

## Tattoos and the Longing-To-Be *Another* World

### Monotheistic Bans vs. the Contemporary Tattooing Revival

The theme of belonging is certainly deep-rooted in tattooing practices of the Ancient World. I would like to explore a complementary theme: tattooing as an attempt to include world features on/in the skin and body so as to attune an individual life to the cosmos. Even today, the inscription of signs on the body and the resulting transformations were and are—I think—intended as a sort of proactive means of controlling the world and its dynamics. In a sense, drawing figures on the body is very similar to drawing figures from the stars in the sky, and then using them for divination and the art of foreseeing the future. Writing the body and writing the sky, in other words, are two complementary but phenomenologically inter-related ways of exerting power over the world (or, at least, an attempt and the illusion of succeeding). So, for example, "drawing this specific figure or symbol on my body will make me invulnerable to hostile forces or safe from evil spirits or bad luck." In this sense, the trans-epochal practice of tattooing transpires a deep and somehow karstic "longing-to-be," a living embodiment of the world's life and, at the same time, a symmetrical "longing for the world to be," a spatialized reification of human mind/body projections or affordances. In short, tattooed or inked bodies are intended as pro-active cosmograms.

Such goals carry a whiff of magic and, almost inevitably, have been branded by monotheisms as forms of idolatry. Nonetheless, I think the primary concern of monotheistic theologians had less to do with the signs or images in and of themselves, and more with a rejection of people taking on the work of God through bodily inscriptions and transformations, that is, imposing their own will onto "creation." On the contrary—and this is an important point of convergence between Peter Petkoff's approach and mine—the symbols, drawings and garments provided by monotheisms manifest acceptance, and thereby belonging, to an order, a specific order of things which corresponds and 'reifies' God's will. In this sense, I think, we can interpret the monotheistic legal ban of permanent inscription on the body differently from impositions of some God's orders (for example circumcision, or invisible "tattoos" such as Christian baptism). These kinds of bodily or spiritual transformation are instead intended as doorways to God's world order, the only true one.

Within the spectrum of the religious resilience of monotheistic faiths, the contemporary revival of tattoos can also be read as an emancipatory attempt to break pre-existing social constraints and schemes, transforming every tattooed body/person into a sort of hero, a superman—a puerile aim, to be sure, but nevertheless attractive and widespread among so-called adults. At the complementary intersection of Petkoff's and my approach, it could be very interesting to analyze the phenomenological synthesis of conduct which "signs of belonging" and "signs of a proactive powerful being" might generate. A "code of belonging" may very well produce a kind of control over the world, while at the same time "recipes for the proactive molding of the world" could become devices of belonging.

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