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This article discusses specific aspects of a more extensive piece of research, carried out thanks to a mobility research fellowship for professors at universities of recognized prestige, conferred by Universidad Carlos III de Madrid and carried out at Columbia University, School of Arts, New York in 2013.

Media and contemporary tattoo

Abstract

Tattoo phenomenon, initially associated with traditional ethnic groups and later with marginal cultures, has in recent decades experienced unprecedented expression in contemporary societies spreading out into very diverse segments of the population, where this practice was heretofore alien. Originally associated with rituals and sacred rites, for some, tattoos have become increasingly fashionable, with this trend largely driven by mediated diffusion channels. Accordingly, the presence of tattoos is evident in the street as well as in the media. This paper is an approach to the role of the media in this state of affairs. During the course of this research, in-depth interviews were carried out with professional tattoo artists and individuals who have been tattooed, in order to learn about the various aspects involved in the mediation of the tattoo and in its execution. As a result of these interviews, it has been established that media have influenced the increase in popularity of this practice, both from the clear perspective of the tattoo's quantitative presence in urban environments, and from the different ways in which visibility has been granted to the tattoo by the media through various platforms and formats involving a variety of areas ranging from, among others, the training of tattoo artists, visual styles, social legitimization of their use, the personal meaning given to tattoos and the reasons for getting tattooed, among others.

Keywords

Contemporary tattoo, media, reality show, body, fashion

1. Introduction

As is widely known, tattoo is part of a series of ritual practices carried out by different social groups which can be found in communities across all five continents. The ritual charge associated with the marking of the skin, either by means of transient or permanent designs, has been widely studied by anthropologists who have examined the lives and the values which have structured those societies whose reality does not form a part of the industrialized world. It is also a well-known fact that the raids carried out by European empires in very distant lands allowed contact with a repertoire of practices that were gradually incorporated into the metropolis. Initially, and for many years to come, tattoo was thus associated with those who were labelled as "wild", and later tattoo

was identified with people at the margins of society given that tattooing was practised primarily by specific groups: individuals indicating that they belonged to particular collectives and which, at the time, were recognised by others because of their differences and their allegiances: bikers, convicts, legionnaires, sailors, and so on.

From the perspective of our western societies, tattoo has invariably been seen as a mark of otherness, linked to a minority, located at the edge of or even further beyond the culture itself. However, in recent decades, overcoming religious prohibitions that had virtually eradicated the tattoo in Europe, and challenging the values projected onto the tattoo as a uncivilized or degenerate practice, cities began to be a space in which tattoo was taking place: springing up were tattoo studios and tattoo suppliers, advertising, tattoos for celebrities and for anyone and everyone.

These lines are intended to highlight a peculiar fact: the ways in which media, television, magazines and the Internet and the highly mediatised universe of celebrities are able to have an impact on the popularization of the tattoo today and the normalization of its practice.

2. Conceptual notes

2.1. *Archaism and modernity*

Tattooing, along with other forms of adornment and body marking, dates back to the tribal practices of cultures far removed from today's technical world. They are associated with processes in which collective life is ritualised conferring them with an identity and sacred nature, and also with a more mundane desire to decorate one's body for erotic and aesthetic purposes. In our globalised and industrialised societies we have been witnessing over the past decades the rise of a range of trends aimed at decorating and marking the body that are associated with a certain contemporary hedonism, as well as the development of a fashion and cosmetics industry with strong transnational economic interests. Indeed, as we will examine, elements with a remarkable presence in public spaces such as media and the images they convey, are hugely powerful transmitters of influence on style, fashion and body adornment, from which it is very difficult to escape. However, in this section, we wish to highlight some considerations relating to the deep human roots of the tattoo phenomenon, now so widespread in contemporary media, to delve further into the mediation and transmission modes that current media use, contributing to the spread of the phenomenon of contemporary tattoo.

In this sense, Martine Segalen's question seems relevant when she asks if in our societies, so oriented to technology, rationality and efficiency, there could be, however, ritual manifestations (Segalen, 2005). In this context we question whether the current phenomenon of the tattoo has a role within the ritual, the tribal or the archaic, despite being naturally modelled by the characteristics of contemporary urban forms. Maffesoli almost answers the question by arguing that "*dionysian, tribal, nomadic*, archaic ways of life are not simply marginal. They are gradually contaminating the whole range of postmodern practices, and individuals or social groups that can believe themselves to be unaffected are extremely rare" (Maffesoli, 2001: 12). This author sees a "synergy between archaism and technological development" (p. 12), and further explains that the hedonism of new generations curiously combines "tribal mimicry [...] with the exacerbated personal realization" (p. 13), because the singularity of the event, of what is being lived in the present, "is rooted in a timeless archaic substratum" (p. 29). According to Régis Debray (1996), the contemporary clash between this seemingly antagonistic pair is characterized, at the same time, by the sacred and the profane, the global and the local, the archaic and the modern. The past, a certain past, does not maintain a relationship of "anteriority" with our present.

The logic that governs it is rather that of "priority". And he poses the question: "why does our most archaic past increasingly and persistently invade our modernity?" (Debray, 1996: 56). The answer is that "archaism" has been misunderstood because "archaic" is not what is surpassed, but instead it is a substrate, it is not what "was fallen into disuse but what is deep" (Debray, 1996: 58). The present, even the event, is lived with intensity and uniqueness, but within it beats and emerges something of the order of the collective, the tragic and the past (Maffesoli, 2001: 67).

Such considerations that would warrant a more extensive approach in further research, provide us with a perspective in which we can consider the relationship of the current tattoo phenomenon in consonance with that which is invariably human, while here we limit our focus to analysis of cultural phenomena which are usually linked to the immediate and the ephemeral, as is the case of fashion and media.

2.2. Fashion

It is of interest to highlight some points in relation to fashion: it is an economic phenomenon promoter of consumption and, in this regard, strongly linked to the obsolescence of objects. Thus, Georg Simmel pointed out in early on in the twentieth century that fashion had been inserted into the mechanisms of the functioning of the market economy, and as such, it was no longer only about goods that become fashionable and generate profits, but about objects manufactured with the purpose of becoming trendy (Simmel, 1988). Roland Barthes explains: "the calculating industrial society, is doomed to create consumers who do not calculate" (Barthes, 2003: 14)

Moreover, the ephemeral and transitory nature attributed to fashion is reflected in the following quote from the poet Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837) who in his work engages fashion in a dialogue with death saying, "FASHION: I'm fashion, your sister. DEATH: My sister? FASHION: Yes, do you not remember that both of us were born of expiration?" (Leopardi, 2013: 14). Later the dialogue continues with provocations enunciated by the very same fashion that startles death; for example, "FASHION: I say that our nature and common uses are continually renewing the world" (Leopardi, 2013: 14). It is interesting that this imagined conversation from the early nineteenth century clearly expresses a quality that is evident in contemporary times, although judging by the words of the poet, it was already certain at that time: in the consumer system, expiration and the need for constant renewal are the mechanisms which oil the wheels of our mercantile society.

We can thus confirm that in such a highly industrialized society and with a marked presence in the goods market, fashion has become a sector with a strong interest in the renewal and in the creation of needs and tastes that must vary so as to ensure the agility of a market that aspires to be prosperous. However, the commercial dimension has other lines of enormous analytical interest, setting out the need for renewal beyond the usual wear and tear of the product brought about by its use, it is, therefore, necessary to recover objects with images and reasons; in other words, with meaning. Fashion, converted into a system of symbols is able to arouse a desire that drives us to purchase, renew and spend (Barthes, 2003).

Consequently, the ways in which we cover our bodies are, at the same time, ways of exhibiting it. Fashion gives meaning to the objects with which we cover and decorate ourselves, so that what we wear gives meaning to our self because "wearing a suit is essentially an act of significance beyond the reasons of modesty, adornment and protection. It is an act of significance and therefore a deeply social event in the very heart of the social dialectic" (Barthes, 2003: 419). Indeed, "through fashion, the duplication of showing off and being looked at has been staged as never before; being looked at has led to the search for identity through the image that builds, that adorns and that offers a form of personal

narrative, that at the same time attracts the gaze of others" (Walzer, 2008: 170). But fashion is a characteristic weave of the individual and the social so, returning to Simmel, the aspect of fashion as a mask would be a way of taking over the general rules through what is exteriorized in order to maintain personal integrity because by being identified with socially instituted ways, it is possible to be ensured of being recognized by others. It is a way to "combine the interest in permanence, unity and equality with varying interest, particularity and singularity" (Simmel, 1988: 27).

Maffesoli explains that there is something both tragic and hedonistic which characterizes our time, and which ties in with a certain level of the awareness of the purposelessness in our lives, with the precarious nature of existence and with a certain avidity pulsion. An avidity which is expressed by a means of consumption that is consistent with the hegemonic socio-political model, but also with a life of consumption in which all that is desired can be obtained instantaneously. This avidity can be seen under the form of fashion (Maffesoli, 2001).

There are, therefore, multiple dimensions which are staged when we try to think of the tattoo as fashion within our contexts and none of these are banal, given that they are all expressions of the individual, society and culture.

2.3. The media and the construction of body image

Fashion and styles undoubtedly have space for their expression and public exhibition on media screens. The current proliferation of media leads to the multiplication of visible surfaces on which to project and view images of individual and social issues. There is no need to dwell on the obvious: namely that an additive phenomenon is currently being produced, a phenomenon whereby the multimedia connection is leading to a progressive existence through screens that function as a new way of contact with the world as far as interpersonal relationships are concerned, as well as the visibility and promotion of certain information, practices, styles and consumption.

Traditional media have been joined in the last decade by the new media platforms through which we have been able to see the result of a spectacularization and increased dramatization of behavior, information and aesthetics (Martín Barbero, 2002). Advertising is, undoubtedly, one of the forms of communication which has made the iconosphere much denser, not only with body images, but also with all kinds of TV shows, magazines, films and more recently, the Internet and social networks: these are places where the corporal, personal aesthetic, along with fashion and the prescription and desirability of beauty, are expressed and made available to consumers. To the previous panorama, interactive media have added the choice of exchange that, with the figure of the prosumer, diversifies the sources of emissions and at the same time, amplifies the diversity of what is visible to others. This has led to an increase that is not only quantitative but which is also providing unincorporated non-mainstream varieties or even the underground varieties, largely relegated to selected areas which almost constitute a privilege.

Regarding the body, the images and prescriptions offered through contemporary media highlight the growing interest in self-image and appearance, reproduction and the consolidation of all kinds of products, techniques, practices and processes proposed and spelled out by the market. The prolific display of an attractive, desirable and seductive body has a concomitant expression in what the market offers, but it is now also pronounced in less massive and more sectorial terms which are displayed in terms of more alternative aesthetics, less affected by a commercial discourse or, at least, with a slightly mitigated expression of the version linked to big brands and industries.

2.3.1. Tattoos in the media

In recent years, mainly through the rise of the Internet and the increase in television of various formats of reality shows, the public has seen and been able to consult a variety of media sources which focus on the tattoo as their sole theme. Furthermore, the presence of tattoo artists and tattoo studios through their own websites and Facebook accounts, Twitter, Tumblr and Instagram have served as means to publicize and draw attention to the work of tattoo artists and tattoo studios, allowing the enormous diversity of ideas and designs to become known throughout the world, and as such, promoting the globalization of the tattoo and extending its presence.

At the same time, the reality of tattoos has been widely expressed through television with channels and programs broadcast nationally and internationally, for example, Discovery, A & E, TLC, Spike and so on. The first instance was *Miami Ink*, which was also the predecessor to many others such as *LA Ink*, *NY Ink*. These were seen in other countries and consequently went on to generate local versions with the same format; *London Ink* and *Madrid Ink* are examples. Other programmes broadcast around the world are: "Best Ink", *Epic Ink*, *Inked*, *Ink Master*, *Bad Ink*, *America's Worst Tattoos*, *Tattoos after Dark* and *Tattoo Nightmares* for example. The latter are dedicated to showing how badly executed tattoos can be repaired or how they can be hidden or disguised under a new tattoo. In Spain *Nightmares in Ink* is broadcasted and in Argentina, *Mandinga Tattoo*; in fact the list of TV programmes shown around the world which feature the tattoo as a central theme is endless. Although there are no statistics in Spain, and it is quite difficult to ascertain exactly how many people have tattoos, Carey Hart mentions in his book that *The New York Times* has reported that in 2007 forty-five million people in the USA had tattoos (Hart, 2008: 23), a figure which has inevitably since multiplied.

The tattoo has appeared in the media in various forms: in stories, sometimes in epic tales as ornaments, as art, as craft and so on. From the comments made by the people interviewed for our research we wish to analyze and understand the ways in which the media is not only present but also intertwined with the tattoo as a growing phenomenon.

3. Research objectives

With the objective of determining the possible role of the media - fundamentally television and the Internet - in publicizing tattooing as a contemporary practice, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were carried out with both individuals who have tattoos and professionals working in the tattoo sector.

The interviews were conducted with men and women between the ages of 21 and 61, with the majority falling into the 21-35 age bracket. Among the interviewees were students, workers from the service and the commerce sectors, professionals with university education, motorsport fans, an ex-legionnaire, a soldier, an actor and a visual artist. In the configuration of the sample, people were selected from a variety of backgrounds, age groups and social classes, in order to obtain a representative mix. The tattoo artists' ages ranged from 23 to 61, and they had a variety of career paths: from apprentices to experienced tattooists. For this research, a total of 32 tattooists were interviewed: 19 men (HTR) and 13 women (MTR) and 39 people with tattoos: 19 men (HTT) and 20 women (MTT) making a total of 71 interviews which were carried out in New York, Madrid and Barcelona, with the objective of collecting information from people living in different cities and countries.

This article presents a series of results, examined from different perspectives, which are part of a broader research study into the phenomenon of the contemporary tattoo. In regards to the role the media plays in both the characteristics adopted by contemporary tattoo and its dissemination, the questions were very specific: Do you think the media have a role in the current state of the tattoo? If so, in what way? How do you assess the role of the

Internet in relation to the tattoo? What role do you think reality TV shows have in the assessment of the tattoo today and its standardization within society?

4. Findings and results

4.1. *The media and training tattoo artists. The role of the Internet*

In the interviews carried out with tattoo artists, an emphatic reference was made to the role of the Internet in their own training, and also the role of the network as a catalogue from which to find references, examples and inspiration (for both professionals and for those who want to have tattoos). Another Internet role is the organization of tattoo conventions which are held throughout the world. They function as meeting places where people can come to meet artists who travel to work in different countries and take the opportunity to be tattooed by them. But it was not always this way, as a tattooist with extensive experience explains, "At first there was nothing. There was no Internet, no magazines, no nothing and no one to tell you how things were done" (HTR₁). Later the same respondent explained, "In order to learn, I bought a catalogue in Italy, because there was nothing here, and I started tattooing my own legs" (HTR₁), and another veteran tattoo artist supports this, "Now it's super-easy for a person to start tattooing, you just get on the Internet at home, without moving your butt from the chair" (HTR₃).

A young apprentice agrees with these assessments, "Today, many people have tattoos because they're fashionable and because they're easy because of the Internet; and there are now many magazines, it's very easy to buy machinery or needles. In that sense, I've been lucky because I've got everything close at hand" (MTR₂). However, the Internet does not only have the role of facilitator. There are tattoo artists who are very critical about the quality of some of their colleagues' work, "There are fifteen billion reproducers who can't do tattoos if they take away the Internet, because they're used to stealing everything from the Internet" (HTR₃). To some extent the large presence of the tattoo on websites, blogs and social networks becomes a two-sided coin because "today, if you don't put something that's yours on the Internet, you don't exist, but if you do, you get it stolen in the same minute" (HTR₃). So Internet can work as a source of learning and as a showcase, but it can also be a means to encourage copying and creative laziness. "With the whole issue of Internet there are many tattoo artists who are intoxicated. If you look at Facebook or Instagram, they're all the same. There are very few tattooists whose work you can see and say, ok, this is his or her own!" (HTR₈).

4.2. *The Internet as a source*

The aforementioned double-sided Internet is also significant in the world of those looking to get tattooed. Tattoo artists complain that sometimes customers look online for ideas for their tattoos and doing so they elude the, for some, desirable process of planning and selecting something more personal and intimate. "There are people who tell me, 'I can't find anything on the Internet' and I'm seriously pissed off! If you want a bird then go and look for a bird and take a photo of it; if you want a flower then go to the florist and buy a real flower; bring me a picture or a real flower and I'll tattoo it to you" (HTR₁).

But for better or for worse, as one tattoo artist says, "The Internet has been both the 'before' and the 'after' in the history of the tattoo" (HTR₃). As in other areas, the Internet functions as an international showcase, however "before the Internet, tattoo artists from all over the world got together at tattoo conventions and that's how styles started to emerge" (MTR₃). Internationalization is very much a consequence of the Internet and it expresses itself in many different ways. For example, a tattoo artist whose studio is in Móstoles, a suburb of Madrid, corroborated, "Now, with the Internet, it's quite common for people to

come from other places; yesterday, I had a girl who'd come all the way from Bordeaux" (MTR₃).

4.3. Fashion

As outlined above, the media convey fashions and styles that reach wider audiences and tattoo has abundant and diverse expressions in different media. There is some tension in relation to considering tattoos as fashion items because on the one hand, fashion is often viewed as frivolous, uniform and associated with the perishable or the exchangeable; and on the other hand, tattoo may be associated with key or significant life moments which are strictly personal and individual and also can be connected to something that is lasting or permanent.

4.3.1. *Between the exclusive, the mainstream, the disposable and the permanent*

Having one's skin tattooed is a choice that, in general, requires much thought and reflection; however, media visibility has prompted many people to have tattoos more impulsively. A successful tattoo artist observes that "there's a certain percentage of people who like tattoos and who like to wear tattoos, they see them as something serious; and there are plenty of people who are tattooed because everyone gets tattooed; let's face it: there are a lot of folks who will regret it!" (HTR₃). Later in this same testimony, a distinction is made between those who love tattoos and those who get tattoos because they are led or encouraged to leave their inhibitions behind and go with the mainstream. For a young tattooed woman, a fashion tattoo could function as a gateway that later becomes something she characterizes as a "way of life". "The truth is, and it's a pity to say it, but we're all like sheep, when there's fashion, people will follow it. It's sad, but maybe then, even if it begins as trying to be fashionable, it can end up as a lifestyle, so to speak" (MTT₅).

However, this idea of fashion can also be seen from another perspective, as one woman, a tattoo artist herself, says, "All of us, and I mean *all* of us, get tattoos because they're fashionable. I do it. I have tattoos because they're fashionable. For instance, this geometric design wasn't trendy in the past; now it is. At the end of the day, we're all moved by trends. But what distinguishes me from the rest is that I look for the creation of an artist, I don't want the same sticker or label as the next person" (MTR₄). Probably, in this testimony, the idea of fashion is associated with artistic style when reference is made to the geometric design of one of her tattoos; but the second part of her commentary is also relevant because it marks out the difference between her and the rest, the majority: the search for the artistic, with all the connotations of prestige and originality which it involves compared to the idea of a copy, what can be reproduced, so mainstream that she describes it as a "sticker". A tattooed woman makes a comparison between the tattoo and clothing and, as in an earlier testimony, emphasizes the unique character, "It's not a tee-shirt that's sold everywhere. Rich people buy exclusive clothes; there are only one or two dresses like yours, just as with tattoos: they're what are exclusive for poor people" (MT₁).

Considering tattoos as a form of fashion, and therefore as something with general circulation in social and public spaces, has transformed the perception of those who chose tattoos before these times of expansion. "Twenty years ago people looked at me askance on the street, but today it's trendy; skulls, tattoos, they're fashionable today, I'm fashionable today!" (HTR₁). Another tattooed woman also relates, "I think people get tattoos more nowadays because in the past it was associated with.... riff-raff. It went something like this: he is tattooed, he is an outsider, tattoos were looked down on, but now things have changed, people see tattoos differently, and more and more people are getting them... I think it's a little bit because of fashion" (MTT₂).

In this regard, the role of the media has been central either because, as pointed out by Mafessoli, they make us see everything under the way of fashion, or because fashion includes tattoos among its visual elements: "You open a fashion magazine and you see an advertisement for Chanel and it's all tattoos; they even have tattoos with a Chanel logo in the ad, and so, visually, the concept of a tattooed person changes; and it will also visually change the concept of a person when he sees a tattooed person; he will not say to himself: a biker or a prisoner, and this makes the tattoo more acceptable to other people from other generations" (HTR2).

In the interviews with people who have tattoos, an evaluative differentiation appears between those who see the tattoo as "fashion" or "mere decoration", and those who see the tattoo as something designed as a profoundly personal expression. "There are people who give it a meaning and there are people who do it for fashion purposes: "I'm going to have a Chinese symbol tattooed here because it's trendy [...] or I'm going to get a tattoo of a bird here because it's trendy. There are, I think, two groups of people: those to whom tattoo does mean something and those who just get tattoos because they're trendy" (MTT3). According to a tattooist who has also developed prolifically as an artist away from the tattoo studio, dabbling in various expressions of visual art (painting, sculpture, graffiti and fashion): "People don't get tattoos done for fashion, on the contrary, I think nowadays people are getting tattoos more for reasons of self-representation" (HTR7). Clearly there are many positions on this issue and, largely, they can be associated with the type of work involved in each tattoo, and, therefore, the kind of demand that it has. The tattoo artist quoted above, not only ventures into other art forms, but his name is widely known in the world of the tattoo in Madrid, allowing him to have a knowledgeable clientele who are especially attracted by his personal style. On the contrary, a tattoo artist who works for a tattoo supermarket sees things quite differently: "Eighty percent do it for fashion and the rest because they like the tattoo" (HTR7).

4.3.2. *Fashion. Copying celebrities*

"Since footballers and all sorts of other people have been getting tattoos, the image of tattoo has improved. If a football player has tattoos, nobody is going to see him as a delinquent" (HTR1). The following summarizes the state of things quite concisely: some people with public impact have promoted, probably unintentionally, by giving a nod to the tattoo that has contributed to its de-stigmatization. We also can observe this in the following passage, "I tattoo football players from Real Madrid. They break that barrier because those who were repressive parents now see that their idols are all tattooed. What happens now is that they switch on the TV and they see actors, actresses, singers, football players... Also at the time the father of the former Spanish king had a tattoo on his forearm, then for certain things, that has changed" (HTR2). It is significant to note how popularity is valued as a capital linked to success that promotes, for example in the case of athletes, one radically different social evaluation of the tattoo phenomenon. It is also expressed by a woman with tattoos, "If you are bombarded all day by the media, in the end what you see becomes normal" (MTT4).

But a lot of famous athletes who become spokespersons of so many products through advertising and thus indirectly "decriminalize" the practice of tattooing, embody a phenomenon which also has another side: many tattoo artists see these figures as fashion promoters who tend to lack both originality and genuine and refined taste, but who, at the same time, appeal to the masses wishing to copy them: "Now the tattoo is accepted because football players have tattoos: Have you seen their tattoos? They're horrendous! Granted, a football player is not, so to speak, an aesthetic or artistic point of reference [...] but unfortunately in social terms, the money they earn and their talent are often confused and often have nothing to do with what is aesthetic" (HTR8). A very critical interviewee goes

further and explains: "I believe that the things that footballers do which are visible and observed, such as having tattoos, become subjects of admiration ... it's like: I want to be like Beckham or I want to be like Guti. I think that for these groups, a tattoo is an object of consumption and has nothing to do with art. It's something that can be bought like anything else, and that's it!" (HTR3). Another tattoo artist agrees: "The whole thing with the media and the famous it's no good because they don't understand tattoo culture and the type of public that admires celebrities and their tattoos is the public that is perhaps more influenced commercially" (MTR3). Or in the words of another tattooist, "so often... the taste of these people... please! They have no training, they've been given a ball and become multi-millionaires, but..." (HTR10).

Some tension between standardization and a greater social acceptance of the tattooed person on the one hand, and aesthetic choices relating to the tattoo on the other can, therefore, be observed. Hence, among some tattoo advocates and tattoo art professionals, there is some dismay at this imitative, serial phenomenon: "Some people want to make a tattoo with the letters used by a footballer and they ask me what great sentence they can end up with? And I don't know... how impersonal! This is a reflection of things that happen all the time socially" (HTR3). And not only athletes serve as models, "Most people have no idea and so they do what is fashionable now, and it seems infinite, but, really, trying to be like stars such as Rihanna, is really just a passing fad" (HTR5).

Although it is true that "people come here with many good ideas, not necessarily just wanting to have the same tattoo as Rihanna, it does mean that a certain percentage of the people coming in, day by day, looking for a tattoo, have been influenced by advertising and visual bombardment" (HTR2). However, in interviews with tattooed individuals there is usually little reference to the media or role models as the inspiration for their tattoos. It could be that the interview process itself predisposes the participants to try to turn the tattoo into a narrative and the personal experience of something more self-glorifying and meaningful, somewhat in the style of the reality show, for example. In the following testimony, a reference to this appears. "I guess that I've been influenced by the people I've seen on TV, in magazines: what an aesthetic! [...] Not really in the sense that I like this or that singer, more along the lines of how well that tattoo looks, it's great!"

This quote and the following are the only ones, from all the research study interviews, which provide evidence of people admitting to having been influenced by a famous model. Along these lines, an ex-soldier explained, "I never thought about getting a tattoo when I was in Africa, but it came about when I saw the tennis player Carlos Moyá" (HTT4). Having a tattoo in order to imitate a celebrity, or using him or her as a role model brings us to another consideration, which is that the tattoo must be seen as something beautiful or potentially embellishing, "I think that what has had the greatest influence is... media, advertising, as always; the typical case of four famous young girls or boys having tattoos... and if someone famous hurt himself, making a nasty cut in his own hand, for example, well, no one's going to copy him, but it's different with a tattoo... sometimes it's a beautiful thing" (HTT1).

Some tattoo artists hold definite views on this state of affairs, for example, "I don't tattoo football emblems because you might get beaten up one day because of my tattoo" (HTR1). And some are limiting options of copying pre-designed models in order to encourage more creative attitudes among those who are looking to get tattooed, so as to avoid copying the designs chosen by media idols. "We all used to use the catalogue when we tattooed, but at the same time, we designed part of the catalogue, and people chose it and that was it. Things start to change when two friends have the same tattoo. But I always tell them that there are hundreds more with the same design!" (HTR12). As a result of this situation, the tattoo artist effectively makes a decision, "In my shop today there's nothing left; before there were a thousand transparencies and today there aren't even a hundred sheets of paper. And

so I say to people, 'tell me what you want and I can draw it for you. Many people come without knowing what they want; or they want the same tattoo as their favorite celebrity' (HTR12).

4.4. Reality shows

As we have seen in the previous section, the image of celebrities has had a multiplying effect on the demand for tattoos, and a tendency to imitation can be detected. It seems that reality shows revolving around the tattoo have generalized the idea that it has to have a vital role and responsibility and express personality, "I think that's a good thing that has come from reality shows, making people aware that you can put something that represents something important to you on your skin. So yes, I think it's good" (HT2). Another testimony supports this idea, "The tattoo appears to have become much more socialized and people are already starting to think and have tattoos, not just aesthetic reasons, but to have something to talk about, something which he or she can explain to people, and say what it symbolizes... but it's TV that's brought this about" (HTR12).

However, the flip side of this is that television, in using the tattoo as narrative, and according to the formal structure and discourse of reality show, has created the idea that all tattoos comes from factual experience, "For reality shows people always have to attach some meaning to the tattoo, but not as you see it: people go out into the street to get a tattoo, they don't go to an audition! And of course, as you see, the story attached to a tattoo has to be interesting for a television format. Not everyone who goes out into the street has cancer or was in the war or their father died or their dog got run over... not always" (HTR3). Another nuance can be seen in the following excerpt from an interview, "On TV, it looks like you always have a story for your tattoo, but it is not always that way! With large tattoos, yes, but with small ones, some flowers that sort of thing, it isn't the case; it's often very exaggerated" (MTR1).

In terms of gender, American program appear to have encouraged the practice of tattooing among women, breaking down the barriers associated with the masculine tattoo. "The phenomenon brought about by Kat Von D seemed to turn women crazy and want to be tattooed just like her" (MTR3).

Another aspect linked to the reality show is related to the image of the profession of the tattoo artist. Spain, and especially Madrid, is a place with extremely strict regulations with regard to the various health issues linked to tattooing; for this reason, one of the participants in this research pointed out, somewhat indignantly, some bad practices that were seen on the Spanish version of the tattoo reality show, "Madrid Ink", broadcast in 2013 by Discovery Max, "The reality show has to be a format that sells: for me it's a crappy format, the way that they treat the issue and, especially what this one has done. To me, it seems aberrant in every way. To begin with, the people chosen don't represent either me or the other people I know, they don't represent us as professionals because really the level... there is one that's better than the others, but they're all mediocre, and then hygienically some of the crap that they've done in front of the cameras, if it was seen by a health inspector or someone... we'd all be hung. To give an example, they cut the plastic with their teeth! They're going to cover a tattoo with plastic and they cut it with their teeth! It's an aberration. Another thing, they had a night out and one of the tattooists got so drunk... she was fast asleep on the sofa in the studio! Things like this can really do us a lot of harm" (HTR3).

4.5. Have the media contributed anything?

As can be observed from the aforementioned, the media have played a prominent role in the current state of affairs regarding publicity and the tattoo in our contemporary societies.

There is a virtual consensus in this respect, "For me, what accelerated the social acceptance of tattoos was communication, and especially the Internet, the expansion of art, communication between people. What once looked less now looks more, and more is accepted. It's accepted that neither tattoo artists nor people with tattoos have to be seen as marginal groups" (HTT10). However, there are of course many nuanced criteria, "In terms of popularity, I don't think the reality shows have added anything, I think they have given people another idea, but they haven't added anything. I say this as forty-two year old who's been tattooing for twenty three years and who's never been out of work or short of work, and that includes the times before we had the Internet" (HTR3).

From the perspective of some tattooists, quantity is emphasized over other aspects linked to the quality of their work. "The world of entertainment and television is okay, it reaches many people, also the Internet, but what counts is doing things carefully, doing them well, supplying information" (MTR3). A very experienced tattoo artist says, "Miami Ink, LA Ink, Madrid Ink... I prefer not to watch them, I saw the first ones and I found them embarrassing [...] Today there is so much misinformation, people think that everything they see and hear is true, and so they so end up being very poorly informed" (HTR8).

The role of the visual, that is so prevalent in our context, and whose momentum through audiovisual media is undeniable, can also be seen as a turning point in the widespread growth and adoption of the tattoo, "Today it's very important for everything to be visual. Today, if someone transforms his/her body, it's also about the visual aspect [...]. So, we see many people with neck tattoos, hands, everything... it didn't used to be like this, but today you see everything and then you don't. Why? Because I think there's a visual revolution in the media" (HTR2).

Nevertheless, there is one aspect, that rather than being engaged with mainstream media, is more linked to the specialized media, such as tattoo magazines, social networks, blogs and websites dedicated to tattoos, "Now the tattoo has entered the media, and we've even got tattooing needle brands wanting to have their own tattoo artists... and that's where I wonder if it's good or not. I don't know [...] do I need to put on Facebook what I've done with this ink or with these needles? Why? With a different ink would it have come out worse? And that's where I have my doubts" (HTTR9). This comment introduces an element that has not yet been addressed, which is the advertising and the commercialization of the world of the tattoo and its supplies, converting prestigious tattoo artists into sponsors for brands and products. This aspect relates media business logic to a practice, the practice of tattooing, which on occasion acquires the dimensions of a supermarket and other times, claims of an artistic status.

5. Conclusions

As outlined above, according to tattoo artists and individuals with tattoos, the media has had a remarkable and multifaceted impact on the practice of tattooing in our contemporary societies. This impact includes such diverse aspects as the training of the tattoo artist and the dissemination of their work, as well as the internationalization of styles and artists, the dichotomy between the search for individual identity and the mainstream brand; or simply, what is and what isn't fashionable; the tattoo as narrative, highlighting a vital moment, the pursuit of the personal aesthetic look, mirroring the famous, the social de-stigmatization of the tattoo and its commercialization.

Having heard the testimonies of those interviewed within this research study, there is no doubt that different media groups have come together to shape and encourage a phenomenon initially linked to ritual and the sacred, and later to the marginal. The media, especially television and the Internet, have given the tattoo both a context and some connotations of our own time. In doing so, they have molded – and it could not be otherwise

- a practice that has not only been renewed but which, as shown in a variety of studies (Walzer, 2015; Lasheras Onions et al., 2012; Reisfeld, 2004; Atkinson, 2003; DeMello, 2000; Rubin, 1987), is full of meaning. The sense of the contemporary tattoo emerges, whether in terms of the social and the anthropological dimension, or interpreted in terms of subjectivity and personal history, or scrutinized as a phenomenon linked to fashion and multimedia broadcasting.

In any case, the tattoo must be seen as a project carried out on the body, whose expression must be read as a cultural text that places the individual within a wider social network (Atkinson, 2003). For the tattoo, as with many other issues, its constant appearance in the media duplicates its own presence. If a subject is included so insistently on the media agendas, then it tends to duplicate its inclusion on the agenda of the audience. The great paradox is that tattooing and other archaic cultural practices are reappearing and being redefined in our societies and in them, aspects of the original form as well as of contemporary times can be found. As Briceño explains, in today's world, the body becomes performance and that " is the *leitmotif* of the society of spectacle and of mass consumption in our contemporary world: an object-symbol, circulating in the market, which adheres to advertising laws regarding physical appearance, fashion, the ephemeral and the playful with versatility" (Briceño, 2011: 8) But also, as we have observed, it has updated primary aspects of humankind, culture and society.

Now if every object of consumption or decoration must be converted into a symbol, in the case of the tattoo this question has a special significance, because all tattoos - whether artistic, craft or mass-produced- constitute a visual message, a manuscript and /or text; and as permanent and significant marks, they produce a meaning which, unlike exchangeable and disposable objects in fashion or television formats, accompanies the subject throughout his or her life.

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