

**Západočeská univerzita v Plzni**

**Fakulta filozofická**

**Diplomová práce**

**Forming the Social Body: Tattoo between the  
Individual and the Social**

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**Katedra antropologie**

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**Diplomová práce**

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Individual and the Social**

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Prohlašuji, že jsem práci zpracoval(a) samostatnì a použil(a) jen uvedených pramenù a literatury.

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I would like to dedicate this paper for my parents: Stanisława and Bogdan Brzeziccy, and for my greatest friends and supporters during the time of my anthropological studies: Eva Pušová and Michal Damek.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Tattoos and tattooing represent the main topic of this thesis. The project aims at exploration of the relationship between the body and the social world it is embedded in. The case study focuses on the contemporary members of Poland and Czech societies. For my research I decided to comprehend tattoos as strong way to kind of self- presentation: showing point of views, feelings, ideological connections and visions (in many ways, for example: political, religious, sub-cultural, ideological and self-expressive). I want to follow both processes of primary creation of the idea of tattoo only in mind, and secondary reflections, which is starting straight after putting ink under epidermis. I also want to answer the following questions: How could tattoos present ideological views of their owners? How could tattoos correspond with theme membership in sub-cultural, political or religious groups? How could tattoos present any form of personal rebel or dissatisfaction? What are symbolical contents and elements of tattoos? How could looks individual process of creating and making tattoo inside mind in perspective of their owner?

For finding answers for those questions I decided to conduct both practical research and theoretical comparisons. I mainly would like to find way of forming “social body” in contemporary society by signifying it in way of tattooing. I mostly concentrate on individual and/or social behaviors and reasons for making this decision. And also for their consequences, reflections and feelings present in minds of their owners, before and after process of tattooing.

Also I would like to pay attention to forms and transformations of contemporary motives and reasons for having tattoos, which I would like to partly compare with “traditional” meaning of having tattooed skin as way into “tribe’s membership” and strictly collective consciousness. I want to visibly separate these two periods and outline fundamental differences between them both in visual, meaningful and symbolical ways of interpretations of tattooing.

Beside the ideological interpretation I am not going to refuse contemporary process of tattooing body as phenomenon with visual core. This form of body modification could be perceive as element of social “fashion”. In their complete and

completive form, all symbolical meanings are transforming into vogue or style, characteristic for specific ages, places or environments.

For introduce the topic I will present some, particular information about how process of tattooing looks, where and when we can find their roots and how it is preparing in technical way. I want to shortly follow traditional way of development tattoo in history (mostly in Australian and Asian areas) and changing these forms for contemporary tattoo-scene that I analyze during practical research. I would like to pay attention only for tattoos made freely after decision of their owner, so I knowingly and purposely want to leave episodes of forced-made tattoos in history outside my own research and analyze.

For theoretical point of my research I choose classical form of symbolism of human body, represented by Mary Douglas. I would like to emphasize, that my choice is not accidental. I am conscious of existing newer and fresher streams of interpretation human body, but that older one is in my opinion most complex and fulfilled, and made me excellent, wide base for compare with my observation concentrated on the phenomenon of contemporary tattooing. This sympathy for the "old-style" of anthropological theories is in my case also connected with my ethnologic education in Poland, where I gained deep respect for classical currents of anthropology, which I want to us in compare with contemporary research and analyze. This way of work, in my opinion, could "justify" my base in quite old, theoretical sources. In course of my work I am also under inspiration of Roland Barthes and his structural analyzes of fashions and trends in contemporary society that I use it for illustration of huge popularity and wide environment of distribution tattoos in the popular culture of contemporary society.

For practical part of my thesis I made ten, wide interviews with ten respondents separately, and used their results as material for comparative analyzes of main streams, similarities and differences of self-interpretations in frame of having tattoo in perspective of their owners. In my questions I concentrated both on personal reflections; social relationships and different perspectives of perceive tattoos. These information helped me in preparing deeper analyze and finding very visible process of transformation meaning of tattoos from collective and social ("traditional") to

individual (contemporary). Finding and describing this process I interpreting as biggest and most visible success of this research.

I presented results of my observation partly in very visible way: with help of schemes, pictures, tables and graphs. Every tattoo that I analyzed during the research is enclosure in form of photo-documentation. I decided for quite visual form of presentation for make it as clear as it is possible. I tried to widen every graphical element of this paper of exhaustive descriptions, for most detailed and friendly receptions for readers.

As conclusion of my work I would like to show, how much more important could be forming individuality by tattooing body, than a social and collective reasons for having tattoos. In contemporary society individual and personal reflections are first motivations for body-forming in the way of tattooing. Also symbolical meaning of body in this situation party lost universal meaning, and could be re-interpreting by individual through own personality and view-points.

## 2. TATTOOS

### 2.1 Basic definitions and information

I consider this introduction as very important, because during the practical part of research this conceptual set was filled with specific, “branch” language and “dictionary” could be useful almost all the time. In this case it is very necessary to prepare sort of a “short guide” about tattooing styles and technologies, for the reader to have an adequate image and understanding of next parts of this work.

For introduction of this study, it is important to define tattoos as a “manual” process, out of its spiritual or mystical meanings, but just to find and show the border of tattooing process, which is the main subject of this study. I would like to use a definition by Margo DeMello, which, in my opinion, is the simplest and the most complete and full: *“Tattooing refers to the insertion of pigment into the skin with needles, bone, knives, or other implements, in order to create a decorative design. Tattooing is a permanent form of body modification, and has been found on every continent of the world as well as among most island populations.”* (DeMello. 2007. p. 265). Also in this definition, we can see the description of the “methodology” of putting ink under epidermis (external part of skin course). These methods could be totally different, depending on age, geographical location and technical possibilities of the particular tattoo maker (DeMello. 2007). In this subsection I would like to shortly characterize technological base of tattooing process, and also the most popular, contemporary visual styles and types of tattoos.

I can distinguish two main technical ways of making tattoos: non-electrical and electrical. First method (characteristic for the age of world’s history before invention of electricity, which is before XIX. century), is usually connected to traditional, tribe rituals. Scheme of this method is similar to using “hammer” (see: Enclosure 1.1) where ink is put under the epidermis as effect of strong hit into wooden stick equipped with kind of “needle” (made mostly from bone or stone fragments) which is soaked with black ink (originating from floral substances, mashed minerals or sots). These elements could be customized into particular shape (see: Enclosure 1.2) or made spontaneous, with abstraction elements (see: Enclosure 1.1): *“Pigments are traditionally created by mixing charcoal or ash with water. In early days of commercial tattooing in the West, tattooists purchased their colors from pigment manufacturers and used word of mouth to find out which inks were safe and permanent. Initially, black was the major color used, supplemented by red, green, brown, and yellow, but as years went by and technology improved, tattooists experimented with pigments*

*and brought in a far wider variety of hues that are used today”* ( Demello.2007. p.275). These traditional ways of making tattoo could be connected mostly with traditional environment of Pacific Islands and also India, China, Japan or also ancient areas of Egypt and Central Asia (DeMello. 2007). Information about tattooing came to Europe as documentations and drawings made by sailors and discoverers of new, geographical areas in XVIII century, for example during the Captain James Cook’s expeditions (see: Enclosure: 1.11). At this time European society treated it as “*freaky*”, “*strange*” or “*wild*” in very negative sense, so tattooing became popular mainly in sailor culture (see: Enclosure 1.13) with motives connected to “*life on the sea*”, travels and adventures connected strongly with sailor folklore (Otrubova, 2011). Contemporary style of tattoo motives inspired by old, sailor type of tattoos (with typical thick outlines and homogenous, simple filling) is called “*old-school*” and is very popular nowadays (see: Enclosure 1.14).

Big change in ways of tattoo making came with the beginning of electricity usage in commercial and everyday life, during XIX and XX century (DeMello 2007). This situation change tattoo machines made from wooden sticks to electro-magnetic mechanism with more complicated construction, based on magnetic coils (see: Enclosure 1.4; Enclosure 1.5), which made process of making tattoos definitely easier, faster and less painful. Margo DeMello describes this process with these words: “*The electric tattoo machine is the primary way how people tattoo the world over. The modern machine inserts ink into the skin via a group of needles that are soldered onto a bar, which is attached to a motor. Like a sewing machine, the machine drives the needles in and out of the skin. There are two kinds of tattoo machines: the liner, which has fewer needles (sometimes only one), and is used to create the outline for the design, and the shader, with a larger number of needles, used to shade and color the design. Machines are not directly plugged into the wall but are plugged into a transformer to cut the voltage down*” (DeMello. 2007. p. 276). This “*technical revolution*” made tattooing much more easier and initiated process of getting tattoo into the mainstream of European culture, connected partly with subcultures, music background and characteristic motives. Technology moved on very fast, and machines change theirs forms to more modern form both in technological and design way (see: Enclosure 1.5).

The newest “kid” of a tattoo technology we recognize a “rotary machine” (see: Enclosure 1.6) which is not using electro-magnetic core and coils to put needles under the epidermis. Instead of magnetic core, it uses very simple mechanism of electric rotary moves, which is connected to strong positives as decreased electricity

consumption, higher stability and smaller weight of the whole machine. Contemporary tattoo makers (understood as non-homogeneous group of people with common profession of making tattoos) change themselves from followers of older coil machines, and newer rotary machines, and there is still no compromise about which way of tattooing is better. All opinions are still based only on personal preferences and experiences of tattoo makers. Also small group of tattoo makers (mostly but not only from Asia) still prefer making tattoo by the most traditional way, wooden sticks and inks put under the epidermis as effect of hitting, without any electricity (see: Enclosure 1..9; Enclosure: 1.10). This method is in close connection with “*contemporary theater*” of reconstructing tribe rituals, motives and esthetics characteristic for “*non-European*” tattoo tradition before the XIX century.

Beside technological changes inside the actual process of making tattoos, we can also follow visible changes of visual styles popular amongst tattooed part of population in XXI century. We can easily recognize some characteristic styles of tattooing, very visible in everyday life. First of them is called “biomechanical style” and is connected with “cyborgization” and mechanization in way of strictly esthetical interpretation like in *science-fiction* or *steam punk genre*. It means that people tattoo themselves with elements of engines, screws, gear-wheels and other mechanical things (see: Enclosure 1.17) embedded, slicked and connected with their own skin, which gives the effect of being “*half-human, half-robot*” (Kolkova.2012). Also (out of mechanical motives drawn onto skin) part of this style are portraits of robots, cyborgs, mechanical hybrids and other imaginations of future beings, well known from science-fiction part of popular culture (Otrubova. 2011).

Next style characteristic for contemporary tattooing could be called “*horror*” or “*macabre*” and is strongly connected to demonology (see: Enclosure 1.18). Characteristic are motives of creatures, daemons, zombies and monsters, mostly visually inspired by horror movies, comics, books, urban folklore and stories connected to dark, depressive, creepy and sad climates. Often they are presented in morbid way – in form of corps, skeletons, portraits of death humans and animals (Otrubova. 2011). Colors of tattoos in these cases are mostly black and gray, with many shadows and soft lines. It is very difficult to call creatures presented that way nice ones (by typical, esthetically pleasing way), which is mostly intentional vision of both tattoo owner and tattoo maker (Kolkova. 2012).

Next one, which I can recognize as one of the newest contemporary tattoo style, is strong “*abstraction*”. These types of tattoos are characterized by apparent

collection of accidental and messy lines, characteristic also for children paintings and draws (see: Enclosure 1.15; 1:16) with strong, black contour and -asymmetrical structure. These tattoo drawings are created of traditional style inspired by ethnical roots, sailor tradition or elements of popular culture (DeMello. 2007). They are forming mostly new style closer to art and modern art, where motives are treated in similar way as paints or sculptures in main category of art: vision and imaginations of author/artist (in this case: tattoo maker could be an artist) and process of creating is the most important element in whole tattooing process, and particular elements doesn't have to possess concrete and visible meaning. Abstract style in tattooing is also often connected with the most visible tattoo form at all: facial tattoo (see: Enclosure 1.12). These motives could be both inspired by ethnical, traditional type of artistic expression, mostly from area of Polynesia (Otrubova. 2011) or only esthetically in form of abstraction. In both cases this type of tattoo is able to cause shock in society and partly stigmatize their owners, that's why facial tattoos are in presence observed as unordinary and unique.

"Newest of the newest" kind of tattoo designs, nowadays not very often nor widely presented in media, is connected with usage of advanced technology and cooperation with computers and mobile sites. In this case, neuralgic spot of whole tattoo is small "QR" metrical, virtual code (see: Enclosure 1.19). This code, copied into mobile or computer using "*Android*" operation system could be later reproduced to animate tattoo motive in virtual space.

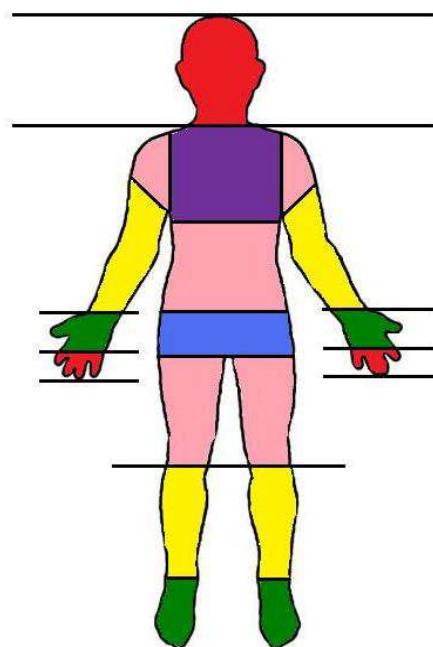
From "*integration*" point of view I can recognize one main activity, where circle of tattoo makers and tattoo owners are meeting together in person, and these are "*Tattoo conventions*". These events have mostly the form of expositions, organized regularly (in most cases: every year) in many bigger and smaller cities in the world (see: Enclosure 1.7). Tattoo makers, organized in "*exposition boxes*", could show the audience live tattooing and portfolios, and they also they participate in challenges of the most interesting and beautiful tattoo (see: Enclosure 1.8). These events have both commercial and integration functions for tattoo makers from different countries, areas and different inspiration schools (Plichcińska 2010).

## **2.2 Body schemes and regularities in context of tattooing**

By these I would like to present two schemes, where (in my interpretation) are located the most popular places for tattooing in scale of contemporary modification of human body. Zones marked by different colors could be located very close, but

meaning of these places in micro and macro scale could be completely different. In all of there cases there is very visible and strong power of metaphors and context of concrete tattoo. There is not possible to explore and study murals out of the space where they are located. There is a point where tattoos are connected with social-spaces of the human being in strongest possible way. We need information about body- space around it to find proper information about tattoos in general. This perspective is often strongly connected with symbolical meaning of body parts; therefore I think it is necessary to make a small introduction into this type of body interpretation:

### **Front part of the body:**



### **Red areas – face, throat and hand – fingers**

Places most visible in *everyday life* are chosen by people who want to make tattoo very visible, and in the same way, don't care about public opinion about them. It is also kind of agreement for differentiations and possibility to being out or against "mainstream". Decision of having that kind of tattoo is often connected with agreement for being put "out of social mainstream" in context of finding a job and/or everyday contact with common people. Fingers are also used for presentation of subculture ideas, by four letter words put on the main part of fingers (for example: punk, skin, hate, love etc.)

### **Green areas – feet**

These are also very visible places for having tattoos. In the same way as in “red areas” tattoos, their owners are outside or against mainstream society. Feet are also often used for “half pictures” which make a full picture only after connecting feet together; this form is generally interpreted as very attractive in visual sense.

### **Blue area – parts of skin around genitals, loins, sometimes also female breasts**

Areas of human body where tattoos can have strong, mostly sexual meaning. Often used to increase sexual attractiveness of a tattoo owner. Areas for tattoo used by sexual workers in the past are today out of its meaning, but still connected with erotic sphere of human behavior. Sometimes connected also with fetishes or special sexual preferences. These areas are not publicly visible, so they are very intimate and connected with private spheres of life and “in-home” behavior.

### **Violet areas – torso and back**

Torso, because of “being located close to the heart”, is often used for placing emotional, personal and meaningful tattoos, connected with family, friends, closest places, ideologies, religion etc. Both in subculture and non-subculture meaning is possible to localized these tattoos with strong, ideological order, in form of mottos, sentences, quotes and symbols. This is linked with taking this part of the body as the “core” of emotional development and personal feelings and “main stream” of human sentiments. These sentiments are very often transformed into very personal form exactly by tattooing.

### **Pink areas – stomach, thighs, top of the arms**

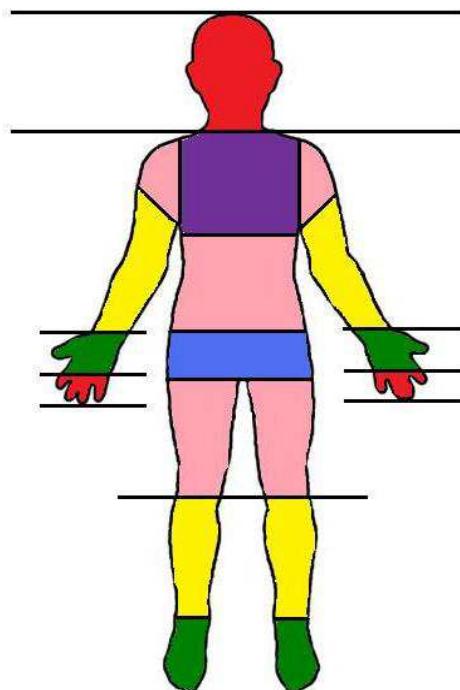
Areas easiest to be covered by clothes, not very visible in public and social life, are being chosen like most popular and most often. Stomach is not popular as a place for tattoo amongst women (because of predictable problems during pregnancy) but amongst of men this place is popular for placing ideological presentation, for example by tattooing words and sentences around the navel. Arm is also typical place connected with sailors and army tattoos in traditional, pre-contemporary meaning of European tattoo roots, often chosen now by people connected with reconstructions of traditional visual style of body-art in many forms. Full colored tattoos with very visible and hard lines are examples of this preference and “specialization” in tattoo style.

### **Yellow areas – forearms**

Quite visible parts of the body often chosen for tattooing by people connected with alternative music scene, subculture or ideologically defined profile for

presentation ideas semi-visible for society, and quite hard to cover. Having visible, massive veins in the middle of forearms is giving symbolical opportunity to place ideological, personal and strong words and declarations there, in the same way as on hands – fingers.

### **Back part of the body:**



#### **Violet areas – back**

Back, because of large areas, is often used for big compositions and complicated motives. Back can be covered very easily by any form of shirt or other clothes, so having tattoos there is more connected with personal feelings (owner can decide who, where and during which situations could somebody see it) than social demonstrations. Back is also the best place to place large artistic paints and graphics in non-changing form. Because of the back's shape it is possible to shape tattoo in a form of huge rectangle – like a canvas.

#### **Blue area – buttocks**

Area important in sexual esthetics and behavior; in a way of body modification tattooing this part of body has a function of underlined shape and round form of buttocks. This part of body, sometimes interpreted in vulgar and provocative way, could be used as a “table” for rude messages and pictures, showed to make society feel shocked and disappointed.

### **Yellow area – calves**

Very painful process of tattooing calves could be contemporary sign of strangeness and resistance to pain. Popular mostly amongst men, by women is this place often interpreted as “not girlish enough” and too coarse for having a tattoo there.

### **Green areas – central part of palm**

Very visible place, chosen by people with strong decision about visual exposition of tattooed skin with all consequences. It's visible part of fist, that's why it could be easily connected with fights, duels and aggression. Motives tattooed there are often dynamic, brutal in meaning, connected with visualization of aggression, symbols of physical power and force.

## **2.3 Symbolic background of particular tattoos**

Nowadays in every environment connected with tattoo making, graphical images depicted on particular tattoos have deep, symbolical meaning. They are either possible to be easily and quickly understood by bigger part of the society, or only by some special groups or subcultures. Interesting aspect in the perspective of this study is similarity between esthetical and tattoos (made in form of free decision), and criminal tattooing, connected more with prison's hierarchy and relationships. Fascinating is how different societies are using similar graphical signs to illustrate totally different meanings, with different motivations and reasons (Samuel. 1990).

Characteristic of prisoner and criminal tattoos showing how deep meaning and symbolical value inside criminal subcultures have permanent signing the bodies. For finding answer of glorified and stigmatized functions of tattoos in this context, we should divide reality into two parts- “out of the prison” and “in prison”. In reality “in-prison” tattoos in most cases are way of glorification inside close-world of criminal organization. By the tattoo prisoner could sign, reinforce and consolidate their position inside group, fight for respect and domination and also recognize people friendly or dangerous, accepted or put down in prison? In unofficial structures having a tattoo could be necessary for having high status during imprisonment. Function of criminal tattoo changed of 180 degrees in time of leaving prison. Things that really helped in being “on the top” of in criminal, closed society and glorify there become way of stigmatization for the other parts of society “out of the prison”. Person with visible, prisoner tattoos has often problem with finding job, relationships or stability, is

estimate and judge very fast by other people. Artistic, neo-primitive, orient and esthetical tattoos, respected in contemporary culture of Europe and Americas as way of redefinition of the forming of the body (Sanders. 2008) are different are far away from prisoner style of tattoo. That one is still doesn't accept, and made feeling of being scared in part of the society doesn't connect with criminal or prisoner culture. That's why defining functions and meaning of that type of tattoos is hard to taking and closing in one way. Picture on skin which describe "kings" of criminal structures in prison could stigmatize him and make him unhappy person, out of society in life out of the prison. Values cultivated in prison's areas (like physical conditions, aggression, ability to cheat etc.) are not cultivated in that way in the world out-of-prison. This conflict of values we could count as one of the biggest reason why criminal tattoos has these two functions- to stigmatization and to glorification mostly together, but not in the same time; depends of circumstances, background and context.

**Table 1.1 Tattoo-motives and their symbols in non-criminal environment  
(example from Czech Republic and Poland)**

Tattoo motive	Meaning
<b>Anchor</b>	A sign of sympathy to the sea and the sailor culture, esthetical connection with pin-up and retro style connected with military stylization of the US Army in 40s of the XX. century
<b>cross, holy trinity, angels or saints</b>	Sign of religious beliefs and declarations, used for personal settlement with mystical and symbolical aspects of religious life. Using pictures of saints as patrons could have a form of a personal amulet, the way to protect oneself in a personal or professional life
<b>Stars (mostly black and red)</b>	Popular, esthetic significant in groups of fans of hardcore, "emo-core" and "screamo-core" music; without a symbolical meaning at all
<b>Pictures with sexual meaning</b>	Sort of a joke and provocation, sometimes a demonstration of sexual preferences or favorite fetishes
<b>Rose</b>	Typical ornament used to get esthetical effect, sometimes also connected with tattoos symbolized members of family and friends (with strong, personal meaning for owner)
<b>Two cherries</b>	Symbol of sexual attractively in soft sense – way of showing owner (mostly girls and women) as cute, sweet and nice person
<b>Devils, monsters, creepy creatures</b>	Symbols of interests inside "horror" esthetic – films, music, comics, clothing. Sometimes showing also depressives states of mind or/and

	visualization of self-reflection with dark and sad character
<b>Winds on back</b>	Kind of mystical visualization of dream about being angel. Showing owner as kind, nice and calm personality, with clear conscience and modesty
<b>Rose of wind</b>	Symbol popular in environment of couch-surfers, back-packers, travelers and tourists, who want to signalize their fascination about free, casual and un-planned travels, like hitch-hiking

(Otrubova 2011; Szaszkiejewicz 1997; Sanders 2008. Samuel. 1990)

**Table 1.2 Tattoo-motives and their symbols in criminal environment (example of Czech Republic and Poland)**

Tattoo motive	Meaning
Rose	Membership in mafia structures
Lanced mouth	Liar, swindler, person that can't trust
Stars on the arms	Rank connected with time spending in prison
Spot on the forehead	Person who playing mad person in prison and during the process in law court
Flying birds	Sign of made escape from prison
Rose of wind	Sign of recidivism
Snake	Symbol of revenge
Devils and the other monsters, creepy creatures	Sign of making other prisoners scared, sign of deterring and brutality guided to other prisoners
Naked woman, vulgar sexual and pornographically pictures	Sign of sexual and erotic fascination or sign of being „Casanova“ out of the prison
Hangman	Being against police, court and guards
Spot on the top of the nose	Being very low in criminal hierarchy, sign of being scorned in prison
Moon	Robber who works on night time
Key with cross	Home of shopping thief
Dollar	Financial offender
Cross	Pocket-thief
Hand with gun	Offender very hard to catch by police
Angel with the devil's head	Cheater
Skull	Murder

Two cherries on one branch	Symbol of prisoner's brotherhood and loyalty
Fakir	Person immune from pain
Anchor	Bags and luggage's thief

(Otrubova 2011; Szaszkiewicz 1997; Sanders 2008; Samuel. 1990)

### 3. SYMBOLICAL MEANING OF THE BODY

#### 3.1 “Writing on the body”

In the frame of anthropology of the body in postmodern studies, the body is often treated as a flesh with a concrete function in a very material sense (Schilkroud. 2004) without any point of view shaped by symbolical meaning or emotional background. I concentrated my study on the personal feelings, relations and self-creation connected to symbolism (Rappaport. 1999), so in a natural way I choose older theories to describe particular streams of tattooing as “writing on the body” in the metaphorical sense. Modern development of tattooing can be interpreted as a huge process based on changes which are possible to follow in many ways: “*When Rubin coined the term "tattoo renaissance" (Rubin 1988b, p. 233–62) he referred to a shift in many aspects of Western tattooing (the nature of the people who created tattoos, involving a shift from tattooists to tattoo artists); a change in clientele (from sailors, bikers, and gang members to the middle and upper class); and a change in iconography (from the badge-like images based on repetitive premade designs known as "flash" to the customized full-body tattoo influenced by Polynesian and Japanese tattoo art). All these aspects of contemporary Western tattooing have received extensive treatment in the social sciences as well as in the Western literature produced by and for the tattoo community itself.*” (Schildkrout. 2004. p. 335). In my point of view, designing research about personal, self-projection in context of individual and social relations between individuals and “*the rest of the world*” giving enough deep and interesting perspective. That studies could be conducted both in small and large environments and research groups. In this theoretical study I would

like to avoid using only one perspective, so I've decided to follow two ways of body-interpretations simultaneously. First of them is described by Mary Douglas in the frame of symbolism, where individual perceptions and creation of the body functioning are in opposition to "purity system" (Douglas. 1970) that is trying to standardize and put uniformed individualities inside one model.

Second perspective that I want to follow is a structural/post-structural interpretation of body tattooing as a form of a social fashion, prepared by myself under inspiration of Roland Barthes, where specific forms and types of body forming and modifying are distributed inside society by fashion processes.

### 3.2 Symbolism

*"The social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society. There is a continual exchange of meanings between the two kinds of bodily experience so that each reinforces the categories of the other. As a result of this interaction the body itself is a highly restricted medium of expression. The forms it adopts in movement and repose express social pressures in manifold ways. The care that is given to it, in grooming, feeding and therapy, the theories about what it needs in the way of sleep and exercise, about the stages it should go through, the pains it can stand, its span of life, all the cultural categories in which it is perceived, must correlate closely with the categories in which society is seen in so far as these also draw upon the same culturally processed idea of the body."* (Douglas 1970. p. 69) By this quote Mary Douglas perfectly presented symbolical perception of human body in context of their expressive function, which is a strong base for my study of tattooing. The body interpreted as a complex with many possible functions, similar to house or garment, can be studied from many perspectives: *"When body, garment, and house are found in a carefully constructed set of rules, we have been warned. It signals are return to the body/temple microcosm."* (Douglas.1999. p. 177) We can surely perceive body as a microcosm – an individual system full of symbols, beliefs and connections intermingling with each other. We can perceive concrete parts of the body in separation from whole body, as "*individual organism*". The body could be also interpreted as a "*whole universe*", mostly present in rituality and religious behaviors,

which is introduced by Mary Douglas by an example of shamanistic ritual (but this perspective could be even wider and applied into spheres existing aside any religion): *"In one sense the body and internal organs of the patient are the theatre of action in the story, but by the transformation of the problem into a dangerous journey and battle with cosmic powers, by shuttling back and forth between the arena of the body and the arena of the universe, the Shaman is able to impose his view of the case."* (Douglas. 1966. p.72) But the body and its symbolical system are not able to drift freely without any foothold because of the social and collective relations around them, prepared by and in the cultural and social spaces: *"The scope of the body as a medium of expression is limited by controls exerted from the social system."* (Douglas. 1970. p.74) This social system (which could be very strong or soft depends of concrete circumstances), is controlling and restricting behaviors treating body-forms and body-system universally in all places and forms of society: *"So far we have given two rules: one, the style appropriate to a message will co-ordinate all the channels; two, the scope of the body acting as a medium is restricted by the demands of the social system to be expressed. As this last implies, a third is that strong social control demands strong bodily control. A fourth is that along the dimension from weak to strong pressure the social system seeks progressively to disembody or etherealize the forms of expression; this can be called the purity rule."* (Douglas. 1970. p. 76) This system can be applied on the scheme of contemporary body-tattooing very easily: even if the potential tattoo owner is not under any control of magical, religious or mystical vision of itself, the social system (if it is strong enough) could affect kinds and forms of self-exposition generated by the body owners. In this case, when I could analyze an individual culture of the individual (presented partly by the tattooed body), I would expect a judgment and critical opinion directed from the society to the individual: *"The judgment upon culture rests on two criteria. One depends upon scale, whether the knowledge being judged is extensive or small; the other depends on integration of the knowledge."* (Douglas. Isherwood. 1979. p. 52) The absence of it could generate both positive or negative, deep or shallow reflections and reactions, ready on many fronts (Douglas. Isherwood. 1979. p. 53), so interpretation of the symbolical contents of the same body could be totally different depending on the position and character of the tattoo-owner and the observer. But every opinion and reaction has its own value and could serve as a basis for a study: *"The image of others that a person acquires from personal contact*

*is occasioned by real fluctuations that are not simple illusions in incomplete experience, faulty focus, and sympathetic or hostile biases, but important alterations in the character of real objects.*" (Simmel. 2009. p. 43)

We can notice a symbolical fight between the individual, self-creative body and the societal rule of purity: "*The physical body is a microcosm of society, facing the centre of power, contracting and expanding its claims in direct accordance with the increase and relaxation of social pressures. Its members, now riveted into attention, now abandoned to their private devices, represent the members of society and their obligations to the whole. At the same time, the physical body, by the purity rule, is polarized conceptually against the social body. Its requirements are not only subordinated, they are contrasted with social requirements. The distance between the two bodies is the range of pressure and classification in the society.*" (Douglas. 1970. p. 77) In the extreme and radical cases when "purity pressure" is staying strongly against the social body in a particular form, the individual could even be driven to exclusion from the main-stream of society. Harmony and universal consent is gained only in the situation where harmony exists between the expectations of the society and the individual vision of a tattoo-owner: "*The physical body can have universal meaning only as a system which responds to the social system, expressing it as a system. What it symbolizes naturally is the relation of parts of an organism to the whole. Natural symbols can express the relation of an individual to his society at that general systemic level.*" (Douglas. 1970. p. 87) To gain hypothetical harmony "...we should expect to find symbols of the human body actively expressing the solidarity of the social body." (Douglas. 1970. p. 87) In the contemporary circumstances presence of such situation is very unlikely due to a strong necessity of the individualization of self-image through any body-modification, generally not accepted by the society. If only for a moment we placed ourselves in the position of the "purity system": "...we would expect to find positive themes of symbolic nourishment developed to the extent that the social body and the physical body are assimilated and both focus the identity of individuals in a structured, bounded system." (Douglas. 1970. p. 164) which is practically almost impossible due to a different behavior of the individuals around us. In hardest cases we can take this "puritan activity" as a form of a manipulation of the individual's bodies: "...we have two versions of a restricted code which serve the function of mediating the individual and his society by manipulating the image of the human body." (Douglas. 1970. p.

164) An exclusion of the individuality by the social system is possible and described as quite a fast process: "*The body is still the image of society but somewhere inside it someone is not accepting its rule. I am suggesting that the symbolic medium of the body has its restricted code to express and sustain alienation of a sub-category from the wider society.*" (Douglas. 1970. p. 166) An individual who created his own body out of mainstreamed code suggested by the society (generally speaking) could be interpreted as an "outsider" not only because of his self-needs of being "out" and removed freely from society, but because of system's operations: "*In sum, the body has been, and still is, constructed in almost as many ways as there are individuals; it seems to be all things to all people. Thus the body is defined as good and bad, tomb and temple, machine and garden, cloak and prison, sacred and secular, friend and enemy, cosmic and mystical, one with mind and soul or separate, private or public, personal or the property of the state, clock or car, to varying degrees plastic, bionic, communal, selected from a catalogue or engineered, a corpse or the self*" (Synnot. 1992. p. 95)

In case of any construction of the body with base on this theoretical fundament, is necessary to note, that individualization of self-perceptions in case of tattoo-owner is not only "voluntary" and "free" process of self-development, where own design is organized by own symbolism, visual creation and "free mind". Society could bring strong pressure for concrete and "only one right" style of looking and body-design, so individual who is not shaped into these norms could decide for "fetishism" and "celebration" of own individuality because of being not accepted by society. This argument finding confirmation in practical research, where large part of my respondents reported hard relations and conflict with society at all, or concrete part or group (see in: chapter 4.3)

### **3.3 Tattooing as fashion system**

"*Coloring the world is always a means of denying it*" (Barthes.2001. p.93) This quote from Roland's Barthes essay in context of tattooing evokes a question. If "coloring the body" in a form of tattooing works in any way destructive towards the social order and its visual standards. The contemporary shift of tattoos from being a sign of a particular subculture (sailors, non-European tribes, soldiers etc.) into a

popular and main-streamed style of a visual design with a very fast distribution through-out many world cultures, groups and ages (Schildkrout. 2004. p.335) gives us the permission of treating it partly as a fashion system. "Fashion", because of its fast distribution, inspirations shifting from one person to another and also for a wide range of this phenomenon (Barthes.2005). I don't won't to categorize tattooing as contemporary because of its technically permanent character and popularity of distribution that is staying for much longer than one or two "fashion-seasons" but I agree with some signs that I can categorize it in way of fashion.

Fashion interpretation must be analyzed in a form of a compleutive process fulfilled with values and norms: "*Values, norms, collectivities, and roles are categories that are descriptive of the structural aspect of a social system only. In addition to such categories. It is necessary to analyze the system in functional terms in order to analyze processes of differentiation and the operation of these processes within a structure. Furthermore, process utilizes resources, carrying them through a series of stages of genesis, and either "consuming them or incorporating and combining them into types of output or product, such as cultural change."*" (Parsons. 1967. p. 11) Fashion is a preparing kind of a distributional system with relation on human's esthetical perception. People react and adapt fast something that they really like (Barthes. 2005). Fashion system is partly constructed by "codes" connected with language's descriptions of elements and parts of concrete things. (Barthes. 2005). In context of tattooing, word "tattoo" has many codes located both historically and currently, which are present in social consciousness by both the visual form (everybody know how tattoo looks) and the language codes. These factors are responsible for the distribution of tattoos and their popularity as a part of a contemporary fashion.

## 4. PRACTICAL RESEARCH

### 4.1. Research target and method

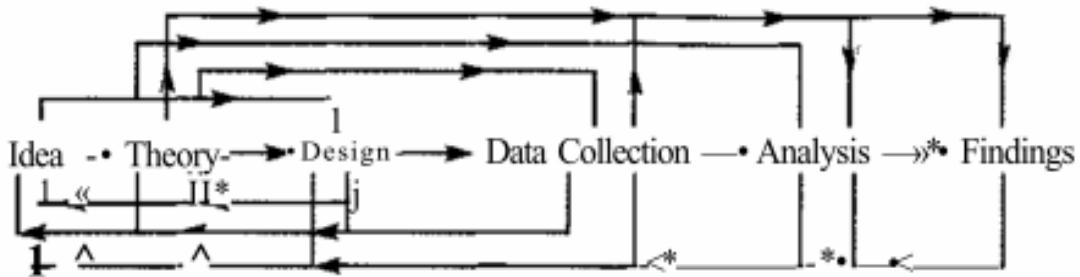
The target of my research is to get the ground knowledge about social and individual aspects of having a tattoo within an example group of tattoo owners from

the Czech Republic and Poland. By this project I aimed to observe and investigate how the social (i.e. collective, in-group) or an individual (i.e. out of society, strictly personal). I also compared the observations related to symbolic meanings of the body within the frame of classic symbolism. I have interpreted my research as qualitative according to the meaning of Bruce Berg's definition:

*"Qualitative research properly seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit these settings. Qualitative researchers, then, are most interested in how humans arrange themselves and their settings and how inhabitants of these settings make sense of their surroundings through symbols, rituals, social structures, social roles, and so forth. Research methods on human beings affect how these persons will be viewed (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). If humans are studied in a symbolically reduced, statistically aggregated fashion, there is a danger that conclusion although arithmetically precise may fail to fit reality (Mills, 1959). Qualitative procedures provide a means of accessing unquantifiable facts about the actual people researchers observe and talk to or people represented by their personal traces (such as letters, photographs, newspaper accounts, diaries, and so on). As a result, qualitative techniques allow researchers to share in the understandings and perceptions of others and to explore how people structure and give meaning to their daily lives. Researchers using qualitative techniques examine how people learn about and make sense of themselves and other." (Berg. 2011. p. 7)*

This definition perfectly complies to my way of thinking and with the model of research. I have tried to keep the perspective of the observation as wide and as best as possible, and to follow both social and individual aspects of contemporary tattooing; topic which I studied, in symbolical, practical and rhetorical meaning, without a prejudice towards my respondents.

As the base methodology I used a model of activities during the qualitative research proposed by Bruce Berg (Berg 2011) where he presented "step by step" way of projecting and applying research from a start to an end. I decided to use it because of a clear, logical form of presenting the whole process, from getting an idea to finishing it in a form of a conclusion (Berg. 2011).



Source: Berg 2011. Page: 19

Similar scheme is also presented by Bernard Russell in form of 5 questions:

*"There are five questions to ask yourself about every research question you are thinking about pursuing. Most of these can also be asked about potential research sites and research methods. If you answer these questions honestly (at least to yourself), chances are you'll do good research every time. If you cheat on this test, even a teeny bit, chances are you'll regret it. Here are the five questions:*

1. Does this topic (or research site, or data collection method) really interest me?
2. Is this a problem that is amenable to scientific inquiry?
3. Are adequate resources available to investigate this topic? To study this population at this particular research site? To use this particular data collection method?
4. Will my research question, or the methods I want to use, lead to unresolvable ethical problems?
5. Is the topic of theoretical and/or practical interest?" (Russell. 2006)

I used these questions to categorize first reflections and “anchored” my ideas into the research reality. I have started planning it seriously right after I became sure, that my answer for all of these questions can be yes. And in connection with this decision, I applied the classical model of research chronology, which has been divided into eight levels prepared by David Silverman and Amir Marvasti and maintained it during the whole research:

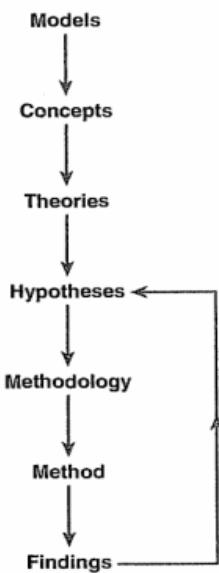


Figure 7.1 Levels of Analysis

Source: Silverman David Marvasti Amir. 2008. Page 135

As for the origins of this research I was inspired by my own experiences from past 10 years, which I have spent partly in the community of tattoo-makers, conventions and expositions as an observer, customer and a participant of this scene (in Poland, Ireland, Germany, England, Lithuania and the Czech Republic). I have become thoroughly familiar with this topic and it helped me much in being able to elaborate all the necessary preparations and the research itself. *Every research project has to start somewhere; typically, the starting point is an idea. Sometimes this idea originates because of a particular problem or situation one actually experiences*" (Berg 2011. p.17) – it was this particular way of thinking I used within the first phase of conceiving an idea for all activities related to this research.

During the “theoretical” phase of research-planning I concentrated myself to media and literature about tattooing, and (in the same time) I started initial studies of the symbolism of the body. I used quite a wide range of publications (from 1990 to 2012) for thorough comprehending of many ideas and their transformation during the long periods of time. In this phase of studying (after initial studies) inspired by Berg’s advice: „*It is important, therefore, to frame or formulate a clear research problem statement.*” (Berg 2011. p.25) I also framed the research question, which I have used later for research question’s design. These questions are:

- a) How tattoos could present ideological views of their owners?

- b) How tattoos could correspond with a membership of sub-cultural, political or religious groups?
- c) How tattoos could present any form of personal rebellion or dissatisfaction?
- d) What are symbolical contents and elements of tattoos?
- e) How does the individual process of creating and making tattoo look?

During the “design” and “data collection” phase of the research I conducted ten half-structured interviews with 10 respondents. The main criteria of being a participant in my research were: having a tattoo made on participant’s own will, being a resident of the Czech Republic or Poland and to able to give permission to make a photo-documentation of the tattoo. One potential respondent quit the participation in research during the interview with an explanation that his tattoos have national meanings, and he was too afraid about presenting them it the public even if being anonymous. Other participants stated no obstructions and agreed to the policy of my research. I conducted quite casual interviews with unlimited time for talking given to each of my participants. All researches were made personally or by “Skype” software with camera transmission. I informed every respondent about anonymity and non-commercial character of the research. For every respondent I had the same set of questions (see in: Enclosure 3.1). I constructed a questionnaire according to Bernard’ Russell’s advices, which I have found very useful during the designing of my questions, their sequence and priorities: *“Question order: Pay careful attention to question order. Be sure that the first question is directly related to the topic of the study (as determined from the title on the front of the booklet); that it is interesting and easy to answer; and that it is no threatening. Once someone starts a questionnaire or an interview, they are very likely to finish it. Introduce threatening questions well into the instrument, but don’t cluster them all together. Put general socioeconomic and demographic questions at the end of a questionnaire. These seemingly innocuous questions are threatening too many respondents who fear being identified (Sudman and Bradburn. 1982). Once someone has filled out a questionnaire, they are unlikely to balk at stating their age, income, religion, occupation, etc. Formatting: Construct the pages of the questionnaire according to standard conventions. Use upper-case letters for instructions to respondents and mixed upper and lower case for the questions themselves. Never allow a question to break at the end of a page and continue on another page. Mailed surveys have to*

*look good and be easily readable or they get tossed out.”* (Russell. 2006). I didn’t recognize any signs of being bored, angry or irritated from my respondents during any of interviews, so I can presume that question construction was satisfactory for this type of relatively small research.

I also tried to prepare an answering-friendly environment and a calm atmosphere was kept during the whole interviewing. An approximate time of one interview was not shorter than 45 minutes, and not longer than 120 minutes. I met my respondents through advertisements in professional media connected to the tattooing and through my own knowledge and contacts. I paid huge attention to find respondents from different cities, environments and groups for possible biggest variety and diversity of answers and points of view presented during interviews. Choosing the two countries Poland and the Czech Republic came natural to me, because of my high communicational skills in both Czech and Polish languages. I also wanted to situate my research in hypothetical area, entitled by me as “Central Europe” where I have located these two countries. I decided to use this location close to western border of the Soviet Union, and collapse of Soviet’s Union domination in both countries at the year 1989. The circumstances in both countries were similar in cultural and social changes and also in the context of symbolical and fashion area of “young” democracy, and could become a good ground for analyzing these two territories in a way of similarities, not contrasts and differences. Historical analyze is not a goal of my research, but in this case, facts from the 20<sup>th</sup> century of European history helped me out to find the right environment for my research in concrete context of whole-social processes and changes in defined time.

I analyzed data in part with the help of software “MAXQDA 10 – trial version” where I primarily categorized and coded the contents of interviews, and in part using the “paper-pen” method by which I analyzed relations and found similarities of respondent’s opinions in second order. I formed part of the data into graphical form, and also transformed it into tables and graphs. I am quoting every analyzed part of interviews in chapter: “4.3 Data analyze” with descriptions and notes of regularities and similarities of my findings. I placed conclusions and some supplements for practical research in chapter 5.

Also I would like to point out, that any mistakes (structural, grammatical or technical) in language of my citations from interviews are not accidental. Languages of interviews were Polish or Czech in every case. I translated it into English by myself with special extortions for keeping the authenticity and individual language style of my respondents as similar to the original version, as possible. My respondents are people of different age, different education and life-styles. That's also why some styles of quotation could be different from one to another.

#### **4.2 Presentation and description: base data**

In his part of my practical research I would like to present base data which I use as a center and the main topic of my research. In the practical part of my work this element is a core of every interview and motivation of choosing respondents. I thought of tattoos as the main motivation of this paper-work. To present it, I used two questions from my questionnaire (see in: Enclosure 3.1), which I treated as an introduction to main topic of the research. These questions are:

- “1) Can you describe your tattoo, please tell me, what is this?”*
- 2) Tell me, where you found the inspiration for this graphical form and visual design of your tattoo?”*

I feel that the best way to analyze the respondent's tattoo is from their own personal and individual points of view. I don't want to make any kind of judgment about artistic and technical quality of my respondent's tattoos; any critical sentences are lively quoted from within interviews with my respondents. During my respondent's talks about their tattoo's they also pointed out the most intimate elements, own perspectives and feelings, which are valuable for research aiming to grasp personalities in the way of forming social bonds. For every description I enclosed a photo in macro-format, where all the parts of tattoos are visible and clear.

##### **Respondent 1-1 (see: Enclosure 2.1)**

**Personal information:** Martyna, 24 years old, from Zawiercie, Poland, student of art

**Description of the tattoo by its owner:**

*“It is sentence; I'm made from recycled material, please reuse or recycle me”; is only black, and is treaded by myself as ecological statement. Is kind of thinking about position of human in the planet Earth: in which position we want*

*to be, and where we are in my opinion... you know, making it was totally spontaneous, but that's why I like so much this sentence and essence and meaning."*

**Information about the visual inspiration of this tattoo-motive:**

*"It was like that: I wanted only and only typography, which I wanted to adapt in visual way, and choose style similar to things that I had tattooed before on my arms. So, when I have secession style on my arms, that font also had to be a bit "wrapped and rolled" in this style (but definitely not in typical secession font!)"*

(Language of the interview: Polish; own translation, date of the interview: 28.10.2012)

**Respondent 1-2 (see: Enclosure 2.2)**

**Personal information:** Marian, 24 years old, Plzen, Czech Republic

**Description of the tattoo by its owner:**

*"It is psychobilly girl with double-bass. On this bass there are symbols of things that I really like, beer, music notes, skull, willows, stars etc. This is something that I really like. You know, I like girls with tattoos, beer, rock'n'roll and things that I have there. And I also love double-bass because of that sound."*

**Information about the visual inspiration of this tattoo-motive:**

*"I looked into internet and I found something, later we took our ideas together with tattoo-artist. It is not any concrete girl, just "suicide girl" with tattoo and rock style. It was summer of this year, in "Garaz" studio, here in Plzen."*

(Language of interview: Czech, own-translation, date of interview: 9.09.2012)

**Respondent 1-3 (see: Enclosure 2.3)**

**Personal information:** Natalia, 29 years old, from Poland – Piła town, I am master in Polish philology and pedagogy

**Description of the tattoo by its owner:**

*"This is classical tattoo in "old school" style, on my left arm; you can see flowers and skulls. Colors also typical for old school style: shadows, black, red and green. Inside there is a face of the woman in Japanese "manga" style – it is a bit different style, but with emotional background (it is that oldest part, not really perfect and successful, but I have sentiments for it, that's I don't want to cover it)."*

**Information about the visual inspiration of this tattoo-motive:**

*"I always loved large tattoos in old school style. And maybe I am not very original in it, but my taste doesn't change until today. In case of tattoos it is important."*

(Language of interview: Polish; own-translation, date of interview: 02.10.2012)

**Respondent 1-4 (see: Enclosure 2.4)**

**Personal information:** Michał, 27 years old, from Olsztyn, Poland, ecologist

**Description of the tattoo by its owner:**

*"This is black and white variation about faces. This tattoo-motive for me is connected with moves and changes. These faces are like masks, the top one is partly covering that "deadly" one located under, which is half-removed, half destroyed. There you can see never ending moves inside theater of human's personality."*

**Information about the visual inspiration of this tattoo-motive:**

*"It was ready motive that I found somewhere, and I felt that I like and understand it. I was 20 years old and it worked that way."*

(Language of interview: Polish; own-translation, date of interview: 011.10.2012)

**Respondent 1-5 (see: Enclosure 2.5)**

**Personal information:** Vojta, 23 years old, from Karlovy Vary, Czech Republic, student

**Description of the tattoo by its owner:**

*"Well...It is simple Celtic cross with symbol of shamrock, on the top of my left hand, under the arm. Cross is black and grey, shamrock is green"*

**Information about the visual inspiration of this tattoo-motive:**

*"...I had some knowledge about Celtic crosses from the past; I knew how it looks. After, I just found some examples in internet, and sent it to that tattoo-artist. But he told me, that pictures were bad, not really traditional and spiritual, not very good in fact. So he found one, historical draft of Celtic cross somewhere, and we decided that it could be the best. At first time I had idea to having that shamrock behind the cross. But it wasn't very nice, so I finally I decide to put shamrock in the middle of the cross – like a diamond – but with shamrock instead of diamond..."*

(Language of interview: Czech; own-translation, date of interview: 11. 09.2012)

**Respondent 1-6 (see: Enclosure 2.6)**

**Personal information:** Vaclav, 22 years old, from Teplice, Czech Republic, carpenter

**Description of the tattoo by its owner:**

*"What is this... barbed wire, parchment, skull with mohawk, belt with cartridges and letters AFAB – it means "all fascists are bastards" and also small sentence: no future."*

**Information about the visual inspiration of this tattoo-motive:**

*"It was just my fantasies and imaginations; I got ideas during the process of making this tattoo. I made project through on skin by pen, and in my drunken imagination. That time it was fine, nice and good looking for me. It was nobody around me that time; it was only my individual, drunk idea. I made it during one evening, "*

(Language of interview: Czech; own-translation, date of interview: 16. 08.2012)

**Respondent 1-7 (see: Enclosure 2.7)**

Kristina, 23 years old, from Stod, Czech Republic, bachelor student

**Description of the tattoo by its owner:**

*"This is a parrot with a mohawk, sitting on the safety pin. Color is black with some shadows: darker and lighter"*

**Information about the visual inspiration of this tattoo-motive:**

*"This is logo of punk publishing company – 'Papagaj Records' from Brno. It was mostly spontaneous and this company there is something very close to me, (...) I like it so much."*

(Language of interview: Czech; own-translation, date of interview: 07. 08.2012)

**Respondent 1-8 (see: Enclosure 2.8)**

Iva, 22 years old, from Plzen, Czech Republic, Waitress

**Description of the tattoo by its owner:**

*"This is head of my cat called Milli, around her there are mallows, butterflies and dust in the air. All in black and red (...) When my cat died two years ago, I wanted it so much, I needed it. Now she is all the time with me. "*

**Information about the visual inspiration of this tattoo-motive:**

*"I found it in internet, I mean – colors, style, some concrete details. Cat as main elements was clear. I wanted this tattoo at the shoulder (closer to heart) but finally I decide to make it on my leg."*

(Language of interview: Czech; own-translation, date of interview: 07. 08.2012)

**Respondent 1-9 (see: Enclosure 2.9)**

Karol, 29 years old from Warsaw, Poland, master of sociology

**Description of the tattoo by its owner:**

*"This tattoo is tree of life from Kabala inside the mirror – at the one side there is woman that is symbolized enlightenment; on the other side – another woman: symbol of indolence and oblivion. Under that characters, there are flower, connected with the same symbolical meanings. Indolence is poppy, enlightenment is lily. Under the mirror there is a fox, which is growl angry on indolence: symbol of wisdom and cleverness in cultures of North, East and West. And there is animal that I really love.*

**Information about the visual inspiration of this tattoo-motive:**

*"About graphic from I am not able to say anything – I just gave all information about what it should be to tattoo-artist, and he prepared all in visual sense. I choose him because: I like style of his tattoo; and I saw from his other tattoos, that he is a person with good experiences in symbolical and mystical forms."*

(Language of interview: Polish; own-translation, date of interview: 08. 10.2012)

**Respondent 1-10 (see: Enclosure 2.10)**

**Respondent:** Liliana, 25 years old, from Toruń, Czech Poland, visual artist

**Description of the tattoo by its owner:**

*"Two lilies, connected to each other by abstraction, organic motive. Everything in black color, no shadows at all."*

**Information about the visual inspiration of this tattoo-motive:**

*"It is just esthetical decoration, more form than substance and essence, nicer thing than social comment. "*

(Language of interview: Polish; own-translation, date of interview: 08. 10.2012)

## 4.3 Data analysis

### a) The location and circumstances of tattoos creation

My respondents had very wide spectrum of experiences and circumstances of their tattoos creation. Some of them are related to decisions to have a tattoo made in a specialized studio or an atelier with a relatively high cost. But on every account the price in every case was interpreted as an adequate or even cheap in relation to the quality of the tattoo:

Respondent 1-9: *"It was in Tattoo-studio "Theatrum Symbolica". First season cost 900 zloty, I will have 2 or 3 another session – coloring and details later, in the same price. In general, I count around 4500 zloty for whole tattoo, and I think that there is adequate price for this quality"*

Respondent 1-2: *"Well... it was summer of this year, in "Garaz" studio, here in Plzen, I paid 3 500 crowns, and it think, that it was cheap... yes, very cheap for this quality.*

Respondent 1-5: *"You know, it is quite funny story... One years ago, in pub "Jekyll & Hyde", here on the Americka street, every first Wednesday of the month was kind of party there, you know, drinking shots, listening music etc. Also there was kind of lottery there that time, where you can get some things, like for example voucher to tattoo-studio. First time when I came there, I won that voucher"*

Other types of tattoo creation, also experienced by my respondents, took place at semi-official studios with professional tattoo-makers doing some extra jobs, mostly in home environment:

Respondent 1-7: *"Tattoo-artist called "Pezot" in Plzen made it in his unofficial studio."*

First of “unofficial” ways of getting a tattoo of my respondents was through their own friend’s capabilities (they weren’t registered as tattoo-makers or as workers of any tattoo-studio). “The Payment” for such a favor was described as non-monetary in both cases; alcohol such as wine or a beer.

Respondent 1-1: *“So... my tattoo was made by my friends (she is learning how to make tattoos), she made it in her apartment, so without full and total rules of sterility and disinfection etc. I paid one bottle of red wine, and I read her aloud book during tattooing process. ”*

Respondent 1-3: *“Made by two tattoo-makers (I intentionally don’t want to use word “artist”, because only one of them was artist...). First phase was made in my friends’ house in Piła; price was only a few beers as a bonus. Second phase made in Koszalin.”*

Most unusual cases were described as self-making tattoos at home using homemade tattoo-machines. I daresay to interpret these as extremely interesting because of the commutation of the two roles and statuses (tattoo-maker and tattoo-owner) in one person, which is in one moment both the creator and recipient of tattooing process:

Respondent 1-6: *“I made it by myself in home, with home-made tattoo machine (ink from pen and some needles, and two wires and engine from old walkman).”*

It is hard to judge, which of the methods of obtaining a tattoo could be the most popular within a contemporary society. People decided of places and tattoo makers depending on their own preferences, possibilities, accessibilities and esthetical tastes. Creating a tattoo themselves was also technically possible (and quite easy because of the simple scheme of coil’s machine working) and sometimes practiced in present time.

### **b) Process of creating tattoo “in mind”**

During the question of mind-creation in context of concrete tattoo, I wanted to get knowledge about basic regularities connected with this process: how long, how deep and in which way are forming processes between moment of getting an idea, and process of making tattoo. I can present it in form of two, typical and most common ways by two schemes:

IDEA → REFLECTION → PROJECT → EFFECT

IDEA → SPONTANEOUS DECISION → EFFECT

First scheme is presenting one way of mind creation in case of tattooing. In this case getting idea is a first step, after becoming phase of reflection which can exist in “elastic” period of time (a few months or even years). Result of reflection is project (made individual or during cooperation with tattoo-maker) and finally effect – tattoo. This process is long, characterized with deep reflection, analyzes of personal taste (of favorite motives, style of design, colors etc.) and symbolical meaning. In group of my respondents this style of creating is most popular, they described it detailed. For some of my respondents phase of reflection was year’s long:

Respondent 1-8: *“It was very long process, at the beginning I wanted this tattoo at the shoulder (closer to heart) but finally I decide to make it on my leg. I wanted that tattoo always, I think that maybe 10 years. When my cat died two years ago, I wanted it so much, I needed it. Now she is all the time with me. It makes me feel much better. I consulted this idea with some of my friends, but it was mostly mine”.*

For some of them reflective process had a few months or one month:

Respondent 1-9: *“Process of devise this tattoo, was around half of the year. On the other hand... I knew for a long time, that I wanted tattoo with mirror as symbol of self-study so long before I started this tattoo.*

*Later I got ideas for other elements. Combining everything and all together – it was something like 6 months. And it was a lot of reflections that time – about symbols elements that I want and I must have there. Some of them are finally not under my skin.*

**Respondent 1-5:** *"I am not sure, if I remember exactly how long... yeah – I had one month of very deep reflection, from getting the voucher to making this tattoo. It was only and only my idea. To be honest I never consulted it with anybody; I was sure how this tattoo should look from the first minute."*

**Respondent 1-2:** *"Well... it was one-month project, later we had finally four, best possibilities. I talked a lot with that tattoo-artist, and we put it together into final version – this tattoo. We had 3 sessions to make it; last one was only for finishing, repairing colors etc... I think that it was finally something like 12 hours. It was all from heart, deep, straight from my mind. I never consulted it with anybody; it is just me in it."*

Second type of mind creating (illustrated by the second scheme) is different than the first one, because of shorter and not that emotionally deep, like first one. Idea as the base is continuing by spontaneous, "wild" and fast decision, often connected more with strong emotions or "*feeling of the moment*" than deep, long reflection. From idea to effect in form of tattooing there is definitely short period of time (few hours or days). Also it could be connected with consummation of alcohol, which is way to reduce self-control and making decision faster. My respondents describing it detailed:

**Respondent 1-6:** *"I got that idea straight after I prepared this tattoo-machine by myself. I wanted to test it, so I started to tattooed myself. It was nobody around me that time; it was only my individual, drunk idea."*

Respondent 1-1: “*This part of the story won't be so nice. Why? Because one day I found foil bag on the floor in my kitchen (near rubbish which we are segregating and recycling all the time). This bag had this sentence painted (it was kind of eco-recycling thing) and I thought that there is kind of ideal sentence for writing on myself, also it characterized perfectly people and animals in general. 2 days later I got appointed and one week after we made it. It was one year ago, some days before my birthday. So reflections were fast and spontaneous, but I still think, that it was good choice. I don't feel that idea could be stale or outdated. Idea of recycling is timeless at all.*”

### c) Relations between tattoo and participation in subculture

Next aspect of contemporary tattooing, which I followed during my practical research was relationship between tattoos and being member of any subculture. For describing concept of subculture for use it as base of this subsection, I would like to use four definitions, presented as complex by Chris Jenks. Which this conception I agree the most, as compleutive and detailed description of main ideas and function of this type of social group: “*Subculture as: A subdivision of a national culture, composed of a combination of factorable social situations such as class status, ethnic background, regional and rural or urban residence, and religious affiliation, but forming in their combination a functional unity which has an integrated impact on the participating individual.* (Gordon, 1947: 40) Another definition from around the same time states that: *The term ‘subculture’ refers to ‘cultural variants displayed by certain segments of the population’.* Subcultures are distinguished not by one or two isolated traits – they constitute relatively cohesive social systems. They are worlds within the larger world of our national culture. (Komarovsky and Sargent, 1949: 143) And so we evolve through: ‘*A society contains numerous subgroups, each with its own characteristic ways of thinking and acting. These cultures within cultures are called subcultures’* (Mercer, 1958: 34) to ‘*Such shared learned behaviors which are common to a specific group or category are called subcultures’* (Young and Mack, 1959: 49).” (Jenks. 2005. p. 8). I asked my respondents about any possible

connection between their tattoos and subculture membership, with description, that by word “subculture” I mean (according to definition quoted above) also religious, political and world-view formations, where my respondent could participate on the principle of sub-group inside society (Jenks. 2005. p. 8). Some of my respondents signalized present or past connection with subculture as motivation to preparing this, concrete tattoo:

Respondent 1-7: *“I am punk rocker, I am still in it. I am visiting concerts, helping in concert’s organization, buying CD and vinyl desks, wearing these clothes. It is very, very important part of my life”.*

Respondent 1-6: *“I was radical punk rocker; still I am in some part of my spirit. I am still in underground about style, music. It is all about “no future”, being alone, against everything.”*

Respondent 1-2: *“I can say, that I partly identify myself with music bands from the “psychobilly” and ‘rock’n’roll” and “ska” scene, they had the same tattoos, so it is something like that; I am so connected with that.*

Other two respondents described reason of having tattoo by connection not exactly with concrete, named group but with way of thinking and life-style which they called “ecological”. I can also partly categorize it as “subculture” kind of thinking and identification with concrete group and mind-space:

Respondent 1-8: *“Not exactly subculture, but it is connected with my ecological life-style and ideology. I am close to ecological actions and many organizations like “Animal Liberation Front”, “Svoboda Zvirat” etc. I am on vegan diet, and I promote this kind of food-style as best lifestyle. Also I very strongly support recycling, saving energy and all ecological ideas”*

Respondent 1-1: *“Not in really straight way, but there is a bit my own, ecological statement, I don’t think that it could be sign of identity with any,*

*concrete group, but my thinks are strictly connected with ecology. Also there is some non-anthropocentrically style of thinking about myself as human, maybe a bit with nonspecifically consumption, way of treating myself and automatically – with eco-feminism. Yes, my way of mind is connected and formed by eco-feminism, which conducted me straight into ecological ideas at all”.*

Last group of my respondent strongly disallow any connection between them and any subculture or “semi-subculture” memberships. During the interviews they putted strong accent of individuality of idea, self-creation and point of view, signalized by the tattoo. They showed own individuality, presented own priorities, philosophies and feelings only in self-perception:

Respondent 1-5: *“By this tattoo I wanted to show just my individual spaces and things. I wanted to show that historical and spiritual meanings, so it is not really about culture or subculture or something like that”.*

Respondent 1-9: *“It is connected with my outlook on life, with opinion that every human is responsible for himself, for his fate. No God, no other creature. In this way, that person, that human is deciding if he wants to develop himself, or just falling down to the bottom.”*

Respondent 1-3: *“Definitely not any subculture! Only one things that I am able to tattooing on my skin, because I know, that there is something sure and invariable, is something connected with my son. Other thinks, like point of views or religion or something like that...no.”*

#### **d) Showing sympathy or antipathy by having tattoo**

Next, I asked my respondent if they are showing any form of agreement or disagreement for or against something by this tattoo. I wanted to know if they feel any positive or negative emotion in connection with something or somebody if form deep

enough for tattooing it in permanent form (in future perspective: it means for their whole lives).

Some of my respondent reported “general rebel” against society around, parental system, against system of control or social order which they observed during every-day life in present or past perspective:

Respondent 1-3: *“Against society, I mean against people who running down other people with tattoos. I am laugh straight in that people faces. Also I am still against control of the system, domination of authorities and politics at all.”*

Respondent 1-1: *“For sure it is kind of my rebel against contemporary state of reality, because I fell that my way of think is different than other people’s thinks. Most of the people in society don’t want to think about it. We are living in world dominated by consumption and egoism, we thing mostly about self-comfort. By my tattoo I situated myself and my status lower than the other people, and it shows how different are my ideas about human’s place on the Earth.”*

Respondent 1-7: *“During my youth of course, right now – not that much. I wanted to be different some time. I was in the past, but now surely I am not against “system” etc. anymore. I am still inside punk culture with it, so against the other side of the world in some ways...”*

Respondent 1-8: *“It was kind of rebel against my parents.”*

Or also strong rebel against concrete point of views and political formations:

Respondent 1-8: *“Tattooed people are not bad at all. I am also against Nazism, I am fighting with it. Sometimes I am glad that I still have that hand, because of that, it was my way to show my rebel against*

*Nazism. I was close to antifascist organizations all this time. It was some kind of symbolical fight, one person just fights on the street, the other one – also makes tattoo. Also I have group of good friends, which we met in this ‘climate’.”*

In some other cases my respondents presented their tattoos as sign of sympathy to something, agreement and self-connection with some kind of music/esthetical/stylistic objects:

Respondent 1-2: “*you know...Is sign that I like mainly with that psychobilly and rock'n'roll subcultures. I like “rock'n'roll life-style” with beer, fun concerts and friends (but without drugs at all!), this kind of style is nice and attractive for me, I really like it. Well... I can tell now, that having tattoo is kind of “illness”. I mean, you made one, and you need another one later. Yeah, I think that there must be addiction.*”

Respondent 1-5: “*It could sound funny, but is about sympathy to Ireland... I see Ireland as symbol, group of symbols, but without connection with that people personally. People not, just culture. That beauty, Celtic culture... strength, power, how big it was. You know... here, in Czech Republic I can see Celtic things and also places almost everywhere – name of places, places in general, rivers, nature, historical artifacts. They were there, so this culture is connected with me as with person born here, in Czech Republic.*”

Last group of my respondents didn't find any connection of authorities or rebel against them in personal interpretation of self-tattooing. They concentrated themselves mostly on personal experiences or philosophical system.”

Respondent 1-9: “*I never think about it in that way. I have it and I like it. There is no deeper philosophy, maybe just that there is important to no to lost dreams and to not to lose time. Maybe is a bit trivial, but there is only one philosophy that I really believe from point of my*

*experiences. In context of tattoos at all – If you want, just do it without caring about anybody or anything.”*

Respondent 1-3: “*Well, is not about riot, not about war or fight. It is all about me, showing my own, demonstration from my inside to the world in positive sense. Is nothing against anything; maybe also not for something... is only positive, only positive way.*”

#### **e) Individual reflection about having tattoo (in perspective of their owner)**

During the next part of research I asked my respondents about self and personal reflections connected with this tattoo. I designed question into simple style “What this tattoo means for you?” and left quite wide space for answering this question. Because of that, answers have very personal character, and pointed perfectly self-reflections of respondents.

Some of my respondents connected it with something that they identify with themselves, they really like in frame of lifestyle and social situation:

Respondent 1-2: “*This is something that I really like. You know, concerts, scene, music, fun. I like girls with tattoos, beer, rock'n'roll and things that I have there. And I also love double-bass because of sound.*”

Respondent 1-6: „*It is symbol of my life when I was 16, story of my life, I really trusted in it that time. About having fun, fighting with Nazism, being punk rocker till death, being against school and system. It was from my head that time, nobody could tell anything, and it was only my decision.*”

Respondent 1-7: “*This is symbol of my young time, my youth as punk rocker. It is great symbol of important part of my life.*”

Other group of my respondents connected their tattoos mostly with kind of "ideological" lifestyle (mostly ecological or philosophical) connected with self-reflections, but not with any group or social construction:

Respondent 1-9: *"For me there is form of reminder that I should remember about work and improve myself. Three of life in the mirror says: way to God is only inside you, in yourself is also way to higher level of recognition. You can open your eyes by yourself. Is your choice, if you are on the way to oblivion, or to enlightenment?"*

Respondent 1-8: *"It is connected with my love to my cat. And it is also about my love and close relation with animal and nature. I feel very close to nature, I try to live in harmony with everything around me."*

Respondent 1-1: *„In my case there is kind of location myself in the same position as fabric material, making importance of human being maybe a bit smaller. I think a lot about having body as own, personal belongings, which is controversial for example in case of organ's transplantations. People don't want to sing agreement for that intervention into body, they want to be buried in ground with heart, liver, kidneys and prefer to be eating by the worms, that saving each other's life by giving it. This is that recycling idea; I think that we should be recycled as much as it can be possible, for being needed if somebody needs part of us. Probably it is connected with my atheism, because I don't believe in life after death, and I think that when I will die, I won't exist anymore in any form. And I don't understand why my heart and other organs can't be used again. I treated my body as plastic material, not as individual which is connected with spirituality, thinking etc. At the moment of my end, body that I left I can put into ground, burn it or give part of me into recirculation. And last option is best done for me."*

Last tendency of self-interpretation of tattoo in group of my respondents is treating tattoos as something esthetical and nice, or in connection with something nice that respondent likes to see and follow:

Respondent 1-5: *"It is about my positive feelings about Ireland, that I want to show for more and more people... you know, wild nature, Celtic spirit, free behaviors island far from other parts of Europe... also quite isolated during the history, with hundreds of beautiful symbols. There are my positive feelings and stories from inside, and I am glad if somebody will understand it that way. But also, you know, there is just my vision, for somebody who only could see it; it will be probably totally different story."*

Respondent 1-3: *"The truth is that I like to watch on my tattoo. Somebody told me once, that it will be awful with white wedding dress, (disharmony, chaos etc...) but I have different feeling, because my tattoo is not vulgar or garish, is not aggressive exposition. This tattoo make me calm, I am in harmony with it, and I want make it bigger."*

Respondent 1-10: *"I am fine and calm that I have this tattoo, because it looks nice, I like it so much. Sometimes I think it could look better half centimeter more on the left side, but I never regret, despite of very impulsive decision of made it."*

#### f) Relationship with society

In next order I asked my respondents if having this tattoo changed in any way their relationships with society – in “local” meaning with family, friends and partners, and in “global” as workplace and people not well known. Half of my respondents reported not to change any relations at all, in any aspects:

Respondent 1-7: *"I don't think so... no, definitely not, never."*

Respondent 1-4: “*I never think about it that way... I don't think so, no.*”

Respondent 1-5: “*It doesn't changes any relationships.*”

Respondent 1-10: “*It is quite small, so not really.*”

Another half of my respondents reported changes, in positive way (intensify good feeling about themselves):

Respondent 1-9: “*It changes me for sure. Sometimes I feel that I am surer about myself, I have my own credo inside my skin. It makes me feel better in some ways.*”

Respondent 1-6: “*I feel more connected with music bands from punk rock, hardcore, grind and underground music scenes. But in the other way, I am glad when society is angry for me, because of that tattoo. I still have some free space on my skin, so I will make new tattoos, because this is kind of addiction. You have one, later you need another one, or more. I also want visible tattoos, for example on my throat.*”

Respondent 1-8: “*It connected me with nature. I also feel more close to the other people from vegetarian and eco scene, because having tattoos is very popular in this environment.*”

Some respondents reported also bad experiences and worse quality of relationships with reason in having tattoo:

Respondent 1-3: “*Unfortunately change in worse way. I am educated teacher and pedagogue, and because of visible and big tattoo (and piercing also) I had problem in finding work place in my branch. I had this problem around 1 year. Now my situation is fine, I have job in private, multicultural school, but I know that in branch of public*

*education there is no place for me. I am' freak', that's why for some people's opinion I couldn't be an authority".*

Respondent 1-1: “*You know...unfortunately when you're living In Poland, in most lively and social situation you have problem with "being out". I fill "beingout" with my tattoo because if I am not going to explain for somebody what is meaning of my tattoo, they think about me as an idiot (in most cases, not all, but most). They normally don't agree with me, I mean, I know some people who agree, but when I am going somewhere with somebody that I don't know well, it never happened. But I fell that the world is changing, there is more and more ecological organization, more active people who are against consumption at all and I hope that everything will move that way very fast, faster than now. I believe in this post-humanistic way of life-philosophy and I am glad that something is going to change in this way.”*

Respondent 1-8: “*My parents were very angry at the beginning; they didn't want to speak with me because of this tattoo, for a long time. Now it is ok, but they still don't want me to have more tattoos.”*

Respondent 1-9: “*My parents haven't seen it until today because we are not living together. My girlfriend has mixed feelings – she thinks, that motive is interesting and in good quality, but she was shocked how big is it. Now she is ok with it. My friends were also a bit under shock, how big it is.”*

Respondent 1-10: “*Accepting tattoos is still problem of this country, mostly for the old generations, but not only. We should be more tolerant and open to other people, and nature and everything around. Right*

*now if something is different, it doesn't mean that there is surely dangerous or freaky".*

#### **f) Being “in” or “out” of society**

I asked my respondents also for another personal feeling – if they feel more “in” or “out” society because of having tattoo. Some of them answering, that they are more “in” whole, or concrete group of society:

Respondent 1-2: *“I am more in society because of this tattoo...but not the whole society, but that part that I really like, my friends, bands etc.”*

Respondent 1-7: *“I fell normal, mostly fine in relation with society and I am not out of that society because of this tattoo. Definitely no.”*

Respondent 1-8: *“Depends of situation and day. My feelings are mostly the same like before tattoo, maybe I am more “in” group of my friends. With whole society I feel fine, not more freaky or strange.”*

Most of my respondents declared “Out” feelings and usually kept distance from social structures. They felt not accepted and wrongly evaluated because of having tattoo and some called themselves permanent and very deep “outsiders” :

Respondent 1-6: *“Let me explain it in the easiest possible way... With my tattoo, I feel closer to the nature and so I want it to exist. But at the same moment, I am far away from the real, current form of society. I feel closer to that imaginative, ideal form - thanks to my tattoo.”*

Respondent 1-9: *“Mostly ‘out’. These symbols are not easy to understand for most of people. Also, to have any kind of tattoo is still a kind of stigmatization; it is slowly changing, but anyway... And it is also about size. Quite small tattoos are accepted*

*better and larger motives, in my opinion, are getting more negative attention.”*

Respondent 1-6: “*I am out of society. I know where my place is, where my friends are and I do not have to think too much about stupid things. I am kind of happy, when somebody is angry or disappointed because of my tattoo. You know, it is a sort of euphoria that I am out of this stupid part of society, out of those silly people.*”

Respondent 1-3: “*Mostly “out”, but the tattoo is not the only reason for that. It is also about my personality and character.*”

In conclusion of this part of research, I would like to mention that “out of society” feelings of most respondent’s cases were declared very strongly and decisively and showed, how much the tattoos can place their owner out of social main-stream according their self-interpretation.

### g) Other Reflections, Ideas and Opinions

I asked every respondent at the end of each interview for “last words” – a special reflection, something that could enrich my research. One of my respondents presented many things about tattooing important for them in an interesting way. I would like to use this quote to finish the practical research as my respondent showed me their own, social and individual reasons for having tattoos perfectly:

Respondent 1-3: “*Kind of last word, summary... let me think for a moment... I will be glad if (in the future) people develop their individual points of view, feelings and reflections, for example by having tattoos. It is very important to express or show something in your own personal way, differently from the others, even though you may*

*be considered “abnormal” or “weird”. People and society are forming themselves again and again and it is not possible to be all the time against the personal vision of body art.”*

## 5. CONCLUSION

### 5.1 Functions of Tattoo in Present Society

Tattoo is usually a simple picture which is put under the skin. Nevertheless, such a simple visual sign can have many functions and great symbolical and ideological background not easy to be understood by every member of society. We can recognize several main functions of contemporary tattoos. Some of them could be presented as complex and mixed, others as special and dominating functions under particular circumstances:

**Magical and religious functions** – in this case, tattoo is used as an amulet against bad powers, a kind of shield against bad powers and black magic, or as a demonstration of religious beliefs and faith.

**Military function** – tattoo is used as “a medal”, a sign of heroism and courage of warrior during the war, and also as medicine for making enemies scared and unsafe.

**Social function** – it is a sign of affiliation with family, tribe or nation, of identification with particular group, culture or subculture.

**Sexual function** – a way to increase sexual attractiveness, a symbol of sexual maturity.

**Aesthetical function** – a way to increase beauty of the body, a positive and nice visual effect accepted in society.

**Repressive function** – a sign of branding, stamping and stigmatization of prisoners, for example in concentration camps during the Second World War.

**Patriotic and “national” function** – signs, symbols or quotes promoting attachment to country or region where the owner of tattoo was born.

**Psychological function** – manifestation of feelings (love, hate etc.), passions, declarations, abilities, remembrances of important people, places or events.

**Informative function** – information about blood group, diabetes, epilepsy or other medical circumstances.

(Szaszkiewicz. 1997. Otrubova. 2011)

For better understanding and to make these functions more “human”, I decided to translate them as first person narrative. In this hypothetic construction, I try to explain the personal motivation of tattoo owners in the most accessible form. I drew inspiration from the interviews made during my practical research. Transformation of these data into a “*belles-lettres*” form is in my opinion appropriate. This construction made all functions readable and shows possible types of personal reflections and deep feelings used by tattoo-owners for description and clarification:

1. “My dairy” – I decided to have that tattoo because I want to remember something important to me.
2. “Clearing myself” – I want to clear my mind by visualization of something that I am afraid of, unhappy about or scared of. I fight my own “demons” by making them visible.
3. “Representations of positive feelings” – I love somebody or I have a favorite passion – there is something very important to me around. I want to show it “on” my body in a permanent form. I want to show my feelings in the most lasting and durable way forever.
4. “Representations of negative feelings” – There is something around me that I am angry about, I feel disappointed of, I want to show how much I disapprove of it. Sometimes, I want to blame somebody for something; I want to show my angriness. I am showing it decisively on my body, I make this form of tattoo because I do not agree with something.
5. “Spirituality” – I am fascinated by something spiritual, mystical, magical. I want to keep some visions connected with these fascinations as an amulet, to make me feel better or to protect me. Also, my religious beliefs are sometimes strong enough to be represented by religious symbols.
6. “Sexuality” – I want to feel more attractive, I want to be more attractive concerning my sexuality and I want to intrigue my sexual partners by unusual decoration of my body. Sometimes, I am an enthusiast for some specific fetish or I want to show my

sexual preference by specific symbols. I am showing that I am open and uninhibited in sexual behavior.

**7** “Ideological identification” – there is a political or ideological group around me (I am their member or sympathizer) which is important for me. I want to show my commitment by putting their symbol on my skin. I want to share these things in the deepest possible way.

**8.** “Visual effect” – I want to present myself as original, interesting, mysterious or out-of-mainstream person. I want to create my own permanent appearance in order to make myself visually more interesting, prettier or more attractive for other people around me.

**9.** “Rebel and revolting behavior against somebody” – I was born, grown up or I already exist in an environment (work, place of living, family), which does not accept body-modifications because of some reasons (religious, cultural, social etc.). I decided to have it done to manifest myself as an ultimate rebel and to express the necessity of being out of that society/group. In some way, I decided to be the “black-sheep” and I agree with being perceived as a strange/weird/abnormal person, even if I try to fight that stereotype.

**10.** “Provocation” – by visual modification in form of tattoos (with strong, aesthetical or meaningful transmission), I subconsciously expect or wait for the reaction from the rest of society and people around me. I want to provoke reaction, I want to be in the center of attention; I want myself to be talked about in wide group. I expect both positive and negative reactions; it is not mainly about their character but about their effect in general meaning.

**11.** “Taste for art” – I have my favorite art-styles, artists or art periods in history so I would like to show this fascination on my skin, in a visible way. I use my skin as canvas and create it according to my ideas and visions. I can mix it by my ideas; I do not have to keep any artistic rules to create it and so everything is going in kind of “freestyle”.

**12.** “Enlarging of self-evaluation” – because of my tattoos, I have better feelings about myself, I am stronger, braver and more unique in my own eyes. My self-evaluation can also grow due to opinions of other people (especially, if I am a member of any particular structure, group or subculture), where the owner of tattoos could be considered as strong, powerful and predominant personality. My evaluation

could be connected by having or not having tattoos (as negative sign), or theirs styles and utterance.

## **5.2 Possible Stages of Collective and Non-collective Awareness of Tattoo-owners in the Present Society**

By this scheme I would like to present 5 stages of membership and presence in any subculture group, which are transforming from collective to individual perception, and are also strongly connected with graphical design of the body and body modifications. Nowadays, people during the process of self-development change affections, relations and reflections from collective into individual:

### **First stage (collective)**

Necessity to be in a group/society/subculture, when somebody wants to be a part of some organized structure – non tattooing



### **2<sup>nd</sup> stage (collective)**

Beginning of being a participant in group/society/subculture, connecting with self-identification within this environment; adapting their symbols and graphical codes as own – non tattooing but with first ideas about it



### **3<sup>rd</sup> stage (collective)**

Tattooed symbols as a manifestation of membership in some environment and full-identification with that code/ideology/vision – tattooed



### **4<sup>th</sup> stage (half-collective, half-individual)**

Deeper observation and longer participation in group; getting to know it; beginning of own-reflection which is connected but not full identification with the main-stream of group ideology/views/opinions – reflection about present tattoos



### **5<sup>th</sup> stage (individual)**

Individuation of self-manifestation visible as tattoos in style of group, but also with some personal meaning, own-reflected, often also provoked – individuation of point of view about tattoo



### **6<sup>th</sup> stage (individual)**

Own-creating of tattoos connected with personal feelings, visions and ways. Standing out of “mother group” in a way of self-design and its creation (not connected with resignation from participation of main-group activities) – personal, self-analyzed and original streams visible in next tattoos.

### **5.3 Contrasts and Dichotomies between past and present types of tattooing**

In this table, I would like to present differences between traditional mechanisms of making and having tattoo (connected with tribe's membership and ritual body modifying), and present reasons for having it (strongly depends on individuality). Transformation of forms, values, reasons and techniques during the history brought cardinal changes which I present here in a table full of contrasts. It is also important to mention that present motives can have both individual and social meanings (for example, connected with subcultures). But in almost all cases, they are building on the principle of individuality, without collective values.

**Table 2.1**

<b>PAST (traditional)</b>	<b>PRESENT (contemporary)</b>
Codify rituals (rules issued by a superior or tribe/group/family)	“Self-rituals” without presence of higher rules
Tattoos as sign of status (warrior, shaman, leader, adult person, strong person etc.)	Tattoo “out of signified status”, could mean everything, does not have to symbolize situation of their owner.
Tattooing body as long time process (travels, way of life, religious history)	Tattooing body as fast process, it is possible to do it any time, no time significance.

Being a tattoo-artist as a special, magical and mysterious function, opportunity not for everybody.	Everyone can be a tattoo-artist if only he/she has a tattoo-machine and basic technical knowledge how to do it.
The same tattoos in the same group/culture/tribe/family/gender.	Strong accent is given to individuality of tattoo-motives, importance of having something different from tattoos of other people.
Demonstration of group's consciousness by making the same or similar tattoos in area of the same environment, family etc.	Strong demonstration of self-individuality by having personal-projected tattoo, connected with own reflections, experiences and identities.
Single-identity: having tattoo connected with natural and inborn environment of social group, religion or status, not possible to change during whole life process	Multiple-identity: by having tattoos with origin foreign from inborn environment it is possible to create many identities and connections with foreign elements of culture or art, science or other.
Symbolical meanings – every line, point or motive had symbolical background and deep meaning	It is possible to have tattoo only because of aesthetic reasons, without deep ideology or symbolical meaning of the whole motive or its elements.
Tattoos illustrated everyday life.	Tattoos as illustration of imaginations

#### 5.4 Social and Individual Perceptions of Having Tattoos

Here I would like to present social and individual type of reasons connected with having tattoo these days. I also would like to pay attention to individual reasons, which are more important and more present in group of my respondents during practical research. Social relations connected with tattooing are also “designed” in form different from traditional and only collective sense, where tattoo owner has to identify himself with whole society/tribe/family. Based on my observation and relations from research, I would like to mark individual aspects of having tattoo as a dominating stream visible on the present owners of tattoos in group of respondents from the Czech Republic and Poland.

## **Social:**

- Identification with group connected by the same or similar tattoos
- Sharing the same ideologies or points of view by the same or similar tattoos
- Demonstration of similar antipathy to something; feeling stronger in group
- Feeling of fight “with the same target” in a stronger group
- Keeping connection, relationships or friendship by the same or similar tattoos
- Identification with the same state, city or region by similar tattoos
- Declaration of loyalty inside specific groups (legal or illegal)
- Connection to tribe/family/group as protection of being alone
- Form of self-signed as answer for social conflicts and problems
- Membership in any group as an important point of social life of humans

## **Individual:**

- Feeling strong individuality and personal independence
- Needs to separate and “to be outside” the main part of society
- Treats tattooed skin as a “diary” for memorizing something
- Personal rebel against “something” or “everything”
- Need to shock people around (typical for conservative societies)
- Need to sign personal ideology, religion feelings or symbols
- Need to be different from surroundings: social sphere, family or workspace
- Aesthetical need to “modify” body for better look
- Significance of isolation, depression, spleen or other bad psychical conditions
- Shows respect for special values, hobbies and other things personally important
- Individual “fight” with other dominations (parental system, politics, law etc.)
- A sort of own manifest made to show viewpoints, for example ecological

## 5.5 End

During my paper work I tried to show, how contemporary tattooing transformed from collective and strictly fixed system in mechanism and meaning, into something individual, very personal and based on self-reflection. In theoretical part of my work I concentrated myself on the body values in definitions of classical symbolism (represented by theories made by Mary Douglas) and fashion streams presented by Roland Barthes and his interpretations of popular culture.

During my practical research I analyzed most popular tendencies in frame of: process of tattoo creating; relations between tattooing and membership in any subculture; individual motivations and reflections connected with symbolical meaning of tattooing for their owners; quality of relations with society (both in general and personal perspectives) and self-interpretation of own place in society (being “*in*” or “*out*” of society) influenced by having tattooed body. I also noted similarities and “main-streams” in frame of ideological and symbolical space of tattooed body in case of my respondents, and also signed esthetical and artistic meaning of body modification for some of them. I also presented some of contemporary (and in form of short contraction- also historical) typologies, technical and stylistic backgrounds of tattooing as complex of mechanical, creative and designed activities with effect supply of strong, symbolical meaning. I analyzed possible reasons of located tattoos in special places on the whole body and contemporary transformation of symbolical meanings in example of differences between popular culture and criminal tattooing. I signed strong meaning of individuality during the emotional process of designing, getting and having tattoos. I signed differences between traditional “tribe’s” form of tattooing set in collective consciousness, and transformation into “new value” which I described as contemporary way of tattooing. Every part of my work I combined with others to getting most compleutive and clear effect in form of conclusion.

At the end of introduction, I would like to mark, that my work has only pilot and base-form (because of relatively small number of respondents during research) and I am not able to surely apply results of the research for whole society of Czech Republic or Poland. My observations and conclusions are coming from small base. But they also could give a introduction for bigger researches in future,

lead for example in much bigger group of respondents of in more countries in Europe. Schemes and models that I prepared there, could be easily apply for any other, contemporary group of people, connected with any visible trend, style or symbols in frame of contemporary styles of visual self-creation of personality.

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## RESUME

### English language

During my research about tattoos and tattooing in contemporary context of social and individual perception and behavior of tattooed people I paid attention to personal opinions and self-relations connected with this form of body modification. I made practical research in group of 10 tattoo-owners from Czech Republic and Poland. I asked about personal reflections about it, connected with symbolical, ideological or subculture meaning. I analyzed personal reflections, relations with society, reasons of decisions and many other ideas connected with self-creation of body in society. I connected it also with theory of symbolical meaning of the body, represented by Mary Douglas, and interpreting tattoos as social fashion, which I was inspired by Roland Barthes.

In summary I recognized that individual character in contemporary tattooing is stronger and more important than social and collective motives for tattooing skin, and not very often connected with any social, religious or political group.

### Czech Language

Moje diplomová práce se věnuje tetování v kontextu socialního a individualního formování lidského tela. Práce je teoreticky ukotvená v klasickém symbolizmu. V praktické části jsem provedla 10 pohovorů s potetovanými lidmi, o tom, jak subiektivně vnímají své tetování. Výsledkem mého výzkumu je postupná individualizace tetování a ustup kolektivního vnímaní tetování.

## 8. ENCLOSURES

### 1. Pictures about design, history and technology of making tattoos:

**1.1** Reconstruction of traditional tattooing process “Ta Mmoko” from Mauritius by “tattoo-machine” made by two, crossed pieces of wood, and igle made by bone



Source: <http://www.themaori.com/maori-tattoo/ta-moko-procedure>. Date of access:

13.02.2013

**1.2** Contemporary reconstruction of, wooden Japanese, traditional tattoo machine



Source: <http://tatuazetniczny.blogspot.com/2010/06/jedyna-taka-wystawa-piotr-wojciechowski.html>. Date of access: 13.02.2013

**1.3 Old, electric tattoo-machine (around 1900 year) of Owen Jensen from “Nu-Pike” tattoo-studio, Long Beach, USA.**



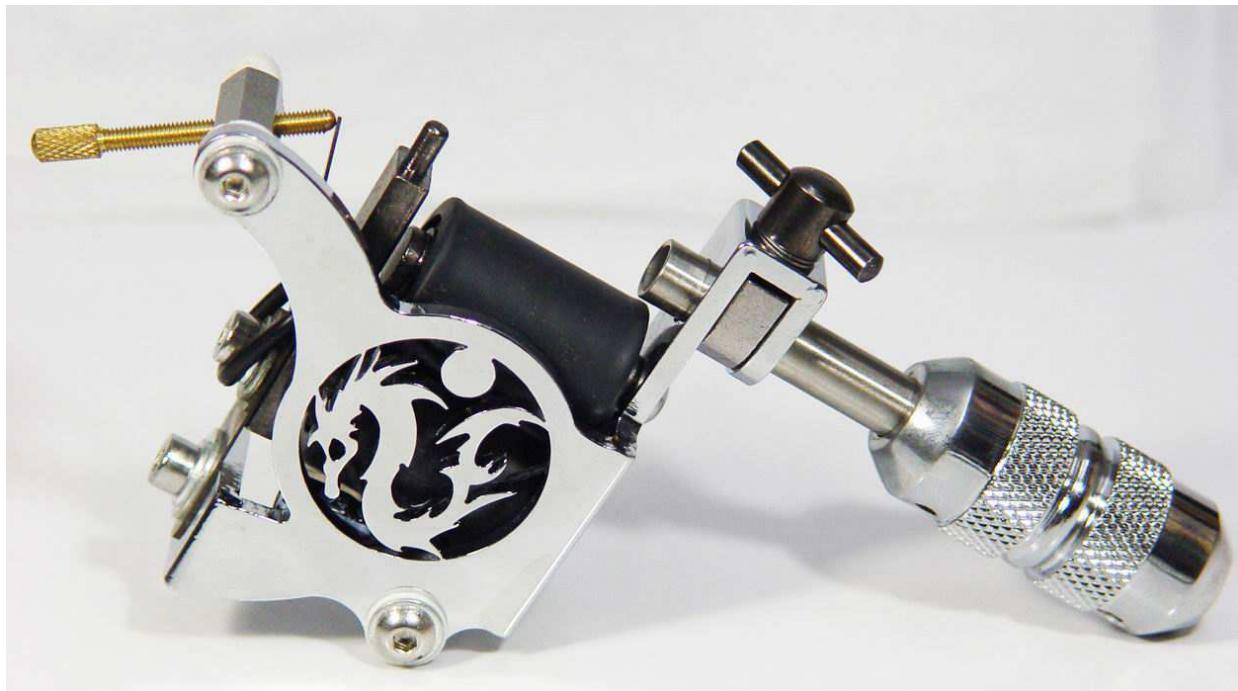
Source: Collection of Tim Hendricks, [http://blog.saltwatertattoo.com/?page\\_id=2](http://blog.saltwatertattoo.com/?page_id=2). Date of access: 13.02.2013

**1.4 Old electric tattoo-machine from 1930 or 1940 year, England**



Source: collection of Ohio Tattoo History Museum, USA.  
[http://www.myspace.com/tattoo\\_history\\_museum](http://www.myspace.com/tattoo_history_museum). Date of access: 13.02.2013

**1.5 Contemporary tattoo-machine with modern design and classical style of (electro-magnetic) mechanism**



Source: <http://mrjack372tattoo.en.ecplaza.net/>. Date of access: 13.02.2013

**1.6 Contemporary tattoo-machine with rotary mechanism**



Source: <http://bishoprotary.com/shop/black-serious/>. Date of access: 13.02.2013

1.7 Photo from International Tattoo Convention in Prague (date 25.05.2012)



Source: Photo from own archive, author: Magdalena Brzezicka

1.8 Photo from International Tattoo Convention in Prague (date 25.05.2012)



Source: Photo from own archive, author: Magdalena Brzezicka

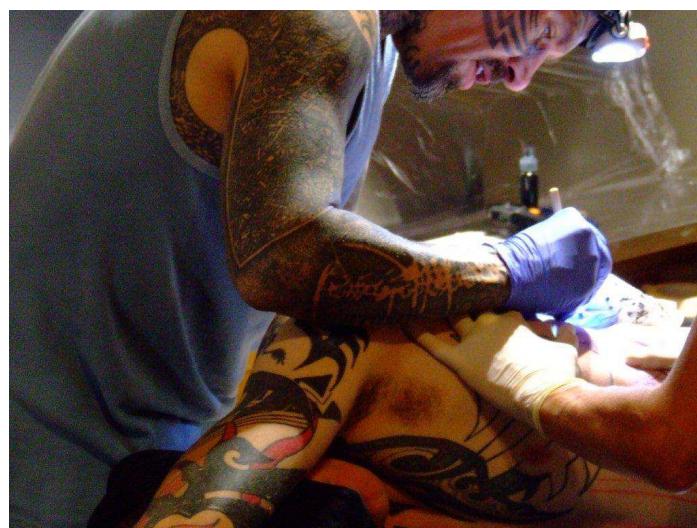
**1.9** Contemporary reconstruction of traditional tattoo methods from Indonesia at “Traditional Tattoo and World Culture Festival” at Cobh, Ireland. 10 of July 2010



Source: <http://tatuazetniczny.blogspot.com/2010/08/traditional-tattoo-world-culture.html>.

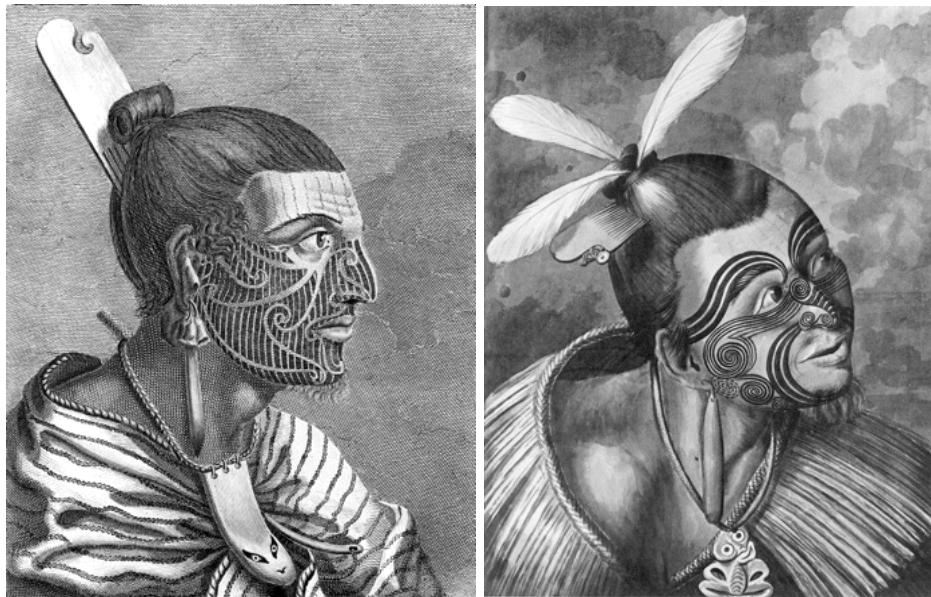
Date of access: 13.02.2013

**1.10** Contemporary reconstruction of traditional tattoo methods at “Traditional Tattoo and World Culture Festival” at Cobh, Ireland. 10 of July 2010



Source: <http://tatuazetniczny.blogspot.com/2010/08/traditional-tattoo-world-culture.html>. Date of access: 13.02.2013

**1.11** Illustrations of traditional, face tattoos of warriors drew by Sidney Parkinson during first journey to New Zealand with Captain James Cook (October 1769)



Source: <http://tatuazetniczny.blogspot.com/2010/10/6-pazdziernika-1769-r-james-cook.html>. Date of access: 13.02.2013

**1.12** Examples of contemporary facial tattoos



Source: <http://skybambi.wordpress.com/2010/12/06/tattoo/skull-face-tattoo-lg/#> . Date of access: 13.02.2013

### 1.13 Examples of old, sailor's tattoos made around 1950 year in USA



Source: Archive of photography from The Museum of America and the Sea in Mystic, USA. <http://tattooroadtrip.com/blog/maritime-tattoo-exhibit-at-mystic-seaport-museum/>. Date of access: 13.02.2013

### 1.14 Contemporary tattoos made under inspiration of sailor's tattoos from 50'Th



Source: <http://www.tatterest.com/old-school-traditional-skull-dagger-tattoo.html>. Date of access: 13.02.2013

**1.15** Examples of contemporary tattoos designed in modern way, without traditional inspiration and motives



Source: <http://mayhemandmuse.com/modernize-your-body-with-yann-blacks-abstract-tattoos/>. Date of access: 13.02.2013

**1.16** Examples of contemporary tattoos designed in modern way, with visible and intentional inspirations in childish draws, transmitted into form of abstractions



Source: <http://mayhemandmuse.com/modernize-your-body-with-yann-blacks-abstract-tattoos/>. Date of access: 13.02.2013

**1.17** “Biomechanical” style of contemporary tattoo, which symbolically connected their owners with “being cyborg or robot”, and connected themselves with technology



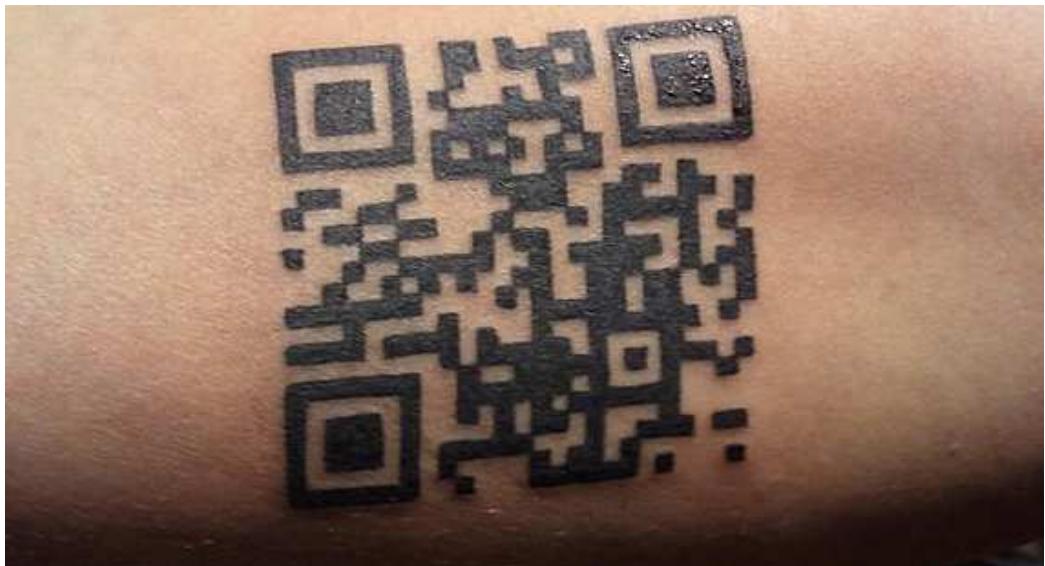
Source: <http://123-tattoos.blogspot.com/2012/04/biomechanical-tattoos.html>. Date of access: 13.02.2013

**1.18** “Macabre” style of contemporary tattoos, where people using most possible creepy, bloody, awful and scary motives, with inspiration in culture of horrors



Source: <http://www.formatmag.com/news/black-gray-tattoo-street-art-fine-art/attachment/black-and-gray-tattoo-b-paul-booth/>. Date of access: 13.02.2013

**1.19.** Most modern way of contemporary tattoo-design: tattoos with “QR code”, possible to animate on internet websites by iPhone technology (2011 year)



Source: <http://www.plus-two.com/> Date of access: 13.02.2013

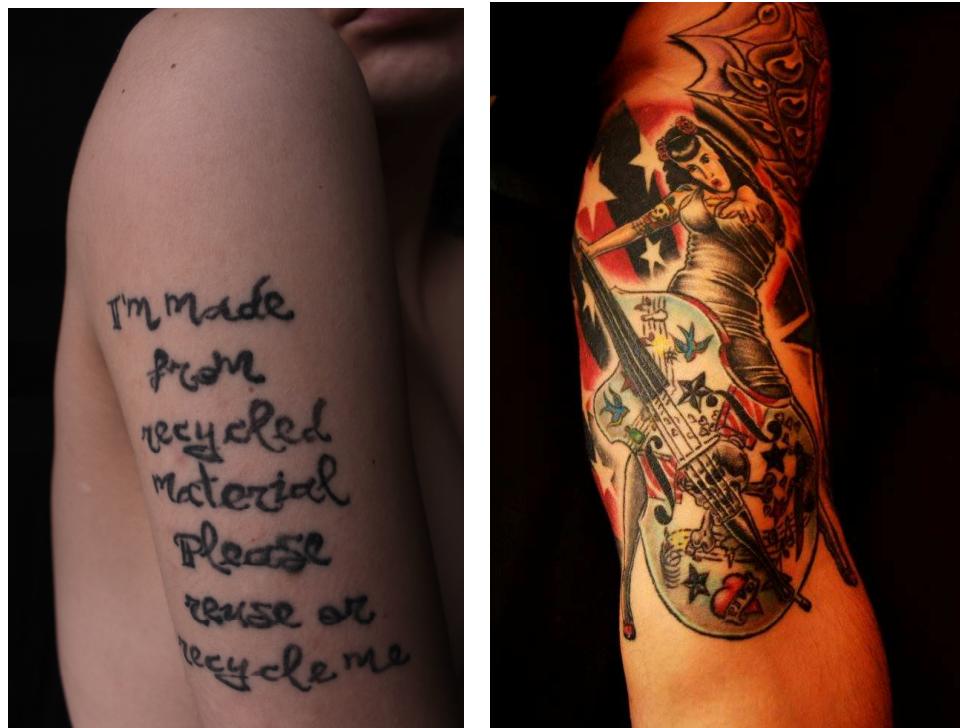
**1.20.** Example on “QR code” tattooed on skin, ,possible to read by iPhone



Source: <http://www.techfreakstuff.com/2011/07/first-animated-tattoo-using-iphone-qr-code-reader.html>. Date of access: 13.02.2013

## 2.Pictures of tattoos- main topics of all interviews

2.1/ 2.2



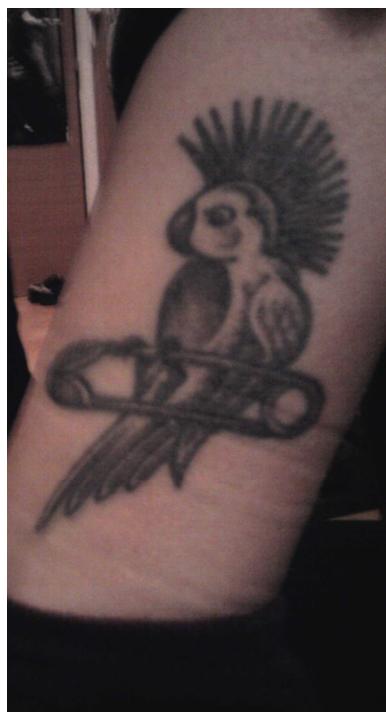
2.3/2.4



**2.5/2.6**



**2.7/2.8**



**2.9/ 2.10**



### **3. Other**

#### **3.1 Scheme of interview's question**

1. Name, age, gender nationality, education, hometown
2. Say a few words about your tattoo- where and when did you make it, how does it cost etc.?
3. Describe your tattoo- what is this?
4. Where did you find inspiration for this form of your tattoo, graphic motive etc.?
5. Tell something about proces of creating your tattoo from: how long was way from idea to made it, how deep was your reflection, did you consulted it with somebody?
6. Are you member of any subcultural, polical or religious group? If yes, is that tattoo connected with it?
7. What this tattoo means and symbol ise for you personally?
9. Do you show any kind of rebel by your tattoo? Are you against something by that?
10. Is that tattoo represent any kind of sympathy or connection with any part of society, different culture etc.?
11. Is that tattoo changed your relationship with society or part of society in any way? Good or bad way?
12. Do you feel more in or out of society or part of society in any way?
14. Are you calm about having this tattoo? Did you ever regret it?
15. Did your friend or family changed relationships with you because of this tattoo?
16. Any other ideas, reflections, stories etc.