# PROBLEMATIZATION OF AUTHORSHIP: The interrelatedness of American and Japanese tattoo traditions, its position in societies and relations between tattoo artists and clients

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## Introduction

Tattooing practices are entering the contemporary art scene in American society.[1] The practice has been present in American societies throughout the ages and is still used in current times. Tattooing was introduced to Native Americans by Polynesians and Siberian tribes during pre-modern times.[2] During the modern times, Americans have developed their own tattooing style, which is referred to as the American traditional style. The tattooing style can be defined through a distinctive use of particular aesthetic elements and methods in relation to one another and in contrast with other styles. The American traditional style was started by sailors who created meanings for tattoo motifs, visual elements, such as hearts, eagles and anchors in order to express their status or position in everyday life.[3] The sailors got acquainted with Japanese tattooing traditions after the opening of Japan in 1853.[4] The Japanese traditions were different in stylistic and technical elements as they used different colors, motifs and tattooing techniques. Americans were fascinated by Japanese tattooing practices and started to use them as an inspiration for their own practice or even tried to copy the style. The growing accessibility of Japanese culture through globalization led towards adaptation of Japanese traditional tattooing practices in America. American traditional tattoo artists such as Sailor Jerry started using Japanese traditional motifs, colors and designs. Therefore, the American traditional style has shifted through adaptation of motifs from Japanese traditional style. Cultural exchanges between the two cultures challenge traditional notions of the authorship of the tattoo designs due to their interconnectivity between Japanese and American traditional tattoo styles.

The understanding of authorship in this case is significant in regard to determining the status of a tattoo artist. To have authorship is to define oneself as the creator of the work in regard to its meaning and visual appearance. A tattoo artist can be acknowledged and recognized by the originality and creativity of his or her work, as well as great skill, when working in original style or in pre-existent styles such as American traditional. However, when working in a pre-existent style, tattoo artists are limited to certain rules such as a color palette that they have to follow, which affects their originality and creativity. The issue is

[1] Kosut, "The Artification of Tattoo", 144.
[2] Heimburger and Bratt, *The Sketchbook*, 11.
[3] Kang, "Illustrated America", 68.
[4] On the 8th of July 1853, American Commodore Matthew Perry, on behalf of the U.S. government, traveled to Tokyo Bay, Japan in his four ships aiming to re-establish a water road between the West and Japan.

particularly complex in addressing American traditional style as it also uses motifs from other cultures. Japanese traditional style also has its own rules in regard to tattooing practices. This leads to a complex understanding of authorship of such tattoos in American contemporary society.

Japanese traditional style has been analyzed in-depth by such scholars as Willem Robert Van Gulik, Brian Ashcraft and Hori Benny. Dutch scholar Van Gulik was the first Western researcher to dedicate a book to analyzing Japanese traditional tattooing. The book *Irezumi: The Pattern of Dermatography in Japan* is an explicit analysis of the history of tattooing in Japan.[5] The author also researched how tattooing practices from indigenous cultures were adopted in Japanese society. Throughout the ages, the status of tattoos in Japan has been constantly shifting between being an art form and a form of punishment for outlaws. However, the ways of becoming a traditional tattoo artist in Japan and the methods of tattooing have barely changed. Traditional Japanese tattoo artists have been trained by master tattoo artists throughout the ages, which is considered to be the only way to learn tattooing in Japan. The book is a historical overview of Japanese traditional style; however, it does not address the contemporary processes such as industrialization that cause cultures to interact and influence each other. The contemporary perspective on Japanese traditional tattooing is provided by Brian Ashcraft and Hori Benny in the book *Japanese tattoos*. Ashcraft and Benny study Japanese tattooing through the analysis of motifs and technical elements such as shading and coloring. The book provides a broad overview of the motifs and divides them into categories: Kanji tattoos, nature tattoos, living and mythical creatures, gods, guardians, heroes and demons. Additionally, it touches upon the stylistic exchanges between the West and Japan.[6]

The American traditional style development and influences from Japanese culture is discussed by Marina Claire Kastan. The author studied American traditional style in regard to stylistic elements such as motifs, as well as technical developments such as the invention of the electric tattoo machine. She treated American traditional tattooing style as being influenced by Japanese style. Kastan argued that the two traditions were significantly different, mainly because Japanese tattooing practices had been regarded as a form of art, whereas American tattooing had been mostly related to commercialism and consumerism.

[5] Van Gulik, *Irezumi,* xiv.
[6] Ibid.

The exposure of Japanese tattooing traditions in America expanded the iconography of tattoos.[7] At the time, American tattoos were mostly aimed at being talismans for sailors and were not seen as an artistic expression.[8] Matt Lodder in his article "The New Old Style" provided an overview of American traditional style despite the Japanese influence. The author studied color, motifs and inspirations in the development of American style. The article includes the analysis of influential American traditional artists such as Ed Hardy and Sailor Jerry. Through the analysis the author characterized American traditional style by repetitive and simple designs. He argued that "western tattooing is basically predicated on copying and reproduction".[9] This can be related to the ideas of commercialism and consumerism mentioned by Kastan. However, the two authors did not address the contemporary discussion on American traditional tattooing, especially in relation to the rise of globalization, industrialization and mass media.

The current position of tattooing practices is discussed by such scholars as Mieko Yamada, Mary Kosut and Margo DeMello. Yamada researched the Western influence on Japanese tattooing practices. The author criticizes the position of Japanese tattooing practices as being part of Western consumerism culture. She argues that "cultural globalization is a threat to the continuity and authenticity".[10] The usage of Japanese culture in western society, especially in mainstream culture, moves away from Japanese traditions and meanings in tattooing. The position of tattoos in mainstream culture is studied by Mary Kosut. She addresses the industrialization of the practice through its appearance in mass media and the art world such as exhibitions. However, the author distinguished between first- and second-generation tattoo artists and argued that contemporary tattoo artists shift the understanding of tattoos as an art form. DeMello also addresses the changing nature of tattooing practices in the West. The author researched the status of tattooing in Western culture and studied it through the perspective of tattoo communities. Even though tattooing practices are more acceptable and visible in mainstream culture, tattoo communities are still present.

The above-mentioned scholars studied tattooing practices from the perspectives of historical and social developments. The research provides knowledge of the American and

[7] Kastan, "Wearing your dreams", 13.
[8] Ibid., 14.
[9] Lodder, "The New Old Style", 105.
[10] Yamada, "Westernization and cultural resistance in tattooing practices in Japan", 326.

Japanese tattooing cultures and their development. However, the authors did not address the question of authorship in relation to tattoo practices. In their studies Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault analyzed the position of the author and the meaning making process. Initially these philosophers addressed the author of texts; however, their analyses can also be applied to visual arts such as tattoos. Barthes studied the position of the author and reader in relation to the meaning of the work. In his essay "The Death of the Author", he emphasized the importance of the reader's interpretation as the reader was the only one responsible for how the text would be understood.[11] In the case of a tattoo, the reader is also the only one who interprets and shows his or her own knowledge of the work. Foucault, on the other hand, in his essay "What is an Author?" states that authorship is related more to the discourse of the author or the work itself than to the authors themselves.[12] The author addresses the discourse as a system of representation that defines and produces the objects of our knowledge.[13] As tattoos have existed in societies throughout the ages, a discourse has been created in such cultures as Japanese and American which are going to be discussed in the present thesis. The two scholars, Foucault and Barthes, did not address tattooing practices in relation to the notions of authorship. However, their notions of 'the death' of the author and discourse will be mainly applied in order to study the authorship of tattoos. Hereby, the current dissertation will analyze the issue of authorship, especially in relation to cultural exchanges between Japan and America and collaboration between a tattoo artist and the client. It aims at discussing the following question: To what extent can the authorship of a tattoo be assigned to the tattoo artist?

In order to analyze the author in the cultural exchanges, it is necessary first to identify the influences of cultures on one another. Chapter One and Two will study Japanese and American traditional practices from historical and societal perspectives, which will be used to compare the two manners in Chapter Three. Chapter One discusses Japanese traditional tattooing style and its development from pre-modern to modern times. The Chapter aims at discussing the following question: How did Japanese traditional tattooing develop? The analysis of the book by Van Gulik provides a basis for looking at Japanese tattooing history. The use of tattoos in different historical periods will be supported by case studies to

[11] Barthes, "The death of the author", 142.
[12] Foucault, "What is the Author?", 300.
[13] Hall, *Representation,* 29

emphasize the status of tattoos in Japanese society throughout the ages. The selected case studies exemplify the influences on the formation of the Japanese style such as woodblock printing, everyday surroundings, mythology and religion. The parts from the book by Aschraft and Benny will be discussed in relation to the case studies as the authors provided an in-depth analysis of the Japanese traditional tattoo motifs. Horitsune II is the main tattoo artist discussed in the Chapter. Chapter Two follows a similar structure and the question to Chapter One as it will provide a detailed analysis of American traditional tattooing practice. The Chapter focuses on the question: How did the American traditional tattooing style develop? At the beginning of the Chapter, the pre-modern history is summarized and the main tattoo motifs are studied in relation to the case studies of tattoo designs mostly by Sailor Jerry.

Chapter Three summarizes the developments of Japanese and American tattooing practices and discusses the cultural influences between the two. It looks at how the two styles traveled after the opening of Japan. The analysis is based on the research carried out by Yamada, Kosut and DeMello in order to place the interculturality of the practice with contemporary society. The arguments are also supported by a visual analysis of case studies in itself in regard to Japanese and American tattoo styles by multiple artists such as Horimoto, Kensho II and Brian Kaneko. The main motif addressed is a dragon as it is the most popular tattoo motif that exemplifies the cultural exchanges between Japanese and American tattooing. Finally, Chapter Four focuses on the issue of authorship in relation to cultural exchange in connection with Japanese and American tattoos discussed in the previous Chapters. Chapter Four discusses the following question: To what extent can a tattoo artist be considered the author of the tattoo? The argumentation is based on the analysis of Barthes and Foucault essays on the topic of what an author is. The two authors are discussed separately and are compared in the conclusion of the Chapter. Additionally, case studies of tattoo artists such as Horimoto are used in order to exemplify the ways of claiming authorship in contemporary American society.

The present dissertation aims at addressing the issue of tattoo authorship in relation to cultural appropriation. The research on the developments of the two tattooing traditions-Japanese and American, leads to the comparison of the two, as well as the study of influences on one another throughout the ages. The development results in the analysis of the position of tattoo artists in contemporary society and the way they present themselves. The position of

the artist is discussed in relation to the theories of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault. Therefore, this study discusses authorship in regard to tattoo artists and other factors such as cultural exchanges, traditions, as well as the desires of the client, that might be influential in creating a tattoo. In order to address the issue of authorship, in this case, the analysis of the tattoo styles is beneficial as it helps the history of the practice, the status of a tattoo artist and a client to be traced.

## Chapter 1: Japanese traditional tattoo style

*The history of Japanese traditional style*

Tattooing practices in Japan have long traditions that are dealt with in the present Chapter. In Japanese culture the practice itself is referred to as *Irezumi* (translated into English as 'inserting ink'), which later became a signifier for the Japanese traditional tattooing style.[14] Before the late 17th century, two definitions of tattoo practice - *Irezumi* and *horimono* – were known in Japan.[15] *Irezumi* literally means 'inserting ink', whereas *horimono* had developed from the art of engraving. The difference between the two is discussed in relation to the developments in Japanese society in the current Chapter. The Japanese traditional tattooing style has been developing since the start of tattooing in the country.[16] The first evidence of tattooing in Japan appears in the Jōmon period (1000 to 300 BCE) on dogū sculptures.[17] Clay figures with face and body markings have been discovered (Fig.1). Moreover, the Chinese source *San-kuo Chih* from the 3rd century mentions the living men with face and body decorations in the "Men of Wa", this is the way Japan called itself back in the third century.[18] The written Chinese source showcases the long history and tradition of tattooing in Japan, which was mainly used to express a social rank. However, a lack of extensive English resources about Japanese tattooing traditions limits the available knowledge of the development of the practice. The traditional tattoo style is believed to be influenced by Indigenous Ainu people where tattoos were regarded as symbols of decoration and protection.[19] Ainu describes indigenous people of Northern Japan who had deep-rooted tattoo traditions for social and cultural reasons. Ainu traditions are considered to be one of the main starting points for the development of tattooing practices in Japan. Tattoo practices in Japan mainly flourished during the Edo period (1603-1867). In his book *Irezumi* Robert Van Gulik addressed the development of tattooing practices in Japan and argued that before the Edo period tattoos were mostly associated with a corporal punishment.[20] The status of tattoos as a penalty was most likely influenced by China. Before the Edo period (1603-1867), tattoos in Japan and in China were associated with slavery and forced labor. Van Gulik distinguished

[14] Heimburger, Bratt and Apfelstedt, *The Sketchbook,* 10.
[15] Van Gulik, *Irezumi,* 3.
[16] Thompson, *Tattoos in Japanese Prints,* 9.
[17] Samel, "Tattooing in Japan: Through the Ages"*,* 965.
[18] Richie and Buruma, *The Japanese Tattoo*, 11.
[19] Heimburger, Bratt and Apfelstedt, *The Sketchbook,* 20.
[20] Van Gulik, *Irezumi,* xvi.

two main functions of penalty tattoos: to shame one as part of the group and to indicate one as an outlaw.[21]

Although tattoos flourished during the Edo period, they mainly had negative connotations. The punishment in the form of a tattoo was institutionalized under the reign of Shogun Yoshimune (1716-1745).[22] The outlaws were usually tattooed in most visible places such as the arm in order to be easily identifiable in their surroundings. It was a way to distinguish criminals from the general public in Japan. The tattooed outlaws were avoided by society and therefore formed small minority groups.[23] Within those small communities, outlaws began to camouflage punishment marks by adding decorative motifs on or around them. This way slightly shifted the status of tattoos as a punishment towards the significance of group consciousness and solidarity. The amusement quarters in Edo city (currently Tokyo) are considered to be one of the first appearances of tattoo practice beyond the punishment context. The pressure of the government was less intense in the entertainment quarters, which enabled the Japanese to understand and identify their feelings and emotions which had been suppressed. This resulted in the development of *irebokuro* - tattoos to showcase loyalty and devotion. *Irebokuro* is known as a vow tattoo in contemporary American society. The tattoos were usually small in size, the most common of them consisting of three dots (Fig.2). The *irebokuro* tattoos were an important development as it influenced the rise of decorative Japanese tattooing traditions. The *irebokuro* tattoos were usually small and hidden and later adopted by Geishas and commoners in Japanese society. The entertainment quarters and the increasing ability to read and write resulted in the growing prevalence and culture of literary fiction. The rise of literature was an important step in the visibility and acceptance of tattooing practices which are addressed in the current Chapter. However, the growing use of tattoos amongst commoners, did not change the negative status of tattoos.

*Ban on tattoos and their legalization*

During the Meiji era (1868-1912), the government responded to the increasing number of tattoos among the lower and middle-class people and decided to impose a ban on tattoos as they were considered old-fashioned and did not represent the culture in the correct way as

[21] Ibid., 13.
[22] Herbert, *Bunshin II Japanese traditional tattoo,* 10.
[23] Van Gulik, *Irezumi*, 13.

envisioned by the Japanese rulers at the time.[24] Japan's government wanted to present the country as a modern and civilized nation according to their standards and tattoos were considered not fit for the concept of the time. Tattoos were banned for the Japanese public, however, available to Western travelers that are discussed in Chapters Two and Three. The ban did not put a stop to the development of the tattoo culture as it only shifted the latter into the underground context. Japanese traditional tattoo practices were hidden from the public due to their negative connotations. Tattoos during the Meiji period (1868-1912) were signifiers of some outlaw status, which resulted in the Yakuza, a Japanese crime syndicate, adopting the practice. During the Edo period (1603-1867), yakuza members were getting tattoos as a punishment. After said practice had been banned, yakuza continued to use tattoos as a mark of belonging to the groups, as well as a sign of loyalty and devotion.[25] The use of tattooing among yakuza members emphasizes the status of tattoos in the punishment context and vow tattoos. Moreover, the ban on tattooing practices in Japan resulted in a decreasing status of tattoo artists. They had to practice tattooing away from the public eye; therefore, they established hidden tattoo shops that were not accessible to the public. Later legalization of tattoos did not completely change the acceptance of tattoos by the Japanese general public. Tattooing was legalized by the U.S. occupation forces in 1948. The ban was mainly lifted due to an increasing need for Japanese tattoos among the American military.[26] After the legalization, the Japanese ruling class still regarded tattoos as signifiers of the criminal world.

*Influences on Japanese tattooing*

The historical context where tattoos were associated with criminals led the general public to the understanding that traditional Japanese tattoos were not supposed to be revealed in public.[27] The reason for hiding the tattoos is directly related to negative assumptions about a tattooed body, as well as traditions established during the time when tattoos were not accepted by society. As discussed above, tattoos were mostly associated with criminals and therefore later were even banned. During the Edo (1603-1867) and Meiji (1868-1912) periods, the Japanese governments viewed tattoos from a negative perspective. Therefore, the development of Japanese style was affected by the negative status of tattoos. Within Japanese style, certain

[24] Thompson, *Tattoos in Japanese Prints,* 6.
[25] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza,* 17.
[26] IJmkers, "The Art behind Appropriation", 41.
[27] Yamada, "Westernization and cultural resistance in tattooing practices in contemporary Japan", 330.

placements and combinations were developed to be easily covered by a *kimono* - traditional Japanese garment.[28] The traditional style usually consists of multiple interconnected tattoos that create a balanced 'body-suit' (Fig.3).[29] The 'body-suits' are considered to be a way of connecting and combining multiple elements to create a dynamic piece with a specific meaning for the client. Traditional Japanese tattoo artists acknowledge the importance of the interconnection between the elements as it creates a unified design on one's body. The whole unity of elements and a traditional background of clouds, running water or waves are typically seen as emphasizing a natural flow of the body and thus creating a dynamic piece.[30] The designs might contain leaves, flowers, lightning and other elements as a decorative addition to the main motifs of the tattoo. According to Herbert, "typical motifs include the dragon, carp, tiger, lion, snakes, hyena, Buddhist deities, legendary or religious figures or creatures, temple guardians or heroes".[31] The style has traditionally been applied by the *tebori* - hand-tattooing technique.[32] The tattoos were made by using bamboo or a slender tool with a needle attached to the tip of it. Different amounts of needles are being attached for specific parts of the tattoo such as shading, lining and coloring. The tool is used manually, in a rhythmic motion, by the tattoo artist to insert the ink into the skin by poking. A traditional style usually consists of black lining, quite extensive shading and colors inspired by nature such as red and green (Fig.3). The style, including colors, has been inspired by designs and styles that were used by *ukiyo-e* prints.[33] The *ukiyo-e* prints are 'pictures of the floating world' which refer to the Japanese traditional woodblock printing and painting techniques.

Woodblock printing

The Japanese traditional tattooing style was inspired by woodblock prints in regard to bold curved outlines, rich colors, as well as shadowing. The printing method originated in China and later, during the Edo period (1603-1867), in Japan. Prints were used to illustrate books and novels at the time, such as the Chinese novel *Shui-hu*, called *Suikoden*, which has two translations into English - The *Water Margin* and *All Men are Brothers*.[34] The novel became

[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Heimburger, Bratt and Apfelstedt, *The Sketchbook,* 23.
[31] Herbert, *Bunshin II Japanese traditional tattoo,* 17.
[32] Yamada, "Westernization and cultural resistance in tattooing practices in contemporary Japan", 321.
[33] Ibid., 329.
[34] Richie and Buruma, *The Japanese Tattoo*, 20.

popular in a few years, which led to it being reprinted and translated into such languages as Japanese. The illustrations in the novel by Hokusai and Kuniyoshi contained highly tattooed bodies, which were important in the formation of the Japanese tattooing style. The illustrations included full body tattoos on the heroes of the novel.[35] Their bodies were represented in the original novels as marked with such motifs as dragons, peonies, cherry blossoms and pine tree twigs. Illustrator Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1789 -1861) was commissioned to create the prints for the novel and to visualize the brigands (Fig.4). One example of the *ukiyo-e* print series is *One Hundred and Eight Heroes from the Chinese Tale: The Water Margin: Zhang Shun, alias White Stripe in the Waves* that represents a male figure with an extensive amount of body tattoos. The prints had a great impact on tattooing practices at the time. This comes to the fore in the coloring and style of the motifs of the tattoos (Fig.5). Traditional Japanese tattooing is represented by the work of the Japanese tattoo artist Horitsune II. Like many traditional artists, he completed an apprenticeship in the traditional tattooing style.[36] He continues the tradition of the style he learned from his master and his work is strictly traditional.[37] Most of his tattoos are full 'body-suits' where the human body functions as a canvas. His designs cover a full body or a part thereof. In the design from the book *Bunshin II/Horitsune II: Japanese Traditional Tattoo/Dragon and Kannon,* the hero is the main motif of the tattoo covering the whole back. The hero depicted in the tattoo greatly resembles the male figure in the *ukiyo-e* print mentioned above. The posture of the two figures is very similar, as well as the position of the sword, hair and facial features. According to Herbert, this exchange between tattooing and woodblock printing "gave tattooing its highly artistic and aesthetic character".[38] It enhanced the artistic value and developed appreciation of the practice. Besides being inspired by *Suikoden* illustrations, the motifs were also inspired by mythology, everyday surroundings and religion.

Mythology

The inspiration for mythology in Japanese traditional tattooing can be seen in the use of such motifs as kirin (Fig.6). Mythological creatures represented in tattoo designs and other forms of art such as painting in Japan are usually combinations of a few or more existing animals.

[35] Herbert, *Bunshin II Japanese traditional tattoo,* 10.
[36] Ibid., 4.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., 10.

The kirin creature is a combination of deer antlers, a dragon face, cloven hooves, carp scales, and a lion's tail.[39] The kirin originated in China and later was adopted in Japanese culture. The Japanese shifted the visual representation of the kirin as it has an ox tail and is presented as sooner resembling a deer than the Chinese kirin. The tattoo by Chris O'Donnell portrays the kirin in red, blue, brown and orange colors which represent nature. The kirin is presented in the shape of a deer, skin of a dragon, as well as the face, cloven hooves and lion's tail.

Everyday surroundings

The inspiration from everyday surroundings mainly pertains to tattoo designs of animals and plants. Throughout the ages, nature has provided an inspiration for poems, paintings, printing, as well as tattoos in Japan.[40] The use of elements of nature in Japanese tattoos can be divided into three categories - main motifs, additional elements and the background. The Japanese traditional tattoo design usually includes one or more categories (Fig.7). According to Japanese tattooing, the most important rule in depicting nature is not to mix up the seasons. The elements in the design have to be selected in accordance with one particular season. As discussed in the previous sub-chapter, the work of Horitsune II is a representation of the Japanese traditional tattooing style. The tattoo on the right arm depicts a tiger as the main motif, peonies as an additional element and water and clouds as the background emphasizing the inspiration from nature in the Japanese style. The background is used in order to unify the tattoo design. The use of this background also emphasizes nature's ability to tie everything together in tattoo designs and in real life.[41] Additional elements such as flowers are also added to the background. The use of flowers and plants has been represented throughout the ages in other forms of art such as painting and printing. The tattoo by Horitsune II, showcases red peonies combined together with the tiger and the background. In Japan, as well as in China, peonies are considered to be the king of flowers.[42] The flower is considered to be a signifier of nobility, honor, and beauty. The imagery of peonies and tigers were imported from China to Japan and later adopted in the tattooing style. Even though tigers do not live in Japan, their images were imported from China and later used by tattoo artists.[43] The tiger is

[39] Ashcraft and Benny, *Japanese Tattoo*, 65.
[40] Ibid., 33.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid., 38.
[43] Ibid., 68.

represented in the most common manner - with its mouth open. The open mouth emphasizes the tiger's ability to ward off evil spirits.[44] The figure of the tiger and its powers is also used in Buddhism, especially in combination with dragons.

Religion

To understand a further context and the significance of religious motifs, attention is focused on the dragon motif. The dragon is one of the most popular tattoo motifs in Japanese tattooing - it conveys a great web of meanings.[45] The motif has been a magnificent subject in woodblock prints, as well as in tattoo designs in Japanese culture. The beginning of a dragon representation in arts in Asia is witnessed during the Chinese Bronze Age (2000 B.C. - 221 B.C.) when the dragon flourished without a set of specific associations.[46] Various types of dragons in art practices also influenced art forms outside China, in such countries as Korea and Japan. The dragon was a prominent part of the *Suikoden* illustrations and provided an inspiration for a further use of the motif. In Chinese mythology, folklore and culture, dragons were represented as having animal-like forms and there is still a debate about what kind of animal inspired the appearance of dragons. The origins of dragons and their meaning are not well-known due to a lack of sources; however, in Chinese culture it is understood as a positive symbol. In many depictions the dragon originates from fire that is 'able to conjure up water and act as a fire extinguisher'.[47] Furthermore, the dragon is considered to be one of the eight beings (*Hacibu-shu*) guarding Buddhism.[48] The dragon is a guardian deity that protects Buddha. In Buddhism dragons are directly associated with nature and are understood as having the ability to connect earth and heaven by their capacity to fly, as well as their capacity to take command over fire and water. Therefore, they are seen as positive creatures - protectors, symbols of good luck, wisdom and longevity. The stylistic representation of the dragons is very similar in Chinese and Japanese cultures; however, it has certain differences in their visual appearance such as the number of toes. Chinese dragons are usually depicted with five toes, while Japanese dragons have three. According to Chinese folklore, the further the dragon moved from China the more toes he lost and it has only three in Japan.[49] The story

[44] Ibid., 69.
[45] Herbert, *Bunshin II Japanese traditional tattoo,* 17.
[46] Wilson, "Powerful Form and Potent Symbol", 286.
[47] Herbert, *Bunshin II Japanese traditional tattoo,* 17.
[48] Wilson, "Powerful Form and Potent Symbol", 298.
[49] Ashcraft and Benny, *Japanese tattoo*, 62.

is reversed in Japanese culture, saying that the dragon gained toes while moving away from Japan. Despite a visual difference, the meaning of the dragon is similar in both cultures.

Traditional Japanese tattooing, especially in relation to dragon tattoos, is represented by the work of the Japanese tattoo artist Horitsune II. In the above-mentioned book, two sleeve tattoos are showcased in the traditional Japanese style tattoos (Fig.7). The motifs and the recurrent elements in the pattern are represented by a dragon and a tiger on each sleeve. The two sleeves, as well as the designs themselves, are symmetrical with regard to their form as they both start in the round shape on the chest and continue onto the middle of the forearms. The two tattoos consist of the main motif, in this case the dragon and the tiger, additional elements of peonies and the background consisting of water and clouds. These motifs, additional elements and the background are commonly seen and understood as part of the Japanese traditional tattooing culture. The tattoos are not only recognizable as the Japanese traditional style due to the subject matter, but also due to the use of particular colors such as red, green, yellow and orange. At first Japanese tattoos were only black due to a lack of resources and ink inventions. Throughout the ages, black has been considered as the most important color and its elaborate use can be seen in the shading techniques of clouds and water.[50] Later, Japanese tattooing practices adopted red, blue, green, yellow and white colors and mixtures thereof. The colors used in Japanese tattooing have strong associations with nature. Red represents the sun, yellow is related to earth and religion, green and blue resembles water and creation.[51] A combination of colors and motifs creates a dynamic piece on the body. The dragon, in particular, can be recognized as Japanese when looking at the number of toes. Moreover, the motif is not showcased as a single subject. It is part of the whole unity of elements on the body, therefore, the whole tattoo design can be regarded as a pattern, which, in this case, is a specific ordering of three different elements. Moreover, the placement of the two tattoos also represents a traditional understanding and history of tattoos as they can be hidden by such clothing items as the *kimono*.

*Japanese tattoo artist*

Japanese artists understand their culture from the inside, as they were raised surrounded by such cultural elements as *ukiyo-e* prints, novels and other tattoo artists. As mentioned above,

[50] Ibid., 33.
[51] Ibid.

tattoo traditions in Japan were inspired by woodblock prints and many tattoo artists were also masters of the printing technique. These tattoo artists adopted multiple methods of printing to tattooing such as shading technique, and in this way continued their traditions in a different form of art and within a different medium.[52] The relationship between tattoo and other forms of art such as woodblock printing showcases the ongoing importance of traditions in art styles, which tattoo artists preserve in their works. Similarities between the two heroes in the illustration of the novel and in the form of tattoos emphasize such exchanges between different art mediums. Through this relationship, tattoo artists were able to claim their association with Japanese art and traditions. In his book *Irezumi,* Professor Willem Van Gulik stated the following: "tattoo masters have always considered themselves as being part of the *shokunin* class- skilled artisans who have produced and developed the traditional folk arts and crafts of Japan".[53] Van Gulik analyzed the development of Japanese tattooing practices and emphasized its connection with other art forms in Japan. On the basis of this he emphasized the importance of apprenticeship for a person to become a tattoo artist.[54] Especially, during the Edo period (1603-1867), tattoo apprenticeship was a requirement.[55] Through apprenticeship the student is taught to use tattoo techniques, the tattoo tools and equipment, to work in the style, as well as learn other Japanese arts and traditions. At the beginning of the process, the student studies woodblock prints and learns the tattoo techniques by watching his master. When the master allows, the student starts to draw and copy the prints, and starts to tattoo a fake skin or oneself in order to better understand the practice. When the master thinks that the student is ready to tattoo, they allow the student to tattoo less important or visible parts of the master's tattoos and when approved, the student starts to tattoo on their own. Such artists as Horitsune II explained the apprenticeship process as taking a few years before the master allowed one to tattoo.[56] As he explained, usually the student continued working in the same style as his master, which is exemplified through his own practices since he is strictly as Japanese traditional artist as his master.[57] This process emphasizes the importance of maintaining the Japanese tattoo traditions in relation to other art forms and norms.

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[52] Van Gulik, *Irezumi*, 91.
[53] Ibid., 93.
[54] Ibid., 110.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Herbert, *Bunshin II Japanese traditional tattoo,* 4.
[57] Ibid.

The Japanese traditional tattooing style has been developing throughout the ages influenced by woodblock printing, everyday surroundings, mythology and religion as discussed in the current Chapter. The inspiration from everyday surroundings, in particular nature, is characterized by the use of color in traditional Japanese tattooing, as the style uses colors from nature only. The style has adopted motifs from all four inspirations, which are usually directly associated with Chinese culture. The novels, as well as mythological creatures such as kirin, elements of nature like peonies and dragons were brought to Japan from China together with Buddhism. The early developments of Japanese tattooing are also affected by Chinese culture in relation to the status and use of tattoos. In China, tattoos were used as a means of punishment, which later was adopted by the Japanese as well. The rejection of tattoos by the ruling class of Japan affected the placement of traditional tattoos, which are still practiced in contemporary Japan. Tattoos were placed in such a way that they could be hidden from the general public by wearing a *kimono*. The style has developed in parallel with the rejection of tattooing practices by the ruling class. Negative connotations in relation to tattoos were present in Japanese culture when the Western tattoo artists and tattoo enthusiasts adopted the style. In order to discuss the way American tattooing has been inspired and influenced by the Japanese tattoo style, the history of American tattooing is going to be analyzed in the upcoming Chapter.

## Chapter 2: American traditional tattoo style

*History of tattooing in the United States of America*

Tattooing practices were present in America during pre-modern times and they had an impact of further developments in tattoo culture in the country. As mentioned above, tattooing practices have been an integral part of many communities including the ones in America. Indigenous people in America became acquainted with body marking practices through interaction with other indigenous people such as large Polynesian migration (around 500 C.E -700 C.E.).[58] Native American tattoos have been influenced by tattoo practices from Polynesia as regards design and meaning (Fig.8).[59] Tattoos were a significant part of Polynesian culture as markings to express one's identity and position in the community.[60] The placement, design and size of such tattoos also symbolized one's position in society, for example, significant social standing was emphasized by a greater number of tattoos as compared to a lower standing.[61] These characteristics of tattoo practices are also seen in Native Americans such as Inuit women who are tattooed with geometric patterns to showcase their marital status and group identity (Fig.9).[62] Scholar Alfred Gell states that "marks on the skin highlighted control over the environment, healing, and upholding religion".[63] Native American tattoos were inspired by Polyneisan tattooing and were used as status symbols in indigenous communities.

The expeditions of Captain James Cook (1728-1779) to the South Pacific, Polynesia and Tahiti in the second half of the 18th century resulted in contact with indigenous tattoo practices.[64] Cook brought drawings and books from his travels containing tattoos, which established a larger visibility of tattooing practices in England and America.[65] Many scholars such as Marina Claire Kastan and Ira Dye argue that through his voyages Cook re-discovered tattooing and brought the knowledge of the practice to the West. Captain Cook, together with other sailors, encountered many men covered in abstract black and white tattoos.[66] During his second journey to Tahiti, Cook brought a Tahitian highly tattooed man named Omai back to

[58] Heimburger and Bratt, *The Sketchbook*, 11.
[59] Dass, "Native American symbols in tattooing", 26.
[60] Heimburger and Bratt, *The Sketchbook*, 12.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Dass, "Native American symbols in tattooing", 30.
[63] Gell cited by Kang, "Illustrated America", 19.
[64] Kastan, "Wearing Your Dreams", 11.
[65] Heimburger and Bratt, *The Sketchbook*, 12.
[66] Ibid.

his homeland and introduced him to the dominant, aristocratic, public.[67] Omai was presented to King George III and was also taken to the state opening of Parliament.[68] Even though tattooing practices were already in existence in the indigenous communities in America, Cook showed them to the rulers and members of the upper class in England. The knowledge of tattooing practice was adopted by the rulers and the upper class there, and later, in the second half of the 19th century, it was taken to colonized America by traveling sailors and middle-class Americans imitating the British.

At the time of Cook's voyages, the Enlightenment took hold in most European countries, which affected England and British America too. Enlightenment philosophers aimed at emphasizing knowledge acquired by reason and evidence as a way of achieving a better life and addressing ideals of liberty and freedom.[69] The ideals were influential in Europe and in America as exemplified by the American Revolution (1765-1791). Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was a German philosopher who addressed the issues of freedom and was one of the most influential Enlightenment philosophers. Kant's understanding of the form of the human body is important in relation to the tattoo practice as it indirectly criticizes it. The philosopher believed that the form of a human body was perfectly beautiful the way it naturally was. In his *Critique of Judgment* Kant acknowledged the beauty of Māori tattoo designs; however, he argued that the form of the human body was already beautiful in itself. Therefore, tattoos were perceived as an unnecessary addition to the form of the body.[70] The beauty of the human body was also emphasized in multiple religions such as Christianity, the central religion in the Western world. The Old Testament argues "You shall not make any cuts on your body for the dead or tattoo yourselves: I am the LORD".[71] The Christian perspective can be compared to the ideas of Kant as both state that the human body or its form is naturally perfect; therefore, nothing should be added to it, including tattoos. The rejection of tattoos by the dominant religion has influenced the perception of tattoos by the Europeans inhabiting North America. Tattooed bodies were regarded as a-religious, anti-social and deviant.[72] In Colonial America, tattoos were mostly used as body markings for slaves, criminals and other outcasts. Slave owners branded their slaves by burning a mark

[67] Ibid.
[68] Royal Museums Greenwich, "Captain Cook".
[69] Gardner, *Art Throughout the Ages*, 772.
[70] Wicks, "Kant on beautifying the human body", 163.
[71] Leviticus 19:28
[72] Kastan, "Wearing Your Dreams", 9.

and/or with tattoos in order to showcase their ownership or as a punishment.[73] Such body branding practice emphasized negative connotations in relation to tattooing as they were usually associated with outlaws.

Despite negative connotations, tattoo culture has been developing since the voyages of James Cook. Sailors learned tattoo techniques from the countries visited, however, they used them for their own purposes. Unlike Polynesian abstract patterns which covered the entire body, sailors were mostly tattooing a few small separate images.[74] The tattoos were mainly representing symbols related to sailors' everyday life environment such as symbols of loved ones that they left behind when traveling and religious symbols that signified protection while being away.[75] Semantic scholar Marina Claire Kastan in her article "Wearing Your Dreams" studies the tattoos of sailors and addresses their artistry.[76] She argues: "power was in what they symbolized more than how they looked".[77] The author claims that the meaning of the tattoo was more important than its aesthetic value. Therefore, Kastan concluded that the significance of the tattoos was the main focus of the practice. The tattoos were aimed at being completed as fast as possible, which resulted in simple two-dimensional designs. Because tattoos were small, they were relatively isolated from one another without any links between them. Tattoos were worn as talismans or mementos by sailors. They were perceived as a functional object to protect a sailor or to remind him of the loved ones rather than as an artistic expression. Thus, agency is assigned to the tattoo which is specific to each motif that was transmitted not only to sailors, but also to the general public.

The accessibility of American tattooing to the general public increased when ex-sailors started to open their first tattoo shops in port towns such as New York.[78] The first tattoo shop was opened in 1870 by the tattoo artist Martin Hildebrandt. At the beginning, a large majority of clients were other sailors. Therefore, the practice remained almost unchanged. The designs still consisted of the things related to the life of a sailor. Also, the matter of simple design was still of great importance, which later became known as the American traditional style. Tattoo artists prepared designs beforehand on 'flash' sheets. Kastan described 'flash' as "pages of painted designs, usually organized by subject - that

[73] Edgerton and Dingman, "Tattooing and identity", 145.
[74] Kang, "Illustrated America", 68.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Kastan, "Wearing Your Dreams", 12.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Kastan, "Wearing Your Dreams", 11.

hung on the walls of a tattoo shop and from which customers could choose an image".[79] The practice was aimed at selling the designs rather than innovating and developing it further. Even though a larger audience took a growing interest in tattooing practices during the 19th and 20th centuries, which is going to be discussed in the following Chapter, the style did not change radically. The American traditional style is characterized by its limited color palette, bold black outline, heavy shading, and easily recognizable subject matters throughout the ages.[80] Traditional tattoo artists use mainly yellow, red, green and black colors. The style is based on copying and reproduction of the same subject matter, for example anchors used by sailors.[81] Also, after the first tattoo shops had been established by ex-sailors, tattooing was primarily taught through apprenticeship. Tattoo artists passed on their knowledge to students through careful guidance. Thus, main categories of American tattoos have survived since the 18th century: tattoos of patriotic symbols, tattoos of initials and names, designs related to the sea world, designs related to love, tattoos of people and animals, tattoos of religious symbols and tattoos of miscellaneous subjects.[82] Patriotic symbols, things representing the marine environment, as well as the loved ones and religious symbols, will be discussed in more detail to showcase American traditional tattooing practice better.

Tattoos of patriotic symbols

Patriotic symbols have been popular since the time of sailors to showcase their commitment.[83] They gained even more popularity during World War II (1939-1945). Men wore numbers of their naval battalion, the name of their ship or other symbols relating to their position and status in the military. Also, symbols of America such as the eagle, the American flag, the liberty cap or the words 'United States' were highly popular among military men (Fig.10). Sailor Jerry was considered one of the most important artists in sailor tattoo traditions.[84] He was part of the American navy himself and later settled in Hawaii where he continued tattooing traditions. Therefore, the designs by Sailor Jerry are exemplary for the traditional tattoo style. The tattoo design by Sailor Jerry resembles an eagle which is the symbol that represents America's honor, prowess and intelligence. The design emphasized the American

[79] Ibid., 12.
[80] Lodder, "The New Old Style", 104.
[81] Ibid., 105.
[82] Dye, "The Tattoos of Early American seafarers", 547.
[83] Kastan, "Wearing Your Dreams", 22.
[84] Ibid., 14.

traditional tattoo style due to its aesthetic properties such as a bold black outline, a limited color palette and heavy shading. Additionally, the eagle was turned into a two-dimensional object. The design of the eagle tattoo in this case is a stylization and not a naturalistic depiction of the animal. It is well recognizable and, as compared to a realistic eagle, is a simple design.

Things of the sea

Sailors also introduced tattoos that resembled things related to the sea and their voyages such as anchors, mermaids, fish or ships.[85] The tattoos directly represented sailors' everyday life environment and position. The symbols of anchors are important as they emphasize stability because an actual object was used to keep the ship steady (Fig.11). Tattoo designs by Sailor Jerry represent the American traditional style of anchor tattoos. As mentioned above, Sailor Jerry was considered one of the most important American traditional tattoo artists as his work is exemplary for the style. The two designs consist of bold back outlines, heavy shading, and a few colors – red, yellow and green.

Representation of loved ones

As sailors usually spent an extended period of time away from their family members or the beloved ones, their tattoos were aimed at resembling the latter.[86] The tattoos usually consisted of the names or initials of the loved ones, together with a banner and other symbols, to express positive feelings such as hearts or flowers (Fig.12). One design by Sailor Jerry represents a heart with the word 'MOM' on top of it. The tattoo is aimed at keeping the beloved mom close while traveling to foreign lands. The other design emphasized lost love as it has 'LOVE LOST' words on top of the heart. The two designs are typical tattoos of sailors and also greatly showcase typical aesthetic elements of the American traditional tattoo style. The two designs have a bold black outline, heavy shading and only a few colors, red, green and yellow, in it. The meaning of the tattoo, in this case, lies in the combination of visual elements and words.

[85] Dye "The Tattoos of Early American Seafarers", 543.
[86] Ibid., 544.

Tattoos of religious symbols

Despite the rejection of tattoos in Christianity, sailors wore religious symbols as signs of protection, mostly during their voyages.[87] Tattoos usually depicted the crucifixion of Christ wearing the crown of thorns as it was one of the most recognizable scenes. As compared to all other subjects of tattoos, religious tattoos were larger in size and were usually placed on a sailor's back. Kastan stated that "the most common punishment for misconduct on the ship was lashing, and a devout captain might refuse to whip a man's back if it featured a picture of Jesus or other religious image on it".[88] The tattoo by Jarret Crosson (Fig.13) represents the most common religious tattoo design as it portrays the crucifixion of Jesus. It is depicted by using mostly black color for the outline and heavy shading, the only other color used was red to emphasize blood running down Jesus' face from the crown. Such religious symbols, as well as things of love and patriotic symbols among other designs, have the same formal characteristics such as a black outline, heavy shading and only a few colors. In the course of the development of the American traditional tattoo style, aesthetic values remained almost unchanged.

These four categories of American traditional tattoo designs were most popular among sailors. Tattoo designs from all categories resemble similar formal characteristics – a bold black outline, heavy shading and a limited color palette. These characteristics have been essential for the American traditional tattoo style. Moreover, all the above-discussed tattoos signify something that can be considered a sign pointing to love of America, being a sailor, someone who died or who you love, faith and protection. All tattoo motifs have an agency assigned to them that is transmitted to sailors and later to the general public. These motifs can be regarded as symbols of sailors' identity because they represent elements of their everyday life.

*American interactions with non-Western cultures*

Even though the traditional style in America is very distinctive, it has always been under the influence of non-western traditions as discussed at the beginning of the present Chapter. In her book *Bodies of Inscription: A cultural history of the modern tattoo community* the cultural

[87] Kastan, "Wearing Your Dreams", 19.
[88] Ibid.

anthropologist Margo DeMello described the development of tattoo culture in the West and the exchange of traditions between the cultures. When the tattoos were introduced by voyagers that travelled to such areas as Polynesia, later voyages were made to India, Korea, and Japan, the popularity of the practice started to increase.[89] During that time it became common practice for sailors to get tattooed while traveling. Alongside their own tattooing practice, sailors were tattooed by non-western tattoo artists, for example, by artists from Polynesia. In this way new tribal symbols were brought to the sailors' homelands. At that time in America, tattoo practices can be divided into two categories - American traditional tattoos and tattoos brought from non-western countries which influenced the development of American tattooing. Non-Western tattoo cultures were presented as different compared to American culture. Therefore, DeMello treated this situation as paradoxical due to a double standard with regard to acceptance of non-western tattoos. Sailors bringing home non-western tattoo symbols on their body regarded them as exotic and interesting elements, while by non-western people they were seen as signifiers of non-dominant culture.[90] Non-Western cultures, especially that of Japan, had a great impact on the American traditional tattooing style.

Opening of Japan

In 1868, when the Tokugawa Shogunate military government (1603-1868) fell and Meiji restoration started, Japan was opened to the West for the first time. Western travelers got acquainted with Japanese culture, especially tattooing for the first time. As described in Chapter One, Japanese tattoos were very different from the American or tribal ones as they varied in formal aspects. As compared to American traditional tattooing, Japanese tattoos were more colorful, different motifs were more united into one coherent image, tattoos more resembled natural forms such as clouds or waves. Americans were confronted with a different approach to a tattooing practice. Japanese tattoo artists created elaborate designs to cover a large part of the body, whereas American tattoo artists tattooed small and not interrelated images. The interaction between America and Japan did not immediately influence American tattooing practice as the Japanese practice was still hardly accessible.[91] A lack of

[89] DeMello, *Bodies of Inscription*, 46.
[90] Ibid., 49.
[91] Kastan, "Wearing Your Dreams", 13.

technological developments such as photography resulted in limited accessibility of Japanese traditional tattooing as only sailors or other travelers had the possibility to see tattooing processes by Japanese masters.[92]

American and English sailors got Japanese traditional tattoos as souvenirs of the places visited. This was considered to be a tradition among the sailors traveling to foreign lands.[93] The men returning from Japan with traditional tattoos imparted knowledge of the new tattoo style to the general public and the tattoo industry in Britain and British America. Tattoo artists and other people learned about Japanese tattoos directly from the examples as they were the only source of information at the time. The elite members of British society began to travel to Japan or bring Japanese tattoo artists to England, and later to America in order to get tattooed by one of the masters. King George V was one of the elite members that travelled to Japan to be tattooed.[94] Despite a negative association of tattoo practices with delinquency, sailors and elite members of British society perceived tattoos as something exotic. The interest in Japanese tattooing flourished after it had been recognized by the British upper-class members. At the same time, as mentioned above, sailors were developing their own tattoo style. The opening of Japan and acknowledgement of their tattoo culture resulted in the incorporation of Japanese tattoo motifs in the American traditional tattoo style.

*Tattoo Renaissance*

The growing fascination in tattooing practices in America resulted in a larger number of tattooed bodies. Scholars such as Juliet Fleming call the period, which started in the mid-20th century 'the tattoo renaissance'.[95] Tattoos were more visible to the general public as an increasing number of people, including women and the middle class, wore them. An increasing diversity of tattooed people challenged the traditional ideas of tattooing in America. As discussed above, tattoos were usually associated with sailors, whereas during the tattoo renaissance the general public adopted the practice. The popularization of tattoo practice in America mainly started in the late 19th and the early 20th century by showcasing tattooed bodies in circuses and carnivals. Tattooed bodies were used in circuses and carnivals

[92] Ibid., 12.
[93] Ibid., 13.
[94] Ibid., 34.
[95] Fleming, "The Renaissance Tattoo", 35.

to shock and surprise the audience as those who wore tattoos were seen as 'freaks'.[96] Throughout the time, the use of tattooed bodies in such environments increased visibility of tattoos and therefore, helped normalize the practice in society.

Technological developments such as the invention of an electric tattoo machine had an impact on the accessibility of tattoos amongst the general public. The tattoo machine was invented in 1891 by a British tattooist Samuel O'Reilly.[97] The machine had a rotary system that moved needlessly up and down. The invention made the process of tattooing more considerable and less painful, which encouraged more people to get tattooed as the practice became more accessible. The rise of commercial photography in 1890 and more accessible travel affected the accessibility of different tattooing practices.[98] It allowed American tattoo artists and enthusiasts to learn and incorporate new elements in their own tattoos from other cultures, for example, Japanese culture. The growing visibility and accessibility of tattoo practices in the general public resulted in the tattoo renaissance. It is the period in the history of tattooing when tattoo artists started looking at other cultures for inspiration, and started addressing tattoos with an artistic purpose.[99] The tattoo renaissance began in the late 1950s and has lasted up till now, with the acceptance of the practice increasing and tattoo artists inventing and adopting new styles and techniques.

The increasing accessibility of tattooing practices led to its adoption by prisoners and other outlaws, as well as members of subcultures such as punks during the second half of the 20th century.[100] Tattoos have been used as symbols of belonging to a certain community such as a particular criminal organization and a way of differentiating themselves from the mainstream society.[101] Tattooing in prison is also done in order to show prisoners' belonging to the common prison culture (Fig.14).[102] Spider web tattoos, for example, were commonly used to emphasize the long sentence served by prisoners. There are differences between prisons; however, most prison tattoos contain symbols denoting that one belongs to the prison culture and are signifiers of one's position in that culture. The topics of the tattoos usually relate to the prisoner's current situation and his past that led him to prison, such as gang

[96] Teffs, "From Cellblock to Suburbia", 18.
[97] Kastan, "Wearing Your Dreams", 5.
[98] Ibid., 14.
[99] Fleming, "The Renaissance Tattoo", 35.
[100] Teffs, "From Cellblock to Suburbia", 19.
[101] Kastan, "Wearing Your Dreams", 10.
[102] DeMello, "The Convict Body", 13.

affiliation.[103] The adaptation of tattoo culture in the context of outlaws in America can be compared to the use of practice by criminals in Japan as discussed in Chapter One. The two groups get tattooed to emphasize their position in society and to showcase their commitment. However, the main difference between the two groups is that in Japan criminals are involuntarily tattooed, whereas in America tattoos are not mandatory. The use of tattoos in a criminal context leads to negative connotations related to the tattooing practice in general society in America. Moreover, the use of tattoos in subcultures later influenced the significance of tattoos as different and 'cool'.[104] The increased visibility of tattoos adopted by members of subcultures also lead to an increasing acceptance and to the changing status of the practice.

The status of American traditional tattoo practice has been affected by the developments and events in society. The use of tattoos by different groups such as criminals, interactions with non-western lands, a rejection of the practice by Christianity, and the indirect influence of philosophers shaped the status of the practice. The style developed in accordance with these events. American traditional tattoos are aimed at being produced fast and simple as at the beginning of the style they were used as talismans or memorabilia by sailors. Tattoos can be characterized by a bold black outline, simple designs, heavy shading and solid spots of color. Such motifs as anchors and ships were developed by sailors. Sailors' interactions with non-western countries, especially with Japan, also had a great influence on the American traditional tattoo motifs. The American style, similarly to that of Japan, developed parallelly to negative connotations in general society influenced by the use of tattoos in the criminal world and common assumptions affected by a rejection of the practice by the main religion and the enlightenment ideals over time. The interconnection between the Japanese and American traditional tattoo styles is dealt with in the following Chapter.

[103] Ibid., 11.
[104] Ibid., 25.

## Chapter 3: Tattoo exchanges between America and Japan

As has already been briefly discussed in the previous Chapter, Japanese traditional tattoos had a great impact on the American traditional style. After the opening of Japan, sailors were returning home wearing Japanese tattoos as souvenirs. The Japanese tattooing culture was also greatly appreciated by the elite members of society. The acceptance and fascination of Japanese tattooing in American society resulted in tattoo artists studying and adopting the style. The differences between the two styles are seen in designs, colors, placement, size and approach to tattoos themselves. Japanese tattoo artists usually looked at tattooing as art, whereas American tattoo artists regarded it mainly as a commercial good. This can be seen in the practice itself as American tattoos were comparatively small and made quickly, while Japanese ones took a few months to be made. The growing number of tools for communication between the two cultures resulted in artists' adopting and shaping other practices. The present Chapter discusses how the American tattooing practice was influenced by the Japanese tradition and vice versa.

### *Japanese artists working in America*

After the opening of Japan, for reasons to be explained next, Japanese tattoo artists started to move to America and continue to practice tattooing there thus spreading the knowledge of the Japanese traditional tattoo style. The move to America was motivated by economic and artistic opportunities. In her article "Westernization and Cultural Resistance in Tattooing practices in Contemporary Japan" the professor of Sociology Mieko Yamada analyzed the shifting and remaining meaning and acceptance of tattoos in Japan and studied the need for Japanese artists to move to the West.[105] In contemporary Japan the negative perspective on tattoos is still strong due to historical and sociocultural traditions. Traditional tattoo artists are still working in shops that are not completely open to the general public. The shops are usually located in hidden places or at home in order to hide them from the public eye.[106] The entrance to the shop is also usually masked, so only people who know their way can enter the shop. The shops do not have any signs or notices and are not open to walk-in clients. The tattoo artists rarely accept new clients, and even if they do, the clients have to be introduced to the artist. By opening a shop in America, Japanese tattoo artists do not have to hide their

[105] Yamada, "Westernization and cultural resistance in tattooing practices in contemporary Japan", 319.
[106] Ibid., 329.

practice. They are able to make this practice visible to the general public by hanging a sign, writing or putting an image on the door representing the tattoo shop. Such Japanese artists as Horitomo, who moved to America in the early 2000s, do not have to hide and being out in the open helps to spread Japanese traditional tattooing outside their country. Horitomo is a Japanese tattoo artist who uses the *tebori* method to tattoo. The artist works following the rules of the Japanese traditional tattoo style (Fig.15). The design of the sleeves consists of the main motifs, stylistic elements such as flowers, and the background usually consists of water or clouds. The unity of all three elements is an important part of the Japanese tattoo design as it was created as a unified design and should emphasize the flow of the body. The two tattoos can be compared to the tattoos of Horitsune II (Fig.7), discussed in Chapter One, as they portray the same subject matter. Both tattoos represent a lion on one hand and a dragon on the other. Both designs are surrounded by other elements such as leaves and flowers. Moreover, both designs have backgrounds resembling wind or water. The tattoos by both Horitsune II and Horimoto exemplify the Japanese traditional tattoo style as they follow the style's characteristics in regard to the representation of the dragon motif and tattoo technique.

*American artists working in Japanese style*

Western artists such as Brian Kaneko working in the Japanese style used another way of presenting Japanese tattoos in America. Those artists adopted the style from tattoos that were brought from Japan by sailors, later by traveling to Japan and deriving inspiration from art prints and photographic images. After the opening of Japan, the influence was direct as the sailors were tattooed by Japanese tattoo masters. Throughout the time, American tattoo artists started appropriating the Japanese tattoo culture and learning this style in America. Brian Kaneko is a tattoo artist currently working in northern California, USA. He started his tattooing career by doing an apprenticeship in a shop called 'visual tattoo' in Arcata.[107] He got acquainted with the tattoo practice while living in America.[108] The majority of Kaneko's designs are Japanese traditional 'body-suits' (Fig. 16). The tattoo consists of the main motif, additional elements and the background which in this example means that the motif is the dragon and flowers are used as additional elements. Also, the background consists of clouds, wind and water, which is exemplary of the Japanese traditional style. The unity of the

[107] Sanjose, "Brian Kaneko- Perseverance".
[108] Adrenalink tattoo, "Crez Interviews Brian Kaneko".

elements and the formal properties such as colors and shading can be regarded as the Japanese traditional style.

American artists travel to Japan in order to become acquainted with its culture and sometimes, even be trained by the tattoo master. The tattoo artists trained in Japanese tradition gain knowledge of other arts and crafts, as well as traditions in Japanese culture through their masters. Trained artists continue the traditions and methods learned during their apprenticeship. On the other hand, untrained American artists working in the Japanese traditional tattoo style affirm their knowledge of the style through their secondary sources such as woodblock prints, magazines and multiple online sources. Artists such as Brian Kaneko, who was mentioned in Chapter Two, is a tattoo artist trained in America and specializing in the Japanese traditional style. In her article Yamada researches artists working in the Japanese tradition who were not trained in the traditional manner and states that increasing cultural globalization threatens the continuity and authenticity of local cultures.[109] Yamada states that "untrained tattooists do not know traditional thoughts on Japanese art".[110] A lack of primary sources and limitations on the secondary ones prevent American artists from understanding the Japanese tattooing culture and its relations to the tradition and other forms of art and crafts, which are important in order to maintain the Japanese traditions in the correct way. Therefore, untrained Western artists working in the Japanese traditional tattoo style assign a different meaning to their tattoos as compared to the trained artists and Japanese traditional artists.

*'One-point' tattoos*

Today Japanese tattoo artists can be divided into two groups on the basis of their tattoo techniques and styles.[111] Cultural exchanges between Japan and America also result in changes in Japanese tattooing practice. As mentioned above, traditional Japanese tattooing was mostly designed to be as a 'body-suit' or to cover part of the body; however, the American influence introduced the concept of the 'one-point' tattoo in Japan (Fig.17). It moved the traditional notion of tattooing into a 'one-point' tattoo that portrays only one element of the original unified design. Today, this concept of one tattoo is considered a

[109] Yamada, "Westernization and cultural resistance in tattooing practices in contemporary Japan", 330.
[110] Ibid., 329.
[111] Ibid., 323.

Western-style tattoo in Japan.[112] However, the motif, coloring, and shading of the 'one-point' tattoos still resemble some of the traditional Japanese style. The two approaches in Japanese tattooing differ in regard to the size, placement and design of a tattoo. The majority of tattoo artists tattoo in both 'styles' (Fig. 17 and Fig. 16) in order to reflect the client's wishes and desires. The change is represented by such tattoo artists as Kensho II as he has made some tattoos that represent only one motif such as a mask without any additional elements or background. Horitomo, as discussed above, is a Japanese artist working in America. In his practice he tattoos in both ways - 'body-suits' and 'one-point'.

*Impact of Electric tattoo machine*

The invention of the electric tattoo machine in America discussed in the previous Chapter, had an impact on both Japanese and American traditional tattooing cultures. The invention had a great influence on the accessibility of Japanese and American tattoos. The American traditional style has been characterized by small, simple designs. The discovery of the tattoo machine made it even easier for American tattoo artists to tattoo because it was quicker and less painful as compared to manual tattooing. The invention also made the Japanese traditional tattooing process more efficient. The *tebori* process of a 'body-suit' was long and complicated as it took around 150 to 200 hours to complete.[113] Usually, the process was divided into separate sessions throughout the weeks or months. The 'body-suit' required tattoo artists and clients' dedication as well as money. Because tattoo artists charge on an hourly basis, the price of a 'body-suit' being around 2 million yen (approx. 15,173 euro).[114] Some Japanese and American tattoo artists working in the Japanese traditional style use electric tattoo machines instead of *tebori*. The tattoos made by means of a tattoo machine are usually cheaper as compared to the ones made by the traditional method as it takes less time and effort. Therefore, tattooing by the *tebori* technique is more appreciated in the tattoo industry because of its complexity in regard to technique, design, the amount of time needed to complete the tattoo and the following of an old tradition. Some American-Japanese tattoo artists such as Brian Kaneko use the electric tattoo machine for its convenience.

[112] Thompson, *Tattoos in Japanese Prints,* 30.
[113] Raveri and Hendry, "The Japanese tattoo", 503.
[114] Ibid.

*Subject matter exchange*

As discussed in the previous Chapter, the American traditional tattoo style has been influenced by the Japanese style as it has adopted such motifs as the dragon. The Japanese dragon motif, for instance, has been popular in the Western culture throughout the ages. As discussed above, contemporary Western society adopted the motif of a dragon in two different manners. On the one hand, Japanese traditional dragons were adopted as part of the 'body-suits' which is the way that Japanese style was originally meant to look. On the other hand, the dragon was adopted as a single motif tattoo. The single dragon, like other singular tattoos, was isolated from Japanese traditions and formed a new subgenre of the style in relation to tattoo size, placement and design. However, in both cases the Japanese dragon motif has kept on signifying the positive meaning as understood in Japanese culture where the dragon tattoo is seen as a symbol of good luck and wisdom. The meaning differs from the way dragons have been understood in Western art practices throughout the ages. As opposed to Japan, Christians in the West interpreted dragons as a negative symbol. The art Historian Sharon Khalifa-Gueta specializes in analyzing the notion of a dragon; in her article "The Evolution of the Western Dragon" she addresses a negative representation of dragons in the West.[115] The author states that negative connotations should be considered against the background of Christianity as dragons were used to symbolize the ultimate enemy. The position of the dragon as an enemy is represented in the legend of Saint George and the dragon.[116] In this legend, the dragon is portrayed as a monster, from whom Saint George has to protect the city.[117] The depiction of the legend can be seen in the work by Raphael (Fig.18). The painting portrays Saint George on the white horse protecting the city from the dragon by killing him with a sword. Despite the negative approach to dragons in the West, American tattoo practice has adopted the meaning and image of the dragon as it came from Japan. The depiction of the dragon in the West and Japan is stylistically different. Western depictions of dragons such as the one by Raphael can be regarded as more naturalistic as compared to its stylized representation in Japan. The main difference between the two tattoo designs is that usually dragons are depicted as part of the unified design in Japanese style, while in

[115] Khalifa-Gueta, "The Evolution of the Western Dragon", 276.
[116] Morabito, "Saint George and the Dragon", 135.
[117] Ibid.

American style it is a singular motif. The colors, lining and shading techniques are also different in these two styles; however, the positive meaning of the motif is similar.

*Japanese traditional dragon and American traditional dragon*

The aesthetic differences between dragon tattoos in Japanese and American traditions can be compared by analyzing the tattoos by Kensho II and Sailor Jerry (Fig.17 and Fig. 19). The color palette of the two dragons is similar. Kensho II used yellow, blue, red and purple for his tattoo, while Sailor Jerry painted the dragon in the same colors and added green. The dragons are also distinct in regard to the outline, as the one by Sailor Jerry is bolder. Moreover, the posture of the dragon is more adapted to the flow of the body in the work by Kensho II. The dragon by Kensho II is more detailed and precise which contributed to the elaborate representation of the dragon. The body and head of the dragon are represented as having different textures as they are shaded differently. On the other hand, the dragon by Sailor Jerry does not portray texture. Sailor Jerry used plain colors and little amount of detail as compared to Kensho II. Furthermore, the difference appears not only in stylistic elements; the dragons themselves are dissimilar. Kensho II portrayed a Japanese dragon which can be recognized by three toes (one hidden behind the dragon's body), whereas Sailor Jerry drew a Chinese one with five toes. As mentioned in Chapter One, the representation of the dragon originated in China and was later adopted in the Japanese traditional tattoo style. Despite the difference in the number of toes, the two dragon tattoos emphasize the characteristics of the Japanese traditional tattoo style in regard to its visual appearance and the use of colors.

The influence between Japanese and American tattooing practices is evident in today's American cultural environment. The Japanese traditional style was brought to America by sailors and later adopted by American tattoo artists. Tattoo artists adopted the style completely or used elements from the style in the context of the American traditional style. The most popular tattoo motif emphasizing the influence of Japanese style is the dragon as it was adopted by the American traditional tattoo style. The dragon can be tattooed in three different manners discussed above - in the American traditional style, as a ‘one-point’ tattoo and as part of a unified design in the Japanese traditional style. ‘One-point’ tattoos developed as a result of American adaptation of the Japanese style. ‘One-point tattoos’ are singular tattoos isolated from other designs. Nowadays, some American tattoo artists who work in Japanese style and some Japanese traditional artists use tattoo machines. Moreover, the

American invention of the electric tattoo machine had an effect on the Japanese tattooing practice. The tattoo machine provided an easier and cheaper method of applying tattoos in both cultures. It made Japanese tattooing practice more accessible to the clients, as well as to artists, especially Americans. American tattoo artists did not need to learn *tebori* in order to learn Japanese traditional tattooing. Such cultural exchanges raise an issue of authorship in relation to Japanese tattoos in the American context which is addressed in the present Chapter.

## Chapter 4: The notion of authorship

The complexity of authorship has been addressed by many scholars such as Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault. In the essay "The Death of the Author" Barthes focused his argumentation on moving away from the figure of the author and thus turning towards the interpretation and understanding of the text by the reader. The ideas were addressed and elaborated by Foucault who also rejected the authority of the author but emphasized the importance of the context of the author and the work itself. In this Chapter, attempts will be made to discuss the concept of authorship in relation to tattoos. To assess the extent to which Barthes' and Foucault's concepts and insights could be applicable to tattoos, the case study of especially American traditional dragon tattoo by Sailor Jerry will be studied in relation to the texts. Also, the analysis of the two scholars will help us understand the complexity of the notion of authorship pertaining to cultural exchanges and relations between tattoo artists and their clients. The relationships between a tattoo artist and a client will also be studied in the analysis of German architect Gottfried Semper and Professor Diana Taylor. Barthes and Foucault started their essays with the position of the author in modern society, which is important in understanding the meaning and function of authorship. Therefore, this chapter starts with the analysis of tattoo artists' position in contemporary American society.

*Tattoo artist as an author in Contemporary American Society*

In his essay Roland Barthes defines the author as a modern figure which is the product of our society.[118] He argues that the increasing importance of prestige influenced the formation of individual authors.[119] Barthes in particular addressed literature writers; however, the emphasis on the author can be seen in other forms of art such as painting and contemporary tattooing. An increasing acceptance of tattooing practices as an art form in contemporary America provides an opportunity for tattoo artists to present themselves in the position of the author, the one who created the work. The authorship of tattoos has been affected by the changing position of the tattoo artist. In her article "The Artification of Tattoo", the Professor of Sociology Mary Kosut researches contemporary tattoo practices in the West and distinguishes between first and second generation tattooists.[120] First generation tattooists are described by

[118] Barthes, "The Death of the Author", 142.
[119] Ibid., 143
[120] Kosut, "The Artifiction of Tattoo", 147.

the author as "those who possess one or more of the following characteristics: self-taught; working-class economic background and habitus; little or no knowledge of the Western art canon; born between the 1900s and the 1950s; or tattooists who worked in the profession prior to the tattoo Renaissance".[121] These artists were usually untrained by masters, however, they work in a particular style and tradition such as the Japanese traditional style. First-generation artists in America acquired knowledge of the Japanese traditional style through limited access to the actual practice. Tattoo artists such as Sailor Jerry became acknowledged with Japanese tattoos only by traveling there and seeing the practice with their own eyes. On the contrary, second-generation tattoo artists are the ones born or who started tattooing after the first-generation and are usually academically trained in subjects related to such art as art history; they are characterized by having some knowledge of the fine art canon. The second-generation's academic training is mostly related to the art field as currently there is no formal education to become a tattooist.[122] As Kosut explains, second-generation tattooists are blurring the boundaries between fine art and tattooing and moving further away from traditional tattoo designs and in this way blurring the boundaries between the status of tattoo artists and other artists such as painters. Throughout the ages, painters have been usually presented as authors of their artworks. The blurred boundaries between tattooing and fine art also result in shifting notions of authorship in regards to tattoos. In his writing Roland Barthes rejects the authority of the author which is present in literary work and in visual arts. By blurring the boundaries between visual arts and tattoos, second-generation tattoo artists are also moving towards the representation of tattoo artists in the tradition of other visual arts.

*Roland Barthes and the notion of the author*

Roland Barthes defines the author as the figure that limits the meaning and understanding of the work.[123] The author argues that the work is commonly explained through the author, which limits the reader to one particular explanation of the work due to the imparted knowledge of the author. As he explains, the author has two main relations to his work – the past and the future. The past is everything that had happened before the work was created,

[121] Ibid.
[122] Serup, Kluger and Bäumler, *Tattooed Skin and Health*, 16.
[123] Barthes, "The Death of the Author", 143.

whereas the future addresses the after care of the work. This notion of the author as the source of meaning for the work is problematized by Barthes. He argues that the meaning of the work should not be understood through the perspective of the author. Moving away from the author, or as the author defines it as 'death' of the author, enables the readers to address their own interpretation and understanding of the work in a better way. The author states that "[when] the author enters into his own death, the writing begins".[124] However, Barthes acknowledges the power of the author to bring all signs and words together in one text, which leads to a broader meaning. Bringing words and signs together creates a multidimensional space, where meanings are created. This theory of Barthes directly relates to the ideas of semiotics expressed by such philosophers as Ferdinand de Saussure. He argued that the meaning was constructed through the language, which is the system of signs.[125] A sign is a combination of a signifier (the actual word) and the signified (the concept that it triggers).[126] The meaning is not fixed as it changes in regards to the signified which is dependent on a particular society and time period. As the language is a construction of signs, the meaning depends on the concepts that the reader understands. Saussure also addressed the status of the author and argued that the intention of the author might differ from the interpretation of the reader due to differences in the understanding of signs. In the case of a text, a reader uses his own knowledge, perspective and culture, which provides an individual understanding of the work. This notion can be also applied to the tattoo practice as the viewer or client might have his or her own interpretation of the practice or the motifs.

The meaning of a tattoo can be understood through its relation to culture. An American traditional dragon tattoo by Sailor Jerry (Fig.19) emphasizes the multidimensional space in culture. As mentioned in the previous Chapter, the dragon design by Sailor Jerry has elements from at least three cultures – American, Japanese and Chinese. The visual elements such as a bold black outline, the simple design, solid color and shading are signifiers to the American traditional tattooing style as the stylistic elements are characteristics of the style. The dragon motif itself is a signifier for Japanese traditional tattooing culture as it was introduced in the style. The adaptation of the motif in the American traditional tattoo practice was explained in Chapters Two and Three. However, the image of the dragon in Japanese

[124] Ibid., 142.
[125] Hall, *Representation*, 16.
[126] Ibid., 16.

culture was adopted from Chinese culture and Buddhism as explained in Chapter One. The presentation of the dragon as a singular object can be seen as a part taken from the unified Japanese tattoo design and placed in a new setting, though still referring to the original setting. This emphasizes the American influence on the Japanese tattooing tradition and adaptation of it in American culture. The meaning of the dragon itself as a positive animal has been taken from Chinese culture and religion. Therefore, the dragon in the form of a tattoo is a signifier for Japanese tattooing culture, whereas the dragon in general is associated with Chinese culture. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Sailor Jerry was one of the first American tattoo artists to adopt Japanese tattooing motifs and therefore, he can be seen as the author of the tattoo in which signs are brought together. However, the meaning of such signs can only be understood in relation to the reader's knowledge and interpretation.[127] The knowledge of the tattoo development, as well as the use of a dragon image in China, Japan and America, is necessary in order to understand the cultural meaning of the American traditional dragon tattoo by Sailor Jerry.

Barthes' theory addresses a literary text, which limits the interpretation and understanding of the reader in relation to the tattoo practice. In the case of tattoos, the reader might also be the person wearing a tattoo. Therefore, the meaning of the body also becomes important. Society consists of agents who have bodies. The body is never a neutral object as it is an integral part of society. The body assigns meaning to the tattoo as it is socially engaged. The external appearance of the body through the application of permanent marks such as tattoos attributes it to a particular community, showcases beliefs and emotions.[128] As explained in Chapter One and Two, tattoos were adopted by outlaws such as criminals in order to showcase their position and differentiate themselves from the mainstream society. Thus, tattoos are part of the identity formation presented by and inscribed on the human body. Throughout time, the tattoo itself without the body of an outlaw also adopted a negative meaning. The meaning of tattoos was carried on in regards to the earlier cultural context, regardless of the intentions of the subject. Therefore, pre-existent tattoo motifs such as the dragon are signs and symbols that carry significance assigned in the past. Roland Barthes addressed the interpretation of the reader only as he discussed the author of the writing; however, the tattoo is also worn by a 'reader' who assigns an additional meaning to it.

[127] Barthes, "The Death of the Author", 148.
[128] Adams, "Transient Bodies, Pliable Flesh", 18-19.

*Michel Foucault and authorship*

Michel Foucault's essay "What is an Author?" is a response to the ideas expressed by Roland Barthes in "The Death of the Author". Foucault addresses the issues of the author and his death as he sees writing as one of the ways for the author to stay alive.[129] The author demonstrates his knowledge in the writing which remains after his death. However, he also moves away from the authority of the author and turns to the construction of the artists through our culture. Foucault argues that the author is a function of discourse.[130] According to Foucault, a discourse is about the production of knowledge through language.[131] It is a social system that defines a language at a particular time and space in which the statements are made. As to the authorship, Foucault argued that the discourse of the work is important as it creates the meaning. Thus, Foucault addressed the author as the 'what' instead of 'who' in the title of the essay. The author exists in a particular discourse. However, the work can be traced back to the author who includes a number of signs specific to that author.[132] Foucault problematized the privilege of individualization of the author.[133] The meaning of the work exists in the discourse in which the author is engulfed. The discourse defines the way the topic is discussed. The text can be studied from the perspective of a discourse by looking at society's perception of a particular work. The discourse is not limited to the understanding of a text as was analyzed by Foucault himself. In the essay he also addresses other disciplines, from philosophy to sciences. Thus, the analysis of tattoos in relation to a discourse is relevant in understanding the notion of authorship.

The current discourse of tattoo practice in America has developed throughout the ages as discussed in Chapter Two. Before the expeditions of Captain Cook, tattoos were perceived as a common practice for indigenous people by white North Americans. Later, after sailors had started adopting the practice, society's perspective shifted towards tattoos being a part of the sailors' identity. Sailors developed their own tattooing style, today known as the American traditional style and they got tattooed in other cultures such as Japan. After the opening of Japan, traditional Japanese tattoos were perceived as exotic by British and American people, therefore it had a positive connotation, especially amongst the British elite.

[129] Foucault, "What is an Author?", 301.
[130] Wilson, "Foucault on the 'Questions of the Author", 341.
[131] Hall, *Representation*, 29.
[132] Foucault, "What is an Author?", 308.
[133] Wilson, "Foucault on the 'Questions of the Author", 343.

A Western discourse, in the case of Japanese tattoos, was opposite to the Japanese one. The Japanese perceived their tattoos through a negative perspective as they were associated with criminality. However, the tattooing practice itself in the West, particularly in North America, has been mainly seen as negative throughout the ages. Christians' and Kant's rejection of tattoos in the discourse of beauty affected the perception of tattoos. The practice was also adopted by sailors, outlaws, 'freaks' and later by members of different subcultures such as punks, which was treated as the opposition to mainstream society. However, the growing visibility and accessibility of the practice had an effect on its acceptance by the general American public. Second generation artists blurred the boundaries between tattoo practices and other visual arts. This shift also affects the way the tattoo practice is being talked about as it becomes more acceptable and increasingly perceived as a form of art.

Sailor Jerry's American traditional tattoo can be seen as a construction of discourses in mid-20th century America. The tattoo in the American traditional style has been perceived as part of the sailor's lifestyle. Sailor Jerry was in the navy when he started learning the tattoo practice and the style. While a sailor, he traveled to Japan and became acquainted with the tattoo practice in the country. The author functioned within his own discourse in this case. Amongst sailors and the general public tattoos were seen as a feature of a sailor, especially in the American traditional style. As mentioned above, after the opening of Japan, fascination with Japanese traditional tattoos was common amongst sailors, the British elite and later the general public in Britain and North America. Japanese tattoos were perceived as something exotic. Sailor Jerry adopted the motif from the Japanese tattoo culture as it was received positively in the West. The discourse of the image of a dragon also was different in North America and Japan. In North America the dragon was seen as an evil creature, whereas in Japan it had positive connotations and was perceived as a guardian deity of Buddha. Thus, the dragon tattoo corresponds with the American discourse in regard to the tattoo practice in America and Japan.

*Collaboration between the artist and the subject*

The two philosophers focused mainly on the examination of the text and the reader, which provides a different relationship between the author and a reader as compared to tattoo practices. There is a difference between a tattoo artist and the person who sees it and the tattoo artist and the person who wears it. As discussed above, the person who wears a tattoo

also assigns meaning to it. Thus, the interconnection between a tattoo artist and a client is more direct and collaborative as compared to a written text. Through exhibiting tattoo sketches and designs in a similar manner as the paintings framed and hung on the wall in the museum, the artists positioned themselves as the ones who did the design. The design of a tattoo is a drawn or printed image of the future tattoo which is later copied and adapted to the body. The design of a tattoo is only one part of the tattooing process. There are a couple of different interactions possible between the client and the tattoo artist depending on the way the tattoo artist is working. A client might be able to choose a tattoo from flash, which might or might not be customized. In some cases, a client provides a space for the artist' complete creative freedom by letting his tattoo do anything that he creates, or partly by allowing the artist to choose one or more elements such as design, style, placement, size or color. Usually, a client expresses his or her own wishes and desires in one or more elements of the future tattoo or even provides a prototype. The representation of a sketch or design can be compared to the preliminary sketches of other works of art such as Michelangelo's drawings and studies (Fig.20) of *The Creation of Adam* (Fig.21) for the Sistine Chapel. The sketches work as a first stage in the creation of an artwork as it is a study of the subject and a way of showcasing the idea to others, such as commissioners. The preliminary drawing is later used as a guidance in the art creation process, in this case, in creating a fresco.[134] At a later stage, the design is usually transferred to the stencil which is a thin sheet of paper impregnated or coated with paraffin or other material used to copy the design on the skin. The design is later approved or rejected by a client, which leads to appropriate actions of the tattoo artist such as starting tattooing or continuing working on the design or placement. The tattoo design can also be regarded as a preliminary drawing as it is not yet adapted to the body in a sense of space and placement.

The adaptation of the tattoo to the body can also be seen as a collaborative process. In his book *The Four Elements of Architecture* the German architect Gottfried Semper addressed the notion of 'dressing' the building and compared it to 'dressing' of a body.[135] The notion is aimed at addressing the symbolic use of the ornamentation. Semper studied the origins of architecture and its relation to applied arts such as textile arts.[136] The author was particularly

[134] Nagel, "Observations on Michelangelo's Late Pietà Drawings and Sculptures", 548.
[135] Suherman, "The significance of dressing in architecture", 6.
[136] Desai, "Designing Building Skins", 17.

interested in the ‘dressing’ of the building. According to Semper, the structure of the building is the material object whose meaning in society is embraced by the ornamentation. The architecture theorist Rina Suherman in her article “The significance of dressing in architecture” in-death analyzed the ideas of Semper. She discussed that the ornaments are not only an artistic expression but they are also a representation of feelings and thoughts.[137] He believes that the architecture and other forms of art developed from the indigenous people that ornamented their bodies and daily objects.[138] The structure of the body, in this case, can be compared to the structure of the building. The structures of buildings and bodies through a comparison of a skeleton to the internal rooms, organs and muscles to machinery, and the nervous system to electrical services.[139] The ‘dressing’ in both cases serves as a way to camouflage the structure of the body and building. Also, the two structures have a social role which is expressed through ‘dressing’.

The collaboration between the tattoo artist and a body is present in the process of ‘dressing’. Tattoo artists adapt the tattoo design to the body in regards to its form. The form of the body is the structure, which is determined by the skeleton, organs and muscles. The application of each tattoo is dependent on the particular body that is being tattooed. As bodies differ, tattoo artists have to embrace the body figure and movements, especially in cases of Japanese ‘body-suits’ as they follow the natural flow of the body in order to create a unifying piece. A tattoo artist has to adapt the drawn or printed design to the client's body. Through this process the placement and size of the future tattoo is determined. Additionally, as discussed above, tattoos serve as tools to express one's identity, status and belonging in society. The social role of a body is emphasized by tattoos which are individually adapted to the body’s structure. The process of ‘dressing’ can be seen as a collaboration between the artist and the client's body in creating a certain visual appearance of the future tattoo.

The collaboration between a tattoo artist and a client can be seen as performance art. As discussed above, tattoo performances are one of the ways for tattoo artists to enter the space of the museum with their work. However, despite a direct presence of the audience, the process of tattooing can be considered as a performance in itself. Performance art is placing the body as the main medium to convey ideas, thoughts and feelings. In her book

[137] Suherman, “The significance of dressing in architecture”, 23.
[138] Ibid., 6.
[139] Ibid., v.

*Performance* the Professor of Performance Art Diana Taylor characterized performance art through the notions of 'doing' and 'done', which was inspired by another performance scholar Elin Diamond, and the use of bodies as a central feature.[140] The notion of 'doing' emphasizes the act of performance at the moment of its happening, whereas 'done' is an object or a product of 'doing'. The tattoo practice can be examined through Taylor's perspective as the process of tattooing as 'doing' and the tattoo on the body itself is 'done'. Taylor describes performance art through the presence of the body, the two-time spaces. Also, she argues that 'performances operate as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated actions.[141] As mentioned previously, a body has a social role which is emphasized by tattoos on the body. Thus, in expressing a particular identity, the body assigns the meaning to the tattoo in relation to society. Moreover, throughout the ages the meanings of tattoo motifs have become associated with certain identities and in this way transmits social knowledge and memory. Society's perspective and the pre-existing understanding of tattoos accepts or rejects tattooed bodies from communities.

The authorship is a complex notion which, in the case of a tattoo, touches upon the issues of the originality of the work, the authority of the author and interrelations between the artist, the client and society. In their studies Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault criticized the authority of the author and rejected it as the main source of the meaning of the work. Barthes states that the meaning of the work lies in the reader's interpretation and knowledge. In the case of a tattoo, Barthes' approach helps us to focus on the cultural traditions and developments in regards to the tattoo practice. However, such developments can only be understood in combination with the knowledge of the reader which, according to Barthes, is the meaning of the work. The reader usually is the one who wears a tattoo which brings the tattoo an additional meaning as the body is socially engaged. The additional meaning that a body assigns to the tattoo can be examined through the notion of a discourse by Foucault. A discourse is a way of addressing the topic at a particular moment in time through the language. Thus, this notion is the way tattoos have been addressed in societies throughout the ages; it is associated with the way the tattooed bodies have been perceived. The client usually chooses the motif of the future tattoo which has the pre-existent meaning. The collaboration between the client and the tattoo artist also adds meaning to the tattoo as the latter is a

[140] Diana Taylor, *Performance,* 7.
[141] Ibid., 25.

combination of the artist's skill and the client’s wishes. Additionally, the collaboration in regards to adapting the particular design to the body is dependent on the structure of the body which influences the visual appearance of the tattoo. This collaboration can be viewed as performance art because the artist uses the body as the main medium. The meaning and the visual appearance of the tattoo is dependent on historical developments, traditions in cultures, readers’ knowledge and interpretation, the client’s wishes and cooperation between the tattoo artist and the client.

## Conclusion

The notion of authorship is related to the issues of the meaning and the visual appearance of the work of art such as the text or a tattoo. Authors have been given the authority over their work and presented through individualistic perspectives.[142] This thesis aims at problematizing such perspectives and studies the authorship of the tattoo practice. Tattooing has existed in societies through the ages and exchanges between the societies have influenced the development of tattoo styles such as Japanese and American traditional styles. Cultures have exchanged the tattoo motifs, their meanings and visual appearances. Tattoo artists have adapted motifs from other cultures to the styles they work in. This raises questions in regard to the authority of a tattoo artist. In this thesis the question of the authorship in relation to the tattoo practice is addressed through the analysis of cultural exchanges between Japan and America, as well as the theories of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault.

In order to address cultural exchanges between the two cultures, Chapters One and Two were devoted to studying the tattoo practices in Japan and America individually. Chapter One provides a chronological analysis of tattoo practice in Japan. It emphasizes main influences on the practice, which is woodblock printing, mythology, everyday surroundings and religion. Each category is represented in relation to the case study and Horitsune II is the main tattoo artist discussed. Chapter two is focused on the development of the American traditional style. It addresses the way the style developed throughout the ages and analyzes the main topics of tattoos - patriotism, the marine environment, love and religion. Sailor Jerry's tattoos are presented as main case studies in relation to the style, especially the dragon tattoos which have been influenced by Japanese culture. Such influence is studied in more detail in Chapter Three which deals with exchanges between Japan and America in relation to the tattoo practice. This interrelatedness raises an issue of authorship in relation to such tattooing practices. The analysis of the authorship is addressed in Chapter Four in regard to the theories of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault. The arguments are supported by the case study of the American traditional dragon tattoo by Sailor Jerry and also by the writings of Gottfried Semper and Diana Taylor. The knowledge of the tattoo practice development in Japan and America was also used to emphasize the arguments presented by Barthes and Foucault.

[142] Foucault, "What is an Author?", 302.

In Chapter One the Japanese tattooing practice was analyzed from the historical perspective. The development of Japanese tattooing began with the influence of Ainu tattooing during the Jōmon period (1000-300 BCE).[143] The practice became increasingly popular during the Edo period (1603-1867) when it was adopted as a method of punishment. [144] Such use of the practice was inspired by Chinese culture. In both countries, it was the way to differentiate criminals from the general society. Later, in Japan, criminals started camouflaging their tattoos with beautiful designs which slightly shifted the understanding of tattoos as merely a method of punishment. Tattoos also became more popular in the amusement quarters where *Irebokuro* (small vow tattoos) developed.[145] However, tattoos were still perceived negatively by the general society and the government. The increasing number of tattoos resulted in a ban on the practice during the Meiji period (1868-1912). Tattoos were legalized by the U.S. occupation forces in 1948 for the sake of accessibility.[146] Despite the ban on tattoos and negative connotations in the general public, Japanese traditional style was still developing. The style is characterized by the use of colors inspired from nature, particular motifs, placements of tattoos so they can be hidden under a *kimono*, and 'body-suits'. The style is emphasized by the importance of traditions in relation to the motifs and technique which are transmitted from a master tattoo artist to a student during the apprenticeship. Despite the centuries-old tradition of the Japanese tattooing style, the practice was perceived negatively in Japan due to its relation to criminality.

American traditional tattoos have also been associated with criminals and other outlaws throughout the centuries. In Chapter Two, the development of American traditional tattooing has been analyzed. Tattooing existed in the native American communities during the pre-modern times.[147] Captain James Cook introduced it to the British elite who began to adopt the practice as something exotic. Sailors were also the people who got tattooed in non-western lands such as Polynesia and Japan and perceived their tattoos as souvenirs. They also learned the technique of tattooing and started developing their own style to correspond to their lifestyle. First tattoo shops in America were opened by ex-sailors and at the beginning the main clients were also sailors and later the military. American tattooing was also adopted

[143] Samel, "Tattooing in Japan: Through the Ages", 965.
[144] Van Gulik, *Irezumi,* 41.
[145] Ibid., 25.
[146] IJmkers, "The Art behind Appropriation", 41.
[147] Dass, "Native American symbols in tattooing", 26.

in circuses and carnivals, which increased the visibility of the practice.[148] However, it was mostly associated with particular groups in the society, not the general public. Negative connotations in relation to the practice increased when it was adopted by prisoners, gang members and by subcultures such as punks. However, an increasing use and the visibility of tattoos influenced the acceptance of the practice by the general society. The American tattooing practice is characterized by relatively small isolated designs, bold outlines, heavy shading, particular motifs and a limited palette of solid colors.

Chapter Three is concerned with interconnections between American and Japanese traditional styles. In these two cultures tattooing was associated with outlaws; hence, it was viewed as negative. However, Japanese tattooing traditions were perceived as exotic in America. Untrained American tattoo artists such as Sailor Jerry started using the motifs of Japanese tattooing in his own practice and in this way, he appropriated Japanese culture. Trained Japanese tattoo artists moved to America in order to have more freedom regarding their practice. The negative approach to tattoos in society limited the tattoo artists' creative freedom in Japan, especially when tattoos were banned, as compared to the situation in America. The travels of tattoo artists intensified the exchange between the two cultures. American tattoo culture had a great impact on Japanese tattooing as it introduced 'one-point' tattoos and an electric tattoo machine. 'One-point' tattoo is a cooperation between the two styles as it is a small and isolated tattoo capturing Japanese traditional stylistic features and the motif. Also, the machine-made Japanese tattooing was more accessible to both the clients and the tattoo artists, however such tattoos were less appreciated as compared to those done by *tebori*. The above-mentioned exchanges and influences raise the issues of the tattoo meanings, originality and authenticity which are addressed in the notion of authorship.

The authorship in relation to the theories of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault has been discussed in Chapter Four. Barthes argued against the authority of the author of a text and emphasized the importance of readers' interpretation and knowledge.[149] According to Barthes, the meaning of the work lies in readers and their ability to understand the signs in the text. The theory of Barthes is limited to the reader as he addressed the meaning of a text. In the case of tattoos, the meaning is also created in relation to the body who wears a tattoo and the pre-existent connotation of the tattoo. The skin becomes the interface between the

[148] Teffs, "From Cellblock to Suburbia", 18.
[149] Barthes, "The Death of the Author", 148.

body and society. Society's approach to tattoo practice is analyzed in relation to Michel Foucault's study of the author. He also rejected the authority of the author and argued that the author was a function in a discourse.[150] This theory addressed the meaning of the tattoo practice in the society at a particular time and place. The way tattoos are discussed in society has an impact on their meaning. As the theories by Barthes and Foucault address only the text, they do not study the cooperation between the artist and a person who wears the tattoo. In the stage of creating a design of the tattoo, a client usually cooperates with the artist in order to emphasize his or her wishes and desires which are taken into consideration by the artist. Later, the design is adapted to the structure of the body, which influences the size and placement of the tattoo. Such cooperation between the tattoo artist and a client can be regarded as performance art due to the body being the main medium of the work. The meaning and a visual appearance, therefore, is created in the interrelations between the tattoo artist, culture, society and a client.

The analysis of the authorship in relation to the tattoo practice emphasized the complexity of the notion. It concerns the creation of the work, its meaning and visual appearance. This thesis follows the tradition of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault in problematizing the authority of the author, specifically of the tattoo artist. This thesis showcases that there are multiple elements that cohesively shape the meaning and a visual appearance of a tattoo. The meaning is created by the interpretation and knowledge of the reader, as well as by his or her ability to understand the signs which refer to a particular culture. It also depends on the discourse of a tattoo artist and a tattoo at a particular time and space. Also, the client's wishes and desires in cooperating with a tattoo artist shape the meaning of a tattoo. The visual appearance of the tattoo is a result of cooperation between the tattoo artists, the client and the body, as well as cultural influences and exchanges. Therefore, the notion of the tattoo authorship is related to the interpretation and knowledge of the reader, cultures, the discourse, clients and their body, the tattoo artist and interrelations between them. The thesis analyses the authorship in relation to a single tattoo design. Further research on multiple tattoos on a body in relation to one another would provide a broader understanding of the tattoo authorship. The existence of multiple tattoos on one body would emphasize the cooperation between the styles and tattoo artists. Moreover, this thesis addressed tattoos in Japanese and American traditional styles which have limited space for

[150] Foucault, "What is an Author?", 305.

originality in relation to the authorship. The analysis of original and authentic tattoos would give an additional perspective on the meaning of a tattoo and the development of a visual appearance. Such research would help the authorship of the tattoo practice be situated in a broader perspective.

## Images

Figure 1: Dogū (Clay Figurine), Final Jōmon period (ca. 1000–300 B.C.), Earthenware with cord-marked and incised decoration (Tōhoku region), Japan.

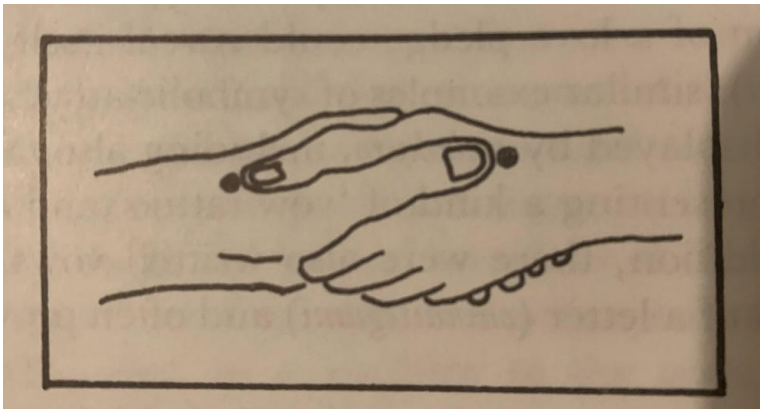

Figure 2: Tamabayashi, *Irebokuro* tattoo design, Illustration from the book *Irezumi* by Willem R. Van Gulik.

Figure 3: Horimoto, Japanese traditional ‘body-suit’ tattoo, ink on skin, *tebori* method, 2018, California, USA.

Figure 4: Utagawa Kuniyoshi, *One Hundred and Eight Heroes from the Chinese Tale: The Water Margin: Zhang Shun, alias White Stripe in the Waves,* Edo period, Tokyo National Museum, Japan.

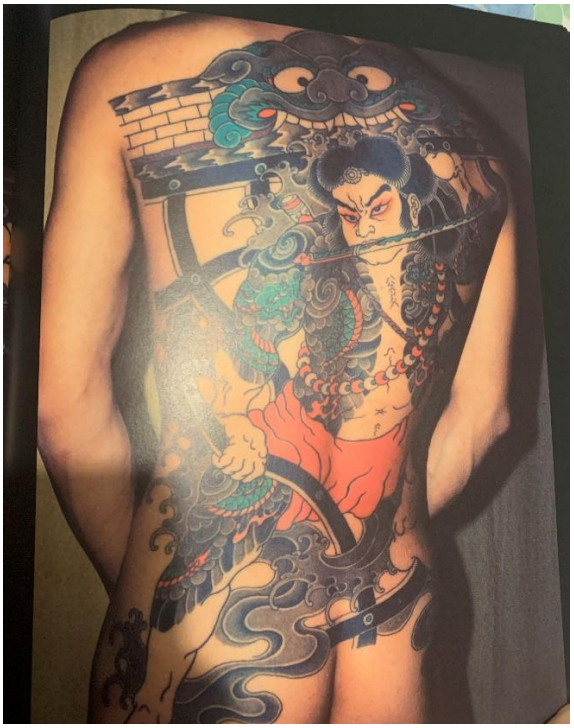

Figure 5: Horitsune II, Japanese traditional hero tattoo, ink on skin, from *Bunshin II/ Horitsune II: Japanese Traditional Tattoo / Dragon and Kannon* page 109.

Figure 6: Chris O'Donnell, Japanese traditional Kirin tattoo design, ink and color pencil on vellum, 2020.

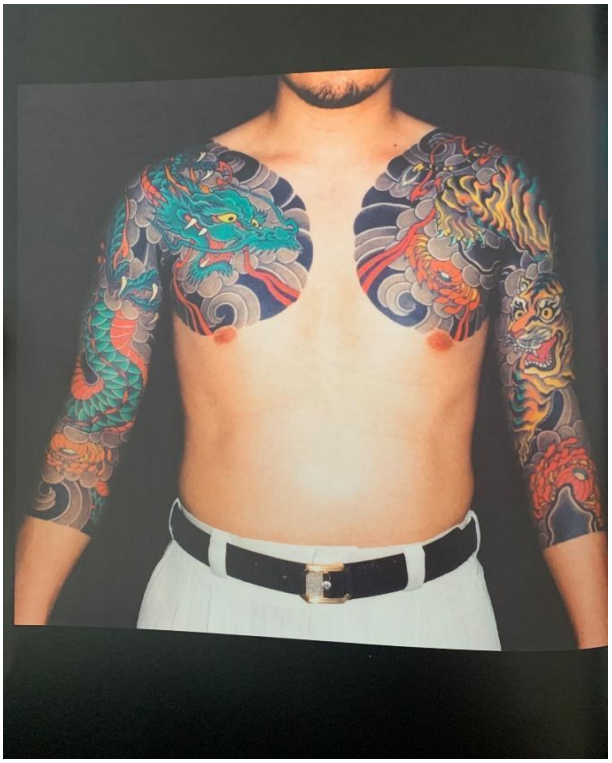

Figure 7: Horitsune II, Japanese traditional sleeve tattoos, ink on skin, from *Bunshin II/ Horitsune II: Japanese Traditional Tattoo / Dragon and Kannon* page 64.

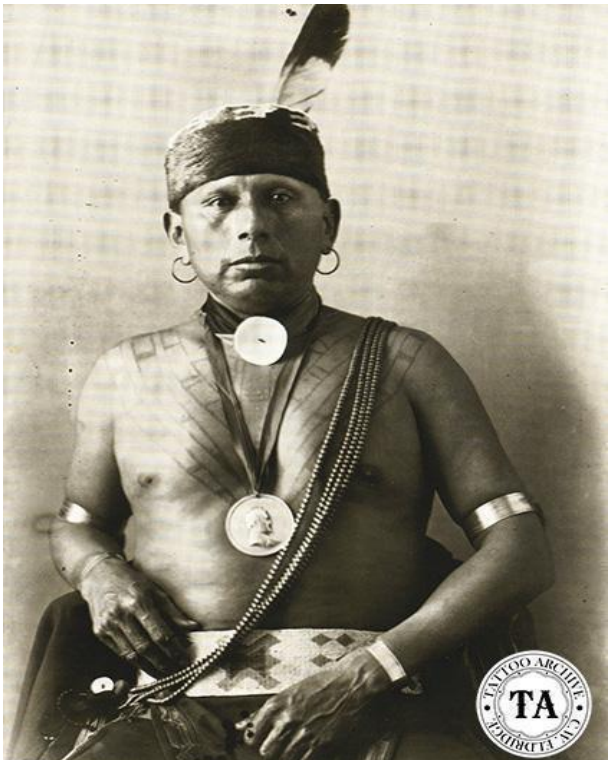


Figure 8: Native American tattoos seen on a person wearing the James Buchanan Peace Metal issued in 1857.

Figure 9: Tattooed Netsilik woman, by photographer Albert Peter Low (1903-04). Canadian Museum of History

Figure 10: Sailor Jerry, American traditional Eagle tattoo design, 1911-1973.

Figure 11: Sailor Jerry, American traditional Anchors tattoo design. 1911-1973.

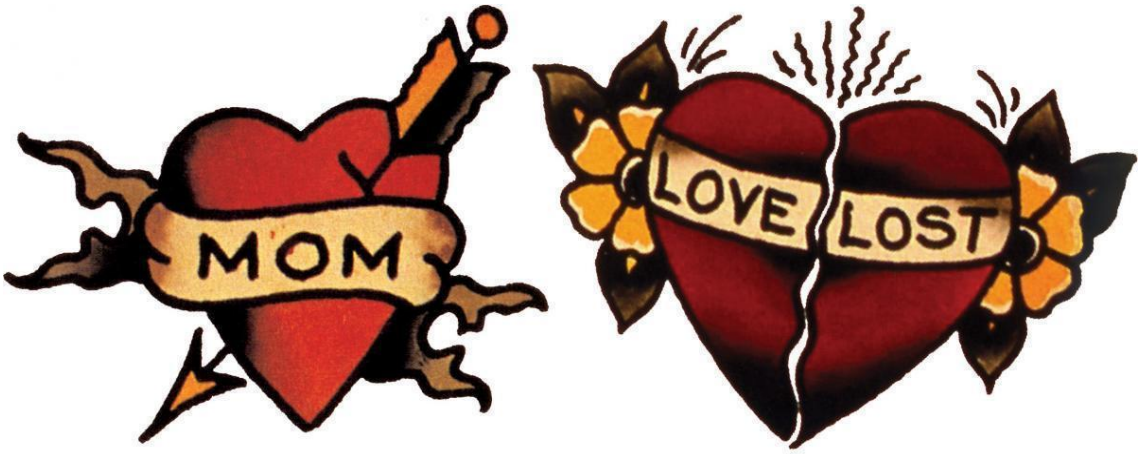


Figure 12: Sailor Jerry, American traditional Things of love tattoo design, 1911-1973

Figure 13: Jarret Crosson, American traditional Jesus' tattoo, ink on skin.

Figure 14: lovehatecork, Spider web tattoo, ink on skin, 2017

Figure 15: Horimoto, Japanese traditional sleeve tattoo, ink on skin, *tebori* method, 2019, California, USA.

Figure 16: Brian Kaneko, Japanese traditional tattoo, ink on skin, Califorania, USA.

Figure 17: Kensho II, Japanese traditional style Haku Ryu, ink on skin.

Figure 18: Raphael, *Saint George and the Dragon,* c.1506, oil on panel, National Gallery of Art, USA

Figure 19: Sailor Jerry, Japanese dragon in American traditional style design, 1911-1973.

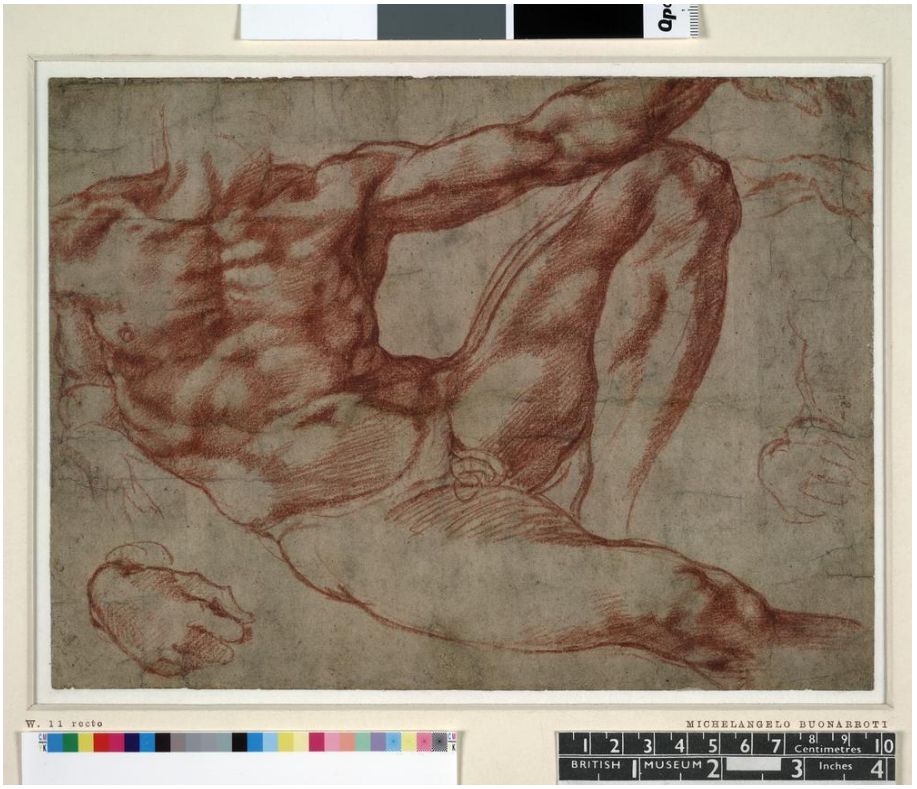


Figure 20: Michelangelo Buonarroti, Studies of a reclining male nude: Adam in the fresco *The Creation of Man* on the vault of the Sistine Chapel. c. 1511, 1511,193 millimeters x 259 millimeters, The British Museum, UK.

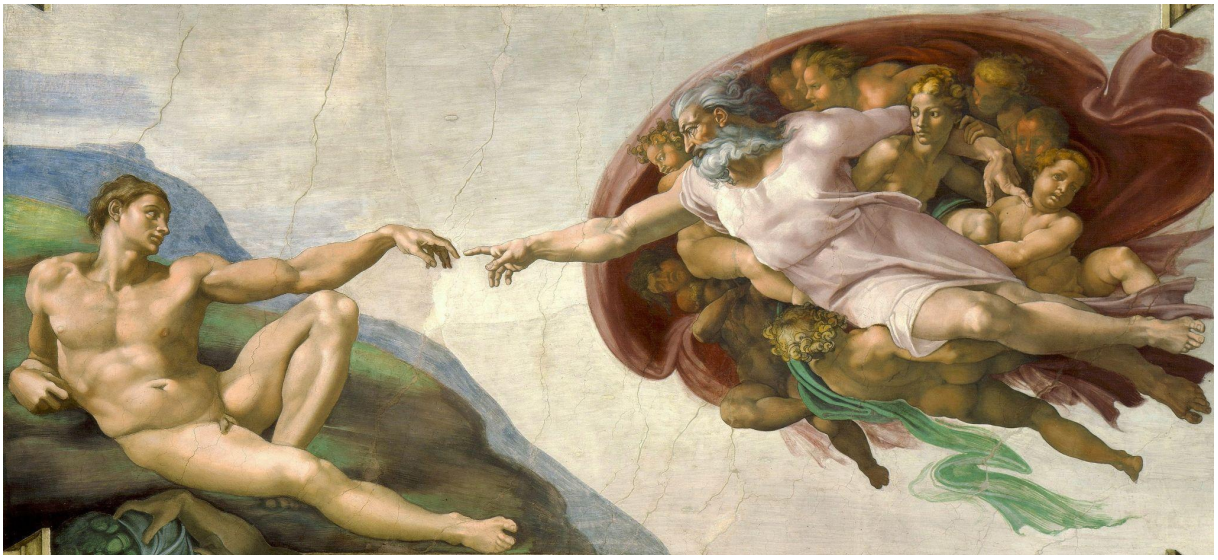

Figure 21: Michelangelo Buonarroti, *The Creation of Adam,* c.1512, 280 cm × 570 cm, Sistine Chapel, Apostolic Palace, Vatican City, Vatican.

**Image sources**

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Figure 5: Bunshin II/ Horitsune II, Japanese traditional hero tattoo, from *Bunshin II/ Horitsune II: Japanese Traditional Tattoo / Dragon and Kannon* page 109. Photograph taken by the author.

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Figure 8: Native American tattoos seen on a person wearing the James Buchanan Peace Medal issued in 1857. https://www.tattooarchive.com/history/oklahoma_tattooing.php.

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Figure 10: Sailor Jerry, Eagle tattoo design. 1911-1973. https://sailorjerry.com/en/tattoos/.

Figure 11: Sailor Jerry, Anchors tattoo design. 1911-1973. https://sailorjerry.com/en/tattoos/.

Figure 12: Sailor Jerry, Things of love tattoo design. 1911-1973, https://sailorjerry.com/en/tattoos/.

Figure 13:  Jarett Crosson, American traditional Jesus' tattoo. https://www.tattoodo.com/tattoos/473043.

Figure 14: Lovehatecork, Spider web tattoo, ink on skin, 2017. https://www.instagram.com/p/BPI2CFvFGnl/.

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Figure 16: Brian Kaneko, Japanese traditional tattoo, ink on skin, California, USA.

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Figure 18: Raphael, *Saint George and the Dragon,* c.1506, oil on panel, National Gallery of Art, USA. https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.28.html.

Figure 19: Sailor Jerry, Japanese dragon in American traditional style design, 1911-1973. https://sailorjerry.com/en/tattoos/.

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Figure 21: Michelangelo Buonarroti, *The Creation of Adam,* c.1512*,* 280 cm × 570 cm, Sistine Chapel, Apostolic Palace, Vatican City, Vatican. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Creation_of_Adam#cite_note-Gardner-1.

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