

Tattoos through Dialectics: Communication, Subjective Perceptions, and Neo-Scholastic Interpretations

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the phenomenology of tattoos through the prism of their communicative role in contemporary society, analyzing how tattoos serve as means of expressing identity, personal values, and belonging to various sociocultural groups. Applying a multidisciplinary approach that encompasses anthropology, sociology, semiotics, and aesthetics, the work illuminates how perceptions of tattoos move from subjective impressions to complex neo-scholastic interpretations, highlighting the dialectical relationship between individual and collective meanings. The analysis is based on the "Grounded Theory" methodology theory, semiotic understanding of the relationship between the signifier and the signified, and sociocultural aspects that shape and define the perception of tattoos in various contexts. The paper concludes that tattoos transcend their aesthetic dimension, serving as deeply rooted symbols in human culture that reflect, shape, and challenge sociocultural norms and values, encouraging further research into the dynamics between tattoos, identity, and social perception.

Key words: tattoo, communication, visual anthropology, visual semiotics, identity, Neo-scholastic approach

Introduction

Tattoos, as an ancient form of body art, have a long and diverse history that spans different cultures and civilizations. From symbols of status and spirituality to expressions of individuality, tattoos have evolved to become significant communication tools in contemporary society. Throughout history, tattoos have served various purposes, from marking prisoners and slaves to symbolizing membership in specific social groups or cultures. In the contemporary context, tattoos have transcended their traditional role and have become a means of self-expression, identity, and personal branding.

With changing social norms and values, tattoos have become more acceptable and prevalent across different layers of society. However, discourses surrounding them still persist, including issues of professionalism, ethics, and aesthetics. The communicative aspects of tattoos are reflected in their ability to convey messages, values, beliefs, and personal stories without verbal communication. Each tattoo carries a specific symbolism and meaning, often deeply rooted in the wearer's personal experience.

Through visual language, tattoos communicate with the outside world, offering insights into an individual's personality, past, interests, or even social and political affiliations. Research shows that tattoos can impact an individual's perception in society, both positively and negatively. Depending on the culture, context, and type of tattoo, perceptions of tattoos can be multifaceted, ranging from highlighting uniqueness to stigmatization. This dynamic relationship between tattoos and social perception is crucial for understanding the communicative role of tattoos in contemporary society. Faced with these complex and multidimensional issues, the aim of this paper is to explore how tattoos serve as means of communication in contemporary society, analyzing their symbolic, aesthetic, and sociocultural dimensions.

Anthropological Discourse on Tattoos

Tattoos, as an ancient form of body art, have a long and diverse history spanning across various cultures and civilizations. From symbols of status and spirituality to ex-

pressions of individuality, tattoos have, over the last few decades, become significant communication tools in contemporary society. Throughout history, tattoos have served various purposes, from marking prisoners and slaves to symbols of belonging to certain social groups or cultures. For instance, in the article by Haluga and Sviličić: "Research on the Contemporary Perception of Traditional Tattoos on the Example of Tattoos of Catholic Women from Bosnia and Herzegovina," a study was conducted on the example of traditional tattoos and their social narrative, which speaks of the historical communicative role of tattoos as a means of creating and maintaining social norms, but also as an element of survival¹.

Furthermore, in traditional Polynesian societies, tattoos were an essential part of initiation rituals, conveying information about an individual's identity, their ancestral lineage, and social status. This practice illustrates how tattoos can act as living texts, communicating complex social messages and values. Thus, understanding tattoos as living texts that convey complex messages and values is not limited to Polynesian societies alone. Similar functions of tattoos can be found in other cultures, indicating a universal human tendency to use the body as a means of communication and expression of identity. In the context of anthropological discourse, it can therefore be said that tattoos are perceived not only as aesthetic decorations but as integral elements of sociocultural practices that reflect, shape, and preserve cultural memory and identity.

Buckland, as one of the pioneers of written words about tattoos, analyzed this phenomenon through an anthropological paradigm, concluding that skin inscriptions partly served as a means of building community and maintaining cultural traditions². In many societies, the tradition of tattooing is passed down through generations, with each tattoo containing elements specific to the culture, history, and mythology of the people. The transmission of knowledge and beliefs through the art of tattooing helps in preserving cultural identity and ensuring its continuity over time. In many cultures, certain tattoos are assigned during rites of passage that mark significant life stages, such as entering puberty, marriage, or achieving warrior status. These rites of passage use tattoos as symbolic markers of transformation, serving as visible signs of status and identity change within the community. Furthermore, tattoos can serve as media for expressing resistance and opposition to dominant cultural norms.

Analyzing tattoos as a form of resistance allows for a deeper understanding of power dynamics within societies and how individuals and groups use body art as a means of social and political expression. For example, tattoos are often used among marginalized and oppressed groups as a way of reclaiming control over their own bodies and identities, thus challenging conventional aesthetic norms and social expectations.

Especially significant within tattoo culture are prison tattoos, characterized by the use of exclusively black ink, as written by DeMello in the book "The Convict Body: Tattooing among Male American Prisoners." DeMello

notes that: "...due to the lack of access to professional tattoo inks, prisoners before the 1970s used improvised materials for tattooing. Thin-line tattoos exclusively in black became a recognizable sign of former prisoners or individuals tattooed on the street. The motifs and symbols of tattoos chosen by prisoners often reflect their origins and current situation within the prison community, and tattoos can have an extremely important role within the prison system as a reminder of the community to which an individual belongs."³

The same work describes the most common method of tattooing within prison known as stick and poke, where an individual uses a sewing needle wrapped in thread, dipped in ink, to repeatedly puncture the skin. Such tattoos, usually performed on the arm or lower part of the arm, are clearly recognizable as homemade, further emphasizing their connection to specific social and cultural contexts.

According to Sanders, tattoos often function as visual expressions of individuality and personal identity, simultaneously serving as means through which individuals can express their alienation from dominant cultural norms and values. This alienation may be motivated by a desire to express uniqueness, resistance to conventional aesthetic ideals, or as a way to explore one's own boundaries and body capabilities⁴. Thus, it is evident that tattoos represent much more than superficial body decoration. They are deeply rooted in human culture and society, serving as complex symbols that convey a wealth of meanings and experiences.

Through the communicative paradigm of tattooing, it is clear how people use their bodies to navigate through social structures, express identities, and maintain connections with the past, affirming the importance of body art in understanding human culture and social dynamics. Furthermore, from an anthropological standpoint, the perception and reception of tattoos over time have been subject to significant changes, often reflecting broader social and cultural changes. In many traditional societies, tattoos were highly valued and respected as symbols of courage, status, or spiritual protection.

However, with the advent of colonialism and the spread of Western values, traditional tattooing practices in many cultures experienced stigmatization and marginalization. In the modern era, tattoos have undergone a renaissance and revaluation, particularly in Western societies, where they have become a means of expressing individuality and resistance to conventions. Researching the ways in which different cultures perceive and receive tattoos reveals a dynamic relationship between the body, identity, and culture. For example, in contemporary Western societies, tattoos are no longer strictly associated with marginalized groups but have become part of broader social acceptance. This reflects changes in social norms and values, especially regarding individualism and self-expression. On the other hand, in some traditional societies, tattoos still have deeply rooted cultural and spiritual significances, showing resilience and continuity of traditional values despite

globalization pressures. Today, tattooing is used in contemporary social movements, such as feminist and LGBTQ+ movements, as a means of challenging dominant discourses on the body and identity.

This indicates that tattoos can serve as powerful tools for social change, allowing individuals to reshape the meanings of their bodies and identities in ways that reflect their own values and beliefs. In the contemporary context, tattoos have transcended their traditional role and become a means of self-expression, identity, and personal branding. With changing social norms and values, tattoos have become more acceptable and prevalent in various layers of society.

However, discourses surrounding them still exist, including issues of professionalism, ethics, and aesthetics. The communicative aspects of tattoos are reflected in their ability to convey messages, values, beliefs, and personal stories without verbal communication. Each tattoo carries a certain symbolism and meaning, often deeply rooted in the wearer's personal experience. Through the visual language, tattoos communicate with the outside world, providing insight into the personality, past, interests, or even social and political affiliation of an individual. Depending on the culture, context, and type of tattoo, perceptions of tattoos can be multiple, from highlighting uniqueness to stigmatization. This dynamic relationship between tattoos and social perception is key to understanding the communicative role of tattoos in contemporary society. Faced with these complex and multidimensional themes, the aim of this work is to explore how tattoos serve as communication tools in contemporary society, analyzing their symbolic, aesthetic, and sociocultural dimensions.

The phenomenology of tattooing thus reveals the complexity of this practice as a form of body art that transcends aesthetic boundaries, serving as a key element in constructing and expressing identity, social relationships, and cultural values. The perception and reception of tattoos over time provide valuable insight into dynamic processes of cultural transformation and social interaction, confirming the status of tattooing as a phenomenon of enduring anthropological significance. Studying the ways in which memories of traumatic events such as genocide and torture are inscribed on human bodies opens a complex field of social and cultural memories.

Paul Connerton in his work explores the role of grief and mourning in creating history, focusing particularly on how memory is transmitted through tattoos, suggesting that such memory is more collective than individual, shedding new light on the perception and reception of tattoos in the context of a permanent marker of human emotional states conditioned by trauma⁵. This approach highlights how traumatic experiences are not only reflected in an individual's psychological experience but are imprinted in bodily experience, where the semioticity of "bodily memory" in the form of tattoos serves as a bridge between the individual and the collective, where personal traumatic

experiences become part of the broader social consciousness.

Researching the Phenomenon of Tattoos with the "Grounded Theory" Methodology

Applying the "Grounded Theory" methodology to the research of the tattoo phenomenon contributes to a deeper understanding of the various cognitive-behavioral layers that make up tattooing practices and perceptions of tattoos within different sociocultural, psychological, and aesthetic contexts. In the book "Constructing Grounded Theory" Charmaz suggests such an approach because it allows for the development of a theoretical framework that directly arises from empirical data, ensuring that the theory is authentically grounded in the actual experiences and perspectives of participants⁶. In the coding process, grounded theory in the context of tattoos enables the identification of key themes such as motivation for acquiring tattoos, meanings, and symbolism associated with tattoos, and the perception of tattoos in a broader social context.

Through open coding, specifics from the obtained data are sorted and nominated, such as reasons for tattooing that can vary from personal expression to belonging to a certain group. Using the technique of constant comparison, phenomena within the obtained data (narratives of tattoos) are continuously analyzed and compared, allowing for an understanding of how the meanings of tattoos are constructed and reinterpreted in different contexts. For example, a tattoo that symbolizes someone's personal struggle may have different meanings depending on the cultural or social context in which it is observed. Theoretical sampling plays a key role in the grounded theory process, allowing researchers to selectively choose participants or data that can further enrich and deepen the understanding of the tattoo phenomenon. This may include, for example, focusing on people with tattoos that represent certain life events or changing perspectives towards people coming from different cultural backgrounds. Through the process of writing so-called "memoranda," researchers develop and refine theoretical ideas, connecting concepts and theories with concrete examples from the data. This allows for a layered analysis that explores how and why individuals choose tattooing as a means of personal expression or social identification. Saturation, or the point at which collecting new data no longer brings new insights, signals that the theory is sufficiently developed and accurately reflects the experiences and perceptions of participants related to tattoos. Ultimately, the grounded theory methodology provides a robust framework for researching the phenomenon of tattoos, enabling the creation of a theory that is directly 'grounded' in the reality of the participants' lives⁶.

This approach not only enriches anthropological and sociological understanding of tattoos but also contributes to the broader field of visual culture, offering insights into the dynamic ways in which individuals and communities

use tattoos as means of communication, expression, and belonging.

Elements of Symbolic Phenomenology of Tattoos: Signifier and Signified

Bridging the gap between individual identity and collective culture, through the prism of semiotics, we can deeply understand how tattoos function as complex symbolic systems that carry specific messages and values. In the semiotic context, each tattoo can be understood as a sign, composed of the signifier (the visible form of the tattoo) and the signified (the meaning that the tattoo conveys).

This interaction between the signifier and the signified allows tattoos to act as means of communication, conveying specific messages without the use of words. For example, a lion tattoo can symbolize courage or royal status, while an anchor tattoo may signify stability or being firmly rooted. It is crucial to understand that the meaning of tattoos is not fixed or universal; it can vary depending on the cultural, social, and individual context. Semiotic analysis of tattoos, therefore, requires considering how meanings are constructed and interpreted within specific cultures and subcultures. In this sense, tattoos can act as symbolic markers of belonging to a particular group or subculture, communicating the identity and values of the tattoo bearer within the broader social context.

Additionally, the semiotics of tattoos can reveal how tattooing involves the process of "writing on the body", where the body becomes the surface on which cultural, social, and personal narratives are inscribed. This aspect of tattooing highlights how the choice of motifs, styles, and locations of tattoos on the body construct complex identities, providing insight into individual life stories, values, and beliefs. Further analysis of the communicative aspects of tattoos includes considering the dynamics of power and resistance. Tattoos can serve as a form of resistance against dominant social norms and expectations, expressing alternative identities, and in this context, tattoos become not only means of personal expression but also tools for social and political communication. Thus, the semiotic analysis of tattoos reveals their deep rootedness in communication processes, where each tattoo serves as a multidimensional sign that communicates across language barriers. By understanding the symbolic dimension of tattoos, we can better comprehend how they function as complex communication tools that reflect, shape, and challenge sociocultural norms and values.

The Aesthetic Element of Tattoo Phenomenology

The aesthetic aspects of tattoos play a crucial role in their perception and integration into social reality, influencing the ways in which individuals and groups interpret and value body art. From an aesthetic standpoint, tattoos

represent a complex interaction between artistic expression, bodily autonomy, and visual culture. This interaction not only reflects individual and collective identities but also impacts sociocultural norms and values related to beauty, taste, and belonging. In the context of social reality, aesthetic choices related to tattoos (including style, size, position, and theme) can serve as means of differentiation or conformity. For example, choosing traditional motifs or styles may reflect deeply rooted cultural values and belonging, while innovative or avant-garde designs may signal individualism, creativity, or resistance to mainstream aesthetics. These aesthetic choices, therefore, are not merely personal expressions of taste but also communicative acts that can stimulate dialogue, provoke reactions, or promote social cohesion. Furthermore, the aesthetics of tattoos can influence the perception of bodily beauty and ideal aesthetic standards within society.

Throughout history and across different cultures, tattoos have varied from symbols of prestige and beauty to stigmatized markings. Changes in the social acceptance of tattoos reflect broader shifts in aesthetic values and norms, showing how concepts of beauty and acceptability are continuously redefined. Given their visual nature, tattoos also play a role in shaping and communicating identities within the visually oriented culture of contemporary society. In the era of social media, where visual expressions and aesthetics rapidly spread and are adopted, tattoos become important elements of personal branding and self-presentation. This indicates a deep connection between the aesthetic aspects of tattoos and social reality, where aesthetic choices become expressions of sociocultural trends, values, and ideologies. Thus, the aesthetic aspects of tattoos play a crucial role in shaping and reflecting social reality. They not only influence individual and collective identities but also serve as means through which aesthetic norms and values are negotiated and reinterpreted. By understanding the aesthetics of tattoos, we can better comprehend how visual culture affects social dynamics, identities, and perceptions of beauty in the contemporary world.

Sociocultural Aspects of Tattoos

The sociocultural aspects of tattoos and tattooing provide deep insights into the dynamics between the individual and the collective, highlighting how these practices reflect, shape, and challenge social structures, norms, and values. Through the lens of sociocultural anthropology, tattooing can be understood as a multifunctional practice that serves aesthetic and identity purposes, but also as a means of communication within and between different social groups. Tattoos often serve as visible signs of belonging, whether to an ethnic group, subculture, or social stratum, allowing individuals to highlight their identity and affiliation. In a sociocultural context, tattoos also serve as tools for narration and preserving collective memory and history.

Through chosen motifs and symbols, tattoos can convey stories, beliefs, and values that are key to a certain culture or group, acting as living monuments that connect present generations with their past and tradition. This aspect of tattooing highlights its role in preserving cultural identity and heritage, especially in contexts where traditional practices and languages are under threat of erosion or oblivion. On the other hand, the sociocultural aspects of tattoos can also indicate processes of social stratification and marginalization.

As forms of body art, tattoos can reflect and reproduce social hierarchies, marking differences in status, power, and access to resources among individuals and groups. In this context, tattoos act not only as aesthetic or identity expressions but also as symbolic markers that communicate and reinforce social positions. The analysis of sociocultural aspects of tattoos in the context of social stratification reveals how certain styles or motifs of tattoos can be associated with specific social classes or groups. For example, exclusive or complex tattoo designs that require significant financial resources can serve as indicators of economic status, while simpler or less visible designs may be more accessible to a wider range of socioeconomic groups. Additionally, the perception and acceptance of tattoos can vary depending on the social context, where certain tattoos or tattooing practices may be stigmatized or valorized according to prevailing cultural norms and values. Processes of marginalization also play a key role in the sociocultural dynamics of tattoos. In some cases, tattoos may be associated with marginalized or subcultural groups, serving as symbols of resistance, belonging, or identity that oppose dominant social norms. However, these same features can lead to social ostracization or discrimination, where individuals with tattoos experience negative social sanctions due to their aesthetic choices. This dynamic highlights the complexity of tattoos as a form of body art that lies at the crossroads of personal autonomy and social expectations, where aesthetic expressions can be both a means of self-affirmation and a source of social vulnerability. Therefore, the sociocultural aspects of tattoos in the context of social stratification and marginalization highlight how tattoos can serve as powerful indicators and reinforcers of social structures and power relations.

Through the lens of tattooing, we can explore how visual and bodily expressions affect an individual's perception in society, and how sociocultural contexts shape and limit the possibilities for personal expression. The analysis of these dynamics provides deeper insights into the complex interactions between identity, culture, and social hierarchies, underscoring the importance of tattoos as a subject of sociocultural research. Further, in certain social contexts, tattoos may be associated with specific stereotypes or prejudices, serving as a basis for discrimination or stigmatization.

This dynamic indicates the power of tattoos to influence the perception of individuals in the wider social context, reflecting complex power relations and social hierar-

chies. Additionally, globalization and technological advancements have contributed to the spread of tattoos and tattooing as global phenomena, encouraging cultural exchange and hybridization. This process not only has expanded the range of styles and motifs available to individuals but also has enabled the creation of new forms of identity and communities that transcend traditional geographic and cultural boundaries. However, this trend also raises questions about cultural appropriation and authenticity, highlighting the need for a mindful approach to tattooing in a globalized world. In conclusion, the sociocultural aspects of tattoos and tattooing illuminate the complex interactions between the individual, culture, and society. Through the lens of tattooing, we can explore how identities are constructed, expressed, and perceived within social structures, and how these practices negotiate belonging, memory, and power. As such, tattoos represent a rich field for exploring the dynamics between personal expression and sociocultural contexts.

Perception of Tattoos in Contemporary Society: The Neo-Scholastic Model

The perception of tattoos in contemporary society reflects a complex network of sociocultural dynamics, where individual and collective perceptions vary depending on the context and social circumstances. In the analysis of these perceptions, a distinction can be made between the primary and secondary perception of tattoos, where the primary perception reflects personal aesthetic preferences and subjective impressions about tattoos, while the secondary perception involves considering tattoos through the prism of their potential social and economic implications. For example, in the context of employment, an employer who personally appreciates or has tattoos themselves may initially have a positive primary perception towards a job candidate who is also tattooed. This primary perception is based on a shared aesthetic interest or a sense of belonging to a certain subculture that tattoos may symbolize. However, the secondary perception reflects a deeper layer of evaluation, where the employer considers how the presence of tattoos in visible places on a potential employee could affect the company's perception by clients, business partners, or the wider public. In this context, the secondary perception shifts into a Machiavellian-mercantilistic analysis, considering tattoos in the context of their functionality or potential obstacles in achieving business goals.

This analysis may be based on the assumption that visible tattoos on employees may not be "socially acceptable" in certain professional or corporate environments, especially in industries that traditionally maintain a more conservative corporate culture. Such secondary perception of tattoos, therefore, reflects not only aesthetic values but also deeply ingrained social norms and expectations that shape professional interactions and decision-making in the business context. Differentiating between primary and secondary perceptions allows for a better understand-

ing of the complex factors that influence the reception of tattoos in different social situations.

This approach also highlights how social constructions of "acceptability" can affect the professional and personal opportunities of individuals with tattoos, pointing to the need for further research on the impact of tattoos on social mobility and integration in different sectors of society. Based on the consideration of primary and secondary perceptions of tattoos, this approach can be further developed into what might be called the neo-scholastic model of tattoo perception. The neo-scholastic model integrates classical philosophical approaches with modern sociological theories to understand the complexity of social reception of tattoos, taking into account how personal values and social contexts shape perceptions and decisions. In the neo-scholastic model, the secondary perception of tattoos is not only viewed through a pragmatic or mercantilistic prism but also includes ethical and philosophical dimensions.

This model explores how social norms and moral values influence the interpretation and valorization of tattoos, emphasizing the importance of context, intention, and potential consequences in evaluating the "acceptability" of tattoos in different social and professional situations. The neo-scholastic model also considers the dynamic relationship between individual autonomy and collective expectations, exploring how individuals use tattoos as means of expressing identity, resistance, or belonging within broader sociocultural frameworks. In this context, tattoos become symbols that simultaneously reflect personal values and navigate through complex social hierarchies and norms.

Furthermore, the neo-scholastic model suggests that the perception of tattoos is not static but continuously changes in relation to shifts in social values, technological development, and global cultural flows. This includes considering how digital platforms and media shape perceptions of tattoos, promoting new forms of expression and enabling cross-cultural exchange and reinterpretation of tattoos. Thus, the neo-scholastic model offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the perception of tattoos in contemporary society, integrating aesthetic, ethical, sociological, and communicative dimensions. This model encourages deeper reflection on tattoos as complex sociocultural phenomena that require a multidisciplinary approach in research, encompassing both individual and collective perspectives in the analysis of social dynamics related to the phenomenology of tattoos, as well as their social acceptability.

Continuing the consideration of the neo-scholastic model in the perception of tattoos, this approach enables an understanding of how similar dynamics of social perception can be applied to other social phenomena. For example, the same model can be used to analyze the perception of other forms of body art through body modifications, such as piercing, scarification, and body painting, where aesthetic, ethical, and socio-cultural dimensions are also evaluated within various social contexts. Moreover, the

neo-scholastic model provides insight into understanding broader phenomena like fashion and clothing, where the choice of clothing and styles can reflect similar processes of social stratification, identity, and resistance.

Through the prism of the neo-scholastic model, we can explore how clothing is used as a means of communication, conveying messages about social status, group belonging, and individual values, and how it is perceived in different professional and social situations. The interrelation between the perception of tattoos and these phenomena indicates the existence of a broader social mechanism in which bodily expressions serve as means to navigate through complex networks of social norms and expectations. Therefore, the neo-scholastic model helps in understanding how socio-cultural contexts and values are manifested through visual and bodily forms, enabling individuals to explore and express their identities within the boundaries of social acceptability. Additionally, this model can be applied to the analysis of digital identities and self-presentation on social networks, where virtual representations of oneself are often used to express similar socio-cultural signals as tattoos in the physical world.

Through the neo-scholastic approach, it can be explored how digital identities reflect and shape social perceptions, identities, and power relations, similarly to how tattoos and other bodily expressions do. Ultimately, understanding these correlations through the neo-scholastic model provides rich ground for exploration, offering a multidisciplinary framework for analyzing how individual expressions of autonomy and identity fit and react to broader socio-cultural structures and processes. This encourages further research and dialogue on the role of bodily expressions in contemporary society, highlighting their complexity and importance in understanding the dynamics of social interaction and identity.

Tattoos in the Discourse of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: Primary and Secondary Perception

The complexity of socio-cultural, aesthetic, and symbolic dimensions of tattoos unveils how this form of body art serves as a powerful means of communication within and between various social groups. By analyzing the perception and reception of tattoos, it can be inferred that there is a significant difference in how tattoos are interpreted and valued, depending on elements that are deeply woven into the human cognitive phenotype. These differences can be understood through the prism of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, where tattoos can be seen as means by which individuals strive to satisfy their basic and higher needs. Namely, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, ranging from basic physiological needs to the need for self-actualization, provides a framework through which we can understand the motivations behind acquiring tattoos. At the level of belonging, tattoos can serve as signs of group belonging and love, symbolizing connections and commu-

nity within families, circles of friends, or cultural groups. At the level of esteem, tattoos allow individuals to express their uniqueness and achievements, serving as a means to gain respect and admiration from others. At the highest level, self-actualization, tattoos become means through which individuals can explore and express their deepest sense of identity, creativity, and personal values. Here, tattoos overlap with an individual's inner need for self-expression and finding deep meaning in their life, reflecting the complex interaction between individual aspirations and socio-cultural influences. Further integrating Maslow's hierarchy of needs with previously elaborated concepts of primary and secondary perception of tattoos, we can develop a synthesis that illustrates the complexity in the perception and valorization of tattoos.

This synthesis not only enriches our understanding of tattoos as a socio-cultural phenomenon but also solidifies the foundations of the neo-scholastic model in analyzing the perception of tattoos. Primary perception of tattoos, based on personal aesthetics and subjective impressions, can be linked to lower levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, including physiological needs and the need for security. In this context, tattoos can serve as a means of personal expression that reflects an individual's internal state, personal preferences, and aesthetic values. On the other hand, the secondary perception takes into account the broader social context and potential social implications of tattoos, bringing into play higher levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, such as the need for belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Here, tattoos become communication tools that allow individuals to establish connections with others, express their identity, and strive towards achieving their highest potentials.

Within the framework of the neo-scholastic model, this dual perspective allows for a deep understanding of how individual aspirations and social norms influence the perception and reception of tattoos. The neo-scholastic model, adopting a multidisciplinary approach that includes philosophical, sociological, and psychological analysis, enables the consideration of tattoos not just as a form of body art but as complex symbols that reflect how an individual navigates through different levels of their needs in interaction with the social environment.

The synthesis of Maslow's hierarchy of needs and primary and secondary perceptions also highlights how social circumstances and cultural contexts shape the perception of tattoos, transforming them from personal expressions into means of social communication and identification. In this way, tattoos become a mirror that reflects the complexity of human needs and aspirations, indicating the dynamic interaction between the individual and society. Understanding the perception and reception of tattoos through Maslow's hierarchy of needs also confirms that tattoos are more than superficial aesthetic expressions; they are deeply rooted elements in human experience that reflect complex processes of need satisfaction, from belonging and esteem to self-actualization. This perspective emphasizes that the perception of tat-

toos is inseparable from deeper cognitive and emotional structures that shape human behavior and interaction. In the light of these findings, it becomes apparent that tattoos are more than ink on the skin; they are a reflection of universal human strivings that are woven into the fabric of our cognitive phenotype. By acknowledging this complexity, we open the path for a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics of tattoos and their enduring place in human culture and society. Ultimately, understanding the phenomenon of tattoos through the neo-scholastic model allows for a comprehensive analysis of how personal experiences and social contexts intertwine in shaping the perception of tattoos. This opens up space for further research and understanding of tattoos as a phenomenon that lies at the crossroads of individual aspirations and societal expectations, highlighting their invaluable worth in the study of human culture and social dynamics.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to shed new light on the complex phenomenology of tattoos, observing them through the prism of communicative and anthropological moments. Tattoos, as a specific non-verbal visual language, offer a deep palette of meanings and symbolism that transcends the boundaries of simple aesthetics, rooted in the human cognitive phenotype and deeply woven into the fabric of social and cultural norms. Through the prism of the neo-scholastic model, this work has defined the dynamic interaction between primary and secondary perceptions of tattoos, highlighting how individual and collective perceptions are shaped through various layers of social needs and cultural contexts. Integrating elements of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, it can be said that tattoos can also be indirectly understood as means to satisfy a wide spectrum of human needs, from basic to those of self-actualization. Understanding primary and secondary perceptions provides insight into the motivations behind an individual's choice to acquire tattoos, as well as the complex processes of social perception and valorization of tattoos. The primary perception, focused on personal aesthetics and subjective impression, and the secondary perception, which considers tattoos through the prism of their potential social and economic implications, reveal a complex network of factors that influence the social reception of tattoos.

Through the neo-scholastic model, this work emphasizes the importance of a multidisciplinary approach in analyzing the phenomenon of tattoos, merging aesthetic, ethical, sociological, and psychological perspectives. This model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how tattoos act as key elements in constructing and expressing identity, social relations, and cultural values, reflecting complex processes of cultural transformation and social interaction.

Ultimately, understanding tattoos as dynamic cultural phenomena that continuously evolve and redefine

themselves in interaction between the individual and society. Highlighting their complexity and importance in visual anthropology, this paper encourages further research and dialogue on the role of bodily expressions in

the contemporary social context, underscoring their invaluable value in studying human culture and social dynamics.

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RAZUMIJEVANJE TETOVAŽA KROZ DIJALEKTIKU: KOMUNIKACIJA OD SUBJEKTIVNIH PERCEPCIJA DO NEO-SKOLASTIČKIH INTERPRETACIJA

SAŽETAK

Ovaj rad istražuje fenomenologiju tetovaža kroz prizmu njihove komunikativne uloge u suvremenom društvu, analizirajući kako tetovaže služe kao sredstvo izražavanja identiteta, osobnih vrijednosti i pripadnosti različitim sociokulturnim skupinama. Primjenjujući multidisciplinarni pristup koji obuhvaća antropologiju, sociologiju, semiotiku i estetiku, rad osvjetljava kako percepcije tetovaža prelaze od subjektivnih do kompleksnih neo-školskih interpretacija, ističući dijalektički odnos između individualnih i kolektivnih značenja. Analiza se temelji na metodologiji "Grounded Theory", semiotičkom razumijevanju odnosa između znaka i značenja te sociokulturnim aspektima koji oblikuju i definiraju percepciju tetovaža u različitim kontekstima. Rad zaključuje da tetovaže nadilaze svoju estetsku dimenziju, služeći kao duboko ukorijenjeni simboli u ljudskoj kulturi koji odražavaju, oblikuju i izazivaju sociokulturne norme i vrijednosti, potičući daljnja istraživanja dinamike između tetovaža, identiteta i društvene percepcije.