them, it doesn't work.

TB: It's honest to say it doesn't work! But why be afraid of snakes? It's not as if you encounter them all the time.

S: Why? I know it is like how you say, a therapy of, you know, aversion therapy.

TB: It's a phallic symbol too, no? At sixteen, could it have been anything to do with that?

S: You are kidding me... ha-ha-ha, you are not serious! I never thought of that. Are you sure. Why?

TB: Well, think about it, in art, Adam and Eve, for example, and in art history and in directories of symbols.

S: No, I really don't think in the French language you would think of the snake and the penis together. No, but it's funny. I will think about it.

TB: Look, I've got to ask you. Isn't, it's an obvious point for an openly gay man, wearing a man's name on your arm. Are you making an announcement about your sexual orientation or people would know anyway? Right?

S: Um, well, it avoids situations. Some people are not aware. I have had women approach me, go for me, you know. Why go through it

all the time? I like to be as real as possible all the time. It is better. Even if it causes problems.

TB: So you really are alerting the general public. Is that why tattoo as opposed to painting?

S: I will say that I have never lied about it. I believe in being honest. People take me as I am, like this. Since I came out, I prefer it like this. Why say it all the time anyway, it brings trouble? I have no fear now.

TB: What do you mean, now? Did you before?

S: Well, I say I haven't lied about it but I have one time. I was by chance in the other side of town, in the East End, and I went into a depanneur and to get cigarettes. Inside was a bunch of guys, the real men or jock type, if you know what I mean. One comes up to me and says, "Who's the guy's name on your arm?" And I said, "Oh, that's the name of my dragon, here, just below the name." Just like that. I did not want to be attacked.

TB: That sounds pretty sensible to me!

S: I did not want to do it. But... and here, well, the yin and yang sign, the usual thing, and the peace sign, well, they are things I really believe in, that's for sure.

TB: Also, I'm thinking yin and yang is the joining of man and woman, of two opposing signs, isn't it?

S: Yes, because it's all a question of attraction. Maybe it doesn't matter, man or woman. But most men, straight men, are like my father, they don't know how to communicate. I think this is the main problem for men.

TB: Any particular reason for that design?

S: The dragon, well, I really liked it and no one would know what it really is.

TB: Adversity?

S: I'm not sure. But people cannot see it or know what it is about until they are really close, until you come really close to you and see it has lots of little details. Well, I saw it and I had it adapted and the details are so great. I changed the design myself slightly, sort of shrunk it down but it's beautiful.

TB: What about the position of a tattoo?

S: It can be where you can't see it or sometimes it is just to show. The letters here on me I wanted to show. Here on my arm, look (he then showed me the large tattoo of the name 'Tim')... See, they look outward. Yes. Tim, an ex-boyfriend. I drew it myself.

TB: Was that someone very special?

S: Yes. I drew it myself, I liked the graffiti style. An ex-boyfriend.

TB: What about the fact he's an ex-boyfriend and he's permanently marked on you?

S: Well, I hope, so I never thought I'd ever remove it. He was part of my life, I loved him, my first love, it happened, it was special... We broke up when I discovered he was HIV-positive. It was very terrible, I went into a big depression. It made me so sad. Imagine all those straight people who say things like, "Good, they deserved AIDS," and things like, "I think they should all die." I have heard this. This really hurts. People all the time want me to take the name off. This is ridiculous. You cannot deny your past.

TB: So it's there on your arm forever?

- S: But actually, it's more irritating for the new boyfriend. And you can have any tattoo reworked or covered or changed. Where I go, the guy is a real professional. He does not say a word. He just works. So perhaps I will change my past, ha-ha-ha! Yes, I might change it but for now, no.
- TB: Are your performances over for now?
- S: Well, when I did come out, I did want the world to know. It's not such a big deal now. I was the biggest queen in the world. In my show, I was so over the top. I was so amazing in fishnets and a shower curtain. The whole shower power trip! I wanted fame in the easy way. It was wild. This tattoo is from this time. There is one other thing though. The tattoo has its own life. All the time things come up with the name Tim on my arm. Where I worked, the boss was called Tim and he didn't like it, or the jokes some made or the attention. He wanted me to change my appearance. Other times, people called Tim approach me. So you never know what might happen with a tattoo. Maybe destiny, ha-ha-ha!
- TB: You have a lot of stars drawn on you.
- S: The big star I also drew or designed it myself, chose the colors and the shading, it's exactly what I wanted it to be and I think it's beautiful and about joy and hope... that's it, really.
- TB: I know I keep on about symbols, but in the light of your performance do you think, do you think about being a star? What about something unconscious? Why the star?
- S: No, no, I don't think so, it's really a formal thing about shape, color and detail. But maybe... Only I will say I am from a very big traditional Catholic family. My father was one of fourteen and I think

he was always trying to get attention and be at the center of things. I think that was passed to me. At these family parties, always trying to be at the center of attention. And we were!

TB: Well, you know how to get attention and also how to engage people?

S: But that is from my mother. It is a skill to be nice to people and know how to take care of them. I know what it takes to make a person believe they are being liked. It is important. This is how I got my job in New York. I can really do that.

TB: Will you show your artwork there, in the showroom?

S: Oh yeah, and I will have a show. I love stars... over here on this arm, I have the Metropolitan Opera logo... I really love this. You look at it and you see all these tiny little stars, tons of stars, or it could be anything, so many things just by looking at it...

TB: None of your tattoos are like your artwork, except maybe the colors?

S: Oh, my paintings, the ones in the apartment there are about my mother but the tattoos are me. Oh yes, I haven't finished yet... there this one on my back. I designed it myself; it's well, from high inspiration.

TB: What inspiration exactly?

S: Inspiration is always what attracts you (Stephan turned his back to the camera to show a large Haida style tattoo). The face in the middle is the face, the one from a singer in the band The Red Hot Chili Peppers, he has it, has on him. I really like the band, they are fun and a bit crazy. The rest is from another guy in the band... I put

the two together to make my design. I love their style, sexy and rather gorgeous.

TB: I think it's Native. It looks Haida, red and black.

S: Yes, it is joined from different Native pictures.

TB: Do you care that it's Native?

S: I don't think it matters where something comes from. In art you can take anything, especially today. This is what art is now, no? To be honest, that one is more of a fashion statement than anything else. Those styles are in, that's it. In this example, I was being a fashion follower, cool if you like.

TB: Could you tell me how you'd explain cool?

S: I think it is the way or capacity to be just ahead of the rest, if you know what I mean. You know what people like before they do. It's a good eye and a sense of what is happening around you, I think, but you can't fake it, it must be you and natural.

TB: And is that all, at least for now?

S: The other star on here, well, I saw it, I liked it, as before, but as you get older and more mature you think about it more. Now that I'm going to be living in New York, I will be able to get some more work done, maybe to mark going there. I don't know what it will bring. But I have been lucky with my tattoos—at least I did things that really represented me.

Reflective summary

During these conversations, it was quite a challenge to really listen, talk and film, all at once. I think I made a conscious decision to listen and follow the interview and I felt somehow out of control of the camera. I

tried to zoom in closely for each tattoo shot but found it was often easier to move myself. I found it hard to shoot the body and individual tattoos while not looking at my subject's face. I realized that I needed eye contact with my participants to gauge the authenticity of the proceedings and reframe or adapt my questions—to think and respond. Stephan, partly due to his performing experience, was so confident and at ease with himself, the video camera took over and I felt that I was on automatic pilot. I found him charming and happy in front of the camera and so visually pleasant that it was difficult to end the interview. Despite this, the interview remained focused and I was pleased with the ease and candor with which Stephan replied.

Our first interview was rather superficial and I found myself wondering about the subject's background and intentions. I felt there was so much unsaid and I had many secondary questions following our first meeting. I telephoned Stephan again and expressed the need to explore his intentions and motivations in more detail. For our next conversation I went through the entire transcribed text again and at our second meeting sought to clarify a number of issues. He was delighted to respond, saying he felt he was clarifying his own thought processes through the interview. Our subsequent conversation was much more relaxed and consequently enabled me to probe more deeply for more detailed answers. We spoke for several hours and this edited transcript condenses a lot of material.

In many ways I felt Stephan's early tattoos marked his coming out and primarily identified his sexual orientation. I felt now that this issue had been addressed and he was living openly as a gay man, he was now ready to

move on with other topics and styles of work, suggesting his next tattoo would represent his new life in New York.

4.3 Sebastian

I met Sebastian when I was interviewing Stephan. He was really interested in our conversation and kept coming over toward us to listen in on what was being said. I had noticed that he kept hanging around seeking eye contact and seemed to be waiting to approach me. He finally asked me what I was doing and said he would really like to talk about tattoos. Sebastian was quite direct and most determined. He said he wanted to correct some prejudices. We agreed to meet later in his workplace.

Describing himself as coming from a conventional and hardworking family, Sebastian is in his late twenties and presents as a sober, shy, quietly spoken and conservative person, of conventional appearance. He was dressed in black, conservative, business cut trousers and shirt with very short hair and was clean-shaven. He then asked to talk with me privately. As we had never met before that day, we had not arranged an interview venue. The filming and interview took place in his workplace, in a small dingy corner, in an otherwise bustling and exclusive beauty salon and spa in downtown Montreal.

This interview was an entirely impromptu affair. The entire filming took place behind a curtain in the basement of the beauty parlor, as my informant clearly wanted privacy. We had little or no time to prepare but simply drank a coffee together and chatted generally for a while and then began taping. The room was dark and created a somber tone on camera. However, this somehow suited the mood of the conversation and I filmed on, only really stopping as Sebastian spoke with emotion and candor. Due to the very intense nature of the discussion, I simply tried to

listen and did not stop to improve visibility or sound quality; I felt this might break the intimate atmosphere or impinge upon an authentic rendering of a very personal experience.

TB: Well, you came to me to talk about tattoo. Why?

S: It's because I have a story to tell you and because in here it's such a dumb world.

TB: Ha-ha...well that might be true but what do you mean?

S: You know what I'm saying, it's all so superficial, especially when you're in this beauty and cosmetic industry. And I heard you talking about what tattoos are about, a fashion.

TB: Is that what tattoo is about?

S: I think for lots of people, they want to shine or show themselves and prove they believe in something.

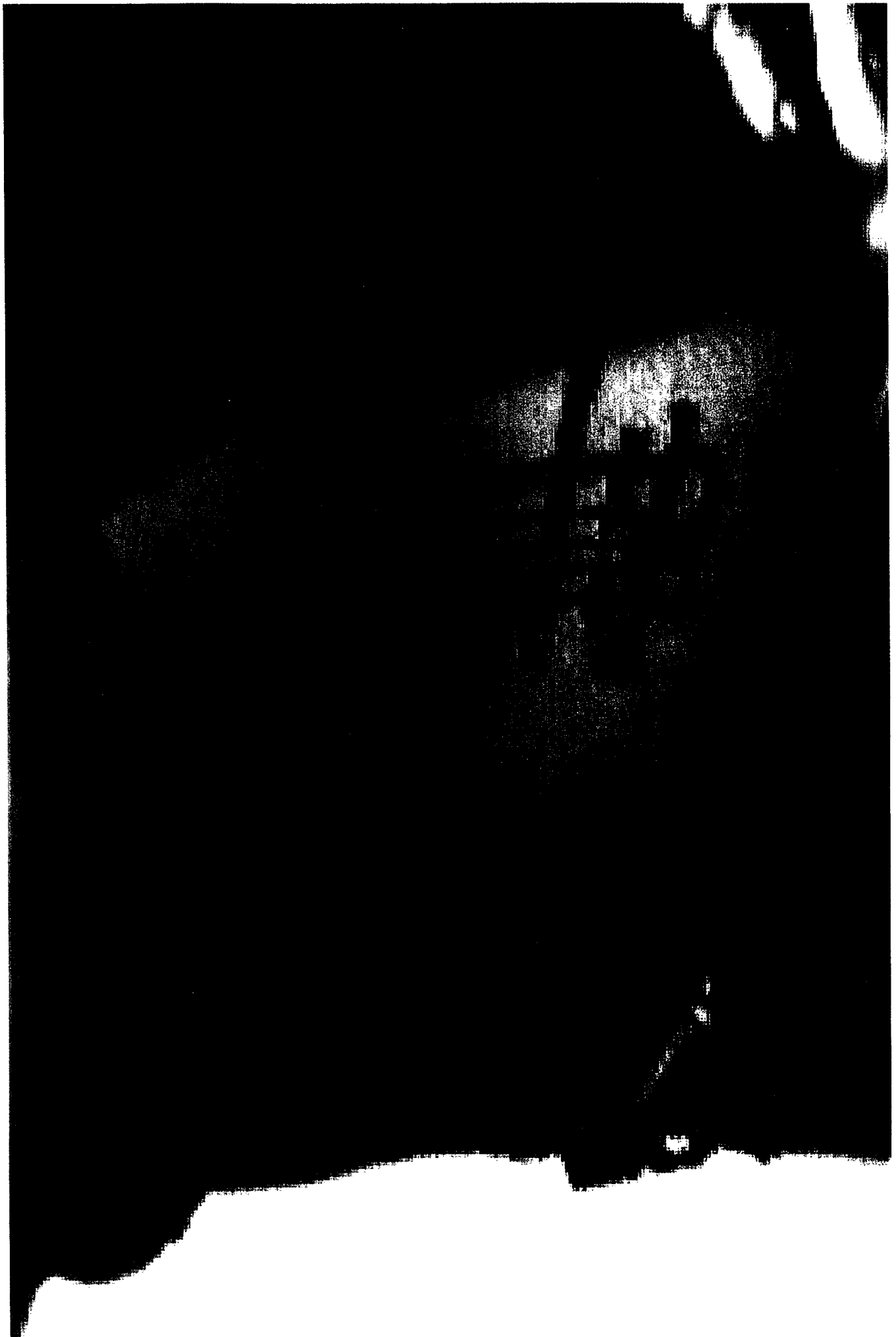
TB: How?

S: Well, a way to seem cool even if they are not, like the way people copy stars to be like them. If it's on their skin, maybe they feel it's as close as they can get to something they admire.

TB: You must see so many tattoos. When I look around here, everyone seem to have one. Why do you think tattoo is so popular in this setting?

S: Like in here everyone has one at least. This is the top beauty and hair salon in Montreal.

TB: What does that really mean? Is it the best place or what?



S: The best stylists are here and the best heads. Everyone has won prizes and the salon is pretty famous, the stylists are known and are cool, they go out that bit farther.

TB: Is that why everyone has a tattoo here?

S: Whatever is underground is in, like tattoo comes out like a craze. People want to show they are rebels, even in a tiny way, they need to express themselves. The mainstream won't do it because it's so mainstream, like everyone else, safe, if you like. Then, everyone rushes for it, if it's underground, whatever is different... and then it goes out 'cause everyone has it... and new stuff comes in. See?

TB: You know I don't get how a thing becomes a fashion.

S: People want to be cool so they take parts of things they see as out there and hope they can make themselves like that.

TB: Did you get your tattoo because of fashion?

S: Well, I'm in hairdressing so I have follow fashion all the time for work but I do what I do because of what I feel. That is art. It's an expression of myself, not about my whole society.

TB: Were you thinking about all this when you got your tattoo?

S: No, not at all. When I got it, I drew it, it was three years earlier after a big event in my life...

TB: Right?

S: The thing is, I have only one tattoo. I will only ever have one. It was after my father tried to commit suicide.

TB: I see.

S: And I had my own dealing with that. As I'm in hairdressing, I'm always dealing with other people and what they want, like caring for other people but not looking at myself. You spend your whole

time listening to other people's stuff, like their problems. All the time, like all the time. And so from that time on, I tried to look at myself... Like the way I discovered I was in hairdressing like my father. That was my ambition: to be like him. I had my own issues with suicide like my father, I have been depressed like him, and I wanted to have a family exactly like my father. So...

TB: It seems there were so many parallels...

S: You bet! I was really just following him too, too much but I couldn't see it. So my tattoo is... it represents who I really was, what I'm really like and what's different from anyone else.

TB: This is all about who you are.

S: Yeah, and I never wanted to forget it either. That's why a tattoo. It's forever... People forget stuff, who you are, and I knew when I was older, it would always remind me so I'd never forget what happened (here, Sebastian loosened his belt and exposed his upper buttocks to show a dark navy, line down tattoo).

TB: I see it now just below the hip. Why there?

S: It's just for me. It's for no one else.

TB: Can you tell me what it is? Or describe it? I see a hand holding strings.

S: The hand of the Godfather, that's from when I was younger and I really loved Mafia movies and westerns. Like the Godfather movies, all the Mafia classics, *Goodfellas*, *Casino*, I really loved the stories, the families, the way they were. Real families.

TB: Is that partly your heritage, being Italian?

S: Oh yes, but it's the loyalty and the stories like I loved, the rebels, they are all family-orientated. No matter how twisted your family is,

you still stick together, and especially in the last years, my family is pretty twisted but we still stick together. No matter.

TB: The hand?

S: That's my dad.

TB: How did you create it?

S: I drew it in one day but I thought about it and I'd been drawing it in bits here and there, for a very long time, putting it all together in my head for three years. I was putting all these things in that I wanted in there.

TB: And they copied your drawing in the tattoo shop.

S: Totally. Totally the way I wanted it. It had to be just right.

TB: Take me through it. What are the other things about?

S: It's a hand holding strings like a puppet and with a trumpet hanging there from the strings and the thing behind is the words, on a scroll, "It's a Lonesome Old Town." Oh, and there's musical notes round it.

TB: But can you see it?

S: I just know it's there.

TB: What about the music?

S: Well, it's because music is a big part of my life. I listen to Sinatra when I'm really depressed... and he expresses it so well and as he's had a hard life too. And Louis Armstrong, well, that's the trumpet. I play a little and also he's the father of jazz, that's if I'm happy. Connick, if I'm in love I am very romantic.

TB: How did you put these things together in a picture?

S: I started with the most important and worked it in... it kinda all jumbles up, as I say, it took a while, I was thinking about myself. All these ideas sorta all together, the words are from a song in a movie,

Leaving Las Vegas... Sting. (Sebastian sang the song) "It's a lonesome old town when you're not around." This is so many parts of me and love is such a big part of my life and that movie. It's about love and suicide and in the end Nicholas Cage goes through with it. And everyone hates that but not me, no. I thought great... right or wrong, he went through with it, he had a goal and he went through with it.

TB: Is this in relation to what happened to your dad?

S: See, my father left me there on the street and went to kill himself not so long ago. I was there, I was the one who had to deal with it.

TB: Really, that sounds very traumatic, er, do you want to continue this...? We can break.

S: It's OK. And then I had to tell my mother. They'd broken up and I had, I had to say what happened. The tattoo is about that. And I feel a lot better now.

TB: Is this a resolution then?

S: Like I say, it's better now I've dealt with the whole suicide thing.

TB: What do you mean? How do you deal with that?

S: Well, now, when I feel depressed, I use the energy to write. And I, well, it never goes away the suicide thing I mean, like being an alcoholic, you deal with it every day. So I don't escape from it, I write it, I use it, my tattoo marks that. I will not forget and it will remind me of what I went through and what is important to me and what happened. I am a very sensitive person. It's what love and family are all about. Like for me, that's all that matters. I think. I don't know but I think it was Frank Sinatra who said "Music is like my wife, I know she'll never leave me."

Reflective summary

Through out the process, it became clear that I needed to pause with Sebastian for some discussion of the sensitive nature of the dialogue. I spent some time considering how we discussed depression, suicide and death, in the incongruous surroundings of a beauty salon. We resumed a couple of times after short breaks when I stopped to ask Sebastian if he was sure about continuing. He was most adamant. I was vaguely disturbed by Sebastian's tattoo with its controlling hand; his single tattoo made Sebastian an exception in my research.

I found Sebastian's candor unexpected and quite disarming. I think that I had somehow anticipated a more colorful, decorative tattoo and a more extrovert personality. Yet, Sebastian was quiet spoken and very earnest. This interview raised for me the very unique ethical dilemma video camera research poses: should this person really expose so much of his private life, family and mental health issues on tape? Despite my expressed concerns, Sebastian insisted. He later ~~he~~ told me, he wanted to 'tell it as it was'. He felt his story was important, somehow operating as an antidote to the superficial surroundings he felt he worked in. Yet, I was left with a deep sense of unease. This interview made me question my responsibility as a researcher to be honest and mindful of the participants desires and expectations.

4.4 Catherine

Catherine was introduced to me via another tattoo artist who said as a young woman, new to the trade she might be interested in sharing her recent experiences. When we spoke on the phone she was eager to meet. Catherine is in her mid twenties and an apprentice tattoo artist, working in a well-known and long established tattoo parlor in the downtown area. The shop is owned and operated by her very successful uncle, who is a highly regarded and quite famous artist. The tattoo parlor is one of approximately ten others on the same street. These are situated in the older rather impoverished part of the city with what Catherine describes as a primarily blue collar clientele, including many walk in customers seeking traditional tattoo designs and motifs. Panels of flash fill these windows, where 'old school' and long established tattoo practice rules.

Catherine describes herself as coming from an old fashioned and traditional Montreal Anglophone family, many members being committed tattoo practitioners or aficionados. Loud and lively, Catherine presented as a vivacious, confident and direct person, making jokes and laughing and swearing throughout the interview. She was candid about customer behavior and her honesty offered me new insights into the workings of the traditional tattoo shop.

I was struck by her natural beauty as she was casually dressed in a long sarong, leather sandals and summer T-shirt. with her long blond hair loosely tied up. There was no tattoo work visible on Catherine and she could easily have passed as a vacationing tourist.

- TB: Um, well, what shall we begin with... have you finished school?
- C: Well, that might be nice. Some chance. But it costs so much and I don't like the idea of student loans but I'll see how I go business-wise.
- TB: Is tattoo a business then?
- C: Oh yes, it has to be. People are in it to make a living. My whole family is in it.
- TB: So you, are you part of a dynasty?
- C: Well, I, well, it's kinda silly, embarrassing, as I was working in this Irish pub... and they, my mom and dad, kept seeing me looking green in the face, all the time. They were worried about the drinking and what I was ending up doing and so, well, I'm not sure if he took the initiative himself or they put him up to it, but my uncle's tattoo place was suggested as a place to go work. The idea was to babysit and greet the customers, you know, talk to them when they come into the shop.
- TB: And it wasn't a plan to be a tattoo artist?
- C: No, not at first. I didn't know how famous or well known or what a reputation my uncle had. It's on Ontario Street, it's pretty well known, it's a big place. Family business, he, my uncle is one of the main tattoo artists and my cousin makes the needles and he's a pretty well-known graffiti artist.
- TB: Is there an artistic link there?
- C: I think so, pop culture and all that, it's also a bit the same, the styles maybe. That's how I started and everyone is tattooed, the whole

family is tattooed. Like my grandfather is covered in tattoos and all the cousins preceding me, like, all have tattoos.

TB: Is that men only?

C: Well, there's no other, like well, I'm the oldest girl so I figured, "Hey, I've got to get one done, it makes sense." So, that's my first one when I was eighteen. I had thought about it. My uncle, well, like he is literally black with tattoos, his arms are covered and redone so much.

TB: People go over the work, change it, or what?

C: So much, especially tattoo artists. People change their minds. They do coverups, they like that, my uncle does a lot. Anyways, I always thought they looked so fun to have. I thought there was a persona that came along with it, they were all so cool. And when my cousin would get a tattoo and show me and he would get ready to tell me a story that came with each one, like parts of a story, and none of them were very talkative. I'm the little kid saying tell me more and it was so mysterious, a kinda imposed mystery.

TB: Did you get your tattoo straight away? After you began working there. This first one?

C: Yes, well, it's an ape, ha-ha, it's Cornelius from *Planet of the Apes* (at this point, Catherine got up and removed her top T-shirt to reveal a large series of upper arm and shoulder covering tattoo work. These included stars and various patterns surrounding them. There also appeared to be a monkey's head). It was, I had showed up for my uncle to do this tattoo, I had made up my mind to get one done and he wasn't there, out with old tattoo buddies and I was so hyped up for it that, and anyway... He wouldn't have let me

get this done, he would have said, "I'm not having my niece running around with a fucking gorilla on her arm!"

TB: Is that because it's unusual?

C: Oh yeah, but I got one of the guys to do it and I just did it to make my little brother laugh.

TB: And the rest of the design around it?

C: It's just, well, it's not that unique, silly and embarrassing, rockabilly San Diego surf rock band... a charged rock and roll sound and a rocket and the lines. I liked them. The box and fire is a rocket. And Cornelius is in the rocket.

TB: You put these elements together and what? You told the artist what you wanted?

C: Well, the whole thing became a big joke in the family... Just imagine what they called me, space monkey... I'm born in the Year of the Monkey... space cadet, space monkey and all.

TB: Rockets... getting high... so many associations!

C: Yeah, that's it, and from my parents and on and on, and I got so sick of being laughed at all the time that I thought, "Yeah, I'm a space monkey," but I turned the tables on them. I got these three stars which are my mom, my dad and my brother. At least, that's what I told them! Then my uncle added the lines, the blue lines.

TB: Why that?

C: The lines, aesthetically it was kinda like, I like linear things and a band I really like was in my head then so it looked really nice to put them together and at the time armbands were really popular. There are so many trends, I'm not into that, so instead of having a

perfectly centered piece, it was shifted over... so the first thing you see when you're lookin' at me is this gorilla head looking right at ya.

TB: I can see that now, yes.

C: And then I had to show up on a basketball court and y'know with a gorilla head staring at whoever I'm covering... girls were real scared of me, so hilarious!

TB: So are you a bit of a hard nut?

C: I mean, I'm tough on a court... Well, I've been told I have an intimidating air about me. But honestly I'm everyone's favorite babysitter... So how does that fit! Hey, I can make puppets outta socks, is that intimidating?!... This bit was alone for a year.

TB: And this is your family. Yep... and that's gonna make Cornelius you then, isn't it?

C: Yeah, yeah...

TB: So why him?

C: Well, he was the leader of the revolution in the movie... and he's everyone's least favorite character... he's s'posed to be a pushover but I really liked him... 'cause that movie really needed a hero and he was the only one, therefore it had to be him. Maybe one of the weaker *Planet of the Apes* movies. I needed a hero and, once again, it was also a joke to make my little brother laugh. Mission accomplished, and when I got in and showed him, I said, "Marco you're gonna die when you see this." And just look at mom's face, she goes, "What about your wedding day?" The first thing out of her mouth... ha-ha-ha and Marco, wow! He saw my mom, he just laughed and went berserk. We said, "Yah! You sucker, mom."

TB: Well, you seem to enjoy the teasing!



- C: Oh, I did, then she goes, "The joke's not on me, it's on you... this is real!" And then I go, "What are you talking about? This is fun." And that's why I did it... to make him laugh. And piss my mom off!
- TB: Did you think your mom would be mad considering the family dynasty?
- C: Well, I knew she wouldn't be that mad 'cause she kinda took it for granted what with my uncle, my godfather, that when we turned eighteen we'd get tattooed.
- TB: So it wasn't getting tattooed that upset her?
- C: No, it was like, "Don't girls get butterflies or some nice Chinese symbols?" And she was upset 'cause it wasn't a normal one and looked hard.
- TB: Your dad?
- C: My dad just nodded. She, my mom, sees it like a trend and she can deal with that. Like women come in with their fourteen-year-old daughters, can you believe it! And march up to me and say, "I want my daughter to be handled by a woman!"
- TB: Oh, I believe it! Are there many women in the tattoo world, you know?
- C: Well, I'm the first in our shop. Well no, there aren't so many.
- TB: Are there many shops?
- C: Well, there used to be only a handful. Now so many and there's not that much business.
- TB: There are a lot of scratchers too?
- C: A lot of the shops are scratchers, anyone can rent out a shop, lots of the shops are pretty bad. And then we had a guy taught by my

uncle and he left and quit and there's a bad vibe there. That's why my uncle was sketched about me coming in... but my mom's the family Pollyanna and he treats me that way, but hell hath no fury like a tattoo artist's scorn for an asshole apprentice!

TB: Well, you've given them a trade and they are supposed to pay back the knowledge?

C: Yeah, and open a shop nearby... no tact.

TB: And that's taking business away... So, it's so male-dominated?

C: Well, the artists but not the clientele, it's split. The women don't get the bigger stuff, like it's real gender-specific, tattoos. The guy stuff, the girly stuff. Like the guys will get like a Canadian flag and the girls sometimes get a big piece but not much, that's rare, they want a pretty animal or flower, usually.

TB: So what do the girls choose? You were saying about the girls and moms coming in?

C: Oh yeah, they say, "What's in and really big, right now?... Where are the butterflies?" And go straight to the wall to the flash and pick some.

TB: They want to know what is fashionable.

C: Oh yes, they just do what's in.

TB: Tell me about the flash. Do you let people copy it, um, is there an issue about owning pictures?

C: There's so much stuff. You can get any old flash from the shop down the street but we don't let you copy it. My uncle is internationally known, he's traveled the world and worked with the best people like Ruby, Luther, they've been to the house, had dinner with my grandmother. And has amazing flash no one else

has 'cause others aren't tapped into that level, so we don't let them take it out.

TB: So you really have come to make this your life work?

C: Like, that's also complicated, it's always been, I hate to say cool, but it is and I really admire people that are into it seriously. So confident as to like to have their marks on them for everyone to see, and it so pisses me off when people come up and see mine and stop and look and say... "Duh, I don't get it!"

TB: But if the marks are so important, why choose flash or a picture everyone can have or someone else drew?

C: I totally agree, it's weird, but people think that and they got their picture off the wall and it's running through their minds that someone else has this and they might see it and they say, "Can you put this bit blue instead of pink, and the end bit orange..." and I go "OK." And everyone does that.

TB: People think they are making it theirs if they change it even in a tiny way. And are you saying that certain pictures then correspond to certain groups?

C: Oh yes... It's so bad some days, we know... we can guess, like, "Hell, take 24c," and I love when professionals come in. Like most of the people coming in are totally, totally blue-collar, working-class. That's the neighborhood. The other kind is the little Westmount teenage girls.

TB: Class is an issue then?

C: Oh yes, all the big work is with kids from Pointe St. Charles.

TB: Working-class neighborhoods? And the idea that dentists have them too?

- C: Ha-ha-ha, we have a lawyer that comes in, twisted, lots of big additions, retarded dude, all naked women all over his body! But no, it's still blue-collar around us.
- TB: And you mentioned trends.
- C: Well, I noticed more Christian punk rockers into big, big old-school swallows and Sacred Hearts, Jesus, and head of thorns, hearts with thorns.
- TB: Real old-school flash is still in then?
- C: Oh yeah, and when I was in San Diego this summer, that's all it was, old-school.
- TB: And what about the effect of wider world events? Dare I ask about September 11?
- C: Well, I've never done an Airborne Infantry tattoo, and I've done maybe 20 in the last month.
- TB: So you're aware of the influence with different media on how a tattoo design is chosen or is something else happening?
- C: People come in all the time with *Cosmo* magazine and say "I want this" or even ask "Well, so, do you know Jennifer Lopez's video? The girl in that, I want that tattoo," and they expect me to know. I have to tell them to go buy *In Style* magazine and bring it in, then I can work with a picture.
- TB: So is that "I want to be like her..." is it really that?
- C: Totally that! Seriously! It's so fucked up! At least five women have come in with a picture of Angelina Jolie 'cause she's the in girl with the perfect tits or whatever of the moment and they want their boyfriend's name on their arm in the same place just like her. And

they say, "And wait till Joe or whatever sees this!" Can you believe it?!

TB: I don't even, I can't think what her tattoo is like.

C: It's the typical little small black dragon girl thing. Grrrr! Makes me want to puke!

TB: How are people about their body?

C: There is no one type, some, well, there's no type of person, some are so like confident, fine and chilled. Others are so, well, I should pay them to touch their body.

TB: So why, what is this public aspect compared with the private tattoo?

C: Um... Well, secret tattoos, not so much, maybe with the big butt girls, yeah, a good few of those, quite a few and I had only one on the penis. Gays, we are near the Gay Village, like the tribal motifs 'cause you're always looking at the body and not the picture, if you know what I mean.

TB: There is a sexual connotation for the private then...

C: There's this thing about tattoos being sexy. I think much of it seems to be catering to the whole silly bad, sexy girl stereotype. For me, I think that stuff should be separate.

TB: How many people create or come in with their own drawings or concepts?

C: A lot, a hell of a lot, um, maybe half, sometimes sketched or drawn in some bad way, it's so bad. So, so bad. The rest, well, it might be a picture or a kid's sticker, anything, but it's something they see and like.

TB: Is that a problem for you, the artist?



- C: Yes, often, as they aren't trained, you have to be able to see it and now my whole aesthetic awareness has so changed and developed... like the completeness of a piece and tattooing has given me a whole new aesthetic. I like when people come in with their own stuff, well.
- TB: I hear a but...
- C: Well, the truth is we usually joke around about how he thinks he's an original or he's an individualist, ha-ha! "A fuckin' snowflake, everyone!"
- TB: I see I'd better be careful! If I want to come in! So tell me about how you think through your work, all this stuff in your head... How did you come up with your next piece?
- C: This one is the big story like, er, um... The shooting star (Catherine pointed to a stream of tattooed stars). That's it. Because Hailey was part of the family... My, or the family, pet dog, much loved, and I did it made sense to have her tie into the family and I wanted something special. I thought of the ribs but it just hurts too much. I started with an outline all the way down and then I got this one, the next star, put in and it hurt so, so much.
- TB: Why, is it 'cause the collarbone?
- C: Yeah, and the position you have to hold I had to, just so vulnerable, look away and wait till it was all over.
- TB: So the pain is a problem?
- C: The pain, I can tolerate it, but I really don't like it so it's not for the pain... Anyway, hooked it up that way... A cartoon, surreal sort of tattoo because of childhood, Hailey was my childhood best friend and if animals can reflect your personality, she was so totally like

carefree walking into walls, that's my family... pretty much and I wanted a good feeling, a good, silly, goofy, happy feeling...

TB: There's a lot of work here, really rich colors, effect of light and shading.

C: Yes, it's well, I wanted it to be fabulous and show how amazing tattoo can be, and my mom to be proud and my brother think it cool, and also nothing I could ever regret and be proud myself, and it took me a long time to do.

TB: What about the work and how it was done?

C: I have, well. This guy, he did my first work, I was his boss's niece and he's done fine art, from a fine art family, not like my uncle who prefers the old-school, by-the-books stuff, he'd rather do a skull, traditional tattoo, or a nice Sacred Heart. But like this guy was so accommodating and did as I asked (Catherine exposed her abdomen and hip and turned toward the camera to reveal a large tattooed, bare breasted geisha and mermaid-type women with clawed hands).

TB: There is a real sheen and play of light.

C: And I chose, like, a chrome look, I chose it all.

TB: Will you color all the stars?

C: No, I'm thinking of leaving some open, maybe for my kids' names or something like that.

TB: Well, quite a traditional girl?

C: Yes, yeah... I guess, well, until the last one, it blew everyone outta the water.

TB: Why, what is it?

- C: Well, it really bugged my mom and dad. Ah, this is meant to be, well, this is it and, yes, it's big. This was the killer.
- TB: Tell me about it.
- C: It's a siren and this one, on the hottest day, just before we moved shop and I wanted it done in the shop, like for nostalgia sake. We had a guest artist visiting from France... he's known and the first time he'd seen a woman, like, working in tattoo and he was impressed and he drew this up so quickly.
- TB: It's amazing detail and the fish scales and the water rushing. What about the hands?
- C: Well, he, I didn't get that he likes monsters, you know, boy, real boy stuff, like masks and horror and hairy things. He wanted her to be like a monster and all, and I wanted her like a nice geisha, especially in case I ever want a full body suit, which I'll probably end up doing. I wanted something that would blend in nicely with other work. So I wanted something a bit different, went for a mystical thing.
- TB: So it's a combination of the two aspects. I see the geisha aspect and... those hands?
- C: There, the crone thing. Absolutely, only the boobs are so big!
- TB: Rather sexy and quite frightening at the same time?
- C: That's a combination of my inspiration and his technique. Or I think so now. I get different reactions and the family are so off about the boobs hanging out and showing, depending on what I'm wearing but I love it... everyone loves tattoo these days.
- TB: So, why is it so popular now?

- C: Like we were saying, it's a lot to do with the influence the box has on people... like how it's made into something cool and hip, individualistic and then there's that whole thing about standing up for your convictions... like particularly some of these straight-edge tattoos like... "poison free youth"... yuck... that anti-drug thing. Everyone needs something and wants to be someone. Either they spend two hours in front of the mirror doing their makeup to get the look they want or a tattoo will do it for you...
- TB: So it's not paper... another art form won't do it?
- C: I don't know, think skin is about the moment... to me, it's really the moment to keep. You have to really, really want one. Like the first one, I was thinking of my dog, then the next one, I did it to get mom off my case... I'll have stars that represent the family the old stars are, like, connections to my grandfather, who has them from World War II. And the last one, I was just back from a surf, carefree surfing summer in California, I was so happy and thought, like, "Yeah, a naked mermaid on my hip. Sure!" Ha-ha.
- TB: So is that you? Like you or is that too simplistic?
- C: That's why the purple hair, not blond like the artist wanted, like me.
- TB: And she's Asian-looking?
- C: Yeah, that's the geisha thing. They are so beautiful. I'm learning more all the time. But I don't know, like, I only realized I had 19 stars done and I was 19 at the time. So you go back afterwards and analyze and see meanings that you can't see at the time, it's so weird.
- TB: So sometimes you are not sure about the reason you chose the picture?

- C: Yeah, and because I'm impulsive and I think the best and most honest things are done on impulse or a whim, I do it and later I think, "Well, why did I want that? What's that all about?" I'm not afraid to make mistakes but I'll figure it out and you can have it covered.
- TB: So there's no real permanence in tattoo then?
- C: But that's what I don't like, I don't know, I think it should be permanent. I don't like the idea that you can change it... like it makes you strong to have that degree of commitment, maybe not a guy I'm dating but I'll have Hailey, my dog. If you regret anything, you forget who you really are or were... I don't think I could get sick of something I believe in, it's like a moment, it's like a photograph of a time in your life, if you like, but yeah, like with friends I don't say all that. They say, "Why did you get them?" And I'd say, "'Cause I felt like it, leave me alone!" I don't want to keep explaining myself to people.
- TB: You have a collection of magazines and photos with you?
- C: Well, I wanted to show you my understanding of tattoo. To show you how amazing it really is. Like here is, my uncle had work in the first magazines and some of his work and at early conventions, I was there in grade eight. I just took the afternoon off, then I missed math, ha-ha, and went down to help and help out there. There's work by Luther and some of my favorites. The great names in tattoo.
- TB: You sound proud to be part of this art form.
- C: You bet! There real skill here and there are a lot of back tattoos, they can't be seen. Yeah, it's odd but they know it's there and other friends see it. But I would never do a face. I would never do that... well, I have done a tattoo over a birthmark scar.

TB: What's that for, do you think?

C: Um, maybe to make it go away or make it pretty again. That's what I reckon. This was the Convention in 1994, so many influences. Psychedelic... Sci-fi TV. The work on my cousin, that's of *Red Dwarf*, that was his favorite show. This is to this day probably my favorite tattoo, the really amazing crone and there was such great work there.

TB: Why the crone?

C: Ha, well, it's so not what people think of a woman. I like that. Amazing, all color, no gray in the shading and there is amazing wash and real skill, it's such great work.

TB: It's not surprising, seeing this level of skill.

C: Um, I have to say that, although people are more open-minded they are also much more demanding, like, they see stuff in magazines and want you to exactly copy it... like.

TB: Is it addictive then?

C: Well yes... and you get this rush... after. Have a great sleep if you're not worrying about it sticking to your bedsheets. And once you have one, you've gone through the unknown bit and you can go on without being so worried.

C: Tell me about flash. How have they built up collections?

TB: If, well, like, if someone comes in with something you haven't seen before, well, we will keep a copy as a reference just 'cause we have tons of pop culture stuff. That's what people really like. The bands the shows, stars, TV, GameBoy games, even cereal packets, for God's sake. Like when someone comes into the shop, even if you're asked to draw up something for someone, I'm not going to

draw it off the top of my fuckin' head, like there's just no way, it's a waste of time and your style is your style and they might not like it or even appreciate it or understand it, so I'll be like, "What do you like? This or this? You, and what would you pick from this or this? And put it with what?" and show them... just have to simplify everything.

TB: How do you do that?

C: "What do you like?" Well, you have to talk to them as if they're children in a tattoo parlor because they are so flustered and scared.

TB: They are so anxious?...

C: Really. They really are. I am so glad I'm aware of that and I was always comfortable in the shop to help them out, but just watching people come in, basically they want you to really pick their tattoo for them and put it on them and just do it. Like they say, "Where do I put it?" And I say, "Where do you think I should put it?" And they say, "Where do you think I should put it?"... they don't know. I wonder, like, they just walked in and do they even think, they just saw tattoo and not think about where it goes. People are so sheepish, it's weird.

Reflective summary

Once Catherine removed her T-shirt, I was surprised by the scale of the tattoo's on her body. Throughout the interview her love and loyalty toward her family and profession seemed to shine from her expressive face. Indeed, I found her work made me think of folk art with its emotional emphasis on home and family; it left me with a feeling that tattoo was often a conservative and sentimental art form.

Catherine brought a large bag full of tattoo magazines and books to the interview, many contained photo's from tattoo conventions of heavily tattooed subjects. Many displayed her uncles artistry. Catherine valued the tradition of the tattoo trade and proven artistry with high levels of drawing skill such as use of perspectives and accuracy. She delighted in showing me the skilled representational drawings of animals and faces, while acknowledging that she would eventually be similarly covered in tattoo's.

The interview was conducted in a room in the university. At the beginning of the interview, I felt the setting might be slightly off-putting but Catherine said she was pleased to be in a university and was delighted that tattoo was getting the attention it deserves. Passionate about her chosen profession and at ease throughout, we discussed for several hours pausing only for refreshments.

4.5 Dima

I had heard of Dima through a student recommendation, as someone who was very heavily tattooed. After a brief phone call I went to his home. Dressed in black, with black hair and with facial piercings, slightly built and looking much younger than his twenty three years, Dima is a graphic artist living in the Plateau Mont-Royal neighborhood of Montreal. His neat and compact apartment was full of his own graphic art, a large collection of finely created black, ink drawings. Everything in his apartment appeared to be decorated in black and white.

A computer dominated the living room space. Experienced in multimedia and business, Dima was, at the time of our first interview, trying to establish a small business via web pages over the Internet. Describing himself as determined to avoid a nine to five graphic job, he showed me his web site and discussed various strategies for employment in a virtual environment.

Dima presented as erudite, articulate and demanding with a particularly modernist approach to tattoo. His knowledge of tattoo history and culture was comprehensive. Committed to tattoo as an art form, he educated me about many aspects of tattoo culture. Describing himself as a night person, Dima spends a considerable amount of time discussing tattoo practice, culture and design with friends on international tattoo chat lines and discussion groups. Together, at the end of our discussion, we spent some time surfing the web and critiquing a large quantity of tattoo art that drew from traditional ancient block motifs that emphasized the body in movement.

TB: Tell me something about you, maybe some of your general background.

D: Yeah, sure.

TB: I think I got your name wrong.

D: My name is Dimitri, yeah... I'm Russian. I was born in Moscow and raised there until I was 10 years old.

TB: How do you live?

D: Well, I'm a graphic artist but I don't want to go back to multimedia.

TB: You showed me, selling and marketing from the Net is so complicated, you really have to do it full-time.

D: I'll sell when I'm painting.

TB: I'd never have guessed. You look soooo Plateau Mont-Royal!

D: Ha-ha, yes, I know I blend in.

TB: Well, I'm not sure what it means.

D: Yes, I know. I love my culture but I'm not a typical Russian or, to the extent other Russians would consider me Russian, I don't know if I would blend in now.

TB: Even in a changing Russia?

D: ... But I'm not Canadian either. Before I immigrated here, I lived in Israel.

TB: So you've done the whole immigrant thing.

D: Yeah, I lived in Jerusalem for almost three years and been through the Persian Gulf war.

TB: You've had a pretty rich life experience for someone quite young.

D: Yes, I'm 25.

TB: How did you first think of tattoo?

D: "Why would you deform yourself like that?" I thought people like that were degenerate and the question I had was, would it hurt, so I was not interested in it at all.

TB: You've come from quite a conservative background?

D: Oh yes, my mother is a professor of Russian language and literature...

TB: So an academic background.

D: Yes, she was a little down on it, we didn't even discuss it. When I turned eighteen, I got my first tattoo.

TB: So was it about breaking with something, becoming an adult?

D: Something that was mine, well, not symbolic but, mmm, but it's covered over. No, it just happened, it happened because I found something that was worth getting that would work with the black.

TB: You had it covered over since?

D: Yes, but this is it, Eno, his name (Dima removed his sweater to reveal his arm which was half tattooed down its full length from his shoulder to his wrist in a large block of black ink. The other half of his arm was drawn out in a block design pattern. I could also just perceive the covered over circle and name Eno).

TB: What is that? Why him?

D: Brian Eno. He was and still is my favorite musician, a very smart guy. I really admire him and he was really under my skin, and even though the work was really horrible, you can see the raised areas there, it's bad and lumpy.

TB: Where?

D: Superrock is really a bad place.

TB: What, full of badly trained...

- D: Yeah, scratchers and not trained and who change every week. But Eno, yeah... it's not that I idolized him but it was something that I wanted to show and that would start conversations in bars or whatever. People would say, "Is this Eno?"... ha-ha, and I'd explain and that would start a conversation about music or his production work.
- TB: So you put it in a prominent place to initiate contact.
- D: Yeah, absolutely, 'cause it's pretty rare to find people who really know about him, but it, this one, I will cover it up, covered up now, I just didn't like the way it turns, it doesn't work with my body and I just drew it when I still thought that tattoos still had to look like tattoos, like this looks like a tattoo design, slash, flash.
- TB: How did you do it?
- D: Yeah, I drew it the way it is now exactly and I went to a good tattoo artist, he had ten years' experience, Imago, to a guy called Jake. But he's left town, just gone, me and a lot of people let down.
- TB: Well, that must be difficult because you have to trust your artist, don't you?
- D: Yes, he's well known. It's important, trust, but it will establish itself automatically in the initial session or process or... No, it doesn't happen over a period of months but will really happen in the first session and the artist has to be a real people person and fake it if necessary. I liked it. I got hold of a research book and it changed my whole perspective.
- TB: How do you mean?
- D: I saw the work of Ed Hardy and I realized tattoos did not have to be a stamp or so dull, they could be anything, it really can be fitted to

the body, Anyway... in that book I saw a design on this really beautiful woman, a neck and a kind of crooked shoulder design (he pointed upward to his neck and traced the wispy fine line drawing that followed his collar bone)... But I liked the place, it was the space, liked it so much and I have seen it copied on so many other people since, mostly badly done.

TB: So this appears important to you: the location and relationship to the body.

D: It has to be, has to be. Oh yes, for me right now, in my appreciation of tattoo, it is, this is more important than the tattoo. And it is so important with this piece, I had it follow the collarbone and I drew it up. But not the top piece, Jake did that.

TB: It's very fine. How long did it take and it must have hurt, especially there?

D: Two session, six hours in two sessions: four and a half and then one and a half touch-up, which is how we usually proceed. It hurt, yeah, I almost passed out and now quite honestly, if I had known how much it would hurt, I wouldn't have had it done... and all the time as it's fully on the collarbone, people, professionals covered in tattoos, they look at it and turn away, they wince. Yeah, it's very heavy and, honestly, I just didn't know.

TB: So you're not into the pain or the mastery of pain?

D: No, no, I tolerate it... I'm in it for the outcome, not the process, but when it was done my body reacted so much, the way I had to lie and I was under-breathing, my extremities going numb, so Jake gave me a glass of wine.

TB: What's that cliché about getting drunk to get a tattoo?

- D: Yeah, well, of course it's not recommended as alcohol thins the blood, you bleed more, the work is harder to do. And anyway, any artist that would accept you drunk is really approaching being a scratcher.
- TB: So there is a code of ethics?
- D: Oh, there is and no self-respecting artist would work with a drunk, it's their responsibility. But in a way, I was expecting a release form like with piercing... But not for tattoo.
- TB: Like to avoid litigation?
- D: Yeah, but there are things they won't do.
- TB: As in facial tattoos?
- D: Um, yes, but I am seriously considering facial tattoo, but I am really taking my time.
- TB: In case you want to work in a bank, you could easily conceal your tattoos... So there are differences between the public and private tattoo, you can conceal your sleeve?
- D: Absolutely, there's a difference. Even when I got this sleeve done, I wanted to continue the work lower below the cuff to the wrist, but Jake, he said no, wouldn't do it and said it wouldn't look good. I think it was his way of protecting me from myself on exactly this issue, and really, a full black sleeve, it's not for keeping hidden, I wanted to show. And really, my relationship with tattoo is quite unapologetic.
- TB: Can you explain that?
- D: If people have a problem with tattoo, it's with them, not with me, and I never had a problem, people treating me badly or negative reactions. In fact, the reverse, I've met so many interesting people

and people come up and say positive things. I think the change in attitude has been gradual, maybe since the fifties and rock and roll and the cool thing.

TB: What's the cool thing?

D: The academic world has run out of ideas and pick up on popular culture. So everything goes.

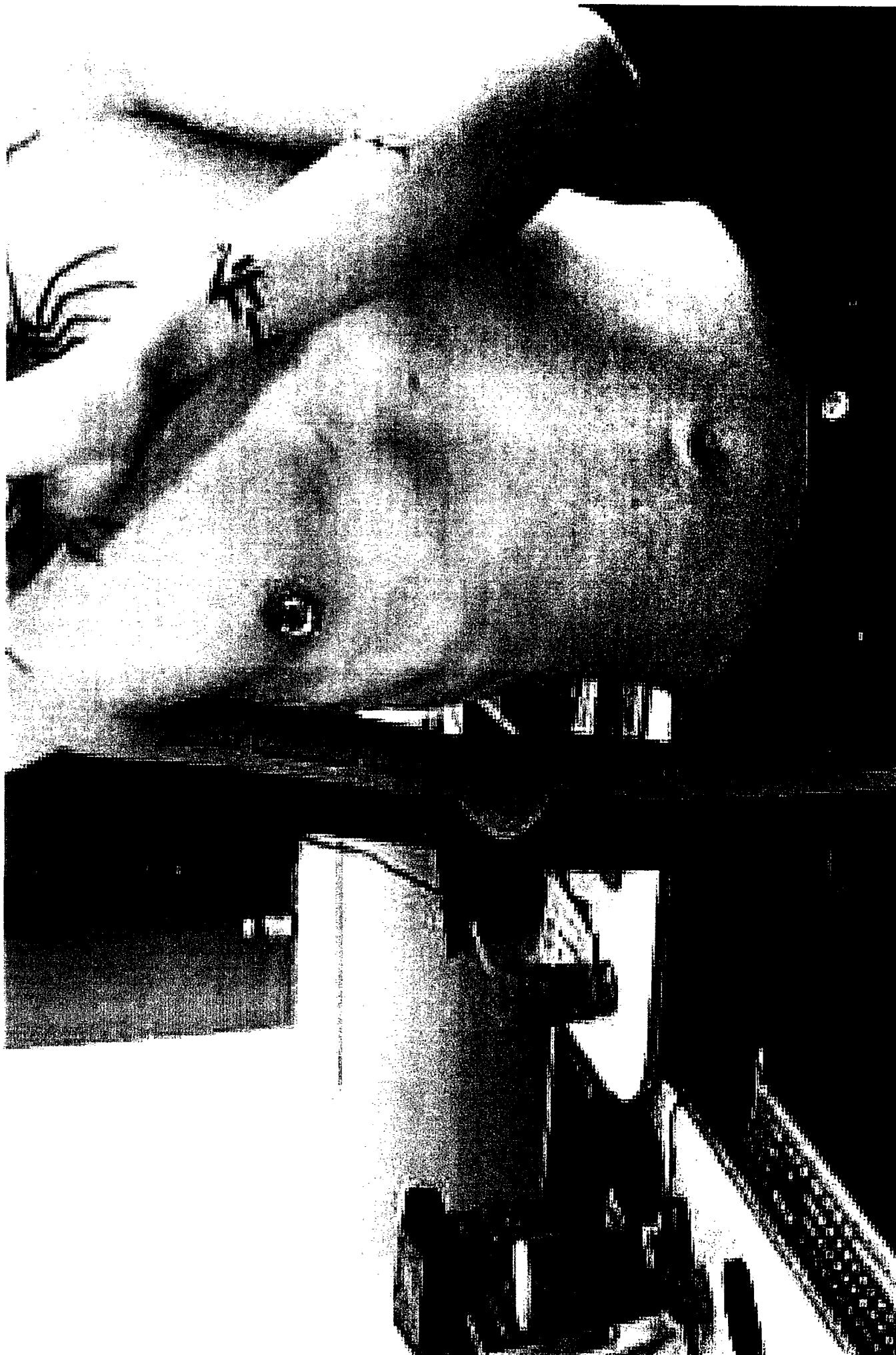
TB: Do you think public perception on what is cool has changed?

D: Well, even through friends, even in Russia, we speak on the Internet, they are covered in Micronesian designs, the global village and all that. The work is all black blocks, his wife too, and I asked him as I haven't been there since 1998, and he says people are used to it now and that the work you see in Moscow is of a very high standard even with the old provincial scratchers coming into Moscow, imagine that. Russia is like my mother and ex-stepfather from St. Petersburg, very conservative, so in this respect, the old Russia in their heads, they thought it degenerate but, as everywhere, it's changed. In Russia, there are two words for tattoo, like one means needling and the other is a word like tattoo.

TB: I suppose like the differences between scratchers and artists.

D: There are many things from my last visit to show how it's changed. One time there, when this little child was playing with me and so fascinated by the tattoo, his mother said to use the good word. People see it better now. He was driving his toy car up and down my arm and he said it was a like a road.

TB: You make me think of how many children and teenagers draw on their bodies... Did you draw on your arms as a child?



- D: I think, yeah, I think everyone does it, it's the first impulse to draw on yourself. I think you say to yourself, "How can I make this last?" The body and skin is the obvious and maybe preferred surface.
- TB: Maybe paper is given to wean them off.
- D: Ha-ha.
- TB: And permanence. How many times are you asked about that?
- D: All the time, all the time. It's the preoccupation of the non-tattooed, like my mother, her coping strategy is to ignore it and never talk about it but with the first one she said, "But it's forever," and I said, "No, it's not forever, it's just until I die."
- TB: Yes, indeed, ha-ha, but on the other hand, I have seen Japanese texts and photos of examples of irezumi art preserved on human skin of the gang members of the yakuza.
- D: Yes, that reminds me of a book I chanced across of the Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany, photos I saw with lamps made out of human skin with tattoos on them... I was sick and disgusted. This is how I saw tattoo, as terrible.
- TB: So appalling. Tattoo is historically associated with slavery and, conversely, religious devotion and the associated taboo of the body as somehow sacred.
- D: Well, that may be the only true statement, that if you are tattooed you will not be buried in a Jewish cemetery. Nonetheless it's not written about in the Torah or the Koran but the representation or likenesses of God is a problem. Yet there are Middle Ages pictures of Jesus.
- TB: Yes... and I suppose the proof of devotion runs through tattoo and I suppose it's linked to permanence.

D: Yes, this is my first tattoo and what it is all about, Eno the star, but I quickly moved away from that point on to a very different idea where the arm becomes the artwork not what is put on the arm, so it is not the picture or symbol or the design but the emphasis on the arm itself. It's like, wow. I'm left-handed, I would joke about it and say, like, my right arm is useless or the auxiliary tool but now it's the focal point of my body, right now it acquires new meaning, it puts them on the same level, and if it's not useful let it be pretty.

TB: Ha-ha.

D: Fine line that I had seen, but the fourth one mirrors this graphic art but with a person's body.

TB: Do you worry about your body, like putting on weight and it changing?

D: Well, it would stretch. I've read about that, I do know where you have muscle growth, he's very interesting... web site his arms are solid black, there is a tiny wave design. The guy's put on a lot of weight and he still looks good.

TB: What else do you have?

D: And my fourth one here, my design, it's on my back, it's my girlfriend's, my girlfriend she's had it for about ten years and we met on the dance floor and I saw her from the back (Dima removed his top t-shirt and turned his back to show a large gothic style curving pattern). I saw part of her tattoo, it's sort of tribal and that's what interested me enough, it's symbolic though.

TB: So you're a kind of people, a group, then tattoo is a common sign?

D: Well, it all depends on the work, you can't generalize, but if I see someone with some heavy work and they see me with heavy work, there is a sense of kinship. You're going to have a positive vibe.

TB: I understand.

D: We have a reason to talk even though it's still looked down upon, although that has changed and I think will eventually go to a point of total acceptance.

TB: So why is tattoo an art form now?

D: It's the level of skill and the change in mentality of the tattoo artists like Ed Hardy and the people doing big solid black pieces. For example, I saw the exact design in a book of flash, all copied, but he was doing amazing stuff in the sixties, and went to an artist to have it done and she said I was crazy but later did it, so ideas change, people move on.

TB: And how long to do this big work?

D: Twenty hours, depending on the amount of pain.

TB: Right.

D: This is started by one artist and then continued later. You can see a slight difference in color.

TB: It makes me think it's like fabric or clothing. It makes me want to touch and see if it's really you... Does it feel the same, your skin, to you?

D: Perhaps a second skin. But there's a bit of scarring and some fading, a definite fading related to sun exposure.

TB: Well, they will change to maybe blue or green?

D: When I had this done, I went to Cuba and despite care and sunblock there is sun damage. People would keep saying, "What

does it mean?" and I'd say, "It doesn't mean anything, it's not for that I did it." People want things to mean things so they can simplify and make assumptions.

TB: What assumptions?

D: Things like thinking I'm a rock musician whereas thirty years ago they would say, "So where did you do time?" ha-ha!

TB: So what next?

D: Well, the rest I'll have done at a convention, convention coming up soon. But I'll tell you Jake's story or how we started. I was so pleased with his work and even when other tattoo people would say, "No way, are you nuts? Don't do the whole arm. Why would you want to cover so much real estate?"

TB: 'Cause you can do so much or have any more work done?

D: That's the point. I didn't want to do lots of disparate little things. Some other people's approach to tattoo is as a diary or your life.

TB: Where I've been or done or things I've been or loved?

D: Yeah, yada, yada, yawn... yawn. And that's fine for them. But for me, it's totally abstract work with the body, to the point I'm so cold, I don't care: if it looks good to me, it's better than some symbol.

TB: Are you saying it's ridiculous to reduce experience to a symbol?

D: Well, of course, because it changes, you change, and I'll tell you, I've been in shops... you should hear it. Like this guy came in and he says to the artist, "I want this tattoo. Here is my concept... I see a tiger, orange and red, bright red colors, which represents my courage, the moon, it's my inspiration." And I see the tattoo artist yawn, yeah, yeah, sure, whatever! The artist is laughing at him but like, obviously, they don't want to lose a potential customer!

TB: Of course, it's a business... there is a tension there?

D: Yeah, and they say there are things they won't do... like cartoons, "Oh, I won't do Tweetie." And some say they won't do Disney characters following some tattoo artists in Florida being threatened with legal action over copyrights... unbelievable.

TB: So there are things that are taboo?

D: The face, hands.

TB: And are certain tattoos considered rather ridiculous?

D: But people, the artists I mean, are able to make a separation in their mind between, say, a perception of people and their own ideas.

TB: And respecting different people... So dolphins and cartoons?

D: It's not art in that sense. It's always craft and it's only art, only when the artist creates or collaborates in the work. You talk and suggest this or that. My new tattoo, I gave him the idea where to separate and break the lines and blocks of black here, so we talked about that and it's my favorite part.

TB: So what happened next?

D: Well, as I was saying, my tattoo artist, Jake, skipped town, while doing major work with a rare book by a Russian artist I have been so inspired by. I had to find another artist to complete the work. And he charged \$100 an hour. I now have a new artist to complete the work with and his work is of an equal level and he charges less, so... So as my artist left town owing me and other people work and a touch-up, I have had to find someone else who, in the end, actually uses better ink. He is a better artist. He condenses the ink better. It's blacker and thicker.

TB: There's a lot of skill in selecting and preparing ink?

- D: Yes, and that is so important, it makes the work totally. When I look at photos of my old body I feel different, it is better now. I also prefer working in people's homes.
- TB: Is that about hygiene?
- D: Of course! You must know and trust the person. People just buy a kit, practice on themselves and butcher their friends. Getting an apprenticeship or a startup is very hard, there are so many young artists trying. Like Arnold, I think he worked for two years at Imago, he's been lucky to get taken on...
- TB: What do you think of the old school?
- D: Envy! So much envy in the old shops and with old-style artists.
- TB: What about art school-trained people?
- D: I think they have different ideas, how tattoo is going to expand. I would think this is the future of tattoo... photo-realist work and new styles will bring in more people.
- TB: Is there still an assumption about symbolic meaning and flash?
- D: Symbol does not resonate for me. I would rather right now focus on the body... I had this girl say it was like a robot arm or cold, this appeals to me. I wanted the emphasis on my arm, not on some other meaning.
- TB: Do you think you will go on?
- D: I will go on, it's a question of time—so much time and money. The time with this sort of work is a considerable commitment... It's so hard and tedious and hard to do: you blink, you miss, it's the hardest thing to do. So much concentration. At the end of it, the tattoo artist was more tired than me... Apparently the artist sees

everything in negative. Like here (shows tiny dot) where he just lost concentration. He was so upset and so sorry.

TB: I can't see it.

D: But it's almost impossible to see, I know, but if he doesn't feel good about it, he'll retouch. Like that, they can be total perfectionist. Some won't do an adequate job, I've seen some really crappie black... patchy.

TB: Could it be done with anything but black? Your art is all black and white ink.

D: For me, even though I love color tattoos, I think they are beautiful, I also know they age worse. This positive/negative space, the high-contrast work is it for me. Even from Eno, my first work, it's black, I love black.

TB: I wonder... is this part of your own color repertoire?

D: I'm a graphic artist so black is obvious, but I'm painting now so color, well, it will go there but black is still it.

TB: I see it, color, creeping in on some work there...

D: Yeah... it's what gives me a buzz, hm? I don't know what to call it. Even when I see a solid black tattoo... even not a very good-looking body but a good concept or placement, my heart skips a beat... I go off... I get very excited. It just brings me great joy and lifts my spirits. I might wake up in the morning feeling crappy, I forget, like I've had a bad dream, then I remember and I see my tattoo and I feel great. I don't know how to express it exactly.

TB: You are like many other people who have described this feeling.

D: Yes, it's a good rush but subtle and nonetheless it's there and it gives me the confirmation that this cannot be deviant... It's not

deviant, for example, in the way it's been associated with pain, extreme amounts of pain, but it's not about pain.

TB: How?

D: Well, it is for some people, like the famous Torture King... Yes, deviance, that's a common prejudice... a false prejudice.

TB: Yeah, I've heard of him. Tim Cridland or he's also Zamora or The Torture King. Do you mean a prejudice of being unintelligent or thick as well ?

D: Yes, and even deviant.

TB: The prison deviance thing has been fairly well researched.

D: Yes, particularly in Russia. I will show you on various web sites, but it's been so studied, for example, into how each symbol means something. This one of the designs I considered but, and it's great, it has high definition. A sort of negative tribal, I might do it with the other arm.

TB: What was the inspiration?

D: It was an inspiration from a staircase, this outside staircase, along with a triangular pattern... from Sherbrooke, passing a tattoo shop and crossing St. Catherine. Near a second- or third-story building there, there is this rusty beautiful stairway on the outside, with triangular panels and large, complex... so I abstracted it and reduced it down. The circles, as a pattern, which gave me an idea for something very rigid and simple that I could see that on the skin, but even that was too complex.

TB: It's really a question of design or pattern?

D: The simplest way was just breaking the skin, you can put a lot of emphasis on the negative design, like negative tribal, but I don't

want to put emphasis on the design but rather emphasis on the arm and I think I did... and it's better to break the pattern. I'd spoken to people through the Net and said it was better, the block design, but it also hurts a hell of a lot more on the inside of the arm.

TB: Yes, I hear that in the upper inside of the arm is a painful place to tattoo?

D: The worst is yet to come... the finishing of my arm and I'm going to do it with a bunch of other people as it's essentially a contest at a tattoo convention and Simon was looking for someone to tattoo and I volunteered. He said, "Right, but I'm not going to charge you much." And it will be judged by someone considered a good artist, partly because he's the boss of a hip place. There is so much overcharging and people are paying astronomical prices, it's going up while you talk to them. Many shops are moved into these pretty places now and they charge!

TB: They need to pay for the high rents in those downtown locations.

D: Now, for the rest of the work, it's at his place... and it's much better... I hate it in the other place and there are these groupies, well, he wants to be nice, talking to these little groupies while he was doing it...

TB: So you don't enjoy the public spectacle aspect.

D: No, not at all, I hate it, especially when you are in pain, it doesn't relax you, so it's better to have it done privately. But my artist said he wouldn't do any more black on me or only if he could do the same amount of color.

TB: Maybe it's discretion or a way to...?

- D: Well, then I met someone else he'd worked on. He'd told him he wouldn't do any more black on him either, but he'd done more on me!
- TB: More tattoo about now, does it have anything to do with the body?
- D: Oh yes, and younger people. I haven't thought about it too much but there is a change, maybe the body, emphasis on the physical as opposed to the mental. In a sense it's a bit like that, like the Church of Body Modification—what is his name?—Steven Haworth, like with subdermal implants. There's a Canadian branch which was sponsored by Shannon Larry which was very interesting, but less so now as it's become trendy, and there is an association with it, body modification and tattoo.
- TB: Do you mean the way many tattooed people also have piercing?
- D: Yes, and tattoo is trendy now, more surprisingly, piercing is seen as more alien... with more negative association as it appears more alien. I think people feel a person hates themselves so much they would even put metal in their body.
- TB: Is the body, in an increasingly visually dominated culture, a way to show how you are?
- D: Like showing your colors, like a rattlesnake...
- TB: Yeah, or visually representing who you are?
- D: Well, so much of the little one-off tattoo is so trivial, so it's not just or only that.
- TB: As if a person can be reduced?
- D: Yes, it's meaningless, really to trivialize yourself into a symbol and it just speaks volumes of prejudice to me unless it's a really old tattoo, and even then, there are plenty of tattoos I don't like... I can't say

all tattoos are great even though I can appreciate other styles and designs, but people don't understand, they come up and show some banal tattoo and expect a reaction or...

TB: Or a bond, as if you must feel this?

D: Yes, as if we have a kinship or a bond and it's fake because there are so many tattoos.

TB: Aha!

D: And it's like the old tattoo joke, the difference between tattooed and non-tattooed is tattooed people don't care if you're not tattooed. Brian Eno said culture is all things we don't need. Maybe it's hard to explain, it's whatever you don't really need to live, like we need food and shelter... but everything else apart from what we must have to survive is culture. I'm not necessarily saying who I am, but I am very proud of it. No, I'm not putting my heart on my sleeve but I am proud of twenty hours of dedication. I don't want to look at myself and see little imperfections and say I was too chicken to finish it or endure it. But the artist who did this showed it to his master, who said, "This guy is the greatest, it takes guts." It was a revelation to me to realize I'm a lot stronger than I realized.

TB: Lots of people don't complete the work then?

D: I have seen so many people in agony, crying even, in the chair, but I know it will hurt but I have zero anxiety as I have the dedication to see it through.

TB: Do you think there a gender divide on subjects or even on the pain thing?

D: Women are wired to take more pain, I... Women, I think, have less serious work and it's more decorative, I think... despite being, I've

heard many say, they show you some little thing and say, "Half an hour of agony—never again!"

TB: And?

D: A picture or a symbol, let's say, you have a lot more chance of being sick of it or really hating it a few years down the road. Like, I have spoken to a guy with a bulldog on his shoulder, his favorite dog, it's a big commemorative piece from when his dog died, this big picture of his dog, now he says, "What was I thinking!" It's very shortsighted.

TB: But people change, especially when you're young, don't they?

D: I love, well, I have six cats and I've seen some fabulous cat tattoos and I love cats but people get sick of things, yes, like "Guns N' Roses forever" and all that but, for me, I knew that the chances are I'd still like Eno in ten years. I realized there were things I really admired. Like, I see a man who wasn't afraid to appear feminine because you aspire in some way... to be sensitive.

TB: Can you say something about the process?

D: I changed this design maybe fifty times and made different variations, so drawn out, over and over, I was sick of it... Then Jake... or the artist and you can work it together.

TB: Do you spend time on Tattoo World's web sites, chat lines...?

D: Yes, oh yeah, of course, a lot of time.

TB: Tattoo has always had sexual undertones?

D: Yes, the young girl groupies hanging around the cool tattoo artists, you see that a lot. Girls like it. The magazines have a sexual undertone, it's all about what sells. You would never see an overweight person's tattoos on the cover, the softcore.

- TB: So what do you talk about on the Net?
- D: Why, how, and questions like; how did your design come about?—and also exchange ideas on healing process and discussion on care, especially with big pieces or large areas of work. People don't realize how important that is—even wearing clothes on top of a new tattoo can really damage it. Stuff like that...
- TB: How do you treat your new work?
- D: The best stuff to use is Webber Vitamin E Ointment, it's first aid, you treat a tattoo like a burn. My tattooist would say, "I tell them to use an antibacterial cream but some people will just pick up anything like, well, peroxide says antibacterial and put it all over." And there other things, like to maintain the position and tension is so hard for big pieces. And you can get so tense. I was even making a fist during my arm tattoo, I didn't even know, and the tattoo artist understood because they are tattooed. If you have no perspective, it's like a chef that doesn't taste his food.
- TB: So it's important that the tattoo artist is tattooed too?
- D: Yes, they know and you have to know the experience.
- TB: So this is old, old school, there's a lot of spiritual aspects in the older classical tattoos.
- D: I'm worldly, I'm so not spiritual.
- TB: You could be with your heritage and background.
- D: Well, I could be but I'm not, I'm a total atheist.
- And this one, these are Black Sun with work from the Modern Primitives book stuff, and he got a lot of shit about that because it was a moko that belonged to a woman and he got it covered up.

- TB: That's sort of funny but there are a lot of coverups, but it's part of the history of tattoo and the personal history.
- D: Yeah, there are so many coverups, like everyone has them.
- TB: And here there's lots of unfinished outlines and ongoing work?
- D: Yeah, then you're in it for the long term and people have to keep coming back... it's a business too. You start the outline and have the hook, they have to come back.
- TB: What about the facial tattoos?
- D: They can be so subversive, facial tattoos on ordinary people more subversive, especially if the person's so ordinary and facial tattoos don't make people more dangerous, it's all prejudice.
- TB: Are you serious about a facial tattoo?
- D: I'd consider something black and less detailed but not yet, I'm not ready yet.
- TB: You have time to consider. There's a lot of taking from other cultures, mixing styles and motifs... what do you think about the idea of cultural appropriation?
- D: Well, there's good and bad, there are cultures that claim ownership and when you look more deeply into the culture its origins are borrowed or taken from another culture... they don't even know, like years ago this writer told me, there's nothing new under the sun, as if there's nothing ever original... so why bother? Nonetheless, I think give it your best shot, you have got to try to do something, try to find something that works in the moment and by saying I'm this... and treat it as an opportunity to play... On the other hand, copy and originality? Brian Eno speaks of culture as a simulator, art is a simulator. What is new? You do something within an art context that

might be mortally dangerous in real life but if you fail in art it's nothing.

TB: At least you tried?

D: Exactly, exactly. With culture it works in the same way—with these kind of glasses or this perspective, I'm playing a persona. I definitely changed myself and I transform myself through tattoo, not always consciously, but in a way I was and still am an extremely shy person, still am. To get tattooed, I was excited and nervous at the same time.

TB: It's changed your life?

D: In many ways. I start conversations with strangers and I could not have known. I was so shy. And at that point of life, I was covering up as much of my body as I could and I was different then.

Reflective Summary

My reaction to the tattoo work I saw on Dima was one of total surprise, as I found myself pondering over the extraordinary block of ink that almost covers his left arm. I marveled at the time this work represented and how Dima had literally transformed himself. I felt an overwhelming desire to touch this new skin surface. I wondered if this new and extraordinary black layer was more akin to clothing or even as a second or a protective skin. I also winced on occasion at his description of the pain he endured to achieve these complex and heavily worked designs.

A year later, when I met Dima again he had completed the long process of block inking most of his left arm. It looked quite impressive and Dima was clearly delighted with the depth of black cover and the completion

of his design. He had also decided on a facial tattoo close to his left eye. I think this rather shocked me even though I knew he had given it long consideration. Dima informed me he had posted our discussions and its transcription onto his web sight. He seemed very pleased. During our subsequent discussions and e-mails I was not surprised when he informed me of his decision to apprentice to a well-established tattoo artist.

4.6 Kurt

I met Kurt through a personal referral; we spoke on the telephone and arranged to meet the same day. I received a warm welcome as Kurt was evidently pleased to talk with me. I interviewed Kurt in his home, a downtown apartment crowded with books, music and substantial collections of toy superheroes, space figures and toys, dice and other objects which he proudly showed me displayed all over the apartment. The television and computer were on in the background as we talked, and other band members came in and out along with several cats. In his forties, Kurt has been the lead guitarist of a number of successful punk bands over the last twenty five years. He had clearly lived an alternative and adventurous life and used tattoo's as a visual notebook.

Punk rock is enjoying somewhat of a revival and Kurt is busy. Currently based in Montreal when not touring, Kurt presents as a quintessential rock musician. He has very black hair with very pale skin and is rather tall and slim; a collection of leather jackets hung in the hall. He wore tight jeans and a studded leather belt. A T-shirt with capped sleeves, and a black skull and crossbones motif completed the outfit. His striking appearance was completed with a brilliantly colorful and large collection of island tattoos which he guided me through with animated anecdotes.

TB: Well, where shall we begin? Where are you from?

K: I'm from New York originally. I am married here, my wife's from Montreal, that's why I'm up here.

TB: A landed immigrant no less!

K: Ha-ha, and I've been in a band in New York since '88 and in various touring bands which tour all over Europe, States and Mexico. Yeah, they are, well, there was two bands: The Radicts and The Lower East Side Stitches.

TB: And here?

K: A little local Montreal project, which is pretty cool, and we have a lot of fun with it.

TB: How do you classify the band? Name?

K: It's called Jerk Appeal.

TB: Fun name! Is it punk?

K: Um, yeah, and sometimes a little more heavy rock and roll. It's whatever we feel. Sometimes '50s style, it's whatever, some like kinda mixed-up thing, sometimes really fast. It's whatever we feel, whatever comes out a bit punk. If it's a good song, we go with it.

TB: You're the guitarist, and what are your influences or where are you coming from musically?

K: I love the early punk stuff, the Pistols and the Clash and The Replacements and I even liked Aerosmith. I still like them.

TB: Well, Steve Tyler still looks good, still pulling the girls.

K: Yeah, he's amazing, even still does back flips across the floor, I could never do that. So whatever works for them is good.

TB: How did you get into tattoo then?



K: I was living in New Hampshire at the time and I always thought tattoos looked pretty cool.

TB: People often talk about cool. What do you mean by it?

K: Cool like interesting, ahead of the times, everyone wants to be and can't be. You didn't see so many then. And of course we were the only people with different-colored hair, funny to say it now but seemed weird to people then. We were constantly accosted by people, whatever, and all that, and then I got my first one, as a little musical note. Here on my chest. It got burned off... I was just testing the water! I wasn't sure what I wanted and if you put something on your arm it's gonna be there forever, everyone sees it, so you'd better be sure you like it.

TB: How do you decide on what you like or want for a tattoo?

K: Some people get a band they're having a thing for at the time—I think I was around 18—then later they hate it. Or worse, some devil or something stupid... and that's fine, only ten million other people have it and mine had to be personal.

TB: That's the, no flash then?

K: No. I've never gotten any flash. Never and no way! The next one I got then was this little bomb here which was the symbol of our band at the time. I say that but that's what we were—a blast! A friend, a tattoo artist and I, well, we started to talk and I asked him, "Do you think you can tattoo over a vaccination mark?"

TB: To hide the mark?

K: No, no, God no, I just wondered if you could do it and he didn't know either.

TB: Can't see the vaccination now (I could barely see the faint vaccination under the tattooed picture of a tiny round bomb).

K: No, you can't tell... but I put a little bomb on, a little thing like that, the guy, he was going, "I don't know if you really want to do it there, you've got a big space there and you don't want to ruin a big space." But I told him not to worry and then later I got the rest around it. This ska guy, this guy drew it up, this guy who's now really famous, a great tattoo artist now. It was maybe only his fifteenth tattoo. Marcus Pacheco, he works in San Francisco.

TB: What's the space thing about?

K: Well, if you want a big piece. That started things rolling, that was it. From there, I had this guitar thing, the band Stray Cats... Brian Setzer's guitar (Kurt twisted his bare arm to show a large tattooed guitar). It's my design, things I love, it's a little rough there, a little cat and skull and crossbones.

TB: The guitar is a tribute?

K: Yeah, and I met him later backstage and I told him I had the guitar and he said, "That's cool I got one too," and I said, "No, look a little closer, it's your guitar." It was so funny, and he says... "Hey mom, come over here! Look, that's my guitar!" His mom was there! Can you believe it! Wow, brings his mom right over! He-he!

TB: There's a real rockabilly thing and tattoo?

K: Oh yeah, it's in the rockabilly theme but the dice and the cats, I love my cats and I have a dice collection and from all over the world and they're in it.

TB: So how did you get them to do this design?

K: I drew it up, I drew this up, sometimes pen and paper, drew it up, take it to them and they do it for you. This jukebox was next to tie them together. I mean, the guitar and bomb into one thing. Even though it's by three different artists, but to bring it together I had to work it in (Kurt drew his finger across the complex tattoos of a jukebox surrounded by patterns). So it would look right. André is amazing, done a lot of my work, trained by Marcus. Like this Bettie Page, she put here (Kurt showed a large fine colored drawing of the soft -porn star, Betty Page, sitting rather demurely crossed legged).

TB: Bettie Page is an icon for you?

K: Oh yeah, I love her and I wanted something a little more tasteful, that's what I like, not some pinup girl with boobs hanging out or sleaze. It's a nice piece, really well drawn, good in the shading, it has class.

TB: Bettie Page, yes, no hang ups and inhibitions?

K: Yeah, she was great. Later then, I had gotten into a motorcycle accident and after that, when the money came in from that, like the insurance money, I thought, "Cool! Get some tattoos!" I went straight away on a Wednesday to get this done.

TB: They're expensive?

K: You have to pay for good people. But I haven't paid for all of them, like some have been free.

TB: Is that 'cause of who you are, a rock musician?

K: If the band's well known, yeah... on tour, they give you their card and send them business, get them on tour... they, kids ask you where you got the work done. It's a kind of free publicity for them.

TB: So this record of where you were at various times.

K: A lot is like a diary, no, more of, well, certain places and times and moods that I was in at the time. Like here, this tattoo is us and the band and we had this van touring around and at the time this Motorhead song was playing, heard this song "Ace of Spades" the whole time (a large card motif was shown with a key bellow). It just marked the time and the thing was, we had this van and everyone kept losing the keys, losing them all the time, so it's about that. I thought I'm putting that on, that tattoo. I made that time happen in there.

TB: So you would remember it?

K: Yeah, it was a good time.

TB: Your arms are full of beautiful colors. What about color, is it important?

K: Colors, oh yes. That's a big thing for me. I tend to go for purple and blue, it goes well with my skin, I tend to have a kind of bluish tint to it! Then came dragon just two days later.

TB: That's pretty big work. What about pain and tiredness?

K: Well, that doesn't really bother me that much, like, but some spots, they hit a nerve in my neck, like someone pulling a tendon—eek!—and then yeah, that hurt. The next week it was finished, as we were running out of time. We'd started with, or put lines and started working on, but it was finished later.

TB: When you say "we," you mean the artist.

K: Yes. Maybe eight years ago, anyway, lying in a hospital bed, I started on the next thing. My mom there beside me, I won't be doin' much else!

TB: Plenty time to draw your next tattoo?

K: Yeah, that's it and that's where I did this next one.

TB: No fade then?

K: I take care of them. In the sun, it's fun if you get good with the sunblock, with the tan you can leave a little circle around the edges and after the sun you get this real sort of glow, really cool effect. They really stand out. I love that they glow and shine.

TB: So you really take care?

K: Oh yes, and here, well, this one here on my chest is for my sister, er, um, my sister was murdered, two guys. Yeah (here, Kurt pulled down the top of his T-shirt to reveal a commemorative tombstone tattoo with a girl's name). She was attacked in the street. She ran out for cigarettes one night in New York a few years back now. They tried to rape her, it went all bad. They killed her with a rock from the street.

TB: That is terrible. I am so sorry. Oh, I see. That's lovely work, and so sad, it's a commemoration of her.

K: Yeah, yeah. This I drew up myself as a tribute. Flower, with yellow roses, she really loved them, they were her favorites, and her nickname was Daisy. So that's there, like with the headstone. I also wanted a cubist effect, yeah. You can see that, eh? Yeah, I drew daisies and then the funny thing is, my mom got the little daisy tattooed on her too after that. And then, it's amazing really, also my sister's mother-in-law and mother-in-law's father... Like I was telling them what places to go to, which shops. They are so into it now.

TB: Everyone is sharing in the tribute. They are all into tattoo now?

K: Yeah, they are so hooked since she started and now she's, my mom's got seven tattoos.

TB: Addictive then?

K: She loves it. The stats are amazing... you have a fifty percent chance of getting another one once you start. You go through some barrier there after the first, then you just go on and on.

TB: Why get more?

K: Well, balance. The body has to look good sort of balanced. If I put my arm this way, unbalanced, is it finished or lopsided?... It just doesn't look good so you go on (as Kurt turned his lower arm he revealed a series of small fish, drawn in the style of the Dr. Seuss books). Like this one, here it fits. When I got One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish. Like, if you're having a party, having a few beers sometime, take this book out, it's great!

TB: Dr. Seuss? He's the inspiration?

K: Yeah... it's really hysterical, lot of fun, wow, lots of fun...

TB: Like this broken martini glass here on your arm. What is that?

K: Our band on tour, south Texas, and, um... and the record company, they took us out to dinner, a whole bunch of us, ordered loads of wine, martinis... we were all getting really loaded and then the singer started throwing glasses, the other guitarist, he's gone now...

TB: You mean gone "gone" or left the band?

K: Oh no, left... he was getting worried maybe he'd cut his hand, he wouldn't be able to play, ha-ha, like it would make any difference! And anyway the glasses were crashing on the ground between us... dumb-ass, cut up, it would do him a favor... and the record

company was getting pissed off and saying we were out of control and I thought that's it, yeah. We were... some girls were goin' to get tattooed and I thought, yeah... I picked up a stem, a martini glass (here, I saw the brightly tattooed glass. drawn on his inside forearm)...the broken stem and I thought, "Let's go get a tattoo." I left and I went into the tattoo parlor and he said, "I can't tattoo you, you've been drinking," and I said, "Don't worry about it." I took off my leather jacket and he asked me what I wanted. I told him, took out the stem, and he said, "What do you want a broken martini glass there for?" And I said, "Yeah, like we just totally pissed off the record company and some guitar player, that's why." And he drew it up for me as I wanted it, then some people came by from the record company and they couldn't believe it, they were sayin', "That's not right, that's not right, no way, what, ah no!" They're pissed off but I'm laughing.

TB: It's a super drawing. I love the color.

K: Yeah, I love them. I test around with these greens. The green and the yellow sloshing martini, it's a great tattoo. I was very happy. And then I went to a color I never thought I could go with, brown, like for the band, the skull, by Mike Ledger. He asked me, "Do you want a high contrast like the way you did it or shading?" I said, "Go ahead with shading." And it's come out so well (while talking, he pulled the other side of his T-shirt to show a large skull).

TB: You drew that. And why the skull?

K: Yes. Well, for the band a skull is it, I drew this when I was with the Radicts, we had like a skull and crossbones flyer. Sometimes you just think, "What shall I use for a symbol?" The thing is, the skull is a rock

band when you think of it. The skull and crossbones in a rock band is always pretty cool, let's face it. Motorhead have the best skull and like one time on tour with three other bands, all of us, all of us had skull and crossbones t-shirts, just ridiculous! But our skull was the best!

TB: Well, what is this, pirates with, cool, is it a bad boy thing?

K: Well, how bad can I be with One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish on my arm! I do what's fun... Like when I got this, a few members of the band said, "Ooooooooooooooh, that's real nice, nice goin' fag..."

TB: So the girls are into tattoo?

K: So much! Like I was goin', "Excuse me!" The next time on tour I had all these girls come up to me, "I love your fish," touching my arm. "I love it." Yeah, fag, eh? That is so dumb. So I say this was when I was little and turn my arm and show Bettie is for when I grew up. And the next one is like that, fun and kinda silly too. This is a wooden mask. I like the look, I think they are Picasso-like. I own some wooden masks, most are still packed away but my wife was playing Crash Bandicoot on a Playstation and I'd never played, she's good and suddenly this weird sound happens like "hoodabughaaa!"

TB: It looks tribal?

K: Yeah, and I said, there is this little thing appears on the shoulder of the Crash Bandicoot and I asked her why and she said, "Well, it's a thing that protects me from getting hurt." I thought this was cool, really cool. I liked it as it's a mask or really a wood block with a face. So I made a drawing, my rendition, drew it with the drums in my own style.

TB: There a lot of humor here in your choices of motif!

K: I like to joke around. Yeah, and I can get hit 'cause I'll be protected as I've got my little hoodabughaaa! I See, when I get hit, I can't die, it protects me, ha-ha-ha! And it's brown, I hate the color but it looks good (this was shown to be a small tattooed mask).

TB: And you have drawings for more work?

K: Oh, plenty. My next tattoo is gonna be the funniest one, it's gonna be a big burn mark on my back.

TB: What do you mean? A burn?

K: Well, this next one will be a burn mark of an iron on my back.

TB: Why, what for? Is it drawn yet?

K: Well, kinda, it's about my sister. I guess I'll tell you the story, my sister and I used to pick on my mom and dad quite frequently and often brutally at times. Like tease them and joke and get them sorta. And this is one my mom tells and this time my sister got her good, really got her. My parents had moved into this condo complex in New Hampshire and she was trying to make friends, you know, invited the neighbors over, they were sitting there drinking wine. All so nice. My mom fixing dinner in the kitchen and these neighbors said to her, my sister, how my mom seemed like a very nice woman. So she said, "Yeah, she's nice... except when she scolds me, which is OK, I s'pose I deserved it... And I love her but it really hurt when she put the iron on my back! Do you want to see the scar? It's on my back?"

TB: And your mom was still out of the room? This was some crazy prank?

K: Yeah, yeah, and of course they believed it! They were so horrified, they put the drinks down and left... My mom comes back in the room and asked "Where'd they go?" And there was my sister

giggling her ass off on the couch... ha-ha. Yeah, we were merciless! We'd tell people they'd beat us senseless and they'd believe it! And my mother still says, "Y'know those people never spoke to me again..."

TB: I believe you!

K: So my mom still tells that story today and I think the best way to carry on my sister's joke is to actually get it done, the tattoo of the famous burn mark story right there on my back. Then when she's sitting around with a bunch of her friends I'll wait and say, "Well, yeah, you did burn us," and then say, "I've still got the mark," and turn around and show her—it will amaze her! We will make it look as much like a scar burn on my back as possible and then flip up the shirt and go look! The best way to carry on my sister's joke one step farther. Well, I never planned to get back tattoos, you can't see them, but this will serve a purer purpose!

TB: You've checked out the possibility with your artist? That's an amazing piece!

K: Yeah, and like, with Arnold, he's very excited to do it, will make the top part look really burned and sunken in. The drawing is ready.

TB: What does your wife think?

K: Well, she thinks it's pretty funny and she doesn't need tattoos, I get them for her, it's vicariously through me... she's beautiful enough as it is. Together four years... married almost a year. This one here, when we were at my mom's, we were looking at interactive computer games, she loved Seuss Green Eggs and Ham, I found the pictures and went to my mom's tattoo artist! And the only one I

changed was blue-eyed fish, I adjusted the color for her here, she's there, she loved those colors, white and pink, that's her in there.

TB: I see lots of humor and irony in a lot of these pictures! Will it ever end?

K: It fits, I'm a loony guy, bonkers most of the time but, well, I like the humor there, but it's all things that mean something to me or that are a part of me. Like, I'll get a pinup of my wife here with a roller-coaster and a spook house. That's it.

TB: Are you going for full sleeves?

K: No, I like island tattoos. The sleeves, they take away from everything else and it then doesn't work. I plan this shape, it's all about the shape and where it fits, think about that, how it moves, I think. There are places where I'm planning things. Space. Got ribs, I probably will get something on my calf, I haven't figured it all out. I could get a beer cap like the Mickey Bigmouth, one of a big bee, I love the circle and the stinger coming down, I love the shape and the colors, green, yellow, white and black, really nice colors... I have an awful lot of red on me, it breaks out with that sometimes, here comes siren boy!

TB: So are you thinking about your body all the time?

K: Oh yeah, put something else, what goes with what, colors play off others, it's got to go together. So it's what works with the pieces around it. It's the whole thing.

TB: Do you think you could explain how you've gone on getting more work done?

K: I don't know, I don't think about it. Started, at first I put it in places where I could cover it, then short sleeves possible, then I got this

one, if you know summer in New York and if I was going on interviews or thinking of working in a bank... ha-ha, I'd have to be covered up with long sleeves, but I went down to another level, then there's a commitment there then. Then it's everywhere. I don't think about it now.

TB: Why is it so much more popular?

K: Yeah. A big fad, everybody, stuff like pop culture and bands do it, they want it. Pop culture thing now, like when we young kids we liked Kiss and we'd put Kiss make up on. Same thing.

TB: People you admire?

K: Sometimes, but they get the idea and then they get creative. They put their ideas into it. I think once you take that step... Breaks down the fear, you've gone past it.

TB: Is that a fear of pain or permanence?

K: Nothing's permanent. The pain is, well, there one thing, it's amazing, the most painful thing, when people, everyone always touches you and hit you right there just when you had one done... it's really like a magnet! I swear to God, magnets. The pain wanes after a day really.

TB: Different for different people?

K: Oh yeah, we had a roadie, big, big guy, crying, whining away, big tough lug. And I am usually joking around. Like some guys won't tattoo you with a beer, I don't care, and some friends, but I got around it, got my wife to get me a water bottle with vodka, brings it back, he's none the wiser! Thinks I'm drinking Nile vanilla water! Ha! Maybe it was my mom that ran back for it. Yeah.

TB: The body on show, is it different for guys?

K: Well, I think for some girls, a tattoo is accenting, as an accent to the body, like above the hip. You can't say generally, it's very individual and it's accepted as normal now, more of the body is seen.

TB: How did that happen?

K: Piercing took everything to another level so tattoo became more acceptable. Like when I got my first tattoo, "That's it, asshole, you've ruined your life!" Freaked out totally, with pierced ears. That's it! That's it! But that was back, back in '82, drawing tattoos all the time. I didn't get those ones though and I'm glad.

TB: Well, you can change them.

K: Yeah, what a fun thing, take this off and put this on! But I maintain them. Well, I'll rub vitamin E and the maintenance matters and sunblock 45-55 preserves them and keep the ink's color from changing.

TB: What do you know about hygiene or the inks?

K: I know where I go, I know what to look for and ask. I had a roommate, well, Mike Ledger, for a while he made his own colors, inks. He knew what he was doing, a line of blenders, wrote his recipes down, mixing away, and one of the only white guys who could do full body suits. He goes to Japan and Hawaii now and will go to the Toronto convention.

TB: They can be secretive about color mixing and techniques.

K: Yes, and I don't say what he did, you know, I sometimes I think maybe when the music thing is done, I might become a tattoo artist. I can draw, I'm an artist, I have different ideas. I'd apprentice to someone, that would be cool.

TB: Has it peaked yet? The tattoo fascination?

- K: No, not at all, but culture goes up and down, repeating, resurging and we see it with music, like '70s music came back, the '80s came back in the '90s for Christ's sake! Of course, people are young getting tattooed, maybe keep on until the seventies or eighties!
- TB: Plenty potential customers for you as future artist!
- K: Yeah, I'm saving my legs to practice on myself first. I know how it feels done right, done right it feels better.
- TB: So, how do you know you won't change your mind?
- K: Well, you have to think and I think in the subculture rock and roll world or the art world, it's so much more thought through than anyone choosing flash. Like the little devils, fraternity things or the black panther with claw marks... or whatever.
- TB: But people do put lovers' names into tattoos?
- K: Well, they do but as I said to my wife, when I get this pinup of her... if this relationship gets screwed up... I love her dearly but if she leaves me I'll replace her head with the Motorhead skull. If it's a bad breakup... skull all over the face! Ha-ha-ha. But I am very happy with them and there are always good stories to tell... and I'm gonna get that thing done for my sister.
- TB: Well, I'd be happy to record it.
- K: I'd like that. The homage to my sister and mom. Hey, and to get my mom again... Ah.

Reflective summary

Familiar with interviews, Kurt seemed at ease talking through his stories. In some ways he performed his interview, as for example, when he showed me magazines he was featured in. His bands web site presents a 'bad

boy' rock image. Yet, I felt Kurt has used tattoos to commit significant and meaningful emotional moments to memory. Although he is a joker with a wild sense of humor, he openly shared his deep commitment to his wife and family, nor did he shrink from expressing the painful content of some of his tattoo motifs.

My interview with him was conducted at breakneck speed; he talked constantly and was both funny and informative, yet also quite touching. I was moved by the story of his sister's death and his deep affection for her. His mother was mentioned frequently with affection but I felt he avoided sentimentality. I found myself feeling uncharacteristically conservative as I declined to drink alcohol in the early afternoon. A true collector and tattoo aficionado, Kurt's enthusiasm was infectious. His love of color and analysis of his creative process were readily displayed in his work. I perceived Kurt as somewhat jaded with his chosen profession; in fact, I believe he is shortly going to make the decision to leave the music industry and apprentice to a tattoo artist.

4.7 Eddie

Over the last eighteen months, I have seen a few young men, homeless street people or travelers, with facial tattoos. On a few occasions, I had found some begging in downtown areas, hanging around in shop alcoves or squeegee cleaning car windows at traffic lights. I spent some time over many weeks trying to make and sustain contact with some of these young men. This involved spending time hanging about in Berri-UQAM metro station and walking around downtown trying to engage these men in conversation where possible.

Other times I would sit in the street to talk while they were panhandling. Talking to them was sometimes difficult. On occasion I was intimidated by the presence of dogs, and sometimes by individuals who appeared intoxicated. At other times, trying to talk on the street was highly problematic, and sometimes I simply could not find these people again. Apart from the noise and awkwardness incumbent in street interviews, difficulties also included making appointments in extreme weather conditions and not being able to contact people later by phone.

I finally managed to sustain a relationship with Eddie, who had substantial and quite extraordinary full, facial tattoos. My first attempts at conversation were greeted with profound cynicism and I spent a considerable amount of time trying to convince Eddie that the interview might have some purpose. This involved sitting in the street with him and chatting and eventually he agreed to meet me the following week in a nearby park.

Eddie has a highly stressful life because of a combination of avoiding a prison sentence in the United States and being a professional train-hopper for over ten years. He has a drug dependency problem and has lived rough for over a decade. Much of that time has been spent in his beloved Montreal.

TB: I noticed many street kids wear hoods. Do you wear the hood most of the time?

E: If I don't wear it, no one gives me nothing. See, they don't want to look at you, not really. They don't want to see you as a person, it's easier for them that way.

TB: But you have your own style, it's all black, did you do all this sewing yourself?

E: Yeah, I sewed it all. I make my own clothes. I like the army stuff, the clothes people give you to wear is kinda, er, I wouldn't wear it. So I just wear what I have until it falls apart.

TB: Where do you live or are you in the street all the time?

E: It depends on where, like there's no welfare in the States, so you are pretty much in the street. Here like you meet people even on welfare with their own place and they let you crash there. A bunch of us. Like I know a few people. So you don't have to be in the street in the winter.

TB: What are you drinking?



E: Beer, but I'm not drinking much these days. Drinking makes me crazy and has got me into a lot of trouble so I don't do it really, well, not so much. I'm trying to stop. No liquor. Don't do liquor but I'm going to buy a beer...

TB: What do you do, heroin?

E: Yeah, well, I've been on it for only a year. Do you think that's long? I keep trying to go back but there is so much hassle in the States, pretty much everywhere, but some places the cops stop you all the time, the south, Louisiana, like with Ryan we have been hassled so much. If you stand near a bank or something, they think you're planning a holdup! We've been moved on a lot.

TB: It's rainy and windy, it's all right here in the park?

E: Oh, I don't mind it, but I got to feed my dogs.

TB: Where are you from anyway?

E: New Jersey, but I've been here years.

TB: How do you make the money for, I don't know, food? Drugs?

E: Well, the heroin, it's either twenty or thirty bucks, that's not much.

TB: No, but it must take hours to panhandle that.

E: It can be four or five hours, depends on the weather. Rain means you don't get much. I don't sit out in the rain. Sometimes you get nothing.

TB: So you and tattoo? Where did it start?

E: The big stuff, my face, around eighteen. (Eddie removed his hood and I had a clear vision of a tattoo that covered a large portion of his face. It appeared to be a pair of curved horns on the forehead and continued down his cheeks into a large triangular pattern). I left home by then. Well, I'd been out of home, I was a bit of a bad

kid... in those homes, residential places, in trouble a lot, not mentally ill, exactly, or that but they would call it, um, like disturbed, but like, but my stepdad had a good job and good insurance so that's why. I was maybe 19 when I did that, the face thing. Yeah, you can film or record. What, are you going to ask me questions or what? Take pictures, whatever.

TB: So where did you do all this tattoo work?

E: Um, different places, in the street, in people's places, jail, all over, depends.

TB: You have a dog. Do the dogs cost much to keep?

E: No, like I say, I've got two dogs, but I don't pay rent, I have no bills, like thirty bucks, a forty-pound bag of dog food lasts forever. And the dogs sorta keep me sane, taking care of them and responsibility and all that... Well, everyone goes on and on about it saying, "That... fuckin' guy got two dogs." But the thing is, I don't pay rent and if I'm not drinking or doing drugs, I don't need much and it costs nothing.

TB: What, like they're judging you panhandling and for spending money on them...?

E: Yep, that's it... like I told you, I have two dogs but it doesn't cost shit.

TB: Well, when we get going you can tell me what your work is about really... Apart from the work I can see, have you any body work...? Mind you, it might be a bit tricky to have you take off your top out here in the park?

E: Nah, it's OK. Most of the time I don't know what it's about. The eyes, around the eyes, I was thinking of a devil or demon. Like horns. I was the devil.

TB: Well, what did it all start with? Did the facial tattoo start off as, with the horns, for example, to shock or outrage? Tell me about it.

E: I started around my eyes. All around. I went around like glasses, and as well I got one big thing started on my chest... which I'll probably never get finished.

TB: Why, you're young?

E: Ha, yeah, well, if I live, whatever...

TB: So tell me, did it start with the horns to shock people or what?

E: Well, what I think when I did it... the horns to be like a demon really. Well, I've always been kinda fuck you, fuck everybody, like these people everywhere, so when I did it, I don't want to be these people ever, like ever.

TB: I don't get it. What people?

E: Like my, or how my mom was, my mom was a hippy.

TB: Really, was she?

E: Yeah, yeah... you know, Woodstock hippy age thing, but to make sure I'm never ever gonna be them or like them, but people change and they don't want to... but to make sure I'll never ever be them... They change 'cause don't have much of a choice, like with other people around them... you know. They just aren't realistic. So that was why.

TB: People take stuff off when they change.

E: Yeah, like I've seen people try and get this shit off with razors, worse than he did when he had it on there, but still there, but not there, looks like shit, but anyway it's not an option...

TB: How did you do it?

E: Well, I did it myself, like, with a needle and ink.

TB: How do you do that then?

E: Well, it's just a needle, stick and poke.

TB: It must hurt and take a long time?

E: Well, not really... it goes numb after a while.

TB: And you have two dogs.

E: They keep me sane. I think I'd go crazy if I had to be alone all the time and they distract me, I feed them, talk to them.

TB: When I look at your face I think about the tribal tattoos, like the Modern Primitives or Maori stuff and that entire neotribal thing, you see. Do you know it?

E: People say that. Yeah. Well, that's more swirls and whirling swirl patterns, designs, like Ryan and I've seen that. I get that all the time, like they think I'm into that *Once Were Warriors* movie... that's not it. I don't care what people think. I don't explain myself to anyone, they don't care, I don't say anything. Some people think it's makeup! They come up and say, 'Oh, you can get that off, right?'

TB: Can I see your neck... what is that?

E: It's writing. It says "I wish I was never born."

TB: But you don't mean that, surely...

E: I really did at the time.

TB: Do you think you'd get that taken off?

E: No. No. It was for real. I will probably end up putting more stuff all over my neck and go do stuff around it. Patterns and that.

TB: Show me your arms, I can see lots of work there. Some of it looks wild like scribble (there was lots of loosely drawn blue -black words and patterned swirling lines and blocks).

E: Ha-ha-ha, yes, scribble! There's a whole arm filled in there, a lot of work, yeah, stick and poke. The whole arm was all black but those bars, the three, I burned it all off, I burned it a couple of years back.

TB: What's that there on your hand?

E: Well, I burned that star into the black. A pentangle.

TB: Is that part, oh, the same thing, the devils and demons?

E: Oh yeah. At the time.

TB: What's all the stuff on your arms? It looks like patterns and words and a date?

E: It's all about Rachel. That's the date and when she died in August. We had gone to St. John's, Newfoundland, together and we rode freight trains to Halifax and then hitchhiked to the ferry and we were coming back and we, she was living in Alaska, and we were going to Alaska and hopping the freight train out of here. We'd waited a couple of days out over by the train yard. Her dog had gone off and was on the track... she went over to it and a Via Rail train came flying around out of the other side of this ridge and she didn't see it. I did not realize it. Was so quick. It just nailed her. And I thought it was the wind that knocked her over 'cause she didn't go flying like the dog did. But, no, it nailed her all right. So I went and turned her over, her arm was hanging there, all this stuff hanging out. I could see she was dead. And then later the cops came and everything. It sucked so much. They was acting like I'd pushed her or something. And after, then I met her brother and gave him her backpack and stuff, that's it.

TB: That's so sad and terrible... is that her name?

- E: I put the date... the date Rachel Brown died. It's funny saying it all again. It's weird saying it now, just talking it out like that. It doesn't faze me that much anymore. It's like it never happened. But it did happen...
- TB: I know of a few accidents with those freight trains.
- E: Yeah, but you can handle those, it's the others. So quick flying along, those commuter trains, not like the freights, loud and slow. It was there and then gone. She was dead just like that. I have the newspaper article... You won't believe it, the line was... "and the train was ninety minutes late." Yeah. I was gonna bring some newspaper articles to show you but I just woke up and came down, I was worried I was late... Yeah, it's a bummer, whatever...
- TB: Tell me about the other arm. What's that?
- E: There's a cut I made and, look, a stupid hardcore band (he rubbed his hand over a small area that has been covered over with a block of ink), of I think one of my first tattoos, I was maybe thirteen, there, but I burnt it, yeah, ha-ha-ha-ha-ha.
- TB: You have many different marks, cuts, burns. So many kids put the names of bands on!
- E: Well, I did that too, whatever, it's so dumb but I was little, ha-ha. Um, I would like to show you other stuff. Stuff Micah did for me. I want to do something for Micah, put stuff on for him too. He had a kid out west with this girl, I was hanging out with his kid when all that stuff happened. He was headed east but I was picking fruit with his ex-girlfriend and I checked her e-mail. I really like e-mail. I wouldn't have half the friends I have from way back if it wasn't for e-mail. E-mail is a really good thing.

TB: How do you manage it, on the road all the time, alternative life and that?

E: Libraries or whatever, even if I need to pay or whatever, but with everyone traveling you lose touch, if you know what I mean, but this way you stay in touch, meet up and find out what's going on. Some are against it, you know, technology, but I think computers are really cool.

TB: Your friends?

E: Well, don't have real friends here, well, acquaintance friends as I am kinda, well, not exactly in hiding but I'm here because I want to live in Alaska and I'd have to go to jail if I go back there and I have the dogs and that stops me but I'd go back. I will go back. I'd go back to jail and get it over with. I loved out there and I could work, I had a school bus, a whole bunch of stuff, friends.

TB: Do you really have to go to jail? How would they find you?

E: If I grow old that's pretty much the only place I'd like to be, but I broke probation, probation for three years, 18 months' suspended sentence. I stole a truck, keys were in it. I took off. I was wasted. The thing is, it was on an island, I wasn't going anywhere, drove it two blocks wasted. Even the owner didn't care. He wouldn't press charges but I had this fucked-up public defender and I was in the system, you know the way it is in the States. It shouldn't even be a felony.

TB: Useless public defender if you have no money?

E: Yeah, yeah, crap system. The charge should have been joyriding not an auto theft. There's nothing I can do.

TB: No way around it?

E: When I called a probation officer to get extradited for a felony, but they won't do nothing till I'm in Alaska.

TB: Couldn't you do the probation?

E: Well, you can screw up at the end and then it's jail, the lot.

TB: What would doing time be like?

E: It's the dogs, I need a friend to watch my dogs. I wouldn't put them to sleep. Still got my dogs, Well, it's easy doing time there, in Alaska. Like, it's all Natives and some white guys, it's cool, salad bars, soda fountain, not like, I've been in Riker's Island, Queens, now that's fucking scary. I been there. Oh yep, I was scared there all right.

TB: Maybe older, you'd be less of a target now?

E: Yes, I was young, a kid, like movie, scary shit. I have a friend in jail in Toronto, I guess the guards are on strike there 'cause there's fighting all the time, he's gotta fight, sounds freaked out like a New York jail. Bad. A bad scene.

TB: You wouldn't think so in good old Canada?

E: No, it's not so bad here, it's all white, but it's not the color of folks...

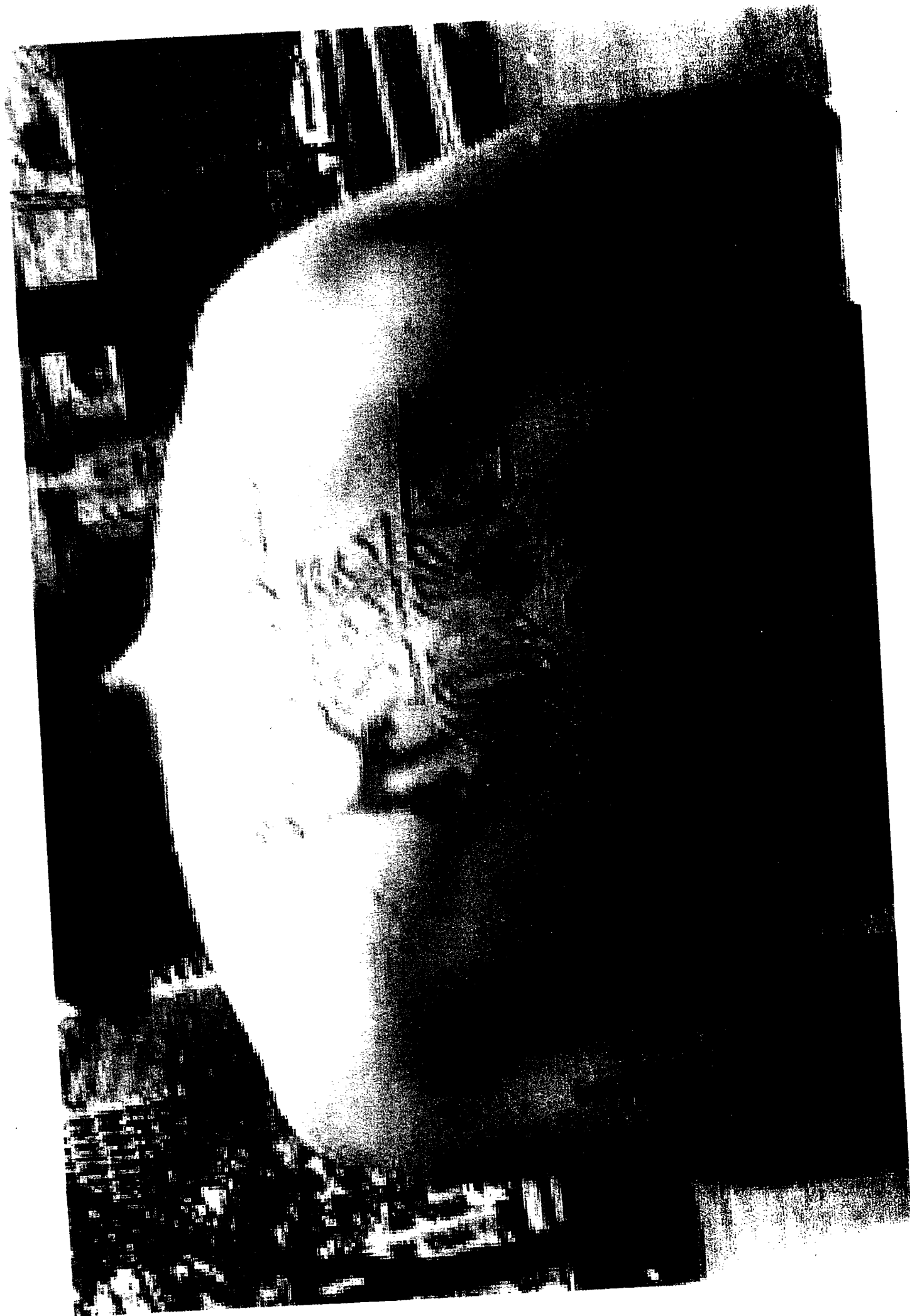
TB: The gang thing?

E: Yeah, that's it. I can't be just the white dude.

TB: What, you're the tattooed dude? With your face being done.

E: Yeah, right! Everybody walks, all eyes watching, you can't, you stand out, you can't be invisible. They are on you, man, all the time...

TB: Have you any old racist tattoos or anything like a swastika that would get you in trouble?



E: Well, no, not now, but when I was a little kid hanging out with skinhead people I had some of that stuff... but no, I've covered it up (he showed me several blocked out and burned areas of skin).

TB: Good idea.

E: When you're younger, hanging with older guys, influence you, there're kids out there with that, used to be skinheads, have stuff like that. Peer pressure, whatever... you don't know what you believe, you want to be cool. You do it to impress them and then maybe they are interested in you.

TB: Let's eat something.

E: Haven't eaten, no appetite yet, I'll probably end up getting high. I shouldn't, I know... 'cause I'm seriously trying to stop. Maybe I should drink, just drink, it's easier to stop, you know, with heroin you can't stay still or sleep, twitchy legs, going all the time, tossing and turning. Get no sleep, I'm tired all the time.

TB: What about detox? I s'pose you can't go into any programs here?

E: No, I can. I went to a Sally Ann detox in Vancouver but it was nasty! My friends ended up chipping in and getting me a train ticket outta there, I just had to leave Vancouver. Like I wasn't doing drugs again until two, three weeks ago.

TB: Maybe you could get it together again there?

E: Yeah, for sure, I love it there, I can work there, I have never had so much money in my life. Like I have never paid rent, I'm 27 and I have never paid rent in my life, but there we rented some land. Can you believe, fifty bucks between the five of us! I never had an apartment but we had a trailer and school bus and the work was cool, I had money to buy stuff and even drive around. It was kinda

neat, money is nice and I earned it. I wanna go back... It's just the dogs.

TB: Hey, you've got "twist of fate" written on your arm there? And fate hurts? What's that all about?

E: It's life, isn't it?

TB: You can make your own fate, can't you?

E: Um... I guess. I don't know.

TB: What's the number three? Are you the third one?

E: I will show you this... this is the stubble-headed bird (at this point, Eddie removed all his top clothing and turned around repeatedly, showing a large bird on his chest and a monkey across his back). Well, Micah did it. It's a banner like a big flag, well, I wanna finish it, of course, I couldn't get it finished. He was dead. I'd like to get the wings around my back... right around. That would be big and cool.

TB: Tell me about Micah. You didn't finish telling me.

E: He was my friend that got run over, like killed, train-hopping in Winnipeg... and we got him cremated. I wasn't there at the time, I was picking fruit. Six of us met up in Winnipeg when we heard what happened and that was only through e-mail. And the guy, the funeral cremation thing, he did it a cost, which was cool. Ninety bucks between the six of us and then we spread his ashes and all went our separate ways. We got to see him laid out and stuff.

TB: What about his family?

E: He was from Alabama but they couldn't ship him back, he didn't have family. We were his family, we got him taken care of... picked up his stuff, his backpack... he had a kid.

TB: What does that say?

E: 'Myself', my friend Aaron wrote that about being in prison, in the dungeon but mostly it's cuts and burns all over. Here and here.

TB: How do you do that? (I pointed to a series of deep burns over his arms and abdomen).

E: Oh, just with hot knives and spoons.

TB: God, that must hurt.

E: No, just put them on the stove and they get so hot and you put it on.

TB: Um, can you say why?

E: Um, most times I don't know. You can get rid of stuff. And it's real.

TB: There's more text here written on your arm... "Life is but a dream till the grave and beyond." And the name Amy?

E: A girl I was going with and the rest is the words of a song.

TB: You've had a bunch of girlfriends! Eh?

E: When I think about it... yeah, maybe I didn't do so bad!

TB: Well... there's a lot of stuff about death here, which isn't surprising, given all you have been through. And that's a lot of work on you back... What is that? "Monkey see, monkey do"... What's that for?

E: You don't know that? You are kidding me. You don't know that?

TB: Yes, but can you say why you put that there? Can you say what you are getting at? It's not about you, right?

E: Ha-ha, ironic, I s'pose. You might say it's about people not being able to think for themselves, being and doing things and not knowing why. Because other people do it or just for other people... and the way people are not honest with themselves or others. Just do what's expected, like not real or whatever. But see this, look at this, see this (I suddenly saw the small line outline of the mountain of

Montreal, complete with crucifix, just above his waist line). The mountain, see the line of the mountain. Do you like it? It's cool, right, it's Montreal. Can you see? I like it here so much. Yeah, that's stick and poke there.

TB: Yes, I can see it well. I like that. It's sort of cheerful. If you like it here maybe you should stay here? Anyway the train-hopping thing sounds worse than dangerous... deadly.

E: Yeah, it's dangerous but if I had to hitchhike it would take me three days to do fifty miles.

TB: Will no one pick you up?

E: Well, it's everything, the tattoos and you're dirty, I don't want to deal with it... then I got the dogs and this way, hoppin' trains, I can go clean across the country and over the border, like me and Ryan came from New Orleans on the boxcars. It's cool. I got books, I got food, I wait, I read, I read lots of stuff, I don't have to deal with nobody. It's real good.

TB: Would you go home?

E: I could visit but who would want to go and live there? Would you live in New Jersey? Ha-ha.

TB: Well, seems plenty people want to!

E: What? No way! It's all shopping malls and that shit. Who wants to live like that?

TB: Ha-ha-ha... so it's back to Alaska?

E: I keep going back and forth in a big circle, running back and forth. I start to go back and then I come back here again. But I will go back, maybe soon, when I'm thirty. Like there's this barge that you can get, like in Prince Rupert, the freight onto the barge... but if the

weather's bad maybe they just leave it... you could get stuck, like, out there.

TB: Don't tell me, you could starve or something.

E: What are you doing it for, will you use it?

TB: Yes, all of it and I hope you can go over it with me later...

E: I'll give you my mom's address, you can send it to me there. Or maybe e-mail?

TB: You are putting up your hood, are you going now?

E: Yeah, like I say, I wear it most of the time, some days I feel so insecure, other days I can just look everyone in the eye, I don't know why.

Reflective summary

We were the subject of considerable public scrutiny during the interview, passers by gazed openly and intently at us. I reflected on his being so easily recognized and I assumed this was why Eddie had been deported back to the U.S.A. twice and he last contacted me from there. I found this interview a most challenging experience. He was, I felt, a quiet, sensitive almost broken man and I was often deeply shocked and saddened by what I heard. I felt a deep sense of sorrow when I returned home to begin transcribing his words and frustrated at my inability to help him. Yet reviewing the film made me feel so much of his unhappiness was of his own making.

Eddie looked as much older than his age and I found looking at his body was quite disturbing as it cataloged so much suffering and bore so many

injuries. Only his simple line drawing tattoo of Montreal seemed to offer some solace.

I still occasionally get e-mail from Eddie. We have checked some queries arising from the text over the Internet and he was keen to add comments and corrections. He was most anxious that his deceased friends names be recorded accurately. He says he still has the desire to travel or has "itchy feet", as he put it. The last time he contacted me, he was train-hopping to Mexico.

4.8 Natalie

Natalie is a well-established tattoo artist in one of Montreal's most successful tattoo shops, in the young and popular areas of the city. I had often passed the shop and seen her working. The shop has large purple drapes and tattoo drawings in the windows, but inside there is very little flash to be seen. There is a vaguely gothic feel about the shop and it sits next to punk and rock designer stores. Instead on a small console sit three books of the three individual tattoo artists' work. Natalie's book or professional record of photographs of her work is an impressive and substantial compendium of diverse skills and colorful designs. She is rare in being a woman artist in what has been until quite recently a heavily male-dominated profession. She has built up a substantial clientele and is considering opening the first tattoo shop in Montreal with all women artists.

I approached Natalie directly to ask her for an interview. She is a graduate of Concordia and, although critical of what she describes as an elite educational system, she seemed interested in discussing the changing perspectives and artistic practices in tattoo culture. Her arms are often covered when not working in the shop as Natalie has full sleeve tattoos. When I first saw her, I was struck by her appearance. She had one side of her head partly shaved to expose a tattoo accompanied by long dreadlocks on the other side. At the time of our interview she wore a long long black pony tale and dark pants and T-shirt. She presented as a very calm, articulate and confident person. She has a very comfortable lifestyle and our first meeting was in her Plateau Mont-Royal apartment, which was full of photos and horror memorabilia. There I spent several very

enjoyable hours discussing the professional and personal aspects of tattoo.

TB: Well, why tattoo?

N: For most people, well, it's got to be understood at different levels. For some, it's just like a piece of jewelry or a decoration.

TB: And there's nothing wrong with that?

N: No, absolutely not. A tiny tattoo, just a cute tiny little thing, like I know shops that won't do that, a little butterfly, they have a four hundred minimum level... But I'll do that. It's important to that person, that's what counts.

TB: Is it women that come in for that sort of thing?

N: Oh yeah, yeah, little thing on the lower back or the bikini line.

TB: Some artists are a bit dismissive about that kind of tattoo...

N: Yeah, I know shops that will refuse to do it. It doesn't have to be a big bold thing to mean something. Like think of the women who have never had the courage to get a tattoo, I have a customer who she says she's always wanted a little butterfly and, "Now I'm 53, the kids are grown-up," and now I've done three on her.

TB: What's your background, are you Montreal born?

N: Well, been here eleven years but born in Ontario, but francophone parents born in Quebec, and going to university was my ticket out of there.

TB: What did you do at college?

N: I applied to Fine Art in Concordia twice and didn't get in. I was so young. Maybe I didn't meet the criteria. I think they thought my work was too illustrational and perhaps they were after something

more abstract, but my grades were great, I was an honors student and had got accepted in Ottawa. I went into General Arts, did anthropology and poetry and my best class was my death and dying class.

TB: That's a theme in the motifs on your arms, I note.

N: Oh yes, but I was always drawing, but I think I got into tattoo because of this guy, in school, this guy who lifted his shirt to show me a Chinese dragon he'd had tattooed and that was it. And I think I made my appointment the next week as a graduation present (I was shown a black twirling pattern across her upper breast). It's funny, the guy I went to for my first tattoo, I know him as an equal now, as a fellow artist. We're equals now.

TB: How long have you been working in this shop?

N: Four years here, but before that in my own place, I shared. I had my little dry heat sterilizer but I got so busy and there were people around and the roommate would want to take a shower! So... I needed to get my own place and I applied for a grant, I was thinking, take the art angle, but didn't get it. Drives me crazy.

TB: Ahead of your time?

N: Maybe... yeah, so I went in with this guy who was looking at the same shop space, he's my boss, well, in that he owns the shop and I give him a percentage of my income, this includes some supplies, but I'm really my own boss, do as I like.

TB: How many there, three?

N: Yes, Arnold has been there a year now.

TB: How do you get people in?



- N: It's all by personal reputation, there's no advertising. For me, I see someone, they tell their friends, that's it. In the four years, I see the progress, not only in the business side but the progress in the work.
- TB: Well, that's one thing good about being an artist: you get better.
- N: Yeah! Except tattoo artists have bad backs, it's tough on the body leaning, stooping over, we all have bad backs! And how you present yourself counts. Yeah, I've learned to never judge who comes in, you don't know what's underneath the outfit. Or what they'll want.
- TB: But you don't have hardly any flash in your shop. But I noticed the individual portfolios.
- N: Well, we don't have hardly any flash. I think people don't realize a tattoo can be anything you want. They look at the walls and they don't see much so they say, "Oh, you can't do much." And I explain that that's because we don't want customers to restrict themselves to flash and that they can really have whatever they like. So I tell them what they can have. I explain.
- TB: So you're pitched toward a fairly sophisticated customer?
- N: Well, if they're not when they come in, I try to get them to be by the time they leave. I try to tell them... to make them understand the difference between a tattooist and a tattoo artist. I always call myself an artist. You can tell a line tracer, if you wipe the line you can see how they tried to improvise and they didn't know how to do it.
- TB: So they don't have much knowledge? And maybe a bit nervous?

N: And something about not knowing what to expect. Taking their clothes off and that. Yeah, I'm like a doctor or a hairdresser, people will tell you stuff about themselves that you would not believe. It's a certain confidential thing you just keep to yourself.

TB: Isn't there a really personal relationship that you have to develop?

N: Yes, and to the point that a few tattoo artists I know have had clients think or imagine there was a romance between them and even stalked them, there is certain vulnerability because you tattoo them. And I would never, don't want to be marked by anyone I didn't like or at least respect. Like, I remember everybody that did mine, mostly friends and people I think who are excellent artists, and there are plenty who are not so nice.

TB: A lot of the old-school tattooists seem a bit bitter or unhappy about the changes in tattoo.

N: They hate new tattoo people, like so... and I think it's all about envy, they had it good for so long and all of a sudden we arrive.

TB: The new tattoo artists?

N: Yeah, we are really taking stuff so much farther and you can't teach an old dog new tricks. Flash that's thirty years old and bad places. But there are some great old artists out there. There's a great old guy out at the Pointe, I respect him. It's a tradition that is secretive and really male-dominated. But changing.

TB: There are different levels, as you say. How do you charge?

N: It's a hundred dollars an hour, but in a way I've screwed myself getting faster at doing the work, something that takes an hour a few years ago I can do in twenty minutes now. So I have to think of that!

TB: There have been a lot of changes in tattoo though...

N: Yes, and it's partly social, so much more accepted and it's seen so much better now.

TB: How's that then?

N: It's the masses, the media. Friends telling friends, MTV, video, rap stars. Tattoo magazines, that's a big thing. So much work in them. I have had my own pieces in them.

TB: Has it moved from marginal to cool?

N: I think so and I don't know if I like that. Well, I'm not sure how I feel about that either, like, maybe.

TB: Not many have a lot of work. I have not easily found women.

N: Well, that's the difference between making it a lifestyle and making it a little fancy piece of jewelry, a little thing. You take it that extreme where you've decided to commit yourself to it because, whatever people think, forget lasers—you are going to have it forever. It costs three times the price of a tattoo.

TB: The face?

N: Well, that's the most extreme, people are shocked by that, but it's a cultural thing. In New Zealand it's common.

TB: Will you do a face?

N: No, I won't do faces because I don't do my own face. Somewhere in there, I will only do what I would do to myself.

TB: I like that as a code of ethics.

N: Hey, I'm not saying I'll do the Bugs Bunny saying "fuck you" or something really out there like that... and there are plenty of those... But who cares, if someone wants that, that's fine.

TB: So is a lot of tattoo still trying to get at people?

N: Well, you know, I'll tell you something, I really believe in something like a tattooist karma, like whatever I do will come back to me, so that's how I go.

TB: And the hands?

N: I will do the hands, but usually they already have work. I have something on my hand I did myself.

TB: And tattoo as permanent makeup?

N: Even a beauty mark, I won't do a little beauty mark, like I have a lot women asking about makeup but I say no, 'cause even a little beauty mark can cause trouble down the line, as the skin loses all elasticity as you grow older.

TB: Great, another thing to look forward to!

N: Ha, well, I don't want them coming back for a fadeout, a touch-up, or complaining about it being blotched out or faded and all those changes. So I say, "Hey, if you want a beauty mark, wear an eyeliner for a day."

TB: That's... There are then issues of an aging or changing body?

N: Yeah, I have people say, "What are you going to do when you're eighty?" And well, the way I see it, by the time I'm eighty, my skin's gonna be so yargh by then. Anyways, at least I'll have my pictures.

TB: So that's really positive?

N: I think so. And it's pictures to look at. The funny thing is that, when you get a tattoo, your body image changes anyway, and in the sense that you sort of realize that it's not forever, it's just the vessel you are in for now.

TB: There are so many differing ideas on why people might get tattooed.

N: Yes, and in the long run I don't wake up every day... and worry about it. I feel that, if anything, tattoo has opened more doors for me than closed any... like I have met way more interesting people and been so much more accepted really. I feel it's so positive.

TB: What about the image you might present as tough or a hard case?

N: Well, people thought that, I don't mind, anyway I have a strong presence—Scorpio and that... Like when I went to Mexico, people said, "Show your tattoos, don't hide them." And I had so much attention, they said, "No one will mess with you. They'll think you're in a gang." I never thought that, it's my job, it's what I like and how I live.

TB: You don't think you are in this as an act of defiance to get at your family?

N: No, I see my mother twice a year and I wear long sleeves, I'm not rubbing it in their faces. No one would even know.

TB: But all the same, you are doing something few women do.

N: True.

TB: So why this? It's hard or would you have to have done something less interesting?

N: I think, 'cause I always drew, I was already collecting them... I'd worked as a waitress I'd seen bikers do it and I thought, "I can do this..." I respected the art, I had friends doing it.

TB: And women in the business?

N: I have a friend started at the same time, she's covered now and when we started rumors said we didn't like each other, a cat fight and all that, and I think it's 'cause we were two women. I think no one would think that about two guys. In fact, we'd love to go into

business together and we will. An all-girl tattoo shop, maybe down the line a bit. It could be great but there are still problems even now. As I sit at the front of the shop, people come in and think I'm the secretary, see me and ask for the artist! Even women! And they say, "You tattoo too? I never thought of that!"

TB: I can imagine the kinds of things they say.

N: Oh, and like I was doing some work on a guy with a bunch of guys, and on the bikini line, and he was making blow job jokes as it looked like I was going down on him, you know the way, hey, and all those cracks they make!

TB: I bet you told him that would cost a lot more!

N: Yeah, and I said, "Be quiet or I'll stick it down farther." Ha-ha, that's what I told him.

TB: Well, it sounds like you can manage it, but it must be difficult all the same?

N: Yeah... like all the time, I answer the phone and people ask for the tattoo artist.

TB: When they hear a woman's voice?

N: Yeah! They think I am in reception! That's why I changed my business card. I changed it from Nat to Natalie. It's fresh and women want a woman sometimes, or lesbians will only want a woman artist, and gay men too. So there is something to work with there, the novelty aspect, and I'm proud of that.

TB: Well, how many women are in the tattoo shops?

N: I'll be going to a convention, like if it's a local one like Laval, there will be only two or three women, but at an international one like the one in Toronto where most people will be from the States, there will

be way more women. Still not that many, though. A lot of things still have some way to come.

TB: As you know so many people in the business and you do work for one another, is your artwork on you free?

N: I wish! I still pay plenty even if they're not watching the clock.

TB: Another thing I wanted to ask: Are there any issues about different racial or ethnic groups and tattoo? Like in some African cultures, traditionally scarification has been the thing.

N: Well, if the skin is really black or a really African or very dark skin, I will advise people not to have tattoos that will cost them hundreds of dollars if it won't show up on the dark skin. You just won't see it, so I've not had so many.

TB: And Native customers?

N: Well, I've had a couple but nothing special that struck me. Haida art, as far as Native art, is really big in tattoo. As far as form goes, it translates well into the tattoo medium. That's really nice to do and is big, real big in tattoo.

TB: Yeah, I see that. The bold black and red.

N: But I don't see so many really, Natives, they are kept away on reserves in Quebec. Well, there's not so many Natives around compared to the west.

TB: Anyway on your own work, maybe we will start on your pieces.

N: I can't say that everything on my body has such great significance. But I will say that the meaning, the significance changes, or it acquired significance with the time of wearing it, some I knew when I got it, I knew what it was about and some I really didn't know at the time. I thought about it later.

TB: Are you talking about unconscious processes?

N: Definitely, like subconsciously where you are at, at the time. One tattoo is this one on my thumb (Natalie showed me a small, thorn like design which ran around her thumb). I dreamt about having a tattoo there, I got up and I did it, did these thorns.

TB: A crown, circle of thorns, no special religious significance?

N: No, not at the time, as the years I have thought about that.

TB: Have you any Catholic tradition?

N: Yes, yes, I am Catholic but I have the devil as well, where that's from, but I'm not satanic.

TB: There are lots of religious tattoos around still, then?

N: I think many of those are really worn as fashion statements, but there are big Jesus portraits and Archangel Michael specifically, I've done crosses and even a star of David. And something maybe Biblical about how you can't mark the perfect god-given body. And as I think Jesus was black, it's difficult to see how that squares with the Midwest, but anyway. Sacred Hearts are also popular with the rockabilly and old school, the way it was.

TB: Is that the biggest popular musical connection?

N: Yes, probably, but there is also rock and roll and metal.

TB: People do get their favorite bands on their arm a lot.

N: Well, I don't enjoy doing them unless it's a real immortal like Elvis or their own band they were in. I don't judge them, if they want it they can cover it later, and it's the same thing with lovers' names, I don't judge. I will suggest like, "Wouldn't you rather a symbolic motif instead?" They usually don't.

TB: It's funny sometimes, it's as if the tattoo is the proof of dedication.
So what do you say?

N: Like, "Are you sure? Are you really sure... sure?" but I know they'll be back to have it covered in a year. But I know, I've marked boyfriends and things like that myself, by symbolism, that's all. I've tattooed my niece's name on my brother but she'll always be his daughter.

TB: What about commemorative work?

N: Customers tell you things... you have to separate yourself. It's very hard. Portraits, someone is dead, a son or daughter, they want the initials often, a sad, sad story or whatever.

TB: Is there still a group and graduation thing?

N: Mother, daughter, best friends, people mostly come into the shop in pairs and many people call ahead and get it done together.

TB: And gender divide in choice?

N: It is half and half coming through the door, but the subject matter is different. It's really rare to have a girl ask for a skull and crossbones and the guy who did my tattoos was just ecstatic that's the stuff I liked, doing mine he was amazed. Generally, for women, mostly it's butterflies, the angels and flowers and things that society will find them pretty for having it done for, if you know what I mean.

TB: What do you think about that?

N: I don't implicate my feelings. I try to do things I feel good about, well, sometimes I've done dumb stuff but it's the best job I could technically.

TB: What about the creatively autonomous customer?

- N: People sometimes bring in a drawing that's awful and then you have to decide what to say and how to handle it. "Exactly like this?" I try to tell them, "Technically, this won't work." And I have done things I didn't want to do and told them, but they want it like that, it's hard. But it must be their decision.
- TB: What? To turn away the reality of the marketplace?
- N: Well, we are a little community, we are friends, even though there are a good few of us. We refer to one another, like a group of three shops, we all refer to each other if we have too much on here, which is unheard of—it's so competitive—which is really special and I don't badmouth shops. I will recommend one over another and of course everyone talks. You'd hear it all back!
- TB: You think it's here to stay?
- N: I think the mix of cultures and people will move it along and keep it changing. Like, for example, I have realized how incredible that Japanese art is and it's really big now. It used to be the hand poking but they now use the machines to outline and just hand do the color.
- TB: Would you include it in your own repertoire?
- N: Yes, a lot of people ask for carp or koi fish and dragons and I find them in books, tattoo magazines even look up Horiyoshi and other artists.
- TB: Is graffiti art a method or style you use?
- N: That's a big thing, a method, I don't do it, but the medium of the spraycan accounts for why graffiti people have gotten into tattoo.
- TB: Is that due to a link with the technique or material?

N: It translates to the needle. The spray and airbrush are similar, the closer, the more concentrated a spot and the farther you go out you get fanning out. And the shading is improved. The old guys use five needles or seven for everything, whereas today there are so many needles. It's finer.

TB: Do you make your own inks?

N: No, but you can mix them like paint.

TB: I have noticed the presence of horror and death in tattoo art...

N: Oh yes, it's so big. Everyone likes to be scared deep down as it's a form of excitement really, I guess.

TB: And the constant presence of death motifs such as skulls?

N: Yeah, so many get skulls, what we all have in common: the fear of death and the fear of the unknown. The whole death thing is so big.

TB: You're a living body?

N: But not forever. You know it's gonna and got to come down to that. The body you have is the only thing you can have forever. Till you die.

TB: Mortality?

N: Death. I've tattooed friends who have died round the other way, all drugs or suicide. So, I have a photo. They bled, they were there, but that's all I have now.

TB: The link is there with drugs and tattoo, but I don't want to overstate it.

N: I was never a drug addict but maybe I replaced a heroin addiction or I chose to replace it with tattoos, instead of becoming a junkie, I chose... to feel pain or go through initiation in a positive or creative

way. So that was my drug and I know plenty who died of drugs. This is definitely better than crack and we all have vices.

TB: What about tattoos as making people seem more attractive or sexy?

N: Yes, that's there. It's a part of it. I'm probably more intriguing with tattoos and sexy because they know they hurt, oh, you can take it. It does hurt, and as you get older, it gets worse, and the big pieces take a long time.

TB: There's a ton of horror memorabilia here in your place and collections of film stills, things stuck everywhere... you have quite a collection!

N: Yeah, I love horror, you know, not talking the slasher-killer misogynistic stuff but the whole romantic side to gothic horror. I love the older films. Let's say my Frankenstein family and homage to him. I love him.

TB: There are, or is a kind of ironic humor here?

N: Oh yes, people say, "How do you live with all this horror?" And I say, "Look at this stuff... it's really funny, not evil." I don't think tattoo like this will ever be socially accepted. A tattoo for me, at this point, should be that you'll know this or be able to tell that about the person. You should be able to know about them without talking to them... a living canvas that will not last. That is cool. Anyway... I'm a mixup of things, a mishmash of beliefs.

TB: So this really has been a really satisfying...

N: Well, my dad told me, "You'll never make it with art, never do anything..." Now I earn a hundred dollars an hour, a good living. Doing something I love to do. I'm so lucky I chose to do this and

make something of myself. Back to school? No way, the only people that can go to school have money. The system sucks. I've lost my belief in education and in school. Everyone I know who stayed in school, in arts, is in debt and you know school should be free. It's ridiculous. We get kids coming in all the time to apprentice.

TB: What was the very first tattoo?

N: Yeah, I think, yes, this is the first, on my chest it's tribal Borneo, there's no big meaning here, I just liked it. The pattern is beautiful. I knew I could cover, I didn't know where I was going with tattoo then.

TB: What's the significance of the placement?

N: Well, none! But I got it there 'cause I could hide it from my parents... ha-ha. The second one was maybe this duality of the hot and cold mixed together and maybe confrontation... two tiny dragons and above it's my own addition, a... I wouldn't cover it.

TB: Then is the location on the body really important to you? Will you tell them where to place a design?

N: No, never, I will give my aesthetic but I let them choose, I don't always agree but it's their choice. There are no rules.

TB: So your arms?

N: Yeah, well, the sleeves are part of the trademark and tradition of being a tattoo artist (Natalie showed me her two fully tattooed arms that were covered in a large number of complex, interconnected designs and pictures. These included devils, Frankenstein, skulls and flowers).

TB: The sleeves say who you are and what you do.

N: Absolutely, it's part of the code. I have a lot of dragons on me, I'm not sure why, other than I like them. On my head, I had to shave my

head for them. I think they are about protection, the two-headed, but I would probably do it differently now as it takes up so much space. But they are also a souvenir of my time in San Francisco. Part fluke, not super conscious.

TB: There's a devil or gargoyle?

N: I view these things as keeping an eye on my back really, taking care, er, like a talisman, almost like having it on your side.

TB: Is that like tribal culture and on the creatures on church facades?

N: Demon masks, spirits, demons on churches, yes, you see them there too. This one is my cat, nothing special here, I love my cats and the color, I give artistic license. I'd say what I want, we talk about it, then I have it done. You know their work.

TB: The whole composition?

N: Well, it's changing and evolving over time.

TB: I notice it's all above the cuff.

N: I like the option of concealment. I don't always want the world to know. Now here, the two butterflies are because I had two abortions, that's two butterflies.

TB: In some cultures, as in Japan, there are special days to honor aborted babies.

N: Soul... I'm interested in the idea of transformation from the cocoon from the idea of the soul.

TB: Not too painful to be reminded of those times?

N: I don't beat myself up about it... the tiger, well, some unconscious processes. The guy I'm seeing is a Tiger in Chinese astrology, but I also have leopard spots tattooed on the same place on the other arm, I am interested in balance (Natalie took me through each

piece). A mirror and a rose, just a favorite flower, like the Japanese peonies I have later. Things that I like, the skull, Frankenstein because he's my favorite man, ideal man, strong, silent misunderstood type... Yeah, he was good really. Always good really! Society just didn't understand him! He didn't mean to drown the little girl... ha-ha-ha.

TB: So that's back to horror and he's a transformation too. What is the baby and spider? (Here, I saw a small child's head with long spider legs and body).

N: This one isn't finished, it's an old design. An old design, the artist is no longer around.

TB: Does that make for problems finding someone to finish someone else's work?

N: Yes, it's slightly unethical and the piece is, well, it's a homage to my punk rock days, the baby spider, homage. Me, sort of. I'm waiting to finish it. I got the dragonfly... well, I got that because before they turn into dragonflies, they are horrible ugly bugs... then they transform into these beautiful things.

TB: Why the devil?

N: The devil, I'm thinking he keeps me aware of what's out there, protecting me from the evils of the world, and then another thing, also to keep me aware of the dark side in me, in myself too... yes, I think that's it.

TB: Well, the eyes are white or not filled in, are they closed?

N: Yes, blank or hollow really.

TB: That makes it quite frightening, I think, why scary?

N: Life is scary. This way I'm prepared. And next it's my ode to rock and roll, Guns N' Roses tribute... still love them. That's a tattoo thing too and there's a heart, I'm really wearing my heart on my sleeve.

TB: And the text?

N: Oh, that's "So easy to remember, so hard to forget," a Doris Day or Peggy Lee song. I love them and it's a reminder of my grandmother, it makes me think of her. Regrettably, I think I thought she'd be there forever and I never took advantage of my time with her and then she died suddenly. And also, I've had relationships come and be gone, friends die. Like here, a lover of two years who committed suicide, so it reminds me of that.

TB: Oh... that is very sad... and why visually, when you will always remember him?

N: Well, it's about holding the moment and making really sure you won't lose it. See here, everything here seems nice and happy and it's like that at first. Then back here, I've got the broken heart, it's black... the black heart.

TB: All the pain... and it's amazing what the human heart gets over.

N: True. But you don't forget. And I have another one on my leg, if you like? (Natalie revealed a very large tattoo, perhaps eighteen inches long, of a geisha, in full traditional costume which spanned the length of her thigh).

TB: Oh yes, of course! Oh, it's a woman, a geisha? What a lovely piece and a lot of work!

N: Yes, the guy I work with did it, and I did his back and he did my leg.

TB: A trade!

N: Oh yeah, we do that. Took twenty-five hours.

- TB: That's amazing. What a lot of work. It's so big.
- N: The goddess of good fortune is dueling with the dragon, and they are looking at each other, and you can see she has pot leaves on her dress as I'm a smoker, and the red, and the gold and green are the colors of Rastafarianism. The dragon has a claw in my leg he's hanging onto me there.
- TB: Well, that's certainly multicultural!
- N: Oh yeah, and here's the first one on myself, it's with my first professional equipment, based on an Aubrey Beardsley, who was a weird guy, a bit morbid too, I like. It's a fetus, no letter, it's like a peacock feather. Maybe death and vanity. And then of course here, that's a death or glory tattoo.
- TB: What's that mean?
- N: The whole idea of what doesn't kill you makes you stronger and rather win than lose.
- TB: Is it going on and on then, no end in sight?
- N: Well yes, but have to time it, I don't want to get full up, you know. I will change and want to add stuff so I have to keep something for today, there's still time, and room for tomorrow.
- TB: And the professional future?
- N: Well, I plan to start something up... that all-women shop... one day. Maybe soon, we're talking about it.
- TB: I'm coming back for the opening.

Reflective summary

In many ways I found Natalie first and foremost, an ambitious and successful business woman. Her eclectic style meant she was as at ease

with traditional tattoo motifs as she was with her unique creations. I felt she placed high value on establishing tattoo as an art form, being particularly interested in creative process, color and originality. I was interested in the way she saw the rise of interest in new tattoo art work. This, she said, had been achieved through improved artistic training and with the aid of increased technical enhancements. These included greater color palettes and refinements in the size and number of needles.

I was impressed by the way she negotiated her career through the macho tattoo world with humor and sarcasm. The financing and design plans for her all woman tattoo shop are well developed. She was also very honest and open and I felt her sincerity must be her greatest asset in providing comfort to new customers. I found her strong and forceful presence perfectly captured in her business card which represented an embellished Frankenstein. This often used motif was full of powerful symbolism about creativity and transformation.

4.9 Glossary of tattoo vocabulary

Body suit :	Full body covering of tattoo's.
Cover up :	A tattoo placed over an existing tattoo.
Crazy :	Mixed and random motifs.
Creations /custom creations:	Unique tattoo works.
Dimension :	A three dimensional affect.

Facial :	Facial tattoo.
Fine line :	Single needle line.
Flash :	Repertoire of photocopied drawings.
Gun:	Electric tattoo equipment.
Inked :	Tattooed.
Irezumi :	Traditional Japanese tattoo styles, usually containing dragons, warriors geisha and animal forms.
Island tattoos :	Separate tattoo's placed all over the body.
Moko :	Traditional New Zealand head tattoo but usually refers to a facial tattoo.
New school or skool :	New methods and styles which might include graffiti, random or free hand drawing and unique pieces.
Old school or skool :	Traditional tattoo practice including flash and standard repertoire.
Pieces :	Individual, artistically created tattoos that are specifically designed for the customer.
Realist :	Representational.
Real estate :	Areas of skin not yet tattooed.
Scratcher :	Untrained amateur tattooist.

Skin virgin :	The non tattooed.
Sleeves or half sleeve:	Tattooed arms or half arms.
Solid:	Good or well done. Can also mean a strong design or full and heavily colored in.
Stick and poke or poking :	Making autonomous home made tattoo with sharp pointed implement and Indian ink.
Stencil:	The transfers some traditional old school tattooists use.
Tat :	Tattoo.
Tattooist :	Tattooist who traces lines.
Touch ups :	Re-tattooed areas to improve color or line.
Tribal/neo tribal :	Work that is drawn from Polynesian Island's early tattoo designs. These are complex, thick black blocks of swirls, lines and patterns.

Chapter 5

Tattoo Motivation

5.1 Specific moments in time

This chapter explores tattoo motivation and its link to defiance and individuation. Why the participants decided to become tattooed was interwoven with many variables, most often with a general interest in various art forms from music to drawing and performance. One of the recurring observations that most clearly emerged from many discussions was the often expressed desire to assert individual difference. Although reason and motivation were always explained as complex, the theme of tattoo as an act of defiance against parents also occurred repeatedly.

Another transgressive or defiant aspect of tattoo is its relationship with a number of alternative sensibilities, or accepted aesthetic conventions, from the use of the body to the content of its motifs. In this chapter, one of the most significant aspects of defiance, the use of horror and humor is discussed. This also relates to the unique way in which tattoos engage the viewer. The immense pleasure and pride the participants expressed in their work was another constant feature of all the interviews. And any listing of the various possible motivations of tattoo begins with the repeated observation that tattoos often operate as visual summaries of a particularly meaningful period of time.

Tattoos are often described as related to a very precise time. Kurt described his island tattoos or individual pieces as a record of "times and certain moods, feelings of things that happened." Where a specific

picture or motif was designed, this was almost invariably described as a visual shorthand for a significant event in time. Catherine summarizes this by talking of tattoo's function thus: "It's about holding a moment and making sure you won't lose it." These times or events were always spoken of as very precious, significant moments. As Karen says, her tattoos signify "A moment in time, or an event that will never be forgotten... When you get a tattoo, it's almost as though you can get it to symbolize a moment, that getting this tattoo is about this point in my life... Every time when I look at one or other tattoo, I'm going to think of this moment or time." Later she added, "When you get a tattoo, it's something you don't want to forget, you want it to be part of your life for as long as you're alive." Natalie similarly described tattoos as "like photos" and "about holding a moment you won't lose." Sebastian, who had only one tattoo, explained how this drawing was created so that he would never forget a terrible time in his life and would remember "how families stayed together, no matter what." Stephan summarized a number of his early tattoos as recording and marking a key period in his life: when he came out and decided to live as an openly gay man and tell absolutely everyone about it. (This is an example of tattoo's operating as a proof or invocation of individuation.) Despite the very wide-ranging experiences and possible functions attributed to tattoo, many of the participants described the pictures as crystallizing an especially significant time.

5.2 Defiance and individuation

When I asked participants about their early beginnings with tattoo, my initial assumption was to see tattoo as an act of open defiance. This was in part due to the number of participants who were under eighteen when

they were first tattooed; I felt this might involve a desire to thwart parental values or authority. Some participants immediately acknowledged this; Eddie, for example, clearly states this as his intention when creating his full facial tattoo: "Well, what I think, when I did it... was, I don't want to be these people ever, like ever... like how my mum was a hippy... but to make sure I'm never, ever gonna be them or like them." Catherine arrived home with a striking tattoo and gleefully recounts her mother's shock: "just the look on her face and straight out of her mouth, 'What about your wedding day?!'" Laughing as she spoke, she said her intention with her first tattoo was to make her brother laugh and annoy her "Pollyanna" mother. Kurt describes his father's reaction at the sight of his first tattoos as one of despair as he told Kurt he had ruined his life. Several other participants recalled not discussing their tattoos or hiding them; Karen describes hiding her first tattoo, which she obtained at fourteen, and keeping it secret for several years. Dima said his tattoos are ignored and never discussed with his mother, as this is the only way she can deal with them. The location of Natalie's first, upper breast tattoo is easily hidden and, cautious of disapproval from her parents, she continues to cover her full tattooed sleeves, saying "I don't rub their faces in it"; she even goes so far as to hide her small thumb tattoo with a sticking plaster when she visits home.

I first felt that the initial attraction and motivation for a first tattoo was related to resistance of parental control and a desire for individuation; this is certainly linked to the popular view of tattoo. However, I soon found the decision to engage with and pursue tattoo to be far more complex. For three participants, getting tattooed was also linked to graduation. My

impression was that the initial contact with tattoo is in keeping with the idea of a rite of passage and transition from childhood to independence. However, continued involvement in tattoo was something quite different: the participants described a decision and an eventual move into a different lifestyle choice. Some participants said they liked tattoo as an art form but, apart from those with facial work, Kurt and Natalie typified a general feeling, when they said they were unsure about "where to go with it." Continuing with substantial tattoo work required what was frequently referred to as a commitment. It appeared that before the decision to "commit" was made, participants considered their future presentation and career options. Natalie said she had seen bikers drawing tattoos and realized she could do it just as well: "I chose to do this and make something of myself." Kurt realized, "At first I was just testing the water, but if you're going on interviews for a bank... I'd have to cover up... then I went down to another level, there's a commitment." Catherine felt that in a tattoo family, it was really a requirement: "That's how I started, the whole family's tattooed." Being in a tattoo family implied that it was only a matter of time; as we spoke, she acknowledged the possibility of eventually having a full body suit.

Even though the reasons many of the participants were drawn to tattoo because of their initial attraction in defiance, it seems the decision to continue was related to the participants' own future and life style choices. Those who embarked on facial work were quite aware that there was no turning back. As Eddie said, "Doing something about it now just isn't an option."

5.3 The function of humor

Tattoo culture is rich in what might be called an alternative aesthetic. I began the research feeling somewhat skeptical of alternative positions in a culture that first struck me as being highly commercial and that had become very much integrated into mainstream popular culture. It may be that radical and challenging alternative artworks that use the body, employ some other alternative aesthetic. Isaac's (1999) model proposes an aesthetic of laughter, which offers insight into the ways in which humor is defiant and disruptive. The body is used as a conduit for humor and satire to transgress and undermine historical representation. Laughter is seen as the antithesis of the static, hierarchical conception of the world. Citing, for example, Nancy Spero's use of her own body in a variety of unlikely, absurd and deliberately vulgar performances, Isaac feels use of the "material body is striving to a future freedom, naked but never fetishized" (Isaac, 1999: 26). This model was particularly interesting to me when I later tried to make sense of the often humorous content and tone of tattoo texts and images.

Some examples of humorous and ironic tattooed phrases were clearly meant as a cynical challenge to stereotypical expectations of lifestyle, as in the expression "monkey see, monkey do," boldly written in slightly crooked capitals across Eddie's back—perhaps all the more ironic and challenging from a homeless person. The Dr. Seuss cartoon fish tattooed on Kurt seemed funny and incongruous on a punk rocker's arm. Karen's large tattoo of a Japanese theater mask struck me as deathly and



grotesque and strangely out of place on this diminutive woman's body. There were also examples of tattoos that evoked a sense of rupture or disturbance, as for example Dima's robotic-looking and completely black tattooed arm. Seeing something so determinedly alien provoked a feeling of anxiety in me. Likewise, the facial tattoo close to his eye, reminiscent of Alex DeLarge in Kubrick's horrible and comic film *A Clockwork Orange*, similarly evoked a sense of satirical irony about the futuristic horrors of a corrupt society. However, more apparent were the examples of humor, most often accompanied by stories of loss and separation. These took the form of macabre jokes that intertwined horror with humor.

5.3.1 The function of horror

The amount and range of macabre and horror flash on display in tattoo shops is quite apparent. Horror is a significant feature of contemporary art and popular culture as a cultural and commercial phenomenon (Grunenberg , 2000). It is also a particular feature of many contemporary rock and punk bands' style, e.g. Marilyn Manson, Nin and Korn, and also in the clothing and decoration of their fans. As a tattoo genre, it has a specific and easily definable style, invariably typified by black "gothic" and highly stylized, wispy, twirling line drawings that include such motifs as vampires, graveyards, tombs, grim reapers, gargoyles and spook or haunted houses. There is also another type of surreal horror motif that resembles the robotic and technological mutants or aliens seen in futuristic horror. These are drawings of humans, machines or animals in various combinations. Tattoo flash also typically includes Halloween motifs as well as many variants of skeletons and skulls with bones. Consequently, I

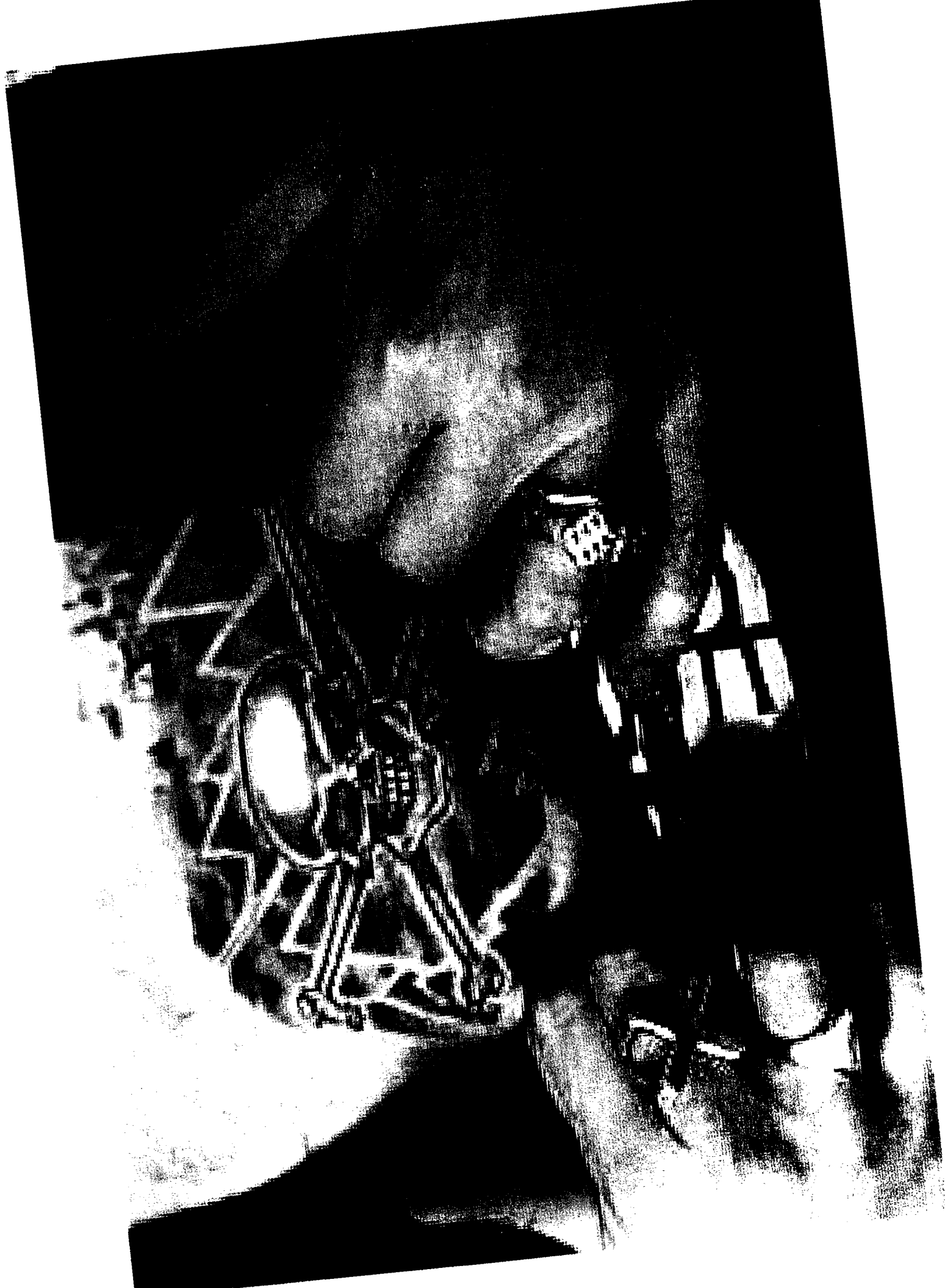
was not surprised to see such pictures on some participants or hear them refer to a variety of horror genres.

A somewhat offbeat example is Kurt's current tattoo project: the accurate representation of a burn from an iron in the center of his back, which he wants to "look really burnt and sunken in." This was described as a souvenir of a practical joke by his murdered sister. The fierce gorilla worn by Catherine was the hero of the horror thriller *Planet of the Apes* and is described by her as being both frightening and funny. This tattoo is part of a larger piece that commemorates the death of her dog and pays tribute to her family. Natalie had a large number of horror-inspired tattoos, including an enormous spider with a baby human face and a Beardsley-inspired, mutant fetal piece on death and vanity. The recurring motif of a luminous green, Maori-styled facially tattooed Frankenstein's monster was worn on her arms and illustrated on her business card. She described this image as funny rather than scary and placed it next to a work commemorating the suicide of her lover. She jokingly informed me that society "just didn't understand him." I later remembered Frankenstein as the rejected monster who eventually commits suicide.

My first response to this facet of tattoo was to see horror as often relating to the destruction of the body. In the horror genre in both literature and film, it is a given that terrible things will happen and people will die. However, my eventual overall impression of these depictions was, as Kurt said about the iron burn, that they are designed and drawn up "to serve a purer purpose." In Kurt's case, this is preserving and carrying on his sister's crazy humor, as well as her memory. I felt these tattoo works of

horror and humor might be read as stories about what most disturbed and distressed participants, signifying an open acknowledgment of fear and vulnerability. It seems to me that this is an aesthetic that most often relates to the wearer's own personal horror.

Since my participants often provided little or no clearly articulated explanation of these pictures, I was left with ambivalent feelings. This genre of tattoo accurately describes the emotional extremes and ambiguity which I felt during the interviews, both laughing with and feeling horrified by some of my participants experiences. The popular horror genre, so manifest in tattoo, abounds in moral tales and narrative. Many of the participants expressed aspects of their life stories through film and television media. These tattoos might allow their wearers to quite literally confront their own anxieties by representing and demystifying them and then deconstructing or reconfiguring them in new, personally acceptable terms. By joking about these horrors, such as, the terrible deaths of loved ones, these scary events are controlled and made safe enough to discuss. Twinning humor and horror with popular media also invites a questioning skepticism that displays a cynicism about any overtly obvious reading. The participants clearly understood how to manipulate representations for their own ends. This was conveyed as empowering while it also demonstrated a type of individual resistance.



5.4 The gaze and the look

My video film data brought up many issues of what I was actually able to see. My shaky hand-held shots and the lengthy editing process made me aware of many different possible perspectives. Filming the participants entailed a pervasive anxiety about what I could really see. Consideration of the public or private location the filming took place in and the frequency with which I had to ask participants to remove clothing often left me uncomfortable with my voyeuristic role. My constantly asking participants to show me their tattoos invariably raised many issues of the preferred reading or view of the tattooed work. There were times when it was difficult to position the camera to see the work. Participants had to turn and twist their bodies; in some cases, positioning themselves for my convenience obscured their own view. In this way, it became obvious that certain tattoos were always obscured or invisible to the wearer and thus offered for the public gaze, while others were private, hidden or for personal consumption only. Karen indicated that some friends were shocked to discover she had tattoos even after years of seeing her.

I found myself thinking about who looks at what and who can see what. This immediately struck me as important if not key to understanding the possible motivation for a tattoo. It is directly linked to who the tattoo work might be for and its possible visibility. There are many variables at play here: the artist's and the picture creator's intentions and the work's location on the body.

Oddly, many participants were blasé about showing some work but at other times held back. I was also made aware that some tattoos do not need or want a response from another person.

Sometimes I would see a participant look in a mirror as the interview progressed. Certain tattoos, such as those on the back, can only be barely glimpsed in a mirror. Three participants had such tattoos. Dima had a tribal pattern that he had first seen on his girlfriend's back when she was dancing; he described the motivation for having it placed there as a symbolic connection. Stephan had a large tattoo on his back that he told me he could not see but knew was there. Eddie had a large text written on his back which, even viewed in a mirror, would only appear backwards to him; I felt his intent was quite simply to convey a message.

Obscured visual access confused me when I had to look at the tattoo while the participant turned away, so that I could not interpret their intentions from their facial expressions. Backward text was evidence of autonomous writing meant for the mirror, while at other times I saw tattoos that would appear backwards in mirrors. At first I was puzzled about why Sebastian had a tattoo he could never see; again I was told that he knew it was there. I wondered if it was also there to tell others what he had worked out for himself.

5.4.1 Eyes

Specific tattoos often manipulate how the viewer sees and reads an image. I saw this in the striking number of eyes tattooed onto the various participants' bodies. These included the eyes of animals, monsters and

people, some of which were looking directly out at the viewer. I thought that this returned gaze most likely signaled defiance. One particular example was Catherine's gorilla figure on her upper arm, turned to stare outward; she explained how her teammates subsequently found her intimidating. Karen's tattooed breast seems to have eyes in the flower centers that look back, meeting any viewer's gaze. Blank or empty- and hollow-eyed creatures I found particularly disconcerting, as with several skulls and devils tattooed on Kurt and Natalie. This tattoo was thought unusual by Natalie, as far fewer women, even by her own observation, wear such tattoos. More typical might be the averted gaze of the Bettie Page tattoo that signaled a demure sexuality, corresponding to Kurt's desire to "avoid sleaze," as he put it. This blank stare invited a sustained or fixed look; it held my attention as the blank eyes refused to return my gaze and retained an impenetrable, cold distance. I therefore read Karen's, Catherine's and Natalie's tattoos with their defiantly returned gaze and blank eyes as reversing any sense of objectification and ultimately resisting victimization.

Facial tattoo and, to a lesser degree, tattooed hands are particular examples of how looking is accompanied by a visual exchange. These tattoos appear to create a very particular predetermined role for the viewer. It is almost impossible not to visually engage with the owner of a facial tattoo; to see it, one must usually make eye contact. It is difficult to avoid being seen looking, as one's own eyes meet the wearer's. Thus engaged, one's reaction is noted. Perhaps tired of others' gaze, Eddie told me he wore a hood most of the time. Several facially tattooed street people also clearly expressed how they covered up and could become



invisible, or just normal as one said, when it suited him. They described how the wearing of certain clothes or baseball hats and an averted gaze or a particular walk kept their tattoos private or within their control.

The free play of my eye, looking and moving around, back and forth over the tattoos I saw, was never passive. Many different modes of visual engagement and exchange took place, not only with the representation but between the participant and myself as we also exchanged eye contact. Many tattoos at first appear to invite the viewer to unconditionally see a motif but I found this engagement was often complex as I searched to locate my perspective, a perspective that was often controlled by the wearer.

5.4.2 Visual pleasure and pride in endurance

I was surprised by the intensity of the commitment and pride participants clearly felt for their tattoos. This perfectly expressed by Dima: "Whenever I see a good solid black tattoo, my heart skips a beat... I get so excited, it brings me great joy and lifts my spirits." As Karen said, "When I see my tattoos, I go, wow!" While searching for the motivation for tattoo, I was often made aware of this sense of visual pleasure; it accompanied all the interviews.

There were also several examples of unplanned tattoos and stories that related to a spontaneous creative process. I particularly enjoyed how some participants described, waking up following a dream or getting drunk or meeting a new artist and creating a tattoo spontaneously. This was accompanied by a passionate explanation of the argument or

emotional outburst that had originally instilled the idea. Unconscious processes were commented on by both Catherine and Natalie, who only realized the associations their tattoos had in their lives some time after the work was commissioned. They enjoyed returning to explore the work later, and both Stephan and Natalie commented on the constant new meanings they kept discovering in old tattoo work. The participants seemed to really enjoy the story-telling that accompanied their pictures and designs. Kurt explained, "I love my tattoos and there's always good stories to tell." This process was variously described as being true and real, linking the emotional and intuitive with something authentic and of real value. As Catherine said, she admired tattooed people because they wear their marks proudly and have the courage of their convictions.

Chapter 6

Imagery and Symbolism

6.1 Image, symbol, simulacrum and text

In this chapter, the significance of various pictures and their content is examined. The difference between symbols and direct representations was also presented by participants. The design process is explored, as are the meanings surrounding the different forms of words, poems and songs tattooed on the participants. The themes of death and dedication formed a recurring backdrop to all the participants' explanations of their tattoo selections, as did the constant interplay with popular culture.

With one exception, all participants were engaged in ongoing work. Kurt said committed tattoo aficionados were inclined to, "give a lot more thought to the content of their tattoos than a casual customer," and I was curious to find out why and how these specific tattoos were conceptualized and created.

Contrary to what I had expected, the construction of identity, or what might include specific aspects of personality such as age, gender, ethnicity, race or religion, played a relatively insignificant role in the creation of images. When the participants wanted a picture or representation, this often involved a specific depiction of an event, person, or significant time. These things were often described as reflecting an intensely lived experience or belief; sometimes they recorded a death and its commemoration or a representation of love or devotion.

6.2 The content of the pictures

The specific tattoos included designs, representations, symbols and texts, often in combination. Many aspects of popular culture were reflected in the enormous variety of the characters, signs, symbols and representations. The celebrities chosen by the participants included the pinup Bettie Page, singer Frank Sinatra, and rock stars and musicians such as Brian Setzer, Axl Rose, Brian Eno, The Red Hot Chili Peppers, and Louis Armstrong. Several films were directly at the source of a tattoo including the sympathetic heroes Cornelius from *Planet of the Apes* and Frankenstein's monster. The films *A Clockwork Orange* and *Leaving Las Vegas* also inspired designs. Childhood cartoon characters appeared as well, but with additions, as in the way characters facial expressions or clothing were changed.

I found home and family, generally thought of as a bastion of folk art and a traditional tattoo theme, to be surprisingly absent among the participants. Where family was represented, it was symbolically incorporated into two participants' existing tattoos. For Catherine, her beloved deceased pet dog was twinned with a symbolic star pattern representing individual family members; Kurt explained how he had changed the color of a picture to pink, to symbolically include his wife.

Flowers, notably daisies, roses and peonies, and trees appeared regularly and a marijuana plant's presence signed its use. Animals were worn by seven of the participants including beloved pet dogs and cats. Birds, insects, fish and a snake were also found. Natalie pointed out that all things Japanese were in vogue at the moment and this was reflected in

Japanese mythical figures, particularly dragons and geishas, which were tattooed on five participants; one person, Catherine, had a variant of a mermaid and geisha. There were some advertising motifs including the Metropolitan Opera logo and the Mickey Bigmouth beer logo. There was one peace sign and an example of a Chinese yin and yang. Numbers were used occasionally. Objects included a staircase, masks, glasses, jukebox, dice, flags, skulls, tombstones and several stars, hearts and aces of spades. Eddie had a most unusual tattoo: a small skyline of Mount Royal in Montreal, the place where he said he was happiest. Many of the depicted objects, including advertising motifs, were also collected by the participants. Natalie collected horror film paraphernalia and Kurt had several collections of toy fantasy figures and dice. Three of the participants were musicians and had musical representations on their bodies. Any question about the individual significance of specific symbols often led to detailed anecdotes; for example, Stephan attributes the stars he wears to his family's insistence on childhood performance and his desire to shine.

6.2.1 Text

The use of text in tattoo has often included the names and initials of significant others. I found several examples of words and texts on the participants' bodies other than the names of lost loves or rock bands. These included short extracts of song lyrics, lines from poems, and sayings. All were deeply personal and associated with meaningful episodes in the participants' lives, often layered with multiple meanings. Sebastian explained that the words of his tattoo, "It's a lonesome old town," are from the title song of the movie *Leaving Las Vegas*. "It's about love and



suicide, there are so many parts of me, in there." The lyrics are explained as encompassing both the story of the film and other associations with western movies that remind Sebastian of family values, his love of music and romantic love.

Natalie wore the lyrics of an old 1960s song by Peggy Lee to evoke the memory of her grandmother, and another extract, "death or glory," from a popular rock album. The songs are integrated into memories, compressed into a single core phrase which is carefully drawn into other compositions. Texts ran over and across other pictures, inviting endless permutations. On one occasion I saw a woman had written "yeah what?" in colorful graffiti style on her arm; she explained that the phrase had two meanings, one a general invitation to question her tattoo work, the other signaling her feelings toward those who might judge her.

During my research I saw many examples of often crudely written text on street people. These included several sightings of the word "hate," clearly self-drawn or done by friends. I had assumed that these texts were directed outward, to the public, as these bold mis-spelled words, savagely carved out on flesh, startle and transgress. However, as the research progressed, I revised this perception. Apart from girls' names, Eddie had several examples of text drawn on his chest. These included the names and dates of death of lost friends. Around his neck, the horrifying "I wish I was dead" had been rather ornately hand-poked by a friend. He told me that he really meant it then and, because it was true at the time, it would stay, a testament to truth, even if he later decided to tattoo over it. A grim "Till death calls our name," he thought perhaps from a poem by Poe, was

also scribbled wildly on his body. This frightening text accompanied all his future e-mail communications, as a sort of terrifying prediction that made me concerned about his well-being. Other texts included the saying “monkey see, monkey do,” boldly written in big, slightly crooked capital letters across his back. Other words included “pain,” spelled “paine,” which at once evoked pain and sadness in me. The extraordinary words “my cell” stared out from across his chest. Here the explanation was his time in prison, or the dungeon, as he called it. I found myself immediately reading multiple meanings from the word “cell,” associating cell with the smallest unit of the body and the body—his body—as the prison.

Much of the tattoo work I saw during my research was highly emotive. Although the tattooed texts I saw were clearly legible and compelling, always forcing out an immediate, usually emotional response in me, they were described as having complex associations and memories that related to significant personal events. This led me to conclude that the text’s audience was primarily the wearer; in other words, it functions as an internal reminder.

6.2.2 Design

Where participants had opted for designs, these were almost always referred to as tribal in influence. These tribal designs did not reflect the participants’ personal cultural heritage but were always aesthetically driven by reference to their formal qualities. The process of creating these designs was often thoroughly researched via the Internet or reference books. I noted that the participants were highly informed about the origins



of their work. For example, Natalie wore a tribal piece that was originally from Borneo. Dima regularly researched ancient tribal designs with other tattooed friends on chat lines based in Moscow. His carefully worked design was created over many months, with his artist. It was eventually worked into "an inversion of a Polynesian tribal design to form a negative space that would emphasize the arm." I had incorrectly assumed that African heritage had been at the source of the ornate tattooed hands, feet and legs I encountered on a women of color, sunbathing in central Montreal, reminiscent of *mehndi* henna designs or the ancient Sudanese *saumer* (black henna) patterns worn on feet. However, according to her, they were entirely her own invention, as she had been raised in a European household. This complex pattern was created by repeatedly drawing it out in marker on her hands before a friend tattooed over it. Several participants described drawing work out first in this manner, usually in indelible pen, to live with it for a while before the final decision to tattoo was made.

Two of the participants had examples of non-representational tattoo in the form of designs and decorative patterns somewhat similar to tribal motifs with their own criteria and design process. Tattoo artists informed me that personal abstract motifs are rarely requested. Among my participants, Karen was alone in having a large abstract picture, which she had designed herself. She found the way it was diversely understood very pleasing: "Everyone who sees it likes to guess at what it is, a wheel, a wave, a shark, a nipple. People see whatever they want and say different things, it's open to different interpretations."

6.2.3 Death and devotion

The manifestation of love and devotion was present on all the participants' bodies; indeed the expression "to wear one's heart on one's sleeve" was used by three of them. This form of dedication was shown in different types of tributes. I encountered two people with tattoo tributes to jailed lovers. In both cases the wearers manifested their devotion even though they might either rarely or never see their partners again. However, the first and most discussed tribute was the dedication to deceased loved ones. Indeed, several artists informed me that commemorative tattoo art, from pictures of pets to portraits of deceased idols and lost children, is common in the trade. Customers' requests for dedications to lost relatives were described by Natalie as sometimes difficult and challenging to deal with. Tattoo artists have to present a detached façade in their role as confidant. This was sometimes difficult and sad for me to accommodate, as I found the representation of death and its commemoration the single most striking aspect of all the tattoo images I saw. Representations of this kind reappeared time and again in many variants. The death of lovers and family members was recounted to me through these pieces. I was frequently disarmed by the candor and sincerity of the moving stories that accompanied tattoos of names, flowers, crosses and hearts. I reflected considerably on how the living body was so often a site of death.

The cubist, highly stylized tombstone with roses tattooed on Kurt's upper chest was for his recently deceased sister. Her nickname, Daisy, was incorporated into the picture. This tattoo of daisies was subsequently copied by his mother and other family members and friends in an act of

communal affection and dedication to her memory. He describes these relatives' defiant celebration her life in the aftermath of such a terrible loss with great pride. Natalie described losing her lover and friends to drug addictions, as she showed me the heart that recalls their memory. Eddie dated the time and place when a lover was accidentally killed by means of a cross with her name. Another tattoo, only half completed, poignantly bears witness to the untimely accidental death of its artist, a close friend. In other ways death is also referred to more obliquely. Sebastian's tattoo directly concerns his father's near-fatal suicide attempt, while Karen describes the nearness and unexpectedness of death in her Japanese masks—tattoos associated with Hiroshima. Keeping someone near even after death is precisely what many of these tattoos seemed designed to do.

6.2.4 Talismans

Talismans seem to be related to tribal cultures. The idea of today's tattoos being described as talismans might seem oddly out of place in contemporary urban Montreal. Yet the idea of a visual charm or amulet, capable of working wonders or benefiting its wearer, was expressed in several interviews. Natalie had several devils, one with blank hollow spaces for its eyes, and another gargoyle-like figure on her arms. On close inspection of her splendid cat tattoo, I observed a tiny demonic figure placed under the cat's mouth, peeping out quite unexpectedly. Her explanation was, "I think it keeps me aware of what's out there, protecting me from the evils of the world, and it also keeps me aware of the dark side in myself."

Karen described her representation of a ladybird on her forearm as a positive symbolic omen associated with and reminiscent of happy times. Kurt also wears a talisman on his upper arm; he laughingly explained the creation of his personal lucky charm, who is based on a drawing created from a combination of a computer game character and a reference to his collection of tribal masks. This personally created little goblin originally allowed game players to cheat death. Kurt reconstructs the creature, "He's my hoodabughaa, yeah, I can't get hit, 'cause I'll be protected by my little hoodabughaa. When I get hit, I can't die, it protects me." In a parallel manner, Eddie wore several occult symbols on his body and hands and I felt they to were used, talisman-like, as signs to keep unwanted people away.

I must add that I often sensed an underlying irony and self-parody in the use of these motifs. Participants appeared aware of the impression—from slightly eccentric to downright odd—they might give. These discussions were accompanied by laughter and joking. However, all the conversations preceding the discussions of charms and talismans related to the death of a loved one. Ultimately, I felt that all these tattooed talismans represented both symbolic protection and cynical knowledge of and confrontation of one's own inevitable death.

6.2.5 Pop culture devotion

The other variety of devotional images that regularly appeared was reserved for popular musicians, celebrities or greatly admired fictional characters. When I began the research, I thought about the use of these characters in rather negative terms. They first appeared to me as little

more than superficial obsessions with the worst aspects of popular culture. By placing pictures of these stars and famous personalities on their bodies, the participants seemed to be manifesting flagrant but unconscious mimicry and, I thought, evidence of uncritical consumerism. This particularly struck me when I surveyed tattoo flash and found pictures of Elvis, Bob Marley, Dolly Parton and other musicians.

Popular culture is often deemed unworthy or trivial, driven by media moguls for gullible consumers. In a similar vein, Baudrillard's (1985) highly influential theoretical understanding of the postmodern and popular culture provides a critique that argues that there is no original point or perfect form from which all else can be copied. Our world is an unending series of copies; everything is simulacra. He presents a grim and depressing vision of a media-dominated world, suggesting that all differences are absorbed into an endless production of images populated by a world of passive observers. As Foucault (1977) indicated in his analysis of visual culture and his reference to the panopticon, people are controlled by insidious internalized forces and all visual culture is interwoven with issues of power. Catherine and other tattoo artists testify to the power of the media: customers frequently bring in magazine or CD covers to copy. Yet the participants indicated that they were able to dip into pop culture critically and at will, to select and differentiate what they wanted to use from the mass of popular culture, reconstructing these images around their interests and aspirations. As Kurt observed about young people today, "Pop culture, yeah, they want it, but then they get creative and put their ideas into it." Popular culture's perception as disposable and trivial, often linked to leisure and free time, somehow

offers an invitation and the freedom to play. Dima expressed this creativity thus: "Culture is a simulator, art is a simulator... I'm playing a persona and with these glasses I change myself."

I was surprised to be given detailed explanations of how and why particular celebrities were chosen. Sebastian, who was also musician, paid tribute to the "greatest, father of jazz," Louis Armstrong, by wearing a tattooed trumpet. Natalie's tattoos of rock and punk bands pay homage both to the bands and, as she said, to her youth. Her love of the horror genre, manifest in her apartment and the character of Frankenstein's monster is clearly painted on her upper arm. This reconstituted and recreated creature carries dozens of positive associations; she describes him as "the ideal man, the strong, silent type," who is ultimately misunderstood. Tito wears her favorite childhood fictional character, Pippi Longstocking, whom she watched on videos. Pippi symbolizes Tito's own life as a wild child who defies authority and yet manages to live happily secure, in a house by herself.

Bettie Page had an similar iconic function for Kurt. Describing how he loves women but was also anxious to avoid the sleazy pinups in popular flash, he chose something classy and durable in Bettie Page, a pornography star who appeared to enjoy her work.

In all cases, the popular characters chosen to be worn signified traits the participants liked and admired; many of these characters also carried an iconic function. They manifest a change in attitude or represent a pioneering, anti-establishment spirit that speaks of defiance and

resistance to accepted conventions. The participants identify strongly with these qualities and revere characters who have them.

Brian Eno, a revolutionary musician, is described by Dima thus: "It's not that I idolized him but he was under my skin." He then went on to describe many of the qualities of the star as things he most admires in men: sensitivity and intelligence, with the ability and confidence to reveal a feminine side. Wearing someone on one's skin may at first appear an exterior show of over-enthusiasm and devotion, something akin to a poster. Yet this membrane that is internal, bleeding and permeable also allows the tattoo to function metaphorically. The tattooed representation is also, as Dima jokingly comments, under the skin—underneath, as something taken in and drawn inside. Devotion to a pop cultural icon was not, I felt, perceived as a simple act of fandom and imitation but rather as reverence for an ideal. These representations pay tribute to carefully considered and desirable personal traits that often reflect a certain cultural resistance and transgression.

6.2.6 Symbol or simulacrum

Not all the participants were interested in using symbols even though symbol is at the core of tattoo tradition. Perhaps the absence of symbol and denial of symbolic intent most surprised me when participants sought direct representation over symbol, as in the way Kurt brought a broken glass to his artist to copy directly. I found the participants mindful of the differences between tattoo's symbolic, representational and decorative uses. As Dima said, "It's totally abstract work... it looks good and it's got to be better than some symbol. So much of tattoo is trivial. It's meaningless



to trivialize yourself into a symbol.” There were occasions when I inaccurately assumed that a symbolic association was desired; for instance, Stephan considered my suggestion of phallic symbolism in connection with the snake he wore as wholly incorrect. He made it clear that he wore the representation as an act of aversion therapy, to conquer his fear of snakes. Natalie categorically announced that there was no symbolic meaning in several of her pieces, described as being chosen on the basis of formal design elements, to visually please.

6.3 Appropriation and value

One of the obvious differences between historical or traditional art conventions and tattoo practice is in the attitude toward artistic appropriation and copy. There was little or no negative connotation associated with the idea of taking another’s work. Indeed, borrowing and paying tribute to the past are integral to tattoo history. Several participants were happy to copy styles and motifs from Native and Polynesian culture. I wondered how local Montreal tattoo culture typified or differed from that of any large urban center populated by generations of immigrants. I saw how many participants might wear Maori designs next to Chinese dragons, Japanese carp with American pop stars and Rastafarian flags. This is in part due to any notion of originality being suspect in a culture that derives its origins from copies of copies of “flash” whose origins are obscure. Certain tattoo shops allow customers to take a copy of prospective tattoos away for consideration. I felt the reasoning behind this attitude is the impact of digital technology, the regular use of the Internet by participants to research and copy all manner of international work.

The current penchant for hyperrealist representation stems not least from the photograph-toting public who require these pictures to be copied directly onto their bodies. Importantly, though, the copy is always deconstructed and added to. In this way participants personalize, own and recreate the tattoo work. They may layer over small formal changes, relocate the design or attach new symbolic meaning to it to make new, personal associations. Although these representations on the participants may at first appear to have no sense of historical or social context they are in fact firmly and personally located in the participants' lives or aesthetic sensibilities. The central or underlying significance is with the individual's sense of self. Finally, the copy is also seen as paying tribute to and honoring the cultures and the artists. In the same vein, many tattoo artists informed me they are happy to see their own work imitated and delighted that their drawings are "out there."

However, it quickly became apparent to me that tattoo culture is nonetheless hierarchical and divisive. The idea of value and the status of a tattoo artist and his or her work is determined by the perception of the artist's capacity to create an accurate representation and draw well. Accurate representational copying is highly valued. This is often associated with the fact that the old school is of lower status than the new customized work. The participants frequently asserted that they felt value was twinned with cost: a better artist charges more. Cheaper was usually seen as inferior, less trained. Considerable pride was taken in naming the best artists and paying large sums for their work. I was surprised at how frequently the same four or five well-known artists' work appeared on the participants. Karen explained that "a low-class tattoo would be badly

drawn and appear as blue stains.” I often felt that the customized tattoo was the pinnacle of the art, which to all intents and purposes mirrors many aspects of traditional art practice. The traditional old-school shops, as Catherine indicated, are primarily patronized by blue-collar workers proud of a working-class tradition. At the bottom of the hierarchy are the scratchers and autonomous tattooists, whose work is never seen in tattoo magazines. These tattoos manifest a crude or inept, emotionally overt and immediate drawing style. These vulgar works embarrass the practitioners and purveyors of old- and new-school tattoo as they both challenge old tradition with its emphasis on skill and transgress against notions of refined artistic practice.

6.4 Carrying a culture forward

Bell’s (1994) anthropological analysis of how tribal Polynesian tattooed skin carries a culture forward raises the question of what cultural readings can be made from today’s tattoo practice. As Bell states, contemporary tattoo is dislocated and not culturally specific and it would be inappropriate to make generalizations based on my participants. However, these people do literally carry around images and motifs that are drawn from our contemporary culture, the media and the objects that surround them. This does not reflect Baudrillard’s dire view of postmodernity as a world full of copied, meaningless images detached from all reference to reality; instead, we see individuals actively integrating selections of pop culture motifs into their personal reality.

Chapter 7

The Body

7.1 The body in art

Throughout the making of the video and later in the audiotaped analysis of my interviews, the dynamic relationship tattoo has with the body was to be revealed in many and diverse ways. In this chapter I present a number of recurring themes that arose concerning gender differences in many aspects of tattoo practice and the acknowledged use of the body as a signal of group membership. I also discuss how the body as a dynamic, marked, sensitive and bleeding surface, with its own history, plays a constant role in every aspect of the tattoo. I found many examples of the transformative power of tattoo, which was to be one of the most striking aspects of the entire research.

Artists' use of the human body may be as old as art itself. Evidence suggests that the original canvas for the visual arts was indeed the human body itself (Cohen, 1999). Several interview subjects recalled drawing on their skin as children; I myself remember drawing flowers on my arms in primary school. Theorizing about the body has a long and distinguished pedigree. Socrates inherited from ancient Orphic law the belief that the difference between mind and body was religious in origin, the soul being from Heaven and the body from Earth. Indeed, I found that tattoo's very carnal insistence on an absence of all things spiritual was to be a recurring feature of the participant interviews.

Several recent books on the body seek to locate it in the realm of cultural representation as a way to encode society's values and demonstrate how a culture wishes to be perceived (Cavallano, 2000). Foucault (1986) wrote about understanding the body in terms of social institutions' desire to define normality by singling out the abnormal and thereby regulating appropriate and acceptable behavior. He argued that, in a visually dominated culture, individuals internalize ideas of what is normal.

Tattoo is often associated with rebellion and transgression. I wondered how much state control and public approbation was perceived by the participants. One of my first questions concerned their first tattoos and parental attitudes. Despite a legal age of consent of eighteen, five of my participants had obtained their tattoos in established shops under the age of sixteen. These tattoos were often hidden from parents; for example, Natalie and Karen both mentioned hiding early tattoo work. There was a universal belief that anyone could easily obtain a tattoo under age and that few public health inspections regulated its practice, despite extensive regulatory guidance (Canadian Health Council, 1997). If state interference in tattoo culture was regarded as minimal, the feeling of perceived public prejudice toward the tattooed was common to all participants but widely thought to be changing. Underpinning many of my conversations was the issue of personal control of the body. The desire to improve its outside appearance was in many ways linked to an ideal—an ideal because tattoos were often unfinished or in progress and associated with internal aspirations to self-individuation and improvement.

I found that the idea of tattoo as the pursuit of an improved body was a theme that manifested itself among my respondents in the wish to enhance their bodies through decoration and embellishment. However, the interview subjects always linked the notion of an ideal body to a more profound progression toward an ideal self. This was described by all the tattoo artists I spoke with as the major aspect of the tattoo's relationship with the body.

The majority of casual tattoo customers were thought by my participant artists to be primarily interested in tattoo simply as decoration. This point is made by McPherson (2001) in a study of working-class Victorian tattoo. All of my respondents, whatever their overall intention, spoke of their work's being visually pleasing and appealing to them. For example, several women told me they really felt their tattoos "made me prettier," or "makes me complete" and Dima commented on his fully tattooed arm, "at least let it be pretty," and Karen remarked, "I have beautiful pictures on my body and I look at my body all the time and go wow!" Kurt insisted on the right look: "I liked the look... it's cool." Stephan said, "Well, it's partly for the look, it's trendy." The idea that the tattoo must be beautiful and decorative was a universally important feature of the process.

If the decision to get a tattoo was an occasion of defiance, then its execution was invariably aesthetically driven, even in the use of text. Considerable attention was paid to the appearance of the letters: style, shape and form. I concluded that a fundamental function of all public tattoos is to serve as part of an overall presentation of self that includes body piercing, clothes and hairstyle. However, it also became apparent

that, in matters decorative, there were gender differences; despite the increase in women wearing tattoos, their choices of motifs, their locations and the quantity of work undertaken differ from those of men.

7.2 Gender and the tattooed body

There was a perception among the artists I spoke with that there has been a radical increase in the number of women seeking tattoos. Indeed, the number quadrupled between 1960 and 1980. Women account for 50,000 to 100,000 tattoos per year in the United States, or half of all new work, as stated by Korn (1996: 85). The participant artists felt that women today account for half of all customers, but found the work done for them to be different in nature. Is this some sort of feminist repositioning of a traditionally male art form?

Nochlin (2000) credits the modernist period and the work of Picasso, and later de Kooning, as creating in the nude a site of cultural challenge. This began with abstraction and the abandonment of the nude as a source of erotic attraction. However, the real reclamation of what today we are more likely to refer to as the body was to come later. Many theorists see feminism as the first challenge to accepted orthodoxy concerning the nude female body. Attitudes to gender and sexuality have reflected the essentially patriarchal tradition, which has portrayed women as passive, anonymous sexual objects (Saunders, 1989). I was keen to explore contemporary tattoo cultures in relation to gender with my female respondents. Feminist theory has played a significant role in the reclaiming of art history. I wondered if there had been a reclamation in tattoo art, which has widely been perceived as a male domain.



The two female tattoo artists described tattoo culture as heavily male-dominated and were scathing in their criticism of sexist comments and gender-biased stereotypes concerning tattoo. Natalie described how she was frequently assumed to be the tattoo shop's receptionist rather than an artist. Of course, female tattoo artists are still fairly rare. Natalie said she knew most of the women artists in Montreal; they are a small group but expanding. She also commented on how few women tattoo artists there were at many of the shops.

Gubar (1997) and Campbell (1992) suggest that feminist perspectives began with the denunciation of universally male-dominated culture. Feminist art makers' use of the body has gone through a large number of changes since its earlier essentialist phase. This essentialist period of feminism, popular until the mid-1980s, was typified as the belief in a common female experience, to which all women could relate.

Essentialism is seen as referring to a notion of an ultimate essence that transcends cultural, class and racial boundaries. I asked the participants about their notion of gender expectations within tattoo culture. Many commented that casual female tattoo customers almost always selected "butterflies or something cute on their ankle." As Natalie remarked, women tend to select pictures that society will consider them "better or prettier for" and women with substantial body work are rare. Her own tattoos of skulls and traditional male motifs were greeted with surprise by her tattoo artist. Natalie, who has substantial work, added, "I've been told I'd be cute if I wasn't tattooed." Tito commented that, in the street, men felt they could "comment on your appearance because you were a

woman and not doing the expected thing, saying stuff like, 'I can't believe it's on a woman's face.'" Catherine's tattooing experience led her to say, "Women almost always choose the girl sections, butterflies, dolphins and flowers. Yeah, they come in with their moms and head straight for the butterflies."

Anti-essentialist critique is one of the most recent stages of feminist thinking and has significantly influenced theories of the body. Interestingly, the women participants were quite aware of the expectations, codes and signs emitting from what might be described as a normative, stereotypical aesthetic, but were clearly not interested in adopting these positions. Betterton (1996) has researched a number of artists who are exploring their place in Western art via the body. Seeing female identity as having been bound to patriarchy and a male aesthetic, she suggests that contemporary artists are in the process of reclaiming and reconstructing the female body.

Other artists seem to be striving to extend the boundaries of what being a woman means. Sometimes this is shocking, deeply challenging to accepted aesthetics. Consider Cindy Sherman's actively rewriting culture or Jenny Saville's and Kiki Smith's work, which features grotesque, bloated, broken or dismembered body parts in a disturbing and horrific manner. Nochlin (2000) states that this is a postmodern deconstruction which seeks to discourage any sensual reading or ideal. In effect, this seemed to be evidenced by the women participants. Committed to tattoo as an art form, they were quite aware of the preferred images many other women chose and went to some lengths to do other kinds of

work. This was done by engaging in counter-stereotypical tattoos, choosing sites that were non-enhancing, selecting original motifs and unconventionally opting for large tattooed areas. In this way, these participants break through old conventions to reconstruct their own ideal and control how they are perceived. Karen echoed a common sentiment: "I'm so not into the whole sexy babe bit."

Throughout my informal discussions with tattooed women several commented on how being a woman invited a different response, as one most typically describing a general feeling said, "its like just being a women means you get comments all the time, people think they have the right to say whatever they want about your body right to your face, as if we should look a certain way."

Of course, the link with tattoo and overt sexuality is well established. A tattoo focuses the mind on a body part and invites objectification. The tattoo process create a high degree of intimacy with the artist; the procedure involves pain and body fluids. Tattoo magazines regularly show scantily clad individuals on their covers. Gell (1986) describes the tattoo as intrinsically sexual. Most of the traditional flash in tattoo shops is geared toward men and the use of tattoos by three of the male participants immediately struck me as a sign of sexual orientation. If theorists who argue that the male body has not been so visible since antiquity (Bordo, 1999) are to be believed, then male bodies may be enjoying a revival. During the 1990s, the nude male body became available for general consumption through mass culture, namely fashion photography, advertising and the film industry. This is manifested by languid and often

seductive body poses and an averted gaze. Bordo traces this to an ancient Greek aesthetic of young male beauty, inspired by a homoerotic sensibility. This, she argues, only serves to produce another idealized male. She also notes a change in the representation of the male body, which she credits to changing social attitudes and hard-won values of equality and artistic freedom. I observed that participants wanted to focus attention on their bodies. Kurt, sporting Bettie Page, said girls really liked his funny tattoos, while Dima indicated that girls hang around tattoo artists. Stephan too signaled his sexual orientation with a man's name in plain sight on his arm. He described wanting a tattoo to be "deliberately sexy and gorgeous." This reversal of the traditional male use of tattoo operated as a highly daring transgressive act. Eddie, despite his striking facial tattoos, had "no problem finding girlfriends"; indeed, he had the names of many on his body. Tattoos were clearly seen as sexually attractive; they carry part of the old-school tradition of macho heterosexuality as they draw the eye and enhance the body. The heavily tattooed women participants' use of tattoo similarly seemed to offset the expectation of traditional female sexuality.

7.3 The visceral body

At the beginning of my dialogs with participants, my ideas about tattooing and the body involved only its surface but I later came to think of tattoo as something more visceral, that is, as involving the internal body as well. The idea of the archeology of the body grew out of conversations concerning the hidden histories as tattoos were modified, added to and changed over time. I was unprepared for and surprised by the very dynamic relationship all the participants had with their tattoos and their

bodies. This not only involved the body's skin but all aspects of its surface from skin tone, scars and hair to moles, and included other features such as the body's movement, its bones, the pain that accompanies tattooing and the skins healing.

I first noticed this dynamic relationship when the participants began to show me each individual tattoo. Quite often they stood up at this point, almost always running their hands over the tattooed surface, touching the image, while rotating the picture; many of them turned around and flexed and relaxed muscles. This also involved a visual exchange to ensure that I could see how the tattooed picture might change on the skin's surface as the body tensed and moved. Several participants had chosen tattoos that ran across bones to create contour.

The skin was constantly referred to in a whole number of ways, not so much as a simple surface but as an interacting membrane. Issues of skin color and surface features were integral to the location and design of a tattoo. Kurt informed me he chose each tattoo's color combinations on the basis of what suited the bluish tone of his skin. I also noted the inclusion of freckles and moles in pictures. Karen, for example, turned her freckles into air bubbles next to the crone-mermaid figure on her abdomen. Surface hair was always considered and shaved or, as Karen said, "You go for areas without hair, that's the thing."

The management of the skin and tattoos after work was done, including healing and the ongoing maintenance of the tattooed body, was important for the participants. Strategies for promoting healing were

explored in group chat lines, explained Dima; this is key when a substantial amount of the body has been tattooed as there is a considerable amount of healing to be managed. Thus, hints on vitamin creams and sun barriers are shared; avoidance of the sun is essential to maintain the tattoos' vibrant colors. Kurt explained, "I like to cover the tattoo in barrier creams and get a glow..."

Aging and the possibility of sagging skin, weight gain and future pregnancy were also considered and planned for. Catherine was leaving space for her future children's names, Dima cautioned against weight gain and others like Karen shared the belief that "Well, at least I'll have beautiful picture to look at when I'm old." Another tattoo customer in a shop said, "I think my skin color will look pretty good with the gray and black tones... and I think I'll be a pretty cool grandmother one day."

Leaving space on the body for future work, occasionally called "real estate" by customers and tattoo artists in shops, was important to many participants. Many had pictures in the planning stage, some had drawings ready or in progress and places on the body had already been mentally reserved or discussed and planned for with the tattoo artist. In this way, many participants showed how their tattoos had clearly been deeply reflected upon as part of the long-term management of the body.

7.4 Tattoo location

The precise location of tattoos was most at issue in relation to facial tattoos and, to a lesser degree, the hands. None of the tattoo artists I spoke to informally in shops would do them unless the customer was



already facially tattooed; my participant artists said they would not tattoo the face unless it was to cover a birthmark. Tattooing over a birthmark was familiar to the artists; Catherine felt it was a gesture to “make pretty again.” None of my participants were interested in cosmetic tattooing, that is, beauty marks, eyeliner or lip tattooing. Natalie took a somewhat cynical view of these procedures although, like many artists I spoke with, she saw them as a growing trend. The two participants with facial tattoos had either done them themselves or worked privately with friends. As Dima said, a tattoo on the face carries a subversive message; nevertheless, some months later he himself had a tattoo done under his eye. Those I met with hands that were fully tattooed, were often obscured by long cuffs, and I was surprised to hear Natalie tell me she still wore a bandage over her tattooed thumb when visiting her parents. The subversive nature of facial and hand tattoos seems to be linked to the viewer’s inability to avoid looking at and engaging in tattoos in those places.

The breast was commented upon by all the women participants; according to Catherine, the breast is one of the most often chosen locations to enhance the body. She added cynically that many female customers brought in clippings from magazines “of this year’s girl with the perfect tits,” keen to copy their tattoos. For Karen, choosing to tattoo a large area on her chest was a challenging and defiant act of reconstruction; as she put it, “I’m so flat-chested, there’s nothing there, so it’s the perfect place.”

7.5 Pain

The issue of physical pain and tattoo was discussed at some length with all participants. Inextricably linked to the tattoo procedure, I felt, must be a desire to vanquish or pass through pain. This view was not shared by any of the participants. Indeed, all of them felt that the pain of tattoo was an unpleasant side effect. There are times when getting tattooed is very painful; many examples were given and each person was quite categorical about how much they disliked the pain. The degree of pain to be endured depends on the location of the tattoo and the amount of skin to be covered. Tattoos in areas that follow the lines of bones, such as the collarbone or over the ribcage are thought particularly difficult to bear. Many subjects had withstood 20 to 25 hours of work on some of their larger pieces. Catherine captured a shared feeling when she said, "The pain was so unbearable, it made me feel so vulnerable that I just had to look away." This aversion to pain and the accompanying exhaustion and general physical demands of substantial tattoo work were expressed clearly and sincerely as something participants would rather do without. Yet, a feeling of pride at enduring pain and at being perceived as brave was also repeatedly expressed, as was the experience of exuberance following tattooing, popularly called the "high" or "post-tattoo rush."

7.5.1 Cuts, burns and brands

During filming, it became apparent that many subjects had other marks on their bodies including scars from operations and injuries. As with other surface features, these were often integrated into an overall design; for example, Kurt tattooed over his vaccination scar. I was shocked to see many examples of self-inflicted burns, cuts and brands in, under or



integrated into some participants' tattoo work. The participants had wildly differing views on these forms of body modification and tattoo. Three of them considered branding in much the same way as one might consider piercing, while others thought it quite deviant.

On more than one occasion, I could see cuts behind a tattooed surface but I was offered no explanation. A woman waiting for her tattoo artist in one shop, on the other hand, proudly displayed her burns thus: "See how beautiful the skin looks, see how the pattern of the skin is like water, I like the colors." My horror at the large areas of burns and cuts on Eddie's body was greeted with a blasé attitude: "They didn't hurt that much when you do them: hold a knife on the stove, put it on, that's it... but the healing's worse, for a while." For a moment as he watched me, I felt that Eddie enjoyed my horror. I read these marks, cuts and burns as testaments to another, deeper, pain.

7.6 Personal history and the body

What I describe here as the archeology of the body was the way in which I found myself probing at the participants' history as I was drawn to the idea of a complex rewritten or hidden past. As the research developed, I realized that the assumption of the permanence of tattoo is something of an illusion. As one of my respondents said, permanence is the preoccupation of the non-tattooed. Until I began this research, I had thought that all tattoos were irremovable. In fact, the notion of the tattoo as permanent body modification is something of a misconception. The history of each participant's tattoos might include a story of changed and overlaid images, redesigns and rewrites. Most of my respondents, and

many of the informal interviews with other artists, indicated that many had had tattoos modified in shops specializing in what are called coverups.

As I asked participants to talk me through their tattoos chronologically, I found that brilliantly colored and seemingly new tattoos could have a complex history. Old work had sometimes been added to, disguised or completely covered over. These were often described as early teenage aberrations or changes in affiliation but also included mistakes, shaky lines, badly drawn work and fading or sun damage. Touchups or redrawn works were sometimes added to and improved, colors changed or rendered more radiant. A coverup completely changes the old work, often leaving no trace. Of course, tattoos can also be lasered off. However, the more immediate and cheaper autonomous burning, cutting or use of razor blades to remove tattoos was something I often encountered. Tattoos were also blocked out or disguised by large colored areas or entirely new work. As Eddie explained when I asked about a deliberately scribbled over and obscured image, "Well, I was little then, I didn't know much, you get influenced by older kids. I covered it." I was also aware of the coverup operating as a sort of personal revisionism. These no longer desired images were sometimes passed over in silence by participants. Since they did not reveal what was hidden underneath, I was left to speculate on rejected superstars, possible gang memberships or secret lovers.

7.6.1 Group affiliation

The question of the tattooed body operating as a sign of group membership was something I explored at some length with my

participants. The idea that tattooed people are of a type and belong to certain sub-groups is a common public perception—one I think I shared as the research began. The most common groups might be assumed to be ex-convicts and soldiers and more recently, as times changed and tattoo became alternative and cool, other sorts of groups including rock musicians.

Early discussions dispelled my assumption that the fully tattooed arms I frequently saw on tattoo artists were purely a matter of convenience, the arms being easy to work on. It quickly became clear that there are areas where tattoos do operate as a sign. The showing of full sleeve tattoos sometimes also functions at another level, as code and as a sign of membership within the community of tattoo artists. Natalie and Dima confirmed this, saying it was a sign of the trade, and Catherine also commented that all tattoo artists had full sleeves; her famous uncle's arms are black with tattoos and she might eventually opt for a full body suit. Two other participants, both considering careers in tattoo, also had almost fully tattooed arms. This sign was universally agreed upon and readily understood by all those within the group.

The second area of obvious signing was the use of tattoo as an expression of shared experience. This was also touched on by several participants. As Dima commented, there is a sense of "you've been through it too"; within the group, there is knowledge of the degree of pain and the healing process that had to be endured to obtain certain designs. Participants explained how one might be attracted to others because of certain recognizable signs of group membership in the content of the tattoo.

Certain symbols, but more often names of rock bands, might align one with diverse subgroups such as “punks,” “goths” or rock aficionados. This was manifest in large shops’ flash collections where the flash is thematically collated. My participants thought these signs, often done in youth, to be an unreliable indicator.

Stephan, who lives as an openly gay man, signals his sexual orientation with a man’s name tattooed in a prominent place, even at some personal risk, as he wants people to see him as he really is. Signs can operate effectively within a sympathetic group but, away from his community, he explained that the homophobic see him as deviant. The wearing of “your colors,” as Dima put it, is not without danger—or potential embarrassment if those wearing them change their affections. As Natalie mentioned, she tries to persuade customers to opt for symbolic representations rather than lovers’ names, knowing she “would see them back in the shop within a year for a coverup.”

7.6.2 Tattoo location as a sign of group membership

Facial tattoos first struck me as a certain indication of belonging to a marginal community, perhaps punks and homeless travelers. I read this sign as a statement of being outside society; however, this was not a universal interpretation according to my anecdotal conversations with street people or with the two facially tattooed participants. My own feeling was that the facial tattoo was perceived as a sign of extreme deviance; it signaled the desire to be seen as marginalized or even outside society. I witnessed considerable prejudice against facial tattoos in the reactions of aghast and gaping members of the public, who

pointed openly during my conversations with people wearing facial work. Several facially tattooed people acknowledged that the public treated them rudely or appeared afraid when they saw them. I wondered following my conversations with street people about the possibility of a facial tattoo operating as a sign of group membership or having a political or anarchic significance.

When I asked whether the facially tattooed belonged to any particular group sharing any political alignment, from anarchist groups to anti-world-trade demonstrators, I felt these questions were greeted with a bemused familiarity. Eddie said he was asked that question often and spoke of police harassment as his tattoos are often read as signs of criminal intent. "I don't find much in common with kids with facial tattoos today. Like ten years ago, there weren't so many of us, we hung together, maybe it meant something then, and I reckon I knew most people with facials. We were the first travelers, like a community, a bit maybe, and you could tell. Now, it seems like just about everyone's tattooed." I concluded that assumptions about types of tattooed people showing recognizable signs was born of prejudice. Even in a small group of tattooed individuals, there was so much diversity and difference that any assumptions about sign and group membership should only be accepted with extreme caution.

7.6.3 Tattoo as a transforming process

The idea of the tattoo moving beyond the skin's surface and interacting with the participants as an agent of change or source of transformation became apparent throughout the research process. I saw many examples of how tattoos were described as being primarily for the

subjects themselves. This was evidenced by the unexpected number of private tattoos and the way in which tattoos are often hidden from public view. I had noticed, for example, how Tito carefully folded tissue paper inside a hat to conceal her facial tattoo. Other participants had tattoos below the waist or kept them covered at all times. The function of private tattoos seemed to address another, personal, agenda. What seemed to be happening was a constant interplay between the tattooed image and the quest for an ideal or desired trait.

Participants described using their tattoos to change themselves. I observed that there were two different ways in which this was demonstrated. First, there is the issue of ownership and control or mastery over one's own body. I felt this ultimately related to mastery over the participant's own sense of self and the capacity to transform oneself. This was voiced by nearly every participant when they said that their tattoos were just for them, or exclaimed that they could do what they liked as "it's my body." As Karen said, "It's something I can control... it's the body I chose." Stephan also commented on how the use of the body expresses the desire "to take the body farther and bring out who you really are," and Karen felt, "I am taking advantage of the fact I am a body, I am changing it."

Secondly, once it is clear that the body is owned, the participants showed that it could be changed or improved and transformed into something better, perhaps closer to an ideal. Many participants spoke of preferring their body now. Tito said she felt prettier. Karen said her body was better and she was happier. Dima said that, before becoming tattooed, he was

different, he had been shy, but now, tattooed, he had definitely changed himself: "by playing a persona, I transformed myself." Natalie spoke of transformation, describing the images she wore as tattoos of metamorphosing creatures, butterflies and dragonflies: "they started ugly and became beautiful." Even her use of Frankenstein's monster reminded me that he was a manmade creation, transformed into a living creature. I could not but feel she was describing her professional transformation. The transformed body often seemed to facilitate or record a change in behavior and self-concept.

The idea of using tattoos as a means of transformation can be related to the notion of the term "transaction," all experience as a form of co-constitutive relationship or transaction between the organism—in this case, the body—and its environment, that is, everything that surrounds us. The boundaries of the skin and body are not fixed but mutually influence and impact on all aspects of the surrounding environment. Sullivan also describes the dynamic between the body and the world as the way "a people live across, through and within their skin" (Sullivan 2001:17.) This is a perpetual process or continual exchange which rejects any idea of a separation between subject and object, individuals and their world. Furthermore, it also avoids any assumption of nature-nurture or mind-body dualism. This is somewhat similar to Neisser's (1988) model of differing kinds of self-knowledge, which I used in planning the research methodology. Our interactions with the environment are explained as part of our consciousness, which impacts on one's construction of our self-concept. In this case, the tattoo on the skin's surface is the immediate environment,

created by the wearer to carry and emit signs first and foremost to him- or herself.

I found myself thinking about how many times participants expressed their definition of beauty on their own bodies, thereby making themselves beautiful and constantly reflecting back and reinforcing their beliefs. This, I felt, could be deeply validating. Tattoos were also used to reinforce an experience: the tattoo reminded the wearer of how transformation can also be achieved through a change in behavior. I noted how many of the texts on the participants' bodies operated as reminders and strategies to change habits or old patterns of behavior. Thus, one tattooed subject said the old rhyme, "a stitch in time saves nine," which was written on her arm, served as a reminder to herself, "to take care about what you don't do for people, till it's too late and they get into trouble." Eddie's dates and names of dead friends killed in train accidents were, I felt, also highlighting his awareness of the inherent dangers of train-hopping; he told me he takes care now. Texts also appeared as cautionary tales, as a reminder of transient relationships and of a desire to not repeat the mistakes of the past. For example, Natalie said the text on her arm, "So easy to remember, so hard to forget," expressed her regret at not taking advantage of and appreciating time with deceased loved ones.

Texts, like pictures, can be reread and re-experienced. I thought that in identifying and naming an experience or problem visually, some participants were clearly working through a life-changing event. Sebastian said his text is to never forget a traumatic event: his father's attempted suicide. His tattoo operates as a visual shorthand: "My tattoo

marks that time and will remind me what I went through and that families stick together, no matter what." This tattoo took two years to design and was clearly a move toward resolution. I began to see how a tattoo might favor reconciliation with oneself and with difficult experiences. I thought about the impact of reading a message every day. As Natalie said, "What won't kill you will make you stronger," when she described her use of the words "death or glory," written on her arm, as referring to loss and suffering.

Finally, there were examples of how tattoo had another transforming effect through the reaction of others. As both Natalie and Stephan indicated, the tattooed image has a life of its own; each viewer responds and reacts differently to what they see. This means a tattoo may acquire a new or unintended meaning, which may have to be argued against or endlessly defended. Many women participants described how their tattoos signaled a perceived "toughness" which caused viewers to distance themselves. For instance, when Catherine appeared on a basketball court with a gorilla tattooed on her shoulder, her teammates "were real scared." People with facial tattoos are treated differently: they are stigmatized. In this way they are fitted into predetermined roles and stereotypes by others' perceptions.

The functions of the tattooed body have been shown to be multifarious. Some suggestions from my early literature review indicated that tattoo is the fundamental medium for the expression of spiritual belief, and that it has never been more widespread (Wojic, 1989). Yet, perhaps unexpectedly, I found few examples of the spiritual. If any general

conclusion may be drawn from the participants here, it reflects a reversal of the old mind-body duality. The tattooed body implies: "I exist as a body, it is my body which defines me."

It may be that in tattoo culture the body is no longer whole but always reconstructed through a process of transaction. It is reinvented, not only on the surface but also—and somehow simultaneously—internally, thereby profoundly altering our relationship with ourselves. Technological advances allow us to change and control the body as never before. Unlike traditional art practice, in tattoo art, the body itself is the artwork. Art making that uses the body directly involves a serious questioning of accepted orthodoxy as to what defines art but this too is changing; tattoo has, broadly speaking, transferred into the high art domain.

Zeglin-Bland (2000) feels that this variety of body art is a direct commentary on how women have been commodified and codified by centuries of artistic practice. The link between aesthetics and ethical issues is a central and recurring theme. Over the last twenty years, body art has, according to Danto (2000), "seen a rejection of a categorical imperative" (p. 78), and I felt this was apparent in the contemporary tattoo art. The women participants, for example, were clearly refusing any categorization and reclaiming their bodies on their own terms.

Artists are creating culture and expressing the enormous diversity and range of differences in what it means to represent the body. However, there may be a need for vigilance against universal explanations of highly complex and diverse forms of artistic expression. It might be tempting,

particularly when there is much focus on the social context of art, to see all artistic practice involving the body as emanating from dominant philosophical and social theories.

In this regard, I feel there is ample evidence of individual agency, indicating that individuals are anything but subject to dominant ideologies. I was pleasantly surprised to see the active character of the participants as makers of culture rather than passive drones registering what was fed to them by the all-powerful media or internalized codes of normality, as suggested by Foucault (1984). The historical marginalization of tattoo, and the common revulsion against body modification may be rooted in the early philosophical disdain of the flesh. This may further reflect a belief that to decorate and adorn oneself is somehow superficial, transient and less worthy than traditional artistic practice. Hanson (1993) describes the philosophical fear of embodiment as ultimately reflecting the fear of death. I found many examples of a candid confrontation with the inevitability of death among the tattooed participants, reminding me of how the tattooed living body simultaneously invokes a reminder of mortality. Yet, the Cartesian separation of mind and body, so pervasive in Western culture, has largely been superseded by a belief that the world and individuals are essentially physical.

7.7 The carnal

Many aspects of tattoo practice among these participants seem to express a desire to improve oneself, externally and internally. Yet the tattooed body is very far from a romanticized ideal. Being wholly material, it is defiantly and insistently low and vulgar: directly connected to pain,

seeping fluids, hairs, moles and scars. Many of the aspects of the tattoo process are relegated to the private, semimedical domain like the unpleasantness of pain and the banality of shaving. In these ways, the marginalization of tattoo can be explained as also related to a fear of the body's fragility and its implicit mortality. Tattoo's association with all aspects of the body makes it appear somewhat coarse and unpleasant, even distasteful. Ultimately reminiscent of all things carnal, tattoos signify a transgression against normative aesthetic theory.

Chapter 8

Final reflection

8.1 Educational implications

In this chapter, I summarize the main findings and reflect on tattoo as a form of personal as opposed to communal resistance. I also refer to the participants relationship with an aesthetic of the everyday, explore the notion of community and difference and consider potential future research. In undertaking this research, I hoped to reveal hidden discourses and ultimately develop connections that might expand curricular content in order to further the relationship between visual culture and its pedagogical applications. My overall conclusions with regard to the specific areas under investigation revealed many surprising issues that have direct relevance to teaching practice.

I began this study by wondering why art students tattooed their bodies. I had little idea how much I might learn and experience through this research process. This meant not only confronting prejudgments on the tattooed but also abandoning any pre- conceived notions on tattoo motivation. The only way to access the respondents motivations was by respectfully attending to and accepting their idea's and opinions empathically. To gain their confidence I had to be prepared to establish engaging relationships, in unknown settings, sometimes with dogged determination. This required entering their world on their terms. Yet, little could have prepared me for what was often a series of emotional and demanding encounters. I certainly laughed with the respondents but was sometimes also moved to tears.

This research approach forced me to remain conscious of my own beliefs, presentation, body movements, eye contact and thoughts as they influenced the relationship with the respondents.

The new Quebec curriculum (MEQ, 2001) requires that educational practice reflect the everyday reality and experiences of individual students. There is no better example than tattoo culture which was revealed as an extraordinary rich and diverse world of remarkable people using tattoo as a complex language for a range of life experiences.

8.2 Summary of findings

In responding to the question of why the participants chose to engage in tattoo, I found a range of complex motives. Most importantly, I clearly heard the participants' often-expressed desire to decorate and take pleasure in the process of changing themselves. I have no doubt that the decision to become tattooed is always primarily aesthetically driven. The desire to assert individual difference was informed by and related to lifestyle choices. The participants consistently expressed their decision continue with tattoo as considered and deliberate. The notion that some tattoos operate as visual signifiers representing a particular moment in time was a common thread for many, but not all, participants. Here participants were not recording where they had been or something they had seen but were rather recording an emotional event.

I was most surprised at the secret and hidden aspect of tattoos. The displaying of tattoos and the public perception of a desire to "show," or attract attention was just one of many other motives. These included a complex array of deliberately constructed visual exchanges related to

looking, seeing and gazing at the image. Many participants' tattoos engaged the viewer on different terms for different purposes.

The analysis of why and how specific pictures were created revealed a choice of designs, patterns and motifs drawn from a wide range of copies and reproductions from both past and present sources, including other cultures and traditions. The use of representation was overwhelmingly informed by reference to all manner of daily activities and objects. Other motifs were drawn from popular culture, including songs, films, celebrities, computer games and television. Participants also included several representations of their personal collections of much loved objects. The recurring themes of creating tributes to death and devotion and integrating them into horror or humorous motifs seemed to represent a strategy for dealing with personal trauma.

I found that tattoo culture was embedded in many aspects of popular culture and I have often observed student art teachers' hesitance and caution about including popular culture in lesson planning and presentations. Traditional, historical art forms are routinely selected over popular cultural ones, which are often described as fun but trivial. Williams (1983) has suggested that popular art and culture are seen as lower in status; the many meanings given to the term "popular" are usually perceived as negative. One definition might include the personal things and objects a lot of people like, and I feel that students often perceive such things as simply being too ordinary or banal. Williams says popular objects and behaviors are often seen as lower in value, once everything which is perceived as "high art," (Williams 1983:11) such as

painting or classical music, and their association with wealth and education has been separated out and identified. "Popular" can also be pejoratively used to mean something employed to curry favor or be motivated primarily for pecuniary gain. However, it can also mean something made for and by the average person, and I feel this best reflects its meaning and allows us as educators to question how popular culture both shapes and is shaped by wider cultural practices.

The study of popular culture should explore issues of motivation and value as well as production and consumption, as indicated by Hall (1980). The participants were certainly happy to embark on such an exploration, as they clearly had diverse and even fractured relationships with popular culture and employed somewhat self-questioning and reflexive devices to question assumptions of passive media consumption. This allowed them sometimes to distance themselves from the new information technologies and assert their individual agency, in ways that I felt critiqued assumptions about passive consumerism. What was most enjoyable to witness was their resistance and the playful way they personally manipulated representations, sometimes employing strategies of turning mass media against itself. In this way I felt the participants were critical and sophisticated consumers of contemporary culture.

The body's visceral nature indicates how tattoo creation is directly linked to both the body's surface and its skeletal structure, muscles and internal workings. Through a constant reference to and reinforcement of images and texts, the participants engaged in a transactional relationship with their bodies to transform themselves. I was not surprised to find that

gender differences were shown to be present in many aspects of tattoo's relationship with the body. Images were defiantly presented as resistant and counter-stereotypical strategies by the women participants, who revealed some forcefully held opinions of societal expectations.

My notion of the permanence of tattoos was shown to be unfounded as so many participants changed or removed work. It appeared that tattoos were changed to accommodate the participants own changing values or ideas. In this way the tattooed body is dynamic and always changing. The discussions that arose from the relationship between the body and tattoo often seemed to reflect a quest for an ideal, as the body was used as a site to display beliefs and affections and function as an arena for potential change and resolution.

8.3 An aesthetic of the everyday

I was quickly made aware of the participants awareness of and sensitivity to their immediate surroundings. The pictures the participants chose were objects from their everyday lives. The media images worn were drawn from film, television, video, computer games and chat lines. These things are part of their everyday experiences—the things they see and do routinely. I wondered how this might be relevant or even transferable into an educational setting. There seems to be an endless number of possible ideas and strategies for inviting students to critique and review their worlds. I have found that students often look bewildered when asked to describe their daily aesthetic experience; indeed, there appears to be a deeply embedded idea that art is somehow removed from the real world (Donovan, 1993). Yet I found their use of everyday events and objects in



the participants art inspiring, authentic and moving in that they served to describe and translate human experience simply and directly.

A study of tattoo might enable students to integrate diverse perspectives into their everyday lives and reflect on their environment, to critically see and analyze the impact of popular culture in their world. By developing evaluative and critical strategies, students can locate issues concerning the process of production and consumption of culture. It might also be useful to consider how focusing on the methodologies of analysis can provide transferable skills for considering the high art world. Perhaps more importantly, it might be valuable to reflect on the possibility of finding mechanisms to instill some of the enthusiasm, passion and commitment the participants felt for the beauty and value they saw in their everyday surroundings. This might require strategies to sensitize attention to the everyday the objects places and things we interact with daily.

8.4. Alternative and resistant?

I realize that I began this research with a range of stereotypes and prejudices, I felt there must be a common anti-establishment sentiment underpinning tattoo culture. I found that tattoo operates as an alternative or resistant aesthetic, in three quite specific ways: firstly in the use of the gaze and the process of visual engagement, as this challenges any immediate, simple reading and demands engagement; secondly in the choice of motifs and the interface with pop culture, often demanding an emotional response that is sometimes linked to shock and humor, thereby defying established notions of refined distance; thirdly, and perhaps at its most transgressive, in the relationship with the carnal body and the

accompanying fear of pain and blood-borne disease and possibly even death.

However, transgressive or resistant cultural practices are not necessarily always radical or progressive. Tattoo struck me as conservative in many respects in that it seeks to preserve and idealize the past. I ultimately felt tattoo practice to present a form of personal resistance that was neither radical nor counter-hegemonic.

8.4.1 Community or difference ?

Several participants mentioned the "tattoo community" and this powerfully evoked an ideal model. On reflection I believe it is one I held at the onset of the research. Community may be said to require unity or fusion of individuals in symmetry with a whole as the social ideal (Sallah, 1996). However, the notion of a community of marginal and alternative cultural groups may be a false one, perhaps based on a romantic illusion that denies difference.

At the beginning of the research, I anticipated finding more evidence of group membership and common resistance founded on a pool of like-minded people. In fact, though, I found no evidence of a tattoo community; rather, there were diverse people pursuing different objectives for sometimes contradictory reasons.

The proposal of community resistance is often accompanied by the notion of a common cause shared by like-minded people (Radford Ruether, 1992). Yet the idea of the self as a unified subject has been

questioned by Neisser (1989). According to the argument, what one says and does has a multiplicity of meanings, sometimes hidden and not always understood. Several participants echoed this idea saying they only later understood the meanings underlying their art work after careful consideration. Neither the individual nor society is a unity and therefore neither is transparent or overtly knowable to others. This became apparent to me during the research process both by monitoring my own vacillations and by using Neisser's model to understand differing types of self-knowledge. This was also demonstrated by the reconstructed pasts and presents of the participants and the fact that they invariably acknowledged that they did not feel they fully knew themselves.

A desire for identification and reciprocal perspective can hamper attempts to reveal heterogeneity. The ideas of a shared experience and the belief in communal oneness have, I feel, often enabled marginal groups to be perceived as "other." This may in part also explain why tattoo has been perceived as deviant. This was supported by the wide-ranging and sometimes contradictory meanings given to tattoo culture and practice, as evidenced by the range of different shops, groups and individuals pursuing quite unrelated aspects of tattoo culture. Plumwood (1994) recommends acknowledging difference and non-exclusion and describes a theory of unassimilated otherness or the politics of difference. This might lead to a more holistic understanding of social relations so that means of expressing disparate movements and discourse, even within groups, can be developed. The potential politics of difference demonstrates an inexhaustible and exciting heterogeneity. I am concerned that reconstructionist theories that insist on the concept of

community, with its emphasis on homogeneity and empathy through shared meaning, may represent a paradigm shift back to a modernistic notion of universal experience.

8.5 Future research

An in-depth ethnographic approach to hidden or marginalized cultural practice illuminates people's experience in their own terms. However, I concluded this approach to research, and particularly the video accompaniment, was very challenging. Perhaps the most difficult aspect was endeavoring to sustain eye contact and make genuine responses while filming. A second person to operate the camera might have made this research much easier but would no doubt have impinged upon the intimacy and immediacy of my involvement and the participants' responses. Indeed the open and honest dialogues achieved through in depth interviewing was at the core of the research process. I was also both disappointed and frustrated when participants withdrew text and frequently challenged by deeply revealing personal information. Yet, despite these reservations I feel this use of a hand held camera informed by an ethnographic approach to research is one I am keen to engage in again. I feel it is transferable into many other potential research settings. For example, most particularly among closed or marginalized groups where a visual component can bring unique insights and where spontaneous and natural dialogue is at its most honest and revealing.

The study of tattoo practice and culture revealed an immensely rich and diverse field. There are many areas that merit further investigation. In particular the history of flash and repertoire drawings are under-

researched. Both the history and study of new forms of tattoo flash and portfolios created by the up-and-coming new wave of women tattoo artists may add different experiences and voices to the practice of tattoo. The complex and creative relationship between body adornment and the presentation of the self in its close association with popular culture also merits continued study.

However, one of the most compelling areas I would like to pursue is the art of the untrained, autonomous tattoo artists and scratchers, particularly transients and street people. The desire to decorate oneself and to record meaningful events, despite marginalization and lives of extreme hardship, is extraordinary and compelling.

The pursuit of tattoo art was demonstrated to be an empowering tool for the participants in this study, as described in the specific and unique nature of their artworks and art-making experience. These representations expressed pain as well as aspirations and achievements. The participants' art created knowledge and insights for them in a variety of ways, sometimes highlighting awareness and thereby effecting change. There is no doubt that this is valid and vital. Indeed, at no point throughout this research did I ever feel that the individual subjectivity that was created through their diverse interpretation of sign, symbol and texts resulted in an impersonal or meaningless world; rather, it gives rise to a unique and fascinating one.

Bibliography

- Armstrong, M., and McConnell, C. (1994). Tattooing in adolescents: More common than you think; The phenomenon and the risks. *Journal of School Nursing, 10*(1), 22-29.
- Baudrillard, J. (1994). *The Illusion of the end*. Translated by R. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bellman, B.L. and Jules-Rosette B. (1977). *A paradigm for looking: Cross-cultural research with visual media*. Norwood: Ablex Publishing Corporation.
- Betterton, R. (1996). *An intimate distance: Women artists and the body*. New York: Routledge.
- Bordo, S. (1990). Feminism postmodernism and gender skepticism. In *Feminism postmodernism*. Nicholson, L. (Ed.). New York and London: Routledge.
- Burg, B. (1995). Tattoo designs and locations in the old U.S. Navy. *Journal of American Culture, 18*(1), 69-75.

Bradley, J. (2000). Body commodification? Class and tattoos in Victorian Britain. In *Written on the body*. Caplan, J. (Ed.). New York: Reakon Press.

Canadian Health Council (1997). Infectious disease control. Tattoo and body piercing, guidelines for practioners.
www.ccsd.ca./links.html.

Campbell, K. (1992). *Critical feminism*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Caplan, J. (2000). *Written on the body*. New York: Reakon Press.

Cavallaro, D. (1998). *The body for beginners*. New York: Writers and Readers Publishing.

Cohen, T. (1999). *The tattoo*. London: Greenwich Editions.

Cunningham, I. (1988). Holistic research: Researching self managed learning. In *Human Inquiry in action*. Reason, P. (Ed.). London: Sage.

Danto A. (2000). Beauty and beautification. In *Beauty Matters*. Zeglin-Bland, P. (Ed). Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

De Beauvoir, S. (1963). *The second sex*. Harmonsworth: Penguin.

DeMello, M. (2000). *Bodies of inscription*. New York: Duke University Press.

Derrida, J. (1972). *Writing and difference*. London: Routledge.

Douglas, J. (1985). *Creative Interviewing*. London: Sage.

- Donovan, J. (1993). Everyday use and moments of being; Toward a nondominative aesthetic. In *Aesthetics in feminist perspective*. Hein, H. and Korsmyer, C. (Ed.). Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Duncam, P. (1999). A case for an art education of everyday aesthetic experiences. *Studies in Art Education*, 40 (4), 295-311.
- Fedorenko, J., Sherlock, S. and Stuhr, P. (1999). A body of work: A case study in tattoo culture. *Visual Arts Research*, 27(2), 109-114.
- Finch, J. (1993). It's great to have someone to talk to: Ethics and politics of interviewing women. In *Social Research: Philosophy, Politics, Practice*. Hammersely M, (Ed.). London: Sage Publications.
- Flemming, J. (2000). The Renaissance Tattoo. In *Written on the body*. Caplan, J. (Ed.). New York: Reakon Press.
- Foucault, M. (1979). *Discipline and Punish*. New York: Vintage Press.
- Gell, A. (1993). *Wrapping in Images: Tattooing in Polynesia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Grunenberg, C. (1997). *Gothic*. Cambridge, Mass. & London: The MIT Press.
- Gustafson, M. (2000). The tattoo in the late Roman empire and beyond. In *Written on the Body*. Caplan, J. (Ed.). New York: Reakon Press.
- Gubar, S. (1998). What ails critical feminism? *Critical Inquiry*, 24 (3), 879-902.

- Hall, S. (1980). Encoding/Decoding in culture, media, language. In *Working papers in cultural studies*. Hall S. (Ed.). London: Hutchinson Publishing.
- Hammersley, M. (1993) . *Social Research: Philosophy Politics and Practice*. London: Sage Publications.
- Hanson, K. (1993). The philosophic fear of fashion, aesthetics and feminist scholarship. In *Aesthetics in feminist perspective*. Hein, H. and Korsmeyer, C.(Ed.). Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Henwood, K. and Pigeon, N. (1993). Qualitative research and theorizing. In *Social research: Philosophy, politics and practice*. Hammersley, M. (Ed). London: Sage Publications.
- Hastrup, K. (1992). *Anthropological visions: Some notes on visual and textual authority*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Hewitt, K. (1997). *Mutilating the body: Identity in blood and ink*. New York: Bowling Green University Press.
- Herivel, A. (1996). A voyage between tide and time: Creating research in the studio. In *Canadian Review of Art Education*, 23(2), 55-71.
- Huyssen, A. (1990). *Mapping the postmodern*. New York: Bloomingdon.

- Isaac, J. (1996). *Feminism and contemporary art: The Revolutionary power of womens laughter*. New York: Routledge.
- James, W. (1890) 1978. *The principles of psychology*. Miller G. (Ed.). London: Penguin.
- Jones, C. (1987). Stigma tattooing and branding in Graeco-Roman antiquity. In *Journal of Roman Studies*, LXXII(2), 139-55.
- Jupp, V. and Norris, C. (1993). Traditions in documentary analysis. In *Social research: Philosophy, Politics and Practice*. Hammersley, M. (Ed.). London: Sage Publications.
- Joyappa, V. and Self, L. (1996). Feminist research methodologies as collective self-education and political praxis. In *Convergence*, XXIX(3), 16-22.
- Keith, C. (1997). Politics, art and education: The positive postmodern challenges to aesthetics and traditional western education. In *Canadian Review of Art Education*, 22(1), 40-55.
- Knauff, B. (1999). *From primitive to postcolonial*. Detroit: University of Michigan Press.
- Kopp, S. (1977). *Back to one: A practical guide for therapists*. London: Science Books.

- Korn, K. (1996). Body adornment and tattooing: Clinical issues and state regulations. In *Physician assistant*, 5(20), 85.
- Kuehnast, K. (1992). Visual imperialism and the export of prejudice: An exploration of ethnographic film. In *Film as Ethnography*, Crawford, P.I. and Turto, D. (eds.), New York: Bearl.
- Lautman, V. (1994). *The new tattoo*. New York: Abbeville.
- Lasn, K. (1999). *Culture Jam: The uncooling of America*. New York: Eagle Brooks.
- Lee, R. (1994). *Doing research on sensitive topics*. London: Sage.
- Leggo, C. (1998). Opening texts: Deconstruction and responding to poetry. In *Theory into practice*, 37(3), 185-191.
- Loizos, P. (1993). *Innovation in ethnographic film: From innocence to self-consciousness, 1955-85*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Lombroso, C. (1896). The savage origin of tattooing. In *Popular science monthly*, 4(1896), 793-803, [www. maps. jcu. au/hist. stats. lobo. ro. html](http://www.maps.jcu.au/hist.stats.laboro.html).
- Maescia-Lees, E. F. and Sharpe, P. (1996). *Tattoo, torture, mutilation and adornment*. New York: Wilsingham Press.
- Mead, M. (1928). *An inquiry into the question of cultural stability in Polynesia*. New York: A.M.S. Press.

- Mies, M. (1993). Towards a methodology for feminist research. In *Social Research: Philosophy, politics and practice*. Hammersley, M. (Ed.). London: Sage.
- Mifflin, M. (1997). *Bodies of subversion: A secret history of women and tattoo*. New York: Juno Books.
- McGuire, S. (1995). *Narrative interpretation: Personal and collective storytelling*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.
- Nicholson, L. (1990). *Feminism/ Postmodernism*. New York: Routledge.
- Neisser, Y. (1988). Five kinds of self knowledge. In *Cognitive Psychology*, 1(1), 35-68.
- Nochlin, L. (2000). The naked and the dread. In *Tate: The art magazine*, 1(21), 15-23.
- Plumwood, V. (1994). *Feminism and the mastery of nature*. London: Routledge.
- Popkewitz, T. (1984). *Paradigm and ideology in educational research*. Great Britain: The Falmer Press.
- Reason, P. (1988). *Human Inquiry in action*. London: Sage.
- Rodgers, C. (1961). *On becoming a person*. Boston: Homewood Dorsey Press.
- Radford-Reuther, R. (1992). *Gaia and God*. San Francisco: Harper Collins.

- Rubin, A. (1988). Tattoo renaissance. In *Marks of civilization: Artistic transformations of the human body*. Rubin A. (Ed.). Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Sallah, A. (1997). *Ecofeminism as politics*. London and New York: Zed Books.
- Sanders, C. (1994). *Customizing the body*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Saunders, G. (1989). *The Nude: A new perspective*. London: Herbert Press.
- Silverman, D. (1993). *Interpreting qualitative data*. London: Sage.
- Sullivan, S. (2001). *Living across and through skins*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Williams, R. (1983). *Keywords*. London: Fontana.
- Wojcik, D. (1986). *Punk and new tribal art*. Mississippi: Mississippi University Press.
- Young, M. (1990). The ideal of community and the politics of difference. In *Feminism Postmodernism*. Nicholson L. (Ed.). New York and London: Routledge.
- Zeglin-Bland, P. (2000). *Beauty matters*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Appendix 1

Example Consent Form

Voluntary Agreement to Participate in Research Project

The subject, content and purpose of this research has been fully discussed with and explained to me. I have freely agreed to participate in this research project as an active participant and entirely of my own free will.

This research includes the use of transcripts and video tape material made during our discussions. I understand the contents of the recorded material are strictly for academic use only.

Signature.....

Signature.....