In the Skin:

An Ethnographic-Historical Approach to a Museum Collection of Preserved Tattoos.

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DECLARATION

I, Gemma Angel, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

This thesis deals with a collection of 300 preserved tattooed human skin fragments held in storage at the Science Museum, London. Historically part of the Wellcome medical collections, these skins are of European origin and date from c.1850-1920. The collection was purchased in 1929 on behalf of Sir Henry Wellcome from a Parisian physician, and is exemplary with respect to its size and coherence. The thesis argues for the significance of such collections for the understanding of the material culture of medicine.

As little archival material relating to this particular collection survives, it is contextualised both in relation to the contemporary museum setting, and within nineteenth-century medical and criminological discourses surrounding the tattoo. Through the adoption of a combined auto-ethnographic and historiographical approach, this thesis sets out to explore all aspects of the collection. The structure of the thesis demonstrates this method and reflects my working process: The project is first situated within the contemporary museum context, and framed within an ethical and political field in which human remains have been problematised. This context underpins a theoretical approach that redefines these remains as hybrid entities, and informs a multi-sensory, auto-ethnographic working method within the museum environment. A close visio-material analysis of the tattooed skins then explores both their substance and iconography in some detail. The collection of skins is then situated within the broader historical contexts of flaying; nineteenth-century collecting practices and medical and criminological discourses on the tattoo; an analysis of historical procedures and contexts of skin preservation and display; and a visual analysis of the iconography of the tattoos and critical discussion of their reading.

Through this approach, I demonstrate that the tattoo was a highly ambiguous and frequently stigmatised sign in the late nineteenth century, whose polysemic and fugitive meaning eluded criminologists who sought to assimilate them into taxonomies of deviance. Similarly, as contemporary museum artefacts, they resist simple categorisation and interpretation, necessitating an interdisciplinary, *ethnographical-historical* approach, which enables a multi-faceted understanding of their substance, significance and origins.

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INTRODUCTION

> I don't know if a written history of tattoos has already been attempted; I believe that it wouldn't lack interest. In an article on human skin and its connoisseurs that I published in a medical journal, I am reminded of a hospital surgeon who recently died, Dr. G... who recommended, during every autopsy, to carefully scalp the skins of subjects wearing tattoos [...] Do you not think, dear colleagues, that a written history of tattoos and those who collect them (because there are connoisseurs) could interest some spirit in love with curiosity... Macabre, I admit.[1]
>
> Anon., 1889

The above comments appeared in the 1889 volume of *L'intermediaire des Chercheurs et Curieux,*[2] in an article entitled *Les tatouages et leurs collectionneurs* (Tattoos and their collectors). Whilst a number of scholarly works on the tattoo had been written by this time, notably in the fields of criminology and forensic medicine,[3] the rather specialised collecting interest that the anonymous author refers to - the preservation of tattooed human skin - had certainly not been addressed in the literature. This most niche of European collecting pursuits first emerged[4] during the nineteenth century, reflecting the growing academic interest in the tattoo amongst criminologists, medical professionals and anthropologists. The collectors themselves were not necessarily directly engaged in the scholarly debates on tattooing, taken up during the final decades of the nineteenth century in specialised academic journals, such as the French *Archives de l'anthropologie criminelle*. These individuals are an historically elusive and eclectic group of (as far as we know) doctors, forensic specialists, police officials, and bibliophiles; men who did not generally advertise their collecting interests, and occasionally even found themselves embroiled in public scandals as a consequence of

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[1] Anon. Pont-Calé, *L'intermediaire des Chercheurs et Curieux*, No. 496, Col. 11, (1889). Translated from the French:
Je suis si l'on jamais tenté une monographie du tatouage; j'ai quelque lieu de croire qu'elle ne manquerait pas d'intérêt. Au course d'un article sur la peau humaine et ses amateurs, publié dans un journal médicale, j'ai rappelé qu'un chirurgien des hôpitaux, mort récemment, le Dr G..., recommandait, à chaque autopsie, de scalper soigneusement la peau des sujets portent des tatouages. [...] Ne pensez-vous pas, très chers confrères, qu'une monographie du tatouage et de ceux qui les collectionnent (car il y a des amateurs) pourrait tenter un esprit épris de curiosité... macabre, j'en conviens.

[2] *L'intermediaire des Chercheurs et Curieux* is the French version of *Notes and Queries,* a long-running English academic correspondence journal founded in 1849, publishing short articles on language, literature, lexicography, history, and scholarly antiquarianism.

[3] See, for example Mathurin Félix Hutin, *Recherches sur les tatouages*, (1853); Ernest Berchon, *Histoire Medicale Du Tatouage*, (1869); and Alexandre Lacassagne, *Le Tatouages: etude anthropologique et medico legale*, (1881).

[4] There are a number of earlier reports of tattooed human skin exhibited in anatomical collections and cabinets of curiosities, which will be discussed at greater length in chapter four. The majority of these specimens do not survive today.

their collecting practices.[5] The anonymous author quoted above offers us a glimpse of the professional context of such a collector, as well as hinting at their source of fascination with tattoos: The doctor in his pathology lab; and the broader appeal of preserved tattooed human skin as a kind of macabre curiosity. The figure of the nameless doctor who routinely stripped tattoos from the bodies of cadavers is encountered more than once in the historical material on tattoo collecting. Similarly, a morbid fascination with such collections - and with collections of human skin objects more generally - is frequently encountered in the columns of the *L'intermediaire des Chercheurs et Curieux* and its English equivalent *Notes and Queries*, as well as in popular press such as the *Mercure de France*, from c.1850 until the early 1930s.

This thesis is the first attempt to write a history of tattoo collections and those who collected them. It explores their practices and motivations, the academic discourses which frame and contextualise the assembly and display of collections of tattooed human skin, and their place within medical and forensic collections, past and present. This history does not claim to be an exhaustive account of all tattoo collections everywhere; but rather it is the culmination of four years of historiographic and ethnographic research into a specific collection of preserved tattoos held in the Wellcome Collection, London. Though comparative collections form an integral aspect of my discussion and analysis, the specific historical and geographic context of the Wellcome Collection tattoos is foregrounded throughout.

The Wellcome Tattoo Collection: History and Context

The collection in focus seems to perfectly match the macabre compilation of skins the anonymous author of *Intermediaire des chercheurs et des curieux* had in mind. Whilst it has proved impossible to establish under what circumstances the individual pieces were gathered, the little we do know comes from Wellcome Library archival records. In June 1929, an itinerant English purchasing agent named Peter Johnson-Saint met with one of his contacts in Paris, a Dr. Lavalette, to finalise the sale of a collection of curious objects. Where exactly this meeting took place is not clear; the only reference to an address is recorded on an accession slip and simply reads 'Rue Ecole de Medecine'[6].

[5] There are a handful of accounts of women collectors of tattooed skin, all of whom were American. The collecting practices of these women are not addressed by this research, the focus of which is on the European context in general, and the French milieu in particular. As for scandals, see, for example, Andre Pascal's account of the Pranzini scandal: *Pranzini. The Crime in the Rue Montaigne*, (London: Rich & Cowan, 1935), pp. 273-278.

[6] As is frequently the case with the Wellcome Collection archives, there are many inconsistencies and mistakes in the records - the correct spelling in this instance should be 'Rue de l'Ecole de Medecine'. Indeed,

This particular street is significant since it is at the historic heart of Parisian medical studies, home to the Université Paris Descartes as well as the important pathological collection of the Musée Dupuytren. But whether or not Johnston-Saint was visiting a member of the medical faculty that day, or a man who occupied himself in private practice, is unknown; Parisian medical registers for the period record no trace of a physician or surgeon going by the name 'Lavalette' or 'La Valette'. Johnston-Saint did however keep a record of his purchasing activities for his employer, including a brief description of the objects he acquired. His journal entry for Saturday June 15th reads as follows:

> I then went to see Lavalette in the rue Ecole de Medecine. This is the man who had the collection of over 300 tattooed human skins. These skins date from the first quarter of last century down to the present time; many of them are very curious and extremely interesting, consisting of skins of sailors, soldiers, murderers and criminals of all nationalities. He also has the very unique mummified head of an Arab, mummified in such a manner as to preserve the features in a most lifelike condition. He says that this was a special process of his own and is unique in mummification. There was also a galvanised human brain, the only example of its kind in the world, prepared in the laboratory of the Musée Dupuytren in Paris […] Lavalette told me that the skins are unique, that no more could now be got under any circumstances and that each skin had taken him a long time and cost him a certain amount to cure and prepare for his permanent collection.[7]

The details of Lavalette's mysterious and 'unique' preservation methods, and how exactly he came to possess such a large quantity of fragments of tattooed human skin, is not revealed in Johnston-Saint's notes. One thing however, is clear; Henry Wellcome - Victorian entrepreneur, prolific collector and Johnston-Saint's employer - was keen to acquire the particular objects Lavalette had on offer for his 'historic medical museum'.[8] His notes, scrawled in the margins of Johnston-Saint's typed reports, emphatically state, 'these of great interest to us for certain section'[9] (see **Figure 1**). What exactly were Wellcome's intentions for this motley collection of human remains? More than eighty years later, they remain in storage at the Science Museum's archives at Blythe House in London, and aside from the inclusion of a few tattooed skins in a small number of recent exhibitions on diverse themes, most of the collection has never been on display to the

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there is some question as to the correct spelling of the name of Johnston-Saint's contact; his handwritten journal entries read 'Lavalette', but are frequently typed in subsequent records as 'La Valette' (**Figure 1**).
[7] Peter Johnston-Saint, *1929a. Johnston-Saint Reports Jan-Nov 1929*, (Saturday June 15th), p. 9. Wellcome Library, London.
[8] For more on this subject, see chapter five in Frances Larson's engaging account of Henry Wellcome's life and work, *An Infinity of Things: How Sir Henry Wellcome Collected the World*, (2009).
[9] Johnston-Saint, *1929a. Johnston-Saint Reports Jan-Nov 1929*, (Saturday June 15th), p. 9.

public.[10] Henry Wellcome's interest in the history of human health and medicine spurred his prolific collecting of a wide range of artefacts from human bones, tissue and skin, to medicine chests, x-ray machines and iron lungs, to birthing chairs and prosthetic limbs - over a million objects by the time of his death in 1936. This thesis is concerned with a small fraction of this vast collection - a mere three hundred individual items housed in a single storage cupboard. Three hundred preserved tattooed human skins, a complete collection in itself, acquired in a single purchase from Lavalette.

Little is known about the seller aside from the suggestion, also made in Johnson-Saint's journals, that he acquired the skins through his work in military hospitals, barracks and prisons. Three years of archive research has revealed no trace of a medical professional named Lavalette during the relevant time period in Paris. It is thus highly doubtful that this was the seller's real name. If indeed he did use a pseudonym, this perhaps suggests that his post-mortem collecting practices, or the sale of these remains, were already sensitive issues in 1929.

The thorny question of the ethics - and indeed the politics - of the preservation, use and display of human remains, are not only matters of historical importance, but are also of contemporary relevance. These problematics, encountered in the present day museum context, have framed and informed this thesis from the outset.

Public opinion and professional approaches to human remains became sensitised in the UK during the late 1990s and early 2000s following a combination of medical scandals, controversial exhibitions and new legislation.[11] Controversy first erupted in 1999, following revelations that pathologist Dirk Van Velzen had ordered the systematic removal and retention of children's' organs during autopsies at Alder Hey Hospital in Liverpool, without the informed consent of parents. Subsequent media coverage of the scandal and public outcry called into question the working practices of pathologists, and lead to a crisis of authority in both the health and heritage sectors, where historical collections of human remains were increasingly becoming viewed as problematic. Sensationalist stories in the press, which described the activities of the

[10] Two of the Wellcome Collection's preserved tattooed human skins are on display as part of the permanent exhibition, *Medicine Man* (http://www.wellcomecollection.org/whats-on/exhibitions/medicine-man.aspx); seven of the skins were also displayed during the course of this project in the exhibition *Skin*, also at the Wellcome Collection (http://www.wellcomecollection.org/whats-on/exhibitions/skin.aspx); a further two specimens were displayed as part of the Science Museum exhibition, *Psychoanalysis: The Unconscious in Everyday Life* from October 13th 2010 to April 15th 2011 (Digital catalogue available online at: http://www.beyondthecouch.org.uk/digital-catalogue).

[11] Lisa O'Sullivan, 'Material Legacies: Indigenous Remains and Contested Values in UK Museum Collections', in Susanne Berthier-Fogler, Sheila Collingwood-Whittick and Sandrine Tolazzi (eds.) *Biomapping Indigenous Peoples: Towards an Understanding of the Issues*, (2012), p. 394.

pathologist at Alder Hey as 'the dismemberment of children',[12] were further fuelled by the inflammatory statements of Alan Milburn, the then Minister of Health, who publicly condemned post-mortem practice as 'gruesome' and 'grotesque'. From the point of view of many medical professionals, pathologists (and especially paediatric pathologists) in particular, this negative publicity inflicted lasting damage on their field. According to one concerned practitioner, 'some very senior and experienced paediatric pathologists have left the speciality and whole departments have closed. Twenty percent of senior posts and almost half of trainee posts remain unfilled.'[13]

In the museums and heritage sector, the broader debate about the repatriation of indigenous human remains to source communities in North America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, from museums in the United States and Britain, had already primed museum professionals for a change in approach to the collections of human remains in their care. In the UK, the human remains debate was further complicated by a series of controversial exhibitions of human bodies that went on display in London from the late 1990s onwards. These included: *London Bodies: The Changing Shape of Londoners from Prehistoric Times to the Present Day* at the Museum of London in 1998; *Spectacular Bodies: The Art and Science of the Human Body from Leonardo to Now* at the Hayward Gallery in 2000; and the commercial exhibition *Body Worlds: The Anatomical Exhibition of Real Human Bodies* at the Atlantis Gallery in 2002. The most significant of these was *Body Worlds*, which displayed twenty five whole anatomised and posed human bodies, as well as one hundred and seventy five organs and body parts, preserved according to the patented plastination method developed by German anatomist and showman Gunther von Hagens. Whilst this exhibition was highly popular with the public, ethical questions were raised in the press regarding the source of some of von Hagens' cadavers. Writing in *The Observer* newspaper in 2002, journalists Paul Harris and Kate Connelly revealed that whilst the twenty-five whole bodies had been donated to Hagens' Institute of Plastination, the provenance of the organs was somewhat more vague:

> Last year he took a consignment of 56 corpses from the Medical Academy in the Russian city of Novosibirsk. Some were believed to be from prisoners, homeless people and the mentally ill whose bodies were unclaimed after they died.[14]

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[12] Sarah Boseley, 'Grotesque breach of trust at Alder Hey.' *The Guardian,* 29th January 2001. (http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2001/jan/29/health.alderhey?INTCMP=ILCNETTXT3487)
[13] Waney Squier, 'The Human Tissue Bill: the death of pathology?' in *Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology,* Vol. 46, (2004), p. 572-575.
[14] Paul Harris and Kate Connolly, 'World trade in bodies is linked to corpse art show,' *The Observer*, Sunday 17th March, 2002. (http://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/mar/17/paulharris.kateconnolly). There has also been some controversy surrounding Von Hagens' plastination 'factories' in Kaszachstan and China.

Though the status of these bodies could not be fully substantiated or denied, many responded with unease to what some considered the 'freak show' theatricality of Hagens' exhibits. The pressure group Pity II, which was set up by parents whose children were involved in the Alder Hey scandal, were among the most vocal critics, demanding that the exhibition be closed. John O'Hare, the chairman of the group, described the exhibition as 'tasteless' and 'insensitive to the suffering of all the parents who are still going through so much trauma.'[15]

The impact of converging scandals and controversies relating to the retention and display of human remains ultimately influenced the development of new legislation in the form of the 2004 *Human Tissue Act* (HTA). In response to public concern over the use of the human body in clinical and research settings, informed consent is the cornerstone of the new Act; however it also encompasses the storage and display of human remains, bringing museum collections into its legislative remit. Lisa O'Sullivan has noted that 'the inclusion of public displays of remains in the Act related to ethical concerns about the source of bodies displayed in exhibitions such as Gunther von Hagens' *Body Worlds*, as much, if not more, than existing museums collections', pointing out that this exhibition was repeatedly referenced in Parliamentary discussions relating to the passing of the HTA Bill.[16] This legislation has had far-reaching implications for the museums sector, and historical medical collections in particular. In response to the Act, many institutions have drafted their own codes and guidelines relating to storage arrangements, handling, public access and display, which are aimed at promoting the respectful treatment of the human remains in their care.

The Human Tissue Authority was set up to act as a watchdog and govern the licensing of organisations that store and use human tissue for purposes such as research, patient treatment, post-mortem examination, teaching, and public exhibitions. Public display is defined by the watchdog as: 'An exhibition, show or display in which a body of a deceased person or relevant material which has come from the body of a deceased person is used for the purpose of being exposed to view by the public.'[17] However, the Human Tissue Authority website also notes that it 'does not license the display of photographic or electronic images, for example on TV or in a textbook', since photography and moving images fall outside of the remit of the Act. Despite this, some

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See, for example: Jeremy Laurance, 'Gunther Von Hagens: Under the skin of Doctor Death', *The Independent*, Tuesday 30th October, 2007. (http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/gunther-von-hagens-under-the-skin-of-doctor-death-395556.html)

[15] Thomas Martin, 'Anger at corpses on show. Pity II shock at art exhibit', *Liverpool Echo*, Tuesday 12th March, 2002.

[16] O'Sullivan, 'Material Legacies' p. 395.

[17] See: www.hta.gov.uk/licensingandinspections/sectorspecificinformation/publicdisplay.cfm

institutions have chosen to restrict or prohibit photography of the human remains in their collections.[18] As well as impacting upon access and display policies, the legislation has also resulted in a restructuring of archives and their storage procedures in many institutions, including the Science Museum. In accordance with new guidelines[19], which foregrounded the 'respectful treatment' of human remains, these collections were in many cases separated from other objects within the museum archive. Tiffany Jenkins writes that this has had a significant effect on the way in which human remains are conceptualised within the museum:

> Whereas in the past, human remains were not considered 'a collection' but parts of different ways of organizing the whole collection and thus part of different disciplines, this policy begins to consider human remains as a category in and of themselves.[20]

In the Science Museum, a separate space, known as the 'Human Remains Room', had already been established on the ground floor of Blythe House before I began my research on the tattoo collection. This room was dark and cool, and filled with glass cabinets housing human remains from the anatomy and physiology collections and ethnographic collections alike. The glass doors in the majority of these cabinets were covered with white paper, so as to screen the contents of the cases from the passing view of museum staff entering the room during the course of their work. These 'shrouds' had the peculiar effect of endowing the unseen material within the cabinets with a kind of taboo presence; on entering the room for the first time, I was immediately aware of the regulation of my gaze imposed by these covers. The restructuring and regulation of this space had been deliberately organised to engender an atmosphere in which one must be more contemplative about the nature of the 'objects' in storage. Whilst the reorganisation of museum spaces may in itself encourage different ways of thinking about human remains amongst museum staff, some industry guidelines make this more explicit. One American publication aimed at the heritage sector, for instance, makes the following recommendations regarding object handling:

> At a minimum human remains should be accorded gentle handling, and handlers must have an awareness of the potency of the remains, the privilege given to

[18] The *Policy on Human Remains* (2006) for the Royal Cornwall Museum in Truro, for example, states that: 'No images of human remains other than wrapped mummies will be available online or will be used for marketing purposes,' p. 6.
[19] See the Department of Culture Media and Sport, *Report of the Working Group on Human* Remains (2003b); and *Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums,* (2005).
[20] Tiffany Jenkins, *Contesting Human Remains in Museum Collections: The Crisis of Cultural Authority*, (2011), p. 134.

> handlers, and their responsibility. Human remains are not specimens; they were people - they are individuals. To begin with, handling should be undertaken only with a specific purpose. One should not browse as if in a library, picking up bones and articulated joints without purpose. Simply put, a mental state of propriety is required of handlers.[21]

This statement is remarkable for its quasi-spiritual overtones and its prescription that object handlers observe an almost religious code of behaviour and 'mental propriety.' Such guidelines may be read as a direct response to professional anxieties regarding the contested presence and status of indigenous remains acquired during the colonial era for British museum collections. Guidelines such as these, however, fail to take into account human remains whose *purpose*, assemblage and day-to-day handling *as specimens* is a necessary and integral part of medical education. Thus a certain degree of ambivalence has arisen among scientists and curators of medical collections, who understand the human remains in their care as both specimens essential to the teaching of pathology and anatomy, *and* as fragments of deceased individuals, whose consent may or not have been sought for their body parts to be retained post-mortem.[22] The edict that 'one should not browse as if in a library' is entirely at odds with the structure and function of most pathology and forensic collections. In these museums and spaces, specimens are categorised according to diseases of specific parts of the body or manner of death, and lined up on open shelves with catalogue numbers, from which their case histories may be looked up in nearby reference files. The open-access shelving system *facilitates* the handling of these specimens, which students and medical professionals may pick up and examine at their leisure. Thus, what may be considered to be appropriate display and handling practice for human remains in one museum context may be unworkably prohibitive in others.

Whilst the repatriation of indigenous human remains from British Museums to ex-colonies such as Australia and New Zealand have sensitised the issue of human remains in the UK, the case for repatriation of remains of European origin has yet to be made successfully. The repatriation debate has been framed largely in terms of colonial remains; collections such as the three hundred tattooed skins, the majority of which are of French origin, do not generally figure within discourses of repatriation. This is despite the likely North African origin of at least some of the specimens, and the

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[21] Vicki Cassman and Nancy Odegaard, 'Examination and Analysis. Human Remains Guide for Museums and Academic Institutions', in Vicki Cassman, Nancy Odegaard, and J. Powell, (eds.) *Human Remains: Guide for Museums and Academic Institutions,* (2007), p. 49.

[22] An element of individuation of human remains may usually be found in medical collections in the form of case notes, without which the preserved specimen may be unintelligible. Whilst specimens may be connected to a specific case history, the identity of the patient is not usually recorded, perhaps reflecting a medical culture of patient confidentiality.

similarly dubious ethics of the practices involved in their acquisition[23] - one of the frequently cited factors that has been deemed to render the return of indigenous remains imperative. The scope of the HTA is restricted to remains less than one hundred years old, a limit considered to be 'a sensible and pragmatic cut-off point, being one that means there is unlikely to be a living relative with a memory of the individual concerned'; but it is also a limit which excludes many colonial era scientific and ethnographic collections.[24] As an historical collection officially classified over one hundred years old, but without a clearly defined community of origin, it is unlikely that anyone could or would come forward to make a claim for repatriation.[25]

The contemporary political and ethical context within which human remains have been reframed and sensitised have thus exerted a significant influence on both my working practices within the museum archive and my theoretical approach.

Working With the Collection: Theory and Methods

During the first year of my research, my work on the tattoo collection primarily took place within the Science Museum archives, in the Human Remains Room, research rooms and conservation lab at Blythe House. I began with the tattooed skins themselves, familiarising myself with their catalogue descriptions and closely analysing their material properties and iconography. The skins are dry-prepared, though through what process and using what particular chemicals is inconclusive; the skins vary in size, colouration, thickness and texture, and though many bear signs of careful preparation, others appear crudely cut from the body, sometimes to the detriment of the tattoos, which are not preserved fully intact. My approach to analysing this collection of

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[23] Whilst I do not wish to conflate contemporary medical ethics with nineteenth-century medical practices, there are nevertheless striking parallels between the origin and acquisition of indigenous remains and the Lavalette tattoos: specifically, the people from whom these remains were extracted were subject to institutional and/or colonial control, and did not give prior consent for their remains to be preserved and retained in European collections.

[24] O'Sullivan, 'Material Legacies', p. 394; citing Lord Warner, speaking in a Lords debate on the Human Tissue Bill, September 16th 2004.

[25] The earliest of the tattoos date from 1830-1850 according to the museum catalogue; these are estimates based upon various dates tattooed onto the skins, as well as Johnston-Saint's written record, which stated that the tattoos dated 'from the first quarter of the last century to the present time.' There is an obvious flaw in dating based on the tattoos themselves - an individual may have received the tattoo in the year inscribed, or it may simply be a memento commemorating past experience, such as a tour of duty served with a particular regiment of the army. In either case, the excision and preservation of the tattoo would, in most cases, have occurred many decades after the tattoo was made. It is unclear from museum catalogue records whether the dates refer to the execution of the tattoo, or the preparation of the skin; thus the exact dating of this collection is problematic and inconsistent. Whilst it is reasonable to assume that the majority of tattoos originate in the late nineteenth-century, based on material analysis and historiography, a number of the tattooed specimens may date far more recently. This raises a potential dilemma where living relatives may be able to identify their deceased family members - particularly in the case of specimen numbers A555 and A542 (**Figure 2**), which have, in the course of this research, been conclusively identified with a specific individual who died no earlier than 1901.

tattooed skins is necessarily interdisciplinary, drawing upon a range of fields; in particular anthropology, the histories of medicine and criminology, philosophy and social theory, histories of collecting, as well as the history of art and visual culture. The objects themselves are difficult to define as such, and pose a unique set of problematics, particularly regarding their place within contemporary museum collections. Taking a multidisciplinary approach to studying this collection is a reflection of the nature of the material under study. Thus these 'objects' emerge from my analysis as multiple also; as I will elaborate in the first chapter they may be regarded as *hybrid entities*, constituted through a range of complex historical socio-material practices. This multiplicity is developed in my discussion of the uneasy subject/object positioning of the tattooed skins, in which I draw centrally upon the work of philosopher and ethnographer Annemarie Mol, anthropologists Cara Krmpotich, Joost Fontein and John Harries, and historians of science Lorraine Daston and Bruno Latour. As assembled human remains, the tattooed skins both disrupt and complicate easy categorisation and stimulate broader cross-disciplinary thinking. Their material substance is best explored through a combination of contemporary conservation science and forensic anthropology techniques, and my own careful visual and tactile analysis. An assessment of the material properties of the tattooed skins provides valuable insights into their post-mortem lives within medical and museum collections.

The materiality of the collection is also approached historically, through an in-depth discussion of the cultural significance and symbolism of human skin, and the flayed skin in particular. Iconographic and mythological representations of the theme of flaying, as well as historical practices of punitive excoriation and the fabrication of various objects from human skin, are explored in relation to practices of tattoo collecting. As well as a consideration of the historical contexts of flaying and the preservation of human skin, the most significant aspect of the materiality of the skins is of course the tattoos themselves. The collection was undoubtedly assembled predominantly for the purpose of the preservation of the tattoos as images and icons, thus the tattoos are the linking factor in my material analysis and my choice and discussion of historical sources throughout. Close study of the iconography of the tattoos on the one hand, and consideration of their techniques of production on the other, led me back to the archive and to the discourses pertaining to tattooing during the nineteenth century, where the images themselves can appear as a kind of 'text'. Indeed, some nineteenth-century scholars themselves viewed tattoos as a form of textual language, reflected by the tendency in their work to read tattoos as a form of

encrypted writing. Last but not least, a considered analysis of nineteenth-century scholarly debates on tattooing grounds the material in a broader discursive context.

Material analysis conducted within the context of a twenty-first-century museum and university history of art department is the starting point for my research into this collection within the framework of an AHRC collaborative doctoral award. Consequently, there are certain theoretical issues and methodological practicalities at stake. Drawing upon the work of Mol, and in particular her ethnography of disease *The Body Multiple,* I begin from my own day-to-day interactions with the Wellcome Collection tattooed skins, attempting to engage in what Mol describes as a 'praxiographic inquiry into reality'[26]. This approach involves an explicit abandonment of the epistemological tradition of philosophy, which 'tried to articulate the relation between knowing subjects and their objects of knowledge.'[27] Rather, Mol argues, knowledge is to be located in practices and their attendant technologies, instruments, papers, materials, conversations and so on. Revisiting the notion of ontology, Mol thus mobilises a *relational* and *multiple* conception of ontology, which lends itself to the study of a collection of objects as incongruous and ambivalent as preserved tattooed human skins. As living tissue the body is modified through the acquisition of a tattoo, enacting a range of social relationships and meanings – bravery demonstrated through tolerance of pain; camaraderie with peers; identification with a social group or assertion of personal identity or beliefs; these are but a few possibilities. In another context the tattooed segment of skin is removed from the body after death, beginning a new post-mortem life as fetishised object, or stigmata collected for criminological or medical study. In each historical moment and location, through each change of hands, the tattooed skins are *enacted* anew, afforded new significance, imbued with the ability to produce new meanings and participate in the production of new knowledge. Attending to these possibilities is central to my research practice, both historically, through the careful excavation of historical documents and texts; and ethnographically, through my own day-to-day interaction with the objects and involvement in knowledge production.

Taking a reflexive approach to methodology and theory-in-practice requires a consideration of the materials, technologies, and physical and social milieu through and in which my work takes place. My active engagement in the production of knowledge in a museum setting must be the starting point for analysis, as this is the lens through which my view into the history of the objects in question is focussed. To describe

[26] Annemarie Mol, *The Body Multiple*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 32.
[27] Ibid.

something of this working context: first of all I am formally inducted into the museum, must learn its protocols and storage systems, pass security checks and object handling training. I am introduced to the conservation staff and given a curator's pass. All of which allows me to enter the storage archives freely: On arrival I sign the staff log at security, where I am then given a pass and keys to the human remains room. The pass admits me through a turnstile and a further three alarmed doors before I reach the part of the building where the tattooed skins are stored. Thus my work at the museum archive involves key passes, log books, trolleys, storage rooms with distinctive smells, cool corridors, as well as conversations with conservationists, curators and security staff. It involves veiled cabinets, fume hoods and latex gloves, computers, cameras and measuring tools. I use my senses to analyse each tattooed skin: I look, I touch, I can smell them. I cannot hear anything except for the constant suction of the fume hood, but I experience them as 'talkative things'[28] nonetheless; things that inspire fascination, stimulate discussion and continually prompt new questions. I bring my own experience and knowledge to bear on them, and make them bear information on this basis: My previous training and practice as a tattooist, for instance, attunes my eye to the technical features of the tattoo marks themselves, the way in which they have been designed and executed. I am in 'dialogue' with them. But what can they tell me through this essentially sensory, ethnographic way of knowing? Many things, which I take care to write down.

This first methodological approach is embedded in the contemporary, lived practices which take place within a museum context, and could be called ethnographic, or to use Mol's term, *praxiographic*. For my purposes, this term has particular relevance, since Mol's emphasis is on the intersecting and multiple social practices that bring into being, or 'enact', specific knowledge objects. The second method entails the analysis of historical sources and academic literature. This too, is of course embedded in my day-to-day practices of reading and the like, and so is bound up with the first approach. I am interested in the ways in which tattooed skins, as complex material and discursive assemblages, were enlisted and mobilised in shaping and defining knowledge practices in distant historical periods. What practices were they enacted in-and-through a hundred years ago or more? Taking a praxiographic approach to research becomes considerably more problematic when dealing with the fragmentary traces left behind by deceased historical actors. How does one go about doing historical ethnography? Is this possible? On the one hand, Mol discusses practical activities in the hospital setting

[28] Lorraine Daston (ed.), *Things That Talk: Object Lessons from Art and Science* (New York: Zone Books, 2004).

of her ethnography that are intrinsically bound up with papers, files, instruments, documents, images – inscription devices which are variously mobilised to coordinate and translate information. On the other, she claims to privilege practices over principles, eschewing 'knowledge articulated in words and images and printed on paper.'[29] However, if the agency of materials and technologies is to be acknowledged as vital a component of the enactment of entities as the human beings involved, then the presence of all these papers, words and images must be recognised as a significant element *of practice itself* - particularly when one is engaged in writing history. In fact, all these papers and objects can provide a window into the praxiological realities of distant times and places. In the context of my work, I am necessarily required to work with historical texts and objects; objects which were mobilised, bound up with and utilised in the bringing into being of elusive historical entities such as the nineteenth-century criminal or the tattoo.

What I attempt then, is a kind of historical ethnography, moving from close visual and material analysis of the tattooed skins, to an excavation of historical sources they may lead me to, and back again. Beginning work within an institution devoted to the collection and preservation of historical artefacts of one sort or another, it seems appropriate to also take the history and context of collecting into account as a departure point. The period from 1870 to 1930 saw the most prolific era of ethnographic collecting, coinciding with the emergence of both anthropology and criminology as distinct academic disciplines, and it is within this historical window that the Wellcome Collection tattooed skins were assembled as artefacts and body parts for Henry Wellcome's Medical Museum. During the early development of academic anthropology, the body of the native held great currency as both the signifier of exotic cultures and European knowledge-mastery of them. Indeed, numerous anthropologists of the late nineteenth century actually 'collected' the natives themselves, bringing 'exotic' peoples to world fairs, museums and lecture theatres.[30] This early practice provided visibility of distant cultures for anthropological and public audiences alike in Europe. However, as David MacDougall points out, this visibility was frustrated by a muteness regarding the culture from which the native was extracted; '[…] the body in question, removed from

[29] Mol, *The Body Multiple*, p. 32.
[30] David MacDougall cites two examples; an occasion when prominent anthropologist Franz Boas assisted in the organization of the Anthropological Hall at the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago, where fourteen Kwakiutl were displayed; and the case of Ishi, last of the Yahi, who spent his final years at the University of California's Museum of Anthropology as a kind of 'living exhibit' MacDougall, 'The Visual in Anthropology', in Marcus Banks and Howard Morphy (eds.), *Rethinking Visual Anthropology*, (1997), p. 276.

its usual surroundings, was often singularly uncommunicative about culture.'[31] An alternative was to photograph the people and their environments, and to collect examples of their material culture, which began pouring into museums and swelling private collections by the turn of the century.[32] In the absence of 'the real thing' visual images and objects came to acquire the look of knowledge, standing in for distant places and peoples and giving the gloss of scientific knowledge and respectability to museum collections which were arranged to 'communicate a religious aura of science celebrating mankind […] Here the visual stood in for absent humanity, as church architecture stood in for the invisibility of God.'[33] In a similar sense, the collection of tattoos purchased for the Wellcome collections came to stand for knowledge itself; indeed, for Sir Henry Wellcome, one of the most prolific collectors of the period, collecting things was very much 'a way of thinking through ideas'.[34] Artefacts, along with physical measurements and linguistic data, were sent back to metropolitan centres by colonial officers, explorers and missionaries, providing the 'intellectual currency' upon which early anthropological theories were based.[35] This intense period of collecting gave rise to the amassing of vast repositories of artefacts from all corners of the globe. However, what to do with all this material presented a problem, both logistically (in the case of collections of the scale and scope of Wellcome's) and theoretically:

> There was something disquieting about visual images. They appeared to show everything, and yet, like the physical body, remained annoying mute. The visual world was like the husk you removed to get at the conceptual and verbal worlds inside, but having done so you couldn't in good conscience throw it away. Visible objects, having exerted great fascination as the product and indicators of culture, but failing as expositors of it, began to acquire a new function (in museums) as metaphors for anthropology. And as metaphor, the visual flourished."[36]

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Henry Wellcome was an exemplary collector of this period, and sustained his goal of the 'complete comparative collection' right up until his death in 1936, long after objects had ceased to hold primary interest for anthropologists in the study of culture.

[33] MacDougall, 'The Visual in Anthropology', p. 278.

[34] Frances Larson, *An Infinity of Things: How Sir Henry Wellcome Collected the World*, (2009), p. 16. It is interesting that the renewed academic interest in ethnographic objects and museum collections in recent times has often invoked this conception of knowing through things. Amiria Henare *et al's* 2007 edited collection *Thinking Through Things: Theorising Artefacts Ethnographically*, and Lorraine Daston's 2004 volume *Things That Talk* are two recent examples that I draw upon in my work.

[35] There is an interesting historical account of the 'gifting' of human bones and other artefacts from medical officials based in colonial Australia and Tasmania in Helen MacDonald's book *Human Remains: Dissection and its Histories*. In this book, MacDonald takes three very different but equally controversial cases of dissection in Tasmania - Mary McLauchlan, William Lanney (the 'last Tasmanian Aboriginal') and Thomas Ross - as well as other cases from Britain, to illustrate how the exchange of human remains between the colonies and the metropolitan centre built relationships of reciprocity and obligation over vast distances.

[36] MacDougall, 'The Visual in Anthropology', p. 277.

The image invoked here of the 'visual husk' which is stripped away to get at the core of cultural meaning concealed within, is intriguingly paralleled in the historical practice of removing tattooed skin from the body. Tattoo collections were primarily assembled in medical settings during a period of intense criminological scrutiny of the tattoo, which was read as a sign of 'degeneracy' or latent criminality. From the 1880s onwards, criminologists and forensic specialists became increasingly interested in the capacity of the tattoo to convey psychological information about their criminal subjects. Whilst the isolated tattoo-mark seemed to offer a clear cultural code with which to decipher the interiority of the criminal other, the conceptual or verbal kernel of meaning presumed to lie within the psyche of the tattooed nevertheless remained obscure. The question of the symbolic signification of tattoos, their potential as markers of identity for criminologists, and their status as a form of 'writing' is further discussed in relation to the historical literature on tattooing in chapter 5.

However, the relationship between tattooing and writing is also worth considering with regards to modalities of collecting, a theme that will be explored in more depth in chapter 4. The European impulse to view tattoos as a form of writing during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is taken up by historian of science Simon Schafer in his discussion of inscription devices and exchange in the South Pacific. In his 2007 article *On Seeing Me Write: Inscription Devices in the South Seas*, Schaffer draws upon a specific historical encounter between a Marquesan chief and British astronomer William Gooch, to illustrate the surprising symmetry between perceptions of tattooing-as-writing and vice versa held by Polynesians and Europeans alike. During the 1792 voyage of the *Daedalus* to the Marquesas Islands of which Gooch was a part, an instance is described in which Gooch was apparently invited to tattoo a Marquesan chief. Misinterpreting the astronomer's pen and ink, the Marquesan lay down to be tattooed. Gooch later recorded this in his diary: 'On seeing me write, deem'd it tattooing'[37]. This episode reveals fascinating symmetrical affinities between European inscription devices and those of the South Seas Islanders. Moreover, Schaffer makes the observation that for European travellers during this period, 'tattooing became a form of peculiarly apt collection.'[38] In the context of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, being tattooed may be viewed as a form of ethnographic collecting in itself, embedded within a wider cultural paradigm of collecting. Nicholas Thomas also discusses the tattoos of sailors on early scientific expeditions in terms of collecting; Cook's early voyages in particular were marked by a shipboard culture in which all personnel were

[37] Simon Schaffer, ''On Seeing Me Write': Inscription Devices in the South Seas', in *Representations*, Vol. 97, (Winter 2007), cited p. 91.
[38] Ibid, p. 100.

encouraged to take part in the gathering of cartographic and navigational data. The impulse to collect was shared by all of the crew, from the botanist Joseph Banks who was famously tattooed, to the average sailor. Thomas writes:

> Getting tattooed was a singular form of collecting, but also a form which exceeded the acquisition of a material object. Tattooing overlapped contingently with collecting in that both represented ways of acquiring curiosities, and tattoos were curiosities par excellence.[39]

Thus the acquisition of the tattoo may be regarded as the first collection in a series – a notion supported by a formal analysis of the tattoos of European sailors themselves. Whilst native Polynesian tattooing may be regarded as 'a unity and a totality, not a form susceptible to numeration',[40] European tattooing by contrast is frequently marked by the proliferation of distinct elements which can exist in series, to be added to over time. The Wellcome collection of tattooed skins contains a number of such examples, which will be explored in greater depth throughout the thesis. A secondary group of tattoo collectors emerges in my analysis of comparative collections of drawings and photographs documenting tattoos, as well as similar preserved tattoo specimens, and in the related discourses and research practices of criminologists and medico-legal experts writing on tattooing during the later part of the nineteenth century.

It is important to note that whilst a significant literature devoted to the study of criminal (and to a lesser extent military servicemen's) tattoos from this period provides an important contextualising discourse, sources which explicitly refer to the collection and preservation of tattooed human skin are extremely rare.[41] Nevertheless, authors studying tattoos through the assembly of drawings or photographs which were published in richly illustrated books, may still be considered collectors; and, regarded as such, their work provides a significant comparative body of visual material within which to situate the Wellcome Collection tattooed skins. In particular, forensic scientist and criminologist Alexandre Lacassagne (1843-1924) assembled an exceptional compendium of images of tattoos traced from life, as well as drawings and some photographs. It is particularly interesting to note that Lacassagne had a strong personal interest in the iconography of tattooing – so much so that he commissioned a series of dinnerware printed with selected tattoo designs gathered through his work in French

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[39] Thomas, Nicholas: 'Introduction', in Nicholas Thomas, Anna Cole and Bronwen Douglas (eds.), *Tattoo: Bodies, Art and Exchange in the Pacific and the West*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), pp. 19-20.
[40] Ibid, p. 223.
[41] To date, I have uncovered only one such article, which has proved invaluable to my material analysis of the collection, further explored in chapter two.

prisons.[42] Lacassagne's most important criminological text on tattooing is his 1881 monograph, *Les Tatouages. Etude Anthropologique et Medico-Legale*, in which he sets out to describe tattooing amongst prison populations according to a scheme which he developed in order to systematically classify tattoos according to seven categories of images and specifications of ten locations on the body.[43] Lacassagne collected around 1,800 tattoo images traced from life, on which he based his conclusions about the relationship between tattooing and criminality.

According to historian Jane Caplan, scholarly interest in the tattoo in France can be dated back to the 1830s, and was initiated by a combination of colonial and medico-legal interest in the practice.[44] Early researches by French pathologists such as Mathurin Félix Hutin and Auguste Ambroise Tardieu focussed upon the permanency of the mark, and the practical potential of the tattoo as a marker of identity. Tardieu stressed that the primary aim of such research was 'to fix [the tattoo's] value as a sign of identity.'[45] Thus tattoos became a cogent part of the developing repertoire of French police science. However, the scope for identification of criminals by their tattoos was ultimately limited to that of any other distinguishing physical feature, and despite their indelibility, tattoos could always be effaced, altered or augmented over time. In light of these difficulties, interest in the tattoo as a sign of identity gradually waned through the 1860s and 1870s, especially given that 'tattoo images were not readily assimilable to the serialised systems of measurement and classification that had meanwhile been devised for the body's other physical signs.'[46] By the 1880s a new, broader shift in criminological discourse was taking place. Whereas earlier schools of penology focussed on the anatomy of the crime, the new criminology and police practice associated in France in particular with François Bertillon, now advocated an approach that focussed on the anatomy of the criminal. At this point, and to some extent under the influence of theories of social Darwinism, there was a shift away from conceptions of the tattoo as a marker of individual identity, replaced by a view of the tattoo as the

[42] See pp. 64-65 for photographic reproductions of some of these, in Philippe Artieres and Muriel Salle's *Papiers Des Bas-Fonds, Archives D'un Savant Du Crime, 1843-1924*, (2009).
[43] These are described as patriotic and religious emblems, professional emblems, inscriptions, military insignia, metaphoric emblems, love tokens and erotic tattoos, and mythical or historical tattoos. This scheme was adapted from the earlier categorisation system compiled by Auguste Ambroise Tardieu in 1855.
[44] Jane Caplan, '"One of the Strangest Relics of a Former State", Tattoos and the Discourses of Criminality in Europe, 1880-1920', in *Criminals and Their Scientists*, (2006), p. 340.
[45] Ambroise Tardieu, *Etude medico-legale sur le tatouage, considere comme signes d'identite*, (1855); cited in Caplan, '"One of the Strangest Relics of a Former State"', p. 342.
[46] Caplan, ''One of the Strangest Relics of a Former State'' p. 344.

stigmata of a 'collectively pathological criminal class'.[47] In this new context, Caplan remarks that:

> Although most of the surviving evidence of European tattooing in the nineteenth century was delivered by criminological controversy, it also was only through this controversy that the tattoo was vested with its association with criminality.[48]

Whilst Lacassagne was certainly the most prominent French scholar writing on tattooing during this time, his research helped to stimulate a flurry of smaller research projects into the practice. As Caplan has noted, much of this work involved the gathering of data, usually presented according to Tardieu or Lacassagne's schemas, and did not offer much in the way of analysis, but was largely descriptive in nature, intending their research to provide the raw material for other scholars. This original research was primarily carried out by practitioners within the military or penal system – prison or army medical officers who were in a privileged position when it came to accessing the tattooed individual in confined populations. However, my archive research has also revealed a strong interest in the collecting of tattooed human skin amongst anatomists and pathologists, particularly within the Académie de Médecine around the turn of the twentieth century.

Nineteenth-century criminological discourse, with which I engage in chapters 4 and 5, provides a valuable context in which to locate the Wellcome Collection tattooed skins. Central to my reading of the historical French literature is the foregrounding of the role of collecting within the enactment of these debates. Gathered images, both drawn and photographed, as well as the collection of tattoos themselves, were part of the practical activity of nineteenth-century criminological knowledge production. Thus an ethnographically grounded, historically informed analysis of the Wellcome Collection tattooed skins and their varying contexts of enactment-in-practice form the core of my methodology. Drawing upon Actor-Network-Theory, and in particular the work of Annemarie Mol and Bruno Latour, as well as the historical work of Jane Caplan, Michel Foucault, and approaches from material culture studies, anthropology and museum studies, I locate these objects within a multi-disciplinary framework which seeks to trace their ontological conditions of possibility and historical trajectory through shifting locations and practices.

[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid, p. 339.

CHAPTER ONE

Subjects, Objects, Entities: Defining the Collection

Beginning a PhD project with a collection of museum artefacts, rather than a defined research question, necessitated a specific approach. From the outset, I was confronted with the problematic of how to define these artefacts as such, and soon came to question whether conceiving of them in conventional terms was in any way productive. In a certain sense, coming to a collection of preserved skins lacking detailed historical documentation, opened up a research space that enabled me to look, feel, reflect - and *listen* to what they could tell me. I was immediately struck by the sense that the tattooed skins were in some way 'loquacious'. The notions of voice and presence, combined with their visceral materiality, brought a sense of *subjectness* to what would otherwise be considered inanimate - dead - objects. So how might they be defined, in such a way as to take account of this apparent duality of subject and object? My encounter with them provoked many uncertainties: *What* are they? Who *were* they? What was their purpose? To whom did this purpose belong? What do they mean today?

These are just a few of the questions and themes with which this thesis deals. The answers are multiple, entangled and thorny, leading me to new queries - some of which, in the end, are unanswerable. The tattooed skins in the Wellcome collection are first and foremost human remains; but they are also residues of former lives, memories made flesh, inscriptions of identity or of institutional domination. Like all human remains, they inspire both fascination and repulsion in many contemporary viewers.[49] They occupy the strange liminal space of boundary phenomena - things that pass between or slip through categories; that defy singular definition; things that may be regarded as ontologically *multiple.*

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[49] As outlined in my introduction, the sensitisation of human remains is contingent upon recent political and cultural movements, which are both historically and geographically specific. However, this is not an exclusively contemporary phenomenon. Ruth Richardson has shown how human remains and their treatment by have periodically become politicised throughout history following similar scandals relating to the medical profession. For example, she relates an incident from 1795, in which the parishioners of the village of Lambeth in London learned that three men had been caught stealing five bodies from their parish burial ground:
'[...] in consequence of such a discovery, people of all descriptions, whose relatives had been buried in that Ground, resorted thereto, and demanded to dig for them [...] being refused, they in great numbers forced their way in, and in spight of every effort the parish Officers could use, began like Mad people to tear up the ground. [Many empty coffins were found.] Great Distress and agitation of mind was manifest in every one, and some, in a kind of phrensy, ran away with the coffins of their deceased relations.' Cited p. 156, 'Human Dissection and Organ Donation: A Historical and Social Background', in *Mortality: Prompting the interdisciplinary study of death and dying*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (2006), pp. 151-165.

Subjects, Objects, and Ontologies

In the first place, the tattooed human skins prompt the question: *what* is it exactly that I am dealing with? The answer to this question is neither straightforward nor immediately apparent - their material substance[50], historical significance, and place within contemporary museum collections, are all contingencies that are enacted through complex, and sometimes obscured, practices. Human remains present a particularly interesting challenge, since the 'post-mortem lives' of substances such as tissue, skin, hair and bone are frequently re-invested with *subjectness* through their interaction with living human beings in archives, museums, funeral homes, morgues, and the like. They continually resist the de-centring of the subject brought about by the processes of dissection, fragmentation and preservation of isolated body parts. Focussing their analysis on the substance of bones, anthropologists Krmpotich, Fontein and Harries work through these particular problematics, making the observation that, 'the humanness of bones was inescapable [...] as reconstituted forms and arranged objects, they defied us to ignore their subjectivity.'[51] In fact, human remains are always something more than the category of subject or object, and it is this excess, this restlessness and uncertainty, that makes them such compelling research materials. Their uneasy, contradictory status provokes 'emotional, political, visceral and intellectual responses'; indeed these responses to objects of human remains have received considerable scholarly attention in recent times.[52]

Writing on the interdependence of bones and the embodied practice of anatomists who literally and figuratively 'articulate' human remains post-mortem, Elizabeth Hallam discusses the multiple manifestations that bones may take on through their enactment in practice, describing;

> The different kinds of entities bones can come to be during their diverse post-mortem lives: trophies, souvenirs, sources of knowledge, things to possess and trade, deceased relatives, scientific data, once living persons, traces of previous

[50] In the day-to-day handling of the objects, even this most straightforward of material facts is problematic, since it is unknown what chemicals may or may not have been used to preserve or conserve the skins in the past. Biohazard stickers are applied to all plastic containers which store the collection. Latex gloves must be worn at all times during handling, and the skins cannot be handled outside of their containers unless a fume hood is used to extract any potentially hazardous fumes or particles. In practice, conservation staff assume that either Mercury(II) Chloride or Arsenic Trioxide may be present, and appropriate technologies and protocols are employed as a consequence.

[51] Cara Krmpotich, Joost Fontein and John Harries, 'The Substance of Bones: The Emotive Materiality and Affective Presence of Human Remains', in *Journal of Material Culture*, Vol. 15 (December 2010), p. 374.

[52] See on the emotive materiality and affective presence of bones for example, the recent special issue of the *Journal of Material Culture* (December 2010); see also Tiffany Jenkins, *Contesting Human Remains in Museum Collections* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).

> violence, channels of communication, potent political substance and remains of ancestors.[53]

These multiple characterisations or incarnations of bones in the work of Hallam and others also resonate with the Wellcome Collection tattooed skins: What kind of entities may they have been and do they continue to be? If they are objects, what do they consist of, substantively? How were they assembled as objects of knowledge, and according to whose criteria? How does their 'subjectness' continue to assert itself? Writing on dissection and anatomical practice in the nineteenth century, Helen MacDonald makes the observation that; 'the human body, in whole or in parts, is never just an object like any other [...] it slips between subject and object.'[54] These 'objects', whilst possessing the defining characteristics required of object-hood, are also endowed with a latent subjectivity still visible in the tattooed trace etched indelibly into the skin.[55] And their fabrication *into* objects conjures another subject, that of the collector who selected, excised and prepared the tattoos for the display cabinet or teaching collection.

However, the conceptualisation of bone, skin or indeed any other kind of human remains, as possessed of an 'oscillating status as subjects and objects'[56], may not go far enough, since such formulations retain and re-inscribe a fundamental dualism at their core. Human remains are far more than merely 'objects' in the simple material sense; but nor are they easy 'subjects', which may be presumed to act and speak quite as the living do (though they do 'act' and 'speak' in their way, which I will return to). This is the case even when a name can be attached to this or that skull, scrap of flesh or any other fragment of a human body. Drawing on the work of Annemarie Mol, it is perhaps more productive to consider such artefacts as *entities*. 'Objects' and 'things' tend to have solid, static connotations, conjuring commonplace artefacts in the mind of the reader - books, chairs, paperweights, for example, are all things devoid of animating characteristics. 'Entity' on the other hand, has a much more ambiguous set of associations - an entity may be something alive, something immaterial, or something abstract, but it is also something with a distinct identity or subset of identities, and

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[53] Elizabeth Hallam, 'Articulating Bones: An Epilogue', in *Journal of Material Culture*, Vol. 15 (December 2010), p. 465.
[54] Helen MacDonald, *Human Remains: Dissection and its Histories*, p. 3.
[55] In most of the Wellcome Collection specimens, the presence of the tattoo is an important factor in the perception of this latent subjectivity, since preserved human skin is often difficult to distinguish from very fine calf or vellum to the untrained eye. Leather objects manufactured from animal skins are both commonplace and familiar, and without some authenticating mark - a tattoo, or an embossed inscription (which are almost always present on human skin bookbindings, for example) - the humanness of a preserved skin can easily be overlooked. Of course, this observation does not apply so readily to some of the larger specimens which retain the features of recognisable body parts - pieces of skin taken from the torso that still possess nipples and belly buttons are unmistakably human.
[56] Hallam, 'Articulating Bones', p. 465.

which may be presumed to be animate. It is this possibility of an *animate* object, or a multiple conglomeration of identities, that I wish to mobilise in using the term *entity*. The very existence of human remains in museum collections disrupts and dissolves taken-for-granted categories of subject and object and necessarily confronts us with the ontologically distinctive entity of the *hybrid*.

Hybridity is a useful concept to work with in relation to human remains, as it allows us to move beyond unhelpful dualisms and to confront the multiple nature of things; things that inhabit not just more than one, but more than two, potentially oppositional states, which nevertheless co-exist whilst remaining in tension with one another. This hybridity emerges from the embeddedness of entities within complex socio-material practices, which continually enact their ontological conditions of possibility in multiple, sometimes contradictory ways. Hybrid entities can take the form of many different species; a non-human animal such as a bird, spider or chimpanzee, a substance such as milk, or a socio-technical assemblage such as the internet. Where material *substances* are involved in this process, my approach is significantly influenced by Actor-Network-Theory (ANT), which is distinctive in its insistence upon the agency of non-human entities (technologies, organisms, materials etc.) within socio-material networks.[57] Indeed, some of these entities (and human remains in particular) are often experienced by those who interact with them as possessed of a will or 'life' of their own, occasionally compelling people to behave or act in unanticipated ways.[58] In her discussion of 'living presence response' to the viewing of works of art, Caroline van Eck describes just such a phenomenological experience:

> […] in which viewers react to works of art as if they are living beings or even persons that act upon the viewer, enter into a personal relationship with them, and elicit love, hate, desire or fear.[59]

This kind of experience has a long history in relation to art objects – be it in museums, churches or other environments - and often these kinds of overwhelming or visceral

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[57] 'Objects are real but they look so much like social actors that they cannot be reduced to the reality 'out there' invented by the philosophers of science', Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, (Essex: Pearson Education Ltd., 1993), p. 6. See also Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 63: 'Objects too have agency'.

[58] Caroline van Eck discusses something akin to this phenomenon in her article on viewer experiences of 'living presence' in art works. She relates the following story as recent example: 'In July 2007 the artist Rindy Sam left the lipstick traces of her kisses on the entirely white surface of a Cy Twombly painting. In her statement to the press, she declared that she had become so 'overcome with passion for this work of art' that she 'had to kiss it'.' p. 643, 'Living Statues: Alfred Gell's Art and Agency, Living Presence Response and the Sublime', in *Art History*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (September 2010), pp. 642-659.

[59] Caroline Van Eck, 'Gell's theory of art as agency and living presence response'. Online: http://www.hum.leiden.edu/research/artandagency/subprojects/deel-proj-eck.html Accessed December 2012.

emotional responses lead to a desire to touch, manually examine and even kiss objects of art:

> Kissing pictures of saints, for example, was a common devotional practice. Particularly if the subject matter of a painting were sacred, touching it could provide vicarious contact with the divine.[60]

These touching practices are not only linked to religious sensibilities, however. As Constance Classen notes, 'portraits in particular have long called forth gestures of intimacy because of their ability to evoke a human presence.'[61] The desire to touch museum or art objects does not always imply confounding representation and represented, or assuming a sacred or quasi-religious power of the object, but may also be a means with which to better *know* and verify the material properties of that object. In *The Book of Touch*, Classen recounts a seventeenth-century experience of object handling within the museum setting:

> In 1694 the English traveller Celia Fiennes recorded a visit she made to the Ashmolean Museum of Oxford. Among the various things she admired there were a loadstone, which she held in different positions to test its magnetic properties, and a cane 'which looks like a solid heavy thing but if you take it in your hands [is] as light as a feather'.[62]

This manual investigation of museum artefacts was an experience which could be taken for granted by the seventeenth-century museum visitor and even more so by collectors and those with whom they shared the experiences of their collections. Over the course of the eighteenth century however, a transition occurred in European collections, which saw prohibition of the touching of museum artefacts become institutionalised in public museums from the end of the eighteenth century onwards. The seventeenth-century experience of Celia Fiennes couldn't be further away from the experience of today's museum visitors, who, ever under the watchful eye of security guards and museum staff, are admonished everywhere by signage indicating: *Do Not Touch*. Despite some exceptions, such as handling collections consisting of non-precious items used in interactive spaces designed for children, it is now generally accepted that museum collections are *not* for touching. This is particularly marked with respect to contemporary collections of human remains; in the wake of the Human Tissue Act, many museums have explicit policies in relation to human remains. The policy on the

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[60] Constance Classen, 'Touch in the Museum', in *The Book of Touch*, (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005), p. 279.
[61] Ibid., p. 280.
[62] Ibid., p. 275.

display of human remains for Leicester City Museums and Galleries, for example, states that:

> There is a high probability of the risk of offending religious and other sensitivities far outweighs the benefits of using human remains in handling sessions. A case could be made against this, but it must be carefully considered. At the present time, Leicester Museums and Galleries is not comfortable for human remains to be used as handling material to maintain respect for their past lives.[63]

Over time, the museum has become a predominantly visual site - but what underpins this particular sensory formation of the museum, and how does this affect our experience of its objects? According to Classen, the early museum retained many characteristics of the private collections on which they were based - the museum tour led by a curator during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries may be compared with the house tour offered by a host.[64] The curator, like the host, would be expected to provide information about the collection and offer objects to be handled and touched. By allowing visitors to touch, and in some cases even make gifts of, museum objects, the curator was enacting ancient notions of hospitality.[65]

Scientific practice also supported multisensory investigations of objects. The seventeenth-century empirical philosopher, Robert Hooke, for example, explicitly stated that 'ocular inspection' must be accompanied by 'manual handling [...] of the very things themselves.'[66] In the contemporary museum context, this manual exploration of objects is reserved solely for curators and conservationists, where a scientific approach to the object is still required to maintain and conserve collections. Although these members of staff are generally exempt from the prohibition to touch, object handling is nevertheless very clearly defined according to a series of strictly observed codes and procedures, and is kept to a minimum. As Classen points out, the 'sense of touch was believed to have access to interior truths to which sight was unaware,' as in the case of Celia Fiennes quoted above, in which she remarked that the cane *looked* heavy but was actually light when she lifted it.[67] Touch, then, can be regarded as functioning to correct the misconceptions - or even deceptions - of sight. However, the handling of museum objects not only gave visitors the opportunity to verify their material nature through

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[63] Leicester City Museums and Galleries, *The Curation, Care and Use of Human Remains in Leicester City Museums Service*, (Leicester: Leicester City Museums Service, 2006), s.91.
[64] Classen, 'Touch in the Museum', p. 275.
[65] Ibid., p. 276.
[66] Cited in Ken Arnold, 'Skulls, Mummies and Unicorns' Horns: Medicinal Chemistry in Early English Museums,' in R. G. W. Anderson, M. L. Caygill, A. G. MacGregor and L. Syson (eds.), *Enlightening the British: Knowledge, Discovery and the Museum in the Eighteenth Century*, (London: The British Museum Press, 2003), p. 76.
[67] Classen, 'Touch in the Museum', p. 277.

touch - it also allowed them to experience objects intimately. As a 'distance' sense, sight tends to detach the viewer from that which they observe; touch, on the other hand, physically unites the person who touches with the object touched, and thus allows an immediacy of experience that transcends spatial boundaries. Classen writes that:

> In the case of human-made artefacts, [touching] also provided the thrill of coming into vicarious contact with their original creators and users, and even - through, for example, hefting a spear or trying on a ring - a sense of what it would be like to be an artefact's original owner.[68]

Implicit within this formulation is the notion of a latent subject's presence embodied in the inanimate object, which may be reanimated or invoked through a kind of haptic transference. A particularly telling example of this kind of vicarious experience is related by German traveller Sophie de la Roche, who wrote of her visit to the British Museum in 1786:

> With what sensations one handles a Carthaginian helmet excavated near Capua, household utensils from Herculaneum...There are mirrors too, belonging to Roman matrons...with one of these mirrors in my hand I looked amongst the urns, thinking meanwhile, "Maybe chance has preserved amongst these remains some part of the dust from the fine eyes of a Greek or a Roman lady, who so many centuries ago surveyed herself in this mirror..." Nor could I restrain my desire to touch the ashes of an urn on which a female figure was being mourned. I felt it gently, with great feeling [...] I pressed the grain of dust between my fingers tenderly, just as her best friend might once have grasped her hand.[69]

The sense of touch here has the power not only to transcend space, but also time, through de la Roche's imagined gesture of holding the hand of a long-dead person. Furthermore, she writes that the female figure depicted on the urn is *being* mourned, translating her own experience in the present moment into the ancient images inscribed on the artefact itself. Although the woman whose ashes she touches is long dead, there is nevertheless a powerful sense of immediacy in de la Roche's description. Classen argues that this perceived ability of touch to bridge space and time 'gave it special value in the museum setting, where visitors were separated by considerable spatial and/or temporal distances from the cultures of origin of many of the objects displayed.'[70]

When that artefact is indeed a *piece* of a once-living person, this tactile experience becomes much more complex. Tactility may be adopted as a particularly apt

[68] Ibid.
[69] Cited in Classen, pp. 277-278.
[70] Ibid., p. 278.

method of investigation of the Wellcome tattooed human skins, both in terms of what touch may yield to phenomenological experience as well as to a material-scientific analysis. This is not without its risks, however - there is uncertainty as to what substances have been used to preserve and conserve the skins, and the presence of potentially toxic chemicals in their surface makes their handling fraught with difficulty. But I *do* handle them - and in fact this has been an integral aspect of my work. In my own experience of handling the tattooed skins, I was initially struck by the inter-sensoriality of my engagement with them. First, I apprehend each one visually. The skin may at first appear as a flat parchment-like surface; the presence of the tattoo has a kind of reducing effect, which encourages this interpretation, rendering the skin merely a surface ground for its inscription. This is perhaps similar to the way in which the apprehension of image content may at first distract attention from the materiality of a photograph. But whilst I initially perceive the tattooed skin as a *surface* - fragile, papery, and brittle - my visual perception of its texture compels me to verify these impressions manually. On picking the skin up between my fingers, testing its weight and pliability, turning it over in my hand and observing its grooves and contours, I find that its materiality defies my initial expectations: the skin may be tough, bark-like and opaque, or leathery, soft and powdery. It is not a flat surface but a multidimensional entity which reveals its human origins in an array of surface features such as hairs, punctures, capillaries, fascia, scars, lesions, and of course, the tattoo.

This multidimensional materiality is an aspect I attempt to explore and convey through my own photographic documentation.[71] In a close-up photograph of specimen number A636 (**Figure 3**) for example, the image highlights the distorted and undulating skin surface, which has occurred as a result of inadequate stretching during the drying process. The reticulated surface pattern, resembling a photographic emulsion cracked with age, reveals the tattoos' location *beneath* the wrinkled and dried outer layers of

[71] There were several limitations to photographing the skins which affected my approach to photography. The major limitation was health and safety - it was necessary for me to have a fume extraction hood suspended around 18 inches above my workspace whenever I had the skins out of their boxes, to extract any potentially harmful dust or volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that may be present in their surface. This restricted both the space within which I could operate my camera, and available light. The portable fume hood was equipped with a spotlight, which compensated for the shadow cast over my workspace by the hood itself and the sizable flue pipe. I always worked with this light on. When it came to photographing the skins, this light was very useful, as I could hold a specimen in one hand, adjusting its angle in the light to bring out its textural features, whilst operating the camera in the other. Whilst this produced some beautiful and striking multi-textured images, it was nevertheless a very tight space in which to photograph the specimens - wide-angle shots did not work well with the strong directional lighting of the lamp and with the fume hood in the way. The light also gave a warm yellow colour cast, which sometimes distorted the true colour of the skin surface. I have tried to compensate for this to some extent digitally, but most of the images are a true reflection of my working environment and tools. The workspace and depth of field limitations also necessitated operating my camera on automatic and semi-automatic settings, which reduced my focusing control over the images.

epidermis. In a number of specimens, the condition of the skin obscures the tattoo almost to the point of complete illegibility. The photograph of specimen number A566 (**Figure 4**) shows an example of a poorly preserved skin - its surface appears patchy, alternately rough and almost shiny-smooth. The texture of this particular skin hints at the conditions under which it was removed from the body. The smoother, paler areas towards the lower edges of the skin show signs of desquamation, indicating the onset of decomposition prior to preservation.[72] Desquamation occurs when the upper layers of the skin blister and are shucked off as decomposition progresses, suggesting that the surgical conditions under which this specimen was collected were rudimentary - perhaps in a military field hospital, or in a prison. Other skins, such as specimen number A669 (**Figure 5**), bear the marks of their excision. This image brings the reverse or fleshy 'inside' of the skin to the fore, as well as the trace of surgical tools: the technique of making an initial cut using a scalpel and then tearing the skin from the underlying tissue manually is visible as a series of ridged grooves. The ridges are formed by fascia, the connective tissue between the skin and fat layers, which is left behind, rather than being cut cleanly away. Handling these objects does more than simply render their textural complexity palpable, however. The senses of course do not operate independently of one another, and the visual apprehension of textured things may encourage a tactile impulse to touch - but it may also provoke a *visceral* response. This is especially the case when examining examples like those above, in which it is easy to conjure processes of cutting or tearing away of skin from the body; processes that we would ordinarily associate with pain, revulsion or horror.

If the provocation of a desire to touch is a particularly apt way in which these hybrid entities may be considered to act, another is through the uncanny ability in which entities such as human remains may be said to 'speak'. This is encountered again and again in the literature covering a wide range of objects in a number of disciplinary fields, including material culture studies, STS and anthropology, but it seems particularly resonant when it comes to human remains. Moreover, I would suggest that there is a relationship between these 'things that talk',[73], the desire to touch, and emotional affect. Lorraine Daston addresses the notion of 'things that talk' in her homonymous book, exploring the ways in which meaning accretes around certain things. The substantive materiality of these 'talkative' things and how they are made shapes what they can mean. She writes that:

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[72] I must thank Dr. Wendy Birch at the UCL Anatomy Laboratory for her insight and observations here.
[73] Lorraine Daston, *Things That Talk: Objects Lessons From Art and Science*, (London and New York: Zone, 2004).

> Some things speak irresistibly, and not only by interpretation, projection and puppetry. It is neither entirely arbitrary nor entirely entailed which objects will become eloquent when, and in what cause. The language of things derives from certain properties of the things themselves, which suit the cultural purposes for which they are enlisted.[74]

The notions of *cause* and *enlistment* are of particular significance when considering what kinds of entities the preserved tattoos may come to be in different historical periods and geographical locations. In the present context, their status as *human remains* enlists them in a political cause that has problematised both the cultural authority of the museum and post-mortem medical practice. This politicised field has undoubtedly invested the tattoos with a renewed 'eloquence'; this status is not fixed however, but is highly contingent.[75] Equally, these entities may pass into 'speechlessness' during interim periods when their properties cease to be of cultural significance. As we will see, the enactment of these specimens in other historical moments may enlist entirely different properties of the thing itself - such as the *tattoo* - for entirely different discursive and political causes. Daston refers to things that talk as 'objects of fascination, association, and endless consideration'[76]; moreover, they are things that compel us to interact with them, to respond in some way; and to generate more talk. If things 'speak to us', they are said to move us in some way. In this formulation, talkativeness is intimately bound up with emotive affect. My interaction with the tattooed skins may thus be understood as an inter-sensorial exchange which moves from visual apprehension to visceral disquiet, to a perception of the 'speaking' agency of the thing, to the urge to touch and its attendant emotive affects. A particularly incisive example of the intertwining of speech and affective presence in articles of human remains is offered by Krmpotich, Fontein and Harries, in their discussion of the emotive power of bones:

> Bones do speak to us, though not eloquently enough, and their emotive and affective force derives from the tensions between their stability and instability, their determinacy and indeterminacy.[77]

Similarly, Daston identifies the source of the loquaciousness of things in their 'chimerical' composition; things that talk are 'things that straddle boundaries between kinds. Art and nature, persons and things, objective and subjective are somehow

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[74] Ibid., pp. 14-15.
[75] During a conversation with Simon Chaplin, the current Head of the Wellcome Library, and former Associate Curator at the Science Museum, he recalled how the Wellcome tattoos were 'not considered problematic fifteen years ago,' when he had first seen them.
[76] Daston, *Things That Talk*, p. 11.
[77] Krmpotich, Fontein, and Harries, 'The Substance of Bones', p. 380.

brought together in these things.'[78] In the above passage the authors mobilise another commonly encountered trope, that of the object which 'does not speak clearly enough'. A tension is encountered between the apparent eloquence of objects, and their semantic muteness. They speak to us in forceful, persuasive ways, but we are often unable to decipher exactly *what* it is that they say. The loquaciousness of such entities derives from their ontologically multiple status, their seeming ability to simultaneously occupy opposing divides of a fault line. This is an observation which may certainly be applied to the Wellcome tattoos, and perhaps even to the tattoo in general: Nineteenth-century criminologist Alexandre Lacassagne, whose important work on the European tattoo will be explored in greater depth in chapters four and five, famously referred to tattoos as 'speaking scars' (*les cicatrices qui parlent*).[79]

Hallam and her co-authors point out that human bones are 'situationally constituted', that the 'different material and visual aspects of bone and bones are yielded within different knowledge-making practices.'[80] Describing (and inevitably contributing to) this process is at the very core of my research when working with the Wellcome tattooed skins, and for further elaboration of this approach, I draw on the work of Dutch philosopher and ethnographer Annemarie Mol. Throughout my research, I have been brought back time and again to the question of ontology. Not an ontology of things-in-themselves, but a *relational* ontology of processes which emphasises the interconnectedness and contingency of phenomena; one in which things are brought into being, moulded, re-shaped or dissolved through a variety of 'socio-material practices'. Annemarie Mol works with such a conception of ontology in her 2002 book *The Body Multiple.* She writes:

> Ontology is not given in the order of things [...] *ontologies* are brought into being, sustained, or allowed to wither away in common, day-to-day, sociomaterial practices.[81]

This is an ontology that attempts to break with the traditional subject-centred humanism of the social sciences and seeks to recognise the agency of non-human actors (be they technological, theoretical or organic) in social life. Following Mol, I attempt what she describes as a 'praxiographic inquiry into reality',[82] according to which knowledge is to be located in *practices* - activities, events, buildings, instruments,

[78] Daston, *Things That Talk*, p. 21.
[79] Alexandre Lacassange, *Les Tatouages. Étude Anthropologique et Médico-légale*, (Paris: J.-B. Baillière, 1881), p. 99.
[80] Krmpotich, Fontein, and Harries, 'The Substance of Bones', p. 380.
[81] Mol, *The Body Multiple*, p. 6.
[82] Ibid., p. 32.

procedures - and *objects* are formed, constituted, amalgamated, translated, dissolved, re-assembled and *enacted* through these practices. Knowledge then, is a practical activity: to use Mol's phrase, it is something which is *done*, moreover it is a process which involves the mobilisation of technologies, instruments, papers, files, bodies, speech, artefacts. In *The Body Multiple*, Mol sets out to explore the ways in which 'medicine attunes to, interacts with, and shapes its objects in its various and varied practices'[83] - not, she stresses, the ways in which medicine knows its objects. She mobilises a conception of ontology that no longer concerns itself with the *definition* of objects as such; nor does it undertake a search for the *essences* of things *out there*. Rather, she shows how *ontologies* are never transcendent, but are brought about through varied and multiple practices - 'practices in which some entity is being sliced, coloured, probed, talked about, measured, counted, cut out.'[84] In the context of her case study of atherosclerosis, Mol is talking about a specific (though slightly different in each enactment) disease, but this approach can equally be applied to the preserved tattooed skins of the Wellcome Collection. Living tissue is probed and coloured by tattoo needles in one milieu; in another, tattoo marks are discussed, counted, redrawn or sliced from cadavers; in yet another context they are reframed, sold, accessioned and incorporated into a larger collection to be measured, counted and discussed again at a later date - this is a process which continues in my own work. More and more inscriptions are gathered from the data, more paperwork is generated.[85] This process, what Latour refers to as 'punctualization'[86], is fundamental to the making and mastery of knowledge-objects.

Furthermore, 'attending to enactment rather than knowledge has an important effect: what we think of as a single object may be more than one.'[87] In the context of my own research, I would put it like this: the pain experienced by the sailor whose skin was punctured and impregnated with ink is not the same entity as the cross-section of tattooed skin sliced from his body post-mortem, despite the fact that in both cases we are dealing with material substances that may be described under one name - the tattoo. The visible, tattooed trace that is debated, drawn and written about by criminologists, is not the same thing as the fleshy souvenir acquired in an army barracks or on board ship. In each location, the object *tattoo* is enacted differently, is imbued with or evacuated of meaning. It is made to stand for travel, memory,

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[83] Ibid., p. vii.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Examples of this 'paperwork', which will be covered in more detail in chapter four, include accession slips, catalogue records, conservation condition reports, photographs and drawings of tattoos, diagrams, tables and figures in texts, etc.
[86] Bruno Latour, *Visualisation and Cognition: Drawing Things Together*, (1990), p. 26.
[87] Mol, *The Body Multiple,* p. vii.

experience, deviance, vengeance, exoticism, primitivism; it is a slightly different entity each time it is encountered. The object *tattoo* thus takes multiple forms during its life - its potential meanings and enactments are as numerous as the cultural and historical locations in which tattooing is practiced. This multiplicity is perhaps best illustrated through a consideration of the process of tattooing itself: The skin is first ruptured and a foreign body injected into the surface tissue, a process which usually involves the intervention of another person, the experience of pain, and the use of specialist tools. But the tattoo is not complete until the skin has healed, permanently sealing in the ink - at this stage the tattoo is still a liminal entity, incomplete, attended by bodily processes such as inflammation, scabbing, and sensations of tightness or tenderness in the skin. After the healing process has completed the tattoo physiologically, the object *tattoo* becomes fully incorporated into the surface of the body as an indelible sign. Thus the tattoo is simultaneously rupture and closure, transitory process and permanent mark. The semantic potential of the tattoo however, may continue to shift and evolve throughout the course of the bearer's lifetime. Exactly what kind of entity the tattoo *is* depends upon when and where it is encountered. This thesis is specifically concerned with the *post-mortem* tattoo, and the contexts in which preserved tattooed skin may be encountered; the clinic, the pathology lab, a physician's private collection, the medical museum, the police archive, and perhaps even the contemporary art gallery.[88]

Methodologically, a praxiographic approach thus has the advantage of being able to take into account the multiplicity of a given entity, whilst grounding the analysis in day-to-day practices and discourses. It is for this reason that I begin with my own ethnographic experience, working with the Wellcome tattooed skins within the museum archives - working with my hands and eyes to learn something of their 'post-mortem lives' and simultaneously producing an episode in their very afterlife.

The Material Image, Tactility and Affect

As previously mentioned, the presence of the tattoo in the specimens encourages a tendency to view the preserved skin fragments as little more than a flat ground for their inscription. The typical museum documentation of the skins in the Wellcome Collection reinforces this effect, as can be seen in a photograph of the skin tattooed with the

[88] Over the course of this project I have been contacted by a number of tattooed individuals who have expressed interest in having their tattoos preserved post-mortem. The reason most commonly cited by these individuals is to preserve the artwork after death. The most significant informant that I have met with, Geoff Ostling, has gone to the lengths of entering into a verbal contract with the Australian National Gallery, which has agreed to accession his tattooed bodysuit post-mortem. The contemporary preservation, exhibition and display context will be discussed in greater depth in the concluding chapter.

phrase *Enfant du Malheur* (Child of Misfortune), (specimen number A581, **Figure 6**). This is an effect that I seek to avoid and disrupt in my own photography, in an attempt to reassert and foreground the three-dimensional corporeal properties of the skin. My day-to-day research practice involves a haptic involvement with the skins - I handle them, hold them up to scrutinise them visually, manipulate them and test their tactile properties with my hands, I register their distinct smell. Capturing this multisensory experience and restoring a sense of tactility to the imaging of these entities has been a central concern in my work. Documenting the skins using a camera inevitably produces two-dimensional images, but the skins themselves do not necessarily have to be rendered as flat images. In my photographs, taken during the course of documenting the collection, I have resisted representing the tattooed skins as two-dimensional 'images' wherever possible, endeavouring instead to reveal something of the fleshy multidimensionality of the collection, thereby restoring something of their material complexity (see, for example **Figures 3, 16, 22, 35,** and **37**).

Of course, the tattoos themselves are not merely images, but are an integral aspect of the modified skins' materiality. The tattooed mark tells a partial story of its own origins, of the techniques and tools used in its production, as well as suggesting a fragmentary biography of the tattooed individual, evoking hopes, desires and allegiances, often in enigmatically coded forms. The skin is a tactile medium unique amongst the senses; it both connects us with others and the wider material world through intimate touch, and provides unique possibilities for communication. Thus it is no coincidence that the language of emotion is also the language of touch: we may feel sorrow, or feel the warmth of a loved one's embrace. In its double significance, referring to the sense of touch as well as an emotional experience, the word 'feel' itself hints to the deep connections between interior emotional experience and skin sensations. Through tattooing, we are also able to mark our skins indelibly with declarations of love, desire for revenge, or symbols denoting grief and emotional pain. Tattooed images and phrases may have emotive potential in themselves, and some are even designed to symbolically correlate with embodied emotional experience. These emotional experiences are in a sense 'performed' on the surface of the body, and may be powerfully enacted anew when encountered post-mortem as preserved skin fragments. This is particularly so in the case of tattoos which express emotional pain: the nexus of tattooed symbol, physical wound, body location and emotional experience are articulated *par excellence* by the dagger-through-the-heart tattoo. This particular tattoo motif is both common and readily legible, appealing to a symbolic cultural lexicon that is widely shared and understood.

A drawing from a book of tattoo designs by a nineteenth-century Lyonnaise tattooer shows a common nineteenth-century version of the iconic dagger-through-the-heart tattoo **(Figure 7)**. The book is now part of the collection of his contemporary, the French criminologist Alexandre Laccassagne, who carried out extensive research into tattooing and criminality during the last decades of the century. His work involved the collection of drawings of tattoos, most of which were traced directly from the skin of the tattooed; the tattooer's design book is unique within this collection. This particular drawing indicates the appropriate placement of the dagger-through-the-heart tattoo on the body: over the left side of the chest, above the heart. As can be seen in this example, the motif often employs the visual illusion (more or less effectively rendered) of appearing to be pierced through the nipple, with falling drops of blood. This element is common to nineteenth-century versions of the motif, which rely on the specific positioning of the tattoo to invoke the symbolically wounded heart, rather than including a representation of the heart itself (compare, for example, the contemporary version of this tattoo design reproduced in **Figure 8**). The specificity of body location essential to the symbolic legibility of this tattoo has historically restricted this version of the motif to men, on whose anatomy the design functions more ergonomically.[89] The design may or may not also include the hand that grips the dagger (an aspect to which I will return later in this chapter) - but in all cases this tattoo is intended to symbolise betrayal in love, a broken heart, or emotional sacrifice or suffering. The origin of this motif and its variants may be found in Catholic representations of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, which typically depict the heart of the Virgin Mary pierced with one or more swords, and wreathed in a garland of roses. This symbolism is thought to derive from the words of Simeon in the Gospel of Luke, who prophesied the Crucifixion when Mary brought the infant Jesus to the temple to be blessed, adding: 'A sword shall pierce through thy soul also.'[90] Numerous examples of the Immaculate Heart may be found in Christian art and architecture; the tabernacle door in the Notre Dame du Rosaire de Lourdes in France, for instance, features a gold relief of the Immaculate Heart pierced with seven swords (see **Figure 10**). The relation of the dagger-through-the-heart tattoo with romantic or devotional love of a woman may derive from this association with the heart of the Virgin Mary in particular, and goes some way to explain its early popularity

[89] Examples of the dagger-through-the-heart may be found on the female body during the twentieth century and contemporary era, though not usually placed over the heart. In women, this motif tends to be worn on the upper arm or thigh (see, for example, **Figure 9**). Hearts pierced by arrows and related imagery incorporating cupids may have a different, parallel iconographic source of origin, which is perhaps more closely associated with concepts of romantic love. It may be that these motifs traditionally hold a greater appeal for tattooed European women.
[90] The Gospel of Luke 2:34-35.

as a distinctly male choice of tattoo motif. Moreover, this interpretation would seem to correspond with early modern European traditions of tattooing, which combined devotional religious body marking with the travel souvenir in the form of Christian pilgrimage tattoos.[91] According to the eye-witness account of seventeenth century English traveller George Sandys, in Jerusalem 'they use to mark the Arms of Pilgrims, with the names of Jesus, Maria, Ierusalem, Bethlehem, the Ierusalem Crosse, and sundry other characters.[92] In fact, this practice went back at least as far the fifteenth century,[93] establishing a long tradition of devotional/souvenir tattooing in Europe. The dagger-through-the-heart tattoo may be viewed in the context of these traditions as an adaptation of broader Christian iconographic and devotional themes.

Contemporary tattoo designs have continued this process of adaption of the motif: Some, such as the tattoo 'flash' design seen in **Figure 8**, feature a scroll in which a lover's name may be inscribed. The phrase 'Love is Pain' is also popular (the word 'pain' in this image may of course also be tattooed, but in this case was most likely drawn by the tattooist to reinforce the meaning of the motif). Others incorporate a combination of popular symbolism; for example, the anatomical heart encircled by a snake, also a symbol of deception or betrayal, refers quite explicitly to the physiological component of a particular kind of emotional pain - a constricting, crushing pain in the chest that could best be described as heartache (see **Figure 11**). For the purposes of this discussion, the male version of the motif worn on the chest is particularly interesting as a distinctly masculine expression of emotional pain. That this psychological suffering is also rendered as a physical wound is significant; the tattooed image and the process of tattooing combining to conjure the visual expression of an ideal of masculine stoicism in the face of suffering.[94] The fact that the tattoo is in itself *an actual* wound, albeit a healed one, reinforces this effect. The Wellcome Collection contains a number of examples of this particular motif, ranging from the faintly fetishistic (see specimen number A670, **Figure 12**); to the very crude (see specimen number A684, **Figure 13**); to the artistically accomplished (see specimen number A524, **Figure 14**).

This connection between the choice of a particular tattoo motif and ideals of masculinity more generally pertains to the enactment of social meanings involved in the acquisition of the tattoo. Whilst there is no singular motivating reason why someone

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[91] Jennipher Allen Rosencrans notes that 'the only definitive account of early modern symbolic tattooing comes from the travel journals of the pilgrims who trekked to Jerusalem, marked their stay with tattoos, and returned to the British Isles.' p. 60, 'Wearing the Universe: Symbolic Markings in Early Modern England', in Jane Caplan (ed.), *Written on the Body*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2000). See also Juliet Fleming, 'The Renaissance Tattoo', pp. 61-82, in the same volume.
[92] George G. Sandys, *A Relation of a Journey begun An.Dom.1610*, (London: W. Barrett, 1615), p. 56.
[93] Juliet Fleming, 'The Renaissance Tattoo', p. 79.
[94] This also recalls the suffering of Christ and Christian practices of mortification of the flesh.

may become tattooed, there is nevertheless a common experience that inflects the practice, no matter where and when it is performed: physical pain. The first and most common question asked by the non-tattooed when the tattooed skin of another is encountered is usually: 'did it hurt?' The experience of pain can never be erased from the mark itself, even after it has healed; thus perceptions of the tattoo are necessarily bound up with the association of pain. It could be argued that he most dominant factor in becoming tattooed in contemporary European and North-American societies is the acquisition of the permanent mark; special emphasis is placed on the aesthetics of the tattooed image within these cultures, in which practitioners are increasingly viewed as artists.[95] Whilst this is quite a convincing argument in relation to contemporary tattoo culture, it does not seem to hold in the case of nineteenth-century European tattooing. Aside from the lack of technical skill of some of the tattooers, which is evident upon close material analysis of the Wellcome tattoos, they also suggest that the symbolism of the designs has greater importance than their aesthetic qualities. Anthropologist Alfred Gell points out that as a 'technique of the body', tattooing has 'an invariant processual contour' which is 'always and everywhere submitted to in its entirety.'[96] In what Gell terms the 'technical schema of tattooing', there are three necessary stages to tattoo acquisition, irrespective of the culture in which it is performed: (1) wounding, followed by bleeding and the insertion of pigment; (2) scab-formation, scarring, healing; and (3) the subsequent acquisition of a permanent indelible mark, frequently ornamental.[97] The emphasis paid to each of these stages varies from culture to culture, and to some extent determines how tattoos are understood within these contexts. For instance, traditional Society Island tattooing in Polynesia places the greatest value on the first stage, in which tattooing is predominantly regarded as a rite of passage.[98] In this context, the permanent mark thus functions as proof that the individual has endured the painful process of tattooing. In Samoan society, the tattooing ritual places more importance on the healing stage, during which the tattoo is 'completed' by the body, described by Gell as a phase of 'transitory crisis'.[99] In societies which attribute relatively little importance

[95] This is perhaps reflected by the shift in terminology from 'tattooist' to 'tattoo artist' that has occurred in the past thirty years; this theme will be taken up in relation to contemporary attitudes towards tattoo preservation in my concluding chapter.
[96] Alfred Gell, *Wrapping in Images. Tattooing in Polynesia*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 304.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid., p. 307.
[99] Ibid., p. 304.

to stages (1) and (2) but attach the greatest social significance to the permanent mark, as is the tendency in the West, tattooing has a somewhat different meaning.[100]

Whilst most tattooed European individuals may have historically placed value on the tattoo mark itself, the tradition of souvenir tattoos (see, for example, specimen number A784, **Figure 15**) acquired to mark a journey or pilgrimage would certainly suggest that in some cases, the tattoo stands for little more than the experience itself. This emphasis is also apparent in the dagger-through-the-heart tattoo, which far from seeking to erase the painful experience of tattooing and demonstrating aesthetic value, presents to the world a highly visceral image which draws special attention to corporeal suffering.

A consideration of the specific iconographic function of the dagger-through-the-heart tattoo requires some discussion of the complex connections between physical (haptic) and emotional pain. As mentioned above, the tattoo commonly provokes the question 'does it hurt?', although the nature of this pain is given little thought, as one can easily imagine how it may feel for the skin to be cut, scraped or grazed. The *location* of this pain is not commonly given to doubt by those who ask whether or not being tattooed hurt. However, this question is worth considering in relation to the dagger-through-the-heart tattoo, since the placement of this tattoo on the body has a specific signification. *Where does it hurt?* is perhaps a more pertinent question to consider in relation to this particular motif. This question is of course frequently asked as a matter of routine clinical enquiry by doctors and medical personnel. The answer, however, may not be so simple, since, as medical philosopher Francisco González Crussí points out:

> Pain, like all sense experience, is a private affair. It is fundamentally enigmatic and unknowable.[101]

When pain is experienced at the surface of the body, as in tattooing, we have at our disposal a wide vocabulary with which to describe the sensations - burning, stinging, cut, abraded, stretched, struck, pinched. For instance, I would describe the sensation of being tattooed as a kind of 'burning sting', both sharp and hot, superficial, and easy for the body to acclimatise to. The skin is 'acutely articulate' in registering a broad range of differentiated sensation. But what of interior sensation - the visceral, and by extension, the emotional? How might the preserved tattooed skin fragment specifically evoke emotional response in others?

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[100] For example, tattooing in these contexts may be a primarily acquisitive pursuit, in which a personal 'collection' of images connected to life experiences and memories are built up over time. Alternately, tattoos may be trophies. These themes will be taken up further in chapters three and four.
[101] Francisco González Crussí, *The Five Senses*, (London: Picador, 1990), p. 6.

The body's sensory capacities are currently most often defined in medical discourse by three categories of physiological schema: The first of these, *exteroception*, incorporates all of our five familiar 'external' senses, including our sense of touch. *Proprioception* refers to our sense of the body in space, as well as our balance, position and muscular tension. Finally, *interoception* includes all sensations of the viscera, or internal sensations of the body. Both proprioception and interoception may be regarded as broadly part of our haptic sense, and thus as extensions of our sense of touch. Interoception is particularly interesting for the purposes of this discussion, as for the majority of people it is for most of the time, a largely unknown realm of sensation, which is connected to transient, emotionally intuitive experience. According to philosopher Drew Leder, this is prefigured by the fundamental spatial boundary between interoceptive sense and the external world. As he puts it: 'the incorporation of an object into visceral space involves its withdrawal from exteroceptive experience.'[102] By way of example, he considers the experience of eating an apple, an act which utilises all five sense modalities: Before it is swallowed we can see, touch, smell and taste the apple, as well as hearing the distinctive crunching sound as we bite into it. Once swallowed, however, these multi-sensory possibilities are lost in the limited perceptual field of the interior. All sensation is thus reduced to one modality: 'inner sensation'. The crudeness of vocabulary and limits of this sensation are frequently a problem for diagnosing physicians who ask the question ‘where does it hurt?’ and ‘how does it hurt?’. Significantly, this 'limited interoceptive vocabulary largely centres around sensations that are *affectively* charged [...] visceral sensations grip me from within, often exerting emotional insistence.[103]

It is perhaps not surprising then, that the language of interoceptive perception is most articulated in relation to pain; most often we are only aware of interior organs when they ache and prompt what may be described as diffuse discomfort, cramping, dull aches and sickening queasiness. But this vocabulary is nevertheless limited in comparison with the various surface pain sensations of the skin. The generic and non-specific nature of these sensations is also attested to by their variety of causes - for example, stress, food poisoning and infection alike can all result in the same cramping sensation. Spatial positioning in interoceptive sensation is additionally very imprecise - it does not share the fine precision of hearing, sight or touch in locating stimuli. The borders of interior sensation are indistinct. The viscera, from which we derive much of our intuitive references to powerful 'gut sensations' are in fact actually quite

[102] Drew Leder, 'Visceral Perception', in Constance Classen (ed.), *The Book of Touch*, (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005), p. 335.
[103] Ibid., p. 336.

insensitive, to the extent that the intestines can be cut in two by a surgeon without a conscious patient feeling significant pain.[104] Whilst the pain register of tattooing is exteroceptive, the tattoo itself occupies equivalently ambiguous spatial boundaries to that of interoceptive sensation, both physiologically and conceptually: In the first instance, the tattoo appears at the surface of the body, but is suspended *within* the skin; similarly, it can also be understood conceptually as a conscious expression of internal life projected outwards, into the external social world.

Referred pain attests to the spatial ambiguity of interoceptive sensation particularly well, and provides a useful framework within which to consider the dagger-through-the-heart tattoo. Referred pain may be described as something taking place in one organ, which can 'experientially radiate to adjacent body areas or express itself in a distant location,'[105] and is commonly experienced by heart attack suffers. It is possible to conceptualise the tattooed symbolic instrument of emotional suffering, the dagger, as an expression of consciously inscribed referred pain, translating the difficult-to-define inner emotional experience into a publicly visible, heightened surface pain sensation. Leder speaks of referred pain as 'an almost magical transfer of experience [...] effected along both spatial and temporal dimensions.'[106] In my formulation, the surface of the body becomes the new spatial dimension upon which pain is registered in a form which is also acutely temporal - the permanence of the tattoo means that it functions as a lasting memory of corporeal, emotional experience. The cartography of pain is thus *sui generis* - it is not located by coordinates or distances; pain perception knows nothing of objectivity. As González Crussí writes: 'pain's distances are not metric and objective, but 'tactile and kinesthetic'.'[107]

It is precisely the indeterminate nature of *visceral* responses to human remains that intrigues me here. The tattooed dagger, placed deliberately over the heart on the surface of the body, may be regarded as an attempt to locate and fix an experience and memory of pain, to make it intelligible and definable to the outside world. The peculiar location of the tattoo, appearing at the surface of the body but suspended indelibly *within* the skin, further complicates the relationship of interior/exterior experience. The skin as both the site of social and intimate contact and a highly sensitive sensory medium, provokes a visceral response in others when it is breached, damaged, or broken. Through the inevitable wounding of the body surface, the tattoo transgresses

[104] Ibid., p. 337.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.
[107] González Crussí, *The Five Senses*, p. 7.

this boundary and invokes pain in the mind of the viewer, even when this is merely imagined, as in the case of the healed mark.

In the case of the preserved tattoo, the texture of the flayed skin adds a further dimension to the perception of painful corporeal experience: the death of the subject. The presence of death may be texturally apparent in the surface of the skin, as in the case of the tattooed skin covered in a dense layer of tiny bumps which have the textural quality of stiffened, coarse sandpaper (specimen number A576, **Figure 16**). What appears here to be 'goose-flesh' - a skin sensation commonly associated with both physical feelings of cold and emotions such as fear or horror - is frozen in the moment of death through the rapid preservation of the excised specimen. The visual and tactile presence of emotive sensation registered by the dead skin fragment is the same reaction we associate with a specific living sensation, except in this case it is caused by rigor mortis of the arrector pili muscles in the skin. The texture of this particular skin provokes a visceral sense of disquiet in myself as I handle it, conjuring the ghost of a sensation, which prickles uneasily over my own skin.

The material specificity of the substance which the tattoo takes for its ground - the skin and the living, sensitive body - is thus necessarily bound up with the potential meanings and significance of the tattooed image itself. As an embodied art form, much of the iconography relies upon the specific body location of the tattoo, or reference to vernacular speech or sentiment. A particularly striking instance of the nexus of tattooed sentiment, body location and emotional experience (and to some extent, physiological pain) is recounted in the journals of Makar Ratmanov, one of the crew on the *Nadezhda*, the first Russian vessel to circumnavigate the globe between the years 1803 and 1806. Encountering the tattooed inhabitants of Nuku Hiva in 1804, many of the crew underwent tattooing by the natives. Ratmanov wrote:

> Many of our officers and men had small figures tattooed on their hands and arms. The captain had an inscription done on his arm: Jllie [Julie] - the name of his wife whom he adores. I had the inscription done in a semicircle over the left breast above the heart: 'Je suis à vous' - 'I am yours'. All the officers felt pain. But I, having given my heart to you, my angel, was so excited making this sacrifice to you in this remote and savage part of the world, my darling, that I did not feel pain and felt that underneath the trembling heart says, 'Yes, I really belong to her'.[108]

[108] Makar Ratmanov, *Dnevnik, vedennyi vo vremia krugosvetnogo plavaniia I. F. Kruzenshterna na korable "Nadezhda" [Journal Kept during the Round the World Voyage of I. F. Kruzenshterna on the Ship Nadezhda]*, in Russian National Library; cited in Elena Govor, ''Speckled Bodies': Russian Voyagers and Nuku Hivans, 1804', in Nicholas Thomas, Anna Cole and Bronwen Douglas (eds.), *Tattoo: Bodies, Art and Exchange in the Pacific and the West*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 70.

What is remarkable about this account is the explicit connection made between the location on the surface of the body of the tattoo - 'over the left breast above the heart' - the tattooed sentiment, itself a dedication with the force of a vow, and the evocation of the 'speaking' heart which internally avers the external inscription - 'I am yours'. In this passage, the potency of his internal emotions whilst he is being tattooed is enough to render the process painless, describing instead a state of 'excitement' that may be read as an almost mystical ecstasy. Moreover, the devotional tone of Ratmanov's entry, addressed to his wife or mistress at home in Russia, and his quite deliberate recounting of the process of becoming tattooed as an act of sacrifice, encodes Christian notions of martyrdom and 'bearing witness' through physical ordeal.

Whilst this nineteenth-century Russian sailor's account is undoubtedly highly romanticised, the religious inflection in acts of devotional body marking such as this perhaps have their basis in Christian practices of mortification of the flesh. German Dominican priest, mystic and writer Henry Suso (Heinrich Seuse, 1295-1363), who was famed for his strict asceticism and inventive mortifications, is depicted in a number of iconographic works inscribing a Christogram onto his chest. In a fifteenth-century German woodcut, the saint is pictured kneeling in contemplation of the sacred heart, whilst appearing to inscribe the IHS Christogram onto his chest (**Figure 17**). Though it is important to point out that this inscription does not necessarily represent a tattoo in the literal sense, this has nevertheless been a common interpretation of this particular depiction of Seuse. A seventeenth-century painting of Suso by Spanish painter Francisco Zurbarán (1598-1664) also portrays the saint revealing marks inscribed on his chest, though in this case they appear more like cicatrices, or a brand (**Figure 18**). In the catalogue entry for a copy of this painting, held in the Wellcome Library Collections, the mark is explicitly referred to as a tattoo; the figure of Suso is described as, 'standing in a landscape, dressed in the Dominican habit, exposing a tattoo of the monogram of Christ on his abdomen and pointing to it with a stylus.'[109] Whether or not Suso was actually tattooed, these two images are intriguing in their portrayal of the saint engaged in acts of *self-touching*. His hands, whether read as gesturing to reveal the marks of his piety, or physically inscribing the marks themselves, are a central motif in the depiction of his devotion; furthermore, it is his chest on which the marks are exposed. Thus hand and chest (or perhaps more accurately, hand and heart) are enlisted in a complex symbolic confluence of gesture, unveiling and faithful testimony.[110]

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[109] *The Blessed Henry Suso*, after Francisco Zurbarán, (c.1636-38). Wellcome Library, London (no. 44830i).
[110] The common expression 'hand on heart', to mean that one is sincerely truthful, similarly recalls active gestures of self-touching, and provides another example of the close association between the language of emotion and the language of touch.

These observations return us to the hand in the dagger-through-the-heart tattoo. Whilst contemporary versions of the motif rarely include this element, it is by contrast very common in similar tattoos from the nineteenth century (see for example **Figures 7, 13** and **14**). The presence of the hand gripping the dagger in these early motifs is intriguing; both suggesting a close connection with Christian symbolism and inscribing a complex exchange between wounds inflicted by others and intentional acts of self-wounding. These exchanges may be further examined by asking the question, *whose hand is this?* The common interpretation of this motif is that the dagger symbolises an emotional wound inflicted by another - usually a woman - who has committed an act of betrayal. Thus the hand may, in the simplest sense, be a quite literal representation of the hand of the person who inflicted the emotional wound. However, the hand of both the tattooer and the tattooed is also implied in the tattoo. The tattooed person who submits themselves to the painful procedure of tattooing is engaged in an intentional and symbol act of self-wounding; the image of the hand-and-dagger retains a trace of this self-inflicted pain, which may be both self-determining and sacrificial.[111] The hand of the tattooer is also evoked in the tattooed image, as the hand that wields the instrument of torture in order to inscribe the permanent mark. Thus the hand in this version of the dagger-through-the-heart motif enacts a series of relational and negotiated acts of multiple self-becoming which may be summarised in the formulation: this person wounded me/I wound myself; this person tattoos me/I tattoo myself.

If certain tattooed images powerfully express experiences of emotional pain, others may be read as devotional. As we have seen, declarations such as the nineteenth-century Russian sailor's 'I am yours', and Christian religious symbolism may both be considered to fall into this category. However, tattooed portraits are also frequently understood as devotional, and are frequently worn as memorials to lost loved ones.[112] This interpretation is often reinforced by the placing of the tattoo over the breast, traditionally the male European's location of choice for emotive designs. One such example preserved in the Wellcome Collection can be seen in the right half of the pair of skin fragments taken from the anterior torso of one individual (see specimen number

[111] Some scholars have interpreted the dagger-through-the-heart tattoo as a symbol which functions as an oath, prefiguring the emotional intent of the tattooed individual, who seeks to avenge an emotional injury. Writing in 1960, the criminologist Jean Graven for example described this motif as an iconographic expression of the saying 'vengeance is a dish best served cold.' p. 90 in 'Le Tatouage et son Importance en Criminologie, IIeme Partie', in *Revue Internationale de Criminologie et du Police Technique,* Vol. 14 (1960). More recent publications reiterate this interpretation, describing the version of the dagger-through-the-heart motif exemplified by **Figures 7** and **14** as an encoded pictorial declaration meaning, 'Death to unfaithful women'. See Jérôme Pierrat and Éric Guillon, *Mauvais garçons: Portraits de tatoués (1890-1930),* (Paris: Manufacture de livre éditions, 2013), p. 82.

[112] See, for example Jane Caplan, 'Indelible Memories: The Tattooed Body as Theatre of Memory', in Karin Tilmans, Frank Van Vree and Jay Winter (eds.), *Performing the Past: Memory, History and Identity in Modern Europe*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), p. 133, Figure 6.6.

A555, **Figure 19**; see also **Figure 2**.) On the left side of the chest we see the hand gripping the dagger, which penetrates the breast just above the nipple. The dagger plunges into the chest, drawing blood, which is detailed in red ink, the colour reflected in a beautifully executed bloom of red roses beneath (see **Figure 14**). On the right side of the chest there is a large portrait of a young girl, which takes up an equivalent amount of space and complements the design on the left side of the chest (**Figure 19**). The proximity and prominence of these two tattoos suggests perhaps a correspondence between the two images, reinforced by the specific body location of the breast, and engendering associations with love, endearment, emotional intimacy and affection. The abdomen tattoo, on the other hand, may invite entirely different interpretations based on the proximity of the sexual organs (see **Figure 2**). In fact, the relationship between these tattooed images on the body of one individual is far more difficult to assess.

Remarkably, during the course of archive research in Paris, I came across a reproduction of a photograph of this particular individual, in a publication on nineteenth-century criminal tattooing,[113] to which I will return in more detail. This photograph pictures the man from just beneath the chin to mid-way down his thighs - revealing a far greater extent of his tattooing than could possibly be inferred from the two preserved skin fragments alone (**Figure 20**). The authors provide no contextual information citing the source or date of this photograph in the book. However, there is a one-line caption beneath the image, which reads:

> While the first of his lovers rests on his breast, truly and forever, the second took a more passionate, intimate place.[114]

The author who compiled this compendium of largely anonymous photographs, police superintendant of the Sûreté Nationale in Paris, Jacques Delarue, makes the quite extraordinary assumption that both of the female figures tattooed over this man's body were his lovers. Furthermore, it is clear from the caption that the specificity of location of the tattoo designs on the body strongly influenced the author's interpretation of their significance. The figure on the chest - placed literally and figuratively 'close to the heart '- is read as his true love, whilst the woman depicted in a domestic or cafe scene on his abdomen, is construed as his mistress, based entirely upon the proximity of this tattoo to his genitals. However, on closer inspection of the proportions of the body and face of

[113] Jacques Delarue and Robert Giraud, *Le Tatouages du 'Milieu'*, (Paris: L'Oiseau de Minerve, 1999), p. 101, plate 17.
[114] Ibid. Translated from the French:
Tandis que la première de ses amantes s'appuie vraiment sur son sein, et pour toujours, la second a pris sa place dans la plus chaude intimité.

the female figure tattooed over the right side of his chest, this tattoo appears to be a portrait of child, and not a grown woman. Perhaps then, this was a portrait of his child, or a young family member whom he held dear? Or perhaps not: The source of inspiration for this portrait, which occupies such pride of place over the right side of the tattooed man's chest, is drawn from an advertisement for Ridge's Patent Cooked Food infant formula milk, published in the British illustrated newspaper weekly *The Sketch* in 1893 (**Figure 21**). The likeness between the preserved tattoo and the printed advertisement is not approximate, but exact: Whilst the drying and shrinkage of the skin has distorted the child's face somewhat in the preserved specimen, her features, proportions, clothing, pose and the large urn against which she rests, are all faithfully reproduced by a skilled tattooist - very likely an early professional - working with hand-needles. The knowledge that the tattooed man photographed in Jacques Delarue's book in fact had no personal connection to the child whose likeness he had tattooed on his chest, complicates any reading of his tattoos based entirely upon the geography of the body. Whilst his tattoos certainly possess a degree of sentimentality, it is possible that the child's portrait was nothing more than an appealing image drawn from popular culture, and may not even have been the choice of the tattooed man himself. It is entirely conceivable that a skilled tattooist eager to display their talents selected this image, which would be all the more impressive executed in ink on skin.

The interpretation of this man's tattoos offered by Delarue is based on an uncritical reading of the spatial topography of the body, which conflates surface representation with emotional and visceral interiority, represented by the heart and the sexual organs respectively. Although the meaning of certain tattoo motifs is undoubtedly constituted in part by their placement on the body - as in the examples of the dagger-through-the-heart tattoo discussed above - this observation certainly does not apply to all European tattoos in general. Rather, the significance of body location in relation to tattoo design may be considered as a *tendency* that emerges from the embodied materiality of the tattoo and its intersection with particular cultural and historical formations of self. It is also worth mentioning another tendency, that of the specific pattern of 'reading' the body, which encourages the thematic connection of distinct elements and facilitates their incorporation into a coherent narrative whole. This pattern links images in the same manner as one follows text on a page, proceeding from left to right and top to bottom, reflecting a typically Western-Latin reading configuration.[115] According to this formulation, the flattened image of the tattooed body

[115] I must thank Dr. Florian Freitag for this observation and stimulating discussion during the 2013 *Probing the Skin* conference at the Friedrich-Schiller-University of Jena.

presented in the photograph is regarded as a text to be decoded, via a series of symbolic associations between images: For instance, the female figure who seems to rest her head on his chest, already construed as someone close to his heart, might also be the imagined cause of emotional pain inscribed by the dagger over the right side of his chest. These kinds of associative 'readings', implicit in the work of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century criminologists, underlines a tendency within their work to view the surface of the body as a page and the tattoo as inscribed text, constructing narrative connections between individual motifs where in fact there may be none.

The example of the Ridge's Food advertisement underscores some of the difficulties inherent in interpreting the tattoos of others. When dealing with human remains, and especially fragmentary human remains such the tattoos in the Wellcome Collection, this becomes increasingly problematic. Removed from the contextual anchor of the life that gave them meaning, it is often impossible to determine what these inscribed memories meant to their bearers. Any interpretation solely based on the iconography of tattoos must inevitably remain rudimentary.

In the case of the preserved skin of the tattooed man, the tattooed image of the child - or indeed the dagger-through-the-heart - may be read as *his* focus of devotion, which has been subsequently fetishised by the post-mortem collector: an image transcribed into living flesh, transformed back into an immutable image. In some respects, handling tattooed skins becomes akin to handling old photographs of people long dead:

> Like relics, photographs are validated through their social biography: ordinary remains (family snapshots) become treasured, linking objects to traces of the past, the dead, the fetishized focus of devotion.[116]

Imagined biographies of the tattooed subjects are similarly evoked with these fragmentary remains as they are handled: Like the family snapshot in a photograph album, which is enacted through active processes of remembering and associative linkage with other images, the preserved tattoo is charged with multiple narrative possibilities through both the connections that may be made between individual tattoo motifs, and related documents, of which the photograph is one example. In the case of the tattooed man outlined above, an interesting relationship between disassociated archive documents emerges; how might one relate to the materiality of the photograph and the tattooed skin in the image, as compared with the actual skin, preserved in an

[116] Elizabeth Edwards, 'Grasping the Image: How Photographs are Handled', in Constance Classen (ed.), *The Book of Touch*, (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005), p. 421.

entirely different museum context? Anthropologist and historian of photography Elizabeth Edwards describes the 'almost insuperable desire to touch, even stroke, the image' when she has observed people talking about their photographs. She writes that:

> From its earliest days the relationship with photographs has demanded a physical engagement - photo objects exist in relationship to the human body, making photographs as objects intrinsically active in that they are handled, touched, caressed.[117]

The photo-object, like the museum object, also engages with the body. Through the active construction of personal or historical narrative, the photograph is 're-temporalized and re-spatialized' as it is handled. As Edwards put it, 'there-then and here-now' become linked: Thus we are reminded of the early museum experience of Sophie de la Roche; in handling museum artefacts and photographs alike, vision, touching and the attendant construction of historical narratives combine to bridge 'insurmountable time and space', and facilitate affective experience. This conflation of time also played out in my own research: in concluding this chapter, I would like to consider an episode from my own ethnographic experience of handling archival materials, which has particular resonance for this discussion.

Pictures in Skin, and the Man in the Picture

The identities of the individuals from whom the Wellcome Collection tattoos were taken remain unknown, with one notable exception: The tattooed man whose torso tattoos have formed a significant part of my discussion of tattoo iconography thus far, and whose photograph I serendipitously stumbled across in a book during a research trip to Paris. I was subsequently able to trace this photograph back to its original archive source at the Préfecture de police in Paris. The original image, a glass lantern slide, includes the surname of the subject in the photograph and the date that the photograph was taken, written directly onto the glass plate: *Fromain, 27/07/1901* (see lower left edge, **Figure 20**). This information was cropped out of the image reproduced in Delarue's book.[118] A second photograph of a large tattoo on Fromain's back also survives; this is the only other piece of archival material pertaining to this individual held in the Paris archive. Finding a surname and a date to link these documents to was in some sense reassuring, though this information in itself does not tell us anything

[117] Ibid., p. 422.
[118] See chapter five for discussion of the significance of the cropping of this image in relation to the enactment of archive documents within criminological discourses on the tattoo and criminality.

about the life of the person in the photograph. Rather, it was my initial interaction with the photograph in the book, and the complex relationship between disassociated archival documents - the preserved skin, the photographic reproduction, and the print advertisement - that provoked deeper reflection.

When I first encountered the photograph of Fromain, I was in the laborious process of looking for potential matches between tattoos documented in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century photographs of tattooed criminals[119] and the preserved tattoos. The majority of the tattoo motifs in the Wellcome Collection are quite generic, consisting of regimental insignia, anchors and tattooed phrases that would be almost impossible to match directly with any individual soldier or prisoner I might come across in the photographs. The only exceptions to this observation are the detailed tattoos preserved in specimens A555 and A524 (**Figure 2**). Looking through Delarue's book, I turned the pages in the hope that I might see a design similar to those in the Wellcome Collection. But what I found was far more unexpected - and far more exciting. To say that it was a shock to see almost the entire body of a man whose preserved skin fragments I knew intimately, is an understatement: I was immediately struck by a peculiar sense of both familiarity and estrangement. The man himself seemed to emerge from the pages of the book almost whole, yet I was only familiar with parts of him. His face was cropped out of the frame, which registered as a frustration, but also told me that it was most definitely his tattoos that were the source of interest to the photographer; something we had in common. But what was perhaps most intriguing - other than the possibility that I might locate the original photograph in a public archive and find out more about him - was my sense of the 'aliveness' of this particular document. As a technology of memory, photography carries within it both the promise of death and the possibility of immortality.[120] It preserves, but as Elizabeth Edwards notes, it also *fractures*:

> In its stillness, deathlike as some commentators have argued, it contains within its frame, fracturing time, space and thus event, causing a separation from the flow of life, from narrative, from social production. In making detail, it

[119] There are a significant number of such photographs from this period, and a many can be seen in popular compendiums of tattoo photography; see for example, Delarue, *Le Tatouages du 'Milieu'*; Gérard Lévy and Serge Bramly, *Fleurs de Peau. Skin Flowers*, (Munich and London: Kehayoff, 1999); Jérôme Pierrat and Éric Guillon, *Le tatouage à Biribi. Les vrais, les durs, les tatoués*, (2004); and *Mauvais garçons : Portraits de tatoués (1890-1930),* (Paris: Manufacture de livre éditions, 2013), by the same authors. However, most of the photographs in these books are sourced from private collections, which are in many cases difficult to locate or access. Comparative collections of photographs will be discussed in greater depth in chapter four.
[120] As has been famously argued by Roland Barthes in his *Camera lucida: reflections on photography*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Cape, 1982).

> subordinates the whole to the part. It is indiscriminate, fortuitous in its inscription, random in its inclusiveness.[121]

Many elements of this characterisation of the photograph struck me as I handled the photograph of Fromain: Here I had before me a trace of his living body, removed from the context and narrative of his life and inserted into a new one in Delarue's book. Who had taken this picture and why? On this, the photograph was mute. I wanted to know *who* this man was, but he was both faceless and anonymous, the image reducing him to an inscription of the tattooed marks in his skin. And this particular photographic record was certainly fortuitous for me - a chance inclusion amongst the parade of photographs of anonymous criminals and miscreants presented in the book. Like the preserved specimen, the photograph has survived long after the death of the subject, and thus the image is imbued with a spectral presence.

As I handled the photograph, with the knowledge that this man was alive when it was taken clear in my mind, it became a kind of 'living' manifestation of the preserved specimen's subject presence. The isolated fragments of skin ceased to be specimens and became instead pieces of an individual, with fullness of form and corporeal specificity. I thus enter into a new relationship with this *individual*, whose tattoos are familiar to me, and whose skin I have touched. A facsimile of life inhabits the photograph, the ghost of a living subjectivity; the preserved specimen on the other hand *is* frozen death, yet it speaks of the deceased subject through the tattoo. Thus there is a twofold complexity to the notion of the 'authentic' or 'original' thing, and each manifestation contains differing complex ontological admixes of subject/object. The photograph may be regarded as a trace of the (almost) whole body, whilst the preservation is an original fragment of that body. These two entities, in relationship with one another, enter into a dialogue, generating multiple possible narratives.

The photograph prompted an effusion of new questions: What was the broader visual narrative to which this man belonged? Which narrative? One told by the body, through the tattoos inscribed on his skin? Or the narrative of the photographer, or photograph collector? And there are yet more possibilities, other contexts and actors, such as the doctor who excised and preserved the skin after Fromain's death, collating it into a new collection, or the criminologists who wrote about his tattoos in their texts. And then there was me; the historian seeking to unpick and weave together anew these disparate narrative threads.

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[121] Elizabeth Edwards, 'Photography and the Performance of History', in *Kronos*, No. 27: Visual History, (November 2001), pp. 16-17.

What we have then, are three interrelated artefacts, or documents, which are the dispersed fragments of intersecting histories. From the example of Fromain, we can begin to see the multiple potential ways in which the tattoo may be 'enacted': As the inscription of an emotional experience of pain and stoicism; through their reading and relational interpretation according to body location and the proximity of other tattoo designs in a book; through a photograph that records a trace of the tattooed body, incorporated into a criminal identification system; and finally as a post-mortem preservation, which fragments unitary elements, isolating the tattoos from the body and facilitating their further re-mobilisation and interpretation. Through these disconnected points in time and space - the skin preservation, the photograph, and the advertising image - we are 'offered glimpses of possible pasts'[122], pasts which are both encountered visually, and felt viscerally.

[122] Edwards, 'Grasping the Image', p. 423.

CHAPTER TWO

Material Analysis and Research Context

I initially set up my workspace at the Science Museum archives in a rarely used object packing room, across the corridor from the conservation labs. The room could accommodate the bulky and very noisy portable fume hood (referred to as "the elephant" by museum staff), as well as having long benches on which I could lay out the skins when analysing and photographing them. I was seldom disturbed there, yet I was in close proximity to the conservation labs with specialist conservation staff generally available should I have any questions about the collection or the working environment. From this work place, I began to meticulously photograph, document and measure each of the tattooed skins. What at first seemed like an arduous task, soon became a fascinating process of discovery – the longer I looked at them and handled them, the whirring suction of the elephant ever present, the more their material properties suggested to me their histories and prompted further research into historical techniques of tattooing, tissue preservation and the iconography of the tattoos. I began to consider the theoretical value of adopting a kind of auto-ethnographic approach, in which my sensory impressions of the collection are described and explored, and thought about how this might be combined with historiography. I soon found that some very interesting historical connections emerged from this initial approach.

In the previous chapter, I have touched upon the ways in which straightforward observation of tattoo iconography can begin to reconstruct a sense of the person, reanimating the body as a whole, and reinstating the fragment back into the (albeit ultimately unknowable) context of a life once lived. In the case of Fromain, connections made between disassociated archival materials provide a more comprehensive picture of his tattoos than the preserved skin fragments can offer alone. The police identification photograph affords a greater appreciation of the extent and entirety of his tattoos and their placement on the body. Thus visual apprehension alone may restore three-dimensionality to the fragmented and flattened-out body. However, perception is never experienced as a singular sensory modality, but is rather an inter-sensorial affair. Other senses offer different revelations.

In the context of a material analysis that will be the primary focus of this chapter, one of the first things to register is the distinctive smell of the skins. It varies from specimen to specimen, but some are highly noisome, with a complex scent that may be described as a pungent marine odour; similar to brine-soaked wood and dried seaweed, tangy and acidic, with an underlying mustiness. Throughout my interaction

with the skins, I have pondered what these smells may reveal about their organic substance and chemical composition. With this in mind, and eager to get to the bottom of the 'toxicity' issue, I raised the question of material testing of the skin with conservation staff early on in the project. Unfortunately, after some exploration of the possibilities, material testing was deemed not to be a viable option. Many of the physical testing techniques that could yield useful data, such as the composition of any chemical substrates in the skin surface, would involve destructive testing of the specimens. Whilst destructive testing could produce information invaluable to the future safeguarding of the collection, it nevertheless conflicts with one of the primary concerns of the museum: conservation. As Matija Strlič *et al* write:

> Heritage objects present particular problems for analysis either due to their uniqueness or due to diverging histories. Another problem is that it is often impossible to sample. This necessitates nondestructive/noninvasive methods.[123]

One such method proposed by Strlič that may be appropriate in this case is 'instrumental sniffing', which involves sampling the air surrounding an object in a contained space, and chemically analysing it for volatile organic compounds (VOC's). Strlič's observation that, 'the complexity of heritage objects is to an extent comparable to the complexity of living organisms'[124] seems strikingly apt when thinking about museum collections of human remains. VOC analysis can tell a chemical story about heritage objects, and provide 'a rapid diagnostic tool for the degradation and condition of [...] collections as well as evaluation of conservation treatments and material analysis'.[125] Each time I open a sealed container and the piquant scent of preserved human skin assaults my senses, I can only guess at the molecular character of their odours; using a mechanical tool to identify their constituent properties would seem to offer a good solution to avoid the problems of destructive testing. However, material analysis of the collection has not been part of the remit of this project – without access to the appropriate training and equipment, the possibilities that 'instrumental sniffing' may offer to an analysis of the tattooed skins remains entirely speculative. This is perhaps an avenue for future research. Smell, then - though highly provocative - remains merely suggestive.

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[123] Matija Strlič *et al*, 'Material Degradomics: On the Smell of Old Books', in *Analytical Chemistry*, Vol. 81, No. 20 (October 15, 2009), p. 8617.
[124] Ibid. Strlič's methodology, which he refers to broadly as '-omics', developed out of the field of metabolomics; the systematic scientific study of the unique chemical fingerprints left behind by specific cellular processes involving metabolites.
[125] Ibid.

Texture, on the other hand, is a trace of an altogether more specific kind. Encountered both visually and through touch, skin texture provokes an entirely different response to that of the tattooed image, which is primarily perceived visually. The skin itself may be tough and bark-like, unyielding and stiff; or soft and leathery, with an internal surface marked by surgical tools, or the intricately pitted trace of deeper body tissues, as can be seen in specimen number A666 (**Figure 22**). The impression of adipose cells, which remain in the connective tissue, or fascia, also reminds us that this specimen was once a part of a body with architecture, depth and interiority. Each skin reveals differences in excision technique, preservation methods and presentational aesthetics. They are simultaneously natural substance and created artifice; a peculiar coagulation of organic matter and chemical agents capable of freezing the impression of a living, feeling moment of somatic experience in time forever - the painful inscription of a tattoo, or even a shiver of cold (**Figure 16**).

Having previously explored the political, theoretical, ontological and emotive qualities of the collection, I now turn to the material composition of these hybrid entities: skin and ink. In what follows, I will describe and explore the specific qualities of their material substance, closely analysing their properties in order to begin reconstructing their histories and post-mortem afterlives.

First Impressions

In summary, the collection is composed of dry-prepared human skins, varying in size from a few centimetres square, to entire sheets of skin removed from the chests of a number of men, with nipples and hair still intact (see specimen number A600, **Figure 23**). Common features in the collection include frilled and punctured edges, formed during the drying process when the newly excised skins were laid out and pinned onto a flat surface. Many tiny pinholes result from this first stage of the drying method; as the skin begins to desiccate over days or weeks, it retracts around the pins, leaving a scalloped pattern along the edges of the specimen. Some specimens have then been trimmed carefully to remove these frilled edges, apparently to better present the skin as a neat, parchment-like surface. Such manipulations suggest both a careful attention to visual display and a striking correspondence between skin surface and writing surface, (an aspect to which I will return in chapter three). There are interesting incongruities too; whilst a large proportion have clearly been cut into shapes that frame the tattoos in the most economic manner possible, as in the case of the tattooed inscription *Campagne de Tunisie* (**Figure 24**), others have been crudely hewn through the tattoo-marks

themselves, and so do not present intact images, as exemplified in the collection of numerous tattooed female portraits over a portion of the chest (**Figure 25**). One might speculate a number of reasons for this; the body surface and tattoos may have been damaged due to injury prior to death, a distinct possibility given that a large number of specimens appear to have come from soldiers,[126] judging by their iconography; or the tattoos may have been harvested in haste, possibly by non-medical professionals seeking to earn some money from their black-market sale to collectors. The varying degree of skill with which the skins have been removed from the body and prepared may lend some support to the latter theory - as we will see, it seems more than likely that Lavalette did not prepare all of the skins himself, as he claimed according to Johnston-Saint's record.

The skin surface itself is highly complex, with visible adnexa such as hairs and nipples, as well as discernable structures deeper beneath the surface, such as capillaries. The skins also bear the traces of surgical tools; unidentified residues which may be chemical, organic, or both; and surface eruptions - all of which may reveal more about their excision and preparation through visio-material analysis.

Reflecting upon the particular articulations and 'visual and tactile attunements' of working with human bones Krmpotich, Fontein and Harries make the observation that:

> There are both congruities and incongruities between bones and flesh… the former conjure adjectives such as hard, dry, contained, stable, past, whereas the latter summon adjectives such as soft, wet, pungent, leaking, recent.[127]

In many ways, the skin may be considered the very opposite of bone in terms of both its substance and connotations: the skin is peripheral, whilst bone forms the structural core of the body; the skin is soft, malleable, fragile and transient, whereas bone is hard, unyielding, tough and enduring. The skin registers life experience on its surface, becoming ever more individuated and associated with living memory as we age; bone, on the other hand, more frequently symbolises anonymous death, the loss of specificity and self:

> We equate the vanishing of flesh which results in the skeleton with the vanishing of our memory in the minds of the living [...] Once the skin, muscles

[126] Following comments in Johnston-Saints' journals, it is reasonable to assume that the skins would have come from populations under institutional purview, (in barracks, military hospitals, prisons etc.); especially since it was these very populations who were the subject of late nineteenth-century criminological investigations into tattooing.
[127] Krmpotich, Fontein and Harries, 'The Substance of Bones', p. 377.

> and organs have fled their frame, the bones attest only to the fact that a life was lived. Except to the scientist, they do not offer the who, what, where, and when. The skeleton is the halfway point to not having existed at all.[128]

Whilst the incongruities between bone and skin are foregrounded in this analysis, it is the *congruities* that interest me here. Similar adjectives to those suggested by Krmpotich *et al* can also be used to describe the Wellcome collection tattooed skins: desiccated, callous, parched, dry, friable, stiff… Words that would not ordinarily be associated with living, sensitive skin. The transformation that has taken place upon death has reformed the skin into a substance with entirely different properties. But how was this transformation accomplished? To what processes have these fragments of human tissue been subjected, in order to render them stable and contained for the museum cabinet? An exploration of these questions requires both material analysis of the tattooed skins themselves, and consultation of historical sources on anatomy preservation techniques.

Preservation Techniques, Texture and Topography

Explicit references and descriptive accounts of preservation methods of tattooed human skin are extraordinarily rare in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century medical and forensic literature. This may at first seem surprising, given that a significant number of such specimens exist today in collections across Europe and America.[129] However, the scarcity of comments on the practice of post-mortem tattoo collecting may indicate that such activities were considered banal, routine and unproblematic – as mere medical curiosities preserved along with a range of other body parts considered useful for medical instruction. On the other hand, a lack of archival evidence of the practice may reflect an awareness amongst the physicians involved in assembling such collections, that their activities may well have been perceived unfavourably outside of the dissection room, pathology lab, or medical circles at large.

Indeed, Professor of anatomy Paul Poirier at the Faculté de Médecin in Paris found himself embroiled in some controversy when sections of skin were removed from the corpse of the executed murderer Henri Pranzini and made into a number of card

[128] Christine Quigley, *The Corpse: A History*, (1996), p. 9.

[129] Comparative extant collections have been documented during the course of this research at the anthropology department of the Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle (MNHN) in Paris; in the Department of Forensic Medicine at Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland; in the Berliner Medizinhistorisches Museum der Charité in Berlin; in the University of Leiden anatomical collections in The Netherlands; as well as a small number of specimens held in the pathology and anatomy collections of several London Universities. A number of these collections will be discussed in the context of collecting practices in chapter four.

cases for the Assistant Superintendent of the Sûreté in 1887. According to Henri de Rothschild, Professor Poirier had in fact been collecting tattoos from cadavers at the medical school for some time prior to the Pranzini affair. Writing under the pseudonym Andre Pascal, Rothschild relates this intriguing account of the episode:

> Professor Poirier had for some time been organising an anatomical museum for the Practical School, notably a very curious collection of tattooings taken from the corpses used for the students' instruction. He had had some intention of stripping thirty or forty square centimetres of skin from Pranzini's back to make himself a note-case out of this human morocco, but being obliged to leave Paris for some days, he gave up the idea. One of his students took it up, however, removed the piece of skin without permission and handed it over to Tramond, of the rue de l'Ecole de Medecine, the specialist in anatomical preparations, to have it tanned and mounted.[130]

This incident apparently caused uproar in the Faculty of Medicine and the préfecture de police, largely due to the unfavourable public attention drawn in the wake of what was one of the most sensational criminal cases of the period. It is interesting to note that Rothschild, himself a physician trained by Poirier at the Faculty, comments in his book that, 'the whole affair was certainly less serious than some people wished it to appear. Human skin, taken from the dissecting rooms of the Practical School had more than once been used to bind books.'[131] Dr. Gaston Felix Joseph Variot[132] had been responsible for carrying out Pranzini's autopsy in his capacity as doctor at the Central Prison Infirmary of La Santé prison. Speaking to the *Société d'Anthropologie de Paris* in May 1929, Variot described his recollections of the affair, and commented upon the source of public consternation regarding the theft of Pranzini's skin:

> After the autopsy, the remains of the corpse were taken down to the dissecting rooms at the Faculty's Practical School. Three weeks later, a full-scale scandal erupted over fragments of Pranzini's skin, which had been stolen to make card cases. The matter was blown up by the daily newspapers and such was the desire to satisfy the curiosity of a public eager for gruesome details, that there was even talk of defilement of the remains of the executed man and calls for harsh penalties for the perpetrator of the theft. There was no objection to the use of the body for scientific experiments and research, but the fact that the skin was used to make souvenir trinkets aroused indignation. Initially, Poirier, a holder of the *agrégation* qualification and head of anatomical studies, was

[130] Pascal, *Pranzini*, p. 273.
[131] Ibid., p. 275. Rothschild is undoubtedly referring to the collecting habits of Professor Andre Victor Cornil, Professor of Pathology at the faculty. He is reported to have favoured tattooed skin for use in his commissioning of many anthropodermic bindings, which will be the subject of further discussion in chapter three.
[132] Although Variot is best known as a pioneering paediatrician, writing extensively on infant nutrition, it is interesting to note that he also had a professional interest in tattoos and their removal, which will be explored at greater length in chapter five.

> accused as he was considered quite capable of taking a sample of skin from the corpse of an executed man to which he had free access. He habitually made boasts in this vein.[133]

Although it may have been deemed acceptable for doctors to carry out dissections and remove body parts in the normal course of their scientific work,[134] the suggestion that they may be collecting souvenirs from infamous corpses aroused abhorrence within the wider public. It is interesting to note that whilst Poirier's esteemed friend de Rothschild freely admits that the idea of fabricating a 'souvenir trinket' from Pranzini's skin was Poirier's caprice, Poirier himself avoided all blame for the incident, and the brunt of the scandal was effectively deflected onto the police. The Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, Dr. Brouardel, set up an inquiry in the wake of the scandal to try and find out who the culprit was. Poirier was able to prove his innocence and the blame fell instead on a morgue assistant named Godinat, who had apparently allowed police sergeant Rossignol to remove large strips of Pranzini's skin, in return for a glass of absinthe and a one hundred *sous* coin.[135] Rossignol had allegedly struck on the plan to have two card cases made from the executed man's skin himself, which he had then intended to present as gifts to the two Chief's of Police, Mr. Taylor and his Deputy Mr. Goron. Whoever was responsible, both Poirier and the upper echelons of police command managed to avoid any repercussions over the incident entirely.

Interestingly, Variot's discussion of the Pranzini affair also briefly mentions the tanning of a fragment of skin taken from another executed criminal named Campi, which was prepared in 1884 by Flandinette, a former technician at the Anthropology laboratory. Unfortunately, Flandinette's preservation methods are not described. However, Variot's comments do indicate an awareness of tanning methods, which he assesses as 'not difficult':

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[133] Gaston Variot, 'Remarques sur l'Autopsie et la Conformation Organique du Supplice Pranzini et sur le Tannage de la Peau Humaine' in: *Bulletins et Memoires de la Societe d'anthropologie de Paris*, 7eme serie, 1920-1929, Tome 10 (1929), p. 44. Translated from the French:
Apres l'autopsie, les restes du cadavre furent descendus dans les pavillons de dissection de l'Ecole pratique de la Faculté. Trois semaines plus tard un véritable scandale éclala à propros de fragments de la peau de Pranzini qu'on avait dérobés pour fabriquer des portes-cartes. L'affaire fut ampliffée par la presse quotidienne; pour défrayer la curiositée publique avide de ces détails macabres, on alla jusqu'a à parler de profanation des restes du supplicié et l'on réclama des peines sévères contre le coupable du larcin. On admettait bien que le cadavre devait servir aux expériences et aux recherchers scientifiques, mais on s'indignait qu'on eut pu utiliser la peau pour confectionner des bibelots-souvenirs. On accusa d'abord l'agrégé Poirier qui était chef des travaux anatomiques et que l'on considérait comme bien capable d'avoir fait un prélèvement de peau sur un cadavre de supplicié dont il avait la libre disposition. Il était d'ailleurs coutumier de fanfaronnades de ce genre.
[134] This may not be a straightforward assumption, since Variot himself came under criticism for carrying out experiments on tattoos excised from cadavers at La Santé.
[135] Variot, 'Remarques sur l'Autopsie...' p. 44. See also Pascal, *Pranzini*, p. 274.

> It is common knowledge that it is no more difficult to tan human skin than that of domestic animals such as calves, sheep, goats, etc. which are so heavily used for industrial purposes. When tannin from oak bark is ground and applied for a long period of time to skin, it combines with organic substances in the dermis which harden and thus become rotproof.[136]

Of all the historical literature that I have surveyed, there is only one article of no more than a couple of pages, which explicitly discusses the preservation of tattooed human skin. Given the scarcity of such material, I believe that it is worth discussing this article at length here, particularly since some of the techniques described bear striking resemblances to the collection at hand. Published in the *Wiener Medizinische Wochenschrift* in 1911, this short article is based on a talk given by Dr. Ludwig Stieda, who worked at the Anatomical Institute at Königsberg around the turn of the twentieth century. Stieda writes that the collection of the Anatomical Institute contained 200 tattooed skins; this collection, if still in existence, would be comparable with the Wellcome collection in terms of its scale. Beginning his first experiments in tattooed skin preservation at Dorpat, Stieda refined his methods whilst at Königsberg:

> For the last 25 years, I have been making a point of selecting any cadaver with visible tattoo marks and cutting out and preserving the skin pieces concerned. That is how this singular collection, perhaps unique of its kind, has come to exist.[137]

It is interesting to note that Stieda claims not to know of any other similar collections, and in fact considers his own to be unique; though he concedes that other such tattooed skin pieces *in natura* may well exist in other anatomical collections. Commenting upon his own practical experiences of experimentation in this area, Stieda distinguishes four different methods for the preservation of tattooed human skin, before going on to assess the relative merits and pitfalls of each one:

Method 1: The skins are first cleaned, then stretched flat on a piece of glass and stored in alcohol in glass cylinders or shallow glass jars. This method of preservation was commonly used for anatomical specimens of all kinds during the second half of the

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[136] Ibid., p. 45 Translated from the French:
On sait bien qu'il n'est pas plus difficile de tanner la peau de l'homme que celle des animaux domestiques; veau, mouton, chèvre, etc. dont l'utilisation industrielle est si important. Le tannin contenu dans l'écorce de chène broyé et mise en contact prolongé avec la peau, se combine avec les substances organiques du derme qui sont ainsi durcies et rendus imputrescibles.

[137] Ludwig Stieda, 'Etwas über Tätowierung', in *Wiener Medizinische Wochenschrift*, Vol. 61, No. 14, (April 1, 1911), col. 893. Translated from the German:
Ich habe es mir angelegen sein lassen, seit 25 Jahren von allen Leichen, an denen Tätowierungen sichtbar waren, die betreffenden Hautstücke herauszuschneiden und aufzubewahren. So ist diese merkwürdige Sammlumg, vielleicht die einzige in ihrer Art, entstanden.

nineteenth century. Comparative examples of tattooed skin originally preserved in this manner can be found at the Gordon Museum of Pathology in London (see **Figure 26**), although a number of these have since been restored in Kaiserling solution.[138] Stieda notes that whilst this is a highly practicable method for smaller specimens, it is much more problematic for very large pieces such as the skin of the entire chest or abdomen: 'one has to roll the skin pieces up and unroll them to demonstrate - all very inconvenient.'[139] This not only suggests that he was collecting very large portions of skin, comparable with some of the larger pieces in the Wellcome collection (see for example, specimen number A524, a large section of tattooed skin from a torso, measuring 408mm x 305mm, **Figure 27**), but that the primary purpose of this collection was teaching and practical demonstration to medical students.

Method 2: Perhaps most relevant to the Wellcome collection, is Stieda's description of his method for dry-preparing tattooed skin: First the excised fragments are rinsed in water and the fat layer on the reverse of the skin is scraped off; then the specimens are soaked in alcohol for up to several weeks to remove excess water from the tissues. Next they are laid flat on wooden boards and stretched taut by thread, until they are completely dry - no mention is made of pinning the skins to the boards, but it is reasonable to assume that the thread must be attached to the skin firmly, such that they will not separate or loosen under tension. A number of Wellcome tattooed skins still retain traces of materials involved in this part of the process; some have stitches still attached, threaded through the small puncture holes; another retains the embedded fragment of a metal pin used to pierce and secure the edges of the skin during drying. Once dry, the skins are coated in a mastic varnish until they appear almost transparent. Thus prepared, Stieda then stored the dried and varnished skins between sheets of white paper in an album.

Whilst the first four steps of this preservation method suggest strong similarities with the Wellcome tattooed skin collection, the final varnishing stage is conspicuously absent. There is only one tattoo in the collection that appears to have been varnished in the manner described by Stieda (see object number A643, **Figure**

[138] Johann Carl Kaiserling (1869-1942) was a German pathologist and pioneer of histologic and pathologic preservation methods. Kaiserling's method, first published in 1896, combined and added to the various formula then in use, and his process involved the use of three different solutions: I, a fixative, containing a mixture of formalin, potassium acetate, potassium nitrate and distilled water; II, a 'colour reviver' which consisted of 80-95% alcohol; and III, a preservative, in which the specimens would be stored, consisting of glycerin, potassium acetate and distilled water. The relative quantities of the different ingredients went through a number of refinements, but 'it is Kaiserling's method which has persisted as, basically, the most satisfactory method of preservation with formalin until the present day.' J. J. and M. J. Edwards, *Medical Museum Technology*, (1959), p. 70.

[139] Stieda, 'Etwas über Tätowierung', col. 893. Translated from the German:
Man muß die Hautstücke aufrollen, beiie der Demonstration auseinanderrollen - das ist alles sehr unbequem.

28). However, a similar collection of dried tattooed skins held in the anthropology department of the Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle (MNHN) in Paris, does contain a number of varnished tattoo specimens (see **Figure 29** for an example). The clarity of the tattoos is considerably improved through varnishing, the designs appearing bolder and more distinct. Varnished skins are also suppler, and generally appear to be in better condition as compared with unvarnished specimens. Stieda notes a curious disadvantage to his drying method however, which he identifies as a problem not related to the method itself, but which, according to him, is to be located in the constitution of the skin:

> As is well known, alcohol, carbolic acid, glycerine and now formalin are used in the conservation of cadavers for the anatomy preparation room; but as decomposition of the cadavers cannot be completely halted, curious crystals form in the inner organs and the skin, and cannot be removed when the skin is dried [...] In completely dry skin that has been rendered transparent, the crystals appears as large and small whitish spots, whose presence partly obscures the tattooed image, and so mars the overall impression.[140]

This account is rather intriguing, as there are a number of examples that would seem to match Stieda's description of 'imperfect' specimens within the Wellcome collection. Several of the tattooed skins show textured surface residues of small, hard white spots that cannot be removed, similar to those described by Stieda, although these skins are not transparent (see for example specimen number A567, **Figure 30**). Often, these spots will affect the entire surface of a specimen; occasionally they appear localised to particular areas.

In many cases, the skin surface is coated with grainy or dusty residues of different kinds: Indeed, the white, chalky appearance of some specimens has lead conservation staff at the Science Museum to recommend caution in their handling, as the white substance has long been suspected to be arsenic trioxide, commonly used in preparing animal skins during the twentieth century. Unfortunately, no material testing has ever been carried out to conclusively establish whether or not this is the case. In some cases, large areas of diffuse white discolouration affect the specimen unevenly, with no palpable coarse or dusty surface residues. In these examples, the tattoo is almost completely obscured by the white patches, such that the discoloured areas

[140] Ibid., columns 893-894. Translated from the German:
Zur Konservierung der Leichen des Präpariersaales wird bekanntlich Spiritus, Karbolsäure, Glyzerin, jetzt neuerdings auch Formol verwandt; da nun trotzdem die Fäulnis der Leichen nicht vollständig aufzuhalten ist, so bilden sich in den inneren Organen wie in der Haut eigentümliche Kristalle, die nicht fortzuschaffen sind, wenn man die Haut trocknen läßt [...] *An völlig trocken und durchsichtig gemachten Hautstücken erscheinen die Kristalle als große und kleine weißliche Flecken, deren Anwesenheit das tätowierte Bild zum Teil verdeckt, also immerhin den Gesamteindruck stört.*

appear to be *beneath* the epidermis. This is especially visible in specimens that retain surface patches of epidermis, since the colouration of these upper layers is usually much darker. This can be seen, for example, in specimen number A534, which shows a skin tattooed with a regal female figure in profile, dressed in long skirts and holding a flag staff, from which a flag billows out behind her (specimen number A534, **Figure 31**). The tattoo itself consists of a simple line drawing, however details of the design are lost in the areas most affected by the white patches. In particular, the area around the head and shoulders are so obscured that it is difficult to discern the outline of the headdress she wears. There is a marked contrast in the legibility of the tattoo in the areas affected by this discolouration, as compared with adjacent patches of darker, yellowish epidermis. Another aspect of this particular specimen that may suggest it was preserved according to Stieda's second method, is the surface texture of the upper layers of epidermis. A pattern of reticulation is visible in these surface layers, particularly around the edges of the specimen. Other similarly pale skins with occluded tattoos share this feature, which is also visible in specimen number A793, (**Figure 32**). This 'wrinkling' is caused by rapid dehydration of the surface layers of skin when immersed in alcohol, and is more commonly seen in older wet-prepared tattoo specimens, suggesting that this skin was pre-dried by soaking in alcohol (see **Figure 33,** for an example from the Gordon Pathology Collections, London, where the textured effect is clearly visible in the upper right hand corner of the specimen).

Method 3: Stieda considers treating with glycerine to be the most effective method for preserving tattooed skins. As in method two, the skins are first cleaned and the fat layer scraped off, as well as the upper layers of the epidermis, which must be 'removed by scrubbing'. The skins are then immersed in glycerine for between two to four weeks, depending upon their size and thickness; when removed from the glycerine they are initially quite hard, but when hung in a cool room for the surplus liquid to drain off, the specimens soften. Finally, they are dried with absorbent paper, spread flat and smoothed between two glass plates.

Stieda describes storing his own specimens preserved in this manner between glass plates in a wooden chest, which facilitates easy handling 'when demonstrating', clearly suggesting that these specimens had a practical use in the anatomical school. He also notes that tattooed skins treated by the glycerine method 'retain the colours and outlines of the figure drawings very well'. Despite his high recommendations for this preservation technique over and above methods one and two, Stieda is 'well aware that this glycerine method will probably find [...] few imitators', stating that whilst he has used this technique for over forty years, many other anatomy departments have hardly

heard of it. It is difficult to say whether any of the Wellcome collection tattoos may have been preserved using Stieda's glycerine method, or something like it; the only useful physical description he provides of these specimens suggests that they are soft once dried. Whilst there are a number of soft, leather-like specimens in the Wellcome collection, these generally have a powdery surface residue, which is perhaps more suggestive of the traces of chemical treatment. There are also a number of tattooed skins with marks on their surface indicative of scrubbing or scraping away the top layers of epidermis (see for example, specimen number A781, **Figure 34**), [141] although these specimens are actually stiff and parchment-like rather than soft. Stieda also makes no mention of whether the scrubbing away of the top layers of skin during the wet stage of preparation leaves any trace on the final specimen. Whilst it is possible that some of the Wellcome collection tattoos may have been preserved in this manner, it is impossible to know for certain without further descriptive accounts or images with which to compare the specimens.

Method 4: The final preservation technique mentioned in Stieda's article is tanning. However, as he himself admits, this method falls outside the usual range of a physician's skills and experience.[142] Though he offers no formula for the tanning of human skin, Stieda speculates that this would likely be the best way to preserve tattooed specimens. This is a reasonable assumption, and in fact a number of the Wellcome collection skins are relatively soft and pliable, not unlike leather. The production of leather of course has a long and complex history, and generally involves the fabrication of utilitarian objects, such as books, shoes and bags; within this context the manufacture of human leather has a very different array of significations, which moves beyond teaching collections such as Stieda's. Historical practices and methods of producing human leather will thus be further explored in chapter three.

Besides the description of his preservation methods, what is most interesting about Stieda's article is his attitude towards the practice of tattooing itself. Whilst he was clearly well aware of criminological debates surrounding the European tattoo and theories of criminality, he was not convinced by their arguments:

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[141] Other skin specimens in the collection that show signs of surface scrubbing or scratching to remove the upper layers of epidermis include: A732, A746, A756, A770, and A801. With the exception of A756, all of these skins have a very dark brown epidermal layer, perhaps suggesting a common chemical cause for the discolouration. It is assumed that in these cases, the dark colour of the upper layers of the skin would have significantly obscured the tattoos, necessitating its removal through manual action.

[142] Given that a tanner's techniques and trade are unlikely to be familiar to a physician, this makes Variot's comments on the straightforward simplicity of tanning human skin somewhat curious. As we will see in chapter five, Variot was perhaps unusual in that he had a working familiarity with tannin, which he used in tattoo removal on living patients.

> I do not concur with those authors who set out to draw inferences about the inner life of the persons concerned from the tattooed figures and signs. Efforts were made for a time to understand the tattooed figures as a further sign of degeneracy. In my view all that is completely mistaken.[143]

For doctors like Stieda, then, it seems that the tattoo held an entirely different source of interest to that of the nineteenth-century criminologist. From his brief comments we can infer that his collection was prepared for teaching purposes, though he does not elaborate on this educational programme, or what exactly preserved tattoos may demonstrate in terms of medical interest in themselves. Stieda may have been unaware of the collecting practices of other anatomists and pathologists; but tattoo collecting was also being practiced in other medical schools across Europe, including the Académie de Médecine in Paris, which we have already touched upon, and to which to which I will return in greater depth in chapters three and four.

Whilst the texture and visual appearance of the preserved skins can reveal a great deal about their material origins and afterlives, this information ultimately remains - like the specimens themselves - fragmentary and disconnected from their original context. Nevertheless, certain inferences may be drawn with a reasonable degree of surety. Such observations may be made, for instance, in respect of the excision techniques used to remove the skins from the cadaver. The thickness of the specimens, as well as the marks of surgical tools on their surface, reveals a straightforward removal method, carried out with more or less skill, across the collection. A pattern of grooves and ridges, which are present on the reverse, or 'flesh' side of a large number of the skins, indicates that the skin was first cut around the tattoos, sometimes in an economical manner to 'frame' the design,[144] and then gradually stripped away from the underlying fat tissue, using a series of short scalpel strokes combined with a manual pulling action, to tear the skin from the fascia (see for example, specimen number A669, **Figure 5**).[145] Depending upon how deep one makes the first incisions with the scalpel, more or less fascia may come away with the dermis and epidermis; occasionally the

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[143] Stieda, 'Etwas über Tätowierung', col. 896. Translated from the German:
Aus dieser meiner Darlegung geht mit Sicherheit hervor, daß ich nicht mit dejenigen Autoren übereinstimme, welche aus den tätowierten Figuren und Zeichen Schlüsse auf das Seelenleben der betreftenden Personen machen wollen. Es ist eine Weile versucht worden, auch die tätowierten Figuren als Degenerationszeichen zu betrachten. Ich halte das alles für vollkommen verfehlt.

[144] In specimens that have very little skin framing the edges of the tattoo, it is possible that the individual(s) who cut them from the body had little experience in skin preservation, and did not anticipate the extent to which the skin would shrink during the drying process.

[145] Fascia is found throughout the body, including between the skin and fat layers over the entire surface of the body. An appropriate analogy for its appearance between the skin and fat layers may be made in the white fibrous 'pith' that lines the inside of the skin of an orange. I am indebted to Dr. Wendy Birch, head anatomist at UCL's Anatomy Laboratory, for her invaluable insights into the structure and decomposition of human skin. Her practical demonstration of the correct surgical method for removing the scalp prior to brain dissection was particularly helpful in my analysis of excision marks on the preserved skins.

cuts have been made so deeply that a quantity of adipose (fat) tissue and adnexa such as small surface veins also remain intact (see for example, specimen number A676, **Figure 35**). It seems reasonable to speculate that a less skilled surgeon would perhaps remove more of this underlying tissue as a precaution, to avoid damaging the surface layers of the skin that they wished to preserve. Ordinarily, and according to Stieda's instructions, this tissue would then be scraped away whilst the specimen was still wet, before being laid out to dry. This stage has been conspicuously overlooked in a number of cases; some of the Wellcome skins measure up to as much as 5mm in depth at their thickest points, and retain a substantial amount of fleshy tissue (see for example specimen number A584, **Figure 36**). Inadequate or incomplete removal of the 'flesh' adhering to the inside of the skin will generally result in a poor quality preservation.[146] A thicker wet specimen will be more difficult to stretch on drying boards; moreover, the drying process will take longer, introducing a greater chance of putrefaction. Drying may also be unpredictable, occurring unevenly and necessitating re-pinning to the support throughout the process. The outcome of these procedures is a hardened, warped and undulating skin surface. An example of this is visible in the large fragment of skin mentioned above (A584, **Figure 37**); the photograph shows a series of deep, curving grooves in the upper portion of the specimen. The skin is completely rigid, with a tough yet soft texture, somewhat like compacted card. The curving shape of the cut and grooves suggests the camber of a shoulder, a difficult body part to stretch in ideal circumstances; a difficulty exacerbated by the excessive thickness of this specimen.

The question of the depth of the skin, and the marks inscribed by cutting instruments, have further intriguing implications. The thickness and shape of a specimen may suggest its original location on the surface of the body; a cut in that surface may be the result of traumatic accident or injury, rather than the work of a surgeon or pathologist. As I work through the tattoo collection in the archives, I habitually crosscheck my own observations with the museum's catalogue database. Most of the entries are brief and descriptive, and there is little, if any, useful historical information. Occasionally, however, I come across an interesting interpretative note that inspires further reflection. For instance, whilst working on specimen number A544 (see **Figure 38**), I read this comment in the catalogue:

Wounded human skin with various crude tattoos, probably French, 1850-1920.

[146] In traditional leather production, the hide of an animal must be 'split' - the surface layers are tanned to produce durable leathers, and the softer 'flesh' side of the hide is made into suede. This is not possible with human skin, as it is not thick enough, nor is its thickness even over the body surface.

The 'wound' in question is visible in my close-up photograph of the skin (**Figure 39)**: it is a straight, vertical tear, measuring 58mm in length, cutting through the centre left side of the specimen. The edges of the fissure are dotted with twenty-five small pinholes, suggesting stitching; but this wound never healed, and these puncture marks were not made with therapeutic intentions. The skin has been pinned in this manner to prevent the edges of the fissure from wrinkling and warping excessively. Since some shrinkage has inevitably occurred around the pins, the typical 'frilling' along the edges of the cut are present. On closer examination, the tear appears very straight and smooth-edged, suggesting that the cut was made with a sharp implement, such as a blade. The pinholes and the absence of any signs of healing indicate that this 'wound' was either sustained not long before death, or that the skin was damaged post-mortem. Tears and damage to the skin are not uncommon in the collection; there are numerous examples in which the tattoos are not preserved in their entirety. Particularly in the case of soldiers, who may have suffered extensive – and fatal – injuries prior to their tattoos being excised, it is possible to speculate that the collection of intact tattoos would often have been impossible.

Another interesting quality of this particular tattooed skin is its readily identifiable body-location. As I handle the skin, my observations lead me to conclude that it was once part of a lower arm; it roughly matches the length of my own arm up to the elbow, and the lower, rounded portion is very suggestive of a hand (see **Figure 38**). On laying the skin over my own hand, I notice a pattern of wrinkling consistent with knuckles corresponding with the spacing of my fingers, and the skin has shrunk and wrinkled in the fleshy space between the forefinger and thumb known as the 'anatomical snuffbox'[147]. Viewed with a backlight source, I see that the wrinkled areas of skin are much thinner, as would be expected over the surface of the knuckles (see **Figure 40**). As well as these textural features, there is also typical horizontal lining over the back of the wrist. The positioning of the digits suggests that this was a left arm. The shape and texture of the skin alone are very suggestive of body location in this case. However, close scrutiny of the tattoos strongly confirms the impression that this segment of skin belonged to a left forearm: Above a series of banded horizontal dots, a short 'bracelet' tattoo is visible, consisting of a decorative pattern of diamonds with a central heart motif. The crude male figure on the back of the hand is also tattooed upright, so as to be presented the right-way-up to others. A number of words and phrases are tattooed vertically down the arm, orientated towards the body in such a

[147] The anatomical snuffbox is a triangular deepening on the radial, dorsal surface of the hand. The name originates from the use of this part of the hand for sniffing powdered tobacco, or 'snuff.'

way that they would have been legible to the bearer - the most legible of these reads 'Mort Aux Vaches,' (see **Figure 41**). Thus a twofold exploration of skin texture, topography, and tattoo iconography can begin to reconstruct a sense of the living, three-dimensional body, reinstating the fragment back into its historical and corporeal context.

In summary, it seems apparent that no single preservation method was used to prepare all of the tattoos in the Wellcome collection. The variation in their colouration, texture, pliability, surface markings and residues, excision and odour all attest to range of preservation techniques, as well as suggesting multiple collecting practices and purposes. Whilst some may have been produced according to methods similar to those outlined in Stieda's article, close visio-material analysis of the collection suggests that a variety of methods were likely used, over a long period of time, and by a number of individuals.

Technique Tells a Story: The Late Nineteenth-Century Tattoo Trade

As material artefacts and human remains, the skins tell fragmentary stories of their material origins and fabrication. However, it is the tattoos that tend to provoke immediate fascination amongst those who view them. They are the undeniable 'skin features' for which this collection was assembled in the first place. Any analysis of the materiality of these hybrid entities thus requires detailed discussion of the iconography and formal aspects of the tattoos, as well as of the techniques involved in their production. The vast majority of the tattoos indicate amateur application, most likely by ordinary soldiers, seamen and semi-professional tattooers.[148] These men either operated an itinerant and opportunistic trade as they moved from place to place, or based themselves at seaports and in barracks. This conclusion is borne out by a combination of close visual analysis of both iconography and the tattooing technique evident in the tattoo marks themselves. In what follows, I will briefly outline some of the methods, tools and materials used in tattooing, paying particular attention to the

[148] Tattooer was the most commonly used English term during the nineteenth century, and reflects the informal and 'sideline' nature of the trade during this period. It was only with the emergence of the first artistically trained practitioners in the latter decades of the century, that the term 'tattooist' came into popular usage. Pioneering British artist Sutherland Macdonald is credited with coining the term, in a self-conscious attempt to elevate the status of the profession. Macdonald rejected the word 'tattooer', which he associated with manual trades such as 'plumber', preferring instead to be referred to as a 'tattooist', which sounded more like 'artist'. I reflect these nineteenth century terminological distinctions throughout my discussion of tattoo practitioners, using the term 'tattooer' to refer to non-professional Europeans operating on a casual basis; and 'tattooist' for early practitioners who set themselves up as professionals in shops, or for whom tattooing provided their sole income. There is no French correlate to these two terms; *tatoueur* translates interchangeably with tattooer/tattooist.

nineteenth-century European context, its clients and practitioners; before moving on to discuss selected examples of tattoo iconography, and what these designs may reveal about the tattooed men whose skin fragments now lie in storage at the Science Museum. The ways in which the nineteenth-century tattoo was read and interpreted by contemporary scholars in the fields of criminology and anthropology will also be briefly touched upon.[149]

The specifics of tattooing processes and practices varies widely from culture to culture, but the basic principle remains the same the world over: the skin is first punctured by a sharp, pointed implement which is loaded with a pigmented substance; alternatively, pigments may be rubbed over the fresh wound after the punctures have been made. The most commonly used method involves applying a series of rapid needle-pricks to the skin ('poking'). Other methods, such as those practised by the Māori of New Zealand, are more akin to 'carving'; relatively deep grooves are cut into the skin, before the pigment is rubbed in. More rarely, a 'skin sewing' method may be used, whereby a needle and thread or a stick dipped in pigment is drawn through the upper layers of the skin. According to anthropologist Lars Krutak, 'skin sewing was a widespread method for tattooing, especially among more northerly Arctic peoples who practiced it for over three millennia.'[150] Written accounts of some these stitching techniques were recorded by nineteenth-century observers: American soldier, explorer and writer William Gilder (1838-1900) described the tattooing methods among the Central Eskimo living in Daly Bay, Canada, which were generally performed by an elder woman in the community:

> The method of tattooing is to pass a needle under the skin, and as soon as it is withdrawn its course is followed by a thin piece of pine stick dipped in oil and rubbed in the soot from the bottom of a kettle.[151]

In 1926, archaeologist Otto Geist gave this description of tattooing in the Bering Strait region of Alaska:

> Soot is mixed with urine, often that of an old woman, and is applied with steel needles. One method is to draw a string of sinew or other thread through the eye of a needle. The thread is then soaked thoroughly in the liquid pigment and drawn through the skin as the needle is inserted and pushed just under the skin

[149] An in-depth analysis of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century criminological and medical field will be the subject of chapter five.
[150] Lars Krutak, *The Tattooing Arts of Tribal Women*, (London: Bennett & Bloom, 2007), p. 146.
[151] William Gilder, *Schwatka's Search: Sledging in the Arctic in Quest of the Franklin Records,* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1881), p. 250.

> for a distance of about a thirty-second of an inch when the point is again pierced through the skin.[152]

Many nineteenth-century criminologists who were interested in the European tattoo read about 'ethnic' tattooing in anthropological reports and the accounts of explorers, reproducing general accounts of these tattooing procedures in their own criminological studies.[153] Prior to the invention of the electric tattoo machine in 1890, the techniques and tools used by the European tattooer were simple and often highly unhygienic, a fact that did not escape the attention of medical officers of the Navy and other armed services.[154] All necessary equipment would be home made or improvised from whatever materials were available to hand. The tattoo design would first be outlined freehand onto the skin with a pen (early professional George Burchett describes using an iodine pencil[155]). Alternately, a pre-drawn design on a sheet of paper or cloth would be laid over the skin and lightly 'pricked' out through the template. Since the skin cannot be easily stretched beneath the paper or cloth sheet, this method of design transfer would have frequently resulted in asymmetric and ill-proportioned tattoos. Needles would normally consist of three to five fine points bound together on a long shaft made of wood or some other durable material; in Japan ivory was used. British tattooist George Burchett (1872-1953) describes the similarities in the hand-poking methods used by Japanese and European tattooists alike in his *Memoires*:

> The Japanese method is prodding. The ivory needle is held at an angle of between 30 and 45 degrees to the skin and is gently pushed under the epidermis. This, in fact, is the method by which Western tattooists worked before the advent of the electrical tattooing instrument which, itself, employs the same principle.[156]

Early examples of intricately carved ivory hand needles dating from nineteenth century England survive in the collections of the Horniman Museum in London (see **Figure 42**), and are extremely rare; objects of this degree of refinement would not have been used by the average European tattooer.

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[152] Cited in Krutak, *The Tattooing Arts of Tribal Women,* p. 150; from Otto Geist's unpublished field notes (1927-1934), held at the Alaska and Polar Regions Archives, University of Alaska, Fairbank.
[153] See, for example, Alexandre Lacassagne and Emile Magitot, *Du Tatouage. Recherches anthropologiques et médico-légales.* Extrait du dictionnaire encyclopédique des sciences médicales, (Paris: G. Masson, 1881), pp. 9-20. Lacassange sets out six different categories of tattooing technique; the fifth of these, which he terms 'tatouage sous-épidermique' describes skin sewing methods.
[154] French naval surgeon Ernst Berchon condemned tattooing as a major health risk. Berchon claimed that tattooing amongst seamen could result in serious infection, which in extreme cases could lead to amputation. He managed to convince the French naval ministry to ban the practice in 1861; however, the order was not enforced in practice.
[155] George Burchett, *Memoires of a Tattooist,* (New York: Crown, 1958), p. 66.
[156] Ibid., p. 65.

Once the design has been outlined on the skin, the tattoo needles are dipped into ink and applied to the skin at an approximate depth of 0.5 to 1 millimetre. Blood and ink continually flow during this process, obscuring the design; thus the area must be continually wiped with a cloth or rag as the tattooer works. The needles must also be constantly dipped into the ink, which is drawn up between the closely spaced needles by capillary action. A small tattoo such as a name or a date may take less than half an hour to complete; larger, more complex work requiring detailed shading (such as the two elaborate chest pieces belonging to Fromain discussed in the previous chapter) would take considerably longer, necessitating multiple sessions over weeks or months. In these cases, the outline of the design would usually be completed during the first session, and the shading carried out in subsequent sessions.

When analysing preserved tattoo specimens, the tattooing technique may be identified through close visual observation of the marks themselves. Different techniques bear key defining features. In this case we are primarily concerned with European puncture tattooing using needle bundles of varying sizes from around three to seven needles. In what follows, I will elaborate my own scheme for identifying specific techniques and describing common errors that strongly indicate amateur or unskilled workmanship, as well as outlining the features that constitute a well-executed tattoo:

(i) Beading - this occurs when needles penetrate too deeply into the skin and ink is allowed to leak into the surrounding tissue and fat layer beneath the dermis. This looks something like a dot-to-dot drawing, in which a line that should otherwise appear smooth is interrupted by a series of 'beads' (see for example, specimen number A733, **Figure 43**). Beading results from an error in judging the correct needle penetration depth (known as the 'throw' of the needle when using an electric tattooing machine), and thus indicates amateur or unskilled work. As in my discussion of excision technique outlined above, similar awareness of the correct depth at which to apply one's instrument - be it scalpel or tattoo needles - will determine whether or not preservation and tattoo alike are well-made, aesthetically pleasing, and will to some extent affect their durability (see point v. *fading*, below). Often, a bad tattoo and a bad preservation will have much in common in so far as much depends upon accuracy of depth. This correspondence between the work of the tattooist and anatomist arises from the natural material properties of human skin, such as thickness, texture, elasticity and grain.

(ii) Feathering - this occurs naturally as cells age and pigment particles migrate into neighbouring tissues, but it can also develop much earlier when needles are

applied to the skin at an angle of less than around 30 degrees, or if too much ink is introduced to the skin too heavily (see specimen number A783, **Figure 44**). This is much more common when hand tools are used in tattooing.[157] Commenting on the handiwork of some of the early professional American tattooists, Samuel Steward describes the way in which poorly applied tattoos degrade over time due to excessive feathering:

> Some of the old artists, now dead, did not do work that would be satisfactory by modern standards. They used outline machines that were too thick and heavy, making delicate fine-line work impossible. Their small stuff "closed up" - that is, the slight spreading of the outline that occurs in every tattoo was very marked in their work. A name, for example, in which the letters were adequately spaced when first put on, might in three years' time become unreadable. The letters "n" and "m" would close together; the loops in the "a" and "e" would come to look like "o". Many of the old boys never really learned to tattoo well during the early years of their experience, and went on to the ends of their lives doing second-rate work, botched, imperfectly shaded and excessively heavy.[158]

(iii) Application of line - within the Wellcome Collection, the use of hand tools is evident in almost all of the specimens. In this method, hand manipulated needle bundles of varying size[159] are used to build up a solid design through a series of individual dots. Unskilled or amateur execution is easier to determine when a hand-poking technique is used, as it is typically far harder to master than machine operated tattooing. So long as one has steady hands, and one's needles and voltage has been correctly set to begin with, a good tattoo machine will to a large extent ensure consistency of depth and line. An unskilled tattooer is more likely to produce lines of uneven thickness or lines with a clearly visible string of dots (the aforementioned beading), rather than a smooth, consistent line (see specimen number A584, **Figure 46**

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[157] I draw on both personal experience of tattooing clients and working in tattoo studios here, but similar observations can be found in a range of practical tattooing guides and tattooists' memoires. See, for example D. W. Purdy, *Tattooing. How to Tattoo, What to Use and How to Use Them,* (1896); Louis Morgan, *The Modern Tattooist,* (1912); Burchett, *Memoires,* (1958); and Samuel Steward, *Bad Boys and Tough Tattoos: A Social History of the Tattoo with Gangs, Sailors, and Street-Corner Punks, 1950-1965,* (New York and London: Harrington Park Press, 1990).

[158] Samuel Steward, *Bad Boys and Tough Tattoos*, pp. 157-158. The same observation may be made of the work of some of the early UK professionals whose reputations may have been greater than their tattooing abilities. In the course of many conversations with Jon, one of the security staff at Blythe House, it transpired that he was descended from a famous family of British tattooists - the Knights. His aunt was the UK's first professional female tattooist, Jessie Knight, and he spent much of his youth at tattoo studios in the company of tattooists. He told me that he had been tattooed on both of his forearms when he was eleven years old by the 'King of Tattooists' George Burchett, who by that time was an old man. He allowed me to photograph these tattoos, which are heavily feathered today (see **Figure 45**).

[159] It may be possible to measure the diameter of individual 'spots' to determine an estimate of needle grouping size; typically a grouping of three or five needles would be used for line work, or seven for very large, bold designs that would be later filled in with solid shading, such as 'neo-tribal' work.

for an example of smooth, fine line work; compare with object number A633, **Figure 47**).

(iv) Prior preparation/ stretching of the skin - inattentiveness to either of these elements of the process is usually indicated by the asymmetric appearance of the completed tattoo design. This results from one of two possible causes: lack of artistic skill combined with inadequate design stencils or transfers, or a failure to adequately stretch the skin during tattooing. Many of the tattooed images in the collection are unevenly executed, suggesting minimal or no prior preparation of the design. This would again imply amateur application using minimal available resources - a professional tattooist would use an outlining pen, or later hectographic carbon paper, to transfer an outline of the design onto the skin prior to beginning the tattoo. Freehand tattooing is considered to be an extremely skilled technique, which is only practiced successfully by professionals who are highly advanced in their field. Good draughtsmanship and some degree of art training are essential in freehand tattooing. Tattoos applied in a freehand manner by an amateur practitioner commonly appear asymmetrical once the tattoo has healed (see, for example, specimen number A631, **Figure 48**). When working with preserved tattoos, one must exercise critical judgement in order to determine whether or not distortion of a tattoo design has been caused by shrinkage of the skin during the drying process, or poor tattooing. In both instances, inadequate stretching of the skin, living or post-mortem, will cause distortion of the tattoo.[160]

(v) Fading - this of course occurs naturally to some degree with age, but should never result in a complete absence of ink in whole areas of a design, unless the ink is introduced to the skin at too shallow a depth. This is the opposing problem to that of beading, but results from a similar error of judgement in correct needle depth, and is also common in amateur work (see, for example, specimen number A663, **Figure 49**).[161]

(vi) Shading technique - in respect of the Wellcome collection, in most cases this does not differ from the technique used to apply outlines, as a 'prodding' or

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[160] This observation makes the skill of the tattooist responsible for the child's portrait over the right portion of Fromain's chest (**Figure 19**), and the condition of specimen A555 all the more remarkable. Tattooed portraits are notoriously difficult to execute without some distortion in the features; the skin over the chest is also one of the more difficult areas to stretch properly. Similarly, some degree of shrinking in the skin would be expected during the dry-preservation process; this would be more apparent in a tattooed portrait. Despite these challenges facing the tattooist and anatomist alike, there is very little difference in the appearance of the child's face in the photograph of the living tattoo (**Figure 20**) and the post-mortem skin preservation.

[161] The issue of fading in tattoos is interesting, both in relation to historical discourses surrounding the indelibility of the tattoo, and contemporary claims made for 'semi-permanent' tattoos, which involve puncturing the skin, rather than decal transfers.

'pricking' method using a hand tool to produce individual dots grouped closely together to form coloured or shaded areas (a circular motion is used when shading with a machine). Traditional Japanese tattooing and skilled hand-poke artists excepted, this tends to produce undifferentiated block colour with little gradation of light and shade. There are some interesting and varied examples of dot work shading in the Wellcome collection; this technique has been used in some tattoos to fill in lettering with solid colour, as can be seen in the tattooed phrase *Enfant du Malheur* (Child of Misfortune) shown on specimen number A554 (see **Figure 50**). Other examples use evenly spaced dots to give the impression of shaded areas; this can be more or less effective according to the skill of the tattooist and the quality of their instruments. Compare, for instance, the crude application of dots to shade the petals of the tattooed flower in specimen A807 (**Figure 51**), with the extraordinarily fine rows of dots depicting hair texture in the female portrait in specimen A629 (**Figure 52**).

There are also a handful of tattoos that show some evidence of machine application. For example, the cross section of a tattoo depicting a female portrait in profile with a checked headscarf (see **Figure 46**) shows very fine line work and patchy colouration using a circular motion. This patchy effect occurs when not enough ink is applied to the area, and may in this case be the result of using a needle grouping which is too fine - possibly using the same fine needle bundle for both lining and shading. This would not be professional practice, but may indicate a relatively skilled amateur with limited resources, or an apprentice to the profession.

As well as considering the traces of tattooing technique, some interesting observations may be made regarding to the pigments used in the collection. Tattoo ink was limited to black for the majority of tattoos in the nineteenth century; Indian ink produced the best results and was favoured by professionals who could afford to invest in quality pigments. However, the majority of tattooers would have made their own pigments using carbon-based materials such as soot (lampblack) and charcoal, which could be mixed up into a solution with water, saliva,[162] or urine. Other colourants could include writing ink, bleachers blue, or indigo, which produced a blue-black result. Red tattoos were much less common, as the ores involved in the manufacture of red

[162] Saliva was commonly used to mix pigments, moisten needles, or even clean the skin before, during and after tattooing. These unsanitary practices were reported in a number of medical journals, and were implicated in the spread of infectious diseases such as syphilis and tuberculosis. See for example, F. R. Barker, 'Notes Of Cases On An Outbreak Of Syphilis Following On Tattooing', in *The British Medical Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1479 (May 4, 1889), pp. 985-989. See also Gemma Angel, 'Atavistic Marks and Risky Practices: The Tattoo in Medico-Legal Debate, 1850-1950', in Jonathan Reinarz and Kevin Siena (eds.) *A Medical History of Skin: Scratching the Surface,* (London: Pickering Chatto, 2013), pp. 165-179.

pigments are highly toxic.[163] Red mercuric sulphide occurs naturally, and has been manufactured for use as a pigment since the early Middle Ages. The pigment was referred to interchangeably as vermilion or cinnabar, although vermilion became the more commonly used term by the seventeenth century.[164] Since the toxic effects of mercury were historically well known, it might seem strange that cinnabar was used in tattooing at all. In European tattooing, red pigments were not commonly used pre-twentieth century, with red inks tending to be used sparingly for small areas of embellishment. The Wellcome Collection possesses only a handful of tattoos containing red dye; out of three hundred tattoos only thirty one contain red pigments,[165] which are generally used to highlight or shade small areas of a design. In one case red has been used to outline a tattooed date - 'c.1874' (specimen number A569). There is marked variability among these pigments, which may be described as fitting into one of three categories: (i) intense, almost iridescent red; (ii) dull purple-brown reds; and (iii) pale rose. The majority of red tattoos fall into the third group, in which the pigment tends to be exceptionally degraded. The red ink in these tattoos is considerably more faded than the black ink used in the same designs, and one often has to look very closely to see any trace of pigment. For example, in the small tradesman's tattoo that depicts a blacksmith accompanied by the name 'DELACOUR' and the date (1862), a light red pigment has been used sparingly to depict a glowing hot iron being worked on an anvil (specimen number A618, **Figure 53**). There are, however, a number of specimens containing exceptionally bright ink, which have lost none of their vivid red colour (see, for example, specimen number A687, **Figure 54**). Microscopial analysis of small areas of skin containing these reds has shown a pigment crystal structure consistent with wet-process vermilion, which has a high cinnabar content (see **Figure 55**).[166] On the basis of these samples, it is possible to determine which pigments have a high cinnabar content by eye. Most cinnabar was mined in China during the nineteenth century, and Chinese vermilion was considered a superior hue to the European pigment. Due to the high cost of cinnabar mined in China, European vermilion often included adulterants such as brick, orpiment, iron oxide, Persian red, iodine scarlet, and minium (red lead) - an

[163] Cinnabar, the common ore of mercury, was highly valued for its bold red pigment despite its toxicity.
[164] Rosamund Drusilla Harley, *Artists' Pigments c.1600-1835: A Study in English Documentary Sources*, (London: Butterworth Scientific, 1982), p. 125.
[165] See Appendix II for a full list of all tattoos in the collection containing red pigments (object numbers marked in red).
[166] Rutherford Gettens, Robert Feller and W. T. Chase, 'Vermilion and Cinnabar', in *Studies in Conservation,* Vol. 17, No. 2 (May, 1972), p. 50. I would like to thank Dr. Ruth Siddall at UCL Earth Sciences for her collaboration and expertise in identifying these pigments.

inexpensive and bright but fugitive (impermanent) lead-oxide pigment.[167] This may explain why there is marked variability amongst preserved tattoos containing red inks, in terms of both permanence and vibrancy of colour: The more commonly available and cheaper European variety of vermilion used by some nineteenth century tattooists likely contained additives which reduced colour saturation, and made the pigment more susceptible to light-degradation over time. Thus a visual comparison of red pigments may suggest that a small number of the Wellcome tattoos were made in parts of Asia where purer forms of cinnabar based pigment were more widely available.

When considered in conjunction with the historical literature on the nineteenth-century European tattooing milieu, the technical elements of tattooing described above can provide a valuable insight into the provenance of the Wellcome Collection tattoos. Whilst a number of professional tattooists were practicing during this period (predominantly in the UK and the USA), only a handful of tattoos in this collection bear the signs of professional workmanship. A professionalised trade had not yet emerged in France in the 1890's, and most tattooers were occupied in other trades. An interesting glimpse of the tattooer's trade comes from Daguillon's 1891 study of the tattoos of the insane, in which he lists the primary professions of the tattooers, as well as those of the asylum inmates.[168] Out of sixty five tattooed men observed at Ville-Evrard asylum, Daguillon reported fourteen cases tattooed by soldiers; eleven by sailors; ten by ordinary workmen; six by vagrants; six who described themselves as professional tattooers; five who tattooed themselves; two tattooed by children; one by an inmate of a military prison; and one by a prostitute, the only mention of a female tattooer. In nine cases he lacked any data on the tattooer's profession. Daguillon's figures, though limited, reinforce the assumption that tattooing was predominantly carried out socially amongst comrades in specific military and manual working occupations. This is also reflected in his data on the 'salaries' of the tattooers: in forty-three cases the tattoo was executed for free; on five occassions it was paid for 'in kind' (for example, with a cup of black coffee, a glass of wine, or dinner). Only in eight instances were tattoos paid for in cash, with prices ranging from twenty centimes up to two francs; the tattoos executed by professionals being included within this category.[169]

Whilst studies such as Daguillon's can provide interesting data on the nineteenth-century tattoo milieu, such material is necessarily limited by its sample and

[167] Nicholas Eastaugh, Valentine Walsh, Tracey Chaplin and Ruth Siddall (eds.), *Pigment Compendium: A Dictionary of Historical Pigments*, (Oxford: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann, 2004).
[168] Daguillon, 'Contribution a l'étude du tatouage chez les aliénés', in *Archives d'anthropologie criminelle,* (1895), pp. 175-199.
[169] Ibid., p. 180.

scope. Considering the ways in which the tattoos of the working and under classes were characterised by the middle-class medico-legal professionals of the period, whose writing will be discussed in more depth in chapter five, the issue of the class-basis of the practice is raised. Numerous late nineteenth-century nobility and royalty were famously tattooed by the early 'tattoo art stars', such as Burchett and Macdonald - receiving a great deal of high profile commentary by the contemporary press. Thus it is evident that the contemporary fascination with the practice was not limited to the soldier, seaman or 'recidivist', as many nineteenth-century criminologists writing on tattooing assumed. Indeed, a far more complex and nuanced class picture emerges from the historical material, in which British royal military figureheads in particular, appear to have played a part in reviving long-standing traditions of pilgrimage tattooing on journeys to the middle east and Asia, reinforcing the practice of 'souvenir' tattooing already popular amongst the lower ranks. The frequency of souvenir tattoos within the Wellcome Collection may attest to this popularity.

Moreover, the iconography of the tattoos can further tell us something about the people to whom the tattoos belonged during life. Tattoo designs could either be drawn from imagination, or design 'flash' sheets and books. Surviving design books from the nineteenth century are rare, but one such example exists in the *fonds Alexandre Lacassagne* at the Bibliothèque municipale de Lyon (see **Figure 56**).[170] In the Wellcome Collection, common phrases and motifs may be broadly categorised according to their iconography. Describing the tattooed images and text; the physical condition of the skins; taking detailed measurements and making photographic records; these are the first tasks involved in my cataloguing of the collection for the museum database. Categorising the tattoos according to their iconography was a natural extension of this work, in order to make sense of the material in the first instance. However, I am wary of reproducing the assumptions found in much historical literature on the tattoo (and particularly in criminological works), which tend to make unproblematic correlations between iconography, meaning and the 'social type' or character of the tattooee.

Before describing the range of images and text found within the Wellcome collection, it is however worth considering the taxonomies of tattoo motifs formulated by late-nineteenth-century scholars' characterisations that would persist well into the twentieth century. Whilst these categorisations are inherently limited and even potentially misleading, the Wellcome Collection was assembled during a period when the development of such taxonomies held strong interpretative currency; thus it is

[170] This book, which belonged to a Lyonnais tattooer and dates from 1889, contains dozens of drawings of tattoo designs and their locations on the body. A number of these images bear close resemblance to specific tattooed skins within the Wellcome collection, and will be discussed at greater length in chapter four.

conceivable that the present collection may in fact reflect the collecting priorities and interests of these early researchers.

One of the earliest attempts at classification by genre of tattoo image was produced in 1855 by French medico-legal expert Auguste Ambroise Tardieu (1818-1879).[171] Tardieu studied the tattoos of fifty one inmates at civilian prisons and hospitals, assigning the images he observed to seven different categories, listed in order of frequency: (i) miscellaneous figures; (ii) military emblems; (iii) love tokens; (iv) initials, names and dates; (v) religious emblems; (vi) professional or trade emblems; and (vii) obscene images.[172] All of these categories are represented within the Wellcome Collection. In my own scheme outlined below, I have noted the frequency with which particular motifs appear - numbers listed on the right refer to number of tattoos, rather than individual specimens, which may carry several tattoos. Some motifs also cross categories, for instance a regimental insignia may also fall into the naval, anchors category. The most commonly occurring motifs are listed below:

Military:

i.	Regimental insignia	20
ii.	Regimental names	12
iii.	Military costume and weaponry	18
iv.	Medals	3
v.	Other (name, date and number)	2

Naval:

vi.	Anchors	9
vii.	Nautical stars	9
viii.	Other (ships, fish, mermaids)	3

Souvenirs (Geographic/Military):

ix.	Sahara (A523, A528, A784)	3
x.	Africa (A647)	1
xi.	Tonkin (A523)	1
xii.	Tunisia (A626)	1
xiii.	Algeria (A528)	1

[171] Auguste Ambroise Tardieu, *Étude médico-légale sur le tatouage considéré comme signe d'identité*, (1855). Tardieu's taxonomy was reworked and refined by a number of other criminologists, of whom Alexandre Lacassagne was the most significant.
[172] Ibid.

xiv.	China (A739)	1
xv.	Morocco (A537)	1

Patriotic:

xvi.	Coats of arms and flags	5
xvii.	Slogans*	3

* "Honour au Armes"; "Republique Française" x2

Religious:

xviii.	Islamic (crescent moon and star)	7
xix.	Christian (crucifixes*)	3

* In the case of specimen number A617, the tattooed crucifix represents a gravestone, and thus also falls into the category of memorial tattoos.

Circus/Performers:

xx.	Clowns (male)	3
xxi.	Tight-rope walker (female)	1
xxii.	Juggler (male)	1
xxiii.	Strongman	1
xxiv.	Dancers/acrobats* (female)	3

* Specimen number A627 is ambiguous; whilst the female figure's attire resembles a typical nineteenth-century acrobat's costume, the tattoo could equally represent a mistress or prostitute. Another of the tattoos depicts a woman pirouetting on a balance ball (object number A598).

Other image categories include: slogans and declarations; names, dates, initials and love tokens; memorial tattoos; female figures and busts; male figures and busts (which may be divided between those in regimental costume listed above, and historical characters); animals; plants and flowers, the most common of which is the pansy (the French flower of remembrance, appears thirty-six times) - these are frequently represented either in pots (commemorative) or single stems, often accompanied by a phrase and/or initials; inanimate objects (such as bicycles); and trade insignia. There is also a handful of miscellaneous designs so idiosyncratic, that they defy categorisation entirely - a pig riding a bicycle, for instance.

Based on the range of iconographic images and phrases, it seems reasonable to conclude that the majority of tattoos in the collection belonged to members of the foreign legion[173] and other soldiers, as well as marines and ordinary working men. Whether or not many of these individuals also served time in military or civilian prisons is far more difficult to determine. Johnston-Saint's journal record claims that at least some of the skins had come from 'murderers and criminals of all nationalities.'[174] But whether this is borne out by the tattoos themselves, or by perceived wisdom about them, is hard to tell.

Considering the tattooed skin fragment from a left forearm discussed in some detail above (specimen number A544, **Figure 38**), there are two tattoos which match descriptions of typical 'criminal tattoos' in the criminological literature. Perhaps the most interesting of these is the tattooed phrase 'Mort Aux Vaches', which literally translates as 'Death to Cows', and is a well-known slur aimed at the French police.[175] This particular phrase apparently originated during the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871), when French soldiers used it as a term of abuse for the German 'Wache' (guard, or sentinels). The similarity of the word 'waches' to the French 'vaches' may explain the evolution of the expression 'Mort Aux Vaches', which was extended as an insult specifically to the police and gendarmes, and ultimately to anyone in uniform. In fact, the insult was considered so provocative that some offenders appeared in court charged with verbally abusing officers of the law. Writing in 1901, Anatole France gives some insight into the use and meaning of this expression in his satirical *L'Affaire Crainquebille* (The Crainquebille Affair). The hapless Jerôme Crainquebille is accused of insulting a police officer. During his trial, his defence clarifies the terms of the insult for the court:

> My client is accused of having said: 'Death to cows!' The meaning of this phrase is in no doubt. If you flip through the dictionary of slang, you will read: 'Vachard, lazy, idle; stretching lazily like a cow, instead of working.' – Cow, who sells out to the police; snitch. "Death to cows!" is said in certain circles.[176]

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[173] See, for example specimen number A532, **Figure 57**, which is tattooed with a 'grenade' insignia and regiment number, a popular regimental motif of the Foreign Legion. The addition of the wreath framing the grenade is very similar to the 2nd infantry regiment insignia, which usually depicts the grenade within a horseshoe.

[174] Johnston-Saint, *1929a. Johnston-Saint Reports Jan-Nov 1929*, (Saturday June 15th), p. 9.

[175] 'Death to Pigs' would be the equivalent insult in English.

[176] Anatole France, *L'Affaire Crainquebille,* (1901), pp. 46-47. Translated from the French:
On accuse mon client d'avoir dit : 'Mort aux vaches!'. Le sens de cette phrase n'est pas douteux. Si vous feuilletez le dictionnaire de la langue verte, vous y lirez : "Vachard, paresseux, fainéant; qui s'étend paresseusement comme une vache, au lieu de travailler". – Vache, qui se vend à la police ; mouchard. 'Mort aux vaches!' se dit dans un certain monde.

According to some writers, a shorthand version of this expression consists of three dots arranged in a triangle, tattooed between the forefinger and thumb, in the region of the anatomical snuffbox (see **Figure 58**). This anti-police slogan has been strongly associated with criminality, and the shorthand version in particular has been read as a form of obscure and cunning criminal 'argot'. Twentieth-century French criminologist Jean Graven writes that, 'a variety of dots [...] speaks its own more discrete and mysterious language, which initiates find easy to decipher.'[177] However, the signification of the three dot tattoo varies greatly depending upon national and historical context. For instance, it has also been associated with sailors, who traditionally received three dots to mark their first voyage. In his lengthy (and frequently contradictory) account of the iconography and meaning of 'criminal tattoos', Graven also reports that 'a ring or bracelet with a diamond designates penal servitude.'[178] French police superintendent Jacques Delarue confirms this interpretation in his 1950 book *Les Tatouages du "Milieu"*, in which he reproduces drawings of these motifs (see **Figure 59**).[179] This interpretation of bracelet tattoos comprising of diamonds, and geometric patterns of dots, is problematic when one considers the complex cultural exchanges that were often involved in tattoo acquisition among Europeans. Indeed, the modern European tattoo contrasts with the traditional tattooing of many tribal societies in a variety of ways: It is not intrinsically connected to one's place in the community as in Māori society; unlike Samoan tattooing, motifs are not prescribed; nor is the process culturally embedded in ritual practice as it is in the Marquesas; it is seldom performed therapeutically as is often the case amongst the Kabyle of Algeria; and neither are European designs conceived as a single, ergonomically placed artwork, as in the case of traditional Japanese tattooing. Of course, all of these elements are present to some extent in European tattooing practices. Moreover, I would suggest that its very mutability is a defining feature of the European tattoo: It is frequently marked by heterogeneity, assimilation of foreign tattoo styles, and idiosyncrasy, which arises from an individualism that links specific marks with personal experience.

The forearm skin in **Figure 38**, for instance, presents a highly complex array of tattooed symbols, which may have multiple cultural reference points. The numerous dots, which are arranged in vertical and horizontal rows, are interspersed with a series

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[177] Graven, 'Le Tatouage et son Importance en Criminologie', p.91. Translated from the French:
Les différents points parlent aussi leur langage, plus discret encore, plus mystérieux, mais facile à déchiffer pour les initiés.
[178] Ibid., p. 90. Translated from the French:
La bague on le bracelet de chaîne avec un diamant, désigne le bagne.
[179] Delarue and Giraud, *Le Tatouages du "Milieu"*, p. 50 and p. 64.

of small crosses; such designs bear striking resemblance to the traditional geometric tattoo patterns found amongst the Berber in Tunisia.[180] The diamond-patterned bracelet, and the form of a triangle with a series of short diagonal 'spikes' along the outer edges, are very similar to the drawings of traditional hand markings in Dr. E. Gobert's 1924 study of Tunisian tattooing[181] (see no. 4, from the town of Mateur, in particular: **Figure 60**). On the other hand, the image of a tattooed heart pierced with arrows and a male figure, Latin lettering, and of course the confrontational phrase 'mort aux vaches', are distinctly European. The word 'Lavene' tattooed vertically down the forearm is a French surname, possibly the name of the individual to whom the tattoo belonged; thus these tattoos may represent broad transcultural influences, rather than a life of criminality and penal servitude, as some criminologists might assume.

Other tattoo motifs mentioned in the work of Graven and Delarue can be found within the Wellcome Collection: those tattoos described as 'identification marks relating to a sentence served in a particular prison or an appearance before a particular court.' Veterans of the Calvi punishment centre are reported to have been identified by a bunch of grapes;[182] the drawing in Delarue (**Figure 61**) is almost identical to the tattoo shown in **Figure 62** (specimen number A708). A second example in the collection (specimen number A701) includes the addition of a tattooed pansy to the design - perhaps indicating a punishment not easily forgotten. Another tattoo motif, consisting of a crescent moon with a lantern suspended from the top point (see **Figure 63**) is particularly interesting; according to Graven, a similar motif known as the *falot* consists of 'a crescent moon adorned with a lantern attached at the top point and a black cat seated on the lower point: it designates individuals who have appeared before the military court (*le falot* in slang),[183] (see **Figure 64** for a drawing of the traditional *falot*, from Delarue). What, then, are we to make of specimen number A704, which is identical in every detail, but for the black cat? Is there some more complex signification at work in this particular version of the motif - perhaps the black cat refers to the

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[180] It is important to point out that these tattoo motifs are usually applied to women as protection and fertility symbols. Whilst it is possible that specimen A544 came from a woman's body, the French phrases are perhaps more suggestive of a soldier of one of the French colonial regiments, stationed in North Africa. It was not uncommon for soldiers to acquire tattoos in the regional style whilst stationed abroad; as outsiders to the region, the issue of gender-appropriate tattoos in that culture would likely have been considered unimportant. There are numerous tattoos in the Wellcome collection which make explicit reference to a North African military context - see, for example A626 (**Figure 24**) and A532 (**Figure 57**).
[181] E. Gobert, 'Notes sur les tatouages des indigènes Tunisiens', in *L'Anthropologie*, (1924), pp. 57-90.
[182] Graven, 'Le Tatouage et son Importance en Criminologie', p. 91. See also image plates 7 and 9 in Delarue and Giraud, *Le Tatouage du "Milieu"*, p. 93.
[183] Graven, 'Le Tatouage et son Importance en Criminologie', p. 90. The full passage in French reads: *Tout une série de tatouages représentent les marques d'identification du passage dans tel pénitencier ou devant tel tribunal; la date de l'événement accompagne parfois le signe. Le plus classique est le falot, c'est-à-dire le croissant de lune orné d'une lanterne accrochée à la corne supérieure et d'un chat noir assis sur la corne inférieure: il désigne les individus ayant passé en conseil de guerre (le falot, en argot).*

outcome of a military trial? Or could the absence of the cat indicate that the bearer managed to avoid a court appearance? Does the addition of a face in the moon have any special significance?[184] Alternatively, the crescent moon and lantern tattoo in the Wellcome Collection could be entirely unrelated to the *falot.* This example underlines the polysemous character of the tattoo and the ambiguity of their meanings. Whilst it may have once been a recognised military-penal tattoo popular with court-marshalled recruits, such motifs may have later been adopted out of nostalgia, as a fashion, or for aesthetic reasons, much in the way that traditional European sailor tattoos such as swallows and anchors are worn today by young people who have no affiliation with the navy.

Certainly the only specimens in the collection that are known to have come from the body of a criminal, are the two halves of the chest piece belonging to Fromain, whose photograph was taken for police identification purposes on his arrest for an unknown crime. Ironically, there is nothing in the iconography of his tattoos that would suggest a link to a criminal milieu. Given the frequency of traditional military designs, and taking into account observations of technique, as well as the historical diffusion of tattooing amongst military populations, it seems more than likely that the majority of tattoos in the Wellcome Collection were produced in barracks, at sea, or in ports, workshops and pubs using limited resources by non-professionals - a few striking examples of more skilled work notwithstanding.[185] Attentiveness to the materiality of the tattooed skins can reveal a great deal about their bearers, their fabrication into objects, and their origins as collection pieces. Following the material clues, we are inevitably lead back to the historical literature on tattooing in Europe, and into a world constructed through the fragmentary stories of sailors, early scientific expeditions to the South Seas, practices of ethnographic collecting, and the beginnings of criminal science. These collecting contexts and discourses will be explored at greater length in chapters four and five respectively.

From Iconography to Archive

Whilst many tattoos in the Wellcome Collection share common (and familiar) iconography - such as nautical stars and anchors - other motifs are somewhat more difficult to identify. It is often these more unique designs, however, which lead to the

[184] Examples of this motif that include the "man in the moon", but not the cat, appear in Delarue and Giraud (plate 2, p. 91), and in Jérôme Pierrat, *Le tatouage à Biribi* (2004), p. 30. Both of these versions of the motif are described by their authors as *le falot*.
[185] These will be discussed at length in subsequent chapters.

most fruitful archival sources. Take, for example, specimen numbers A754 and A747 (**Figure 65**). These two specimens were stored separately and no connection between them was made in the museum catalogue. However, when pictured side-by-side, the relationship between the two becomes visually apparent. Both segments of skin are of similar dimensions, A754 measuring W144mm x H86mm, and A747 measuring W137mm x H88mm. Both are tattooed in a similar, amateur style with two large eyes, each with short, thick eyelashes and thick black eyebrows. Hand-held needles were used, as evidenced by the tattoo itself, and both eyes were likely tattooed by the same tattooist. Furthermore, when placed next to one another, it is clear from the orientation of the eyebrows that they were intended to form a pair, and that A754 and A747 are the left and right eyes respectively. But if these tattoos were originally a pair, as the images themselves seem to suggest, then why preserve them as separate specimens and risk losing the significance of their iconographic entirety? This question naturally leads me to consider where on the body they might have been worn. Analysing the condition of the skin and the tattoos more closely gives an indication of their former location on the body. When handling them, I found the skin to be hard, non-pliable and unusually thick. Turning the skin over, the reverse side reveals a textured pattern of rounded depressions. This 'dimpling' is caused by relatively large adipose cells, which have left an impression in the fascia, as the skin has dried – suggesting that this skin has been removed from a fleshy area of the body such as the buttocks (see **Figure 66**).[186] Both skins are also particularly hairy, covered with a layer of short, curly hair. Given the scale of each eye, and that they have been collected as separate specimens, this further suggests that they came from the buttocks, where it would not have been possible to remove one continuous section of skin which preserved both tattoos intact.

In fact, two eyes tattooed onto the buttocks was at one time a fairly common motif amongst sailors, and has a long iconographic tradition going back to at least the middle of the seventeenth century. Though this kind of tattoo would have largely remained hidden by clothing during life, there are historical references to this particular tattoo. Known as the 'King of Tattooists', George Burchett relates this encounter with a client in his memoirs:

> A sailor breezed in, a tall, strapping boy, fresh from a long voyage to the Far East. He just wanted two eyes tattooed. Two bright blue eyes like his own. That seemed simple enough. I told him it would not take long and mentioned the fee he would have to pay. The boy looked round, went to the couch and let down his

[186] I must once again thank Dr. Wendy Birch at UCL Anatomy Department for her invaluable observations and insight here.

> bell-bottom trousers. 'I want the eyes tattooed on my buttocks; one on each cheek and looking straight ahead.' It took me a moment to recover. 'Why on earth do you want two eyes glaring out of your bottom?' I asked. 'To be able to see what's happening behind my back,' he replied. 'Some sauce, you wouldn't be able to see much when you were sitting down,' I told him.[187]

Whilst there is certainly an element of bawdy humour behind this design, authors Scutt and Gotch suggest that such motifs 'probably sprang from naive superstition, akin to warding off the evil eye.'[188] A surgeon captain and dermatologist in the Royal Navy, Ronald Scutt describes the eyes-on-the-buttocks tattoo as 'not uncommon', and presents two photographic examples in his book *Art, Sex and Symbol* (**Figure 67**). In this particular example, the meaning of the tattooed eyes is underscored by the accompanying statement 'I see you.' This tattoo also appears in collections of early French criminological photographs, many of which have been anonymously reproduced in a number of popular books on the subject.[189] One of the earliest iconographic sources in which the tattooed eyes appear is the 1653 engraved frontispiece from John Bulwer's fantastically titled *Anthropometamorphosis: Man Transform'd, or the Artificial Changeling. Historically presented, in the mad and cruel Gallantry, foolish Bravery, ridiculous Beauty, filthy Fineness, and loathesome Loveliness of most Nations, fashioning & altering their Bodies from the Mould intended by Nature. With a Vindication of the Regular Beauty and Honesty of Nature, and an Appendix of the Pedigree of the English Gallant.* The frontispiece pictures various peoples of the world, their bodies modified according to cultural tradition, including tattoos, scarification, earlobe stretching and piercing, as imagined by the author. Amongst this cornucopia of exotic foreigners appears a figure in the lower left hand corner, with two eyes tattooed onto his buttocks (**Figure 68**). This tattoo motif still appears today, and is generally an exclusively male choice of tattoo motif, though its female counterpart exists in the form of two eyes tattooed onto the breasts.[190]

In this case, the materiality of the tattooed image and the skin combine to tell a story about the broader context within which these hybrid entities sit historically; both in terms of the context of the individual body into which it was inscribed, and the social

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[187] Burchett, *Memoirs*, p. 180.
[188] R. W. B. Scutt, and Christopher Gotch, *Art, Sex and Symbol. The Mystery of Tattoo,* (London and New York: Cornwall Books, 1986), p. 98.
[189] See, for example, plates 26 and 27 in Delarue and Giraud, *Les Tatouages du 'Milieu'*, p.108.
[190] Having discussed this tattoo motif with an informant who had two eyes tattooed onto his buttocks whilst working in an all-male factory environment, it would seem that in a contemporary context at least, this design represents a playful enactment of normative male heterosexuality in social contexts where collective same-sex nakedness is routine. In this case, my informant told me that he had decided to get this particular tattoo after joking about it in the showers with his male colleagues, one of whom was the son of an ex-sailor who had the same tattoo. Thus the tattoo, though unseen by others in his day-to-day life, was always intended to be seen by his male colleagues in the communal showers at his workplace.

environment that the individual occupied and which enacted the tattoo's significance. From this and other examples explored throughout the thesis, it is possible to see how the iconography of the tattoos themselves 'speak' of their origins, and lead me to relevant archives which can shed further light on their object-histories.

CHAPTER THREE

The Body Strip't Bare: Flaying in Myth, Folklore and Medicine

Having looked in some depth at the material properties of the collection, it is worth turning now to the interconnected histories within which these materials are enmeshed; keeping in mind the multiplicity of these narratives and the contingency of their particular historical, geographical and cultural locations. Leaving aside tattooing practices for the moment, I instead want to focus upon the substance which the tattoo takes for its ground - the skin. It would be impossible to fully understand the Wellcome tattooed skins (or for that matter any practice of tattooing at all) without considering the deeper cultural and iconographic significance of human skin. Whilst chapter one looked in some detail at the complex relationship between physiological, sensory and emotional exchanges related to the skin, what I am interested to explore here is the broader cultural symbolism of skin, and of the flayed skin in particular.

The significance of skin as both a bodily and social boundary has thus far been touched upon, but not elaborated in great detail. In this chapter, I will seek to explore the complex and historically shifting relationship between dualities of self/society, internal/external, surface/exterior, and the special attention skin has received in articulating these exchanges through imagery and narrative, as well as social practice and ritual. Flaying may be considered the most extreme of these practices, and the image of the flayed skin has had (and continues to have) a potent significance within many cultures.

Furthermore, the peculiarity of preserving skin, and particularly dry-preserving or tanning skin, warrants an expanded approach, not limited to the preservation methods and practices available to the anatomist, discussed in the previous chapter. Whilst Stieda's methods are illuminating, suggesting some possible techniques and purposes for the preservation of tattooed human skin within a medical context, this author was, by his own admission, unable to comment on tanning processes, which may also have relevance to human skin preservation practices. The Wellcome Collection tattooed skins may be regarded as partial flays, some of which have been preserved in a manner reminiscent of parchment or leather; the small specimen tattooed with an inscription for instance, has the fine, pliable yet fragile texture of a thin parchment (specimen number A795, **Figure 69**). Other skins in the collection possess a more leather-like quality, and are by contrast much thicker and softer, such that one could almost fold them double without risking any damage to the specimen (see, for example, specimen number A534, **Figure 31**; also specimen number A753).

The production of human leather and its manipulation into a variety of objects of use, has a long and complex history, which is frequently linked with corporal punishment (as a method of execution through flaying alive or the use of the skin after death), martyrdom, domination of an enemy and trophy collecting, and occasionally devotional or medicinal fetishism.[191] This chapter thus sets out to trace the intersecting cultural and historical enactments of the flayed skin through mythology, folk medicine, corporal punishment, trophy collecting and medical practice.

Mythical Flaying: Punishment and Martyrdom

> Flaying is both a remote and a contemporary practice; it is a recourse of law but also a form of 'poetic' or moral justice.[192]

The above observation offers a particularly salient departure point for the historical discussion of flaying practices with which this chapter principally deals. The two sets of oppositions presented in this passage may be productively considered to be the defining poles within which my own analysis is situated. On the one hand, flaying is a remote practice in so far as myths and legends speak of it as a particularly cruel form of torture; and yet is it also familiar, encountered in the contemporary anatomical exhibits of Gunther Von Hagens (**Figure 70**), and private collections of nineteenth-century preserved skins, as well as in more disturbing twentieth-century accounts of ritual flaying, which will be discussed at length later in this chapter. Similarly, in some parts of Europe, flaying was historically encoded as a punishment for the most severe crimes in medieval law; and although (as far as we know) rarely carried through into sentencing and execution, flaying was nevertheless taken up as a potent literary and iconographic symbol of justice within medieval and early modern cultures. Thus my discussion and analysis interweaves representations of flaying in myth and the visual arts, historical accounts of flaying, and the fabrication of objects of use and display from human skin, some of which survive in contemporary museums and collections.

The skin may be considered as both a physiological and symbolic boundary between the self and world, the site at which identity is formed, ascribed or

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[191] I use the term 'fetish' or fetishism' throughout in terms of the anthropological concept, rather than in the appropriated Freudian sense of these terms. In this sense, a fetish is an object manufactured by people which is believed to posses supernatural power, in particular power over others. Fetishism of this kind is present in all religions, and the Holy Cross and consecrated host within some forms of Christianity are examples of fetishes.

[192] Sarah Kay, 'Original Skin: Flaying, Reading and Thinking in the Legend of Saint Bartholomew and Other Works', in *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 1, (Winter 2006), p. 47.

dissolved.[193] The sense of touch is the first of the senses to develop, and the skin is the primary point of intimate contact with both the material world and others. This primacy of the skin and the haptic sense is recalled in Paul Valéry's famous dialogue, in which he locates the most significant aspects of human experiences not at the core, but at the surface:

> That which is most profound in the human being is the skin [...] The marrow, the brain, all these things we require in order to feel, suffer, think [...] to be profound [...] are inventions of the skin! [...] We burrow down in vain, doctor, we are [...] ectoderm.[194]

Claudia Benthien argues that this conception of self offered by Valéry stands in marked contrast with the dominant trend in Western thought since the Renaissance, which has increasingly located the 'authentic' or 'true' self beneath the surface of the body. In this conception, the skin is imagined as 'enclosing' the self in a 'protective and sheltering cover', which also has the potential to be 'concealing and deceptive.'[195] In parallel the skin is seen as a surface on which the hidden self may be read, through a range of affective physiological reactions such as blanching, blushing and perspiring. She contrasts this view with understandings in which the skin is equated with the person and the body surface is not a rigid boundary but a porous one. Archaic language reflects this association between self and surface in metonymic expressions such as 'nasty skin' or 'decent skin', in which the skin is equated with the whole person.[196] As art historian Daniela Bohde writes, 'skin appears in these expressions as something intimate or as something superficial; often it refers to life or to the actual person.'[197]

These shifting conceptions of self and skin are of central importance to a discussion of the symbolism of flaying in literature and the visual arts. However, these conceptions are both fluid and conflicting; in the context of the arts of the sixteenth century, for example, Bohde argues that the act of flaying throws the identity of the central flayed figure into question in contradictory ways, since 'on the one hand skin is presented as a bearer of identity, on the other it appears as a covering, concealing the 'real' identity.'[198] She also cautions that notions of identity and the self are subject to

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[193] Claudia Benthien, *Skin. On the Cultural Border Between Self and the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 1-15.
[194] Paul Valéry, 'L'idée fixe; ou, Deux hommes à la mer', in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, Pléiade, 1957), pp. 215-216.
[195] Benthien, *Skin*, p. 17.
[196] Ibid., p. 18.
[197] Daniela Bohde, 'Skin and the Search for the Interior: The Representation of Flaying in the Art and Anatomy of the Cinquecento', in Florike Egmond and Robert Zwijnenberg (eds.), *Bodily Extremities. Preoccupations with the Human Body in Early Modern European Culture* (London: Ashgate, 2003), p. 11.
[198] Ibid.

historical and cultural change and variation and should not be projected onto historical art and literature. [199]

Before discussing the various historical representations of flaying, it is worth first considering the structure and substance of the skin itself. The word *dermis* is derived from the Greek *derein*, meaning to flay, hence modern anatomical terminology for the skin structure retains an etymological trace of the practice of flaying, which was both significant in myth as well as a necessary part of medical dissection and the production of anatomical knowledge. Related terms for other layers of the skin can thus be regarded as having their roots in relation to this central layer, which was the locus of flaying in the production of animal leathers and flayed human skins alike; *epi*dermis (*upon* the flay) and *hypo*dermis (*beneath* the flay)[200]:

> Probing beneath the epidermis, we reach the second of the skin's two primary layers, a thick layer of dense connective tissue called the dermis. This is the layer that really imparts toughness to skin. It is pliable, elastic, and has considerable tensile strength. Most of the thickness of our skin - and most of the thickness of the hide of any animal - comes from the dermis.[201]

Modern anatomy describes human skin in terms of a *laminar,* or layered, structure with distinct boundaries between layers. For example, the dermis is described as a layer *separate* from the fatty hypodermis beneath, despite the fact that the hypodermis has a multifolded or 'invaginated' structure. This internal 'folding' of the fatty and connective tissue *into* the dermis makes the 'boundary' between the dermis and the hypodermis quite indistinct, even under a microscope. In keeping with the etymological structure of skin, it is nevertheless at this ambiguous boundary that the skins and hides of animals are separated in the manufacture of leather and furs.

The flayed skin may in itself be regarded as a kind of 'double', a paradoxical surface with two sides: The outer, sensitive skin surface, which functions as both a communicative sensory medium and a protective physiological barrier that contains the self; and the fleshy 'inside', whose depth and limits are not merely a matter of the demarcation of multiple layers of tissue, but whose symbolic reach extends into complex and contradictory notions of selfhood and interiority. Flaying thus destroys the individual both through the violent tearing away of the protective outer layer of the physiological body, and by enacting an irreversible splitting of the self, reducing the integrity of the interior to a single, inverted layer. Somewhat surprisingly, this 'inside'

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[199] Ibid., p. 14.
[200] R. Reed, *Ancient Skins, Parchments and Leathers* (London and New York: Seminar Press, 1972), p. 16.
[201] Nina G. Jablonski, *Skin, A Natural History* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), p. 15.

layer of the separated, flayed skin has not received much attention in discussions of the iconography and practice of flaying, with most analyses focussing on the 'empty' skin, usually depicted in the visual arts as a bloodless, hollow casing; or on the exposed muscular body beneath the skin. However, a number of paintings from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which deal with mythical themes of flaying seem to address the interiority of the flayed skin itself, to which I will return.

Accounts of flaying alive go back to ancient mythology and literature. Most prominently, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* contains two iconic episodes of skin removal, which have had significant influence upon European imagery and narratives involving flaying. Steven Connor identifies the conception of wholeness as being at the core of the ancient Greeks' preoccupation with the skin, in which the various animal and human hides of Greek myth are typically endowed with supernatural or healing powers:

> The flayed or abstracted skin was the object of fascinated attention for the Greeks, and was often the bearer of specific powers. The skin was not so much the principle of identity as that of entirety. You could be made more entire, more yourself, by taking on another's skin.[202]

This conception of the magical 'doubling' of one's own skin through the fatal flaying of another, is a recurrent theme within mythology, as well in some historical accounts in which the flayed skin has been kept as a trophy, or worn for it's perceived magical or healing properties. Of the two ancient Greek sources that deal with the flayed skin and its double, the myth of Marsyas is perhaps the most resonant, and became a popular theme within the visual arts from the sixteenth century onwards. I will return to Marsyas and his representations shortly; but first I will briefly consider the second myth, the Tunic of Nessus, which principally concerns Heracles and Deianira. According to Ovid's account in his *Metamorphoses* (Book IX), Heracles takes Deianira as his wife after slaying the Lernaean Hydra, and travels with her to Tiryns. On the way, the centaur Nessus offers to help Deianira across the fast-flowing river Evenus, whilst Heracles swims across. When Nessus attempts to carry her off, Heracles fatally shoots him with an arrow poisoned with the blood of the Hydra. Dying and determined to seek revenge, Nessus offers his blood-soaked tunic to Deianira as a gift, telling her that it will act as a charm against all infidelity on the part of her husband. Naively, Deianira takes the gift. Later, when she fears that Heracles has fallen in love with Iole, she recalls Nessus' promise and sends the herald Lichas to deliver the shirt to her husband. But when Heracles puts the tunic on, the poisoned blood burns into his skin:

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[202] Steven Connor, *The Book of Skin* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), p. 10

> He attempts to tear off the deadly garment; but where it is torn off, it tears away the skin, and [...] either sticks to his limbs, being tried in vain to be pulled off, or it lays bear his mangled limbs, and his huge bones.[203]

Heracles is flayed alive by this second skin; the only escape from his torment is to immolate himself on a funeral pyre, which he sets light to himself. Heracles' horrific death through malicious flaying and immolation results in his beatification and ascendance to the pantheon of gods at Jupiter's behest. Whilst the bloody tunic is the instrument of Heracles' agonising death, a doubling of his skin that destroys rather than fortifies, the act of flaying in this myth also functions as symbol of immortality through Heracles' resurrection as a god.[204] Thus the poisoned tunic in this narrative represents a reversal of the flayed skin's power to reinforce or make the wearers skin more entire or 'whole'.

A belief in the fortifying or healing power of the flayed skin recurs in ancient ritual practice,[205] as well as in European folk medicine, practiced right up to the middle of the nineteenth century. In his seminal book *The Skin Ego,* psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu articulates the conception of the flayed skin as a symbol of immortality and resurrection in reference to the myth of Marsyas. In this narrative, the satyr Marsyas picks up the reed pipes or *aulos* fashioned by Athene, and produces such beautiful music with it that all the peasants in Phrygia are delighted by it:

> They cried out that Apollo himself could not have made better music, even on his lyre, and Marsyas was foolish enough not to contradict them. This, of course, provoked the anger of Apollo, who invited him to a contest, the winner of which should inflict whatever punishment he pleased on the loser. Marsyas consented, and Apollo impanelled the Muses as a jury. The contest proved an equal one, the Muses being charmed by both instruments, until Apollo cried out to Marsyas: 'I challenge you to do with your instrument as much as I can do with mine. Turn it upside down, and both play and sing at the same time.' This, with a flute, was manifestly impossible, and Marsyas failed to meet the challenge. But Apollo reversed his lyre, and sang such delightful hymns in honour of the Olympian gods that the Muses could not do less than give the verdict in his favour.[206]

Having thus defeated Marsyas in the contest, Apollo cruelly flays him alive as a punishment for his hubris. He then either hangs or nails the hollowed out skin to a tree, depending upon the account. When preserved intact in this manner, this empty

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[203] Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*, trans. Henry T. Riley (London: George Bell and Son, 1908), p. 173.
[204] There are also interesting parallels between the death of Heracles, who is a demi-god, and Christ and the crucifixion; both follow similar narrative structures involving deception, physical ordeal, death and their subsequent resurrection and beatification.
[205] For example, the life-death-rebirth deity of Aztec mythology and religion, Xipe Totec, was typically represented as the flayed god, to whom human sacrifices of ritual flaying were made.
[206] Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* (London and New York: Penguin, 2011), p. 77.

envelope of flesh, according to Anzieu, becomes invested with the symbolism of resurrection:

> the skin that has been torn from the body, if it is preserved whole, represents the protective envelope, the shield, which one must take from the other in phantasy either to simply have it for oneself, or *to duplicate and reinforce one's own skin*.[207] (my emphasis).

Classical sources recount the preservation of Marsyas' intact skin into historic times. It was said to have hung in a cave where the river Marsyas rises, at the foot of the citadel of Celaenae. Anzieu tells us that the flayed hide of Marsyas remained 'sensitive' to the sound of the river and the music of the Phrygians, which 'made it quiver',[208] suggesting that the skin possessed a latent power of reanimation. Indeed, he describes the skin as a powerful symbol of the resurrection of the hanged and flayed Phrygian god.

Renaissance interpretations of the myth, known through Ovid, often carried an unambiguous moral meaning, in which the god Apollo justifiably punishes Marsyas as an impudent challenger. Writing on pictorial art of the Cinquecento, Daniela Bohde notes that representations of flayed bodies increased in popularity from the mid-sixteenth century onwards. In keeping with Renaissance moral themes, the god was frequently represented as a 'radiant victor', who triumphs over the 'wild satyr', thus establishing a moral context ' in which culture, wisdom and justice have been juxtaposed against barbarism, stupidity and an overestimation of self.'[209] In addition, Bohde highlights the relationship between the artistic engagement with these myths and anatomical illustrations and practices:

> These were usually either the silen Marsyas flayed by Apollo, or St Bartholomew, but many anatomical illustrations emerged at the time of dissected, skinless écorchés whose bodies give the impression of still being alive. Yet partly skinned corpses were, in fact, exhibited. They were displayed during ceremonial dissections held in the universities which excited considerable public interest.'[210]

Claudia Benthien contends that flaying became a popular iconographic theme during this period in part due to the development of anatomy, and in part because of strong

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[207] Didier Anzieu, *The Skin Ego* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 50-51. Relating to the flayed skin as trophy Anzieu also introduces an important theme relevant to the collecting of human skin, to which I will return later in this chapter.
[208] Ibid., p. 52
[209] Ibid.
[210] Daniela Bohde, 'Skin and the Search for the Interior', pp. 10-11.

associations with penal torture. According to this assessment, flaying represented a 'synthesis of the most extreme form of capital punishment (torture) and the medical production of knowledge.'[211] This observation seems particularly relevant to an assessment of Dirck van Baburen's c. 1623 painting *The Flaying of Marsyas* (**Figure 71**), in which the figure of Apollo is depicted making the first incision to Marsyas' tethered leg, cutting the skin with a knife in one hand and peeling it back with the other. Apollo's gaze is fixed in rapt concentration on the task before him, his expression almost one of sadistic delight. In this painting, Apollo actively participates in the punishment and torture of Marsyas, whilst appearing to adopt the curious gaze of the anatomist who probes beneath the surface of the body in the pursuit of medical knowledge.

In some visual representations of the myth, the flayed skin is addressed through more symbolic means in the clothing of Apollo. In Jusepe de Ribera's 1637 painting *Apollo and Marsyas*, for example, it is the *interior* of the flayed skin that seems to be the main theme of the work (**Figure 72**). The central figures of Apollo and Marsyas are compositionally arranged in a manner similar to Baburen's painting; Apollo is in the process of peeling the skin from Marsyas' thigh, the raw interior of the skin exposed as he tears it away from the muscle with his left hand. The vivid red colour of the fleshy inside of Marsyas' skin is matched in Apollo's cloak, which appears almost to merge with the fresh wound, billowing up from the satyr's body and enveloping the god. The cloak both separates and unites the figures, standing in bright contrast to the subtler hues of their skin - but it also prefigures the stripped, inverted skin of Marsyas *clothing* Apollo. Thus the cloak in this image seems to stand for the 'doubled' skin; in taking possession of Marsyas' hide Apollo's authority is strengthened and his own skin is symbolically reinforced. Furthermore, the raw and inverted skin suggested by the red cloak powerfully evokes Marsyas' vulnerability and shame: a 'more-than-naked'[212] exposure that will destroy him. This motif also appears in Antonio de Bellis' *The Flaying of Marsyas by Apollo,* (c.1637-1640, **Figure 73**), and one of the relatively rare eighteenth-century paintings engaging with the myth: Carle Van Loo's *Marsyas Flayed by the Order of Apollo* (1735, **Figure 74**). In the latter painting, Apollo does not participate directly in the flaying, but his otherwise naked body is draped in a vivid red cloak, which appears almost to peel away from his radiant skin. The figure of Apollo here thus presents both sides of the flayed skin to the viewer simultaneously, anticipating the torture to which the horrified Marsyas will soon be subjected.

[211] Benthien, *Skin*, p. 63.
[212] Ibid., p. 71.

Early anatomical illustrations representing the écorché employed quite different associations with the flayed skin, alluding to the martyrdom of Christian saints. Several saints were believed to have been martyred through flaying alive, though the death of Saint Bartholomew is one of the earliest and best-known biblical references to flaying as a form of both corporal punishment and an act of martyrdom. In this legend, the Armenian king Astyages ordered Bartholomew executed for converting his brother Polimius to the Christian faith. Whilst there are varying accounts as to the precise manner of his death,[213] his flaying alive is the version that has most endured through representations in art and literature. Michelangelo's fresco *The Last Judgement* (1537-1541) on the alter wall of the Sistine Chapel depicts Bartholomew, presenting his flayed skin to God as proof of his martyrdom (**Figure 75**). A number of relics of Bartholomew were said to have existed in the Cathedral of Saint Bartholomew the Apostle in Lipari, including a large piece of his flayed skin, and he is remembered today as the patron Saint of tanners, leather-workers, parchment-makers and book-binders, all professions which have close affinities with the skin, its removal and preservation. In her discussion of medieval parchment texts, historian Sarah Kay notes that most medieval narratives that involve flaying have their origins in antiquity; however, there are occurrences of flaying as a form of execution in medieval law, to which I will return.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the iconographies of the flaying of Bartholomew and Marsyas also made their way into anatomical illustration. On the other hand, Renaissance artists in particular were enthusiastic about the value of anatomy to their work; some of them (such as Leonardo and Michelangelo) carried out their own dissections, and the removal of the skin to study the external musculature was also associated with anatomical instruction of the art academies that formed after the second half of the sixteenth century. Similarly, the 'increasingly visual orientation of anatomists required the cooperation of artists', who made significant contributions to important anatomy atlases.[214] Perhaps the most striking example of an anatomical illustration that also draws on the iconography of Bartholomew, is the 1559 engraving by Spanish artist Gasparo Becerra, which appeared in Juan Valverde's *Anatomia del corpo humano composto*, a vernacular adaptation of Andreas Vesalius' famous *De humani fabrica* (1543). In this image, an écorché holds up his flayed skin in one hand and a knife in the other, appearing to have flayed himself (**Figure 76**); thus employing a popular motif in anatomical illustrations of the period, in which 'the fatality of the

[213] In some accounts, Bartholomew is beaten unconscious and thrown into the sea to drown; in others he is crucified upside down; elsewhere he is flayed alive.
[214] Bohde, 'Skin and the Search for the Interior', p. 20.

flaying and the function of the skin to keep the body together [are] negated.'[215] The figure's gesture of holding up his skin bears marked parallels with Michelangelo's fresco of Saint Bartholomew in the Sistine Chapel. Resonating with the anatomical interpretations of the flaying of Bartholomew is Melchior Meier's *Apollo with the Flayed Marsyas* of 1581, in which Apollo takes on the characteristic pose of Bartholomew, skin and knife in hand, and Marsyas appears as anonymous écorché **(Figure 77**). In this illustration, Bohde identifies the main theme as the separation of the skin from the body:

> In tearing the skin away from the body of muscles, [Marsyas'] identity is destroyed, he is no longer a recognisable mythological figure, but instead a nameless écorché.[216]

The god Apollo, in full possession of the skin, which he holds up to a group of onlookers, appears to have further empowered himself in the destruction of the satyr's identity. The skin, hanging limply from his hand, is indistinguishable from the cloak draped about his shoulders, appearing as both trophy and garment.

Ribera's *The Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew* similarly depicts the saint bound to a tree by wrists and ankle, as his torturer strips the skin from his arm, outstretched towards the heavens (**Figure 78**). The composition is also strikingly similar to many early modern representations of the flaying of Marsyas by the god Apollo, which frequently portray the inverted figure of Marsyas tethered hand and foot to a tree. This is despite the accounts in classical sources locating the flaying as having taken place in a cave near Celaenae. It is only after the satyr is flayed that the sloughed skin is nailed to a pine tree by Apollo for all to see. It may be that the image of the skin pinned to a tree, as a public display of the consequences of challenging a god, had greater resonance for early modern artists, since it incorporates a striking visual reference to the Crucifixion.

If, as we have seen in the ancient Greek myths of Heracles and Marsyas, the shed skin holds the promise of renewal, it is not necessarily for the rebirth of the individual sacrificed in this manner. Rather, the ritual or punitive flaying of an individual often serves to reinforce the status or power of a broader social or theistic order. The old Persian legend of Cambyses and the flaying of Sisamnes was first recorded by Heroditus in his *Historiae,* and later reproduced in the medieval text *Gesta Romanorum,* published in several editions from the late fifteenth century and combining oriental, legendary

[215] Ibid., p. 34.
[216] Ibid., p. 25.

and classical fables.[217] In the case of Sisamnes, the corrupt Persian judge who was flayed alive by King Cambyses, we see an exemplary punishment meted out as a consequence of Sisamnes' transgression of the judicial social order. The skin in this story functions as a text, which in its refashioning into the seat of judgement on which his successor and son must sit, acts as a reminder of his father's transgression and punishment. Though dead, the flayed skin still registers of the memory of the father's suffering and punishment; blank, dehumanised and mute by virtue of having his identity literally stripped away, Sisamnes' skin nevertheless retains the power to 'speak' on the part of the court who condemned him, as through an act of penitential ventriloquism.

Gerard David's fifteenth-century diptych paintings *The Judgement of Cambyses* (**Figure 79**) and *The Flaying of Sisamnes* (**Figure 80**), depict the arrest and subsequent gruesome punishment of the corrupt judge. Paintings of this type were often displayed in Dutch and German town halls during the early modern period, and these two were hung in the alderman's chambers of the Town Hall of Bruges.[218] In the first painting we see Sisamnes seated on the judicial chair wearing his robes of office, as King Cambyses accuses him. A guard takes him by the arm, and in the background the figure of Sisamnes can be seen accepting a bag, presumably the bribe which has undone him. On the wall on either side of the judicial bench, are two roundels, which appear to depict scenes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The left image portrays the figures of Deianira and Heracles, referring to the poisoned tunic of Nessus and invoking the themes of revenge and betrayal. The image of the right appears to show a bound Marsyas tied to a tree, alongside whom stands a female figure, who is perhaps an epicene of Apollo. Thus both of the iconic Greek flaying myths appear within the first painting.

In the second painting, we see the grimacing figure of Sisamnes laid out on a table which is highly reminiscent of the anatomists' slab, suggesting a striking relationship between anatomy theatre and corporal punishment. Cambyses presides over the execution, as four flayers set to work on Sisamnes' body. His judicial robes, stripped from his body, lay crumpled beneath the table, echoing the removal of the skin, and referencing the poisoned Tunic of Nessus - tainted as Sisamnes has tainted the cause of justice - which once removed, will strip away the skin with it. The raw red sinew beneath the skin of one leg is exposed, the colour mirrored in the discarded robe; thus the red garment in this context also seems to refer to the inverted skin. The removal of the skin in David's painting is employed as a motif which re-inscribes the authoritative power of the social order over the individual who has transgressed that

[217] Robert Mills, *Suspended Animation* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), p. 59.
[218] The two paintings discussed here are now in the Groeningemuseum in Bruges, Belgium.

order. According to the historical account of Herodotus, following his execution by flaying alive, a seat was fashioned from Sisamnes' tanned skin, on which his successor would sit in judgement:

> After he had torn away the skin he cut leathern thongs out of it and stretched them across the seat where Sisamnes had been wont to sit to give judgement; and having stretched them in the seat, Cambyses appointed the son of that Sisamnes whom he had slain and flayed, to be judge instead of his father, enjoining him to remember in what seat he was sitting to give judgement.[219]

In the background of the second painting, we see the judicial bench hung with the disgraced judge's tanned skin, a permanent reminder of the consequences of abuse of office (**Figure 80**). Rather than a symbol of resurrection, here we see that the skin has become a kind of trophy-object through its re-fashioning into an object of everyday use. The particular significance of the judiciary chair further invests the skin as relic of legal and monastic power and authority: 'the inscription of the law is incarnated in the skin, which is taken from the individual and placed in the possession of public order.'[220] In this work and others, such as the various depictions of the flaying of Marsyas, it is possible to see how the skin stands in metonymically for the individuated self. Through the removal of the vital physiological and social barrier of the skin, the social order re-asserts itself as dominant:

> The flaying of one man at the hands of others seeks to restore the existing order symbolically through the use of the most extreme means [...] The act of flaying deprives the victims of their identity along with their lives; in extinguishing the skin, it obliterated the person.[221]

Benthien ascribes the 'intense preoccupation' with the theme of flaying in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century visual arts to an 'epistemological rupture that was triggered by the emerging discipline of anatomy.'[222] In both Bohde's and Benthien's analyses of representations of the myth, connections may be drawn between Apollo and the anatomist, who is often depicted as taking great interest in the act of flaying, as though fascinated. Indeed, the flaying of Marsyas almost seems a natural episode from classical literature to invoke for the purposes of scientific anatomy; even Ovid's

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[219] Herodotus, *The History of Herodotus, Volume 2, Book V*, trans. George Campbell Macaulay (A Public Domain Book: Digital, 2010), pp. 191-95
[220] Benthien, *Skin*, p. 72.
[221] Ibid., p. 72.
[222] Ibid,, p. 63.

description of the scene betrays a kind of anatomist's gaze, which lays bare the sensitive, palpitating viscera exposed beneath Marsyas' flayed skin:

> 'Why,' said he, 'art thou tearing me from myself?' [...] As he shrieked aloud, his skin was stript off from the surface of his limbs, nor was he aught but one entire wound. Blood is flowing on every side; the nerves, exposed, appear, and the quivering veins throb without any skin. You might have numbered his palpitating bowels, and the transparent lungs within his breast."[223]

Flaying in Law and Practice

Despite the apparently extreme nature of the episodes outlined above, similar practices did take place from medieval times and well into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Various artefacts have been manufactured from the skins of executed criminals during the modern period, and in particular, numerous books bound in the skins of executed criminals still survive. There are also a significant number of historical references to medieval punitive flaying in England and France. The most frequently recounted incidents concern the English practice of flaying those who were found guilty of committing sacrilege. The flayed skins of the malefactors were then nailed to church doors as a warning to invaders or heretics, in a manner somewhat reminiscent of Marsyas' skin, which was nailed to a tree. In 1848, antiquarian Albert Way wrote of the 'strange tradition' that 'darkly subsists among the peasantry' in Hadstock near Essex, related to the 'cruel and summary vengeance there supposed to have been inflicted upon a sacrilegious Dane.'[224] According to local accounts, a Dane had been flayed as a heretic during the Norman invasions, and his skin attached to the north door of the church as 'a ghastly memorial of ecclesiastical vengeance, and a warning to all who might approach the church with like unhallowed attention.'[225] Such legends were not isolated to this locality; Way also recounts an entry in the *Catalogue of Antiquities and Miscellaneous Curiosities* of the Society of Antiquaries of London, which preserved within their collections a fragment of skin taken from the doors of Worcester cathedral:

> A portion of skin, supposed to be human, according to the tradition that a man, who had stolen the *sanctus*-bell from the high-altar in Worcester cathedral, had been flayed, and his skin affixed to the north doors, as a punishment for such sacrilege. The doors having been removed, are now to be seen in the crypt of the

[223] Ovid, *Metamorphoses* , p. 121.
[224] Albert Way, 'Some Notes on the Tradition of Flaying, Inflicted in Punishment of Sacrilege; The Skin of the Offender Being Affixed to the Church-doors', in *Archaeological Journal V* (1848), p. 185.
[225] Ibid.

> cathedral, and small fragments of skin may still be seen beneath the iron-work with which they are strengthened.[226]

Way goes on to describe how he himself obtained a fragment of skin, also believed to be human, which had been found attached to the surface of the north doors of Worcester cathedral. He sent the fragment to John Quekett, the then Assistant Curator of the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons, for analysis, and received the following reply:

> I have carefully examined the portion of skin which you forwarded to me for my inspection, and beg to inform you that I am perfectly satisfied that it is human skin [...] A section of the specimen, when examined with a power of a hundred diameters, shews readily that it is skin, and two hairs which grow on it I find to be human hairs [...] The hairs of the human subject differ greatly from those of any other mammalian animal, and the examination of a hair alone, without the skin, would have enabled me to form a conclusion.[227]

Way sent on a further two samples to Quekket for 'microscopial analysis', taken from separate churches in Hadstock and Copford, with the same verdict of human skin returned. Although the covering of doors with leather was a common medieval practice, many modern authors consider the use of human skin for this purpose to be questionable.[228] However, M. J. Swanton points out that punitive scalping and flaying were known from the tenth century onwards in England. After the Conquest, as concepts of treason became increasingly important in the developing feudal state, these punishments entered into punitive codes for the crime of *lese-majesty*; broadly conceived during this period to embrace concepts of breaking faith or betrayal of trust in any sense.[229] In English customary laws that go under the title *Leges Henrici Primi*, any man found guilty of murdering his lord:

> [...] shall be condemned to scalping, or flaying *excoriatione* (or disembowling *evisceratione*), or to human punishment which in the end is so harsh that while ending the dreadful agonies of his torture and the miseries of his vile manner of death, he may appear to have yielded up his wretched life before he won an end to his sufferings.[230]

It is perhaps from the thirteenth-century English Romance *Havelock the Dane* that stories of the flayed skins of Viking invaders being pinned to church doors first

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[226] Ibid., p. 186 (citation).
[227] Ibid., p. 187.
[228] Reed, Ancient Skins, Parchments and Leathers, p. 187.
[229] M. J. Swanton, '"Dane-Skins": Excoriation in Early England', in *Folklore*, Vol. 87., No. 1, (1976), p. 21.
[230] Ibid., (citation).

found inspiration. In this narrative, one of the condemned, 'the king's own friend', Earl Goddard, is condemned to be flayed alive for his treachery.[231] Medieval historian W. R. J. Barron notes that flaying alive held a particular fascination to the medieval authors of romance, but contends that, in England at least, flaying was an exceptional punishment meted out according to ancient custom:

> In the English romances, so often based on French originals, flaying alive is the characteristic death inflicted on Christian knights captured by giants, pagans, Saracens - an indication of the inherent barbarity of their traditional foes; paradoxically, it is also the death thought appropriate to giants, pagans, Saracens whenever they fall into the hands of Christian knights - appropriate because they have rebelled against God or know nothing of Him.[232]

Although scalping is mentioned in the Laws of King Edmund (AD939-46) as a penalty for runaway slaves guilty of theft, and as a punishment for recidivists under the Laws of Canute (AD1016-35), Barron nevertheless considers that in the English context, 'flaying made an impression upon the popular imagination out of all proportion to its frequency.'[233] Documented cases of judicial excoriation in England are indeed rare; in 1176 the king's vice-chancellor, Adam, was condemned for treason and sentenced to be hanged and flayed, but managed to escape his fate by claiming benefit of clergy. Edward I's treasurer, Hugh de Cressingham, was not so lucky, however - after the battle of Stirling Bridge in 1297, the victorious Scots took the body of their enemy and 'cut his skin into small pieces - not as souvenirs, but in contempt, for they declared he was not so much a treasurer as a traitor to the king.'[234]

In the feudal society of the Middle Ages, treason constituted the most fundamental offence. Plotting the death of the sovereign, counterfeiting his coinage or falsifying his signature, seducing his wife or the wife of his son and heir, and betraying the realm to an enemy, were all considered acts of treason, since they constituted both a betrayal of trust and an attack on the State.[235] These crimes thus demanded exemplary punishments, such as hanging, drawing, quartering, disembowelling and beheading. Although flaying alive was rare even as an exemplary punishment, Barron notes that, in France at least, 'flaying was evidently not merely a means of inflicting a cruel death on a

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[231] Ibid., pp. 21-22.
[232] W. R. J. Barron, 'The Penalties for Treason in Medieval Life and Literature', in *Journal of Medieval History*, Vol. 7, No. 2, (1981), p. 193.
[233] Ibid., p. 191.
[234] Swanton, '"Dane Skins"', p. 22.
[235] Barron, 'The Penalties for Treason', p. 187.

criminal, but of marking abhorrence of breaches of the fundamental bond of feudal society.'[236]

There are a number of historical cases of flaying in the literature. Philip and Walter de Launoy were also condemned to be flayed alive 'by degrees' in 1314, following their conviction for adultery with two daughters-in-law of King Philip IV of France.[237] In 1366 the chamberlain of Robert, Count of Rouci, betrayed his lord's castle to an attacking force, and was partially flayed prior to being executed for his treachery. Another episode occurs in which flaying is meted out as an act of popular retribution: Guillaume des Baux, prince of Orange, was seized by rioting citizens of Avignon during the Albigensian crusade in 1218, flayed alive, and dismembered.[238] In this and other instances occurring in France, Barron contends that 'to the popular imagination, flaying was a fit expression of hatred of and contempt for a noble who might be regarded as a traitor to a cause espoused by the mob.'[239] Punitive incidences of excoriation, though no mere fictional horror in the French medieval context, would rarely have been witnessed as a real-life event. Nevertheless, flaying seems to have exerted a powerful influence in folk-memory, reflected in both popular medieval romances and common expressions such as *crier comme si l'on vous écorchait* ('shout as if you were skinned'). In England, the enduring power of flaying as a particularly cruel and iconic punishment is reflected in popular accounts of the 'Dane Skins'. A particularly interesting oral account was recorded by John Throsby in Leicestershire during the eighteenth century, in which elements borrowed from classical myth are interwoven into the tale:

> Almost a century ago a shepherd boy, a servant to one Day, a farmer of *Sharnford*, folding sheep in the field near High-Crofts (ss?), was threatened by some villains, if he did not leave his master's doors undone (or unmade) at night, they would, the next time they found him a-folding, *skin him alive*! The boy, however, told his master, and he was kept from folding for some time. But going again, these unparalleled and execrable villains *skinned the boy alive*, in a hollow place in the field near High Cross, and hung up his *skin on a thorn.* The story goes, that they skinned a sheep to wrap him in; the boy went home in this woeful condition, and expired in great agonies. This story most old people talked of when I was a boy. I have lately asked an old man of Sharnford, who relates the circumstance as above, which I believe to be real facts. - Mr. Fowke of Elmesthorpe.[240]

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[236] Ibid., p. 192.
[237] Swanton, '"Dane Skins"', p. 22.
[238] Achille Luchaire, *Social France at the Time of Philip Augustus*, trans. Edward Benjamin Krehbiel (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1912), p. 272.
[239] Barron, 'The Penalties for Treason', p. 193.
[240] John Throsby, The Supplementary Volume to the Leicestershire Views: Containing A Series of Excursions in the Year 1790, to the Villages and Places of Note in the County (London: J. Nichols, 1790), p. 239.

The hanging of a shepherd boy's skin from a thorn is reminiscent of Marsyas' hide hung from a tree by Apollo; the especially cruel act of sending him home wrapped in a sheepskin also mockingly recalls the myth of the Golden Fleece.

In each of the major mythical or legendary accounts of flaying - Marsyas, Bartholomew and Sisamnes - there are three intersecting themes which underpin the ritual punishment: Firstly, the skin is flayed from the entire body whilst the victim is alive in a public spectacle of punishment; secondly, the violent tearing away of the skin is both a symbolic and literal act of destroying the self; and finally, the flayed skin is preserved, either as a trophy of punishment and justice; or as a symbol of martyrdom, and therefore immortality. Whilst the symbolic power of the flayed skin has great resonance in such myths and morality tales, actual historical cases of execution by flaying alive are extremely rare and tend to be confined to the Middle Ages.

A more recent case was reported in Mongolia in the 1920s, however; what is even more surprising about this incident, which would be otherwise easy to dismiss as a legend of war, is that the entire flayed and dried skin of the victim, 'Prince Khaisan/Chaisana' is preserved to this day in the National Museum in Prague (see **Figure 81**). This artefact has been stored in the museum's collections since 1981, having originally been in the personal possession of Václav Kopecký, an army quartermaster who brought it from Irkutsk to Prague in 1920. He apparently obtained it from Captain Vasili Bulatov of the 41st Siberian Rifle Regiment, during military service in Siberia. Bulatov had discovered more than one flayed human skin in the course of his mission to negotiate and arrest the notorious Mongolian warlord Dambiijantsan, also known as Ja Lama (see **Figure 82**). Dambiijantsan was regarded as a ruthless warlord and had a reputation for incredible cruelty and brutality. According to Czech anthropologist Emanuel Vlček:

> He had prisoner's hearts cut out or had them skinned alive. He frequently carried out torture himself. He regarded human skins as ritual objects and hung them in his yurt in order to inspire terror in his visitors and subjects.[241]

In 1914, Bulatov was under orders to negotiate with Dambiijantsan and compel him to subordinate himself to the Russian government; if he disobeyed he was to place him under arrest. Dambiijantsan attempted to evade Bulatov and was seized at his

[241] Emanuel Vlček, 'Kůže stažená z živého člověka. Pozoruhodný exponát Národního muzea', in: *Vesmír* Vol. 82, únor 2003/02, p. 94. Translated from the Czech:
Nechával je bičovat, tlouci holemi, zajatcům dával zaživa vyříznout srdce nebo je nechal stáhnout z kůže. Mučení mnohdy vykonával sám. Lidské kůže považoval za rituální předměty, visely v jeho jurtě, aby naháněly hrůzu návštěvníkům a poddaným.

home, where Bulatov made an inventory of his property before deporting him to Russia. There he found fifty wooden sticks covered in human blood and two flayed skins, both of which he kept as exhibits which could be used in court. The provenance of the flayed skin which now resides in the National Museum of Prague is described only through the evidence gathered by Bulatov through interviews with local people following Dambiijantsan's arrest; and documentation which Václav Kopecký brought to Prague with the skin itself. Vlček relates the story as follows:

> Prince Dambiijantsan, or Ja Lama, had a disagreement with Prince Khaisan, his kinsman, over some altogether trifling affair. However, they fell out to such an extent that Ja Lama ordered Khaisan's imprisonment. Khaisan's mother knew of Ja Lama's cruelty and therefore she immediately sent to plead for her son's life. As a ransom, she offered all her gold, precious stones, silver vessels, clothing and furs, and allowed all her herds of cattle, horses and camels to be driven away.
> Ja Lama feigned agreement with the proffered ransom; however, while his herdsmen were driving the livestock away, he ordered Prince Khaisan to be skinned. He entrusted the work to a trained Kyrgyz and ordered him to remove the skin in such a way that Khaisan would remain alive. The Kyrgyz began from the soles and the back of the lower limbs, then continued with cuts which led to the buttocks and up to the back of the head. However, in the midst of his torment, Khaisan died. Ja Lama, who was present, was enraged, for now he could not carry through his aim - to hand the son over to the mother, skinned but still alive. Therefore, even though Khaisan was already dead, Ja Lama shot him through the head; he also had the Kyrgyz flayed. Then he sent the mother the bloodied skin of her son; the woman went mad on the spot.[242]

In this account, backed up by official documents and the flayed skin itself, the skin of the victim is a trophy enacted through the brutal torture and subjugation of an enemy. Although Bulatov had kept the flayed skins as evidence to be used in court against Dambiijantsan, it is not clear whether these items were ever produced at trial. The whereabouts of the second skin is unknown. As for Dambiijantsan, he returned to Mongolia following the October Revolution, and was later assassinated in 1922 by Mongol revolutionaries. Following his death, Dambiijantsan was decapitated and his head taken back to Russia, where it was displayed at the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersberg. Thus Dambiijantsan's remains also became a kind of trophy, in this case

[242] Vlček, 'Kůže stažená z živého člověka', p. 96. Translated from the Czech:
Džá-lama s nabídnutým výkupným naoko souhlasil, avšak zatímco pastevci přiháněli dobytek, dal knížete Chaisana stáhnout z kůže. Práci svěřil cvičenému Kirgizovi a přikázal mu stahovat kůže tak, aby Chaisan zůstal živý. Kirgiz začal od chodidel a dolních končetin, pak pokračoval z řezů vedených na zádech a na týlu hlavy. Chaisan však uprostřed trýzněni zemřel. Přítomný Džá-lama se rozzuřil, neboť již nemohl uskutečnit svůj záměr - předat matce syna staženého z kůže, a přece živého. Proto Chaisanovi, již mrtvému, prostřelil hlavu a z kůže nechal stáhnout i Kirgize. Poté předal matce zkrvavenou kůže synovu. Žena na místě zešílela.

belonging to the state that regarded him as a politically troublesome warlord (see **Figure 83**).

The Medical Gaze and the Criminal Corpse

As we have seen, an exploration of the iconographic theme of flaying from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century in the visual arts involves both the medical gaze of the anatomist who 'peeled back the body surface to expose what lay beneath', and the 'horror of excessive exposure' latent within the social subconscious of the period, which was connected to ingrained associations between the extremes of corporal punishment and the anatomists table.[243] The use of the criminal corpse as raw material in medical practice was not limited to the anatomy school or university dissection theatre, however; the body of the criminal was also highly valued in European folk medicine, to which I will return.

Although representations of flaying in the pictorial arts ceased to be a popular theme in the nineteenth century, muscle figures known as *écorchés* (flayed men) were still commonly in use in European art schools, and in both England and France, corpses were flayed and cast to produce life-like muscle figures, often mimicking the poses of ancient statues. The famous *Smugglerius* was a cast in 1776 from the body of a criminal in the pose the *Dying Gaul* for William Hunter, and military surgeon and artist Jean-Galbert Salvage flayed corpses to produce the écorché in the pose of the Borghese Gladiateur for the French Art Academy.[244] A particularly striking example of a sculptural work depicting the flayed criminal body dates from the early nineteenth century. In 1802, English sculptor Thomas Banks sold a plaster cast of the executed criminal James Legg's flayed and crucified corpse to the Royal Academy, where it still hangs as part of their collection of anatomical casts. James Legg was convicted of murder and hanged before his body was turned over to the surgeon Joseph Constantine Carpue for dissection. At the behest of Banks and two other Royal Academicians - Benjamin West and Richard Cosway - the body was first to be nailed to a crucifix in the manner of Christ, and then flayed once the body had 'settled' in this position. The experiment aimed to establish that most depictions of the Crucifixion were anatomically inaccurate, as Banks and his colleagues believed. Carpue describes the procedure as follows:

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[243] Benthien, *Skin*, pp. 61-94.

[244] See for the Smugglerius Martin Kemp and Martina Wallace, *Spectacular Bodies: the Art and Science of the Human Body* (London: Hayward Gallery, 2000), and for Salvage: Philippe Comar (ed): Une Leçon D'Anatomie à L'École des Beaux-Arts (Paris: Beaux-arts de Paris éditions, 2008), pp. 226-231.

> A building was erected near the place of execution; a cross provided. The subject was nailed to the cross; the cross suspended...the body, being warm, fell into the position that a dead body must fall into...When cool, a cast was made, under the direction of Mr. Banks, and when the mob was dispersed it was removed to my theatre. [245]

After this grim public display, the body was taken to Carpue's theatre where he flayed the body. Banks then made his cast (**Figure 84**). There are a number of intriguing aspects of this incident and the anatomical cast itself. Firstly, it draws a parallel between the iconography of the crucified Christ and the flaying of Marsyas. As well as touching on the deep-rooted cultural symbolism of Christianity and Greek mythology, we also see a re-enactment of these episodes within a nineteenth-century legal-scientific framework, in which the perpetrator of a capital crime is executed before a public audience, and whose body is then transformed into a spectacle of archaic torture for the purpose of satisfying scientific curiosity. Although the process of flaying the body is carried out away from the 'mob' that witnessed the death, the final artefact, the cast of the flayed body, is nevertheless put on public display after the body has been disposed of. The *Anatomical Crucifixion (James Legg)* speaks on multiple levels of the interrelated practices of flaying, penal punishment, the medical gaze, and the uncovering of the body to reveal the 'truth' of what lies beneath - in this case, the arrangement of the muscles of a crucified body. Whilst Christ's Martyrdom did not involve flaying, we are reminded of the parallel between Marsyas' crime and punishment and Christ's; both were perceived to have challenged the social and theistic order, and both were hung by their tormentors from a support - a tree and a crucifix respectively.[246]

As a scientific experiment carried out on a criminal corpse in order to satisfy primarily artistic curiosities, the flaying of James Legg is an unusual case. However, the criminal body has long been put to other less-than-scientific uses, and the raw material of the criminal corpse has been used both for its magical properties in folk medicine, and to fashion objects of use such as bags, books and boots, to which I will return. During the nineteenth century, the criminal body became the site of intense study by forensic scientists and criminologists, who sought to understand the criminal 'soul' through the decoding of the surface signs of the body. In prison, the criminal body was observed, measured, and classified. Following executions, bodies were carefully

[245] Image and text available online: <www.racollection.org.uk/ixbin/indexplus?_IXSESSION_=on_RhmDMKsE&_IXSR_=&_IXACTION_=display&_MREF_=11091&_IXSP_=1&_IXFPFX_=templates/full/&_IXSPFX_=templates/full/&_IXTRAIL_=Academicians> (accessed 16/10/2011).

[246] Though representations of Marsyas often depict him inverted, the arms are almost always bound outstretched in a similar arrangement to that of traditional crucifixions.

examined for any abnormalities that might reveal clues to their criminal make up, and notable specimens were carefully preserved for criminological museums and forensic teaching collections.[247]

Writing on the history of the criminological museum in Europe during the late nineteenth century, Susanne Regener describes the still-complete collection assembled by Cesare Lombroso, which is housed at the Institute for Medical Jurisprudence in Turin (*Instituto di Medicina Legale)*. This collection comprises a core of visual artefacts, which established the Archive for Psychiatry, Anthropology and Criminal Science in 1880. During a visit to the archive, Regener describes some of the material within the collection, including:

> Photographs, drawings and lithographs depicting criminals, psychiatric patients, and prostitutes; objects and pictures that were made in prisons and psychiatric institutions by their inmates; brains and whole heads preserved in liquid [...] wax and plaster masks of fugitives, plaster casts of ears and hands, preserved pieces of tattooed skin; a mummy in a cupboard, and many skeletons and skulls.[248]

This is, in fact, the only explicit reference to an extant collection of preserved tattooed skin assembled by a nineteenth-century criminologist that I have discovered - what was far more common practice was the 'collection' of drawings of tattoos traced from life, which will be discussed at greater length in chapter four. Both Lombroso and Lacassagne's collections contained numerous drawings of tattoos, and despite their theoretical differences, it seems that both scientists' main interest in these marks was 'directed towards their (objects) usefulness for bio-semiotics.'[249] Visual artefacts in general, and tattoos in particular, 'were ascribed a power of expression, as it were, as if they could speak for themselves.'[250] Indeed, Lacassagne's famous characterisation of tattoos as 'speaking scars', suggests not only that he regarded these marks as a peculiar form linguistic expression, but also that the surface of the body could be 'read' in the manner of pages in a book, an observation which presents intriguing associations with French practices of binding books in tattooed human skin, to which I will return.

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[247] Gaston Variot's report on the autopsy of the notorious murderer Henri Pranzini is particularly interesting in this respect. He described the body, which is otherwise healthy, in great detail, making special note of his 'very well developed genitals', and the 'remarkably well developed' muscles of his torso, shoulders and upper arms. He also commented that the weight of his brain was 'slightly below average,' and that the examination of the skull by his colleague Professor Papillault showed 'several anomalies.' Variot, 'Remarques sur l'Autopsie...', p. 43.
[248] Susanne Regener, 'Criminological Museums and the Visualization of Evil', *Crime, Histoire & Societes/Crime, History & Societies*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2003), p. 3.
[249] Ibid., p. 5.
[250] Ibid.

Further indication that the flaying - and possibly even the public display - of the skin of an executed criminal was practiced in continental Europe during the nineteenth century, may be found in the recent discovery of the fully flayed and heavily tattooed skin of an unidentified Frenchman, currently held in a private collection in London. Initially found at the famous Parisian flea market at the Porte de Clignancourt, some eleven years ago, this object remains fully intact and is still pinned to the door that apparently provided the original support for stretching and drying the skin. Upon meeting the collector (who prefers to remain anonymous) early in 2010,[251] he shared with me the story of how this rather gruesome artefact came to be in his possession. Whilst wandering *Les Puces* in 2002, he was drawn into a small medical and scientific antiques shop:

> There seemed to be a large dark door leaning there. Something was odd about it though. For some reason the top corners had been sawn away lending it the appearance of a wide coffin lid. In the dim light I could see that there was something adorning the surface of the panel. I made my way in past racks of dusty old medical and scientific equipment. A small angle-poise lamp cast a pool of light on the floor and I pushed it up towards the panel. It took me a moment to take in what it was I was actually looking at. A dark crumpled face with blank sockets looked down at me. As my eyes adjusted to the light I could see that it was a figure of a man or rather half of one. Imagine drawing a line around your body from the ankle, up the sides of the legs and thighs, along the front of the arms, across the top of the shoulders, up behind the ears and over the top of the head and then down the other side. Someone had taken a knife and flayed, quite crudely, the entire front skin off of a man's body. The skin was cured in some way and while still soft, had been laid out on the door and stuffed with what looked like rags and horsehair. The skin had then been nailed around its edge every few inches. With the stuffing he was presented in 3D, a nightmarish approximation of how he had once looked in life. Looking up at his face I could make out his ears and some short hair to the sides. His neck seemed stretched or marked. Running from the left side of his chest to his groin was a cut, which had been stitched back together with thick thread. His groin was a patchwork of flaps of skin and stitching but without 'Mr Happy' that I could see. It was as I was peering at this peculiar arrangement that I made out a word tattooed just above where this unfortunate man's appendage should have been. In quite large letters was the word, 'Bonheur'.[252]

[251] The collector initially contacted me for an expert opinion on the tattoos that cover most of the dorsal surface of the body. The majority of these tattoos are extremely crude and most certainly made by an amateur; the orientation of tattoos covering the thighs in particular indicate that at least some of them were made by Bonheur himself, as they appear upside-down to the viewer. Almost all the tattoos are black, with the exception of some small and remarkably bold areas of red on the legs, which were most likely produced using a cinnabar-heavy pigment, as discussed in the previous chapter. A large proportion of the tattoos, particularly those on the thighs, are explicitly sexual.

[252] Anon., *I Live With Another Man Only He's Dead and Nailed to a Door*, unpublished manuscript, written by the collector and Bonheur's owner. The abdominal tattoo 'Bonheur' is visible in **Figure 85**.

'Bonheur', as he has come to be known, is very interesting in a number of ways. Insofar as the skin is both heavily tattooed and dry-preserved, this entity is comparable with the Wellcome tattoos; initial laboratory testing also indicates that the preservation dates from around 1860,[253] which would make this specimen roughly contemporary with Lavalette's tattoo collection (see **Figure 86**; an interesting visual comparison may be made between the flayed and stuffed skin pinned to the door panel and David's figure of Sisamnes in **Figure 80**). However, there are also a number of important differences between these preservations, which will be discussed later. Most intriguing of all is the story - or perhaps it would be more accurate to say the legend - that was passed on with the skin when it was sold in 2002. This story, like a folk tale passed on through oral tradition, was recounted by the antique shop owner, before it was passed on to me by the collector:

> [Bonheur] had been a sailor in Marseilles, date unknown. Convicted of rape and murder he was sentenced to death, hung and the body turned over to the local medical school for dissection. Then at the last minute the law courts decided to make an example of him and ordered him to be flayed, nailed to the door and then displayed in the courts as a grim warning to all.[254]

The structure of this tale bears striking resemblance to the flaying myths and legends of antiquity and the Middle Ages. The framing context is one of crime and exceptional punishment; the motif of flaying is coupled with more familiar eighteenth-century associations of degradation and increased severity of punishment through post-mortem dissection imported from Britain; and the use of a door as simultaneous support for the preservation of the skin and exemplary display recalls medieval practices (whether real or imagined) of pinning the skins of malefactors to church doors. Whereas the flaying myths previously discussed are not validated by surviving artefacts (human relics preserved at Lipari notwithstanding), here we have an artefact of human remains with an unsubstantiated story of origin strongly reminiscent of common flaying myths. The story of the flaying of Sisamnes has particular resonance in relation to Bonheur - both individuals, having transgressed the social and moral order, received exemplary punishment enacted primarily through the removal and preservation of the entire skin. Whilst Sisamnes' skin was fashioned into the seat of judgement for his successor, Bonheur's hide was pinned to a door and thus may seem to

[253] The skin has been at the Forensic Anthropology laboratory of Bournemouth University since 2011 for material testing. Dating of the artefact has been established through analysis of the wooden support on which the skin is pinned. Close observation of the support, pins and the drying pattern of the skin indicate that the skin has not been removed from the wooden door since it was originally preserved.
[254] Unpublished manuscript.

have more in common with the English 'Dane-Skin' myths of the eleventh century. However, the particular manner in which his skin was preserved in relief, stuffed with horsehair and rags in order to retain a certain voluminous or life-like quality, suggests a closer resemblance with upholstered furniture, of which the human leather seat in the Sisamnes legend is the iconic example. This similitude is reinforced through the use of upholstery tacks to pin the skin to the door, and may even suggest that an upholsterer, rather than an anatomist or a tanner, carried out this particular preservation.

Is such a grim judicial spectacle likely to have taken place in mid-nineteenth century France? This would seem highly unlikely; nevertheless, at least one aspect of the story may be borne out through material analysis of the skin and the door it takes for its support. The long mid-line suture, which runs from clavicle to groin, certainly suggests that an autopsy was performed, if not full medical dissection. It also seems probable that this skin was obtained directly from a French medical school. Moreover, there are also some intriguing features to the support itself, which may indicate that this artefact was intended for macabre display of some sort. Something that impressed upon the collector when he first saw it in the Paris market shop, was the peculiar way in which the top corners had been cut away, which gave the strong impression of 'a wide coffin lid', (see **Figure 87**). This alteration seems to be intentional, suggesting that it was a conscious (and somewhat morbid) display decision. On further examination of the door panel, it is apparent that small rectangular sections have also been cut from the lower corners, leaving a long narrow strip along the base of the door panel. There is a clear watermark stain, rising upwards from the lower edge of this strip, which further suggests that the entire panel was once propped upright, perhaps slotted into a purpose-built wooden support base, which would allow it to be free standing. If this was the case, it seems unlikely that the door was ever intended to be hung at a court of law or indeed in any other sort of building - rather, it suggests a portable exhibition piece, which may have even been displayed outdoors or at temporary exhibits, thus accounting for the water stain.

Whether or not Bonheur was hung for murder and castrated for rape has not been possible to determine, though there would almost surely be court records of such a case if indeed there were any veracity to the story. In the absence of such records, his story must be regarded as an oral legend, possibly passed on from the original collectors who put the preserved skin on display for a public who would be drawn in by such a gruesome story. It is perhaps more reasonable to speculate that he was a criminal, whose body was made readily available for dissection following an otherwise natural death in prison.

This chapter has thus far dealt mainly with the symbolism and meaning of the entire flayed human skin - stripped from the body, preserved and displayed whole. But what of the fragment? There are significant distinctions to be made between the entire preserved skin and the fragment: Specifically, the whole skin can retain a confronting sense of individuality and personhood, as I experienced first hand in the case of Bonheur. This is also reflected in the naming of what is an otherwise anonymous skin after one of his tattoos - a distinguishing characteristic of the skin itself. All those that I have spoken to who have encountered Bonheur, tend to refer to the flayed skin by name or as 'he', rather than 'it.' The isolated fragments of tattooed skin in the Wellcome Collection, by contrast, do not generally conjure the same subject pronouns. These pieces have become abstracted from the body, and thus have lost much of their identity; in some cases even appearing as flat documents, not unlike papers in an archive[255] (see **Figure 69**).

One attribute that the entire skin and the fragment have in common across a broad range of geographical and historical contexts is their potential enactment as trophies and healing relics. Whilst the entire flayed skin is endowed with magical, restorative and reinforcing properties in mythological narratives, it is invariably the fragment that finds practical application in European folk medicine. Human bone, blood, fat, skin and other body parts considered to possess potent healing powers, have long been used in the treatment of a wide range of ailments from epilepsy to skin conditions.[256] As well as the holy relics of martyred saints such as Bartholomew, the body parts of executed criminals were especially revered for their potency, and often highly sought after. Folklorist Wayland Hand notes that:

> It is one of the ironies of folk medical practice that things connected with the realm of the dead should by some inexplicable logic be employed to combat sickness and sustain life.[257]

The curative power of the corpse (and particularly the criminal corpse) has a long history in Europe. The Romans valued human blood as a cure for epilepsy; and in Hanau and Berlin it was reported as late as the 1860s that some spectators attending public executions would arrive at the scaffold equipped with spoons, cups and cloths, in

[255] A critical analysis of this comparison will be taken up in more depth in chapter four.
[256] For a fascinating overview of this field see, Richard Sugg, *Mummies, Cannibals and Vampires: The History of Corpse Medicine from the Renaissance to the Victorians* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).
[257] Wayland D. Hand, 'Hangmen, the Gallows and the Dead Man's Hand in American Folk Medicine', in J. Mandel and B. A. Rosenberg, (eds.) *Medieval Literature and Folklore Studies: Essays in Honor of Francis Lee Utley* (New Brunswick and New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1970), p. 323.

order to collect the fresh blood of the corpse for medicinal purposes.[258] Handkerchiefs soaked in the blood of the criminal were often sold by the executioners themselves,[259] who traditionally operated a side-line trade in human material obtained from the scaffold.[260] The sudden traumatic and violent death of the executed criminal was directly linked to the potent healing powers of the corpse, which were commonly believed to '[derive] from a vital force which remained in the body beyond the moment of death.'[261] Kathy Stuart writes that the role the German executioner from 1600 to the 1800s was frequently also that of lay healer, and that they often presented themselves as medical professionals who were careful to convey that there was nothing 'magical or miraculous' about their practice.[262] In England, access to the executed criminal body could be obtained by paying a fee to the hangman.[263]

As well as consuming parts of the dead body, the touch of a corpse was thought to impart healing properties. Christopher Hibbert writes that English children were taken onto the scaffold so that the dead man's hand, 'damp with death sweat' could be 'rubbed against their skin as a cure for scrofulous diseases.'[264] The notorious 'dead man's hand', or 'hand of glory' as it is more popularly known, has historically been amongst the most sought after of criminal relics; according to Wayland Hand, the trade in this most potent of body parts continued unabated well into the nineteenth century.[265] Human skins were also fashioned into belts worn by pregnant women during labour,[266] recalling the magical and protective 'doubled skin' of flaying myth, and suggesting powerful associations with birth, death and re-birth:

> Flaying is always, it seems, accompanied or followed by the possibility of a re-assumption: either the assumption of another skin, or the resumption of one's own skin (through healing). The skin therefore provides a model of the self preserved against change, and also reborn through change.[267]

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[258] Christopher Hibbert, *The Roots of Evil: A social history of crime and punishment*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1963), pp. 267-268.
[259] Ibid.
[260] This trade was also practiced by executioners in early modern France, Italy and Britain. For more on these contexts, see Sugg, *Mummies, Cannibals and Vampires*, pp. 84-87.
[261] Kathy Stuart, *Defiled Trades and Social Outcasts: Honor and Ritual Pollution in Early Modern Germany*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 160. See also Hand, 'Hangmen, the Gallows and the Dead Man's Hand', p. 324.
[262] Ibid., p. 172.
[263] William George Black, *Folk Medicine: A Chapter in the History of Culture*, (London: The Folklore Society, 1883), p. 101.
[264] Hibbert, *The Roots of Evil*, p. 268. See also Black, *Folk Medicine*, pp. 100-101.
[265] Hand, 'Hangmen, the Gallows and the Dead Man's Hand', p. 324.
[266] Robert Jütte, 'Haut als Heilmittel', in Ulrike Zeuch (ed.), *Verborgen im Buch – Verborgen im Körper*. Ausstellungskataloge der Herzog-Anton-August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, No. 81 (Wiesbaden: Harrowitz Verlag, 2003). See also, Stuart, *Defiled Trades and Social Outcasts*, p. 158.
[267] Connor, *The Book of Skin*, pp. 31-32.

The skin of the criminal corpse thus obtained a special place within European folk medical practice, perhaps also accounting to some extent for the fetishization of objects manufactured from criminal skins. In England and Scotland a number of books, wallets and card-cases have historically been produced from the skins of high profile murderers, in particular. A card-case made from the skin of William Burke, who was executed in 1829 for murdering sixteen people in order to sell their cadavers to the local anatomy school, is still on display today at the Edinburgh Police Museum (see **Figure 88**) and a notebook allegedly bound in his skin is shown at the Surgeon's Hall Museum at the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh. Numerous other human skin objects survive in libraries and museums across Europe and in the US, the majority of which date from the nineteenth century. Frequently, it is doctors and police officers that were responsible for their manufacture and collection. The American doctor and Democratic politician John Eugene Osborne (1858-1943), for instance, made a bag, a coin purse, and a pair of shoes from the skin of George Parrot, who was sentenced to death for the murder of two law officers. He was lynched in 1881 by an impatient mob before the official sentence could be carried out. Osborne carried out the autopsy on the body to determine whether there were any observable 'criminal abnormalities' in Parrot's brain, before having his skin tanned.[268] He is alleged to have worn the human-skin shoes to his inauguration as Governor of Wyoming in 1893. The bag and purse have since been lost; however, the shoes can be seen in the Carbon County Historical Society Museum, in Wyoming (**Figure 89**).

Shoes made from human skin were also historically known in France. According to Valmont de Bomare, during the eighteenth century, Royal surgeon Jean-Joseph Sue (the Elder), grandfather of the novelist Eugène Sue, presented a pair of human leather slippers to the Cabinet du Roi in Paris; Bomare also mentions that this collection possessed a leather belt on which a human nipple was clearly visible.[269] Numerous accounts of human skin bags, belts, boots, waistcoats, and breeches are found in the literature,[270] though few of these items can be located in extant collections, and some

[268] Ruth Penfold-Mounce, 'Consuming Criminal Corpses: Fascination with the Dead Criminal Body', in *Mortality*, Vol. 15, No. 3, (2010), p. 259. Penfold-Mounce draws a comparison between John Osborne's actions and the habit of some serial killers, who take and wear the skins of victims and keep body parts as souvenirs. She gives the example of Ed Gein, whose female body suit fashioned from the skins of his victims famously inspired the character 'Buffalo Bill' in Thomas Harris's *The Silence of Lambs*. This would seem to be an overstatement, however, since Osborne did not actually murder Parrot for his skin; a more appropriate parallel may perhaps be drawn with Dambiijantsan's flaying of Khaisan.

[269] Valmont De Bomare, *Dictionnaire Raisoné Universel d'Histoire Naturelle,* Paris (1775), Tom. 6, N-PIE, pp. 502-506. See also the entry "Peau Humaine Passée" in d'Alembert et Diderot's *Encyclopédie*, Tome 12, 1765, p. 220.

[270] For an exhaustive account of these, see the chapter 'Religatum de Pelle Humana' in Lawrence Thompson's *Bibliologia Comica: or, Humourous aspects of the caparisoning and conservation of Books*, (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1968), pp. 119-152.

are no doubt the stuff of legend. A particularly interesting account of a human leather vest comes from Italy:

> [...] the sixteenth-century sculptor Silvio Cosini of Fiesole made a vest out of the skin of a criminal corpse he had stolen for dissection and wore it over his shirt for its magical and protective powers.[271]

In this narrative, we see the intersection of multiple themes relating to the treatment of the criminal body and the power of the flayed skin: Cosini, as both an artist and a member of an Italian brotherhood responsible for criminals condemned to death, would have been familiar with two very different ways of dealing with the corpse; the performance of last rights for the executed, and the use of the body as raw material for dissection by artists and anatomists.[272] His fabrication of the skin of a criminal corpse into a garment however, has more in common with folk medicine and magical practices involving body parts, as well as recalling the image of Apollo, shrouded in the raw inverted skin of the flayed Marsyas.

The manufacture of garments from human skin in particular, seems to suggest affinities with the magical notion of 'doubling' or reinforcing one's own skin through the appropriation of another's. In France, rumours abounded of the production of human leather during the French Revolution, though to what extent this was merely Royalist propaganda has been the subject of much debate. One particular tannery at Meudon on the outskirts of Paris is frequently mentioned in the historical literature on human leather, to the extent that it was somewhat mythologised by nineteenth-century commentators. Bibliographic scholar Lawrence Thompson considers the impetus given to anthropodermic bibliophagy[273] and related arts during the early nineteenth century as being a result of such myths of the French Revolution. The tannery at Meudon was said to have filled all the requisitions for the leather goods needed by the revolutionary army quartermasters, including gloves and breeches. Despite the doubt surrounding the historical accuracy of such reports, these stories were still being quoted in the early twentieth century. In his 1901 *Practical Treatise on the Leather Industry,* A. M. Villon includes the following story from the *Souvenirs de la Marquise Crequi*:

> At Meudon they tan human skins, and when it comes from this factory it leaves nothing to be desired in either quality or condition. It is well known that many people wear breeches of the same kind and of the same material; this material

[271] Katherine Park, 'The Criminal and the Saintly Body: Autopsy and Dissection in Renaissance Italy', in *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (Spring, 1994), p. 26.
[272] Bohde, 'Skin and the Search for the Interior', p. 28.
[273] The binding of books in human skin.

> having been furnished by the bodies of those executed in the revolution of 1789 [...] The skin which is provided by men is of a consistency and excellence superior to that of the chamois; but it has less solidity due to the softness of its tissue.[274]

Such stories of the preservation and fabrication of human skin into clothing and objects of use during this period of intense social and political upheaval, suggest an element of the trophisation of human skin within the popular imagination, which may have endured in cultural memory of earlier punitive flaying practices. Parallels may also be drawn with later collections containing human skin. Indeed, Susanne Regener considers human remains held in the criminological museums of the late nineteenth century in similar terms, since, she argues that such objects 'also function as symbols of victory, trophies, in the fight against crime.'[275]

The mythologization of flaying is also recalled during the Second World War in German concentration camps, where everyday objects such as book covers and lampshades were reportedly fashioned from human skin. Ilse Koch, the infamous 'Kommandeuse of Buchenwald' was alleged to have selected inmates from within the Buchenwald concentration camp whose tattoos she admired, which she then had removed and preserved at her whim.[276] Whilst SS Dr. Erich Wagner certainly *did* remove tattoos from the bodies of concentration camp prisoners at Buchenwald following up from his doctoral work on the tattoo,[277] preserved tattoo specimens within this context are certainly trophies of domination. Benthien characterises practices of,

> reshaping of human skin into trophies and the simultaneous, deliberate degradation of human body parts into mere articles of everyday use [...] [as] a symbolic assertion of power over a human being's most elemental possession: his skin.[278]

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[274] A. M. Villon, *Practical Treatise on the Leather Industy*, (London: Scott, Greenwood & Co., 1901), p. 28.
[275] Regener, 'Criminological Museums', p. 8.
[276] In his 2010 book, *The Lampshade: A Holocaust Detective Story from Buchenwald to New Orleans*, journalist and author Mark Jacobson reports on the peculiar Nazi inclination for collecting and fabricating objects from (often tattooed) human skin. Czech Communist surgeon and prisoner of war Dr. Franz Blaha, who gave evidence at the Nuremburg war crimes trials testified that: 'It was common practice to remove the skin from dead prisoners [...] It was chemically treated and placed in the sun to dry. After that it was cut into various sizes for use as saddles, riding breeches, gloves, house slippers, and ladies handbags. Tattooed skin was especially valued by SS men.' (p. 13). Anecdotal evidence of the habits of Ilse Koch also crops up. Reporting in 1945, UPI correspondent Ann Stringer quoted a Dutch engineer who had been a prisoner at Buchenwald. He described how Ilse Koch 'would have prisoners with tattoos on them line up shirtless. Then she would pick a pretty design or mark she particularly liked. That prisoner would be executed and his skin made into an ornament' (p. 19). For a more critically nuanced discussion of the allegations made against Ilse Koch, see Alexandra Przyrembel, 'Transfixed by an Image: Ilse Koch, the 'Kommandeuse of Buchenwald', in *German History*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (2001), pp. 369-399.
[277] See Erich Wagner, *Ein Beitrag zur Tätowierungsfrage*, Inaugural Dissertation (1940), einer Hohen Medizinischen Fakultät der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität zu Jena. This thesis contains photographic examples of tattoo specimens he collected post-mortem.
[278] Benthien, *Skin*, pp. 81-82.

Whether or not stories such as those of the Meudon tannery were entirely mythologised, or just exaggerated, there is nevertheless one description, related by Villon in his *Treatise,* which provides some useful information as to methods for the preparation of human leather. He refers to Valmont de Bomare's *Dictionnaire universelle d'histoire naturelle* first published in 1765-, which describes experiments carried out at Meudon, and relates the following recipe for the tanning of human skin: 'Allow it to macerate for several days in a wash charged with alum[279], Roman vitriol[280] and common salt; take it out, dry it in the shade, then taw it.'[281] Villon goes on to provide the following description of human leather:

> Human skin is sometimes harsh and dry, sometimes soft and glossy; its colour varies from the palest pink to the deepest brown. Its thickness varies from a seventieth of an inch to a sixth of an inch, its greatest thickness being found over the belly. When tanned, it increases in thickness and gives a very tough leather, fine-grained and very soft.[282]

In the case of the Wellcome Collection tattooed skins, almost all conform to the former description of their tactile properties as being 'harsh and dry', having a closer resemblance to parchment than leather. Whilst leather has traditionally been used in the manufacture of clothing and bookbindings, quite different preservation processes have historically been used in the production of parchments used for writing. The correspondences between the skin as writing surface and the tattoo as a form of writing, alluded to in the work of many nineteenth century criminologists, invites further reflection on the preserved tattoos as a kind of pre-inscribed parchment.

Anthropodermic Bibliophagy: The Body As Book

In a 1929 newspaper interview, French novelist and poet Anatole France described his experience of watching the tattooed American dancer Irene Woodward perform on stage in Paris. Interestingly, he made repeated and explicit reference to her tattooed body as a book, whose surface he variously described as an 'art gallery', a 'handbook of historical facts', and a 'fleshy textbook.' Popularly known as *La Belle Irène*, France

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[279] *Alum* is both a specific chemical compound and a class of chemical compounds. The specific compound is the hydrated potassium aluminium sulphate (Potassium alum) with the formula $KAl(SO_4)_2{\cdot}12H_2O$. The wider class of compounds known as alums have the related empirical formula, $AB(SO_4)_2{\cdot}12H_2O$. Ammonium alum is known to be used in tanning.
[280] Blue, or roman vitriol is cupric sulphate (or Copper(II) Sulphate).
[281] Villon, Treatise on the Leather Industry, p. 28.
[282] Ibid., p. 27.

related his experience of seeing her performance, in his conversation with *Revue de France* journalist Nicolas Ségur:

> I have known at least one illustrated woman. That was Irène, the beautiful dancer at the *Eden*, who was much written about in the press [...] her entire body, from head to toe, was an art gallery, a handbook of historical facts [...] I was madly curious to see these key events from the Bible and history on the desirable white body of La Belle Irène. What an education such a book would be, and how one would sail through one's history exams after deciphering this fleshy textbook! However, it was all in vain. According to Lemaître at least, the beautiful Irène was a closed octavo book with just one reader: her husband.[283]

France's description of her as an octavo book is particularly suggestive: Both of her own diminutive feminine form, framed as a small book that may be intimately kept on one's person, hidden in a pocket; but also via the reference to many pages created by folding one sheet over and over on itself, suggesting that the dancer's body consisted of a many layered skin, whose multiple stories were concealed through the 'doubling over' or *inversion* of the tattooed skin. This episode is particularly striking for its quite explicit interpretation of the tattoo as both text and image from which 'facts' may be learned, a concept that was also strongly implied in the work of nineteenth-century criminologists such as Lacassagne. This resemblance of the tattoo with forms of writing suggests notions of the skin as a parchment on which a text may be written; in this way the body may be regarded as a fleshy 'book,' which contains multiple stories that are continually unfolded on its surface. As Steven Connor points out, 'the implication of the skin in the idea of the book is more than a metaphor. For centuries of manuscript and book production, books were primarily things of skin,'[284] having traditionally been written on parchment and bound in leather.

Writing on the reading and handling of medieval Christian manuscripts, Sarah Kay describes the materiality of these parchments:

> Just occasionally you can make out on its velvety surface a trace of its genesis, most commonly a pattern of hair follicles, or a filigree of tiny veins: subliminal reminders that it cannot altogether escape the time-bound world of mortality.[285]

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[283] Nicolas Ségur, 'Nouveaux propos d'Anatole France', in *Revue de France*, November 1929. In this interview, France described the tattoos on Irène's body in highly erotic terms: 'The beautiful American's back allegedly depicted the Battle of Trafalgar, her belly showed the War of Seccession and the Discovery of America by Christopher Columbus. The Adoration of the Magi adorned her chest and her two breasts were the hemispheres of the globe. Anybody embraced by the arms of the beautiful Irène would be covered by the conquest of Mexico, which is represented on them, and anyone imprisoning her thighs would also have simultaneously captured Jerusalem which adorned them, conquered by Tancredi.'

[284] Connor, *The Book of Skin*, p. 42.

[285] Sarah Kay, 'Original Skin': Flaying, Reading and Thinking in the Legend of Saint Bartholomew and Other Works', in *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Winter 2006), p. 35.

This description of animal skin parchments may equally be applied to the Wellcome Collection tattoos, whose various skin adnexa and surface features attest to their human materiality; in specimen number A670 for instance, the tracery of fine red capillaries can be discerned just beneath the surface, as well as hair follicles and the protrusion of a nipple (see **Figure 90**). Kay describes imperfect parchments variously as 'scarred, blotchy, scraped, cut, split, holed, torn, stretched, strained, or dried to a hornlike consistency, all blemishes which are consequent on the flaying, scraping, stretching and drying of hides.'[286] On precious parchments, the flawed parts of the skin, which testify to it's animal origins, are avoided by the writing block, and generally appear at the limits of the page. The materiality of the parchment is thus marginalised: This practice is to some extent paralleled in the preparation of a number of the Wellcome tattoos, in which the frilled and pinned edges have been carefully trimmed away, thus minimising the signs of their preservation (see **Figure 69**). In her discussion of parchment manuscripts which recount the martyrdom of saints such as Bartholomew, Kay considers that perfect parchments may be regarded as representing the immortality of the protagonists whose narratives are contained within the page. By the same token, damaged parchments can reflect a graphic realisation of the texts' content of suffering:

> These causes of damage - scraping, cutting, splitting, tearing, holing, stretching, drying out - are all processes that, inflicted on a living human body rather than on a dead animal would be forms of torture. Folios bearing defects like these thus constitute a mute doubling of the kinds of suffering undergone by the protagonists of many of the texts that are written on them.[287]

But what of human parchments, such as those in the Wellcome collection? These are not entities that can be presumed to be 'mute'; their 'texts' are pre-inscribed on the 'page', which in many cases speak quite directly of the suffering of their protagonists through tattooed statements such as *Enfant du malheur* (**Figure 6**), *l'amour fait souffrir; l'envie de crier; fait courir* (specimen number A583, **Figure 91**), or even through images, such as the dagger-through-the-heart, previously explored in chapter one (**Figure 14**). 'The wounds in the parchment' described by Kay, also recall the 'wounded tattoo' described in chapter two (specimen number A544, **Figure 39**). The wounds that Kay writes of in animal parchments are literal wounds - and just as larger cuts, holes and splits may be stitched in the production of traditional parchments[288], so too are damages to the human skins preserved in the Wellcome collection. Tears such as the

[286] Ibid.
[287] Ibid., p. 36.
[288] Ibid., p. 35.

one pictured in one of the skins from the collection which appear in the centre of a specimen, the ruptured edges drawn back together during the preservation process, call to mind the suturing of wounds (**Figure 39).** In the case of medieval texts, Kay considers that the symbolic interplay between narrative and parchment surface 'sutures' the theme of flaying to the page'[289]; a parallel that may certainly also be drawn between anthropodermic bindings and the texts contained within them.

Claudia Benthien makes the claim that in Europe, a cultural shift took place from the eighteenth century onwards, in which flaying transitioned from a real-life penal practice with 'high iconographic visibility', to metaphor that 'remained in social consciousness', but which largely disappeared from the visual arts.[290] However, this observation does not seem to be born out historically; both in the example of James Legg, whose body was actually flayed post-mortem as part of a penal process and manipulated to produce art, and in practices of binding books in human skin, particularly the skin of criminals. Steven Connor writes:

> […] although binding in skin is often thought of as a kind of atavistic barbarity, the practice does not, according to Lawrence Thompson at least, seem to have been known before the eighteenth century.[291]

In fact it is during the early nineteenth century that some of the most well known examples of anthropodermic bibliophagy originate. In England, these followed the pattern of flaying-as-penal-punishment, with a number of volumes being bound in the skin of executed criminals, such the murderer John Horwood in 1821. This binding survives in the archives of the Bristol Record Office (**Figure 92**). In this and similar cases, the skin was used to bind volumes which contained the reports, case and trial notes of the executed person, in an apt gesture of 'admonitory ventriloquism'. As Connor succinctly puts it:

> As a mute affidavit of the authenticity of the account it encloses, the skin binding provides the same kind of bodily countersign as the cross or thumbprint by means of which the illiterate may make their attesting marks in legal documents. Normally, it is the legal document that is biding upon the body it concerns; here the body's own binding seems to underwrite and circumscribe the power of the official record.[292]

[289] Ibid., p. 38.
[290] Benthien, *Skin*, p. 81.
[291] Connor, *The Book of Skin*, p. 43.
[292] Ibid.

However, there is another factor at work here, which involves the fabrication of the body into its own text - the text of a misspent life which is re-enveloped in that corporeal symbol of individuation, the flayed and preserved skin. This relatively recent historical practice seems to have much in common with medieval notions of flaying as a form of 'poetic' or exemplary justice; the narrative of the life within the book and anthropodermic binding together present a kind of *exemplum justitiae* which may be summed up as: 'these are his deeds, and this is what became of him.' Furthermore, in the case of anthropodermic bindings, 'the skin validates the book, but the text must reach outside itself to give its authenticating stamp to the mute skin that confines and confirms it.'[293] In other words, whilst the skin is recognised as a bearer of the social inscription of meaning, the cover of the anthropodermic book must nevertheless declare itself to be human skin through inscriptions such as *Cutis Vera Johannis Horwood* (the skin of John Horwood).

Such textual anchors are not necessary, however, if the skin already bears an inscription which testifies to it's human individuality - an inscription such as a tattoo. In contrast with the English, it is reported by bibliographic scholars that French penal practice was not so enthusiastic about the dissection of deceased criminals, with only one known example cited in the literature of a criminal whose skin was used to bind a book in France since the Revolution. The subject of this binding was the executed criminal known as 'Campi', whose real name was apparently never revealed to the public, and a portion of whose skin was supposed to have been used to bind an account of his trial and dissection.[294] The whereabouts of this book is unknown. This unsubstantiated example aside, it seems that the practice of fabricating criminal skins into bindings for exemplary moral accounts of their misdeeds was a peculiarly English practice. Human skin bindings were, however, popular in some French circles. As late as the 1920s, specialist bookbinders of Paris were still receiving commissions for anthropodermic bindings, some of which had particularly interesting features. Lawrence Thomas relates this particular instance:

> One lover of unusual bindings, a Dr. Cornil of the Academy of Medicine, senator from L'Allier, and professor of pathological anatomy in the Faculty of Medicine in Paris, managed to find a tattooed skin portraying two knights from the period of Louis XIII in single combat, and he could think of nothing more appropriate than to order his copy of 'The Three Musketeers' bound in this hide. He had another tattooed bit of human integument showing a heart pierced by an arrow, and this was used for binding his copy of 'Bubu de Montparnasse'. His binder

[293] Ibid., pp. 44-5.
[294] Anon.,'Les Reliures en Peau Humaine', in *La Chronique Médicale, V* (1898), p. 137.

> was Rene Kieffer, who protected the worthy doctor by calling him Dr. V […] in his communications to the 'Mercure de France' on the matter...[295]

This is certainly intriguing, and the adoption of a pseudonym by Professor Cornil suggests that he was well aware of the questionable nature of his collection. Moreover, 'Dr. V' recalls the elusive 'Dr. La Valette' or 'Lavalette', who met with Johnston-Saint at the Paris Faculté de Médecine, where Cornil was made *professeur agrègé* in 1869. Whilst Cornil's death in 1908 rules him out as the man who met with Johnston-Saint in 1929, the pathology professor may have been involved in assembling a tattoo collection at the Paris school prior to his death, which could then have been sold on by a colleague or friend at the school. In a speech to the *Société d'Anthropologie de Paris* in 1929, Dr. Gaston Variot also comments on Cornil's collection of anthropodermic books:

> The notion of tanning human skin to preserve it has existed since time immemorial, and lately in particular, bibliophiles have had the notion of binding precious books with this rare skin. My friend Dr. Paul Dorveaux, the archivist at the Academy of Sciences, has provided me with some information about the use of human skin, which I reproduce verbatim here. Professor Cornil had several books bound in this way in his library collection, which was broken up and sent to the saleroom after his death.[296]

Thompson relates a number of like reports of privately commissioned tattooed bindings from Ernest de Crauzat's *French Binding from 1900 to 1925 (La reliure française de 1900 à 1925)*. Rene Kieffer was in fact the dean of anthropodermic bibliopegists in Paris, completing a number of special tattooed human skin bindings for clients:

> For R. Messimy he bound a copy of *Fêtes foraines* with an inlaid piece of human skin tattooed with the likeness of a wrestler, a copy of *Les trois dames de Kasbah* with inlaid plates of human skin on both covers showing two ladies in states of dress reminiscent of 'Sacred and Profane Love', as well as a further two more tattooed volumes.[297]

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[295] Thompson, Bibliographica Comica, p. 139

[296] Variot, 'Remarques sur l'Autopsie...', p. 45. Translated from the French:
'*De temps immémorial on a eu l'idée de tanner la peau humaine pour de faire relier des livres précieux avec cette peau rare. je dois à mon ami le Dr. Paul Dorveaux, archiviste de l'Académie des Sciences, quelques renseignements sur l'utilisation de la peau humaine, les reproduis tels quels. Le professeur Cornil avait plusieurs livres reliés de cette manière dans sa bibliothèque qui fut dispersée à l'hôtel des ventes, après sa mort.*'

[297] Thompson, *Bibliographica Comica*, pp. 150-151.

Messimy is described by Thompson as 'an indefatigable collector of tattooed anthropodermic bindings'. As well as commissioning works by Keifer, he also had the book-binder De Sambleaux-Weckessen bind a volume of *Sahara et Sahel* 'with an inlaid tattoo of an equestrian knight of armor.' Such volumes were frequently bound with human skins sought for the specificity of their tattooed images in relation to the context of the text bound within. The French binder Firmin-Didot also reportedly bound a copy of a *Dance of Death* for Edmond Halphen 'in the skin of a sailor with tattoos portraying exotic love themes side by side with reverent portraits of superior officers'. According to De Crauzat, Halphen later presented this volume to the Bibliotheque Nationale.[298] Many of the tattooed bindings mentioned by De Crauzat and Thompson are thought to still survive in private collections, and remarkably, De Crauzat reproduces photographs of some these in *La Reliure Française* (see **Figures 93** and **94**).

In the case of British and French anthropodermic book-binding, it is clear that different motivations were at work in different national milieus; whereas British anthropodermic bindings were most often (but not always) the result of corporal punishment, and very much still connected to the skin of the criminal, the French counterpart to this practice seems to have largely been practiced amongst private collectors and doctors, with greater fetishistic value attached to tattooed human skins. Benthien's contention is that forms of partial flaying, such as the Nazi collection of tattoos at Buchenwald, was not representative of practices which 'expose what is beneath the surface', as was the case in anatomy, but rather represented a symbolic assertion of power and fetishisation of the skin through its collection and preparation.

However, it is difficult to locate collections such as the tattooed human skins of the Wellcome Collection easily in either one category or the other. In the absence of specific historical documentation regarding this collection of nineteenth-century tattoos, it is possible to speculate that the amassing of such collections *was* in fact an attempt to 'scratch beneath the surface' of the criminal psyche, through interpretation of the surface signs of the body. In this sense, criminologists could be considered to be involved in a search for the 'criminal soul' which lay beneath the surface of tattooed other, the tattoos themselves providing the unmistakable clue to the deviant or abnormal psychology within. On the other hand, it is perhaps the case that this collection bears more in common with tattooed anthropodermic bookbindings of the

[298] Ibid. See also De Crauzat, *La Reliure Française*, p. 137. There is no trace of such a volume at the Bibliotheque Nationale today.

period, linked with the criminal body, human trophy collecting and the fetishization of human skin.[299]

Throughout European history, the skin has been variously invested with complex and often conflicting notions of selfhood and identity, appearing as a deceptive cover that masks the 'true' inner self, representing the principle of selfhood and entirety, or a surface on which identity may be inscribed. Once the skin is removed from the body, these meanings are complicated further: The flayed skin is encountered historically in practices and narratives of exemplary torture and execution; as a barrier which must be breached in the pursuit anatomical and medical knowledge in the visual arts and medicine; as a healing relic whose deathly touch can restore the skin of the living in folk medicine; as a trophy of war or justice done; or as an especially fetishised raw material for the manufacture of rare luxury goods. To conclude, the complex and shifting cultural meanings of the flayed skin discussed in this chapter inform and enact the kinds of entities that collections of preserved tattoo skins may become through their shifting use, display and assembly into collections: 'trophies, souvenirs, sources of knowledge, things to possess and trade, deceased relatives, scientific data, once living persons, traces of previous violence, channels of communication, potent political substance and remains of ancestors.'[300]

[299] The Pranzini case discussed in chapter two would seem to be the archetypal example which involves all three of these elements.
[300] Hallam, 'Articulating Bones', p. 465.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Collecting and the Body in the Archive

Having looked at the various historical contexts of flaying and the fabrication of human skin into objects of use, as well as considering the specific materiality of the Wellcome Collection tattoos, I will now focus upon the particular collecting practices involved in assembling the collection. As I have shown, material analysis of the collection raises many questions, and provides some answers; particularly in terms of preparation techniques, and who may have been interested in preserving tattooed human skin during the late nineteenth century. But in considering the complex motivations for collecting the tattoos, another approach must be sought. With these questions in mind, it is necessary to locate the Wellcome tattooed skins - and indeed the tattoo and tattoo collections more generally - within the broader context of the collecting cultures of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Thus the exploration and analysis of comparative collections of tattooed human remains, as well as iconographic collections of tattoos in the form of drawings, photographs and waxes also constitute a significant part of my discussion. Finally, this chapter looks at the ways in which different collecting practices enact the tattoo in multiple ways and for different discursive purposes, considering their fabrication into museum artefacts in terms of Bruno Latour's concept of the *immutable mobile.*[301] Particular attention will be paid to the sites in which tattoos are encountered, such as the clinic, the prison or police archive, the pathology lab, and the criminological museum, opening up the discussion of medical and criminological discourses surrounding the tattoo in chapter five.

Beginning with the tattoo collectors, it is important to identify the contexts in which the tattoo is first acquired. As I will demonstrate, becoming tattooed in the European context may in itself be regarded as a form of collecting. Initially, the itinerant tattooee, classically the sailor or soldier, acquires on their travels various tattoo marks as souvenirs. Later, following the death of the tattooed, another collector selects, excises, prepares and collates the tattoos for a private or institutional collection, ostensibly for academic study.[302] Time passes, academic interests shift and change - some schools of thought fall out of favour or are discredited, and tattooing ceases to be an active study concern in disciplines such as criminology. The collection is sold, and

[301] Bruno Latour, 'Visualisation and Cognition: Drawing Things Together' in, H. Kuklick (ed.), *Knowledge and Society Studies in the Sociology of Culture Past and Present* , Jai Press, Vol. 6 (1986), pp. 1-40

[302] As previously explored in chapter three in some depth, it seems more than likely that there was an element of fetishisation at play behind the collection of tattooed human skin even within academic contexts. Specific instances of this form of collecting will be examined further in this chapter.

absorbed into yet another collection, that of the museum - the repository for curious relics of past human endeavour. Thus with each shift in location, or *site of enactment* - living body, medical teaching collection or cabinet of curiosity, and public institution - it is possible to see that the meanings ascribed to these objects metamorphoses also, thereby complicating the question of *why* and *for what purpose* they were assembled.

In what follows, I will aim to demonstrate how the tattoos of the Wellcome Collection were collected in multiple senses and in more than one instance, in each case enacting a different conception of the tattoo and the collection, enlisting examples of comparative collections in order to historically locate the tattoos within their sites of enactment.

The First Collectors: The Tattooed

The earliest documented incidence of the collection of a tattooed human skin dates from seventeenth-century England. This skin, now lost, belonged to a native of the island Meangis known as 'Prince Giolo' or 'Jeoly', who was transported to England in 1691 by explorer-adventurer William Dampier.[303] Jeoly's entire body was tattooed with the elaborate geometric markings, which resemble traditional Micronesian tattoos of the Caroline and Palau Islands,[304] as well as sharing formal similarities with Marquesan *te patu tiki,*[305] which Dampier describes in the account of his travels, *A New Voyage Around the World*:

> He was painted all down the Breast, between his Shoulders behind; on his Thighs (mostly) before; and in the Form of several broad Rings, or Bracelets round his Arms and Legs. I cannot liken the Drawings to any Figure of Animals, or the like; but they were very curious, full of great variety of Lines, Flourishes, Chequered-Work, &c. keeping a very graceful Proportion, and appearing very artificial, even to Wonder, especially that upon and between his Shoulder-blades [...] I understood that the Painting was done in the same manner, as the *Jerusalem* Cross is made in Mens Arms, by pricking the Skin, and rubbing in a Pigment.[306]

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[303] Meangis is the seventeenth-century name given by Dampier; this is almost certainly the present day island of Miangas, also known as Palmas, part of the Talaud Islands archipelago in Indonesia.
[304] See Tricia Allen, 'European Explorers and Marquesan Tattooing: The Wildest Island Style' in D. E. Hardy (ed.) *Tattootime Volume V: Art from the Heart* (1991), pp. 86-101; also Kotondo Hasebe, 'The Tattooing of the Western Micronesians', in *The Journal of the Anthropological Society of Tokyo* Vol. XLIII, No.s 483-494 (1928), pp. 129-152 (in Japanese).
[305] *Te patu tiki* is the common term for indelible body marking in the Marquesan language, meaning to 'wrap in images'.
[306] William Dampier, cited in Geraldine Barnes, 'Curiosity, Wonder and William Dampier's Painted Prince', in *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Spring/Summer 2006), pp. 37-38.

Having failed in his mission to discover unexploited spice and gold wealth in the Spice Islands, Dampier found in his 'Painted Prince' Jeoly ample compensation as a marketable curiosity on his return to England.[307] His ambitions were thwarted on his arrival home, however, when financial exigency forced him to sell Jeoly on to other interested parties. Jeoly thus began a new and short-lived career 'as a sight' at the Blue Boar's Head Inn on Fleet Street in London. The broadsheet advertising his public appearances from June 1692 includes an illustration by John Savage, which represents the elaborate tattoos over the front portion of Jeoly's body in some detail (**Figure 95**). The tattoos depicted in this illustration are similar to tattoo designs recorded by other visitors to the Marquesas in the early nineteenth century, such as the 1804 engraving of a tattooed inhabitant of Nuku Hiva (**Figure 96**), based on drawings by artists on the first Russian circumnavigation lead by Ivan Kruzenshtern, captain of the *Nadezhda*.[308] A brief handwritten account of Jeoly's life - and his death in Oxford - is recorded by the chaplain of Merton College, John Pointer, and preserved among the manuscripts collections at St Johns College Library at Oxford University:

> This Indian Prince (whose Body was thus curiously painted) was taken prisoner by an English Man of War as he and his Mother were going out upon the sea in a Pleasure-boat. His Mother died on ship-board; at which the Prince her Son show'd abundance of concern and sorrow. His language was unintelligible. He was about 30 years of age, and well shaped. He was shown for a Sight, his Body being so curiously painted. This more Sham'd to those that so expos'd him, one of the Royal Blood. Being brought to Oxford, he fell sick of the Small-Pox and there dy'd, and was buried in the Churchyard ^in 1694. His Skin was taken off by Mr. Poynter the Surgeon at the desire of the University who was willing to have it preserved in the Anatomy-School. See a further Account of him in Dampiers travels.[309]

Preserved human skins had been put on display as curiosities in anatomical cabinets throughout the seventeenth century; four items of human skin were exhibited at the *Kabinet Van Anatomie* in Leiden, for instance.[310] In the anatomy school at Oxford University, a number of human skin specimens were preserved and recorded in seventeenth-century inventories of the collections. Such descriptions as "A piece of a womans skin Tanned", and "The Skin of a man stuff'd with the Hair on his head", are

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[307] For a critical discussion of Dampier's account of Jeoly, see Barnes, 'Curiosity, Wonder and William Dampier's Painted Prince'.
[308] See Elena Govor, '"Speckled Bodies"': Russian Voyagers and Nuku Hivans, 1804', in Nicholas Thomas *et al* (eds.), *Tattoo: Bodies, Art and Exchange in the Pacific and the West* (London: Reaktion, 2004), pp. 53-71; this engraving is also reproduced in Nicholas Thomas' introduction to the same volume, pp. 9-10.
[309] John Pointer, *Manuscripts,* St Johns College Oxford, MS253 Volume 4: Folio 23.
[310] Arthur MacGregor, 'Collectors and Collections of Rarities in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', in Arthur MacGregor (ed.), *Tradescant's Rarities: Essays on the Foundation of the Ashmolean Museum 1683*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 78.

listed by historian of science and founder of the Museum of the History of Science at Oxford, Robert Theodore Gunther.[311] The fragment of Jeoly's skin described by Pointer seems, however, not to have survived. In her discussion of the collection and what became of this particular fragment of tattooed skin, early modern cultural historian Geraldine Barnes notes that:

> Unsystematic cataloguing and lax security in the Anatomy School might well have resulted in the disappearance of this particular natural rarity into the hands of a private collector or collectors.[312]

This episode establishes an earlier form of tattoo collecting which encoded the tattooed skin of the native as a curiosity of potential anatomical interest. Although extant skins of this type are uncommon within contemporary museum collections (discounting ancient tattooed mummies in Russian, Egyptian and European collections that have been excavated from archaeological burial sites), there is one example of an anomalous tattooed skin at the anthropology department of the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle (MNHN). This collection, perhaps the best comparative exemplar for the Wellcome Collection, contains many examples of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century tattoos of European origin. One particular piece is conspicuously different, however: This large fragment of skin was excised from the right side of the chest, on which a nipple is visible, extending all the way down to the hip, preserving the skin of the abdomen, as well as the right shoulder, a portion of the upper arm, and part of the back over the shoulder blade. The skin is notably darker in colour than the other specimens in the collection, appearing quite brown; the tattoos cover a significant portion of the skin fragment, which has been cut economically to follow the form of the tattoos. These are black, consisting of a distinctive tribal pattern incorporating geometric shapes and abstracted zoomorphic forms (**Figure 97**).[313] Collection records indicate that the provenance of this tattoo is Laos; thus this specimen falls into a different category of ethnographic and iconographic interest to the other tattoos within the MNHN Anthropology Department collection.

Etymologically, the word *tattoo* and associated terms in European languages (such as the French tatouage) derive from the Tahitian word *tatau*, an onomatopeic word meaning to strike, mark or tattoo. The terms *tattow* and *tattoo* first appear in English in 1771, in the published accounts of Captain James Cook's voyages to the South

[311] R. T. Gunther, *Early Science in Oxford*, Vol. 3 (1925), pp. 260-264.
[312] Barnes, 'Curiosity, Wonder and William Dampier's Painted Prince', p. 45.
[313] MNHN collection records indicate that this specimen originated from Laos, and was donated by a 'Mr. Rouffiandies', whose collection dated from c.1906-1919.

Seas.[314] Although the Pacific encounter had a significant effect upon wider European consciousness of tattooing practices, these experiences were not, as has been claimed by some authors, the originary point for European tattooing. According to Jane Caplan and others, the historical material points rather to a process of 'convergence and reinforcement', in which the tattoo was 'propelled into a new quality of visibility from the end of the eighteenth century.'[315] Written accounts in the journals of early explorers and sailors sometimes reveal their familiarity with similar practices in Europe; thus it seems more than likely that European encounters with Pacific tattooing *reinvigorated* latent European tattooing practices. These accounts are invaluable in reconstructing early European experiences of tattooing within specific milieu.

In most cases, however, it is impossible to know many aspects of the lives of tattooed European sailors, soldiers, and workingmen, since they seldom left behind written personal histories - save for the words and images they inscribed into their flesh.[316] Nevertheless, it is with these historically obscured individuals that we must begin. The sailor or marines, (and to a lesser extent soldier's) tattoo can now be regarded as iconic, both in broad cultural terms and within tattoo art practice - indeed, this category of images could now be said to have become a genre within the corpus of contemporary European tattoo iconography.[317] Collections of tattooed images bound up with seafaring life, (such as those seen in specimen number A585, **Figure 99**) are emblematic of early sailor tattoos - a fouled anchor, possibly indicative of rank;[318] the pierced heart symbolising betrayal in love, a common woe of the sailor away at sea for long stretches of time; creatures of the sea; and the bearer's name, inscribed to provide an identifying mark in the event of death. It is often difficult to determine whether such tattoos belonged to ordinary civilian seamen or men enlisted in the marines corps: In his 1881 study *Le Tatouage*, criminologist Alexandre Lacassagne lists numerous professional tattoo emblems, describing the variations these professional motifs may take. Under the category "Marine" for instance, he lists tattooed inscriptions of the word *marine*; fouled anchors; anchors; the figure of a sailor; a ship and fouled anchor; and naval insignia consisting of a barrel and axe, all as possible variants.[319] The Wellcome Collection contains a number of tattoos of naval insignia - specimen number A689 for

[314] Nicholas Thomas: 'Introduction', in Thomas,*Tattoo,* p. 7.
[315] Caplan, 'Introduction', in Caplan, *Written on the Body*, p. xx.
[316] The notion of tattooing as a form of body-writing or personal memoire is explored by Philippe Artières in his book *A Fleur de Peau. Médecins, Tatouages, et Tatoués 1880-1910* (Paris: Editions Allia, 2004).
[317] See, for example, the classic twentieth century tattoo flash by American tattooist "Sailor Jerry" Norman Keith Collins (**Figure 98**), who was himself a sailor in the United States Navy from the age of 19. He was one of the twentieth century's most famous tattooists, and made his name as a professional tattooist to sailors.
[318] The fouled anchor is often associated with the Chief Petty Officer.
[319] Alexandre Lacassagne, *Les Tatouages, étude anthropologique et médico-légale* (1881), p. 47.

example is tattooed with a fouled anchor,[320] the year "1883" and the designation "1er MNE" (First Marine Corps), (**Figure 100**). Men employed as sailors, or more likely in naval regiments of the armed forces, make up a small but relatively unambiguous percentage of the occupations represented within the collection. Traditionally, this group has also been among the most enthusiastic of tattoo collectors in Europe. Commenting upon the acquisition of tattoo marks by European sailors visiting Polynesia in the eighteenth century, historical anthropologist Nicholas Thomas makes the following observation:

> Whereas objects gathered might be lost, broken or sold, and could only ever be tenuously connected with one's person and uncertain in their significance, your tattoo is not only ineradicable and inalienable, it is unambiguously part of you.[321]

Thomas explicitly likens the act of becoming tattooed to a form of collecting; specifically, he views the tattoo in this context as a bodily inscription that records the trace of an encounter. Following on from this argument, it is further more useful to conceptualise the tattoo with Bruno Latour and Simon Schaffer as a kind of 'immutable mobile'[322]: it is mobile insofar as the tattooed body travels, in this case the body of the sailor who brings home proof of an ethnographic encounter; and it is immutable by its very nature as a permanent mark. The emergence of 'a novel tattoo fashion' amongst the ordinary seamen who made up the crew of Cook's *Endeavour* in 1769 can be contextualised within a broader shipboard collecting culture, in which all crew were encouraged to participate in the gathering of cartographic and navigational data.[323] Simon Schaffer has shown how the European tendency during this period of exploration and information gathering was to interpret Polynesian tattooing as a form of writing.[324] Given the scientific remit of voyages such as Cook's it is thus easy to imagine how, for the common sailor who may not possess a great deal of literacy, 'tattooing became a form of peculiarly apt collection, an inventory of signs both mobile and exquisitely immutable.'[325]

It was not only the common sailors on early voyages who were tattooed, however. Sydney Parkinson, the artist responsible for producing iconic images of

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[320] This particular naval symbol dates back to 1588, when it was used as the official seal of Lord Howard Effingham, the Lord Admiral of Great Britain. It has since become a universal symbol for naval forces around the world.
[321] Thomas, *Tattoo*, p. 20.
[322] See Latour, *Visualisation and Cognition*.
[323] Thomas, *Tattoo*, p. 19.
[324] Schaffer, '"On Seeing Me Write"', p. 93.
[325] Ibid., p. 100.

tattooed Māoris on the Cook voyages, was apparently not merely an ethnographic observer, but was himself tattooed whilst moored at Tahiti:

> [Myself] and some others in our company underwent the operation, and had our arms marked: the stain left in the skin, which cannot be effaced without destroying it, is of a lively bluish purple, similar to that made upon the skin by gun-powder.[326]

According to historical anthropologist Bronwen Douglas, this transcultural exchange 'inaugurated a famous nautical tradition that made a tattoo the badge of a voyage to Polynesia in the eighteenth century.'[327] Numerous accounts of these encounters may be found in the travel diaries of the men who participated in pioneering European voyages around the globe. As Joanna White observes:

> Journals from the period [reveal] how, for the gentlemen professionals and some of the sailors who travelled on board ships to the Pacific, the experience of being tattooed was a novel activity, engaged in out of curiosity.[328]

Whilst tattooing may have been a 'novel activity' for some of these crews, others were already familiar with the practice. Journal records occasionally disclose an acquaintance with tattooing procedures as practiced at home; the Frenchman Jean Pottier de l'Horme, for instance, arriving in Doubtless Bay onboard the *St Jean Baptiste* nine days after Cook had passed, remarked that the indelible black body marking of the Māori were 'inlaid in the skin in the same way that some people have crosses inlaid on their arms.'[329] These comments strongly suggest that l'Horme was well aware of analogous European tattooing practices, and it seems probable that he was referring to the long-standing tradition of Christian pilgrimage tattooing. It was perhaps this latent awareness of similar tattooing customs at home that contributed to the rapid appropriation and adaptation of indigenous tattooing motifs. In some cases, tattoo designs that served as a mark of distinction among certain tribes and groups were adopted by European sailors for their own purposes. For instance, John Elliott, a mid-shipman on board the *Resolution* during Cook's second voyage, describes how he and his messmates were collectively tattooed during their visit to Borabora in the Society Islands:

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[326] Sydney Parkinson, *A Journal of a Voyage to the South Seas in his Majesty's Ship, the 'Endeavour'* (1773), p. 25.
[327] Bronwen Douglas, '"Cureous Figures": European Voyagers and *Tatau*/Tattoo in Polynesia, 1595-1800' in Thomas, *Tattoo,* p. 44.
[328] Joanna White, 'Marks of Transgression: The Tattooing of Europeans in the Pacific Islands', in Thomas, *Tattoo*, p. 74.
[329] Jean Pottier de l'Horme, 'Extrait du journal de Pottier de l'Horne [*sic*], lieutenant du vaisseau le St Jean Baptiste pour le voyage des découvertes dans le sud commencé en 1769 et fini en 1773', in Robert McNab (ed.), *Historical Records of New Zealand*, Vol. II, (Wellington, 1914), pp. 322-324.

> [...] all our Mess conceived the idea of having some mark put on ourselves, as connecting us together, as well as to commemorate our having been at Otaheite. For which purpose we determined on having a compleat Star drawn and then tattowed with black, the same way as the Natives are tattowed, upon our left Breast, and painful as this operation was, we all underwent it, and each have a very handsome Black Star on our left Breast, the size of a Crown piece.[330]

The black star motif adopted by Elliott and his messmates was perhaps similar to the black star tattoo seen in specimen number A721 (**Figure 101**). This particular tattooed star is unusual - most stars within the collection are nautical stars, which feature two overlaid four point stars, referencing the four major points and four midpoints of a compass (see for example, specimen number A779, **Figure 102**). Sailors and marines traditionally wore the nautical star as a talisman to protect against being lost at sea. A further example of the eight-point nautical star can be found in specimen number A584 (**Figure 37**). Elliott's account reveals how tattooing was in some cases adopted amongst European sailors as a 'multi-referential' practice: The tattoo could enact a common bond amongst the crew, 'connecting us together', as well as functioning as a souvenir of the voyage. White notes that this 'dual expressive potential' of tattooing held particular appeal for European sailors who possessed little in the way of personal possessions, and for whom the forming close social bonds with one's crewmates was necessitated by the extended periods spent together away from home and in close quarters.[331] In this context, the mutual experience of acquiring a tattoo could help to cement social relationships, whilst the permanent mark was a souvenir that one could unambiguously call one's own.

The notion of collecting is thus ingrained in established European tattooing traditions that record experiences of travel, present in the Christian pilgrimage tattoo and the sailor's tattoo alike. Moreover, the notion of marking novel experiences or ethnographic encounters on the body is also reflected in the iconographic or formal pattern of European tattooing, which can appear on the body as a 'collection' of motifs. The tattooed skin specimen shown in **Figure 25** is an exceptional example of a 'collection' of tattoos; twenty individual designs, grouped tightly together and arranged to balance the relative scale of each image, jostle over what was one half of the chest in a space almost twenty-one centimetres by sixteen. In contrast with the distinctive Japanese form of tattooing, or *irezumi*, which emerged during the Edo period (1600-1868), the European individual tended to be tattooed with a number of different,

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[330] John Elliott, in *Captain Cook's Second Voyage: The Journals of Lieutenants Elliott and Pickersgill,* (ed.) Christine Holmes (1984), p. 20.
[331] White, 'Marks of Transgression', pp. 74-75.

isolated designs that were not necessarily thematically linked and could be added to over time. The development of the Japanese style, by comparison, was strongly influenced by woodblock illustrations depicting characters and scenes from the popular Chinese novel *Suikoden* by the fourteenth-century writer Shi Nai'an (translated as *Water Margin* in English). Thus *irezumi* was intrinsically connected with the broader cultural field of narrative and pictorial arts; the tattoo in this context was conceived both thematically and ergonomically as a single work of art that would be applied to the skin over a number of sessions (see **Figure 103**). In contradistinction to the Japanese form of tattooing, it is possible to view eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European tattooing as a process of curio collecting: The more tattooed souvenirs one possessed, the more the body came be viewed as 'exotic' and strange. This is most evident in the case of those who took their tattoo collecting to the extent of acquiring entire body coverage. The bodies of the European and American Tattooed Man or Lady thus became living, breathing 'cabinets of curiosities', from which they could make a living as performers at fairs, sideshows and circuses (see, for example, the postcard of American tattooed brother and sister double act, Frank and Annie Howard, **Figure 104**). Whilst many tattooed performers did employ narrative in their acts, often inventing outlandish and dramatic stories of kidnap and forcible tattooing at the hands of 'savage' natives in far-flung exotic lands,[332] the element of narrative in European tattooing is marked by its mutability and fluidity. This tendency emerges as a consequence of the multifarious possible narrative linkages between many distinct motifs; a tendency which I have already touched upon in relation to the reading of Fromain's tattoos in chapter one. Further inference that tattooing and storytelling were linked in the popular European imagination may be drawn from the comments of Anatole France made in the *Revue de France*, in which he described the tattooed body of La Belle Irène as a beautiful illustrated book.[333]

A particularly interesting collection of nineteenth-century French tattoo motifs can be found in the *fonds Lacassagne* at the Bibliothèque Municipale de Lyon, collated in a rare design album dated 1889, which once belonged to a Lyonnaise tattooer (see **Figure 56**; also **Figure 7**). On one page in this book, we see a collection of different tattoo motifs, sketched over the tattooer's impression of a male torso (see **Figure 105**).

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[332] This was a common trope among the earliest tattooed European and American performers: The Englishman John Rutherford who travelled with a 'caravan of wonders' in the 1820s and 1830s for instance claimed that he had been taken captive by Māoris in New Zealand in 1816 and forcibly tattooed. On early European and American tattooed performers see Stephan Oettermann, 'On Display: Tattooed Entertainers in America and Germany', in Caplan (ed.) *Written on the Body*, pp.193-211.

[333] Nicolas Ségur, 'Nouveaux propos d'Anatole France', in *Revue de France*, November 1929. See my previous discussion of this episode in chapter three, p. 137.

It is highly unlikely that this drawing represents the selection and placing of tattoos on a specific client; the sketch was not intended to be a portrait or 'life drawing', but was rather a portfolio of designs belonging to a professional tattooer, used to display his wares. Moreover, this drawing presents us with a remarkable example of the traditional pattern of European tattoo acquisition: Unlike twentieth-century and contemporary tattoo flash sheets, which include a number of isolated designs on a flat white ground (see, for example, **Figure 98**), the unnamed nineteenth-century Lyonnaise tattooer has arranged a selection of isolated motifs over a background sketch of a specific body part[334]; not only presenting an array of tattoo design choices to his clients, but also suggesting their body location, and even how these individual designs may be supplemented in relation to one another over time. The arrangement of several self-contained pictures over the chest in the Lyonnaise drawing, reflect the wider tattooing habits of European men (and some women) during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in which the process of becoming tattooed may in itself be regarded as a form of collecting. Whilst in many cases these 'collections' may signify nothing more than the memory of the process of becoming tattooing, I would argue that the European tattoo acquisition pattern invites a tendency for 'reading' by non-tattooed Europeans who view them.

Thus the tattooee is the first collector in a series - selecting both a design and section of skin on which to have it inscribed, and building up a unique set of images which allude to their travels and experiences, perhaps over the course of a lifetime. In some cases, this reference is made so explicit as to almost render itself redundant: 'Souvenir du Sahara' (specimen number A784, **Figure 15**) speaks quite literally of the tattoo-as-souvenir, and is not an isolated example in the Wellcome collection. The historical material through which the European tattoo may be traced frequently follows a peripatetic pattern. The men whose tattoos were recorded in archives, documented in photographs and removed post-mortem were often employed in itinerant trades, which took them to far flung-places. Soldiers in particular recorded these destinations on their bodies through tattooing. Writing in 1820, French surgeon and naturalist René Primevère Lesson gave his account of the relationship between European tattooing and travel:

> There is no doubt that in the course of long-distance voyages this class of individuals [European sailors] has borrowed this bizarre decoration from savages, and that idleness and caprice efficiently propagated it, as is easy to

[334] Another example from the pages of this particular design book which shows drawings of tattoo designs on the body can be seen in **Figure 7**.

> ascertain among those who are assembled on board ship, in camps, prisons, and galleys.[335]

Although incorrect in his estimation of European tattooing as a practice essentially 'borrowed' from foreign cultures encountered during exploratory voyages and expeditions, this opinion was not uncommon amongst French intellectuals during the nineteenth century. The intense period of study of the tattoo which came about from around the 1880s onwards, coincided with a period of increased visibility of the tattoo in Europe, during which the first professional tattooists emerged in Britain and America, and the art form went through a number of technological and artistic changes. Foreign design influences such as the beautiful and accomplished Japanese *irezumi,* combined with technological invention in the form of Samuel O'Reilly's 1891 electric tattoo machine, and the patronage of royalty – traditionally the preserve of the fine arts – all coincided to inspire a generation of tattooists, who took advantage of a surge in the popularity of tattooing. It was also during this period that collections of tattoo imagery, as well as examples of preserved tattooed skin, were assembled by physicians and criminologists.

Secondary Collectors: Criminologists, Police and Physicians

The surge in popularity of tattooing amongst the male European working classes[336] caught the attention of a second group of collectors during the late nineteenth century. Although there was certainly a strong interest in the tattoo amongst prominent criminologists during the nineteenth century, there appears to be no explicit reference to or discussion of the collecting and preparation of tattooed skin in their work. There is, however, one account of an extant tattooed skin specimen at the Museum of Criminology and Jurisprudence in Turin, historically assembled by the prominent Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, suggesting that the collection of tattooed skin was not an unheard-of practice amongst forensic specialists.[337] Jane Caplan makes the assertion in the endnotes to her essay *'National Tattooing': Traditions of Tattooing in Nineteenth-Century Europe* that 'pathology clinics might preserve a few examples of

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[335] René Primevère Lesson, 'Du tatouage chez les différens peuples de la terre', in *Annales maritimes et coloniales,* Part II, (1820), pp. 290.

[336] Amongst the collections of tattoo tracings, photographs and preserved skins held in police, criminological and medical archives, are numerous examples of the trade insignia of ordinary working men - tinsmiths, stonemasons, blacksmiths, winegrowers - suggesting that there was a significant class dimension involved in tattoo collecting practices.

[337] As discussed in chapter three, p. 125; see also Regener, 'Criminological Museums and the Visualization of Evil', p. 3.

tattooed skin, but this was not the standard recording method'.[338] However, the three hundred skin specimens in the Wellcome Collection alone amount to much more than a 'few' examples - and there are many more in comparable collections across Europe. In Paris, for example, the anthropology department of the MNHN holds fifty-six pieces of tattooed human skin within their collection. Similarly, the Department of Forensic Medicine at Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland has sixty wet-prepared tattoos; the Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal e Ciências Forenses (INMLCF) collections in Lisbon, Portugal, contains seventy wet-preserved tattoos; the anatomist Dr. Ludwig Stieda also mentioned a collection of two hundred pieces in Königsberg; and there are many more examples of smaller collections in London, Berlin, and Austria. The question then, is *who* - if not the major criminological theorists of the time - were collecting tattooed human skins? Although the identity of the collector 'Dr. Lavalette' remains obscure, the archival clues which have led me to the Academie de Medecin in Paris at the turn of the twentieth century, suggest several possible candidates for the Wellcome Collection tattoos in particular. A number of sources cite the involvement of at least three prominent doctors in the collecting and preservation of tattooed human skin: Dr. Andre-Victor Cornil (1873-1908), Professor of Pathology, known for his interest in tattooed anthropodermic bookbindings; Dr. Paul Poirier, Professor of Anatomy, most notably associated with the Pranzini scandal mentioned in chapter two; and the paediatrician Dr. Gaston Felix Joseph Variot, who also specialised in tattoo removal, having worked as *medecin de l'infirmerie centrale des prisons*, and whose work on tattoos will be examined in greater detail in chapter five.

It is reasonable to assume that the tattoo collectors had some medical training, as well as access to tattooed cadavers; I would put forward the suggestion that it was likely that the surgeons and pathologists who were employed in prisons (like Variot), barracks and on the battlefield who were gathering this 'raw data', which could contribute to the production of criminological or medical knowledge. This supposition would follow Caplan's observation that much of the original research that nineteenth-century academic studies of tattoos drew upon, was actually collected by 'the ordinary prison or army medical officers' […] who were 'practitioners not academics.'[339]

In France, the most prominent criminologist writing on tattoos during the late nineteenth century was Alexandre Lacassagne, carrying out detailed research into the incidence of tattooing amongst prison populations. This work involved the gathering of a considerable amount of data, which he then set about systematizing:

[338] Caplan, '"National Tattooing"', p. 289.
[339] Ibid., p. 161.

> By 1881 he had collected copies of 1,600 tattoo images, traced from life, mounted on specially prepared paper and carefully catalogued according to seven categories of image, ten specifications of location on the body, and so on.[340]

As well as drawings traced directly from the skin of the tattooed criminal, photographs - and in some cases even the tattooed skins themselves - were collected as raw data by prison wardens, military physicians and criminologists. In the 1890 edition of the most important journal of forensic science of the period, the *Archives d'anthropologie criminelle*, an article appears which describes the extensive forensic teaching collection Lacassagne assembled at the laboratory of Legal Medicine in Lyon. Located upstairs from the state-of-the-art criminological laboratory, where teaching and research took place, was a large criminological museum, where students, colleagues and visiting professionals could study preserved specimens from a variety of crime scenes including suicides, accidental deaths, and homicides. The museum contained everything from cases dedicated to the study of skull fractures, caused by falls, bullets and blunt-force trauma; to vials containing a range of poisons; to a cabinet displaying cartridges and projectiles from all known firearms; to a collection of photographs' of criminals faces numbering in the hundreds, carefully categorised and displayed according to the crimes they had committed. As well as a collection of various ropes and cords used in cases of hanging, the article also mentions a 'curious and magnificent collection of two thousand tattoos.'[341] How exactly these tattoos had been collected, prepared and displayed, is not described by the anonymous writer.

What became of this collection of preserved tattoos is unclear; Lacassagne's collection of photographs of tattooed criminals has also been lost or dispersed, most likely into private collections.[342] Only four photographs remain in the *fonds Lacassagne* at the Bibliothèque Municipale de Lyon today. It is possible that Lacassagne's sizable tattoo collection - which would have dwarfed the Wellcome Collection - was also absorbed into the anthropological and medical collections of other French museums and institutions. The aforementioned MNHN collection, for instance, contains fifty-six examples of dry-prepared tattooed skin (formerly belonging to the Musée de l'Homme). One of these fragments, bearing the tattooed phrase *Le passé m'a trompé / Le present me*

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[340] Ibid.

[341] Anon., 'Les Musée du laboratoire de médecine légale à Lyon', in *Archives de l'anthropologie criminelle* (1890), p. 366. Translated from the French:
N'oublions pas une curieuse collection de cordes ou liens de pendus et une magnifique collection de 2,000 tatouages.

[342] The contemporary American collector Stanley Burns has several photographs of tattooed criminals, which were part of Lacassagne's original collection, for instance.

tourmente / L'avenir m'épouvante (The past has deceived me / The present torments me / The future terrifies me), no longer appears to be amongst the current collection of preserved tattoos at the MNHN. However, a photograph of this particular specimen is reproduced in Jacques Delarue's *Les Tatouages du 'Milieu'*;[343] the handwriting of the tattooer bears striking similarity to the same tattooed phrase that Lacassagne had printed onto a private collection of dinnerware (see **Figure 106**).

Other useful comparisons may be drawn between extant collections of tattooed skin, photographs and drawings of tattoos recorded in textual sources from the period in question. The tattoo design album preserved in the *fonds Lacassagne* at the Lyon municipal library for instance, contains a number of drawings with remarkable iconographic similarity to some of the Wellcome Collection tattoos. The first of these, a pencil sketch of a soldier carrying full kit and a standard (see **Figure 107**) may be compared with the partially faded tattoo depicting a soldier in a similar attitude (see **Figure 49**). This particular tattoo was initially quite difficult to interpret; large portions of the design are invisible or indistinct due to excessive fading, and the relative angles of the male figure's head, body and arms are confusing. He appears to stride forwards, whilst looking back over his right shoulder - but his right arm seems to be bent backwards at an impossible angle. The objects he carries over his shoulders are also perplexing: He is wearing a pack of some kind, from which an upturned face seems to emerge - could he be carrying a fellow soldier? This does not seem likely, as no second figure is visible amongst the confusion of faded lines. This particular motif perhaps makes more sense when compared with a reversed image of the Lyonnaise tattooer's sketch (**Figure 108**). It is possible that this tattoo may have been executed as a reverse image of the sketch, should the tattooer have employed two stages in the transfer of the design; perhaps tracing it directly from the pages of a design book, before applying the transfer face down on the skin surface to leave an impression, or lightly prick out the image through the sheet. The most striking similarities between the tattoo and the sketch are the angle of the figure's head and the *képi* that both soldiers wear - a style of cap common amongst the French Foreign Legion, the army and the Gendarmerie alike. The attitude of the tattooed figure becomes clearer when compared with the running stance of the sketched soldier; two boots are visible in both images, one leg raised, with the sharp point of his bayonet pointing towards the ground in front of his feet. Whilst this tattoo was undoubtedly executed by a tattooer of inferior draftsmanship to the Lyonnaise tattooer to whom the sketch belonged, it is possible that this remarkable

[343] See Delarue and Giraud, plate 41, p. 119. Photograph credited to H. Tracol. Collection Musée de l'Homme.

piece of tattoo 'flash' was a popular design copied by other amateurs and semi-professionals in the army. The design may have been adapted and altered to the preference of the client - in this case, the flag may have been omitted from the tattoo because this particular individual was not the standard bearer of his regiment. Whatever the case may be, the similarities between these two archival documents are intriguing.

Perhaps the most striking comparative example of a tattoo from the pages of the Lyonnaise design book, is a small motif depicting a woman riding a bicycle. This carefully drawn sketch is presented as one discrete design amongst a cluster of eight individual tattoos distributed over the surface of a male torso, from just beneath the collarbones to just above the navel (**Figure 105**). The woman on a bicycle (which may be a Penny Farthing, judging by the relative scale of the front and rear wheels), is positioned on the lower right side of the chest, over the ribs. The image has a number of distinctive features: The turn of her head and the hat that she wears; two large ribbons, which are part of the sash of her dress, flying out behind her; her left knee is raised and her right leg outstretched in a peddling motion; and the positioning of her hands, the left gripping the handlebars, and the right resting on her knee (**Figure 109**). When compared with one of the tattoos in specimen number A579 (shown in **Figure 110)**, we see all seven of these features listed above reproduced more or less accurately, despite the extremely crude execution of the tattoo. The outline of the design consists of a series of faded dots vaguely strung together, such that the tattoo appears incomplete; the front wheel of the bicycle is without spokes, and the facial features are also missing. Despite these omissions, the tattoo includes some additional flourishes, such as boots with buttons extending up the figure's right calf, and a bow at the collar of her dress. Given the similarities between the Lyonnaise sketch and the tattooed skin specimen, it is reasonable to conclude that this tattoo was very likely derived from this particular drawing, or one very like it.

As well as iconographic parallels with early examples of tattoo design books, the Wellcome Collection tattoos share similarities with many of the hand-traced tattoos collected by Lacassagne and others, published in their works on criminology and the tattoo. That many of these tracings have comparative equivalents amongst the preserved specimens further suggests that the Wellcome Collection was originally assembled in line with the research interests of nineteenth-century criminologists. Examples of similar iconography, such as tradesmens' tattoos depicting various tools, often presented within a wreath alongside a name, initials or date are commonplace: Compare, for example Lacassagne's tracing of a tinsmith's insignia, with compass,

hammer and shears[344] (shown in **Figure 111**), with the tattooed anvil, hammer, compass and set square in specimen number A669 (**Figure 112**). Other examples of insignia incorporating tools may not represent tradesmens' tattoos, but refer to membership of specific military corps. Specimen number A696, (**Figure 113**) for example, includes the tattooed name 'H HEYNAUT' and the year 1856, tattooed beneath a crossed shovel and pickaxe - the traditional trade tools of miners, as well as the insignia of engineer battalions.[345] Another interesting example from Lacassagne's collections of drawings, includes the professional emblem of a Master of Arms, consisting of two crossed fencing foils, combat mask and glove, *chaussons*, a sabre and a plastron[346] which is itself 'tattooed' over the chest with the phrase *Honneur Aux Armes* (Honour Of Arms), (see **Figure 114**).[347] A very similar example of this professional motif, bearing the same phrase, two crossed foils, a pair of gloves, fencing boots and a mask, is preserved in specimen number A650 (**Figure 115**). It is particularly interesting to note Lacassagne's interpretation of some of the tattooed emblems he encountered: Recalling my discussion of the 'grappe de raisin' (bunch of grapes) motif in chapter two, Lacassagne also reproduces tracings of this tattoo, with the addition of two crossed tools, identified as the trade tools of a winegrower (see **Figure 116**).[348] Whilst the inclusion of the tools would seem to suggest that this tattoo was a trade emblem, it also calls into question Graven and Delarue's unproblematic reading of the *grappe de raisin* motif as indicative of time served in a specific prison. Although these diverging interpretations may be correct in both cases, this example underlines a fundamental problem in the attempt to construct reliable taxonomies of the iconographic signification of tattoos - a bunch of grapes may, in fact, signify nothing more than a bunch of grapes.

Perhaps the most striking example of iconographic similitude between Lacassagne's collection of tattoo design tracings and the Wellcome preserved skins is the tattoo of a circus strongman, or wrestler. In Lacassagne's text, this motif is described as the professional emblem of a *lutteur* - a fighter, or wrestler - and may take several forms, including a wrestler with weights or dumbbells; two wrestlers in combat;

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[344] Lacassagne and Magitot, *Du Tatouage*, p. 32.
[345] In particular, the 317th Engineer Combat Battalion officially used this insignia from 1943. It usually appeared with the Lorraine Cross and oak tree representing the Argonne Forest, with the motto 'By Industry and Honor'. Although this example is specific to the US troops during the Second World War, many regimental symbols and insignia were used informally by servicemen, going through many stylistic changes over a long period of time prior to their official adoption by military authorities. This particular example has its origins in US-French Allied operations in France during World War I, but the crossed pickaxe and shovel predates this period, possibly deriving from nineteenth century penal battalions.
[346] A *plastron* is the name for the large protective pad worn by a fencer to protect the chest, or a lancer's protective breastplate.
[347] Lacassagne and Magitot, *Du Tatouage*, p. 35.
[348] Lacassagne, *Les Tatouages*, p. 47.

or weights, dumbbells, or cannonballs.[349] The figure accompanying Lacassagne's text shows the figure of a man in a close-fitting long-sleeved shirt, through which his pectoral muscles have been crudely defined, shorts and what may be stockings. He stands with his left hand on his hip and the left arm is raised, a block weight gripped in the left hand (see **Figure 117**). The attire of this figure is reminiscent of the classic stage costume of French strongmen performing in carnivals and circuses during the late nineteenth-century. The typical costume of a close-fitting bodystocking or leotard, shorts, and boots can be seen, for example, in the 1876 carnival poster advertising the extraordinary feats of strength performed by "Bazin, L'Hercule du Canon", who is depicted firing a cannon from his shoulder, whilst walking with block weights strapped to his feet (see **Figure 118**). A very similar tattooed figure is preserved in specimen number A593; in this example, the strongman is wearing a very distinctive costume, much like Bazin's, with the addition of stars decorating his shorts. The tattooer, though unskilled in shading techniques, nevertheless attempts to define the musculature of the figure, defining the pectorals and biceps with crudely dotted lines and heavy areas of solid shading, as well as the muscles of the thighs (**Figure 119**). The figure's pose is identical to the tracing reproduced in Lacassange's text. Tattoos depicting circus and other performers make up a small proportion of the Wellcome Collection - a mere nine[350] individual motifs, or three per cent of the whole collection. Nevertheless, if Lacassagne's interpretation of these kinds of motif as 'professional emblems' is correct, it is intriguing that this rather marginal of professional groups are represented in tattoo collections at all.[351]

Lacassagne assembled his first collection of tattoo tracings during a year spent in Algiers in Medea province, where he gathered tattoo imagery from the bodies of men enlisted in the 2nd African Batallion (known as the *Bats d'Af*), as well as men serving time in military prisons. During the late nineteenth century, there were four single penal battalions of Infanterie Lègére d'Afrique (Africa Light Infantry), which was composed of French civilian or military criminals, as well as the all-volunteer Légion Étrangère (Foreign Legion). Lacassagne collected his data on the tattoos of 360 soldiers

[349] Ibid., p. 42.
[350] See my note in chapter two, p. 93 on the interpretation of these designs.
[351] Daguillon also records a 'fairground athlete', a 'dramatic artist' and a body builder amongst the tattooed patients he studied at Ville-Evrard asylum. Daguillon, 'Tatouage chez les aliénés', pp. 177-178. One might speculate that tattooing may have been more common among those who made their living through displaying their bodies or performing physical feats for a public audience, since the presentational aesthetics of the body would have been a significant professional concern. Similar observations may be drawn with contemporary athletes and sports men and women, whose 'body work' often extends from the gym or sports field to the tattoo studio. The tattooing of the Olympic rings symbol, for example, was extremely popular among athletes during the London 2012 games, functioning as both a symbol of elite group membership, a souvenir of participation in the event, and a badge of physical prowess.

from the 2eme *Bats d'Af*, who had been enlisted in the penal battalions for offenses such as desertion, selling their military-issue effects, or stealing from their comrades.[352] The remainder he gathered from the military prisons. Lacassagne writes:

> I gathered about sixteen hundred tattoos. This collection, which I believe to be unique, is of great importance, since it represents absolutely accurate drawings, inscriptions or emblematic statements on the skin of four hundred people.[353]

In his first published study, Lacassagne did not reproduce any illustrations of regimental motifs, focusing instead on trade emblems and inscriptions. In fact, he considered the influence of military life to be a weak factor in the acquisition of tattoos, not at all comparable with the naval milieu, where tattooing was a way of life. Rather, he identified time spent in prison to be the major factor in the acquisition of tattoos amongst the battalions he studied,[354] concluding that:

> [...] the large number of tattoos almost always gives the measure of the criminality of the tattooed or at least an appreciation of the number of his convictions; and his stay in prison.[355]

The correspondence between Lacassagne's study of French colonial regiments in North Africa, and the range of military tattoos from this region represented in the Wellcome Collection is striking. There are a considerable number of tattoos whose inscriptions refer to specific regiments of the African Infantry regiments; the most frequent of these being the *zouaves*, who were largely raised by short-service conscription from the French settler population. Specimen number A775, for example, bears the shorthand regimental inscription of the 2eme zouaves: "2.Z" (**Figure 120**); other regiments which crop up in emblems and inscriptions include the 1st and 3rd zouaves, the 12th *Hussards*, 6th *Chass d'A*f (Chasseurs d'Afrique - a light cavalry corps of the French Armée d'Afrique), as well as numerous *ligne* regiments. Although the geographical parallels with Lacassagne's collection of images are certainly significant, none of the regiments mentioned above in the Wellcome Collection were penal

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[352] Alexandre Lacassagne, 'Recherches sur les Tatouages et principalement du tatouage chez les criminels', in *Annales d'Hygiene et de medicine legale*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (1881), p. 290.
[353] Lacassagne, 'Recherches sur les Tatouages', p. 289. Translated from the French:
'J'ai réuni à peu près seize cents tatouages. Cette collection, que je crois unique, a une grande importance, puisqu'elle représente d'une manière absolue les dessins, inscriptions ou emblèmes relevés sur la peau de quatre cent individus.'
[354] Ibid., p. 291.
[355] Ibid. Translated from the French:
[...] le grand nombre de tatouages donne presque toujours la mesure de la criminalité du tatoué ou tout au moins l'appréciation du nombre de ses condemnations et de son séjour dans les prisons.

battalions; historically, it is these groups of men whose tattoos were the subject of criminological interest.

Significant collections of photographs of tattooed soldiers from the North African penal battalions were also gathered during the late nineteenth century. Many of these images have been reproduced in recent popular publications on the theme of criminal tattoos; the majority of these photographs are held in private collections and little is known of their provenance. Jérôme Pierrat and Éric Guillon's 2004 book *Le Tatouage à Biribi*, for example, contains seventy-five black and white photographs of tattooed men from the disciplinary battalions in Algeria, known colloquially as 'Biribi'.[356] The photographs in this collection of portraits are typically taken against a black background, and are cropped to frame the naked bodies of the tattooed men from the waist up (**Figure 121**). In most cases the entire head and neck is included in the image; but it is the tattoos that are the real subjects of these portraits. Amongst this collection, there are a great many motifs in common with those preserved in the Wellcome Collection including phrases such as *Enfant du Malheur* (Child of Misfortune), *Pas de Chance* (No Chance), *Robinet d'Amour* (Love Tap), and *Sans Pitie* (Without Pity); mementos and references to place such as *Souvenir D'Afrique*, *Maroc* and *Tunisie*; as well as numerous female portraits, military busts, wreaths, lions, leopards, flowers and daggers, etc. Despite the close similarities between the repertoires of motifs, I have been unable to make any unequivocal matches between this collection of images and the preserved tattoos. Thus whilst these photographs provide an important collection for the purposes of comparison of iconography and milieu, it has not been possible to conclusively determine whether the Wellcome Collection tattoos were collected from the bodies of North African military soldiers in these locales.

The photographic documentation of tattooed criminals during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also took place in French police departments; although this does not seem to have been systematic, judging by the extant material available in public archives. I found these to be limited and disparate in general. In the Préfecture de police archives in Paris, for example, only twenty-four glass plate photographs of tattooed criminals survive. The photographs in this archive are of particular interest, however: both because the photograph of the tattooed individual Fromain is part of this collection; and because the context and content of these images demonstrates a process of technological surveillance of the body which is quite different to the photographs in Pierrat and Guillon's book. Most of the *Biribi*

[356] Biribi was a French game of chance that was made illegal in 1837, which was known as a 'cheat's game'. In the French army, 'to be sent to Biribi' was a slang expression for being sent to the disciplinary battalions in the North African colonies.

photographs are close cropped to focus on the tattoos over the chest, abdomen and arms, suggesting that these photographs were made in order to document the tattooed images and phrases themselves, much like Lacassagne's tattoo tracings. The Paris police collection of photographs on the other hand, display the body within a broader context of measurement and data gathering, of which the recording of the tattoo appears to be just one aspect. For example, two photographs of a criminal named 'Bourgerie' show a naked and heavily tattooed man, standing in front and back views against a grid backdrop, in order to facilitate the accurate measurement of his physical proportions from the two-dimensional image (**Figures 122** and **123**). Thus these images were intended to record of a broader set of anthropometric data, as well as document his tattoos. In another photograph that focuses on the body part, in this case a tattooed forearm, we see the limb extended out over a white plate and photographed from above (**Figure 124**). The isolation of the limb in this image affords greater specificity to the tattoos, but the positioning of the arm and the perspective of the camera also suggests a procedure of systematic measurement designed to identify *specific* criminal bodies. The science of anthropometrics, developed into the first effective modern system of criminal identification by Parisian police official Alphonse Bertillon in the late nineteenth century, was directed primarily towards the practical purpose of identifying individual criminals, through a combination of statistical and photographic methods.[357] Bertillon's system of 'signalment, or 'Bertillonage' as it became known, involved two key elements:

> First, he combined photographic portraiture, anthropometric description, and highly standardized and abbreviated written notes on a single *fiche,* or card. Second, he organzied these cards within a comprehensive, statistically based filing system.[358]

The purpose of this system was primarily technical in its aims, directed towards the rapid recognition and retrieval of information that could be used to identify repeat offenders. Through this system, 'technicians' of crime such as the police could gain knowledge and mastery over individual criminals in their fight against crime; criminologists on the other hand sought knowledge and mastery over a far more elusive subject: the criminal 'type.' As Allan Sekula succinctly puts it:

> Herein lies a terminological distinction, and a division of labor, between "criminology" and "criminalistics." Criminology hunted "the" criminal body. Criminalistics hunted "this" or "that" criminal body.[359]

[357] Allan Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive', in *October*, Vol. 39 (Winter 1986), p. 18.
[358] Ibid.
[359] Ibid.

This distinction is reflected in the inscription processes employed by criminologists and police technicians such as Bertillon, and in their visual data gathered. Whilst Lacassagne collected hundreds of tattoo images in order to construct a taxonomy of criminal tattoos, the police technician photographed the tattoos of individual criminals as part of a cataloguing process which involved the exhaustive recording of numerous other physical measurements. Thus the photographs of tattooed men in the Paris police archives seem to visually operate within a broader system of measurement, surveillance, and identification, despite their fragmentation within the archive, an element to which I will return in chapter five. The documentation of criminal tattoos within the context of the police department then, served a primarily practical function - identifying recidivism in the course of ordinary police work. What then, are we to make of post-mortem photographs of the tattooed criminal body? The post-mortem photograph of a heavily tattooed man named 'Claude Heitzmann' seems to lay at the interstices of tattoo collecting practices: The photographic documentation of his tattoos for the purpose of detecting recidivism is redundant; the body laid out on the mortuary table is intact, yet one could easily imagine that his tattooed skin is about to be stripped away and preserved by the doctor performing an autopsy. I am reminded of the peculiar relationship between the photograph of Fromain and his preserved skin; fragmented and dispersed in separate archives, registering different traces of his tattooed body perhaps for entirely different purposes.

The criminological and medical interest in the tattoo during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, to which Lacassagne's work formed a major contribution, emerged in part from a wider context in which theories of *dégénéresence* and atavism became popular in the French and Italian schools of criminology respectively.[360] Tattooing as practiced amongst particular groups and classes of European society was considered by many scholars to represent a worrying sign of decline in the collective moral character of the populace. Already associated with 'primitive' peoples in Polynesia and overseas colonies, it was easy to transpose the 'primitive morals' of one group onto another. Writing in 1908, Austrian architect and critic Adolf Loos explictly connected the amorality and body marking practices of Papuan peoples (whom he likened to two-year-old children) with the European criminal or 'degenerate':

> A child is amoral. A Papuan too, for us. The Papuan slaughters his enemies and devours them. He is not a criminal. But if a modern person slaughters someone

[360] Caplan, '"National Tattooing"', p. 156.

> and devours him, he is a criminal or a degenerate. The Paupuan covers his skin with tattoos, his boat, his oars, in short anything he can lay his hands on. He is no criminal. The modern person who tattoos himself is either a criminal or a degenerate. There are prisons in which eighty percent of the inmates have tattoos. People with tattoos not in prison are either latent criminals or degenerate aristocrats.[361]

Though not all commentators held quite such extreme views as Loos, the association between tattoos and primitivism was widespread amongst intellectuals in the medico-legal field. Re-coded and re-inscribed, the tattoo in the European context came to be associated with criminality towards the end of the century. Jane Caplan writes that 'visibility [of the tattoo] and pathology arrived more or less simultaneously, engulfing a practice which had previously been defined by latency and marginality.'[362] Whereas the tattoo had attracted attention from French pathologists and police scientists who were primarily interested in the permanence of the mark and its potential for individual identification earlier in the century, a shift occurred around the 1880s which re-defined the tattoo as a stigmata for an imagined collective criminal underclass. However, unlike other physical features which could be scrutinized for abnormality, the tattoo presented a unique challenge, since it was not an inherited but a *socially acquired* characteristic. The ambiguity of the mark, and its inherently cultural nature did not escape Lacassagne, whose theories placed emphasis on the *social* etiology of crime:

> The social milieu is the breeding ground of criminality; the germ is the criminal, an element which has no importance until the day where it finds the broth which makes it ferment.[363]

The tattoo is a kind of boundary phenomenon, both physiologically and socio-culturally; it appears at the body surface, but is suspended indelibly *within* the flesh. Thus, it may be argued that it was the *liminality* of the tattoo which made it such an irresistible subject of medico-legal research. Moreover, tattoos were a highly visible sign, and viewed as such, they were invested with a kind of loquaciousness which seemed to invite interpretation; prompting Lacassagne's elegant characterisation of

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[361] Adolf Loos, *Ornament and Crime: Selected Essays* (Riverside, California: Ariadne Press, 1998), p. 167.
[362] Jane Caplan, '"One of the Strangest Relics of a Former State", Tattoos and the Discourses of Criminality in Europe, 1880-1920', in *Criminals and Their Scientists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 344.
[363] Alexandre Lacassagne, 'Les transformations du droit pénal et les progrès de la médecine légale, de 1810 à 1912', in *Archives d'anthropologie criminelle* (1913), p. 364. Translated from the French:
'Le milieu social est le bouillon de culture de la criminalité; le microbe, c'est le criminel, un élément qui n'a d'importance que le jour où il trouve le bouillon qui le fait fermenter.'

tattoos as 'speaking scars'.[364] This pithy phrase indicates a conception of tattoo-as-writing in the work of Lacassagne, a view shared by many of his contemporaries in the field. The first step in this classificatory project was to reify the mark into sign, by placing the tattoo into a schema alongside other 'primitive' forms of writing such as hieroglyphs, pictograms, professional emblems, graffiti etc.[365] However, whilst tattoos at first appeared to present a legible message to the outside world, their cryptic 'criminal' code proved frustratingly opaque. The visual data gathered did not 'speak for itself', but required further rationalisation through, for example, the re-presentation of images as part of schematic diagrams indicating the incidence and location of tattoos on the body, accompanied by annotations, charts and tables, as well as descriptive and analytical texts. As Caplan has pointed out, the raw data itself often revealed little more than the fact that tattooing was commonly practiced amongst the male working classes in general.[366]

The bringing into being of the tattooed criminal 'other' in the nineteenth century was accomplished by means of these processes of inscription. Through the amassing of visual material and theoretical speculation in accompanying texts, a 'criminal class', whose physical and behavioural characteristics could be mapped and catalogued by criminologists, gradually emerged from the effusion of data in a new 'archetypal' form. Writing on inscription processes and power, Bruno Latour argues that,

> [...] a 'state', a 'corporation', a 'culture', an 'economy' are the result of a punctualization process that obtains a few indicators out of many traces. In order to exist these entities have to be *summed up* somewhere."[367]

Similarly, the criminal is 'summed up' in the work of criminologists by a few physical indicators, of which the tattoo seemed to be one of the most compelling. Thus the complex, unpredictable, 'deviant' human being is re-shaped into a more manageable object of knowledge in a transformative process which operates to distil whole entities into two-dimensional inscriptions; in this case preserving only the trace, the tattoo itself.

Whilst the tattoo may be an 'inalienable and unambiguous' part of an individual human being during life, this ceases to be the case in death. Regarded as a text, it can be removed from the body upon death and preserved in the manner of pages in a book. In

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[364] Cited in Caplan, '"Speaking Scars": The Tattoo in Popular Practice and Medico-Legal Debate in Nineteenth-Century Europe', in: *History Workshop Journal*, No. 44 (Autumn, 1997), p. 129.
[365] Lacassange, cited in Caplan, '"National Tattooing"', p. 161.
[366] Caplan, '"National Tattooing"', p. 158.
[367] Latour, 'Visualisation and Cognition', p. 26

the case of the Wellcome Collection we are confronted with just that: the assemblage of tattoos into skin-texts post-mortem, some of which are carefully trimmed to present neat human parchments. Extracted from the context of the life that gave it meaning, the tattoo may be preserved, sold, re-coded and re-mobilised to the ends of others. According to Latour, the process of mobilization often begins with the gathering together of objects: 'collections of rocks, stuffed animals, samples, fossils, artefacts, gene banks, are the first to moved around.'[368] The collection is then the first 'essential' inscription[369], and in the case of the Wellcome Collection tattooed skins, it is also their final resting place.

As museum objects, the tattooed skins are a particularly intriguing case, since they already materially embody many of the defining characteristics of the immutable mobile, as well as constituting an inscription of the knowledge-gathering practices of the museum in-itself. The skin has been rendered immutable through chemical treatment and dry-preservation processes, thereby endowing the tattooed sign with permanence beyond death; the specimens, though not entirely flat, have been transformed into two-dimensional surfaces, thus modifying their scale in removing them from the body and facilitating their portability; they can be continually 'reshuffled and recombined' through exhibition display; and they can be reproduced at little cost through photography, creating new inscriptions which can be made part of a written text (of which this thesis is an example). Finally, and perhaps most significantly in the period and site of enactment in the historical context with which we deal, they can be made to 're-merge with geometry'[370]; that is, with the three-dimensional world of real bodies, real criminal acts, real prison milieu - the knowledge sought by criminologists through the collection of tattoos made disciplinary power-knowledge of the criminal and their subsequent manipulation possible. Thus, 'all these inscriptions can be

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[368] Ibid., p. 16.

[369] This is complicated with regard to the Wellcome preserved tattooed skins, since they embody at least two *prior* inscriptions: the tattoo itself acquired during life, and its subsequent preservation post-mortem, presumably for inclusion in a private collection. It is unknown how many times these particular objects may have changed hands before finding their way into the Wellcome Collection, but in each new permutation new meanings may be inscribed.

[370] Indeed, this concept is something that I have explored first hand in my own archival work on the Wellcome tattoos. Whilst they may be productively considered as 'immutable mobiles' within the context of processes of institutional collection and inscription, the skins nevertheless resist this 'flattening out', since they are multi-textured, three-dimensional body parts, and not simply text on parchment. The tension between their status as *both* immutable mobiles and hybrid entities may be most clearly demonstrated by my discussion of specimen numbers A754 and A747 (**Figure 65**) in chapter two: These two specimens appear within the archive as separate inscriptions, however on closer examination of their material qualities and related archival documents, these two tattoos simultaneously *remerge* with the geometry of the whole body of the deceased, and other documentary inscriptions which make sense of the iconography of the tattoos. Thus, the uneasy relationship between their status as archive 'documents' and human remains is the very source of their loquaciousness; it is in the interstices of this conceptual space that they reveal their origins.

superimposed, reshuffled, recombined, and summarized', with the result that; 'totally new phenomena emerge, hidden from the other people from whom all these inscriptions have been exacted.'[371] The archetypal, 'obscenely' and 'heavily' tattooed criminal emerges, but this distilled knowledge is not accessible to the tattooed population from whom it was extracted.

The nineteenth-century criminological project which devoted such energy to the collection and analysis of data on European tattooing ultimately failed to (entirely) re-code the tattooed individual as deviant, precisely because the polysemous nature of the images themselves. Tattoos, once removed from the body, turned out to be no more than 'fragile inscriptions which are immensely less than the things from which they are extracted.'[372] Through their determined study of the 'criminality' behind the tattoo, criminologists of the period left a lingering impression of the disreputability of the practice within Western popular culture, leaving us with an incomplete picture. Thus the knowledge practices of the nineteenth century continue to shape our understanding of the Western tattoo; 'By purifying the world we contribute to shaping it in a certain way, making some things present and others absent, enacting some possibilities whilst rendering others invisible.'[373] Caplan argues that it is difficult to determine to what extent Western tattooing had it's own indigenous European roots, since we owe a large part of our knowledge of the tattoo during this period almost entirely to the efforts of criminologists and prison doctors - few other voices enter into the historical record, and thus cannot be heard. However, there seems to be strong historical support for a long-standing tradition of medieval and early modern Christian pilgrimage tattooing, which continued to inform the European pattern of tattoo acquisition associated with travel throughout the eighteenth century.

For the tattooee and the collector of tattooed skins alike, the trace - whether a remembered experience or hand-traced drawing - was simply not enough; compulsion seems to have dictated that experience and knowledge must be etched into flesh and reified into material object respectively. Thus the tattooed and the collector are ironically bound by their mutual engagement with the inscription itself. Yet the question remains - who exactly were the collectors of tattooed human skin in the late nineteenth-century? The collecting methods of criminologists (which will be elaborated in chapter five), consisted mainly of drawings and photographs, far as archive records indicate - and if these forms of collecting were sufficient for the gathering of research data, then why collect human remains at all?

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[371] Latour, 'Visualisation and Cognition', p. 29.
[372] Ibid.
[373] Ibid.

From Immutable Mobiles to Hybrid Entities

Annemarie Mol defines ontological politics as 'a politics that has to do with the way in which problems are framed, bodies are shaped, and lives are pushed and pulled into one shape or another.'[374] This pragmatic yet elegant description has clear affinities with processes of inscription and the production of standardised knowledge objects analysed by Latour as immutable mobiles. Yet the entities which emerge from these practices of framing, shaping and manipulation only appear to be stable, discrete and straightforward on paper. Scratching beneath the surface reveals a web of complexities and contradictions-in-tension. It reveals hybrid entities. The Wellcome tattooed skins may profitably be conceptualised as immutable mobiles when considering the socio-material practices in which they have been historically embedded; however, their material ambiguity and hybridity nevertheless disrupts and resists their flattening out and compartmentalisation.

One especially questions the status of the tattoos as 'documents' in the sense of images and words recorded on paper or parchment when confronted with specimens such as A527 and A670. Unlike the small, trimmed fragment of skin tattooed with the inscription *Je Jure D'aimer Henri Faure J'usq'ua La Mort* (specimen number A795, **Figure 69**), these two examples bear none of the aesthetic manipulations that effectively transform the tattooed dedication to Henri Faure into a neat parchment page, reminiscent of a love note. Rather, both specimens retain a strong sense of corporeality, which emerges from their 'unflattened', multidimensional surface and the presence of adnexa such as hair and nipples, which facilitate identification of body location. Specimen number A527 is particularly intriguing: Measuring approximately 490mm x 237mm, it is one of the largest skin fragments in the collection - a fact which is somewhat curious considering the relatively small size of the two tattoos that this piece carries (see **Figure 126**). Moreover, the tattoos are located at the outermost edge of the skin fragment, over what would have been the left shoulder blade and mid-back. To the left of the tattoos of a nautical star and a male portrait in Arab dress, is a large area of unmarked skin, making up more than half of the surface area of the entire specimen. The upper portion of this section of skin is marked with deep creases and folds, with a distinctive pattern of skin wrinkling where the arm joins the body at the glenohumeral joint. This wrinkling identifies the area where the skin wraps around the side of the body under the arm, confirmed by a clump of wiry underarm hair; a narrow strip of skin from the inside of the upper left arm protrudes from the left edge of the patch of

[374] Latour, 'Visualisation and Cognition', p. viii.

hair. It seems odd that this large area of skin, including the armpit, should have been preserved along with the tattooed skin from the back - presuming that the collector was primarily interested in the tattoos, of course. One possible reason for this may be that the strip of armpit hair orientates the location of the tattoos on the body. However, this is a highly unusual example within the collection; the majority of specimens from which one is able to identify specific body parts are more or less heavily tattooed (such as the left forearm discussed in chapter two, **Figure 38**), or carry tattoos that are coincidentally adjacent to nipples or belly buttons. The skin from this part of the body - wrapping around the side of the torso from back to front, and including part of the arm - cannot be perfectly flattened out in the way that skin from the chest, thighs, arms or back can; the skin retains the curvature and contours of this part of the body and therefore maintains a sense of three-dimensionality. Specimen A527 does not seem to fit the criminological collecting rationale, which isolated the tattooed image from the body, flattening it out and rendering it immutable, in order that it might be better assimilated into iconographic taxonomies.

Specimen number A670 is also somewhat anomalous in this regard. The skin in this case has been excised much more economically, cut in an irregular shape which amply frames the tattoo, measuring 258mm x 123mm. It has been preserved with care and is very thin, with a brittle non-pliable, parchment-like texture and an undulating surface. The tattoo, a faded dagger outlined in black, appears to pierce through the nipple (**Figure 128**). A number of skin fragments within the collection possess visible nipples; however in this case, the nipple forms a prominent protrusion, standing 7mm above the skin surface in a perfectly rounded convex 'bubble' (see **Figure 129**). It seems unlikely that the skin would have dried in this shape without deliberate manipulation - rather, it appears that although this skin was well stretched during the drying process, the preparator carefully 'pushed out' and stuffed the nipple, successfully retaining a convex shape once the skin had fully dried, at the expense of an otherwise flat specimen surface. This remarkable manipulation has fetishistic overtones reminiscent of the collecting practices of some bibliophiles discussed in the previous chapter. Indeed, this particular specimen may be compared with the example of an anthropodermic bookbinding prepared by René Kieffer, reproduced in de Crauzat, which features a cover inlaid with the tanned nipple and areola of a woman[375] (see top left cover, *Éloge de seins*, **Figure 94**).

Through some of the examples outlined above, and the discussion of the affective presence of, and visceral response to, human remains in chapter one, it is

[375] De Crauzat, *La Reliure Française,* p. 144-145, plate CXL.

possible to see how the messy, problematic fleshiness of the tattooed skin continues to reassert itself. Whilst the tattoos may be considered variously as icons, images or texts, the skin surface itself is not two-dimensional, but rather is a multidimensional ground - far from being flat, it may have protrusions or be warped and undulating, or else cracked, folded and creased; it may be translucent, pliable and parchment-like, or indurated, callous, and inflexible; its surface may be reticulated, milky, friable, ferruginous, veined or vitrified. Hallam refers to the anatomical way of knowing bone as having 'architecture, texture and pattern'.[376] So too does skin. Thus the materiality of the preserved tattoos continually resists their reduction into visual or textual 'documents' in the archive.

Hybrid Entities and Sites of Enactment

The specific kinds of entities that the post-mortem tattoo may become is contingent upon the sites and practices in which they are discussed, collected, framed, assembled, and *enacted*. So far I have discussed comparative collections of drawings and photographs of tattoos, as well as a few examples of preserved tattooed skins held in other museum collections, drawing out some of the similarities in iconography between these various documents and entities, in an attempt to historically situate the Wellcome Collection within broader collecting practices. However, I am also interested in the ways in which these documents were mobilised in the production of medical and criminological knowledge, and the multiple possible enactments of the tattoo brought about through these discourses.

If the kind of entity the tattoo may become is in a large part determined by *where* it is encountered, then the different sites of enactment of the tattoo must be examined further. We have already seen how the body of the criminal was 'collected', systemised and filed away in police and criminological archives during the nineteenth century, and touched upon the role that photographs and drawings of tattoos played in these processes of inscription and punctualization. The tattoo was not only an object of study for police and forensic specialists, however; discussions of tattoos also appear in medical reports and collections from the period. In the context of the hospital or clinic, the tattoo was frequently encountered as a risk to health by medical professionals, whose work on the anatomy of the tattoo and the etiology of disease interpreted the tattoo as a potentially harmful foreign body. Tattoo ink, inserted beneath the upper layers of the skin during tattooing, was in itself a foreign substance of unknown

[376] Elizabeth Hallam, 'Articulating Bones', p. 465.

composition, which could be harmful to health.[377] The possibility of introducing other foreign bodies such as the bacterium *Treponema pallidum*, responsible for syphilis infection, or *Clostridium perfringens*, the bacterium commonly associated with gangrene, through unsanitary tattooing practices and equipment, was a concern amongst many doctors.[378] The tattoo is thus encountered in the clinic as a potential vector of disease and carrier of multiple foreign bodies, enacting a conception of the tattoo as a multiple entity comprising of ink, bacteria, inflammation, granulomas, etc.

A number of medical collections contain images of tattoos which are the site of skin disease; typically, these represent syphilis infections.[379] The Mütter Museum at the College of Physicians of Philadelphia in the US, for example, hold within their collections an 1877 watercolour sketch of a tattoo infected with several syphilis lesions (see **Figure 130**). The sketch shows the ventral surface of the forearm tattooed with the figure of woman in black and red. Several large rupial sores erupt from the tattooed lines, engulfing portions of the design; the lesions are coloured bright red to depict inflammation at the site of infection, matching the red tones of the tattooed sash, hem and spotted pattern on the female figure's dress. The sores in the upper portion of the tattoo seem to merge with the design, contributing an almost aesthetic addition to her dress; they appear like puff sleeves. Coloured drawings of infected tattoos such as this one are rare within nineteenth-century medical collections; indeed, examples of the tattoo as the site of skin pathology are uncommon in general, suggesting that whilst there were concerns about the health risks of tattooing, actual cases of infection requiring hospitalisation were infrequent. Within the famous collection of dermatological waxes in the Musée des Moulages at the Hôpital Saint-Louis in Paris, for example, there is only one example of a tattoo infected with syphilis (see **Figure 131**). In this case, three tattoos are depicted over an arm, extending from the bicep down to the wrist. The uppermost of these, a portrait in profile, is partially obscured by the syphilitic skin eruption, which appears to eat into the flesh, presenting a far greater visceral quality than that of the sketch in the Mütter Museum.

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[377] This seems to have become more of a health concern during the middle decades of the twentieth century, when medical journals began to report cases of mercurial sensitivity in the red portions of old tattoos. As we have seen in chapter two, cinnabar and vermilion pigments were used in tattooing, despite their high mercury content. For reports on adverse skin reactions to mercury-based tattoo pigments see Frederick G. Novy Jr., 'A Generalized Mercurial (Cinnabar) Reaction Following Tattooing', in *Archives of Dermatology and Syphilology,* Vol. 49, No. 3 (Mar. 1944), pp. 172-173; also, F. E. S. Keiller, 'Mercury Dermatitis in a Tattoo: Treated with Dimercaprol', in *British Medical Journal* (Mar. 23, 1957), p. 678.

[378] In France, Ernest Berchon, René Primevère Lesson and Mathurin Félix Hutin all wrote on the serious dangers tattooing posed to health.

[379] Cases of tattoos infected with tuberculosis were also reported in the medical literature of the late nineteenth century. See, for example D. W. Collings and W. Murray, 'Three Cases of Inoculation of Tuberculosis From Tattooing', in *The British Medical Journal*, Vol.1, No. 1796 (June 1, 1895), p. 1200. This particular article also contains two very interesting images of tattoos infected with tuberculosis, which will be discussed at greater length in chapter five.

Despite medical concerns about the tattoo as a source of contagion, there are relatively few documented cases in the medical literature of diseases communicated by tattooing. However, the images and artefacts discussed above are nevertheless of historical significance, both for the study of the material culture of medicine, and in reconstructing the sites of enactment of the European tattoo. Whilst medical drawings made in the clinic and wax moulages cast in the hospital provide useful comparative examples of iconographic collections, like photographs, these documents usually record traces of the *living* body and tattoo. A survey of extant preserved tattoo collections in the UK and France has uncovered no examples of tattoos showing signs of infection.

Another significant context of enactment of the post-mortem tattoo is the pathology laboratory. In the course of this research, I have encountered several small collections of preserved tattoos in a number of London university and medical museum collections; almost all of these differ significantly from the Wellcome Collection in that they are wet-preserved specimens. Notable examples include a number of tattooed skin fragments in the Hunterian Museum's anatomy collections; three specimens in the forensic collection of St. Bartholomew's Pathology Museum; five pieces in the Gordon Museum of Pathology at Kings College;[380] one at Imperial College London; and two pieces in University College London's own pathology collections. It is not uncommon to find at least one example of preserved tattooed human skin in many historic university anatomy and pathology collections. Most of these tattoo specimens are wet-preserved and date more recently than the Wellcome Collection tattoos - usually from the early decades of the twentieth century anywhere up to around the 1980s.[381] It might seem somewhat unusual that university anatomy and pathology departments would preserve these specimens at all; particularly post-World War II, after alleged Nazi tattoo collecting practices had come to light in eye-witness accounts, biographies and the

[380] I refer specifically to five historical skin pieces, which have been preserved for the sole interest of the tattoos - only one of these pieces is dry-prepared in a manner similar to those in the Wellcome Collection. There are further examples of specimens bearing tattoos in the Gordon Museum forensic collections. With the exception of one small black and yellow devil tattoo, which was removed at the behest of the patient, all of these are larger body parts with specific forensic interest; the preservation of the tattoos in these cases is entirely incidental.

[381] Patient case histories and provenance records for these specimens are often absent, brief or difficult to verify. In the wake of the Alder Hey scandal, many university anatomy and pathology teaching collections were hastily thrown away. Many of these specimens were long-neglected, having not been used in teaching for decades, and the lack of provenance records became a cause for concern amongst many curators and heads of departments, in the wake of media backlash against the medical profession following public inquiries into organ retention practices at Alder Hey Children's Hospital and Bristol Royal Infirmary. Whilst many institutions were throwing out their historical collections of human remains, curators and technicians at University College London, who recognised the historical importance of these specimens, were absorbing them into their own collections. The UCL Pathology Museum at the Royal Free Hospital in Hampstead is now home to many of these discarded specimens, which are currently undergoing restoration. Many arrived without paperwork, however - thus it is often impossible to determine their provenance. In these cases, the only way to estimate the date of a specimen is through the construction and type of container in which it is preserved.

popular press, and the tattoo had long ceased to be a serious object of criminological study. As we have seen in the Mütter Museum example, the tattoo may be of pathological interest to the medical professional in such cases were the tattoo has become infected or is the site of inoculation of disease. But there is nothing inherently pathological about tattooed skin in itself; and whilst medical collections may contain a small number of *images* of tattoos that have both iconographic value and pathological interest, I have not encountered a single preserved tattooed specimen that bears signs of infectious disease. And yet, in many contemporary pathology collections, specimens such as a remarkable collection of tattooed butterflies (**Figure 132)** are displayed alongside other pathological skin specimens such as cutaneous anthrax, fibromas, keloids and glanders. The framing of these entities within a pathological context is curious - what, if anything, can be learned from these tattoos in medical terms? Or are these striking collections of decorated human skin merely objects of medical curiosity?

The collection of butterfly tattoos are a case in point (**Figures 132** and **133)**. These particular tattoos belonged to one individual, whose very brief case notes have been recorded and retained along with the specimen in UCL Pathology Collections. The notes provide an intriguing glimpse into the life of the individual to whom the tattoos belonged, as well as revealing something of the clinical interests and collecting practices of the doctor who preserved them:

> From a man aged 79 years who had earned his living for many years as the Tattooed Man in a circus.[382] His entire body, except for the head and neck, hands and soles of his feet, was covered with elaborate tattoo designs. He died of peritonitis due to a perforation of an anastomatic ulcer ... In tattooing, fine particles of pigment are introduced through the skin, taken up by histiocytes and become lodged in the tissue spaces of the dermis. Pigment also passes to the regional lymph glands via the lymphatics. In this case, all the superficial lymph nodes were heavily pigmented.

It is clear from these brief comments that the nature and extent of this man's tattoos were indeed of anatomical interest to the medical practitioner: The tattooed man had been so extensively tattooed that gradual migration of ink particles resulted in the collection of pigment in the lymph glands. This demonstrates that although tattoo ink is trapped permanently under the skin following healing, it nevertheless travels within the body over time, filtering into the body's tissue drainage system, and collecting in the lymph glands. Whilst this is certainly an interesting anatomical

[382] I have been able to establish the year of death of this individual as 1954, based upon the post-mortem record code in the case notes. That would mean that the Tattooed Man was born in 1875; his tattoos are therefore contemporary with some of those in the Wellcome Collection, assuming that he was tattooed in his early twenties.

observation, it is not the pigmented lymph glands that the doctor has chosen to preserve, but rather the tattooed skin itself. Thus these tattoos are involved in processes of inscription which involve dissection, an autopsy, the recording of case notes and the selection and preservation of fragments of tattooed skin. These processes enact the tattoo as an entity not fixed indelibly in the skin, but as migrating ink particles within the lymphatic system. In the context of the pathology lab, the tattoo is not only encountered as ink particles in skin, but also as ink particles in the lymph glands, as an entity with deeper, hidden interiority. The tattoo appears in the adjacent body tissues as a *foreign body*. Yet without the accompanying case notes, we would never have known that this man's tattoos had exerted any effect on another of the body's organs and systems at all.

It would be equally impossible to know if these were the only tattoos he possessed - or indeed, whether they all necessarily belonged to the same person. There are strong stylistic similarities between the butterfly motifs, suggesting the work of a single tattooist, or perhaps that the individual motifs were part of a larger design. But just *how* large or complex the design may have been, we certainly cannot tell just by looking at these five small tattoos. We know that they belonged to a seventy-nine-year-old man, who made his living as a Tattooed Man, only because the doctor tells us so. He or she also tells us that his body was covered in tattoos - yet only five small pieces have been preserved. Five carefully selected motifs, chosen by the doctor from an already complete collection, which provided the livelihood and told the life story of one unnamed man. What selection criteria did the pathologist adopt when deciding which tattoos to preserve, and which to consign to the grave? The manner in which the specimens have been excised and mounted are strikingly reminiscent of a lepidopterist's collection of butterflies - could this reflect the personal collecting interests of the pathologist, or perhaps even the Tattooed Man himself? Both the pathologist and Tattooed Man alike chose these butterflies - did they also share a passion for lepidoptery? Many people will be familiar with the kind of insect specimen displays that are a staple of natural history collections - the old nineteenth-century museum cases containing neat rows of pinned and mounted moths and butterflies, neatly organised according to subspecies and visual characteristics.

The tattooed butterflies share some remarkable similarities with these entomology collections; they are arranged one above another, and 'pinned' to a support with small surgical stitches. Unusually for specimens found in pathology collections, this support is a slightly translucent black. This appears to be a deliberate choice on the part of the pathologist - the black perspex provides a contrasting ground for the display of

tattoos on opposite sides of the vitrine, such that they do not visually detract from one another. These aesthetic choices suggest a nuanced interest in the collection and display of these specimens, which goes far beyond a straightforward medical interest in the anatomy of the tattoo. Thus a further enactment of the tattoo emerges from the assemblage of tattooed skin, perspex vitrine, surgical stitches, formalin, and glycerin; as a multi-layered aesthetic object, which is both artifice and natural history specimen. From the limited case notes and analysis of the specimen itself, we can learn something about the pathologist's interest in the tattoo, but the purpose of the preserved tattoo - perhaps as a pedagogical tool, perhaps a more idiosyncratic collectors item - remains obscure.

A Note on Tertiary Collectors: The Contemporary Museum

What was Henry Wellcome's purpose in purchasing Lavalette's collection of tattoos? Although he never gave any indication of what place they would take in his unrealised 'Historical Medical Museum', he nevertheless regarded them as significant. His handwritten comment in the margin of Johnston-Saint's purchase report dated 1929 indicates that he had a 'certain section' of his museum in mind for the tattoos (see **Figure 1**); thus it seems clear that Wellcome considered them of value to medical history. Though we will never know what purpose they may have served in Henry Wellcome's museum, the meaning of the tattoos has not remained static since their accession into his collection, but rather continues to be reinterpreted and re-enacted within the museum context. One of the most significant ways in which collections are enacted within the museum is through exhibition and display. I have contributed to this process myself, through my involvement in the recording of audio-guide commentary for two of the preserved tattoos that are on permanent display in the *Medicine Man* exhibition at the Wellcome Collection galleries on Euston Road in London (see **Figure 134**). A number of other tattoos in the collection have been displayed in temporary exhibitions on different themes in recent years, recalling the immutable mobile through their 'reshuffling and recombination.'

The most recent example of this 'reshuffling' through display and curatorial interpretation was the Science Museum exhibition *Psychoanalysis: the Unconscious in Everyday Life* (13th October 2010 - 15th April 2011). The two tattooed skins chosen for display were specimen numbers A542 (**Figure 2**, right) and A543 (**Figure 135**), two of the largest skin fragments. Although they possess some similarities in terms of their shape and size, both pieces having been removed from male torsos, the iconography of

the tattoos and the aesthetic quality of the designs are entirely different. One is the left portion of the chest and abdomen belonging to Fromain, showing the hand clasping the dagger, wreathed by roses, and part of the elaborate scene over the abdomen, depicting the table set with a meal, bottle and wine glasses. As previously discussed at some length in chapter one, the right portion of this design is preserved on a separate section of skin from the same body, and depicts a woman sat at the table, in what is a strikingly detailed portrait. This is a well-executed tattoo, and shows indication of skilled hand application, likely the work of an early professional. The other tattoo displayed in the *Psychoanalysis* exhibition consists of a collection of classic sailor motifs, as well as others which reference the foreign legion - busts, wreaths and so forth - and are executed by an amateur practitioner, certainly with hand needles. These tattoos were displayed in the 'Cabinet of Wish-fulfilment' alongside a series of Roman ceramic votive offerings depicting feet, eyes, faces and phalloi. The votives are given a great deal of attention in the accompanying audio script and wall plaques. The tattooed skins however, are not contextualised at all; in fact, their relation or lack of it to the other objects in the vitrine is not mentioned, leading viewers to make their own associations as to what it might mean to see preserved tattooed human skins juxtaposed with disembodied clay eyes, penises, and hands. In some respects, this particular exhibition represents a departure point from the criminological theories about the tattoo advanced during the nineteenth century - the tattoo is no longer read as an inherent sign of deviance or criminality. However, the close association between the surface and the interior persists; framed within the context of Freudian psychoanalysis, the exhibition offers the suggestion that the interiority of the other may be understood through 'reading' the symbols inscribed on the body surface.

CHAPTER FIVE:

The Tattoo in Nineteenth-Century Criminological and Medical Discourse

In my previous chapter, I have explored some of the intersecting collecting practices and contexts within which the Wellcome Collection tattoos may be framed, demonstrating how the tattoo is continually reinterpreted and re-enacted within these shifting contexts. The most significant comparative collections are historically found within the context of medical schools and forensic science laboratories, in which collections of drawings and photographs of tattoos, as well as samples of preserved tattooed skin, formed the 'first inscription' in complex knowledge-gathering processes. These iconographic and material collections were crucial to - and instrumental in - the development of the medical and criminological discourses surrounding the tattoo which emerged in continental Europe from around the 1880s onwards. This chapter deals with these discourses, and explores the combination of factors that compelled nineteenth century physicians and criminologists to collect tattoos.

The scholarly interest may be traced to two discrete yet interconnected areas of research: the anatomy of the tattoo; and the tattoo as a sign of social deviance. The former field of scholarship was predominantly pursued during the middle decades of the century by medical practitioners, whose research focussed upon determining the permanency of the tattoo and methods for their removal (although these were later refined by physicians in the final decades of the century), as well as concerns for public health and the transmission of infectious diseases via unhygienic tattooing methods. The work of scientists, doctors and military surgeons such as René-Primevère Lesson[383] (1794-1849), Jean Mathurin Félix Hutin (1804-1892), Auguste Ambroise Tardieu (1818-1879), and Ernest Berchon (1825-1894) had significant implications for early nineteenth century criminologists and police scientists, who were primarily concerned with the potential of the tattoo as an identifying mark. It was only in the later part of the century that the tattoo came to be re-coded as a physiological signifier of psychological deviance and latent criminality, through the systematic work of prominent criminologists such as Alexandre Lacassagne in France, and his professional rival Cesare Lombroso in Italy. Their work, in turn, fostered a renewed interest in the tattoo amongst medical professionals across Europe, who primarily concerned themselves with risk factors associated with disease transmission, as well as practical methods of

[383] Lesson was a naturalist and traveller, who also commented on shipboard tattooing practices he witnessed amongst sailors whilst at sea. He is listed in the *Biographical Index of Members, Associates and Correspondents of the Academy of Medicine (1820-1990),* (Paris, 1991).

removal. These doctors were also in a position to collect and preserve examples of tattooed skin from the bodies of cadavers that routinely passed over their tables.

As I have previously touched upon in chapter four, the tattoo in Europe has a long but somewhat ambiguous history: Whilst early textual and archaeological evidence indicates that tattooing was widely practiced among the Scythians, Celts, Picts and Germans in prehistoric Europe, the historical picture is far less clear for later periods. The sporadic and discontinuous visibility of the tattoo in European cultural history has thus led Jane Caplan to characterise the history of European tattooing by its tendency 'to resolve itself into a history of the particular episodes of its emergence into view'.[384] The tattoo in Western civilization has received sporadic and incomplete scholarly attention going back perhaps as far as A.D. 97, according to some sources. Numerous historical accounts describe tattooing and other forms of branding that were practiced in ancient Greece and Rome to mark slaves and captured prisoners of war.[385] Some scholars have regarded this ancient use of the tattoo as a mark of low social status and stigma to be a powerful contributing factor in the later European reception of the tattoo as an inherently aberrant sign.[386] Indeed, historian C. P. Jones has argued that the very term 'stigma' is derived from ancient Greek and Roman tattooing practices,[387] and many nineteenth-century criminologists writing on tattooing point to the ancient world almost as a justification for relegating the practice to a fundamentally low-class and disreputable status. Writing in 1869, the French naval surgeon Ernest Berchon cited a number of early works on methods of tattoo removal, of which Archigene (A.D. 97) appears to be the earliest.[388] Perhaps as long as tattooing has existed, and certainly where they have been externally imposed on the tattooed as a sign of low status, as in the marking of slaves, prisoners or deserters, tattoo removal methods have also been sought. In ancient Greece, tattoo removal was allegedly carried out in the sanctuary of Epidaurus; according to Le Goarant de Tromelin, the names of famous doctors who carried out these procedures include Cinnamos, Eros, Tryphon, and Criton.[389] Thus the relationship between criminality, the attribution of low social status, tattooing and the search for reliable methods by which to obliterate the permanent mark, have long been

[384] Caplan, 'The Tattoo in Popular Practice', p. 111.
[385] C. P. Jones, 'Stigma: Tattooing and Branding in Graeco-Roman Antiquity', in *The Journal of Roman Studies,* Vol. 77, (1987), pp. 139-140.
[386] See for example Caplan (ed.), *Written on the Body*.
[387] Jones, 'Stigma' pp. 140-141.
[388] Ernest Berchon, *Histoire Medicale Du Tatouage,* (Paris, 1869), p. 96. Some of these early tattoo removal solutions make for interesting reading - suggesting everything from Archigene's urinary deposits mixed with vinegar, to breast milk mixed with honey and oil.
[389] Le Goarant de Tromelin, *Le tatouage, Considérations psychologiques et médico-légales*, (Lyon: BOSC Frères, M. & L. RIOU, 1933), p. 27.

closely connected. These themes emerge in nineteenth century medico-legal discourses on the tattoo, which I will explore here in some detail.

Aside from the Pacific encounter of the eighteenth century previously discussed in chapter four, one of the best-documented traditions of European tattooing is the Christian pilgrimage tattoo. This practice was widespread in medieval Europe, suggesting that at this time the tattoo was invested with 'honourable' associations linked to Christian devotional practice; Caplan notes that these tattoos were sometimes explicitly described by their bearers 'as a token of suffering in honour of Christ.'[390] Pilgrimage tattooing has been associated with numerous holy sites in Europe, notably Loreto in Italy[391] and Jerusalem in present-day Israel.[392] One of the most frequently cited accounts of seventeenth-century pilgrimage tattooing comes from the travel journals of William Lithgow, who was tattooed in Palestine during a visit in 1612:

> Earley on the morrow there came a fellow to us, one Elias Areacheros, a Christian in habitour at Bethleem, and purveier for the Friers; who did ingrave on our severall Armes upon Christ's Sepulcher the name of Jesus, and the Holy Crosse; being our owne opinion, and desire: here is the Modell thereof. But I decyphered, and subjoyned below mine, the four incorporate Crowns of King James, with this inscription, in the lower circle of the Crowne, Vivat Jacobus Rex: returning to the fellow two Pisaters for his reward.[393]

According to some accounts, Christian pilgrimage tattooing in Palestine continued uninterrupted from at least as far back as Lithgow's experience, well into the twentieth century. During a visit to Jerusalem in 1956, John Carswell met a professional tattooist, Jason Razzouk, who was apparently still using the traditional tattoo designs carved into woodblocks that had been passed down through his family since the seventeenth century.[394] The persistence of such traditions within Europe did not dissuade criminologist Cesare Lombroso from his estimation of tattooing as an 'atavistic' practice, however. In Lombroso's study of tattooing in the Italian army during the 1860s, he compiled accounts of tattooing amongst Italian communities of peasants and rural workers in Lombardy, Piedmont and the Marches, as well as pilgrims to the shrine of Loreto, where tattoos were explicitly linked to the first instance of crucifixion

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[390] Caplan, 'The Tattoo in Popular Practice', p. 115.
[391] Caplan, 'National Tattooing', p. 159.
[392] Scutt and Gotch, *Art, Sex and Symbol*, p. 27; pp. 65-66; see also Steve Gilbert, *The Tattoo History Source Book,* (New York: RE/Search Publications, 2000), pp. 150-151.
[393] William Lithgow, *The Totall discourse of the rare adventures and painefull peregrinations of long nineteen yeares travayles from Scotland to the most famous kingdomes in Europe, Asia and Affrica,* (J. MacLehose: Glasgow, 1906), p. 253. See also **Figure 137** for the illustrations of Lithgow's tattoos, reproduced from the text (p. 252).
[394] John Carswell, *Coptic Tattoo Designs*, (Beirut: The American University of Beirut, 1956). Carswell reproduces one hundred and eighty-four prints from these woodblocks in his book.

stigmata in the Christian tradition, that of Saint Francis.[395] Collectively he characterised this group of ordinary citizens as little different from 'primitive peoples', among whom tattooing represented a kind of 'historical atavism':

> The first and most primary cause of the diffusion of this custom among us is in my view atavism, and that species of historical atavism that we call tradition, for tattooing is one of the special characteristics of primitive man and those in a state of savagery.[396]

Many authors explicitly connected the traditional tattoos of 'primitive' or 'savage' peoples with the body markings of European criminals, believing tattooing to be the mark of a fundamentally 'uncivilised' mind. In one of his earliest works on tattooing, co-authored with the vice-president of the *Société d'anthropologie de Paris*, Dr. Emile Magitot (1833-1897), Lacassagne distinguishes between *tatouage ethnique* and a medico-legal perspective on the tattoo, although he also draws parallels between the motivations of each group:

> The special character of the design according to its location, and especially the number of tattoos, are the manifestation of the instinctive vanity and the need to display, which are a characteristic of primitive man and criminal natures.[397]

Most accounts of tattooing in the criminal-anthropological literature of the period follow a similar pattern: At the outset, an historical context is delineated in which the tattoo is degraded, either through reference to ancient European punitive tattooing practices, or to the practices of tattooing in non-European cultures labelled 'primitive' or 'savage', in order to then discuss contemporary examples of tattoos on prisoners, military personnel or the insane, and argue that they were chosen voluntarily for reasons of 'vanity', due to membership of the 'criminal underclass', and even 'perversity'. In this way,

> Tattooing was commonly represented in nineteenth-century European cultural sciences as a literal marker of the primitive: lines drawn on the body mapped the boundary between the savage and the civilized, and potentially endorsed the cultural superiority of the Europeans.[398]

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[395] Catherine Pigorini-Beri, 'Le Tatouage Religieux et Amoureux au Pelerinage de N. D. de Lorette', in *Archives d'anthropologie criminelle*, 16, (1891), p. 10.
[396] Cesare Lomroso, *L'uomo delinquente*, (Milan, 1876), p. 54. Cited in Caplan, 'National Tattooing', p. 159.
[397] Lacassagne and Magitot, *Du Tatouage,* p. 37. Translated from the French:
Le caractère spéciale du dessin d'après sa localisation, et sourtout le nombre des tatouages, sont la manifestation de cette vanité instinctive et de ce besoin d'étalage qui sont une des caractéristiques de l'homme primitif et des natures criminelles.
[398] Caplan, 'The Tattoo in Popular Practice', p. 112.

Thus the nineteenth-century historical material on the tattoo presents a picture in which the surface of the body emerges as a primary site upon which the identity of the criminal could be verified and governed. During this period, intense scrutiny and documentation of the tattoo became one element within the developing repetoire of anthropometric techniques that were designed to identify and classify the criminal body. The emergence into view of the tattoo during this period was largely a result of efforts to police the 'indistinct and shifting borderline between 'labouring classes' and 'dangerous classes,' in which the tattoo played a highly visible part.[399] Indeed, if it were not for the researches of medical professionals and early criminologists from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the history of tattooing in Europe and Northern America during this period would be considerably more opaque.[400] The sudden effusion of small-scale studies and research articles published in medical, military and criminological journals from around 1850 through to the first few decades of the twentieth century, reveals the emergence of a strong scholarly interest in tattooing. These studies focussed predominently upon typically segregated social milieu - the hospital, barracks and prison - contexts which provided ample opportunity for research to be carried out amongst peculiarly isolated populations. Occasionally, the tattoos of the native in the colonial context were the subject of research; but for the most part, this work dealt with the tattoos of the soldier or sailor, or else the 'deviant' element within the population - prostitutes, criminals, or those whose reckless or foolish behaviour led them to the clinic for treatment.

The nineteenth-century criminological field was by no means united in its interpretation of the nature or significance of the tattoo, however. Whilst some theorists - notably Cesare Lombroso and Enrico Ferri in Italy; Hans Kurella[401] and Neumann in Germany; and to some extent Lacassagne in France - saw the tattoo as having a specific significance, others such as Gustave Gabriel Tarde (France), Joest, Baer and Leppmann (Germany) and Verwaek (Belgium) were not so convinced.[402] Thus, whilst there was often overlap between disciplinary fields, and in particular within the developing disciplines of criminology or forensic science, and medicine, it is important to note the distinctions between discourses emerging from different geographical locations. For instance, Jane Caplan has pointed out that whilst there was a great deal of

[399] Ibid., p. 109.
[400] Caplan, 'National Tattooing', p. 156.
[401] Hans Kurella, for example, Lombroso's most important follower in Germany, made the extraordinary claim that 'tattoos revealed latent criminality, with almost total accuracy if the individuals bearing them also have a receding forehead, a powerful jaw and protruding ears'. *Naturgeschichte des Verbrechers*, (Stuttgart, 1893); cited in Graven, 'Le Tatouage et son Importance en Criminologie', p. 96
[402] Graven, 'Le Tatouage et son Importance en Criminologie', p. 84. See also Caplan, 'National Tattooing', for an overview of some of the differences in opinion among criminologists in different national contexts.

interest in the tattoo in continental European criminological debate, this preoccupation did not extend across the channel to Britain. She writes that, 'not only was British criminology relatively dissociated from the continental schools, but tattooing was sufficiently normalized that it attracted virtually no official or scholarly attention.'[403] It is not surprising, then, that the first professional tattooists to successfully establish their trade (as well as international reputations for themselves), during the later part of the nineteenth century were British and American. Whether their success was enabled by the relative lack of pathologizing discourse in the UK and USA, or vice versa, is difficult to establish. However, a survey of the British and American medical literature of the period suggests that there was some concern for the public health risks associated with tattooing - particularly in the transmission of infectious diseases such as Syphilis and Tuberculosis.

There are interesting analogies between the criminological studies of tattooing and the medical accounts, which, whilst following different intellectual trajectories in differing national contexts, can provide useful narrative linkages in tracing the history of the European (and to some extent the American) tattoo. In particular, an analysis of the visual material gathered by criminologists and medical researchers alike suggests an intriguing congruance in conceptual formulations centring around the visual nature of their objects of study - tattooed skin and skin disease, respectively. In what follows I will consider the complex relationship between criminological and medical understandings of the tattoo as identifying mark, stigma of deviance, and health risk, as well as exploring some of the similarities in the pictorial strategies employed by criminologists and medical researchers alike.

Criminological Perspectives on Tattoos: Identifying Marks and Criminal Natures

In 1889, Lacassagne published a report on the case of a fatal shooting in the *Archives de l'anthropologie criminelle*. During the course of the autopsy, he noticed that three bullets had penetrated the body at different points, taking different trajectories and lodging in different body tissues. Despite this, each bullet bore identical markings - marks that would be referred to in contemporary forensic science terminology as 'striations':

> It was, indeed, extraordinary, that the bullet found in the larynx, which had not collided with anything hard, was creased along its axis with the same kind of

[403] Ibid., p. 158.

> furrow as the bullet that was lodged in the shoulder [...] It seemed to be a kind of marking or sign of identity of the revolver.[404]

This incident, although dealing with forensic phenomena entirely unconnected to tattoos or tattooing, is very telling. The language Lacassagne employs in relation to the surprising correlation between bullet and gun reveals a preoccupation with the signs of criminal actions, intent and *identity*. Whilst contemporary understandings of the matching of bullet striations to unique firearms is commonplace, this forensic phenomenon would today be understood in terms of the material *trace*, rather than as a semiotic indicator of the 'identity' of a particular gun. The difference, though subtle, is significant; it points to a tendency within the wider nineteenth-century criminological project, which viewed and categorised material, psychological and biological factors of crime in terms of material signs which, with the appropriate statistical and analytical tools, could be read in terms of identity - be it a weapon such as a gun or a blade, the scene of a crime, or a tattoo. As a distinctive and highly visible surface sign, the tattoo seemed to offer special promise to the forensic sciences as a means of individual identification. Moreover, the commonly held belief within forensic medicine in the life-long durability of the mark paradoxically made tattooed subjects potential allies of the discipline.[405] However, this durability began to be called into question following a number of high profile cases during the mid-nineteenth century, which turned on the potential of the tattoo as an identifying mark.

Perhaps the most significant of these episodes took place in Germany, and involved a missing tattoo and a case of unsettled identity. The Schall Case, as it became known, began with the grisly discovery of a decapitated corpse in the marches of the Spree River outside Berlin in September 1849. The assailant had made a deliberate attempt to render identification of the victim impossible by mutilating the face and smashing the bones of the skull. The police who searched the scene and the pathologists who conducted the autopsy could find no evidence of the victim's identity, and so the unidentified body was buried.[406] Two protagonists emerged from the continuing investigation: Gottlied Ebermann, who was the presumed victim, and Franz Schall, the

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[404] Alexandre Lacassagne, 'De la déformation des balles de revolver, soit dans l'arme, soit sur le squelette', *Archives de l'anthropologie criminelle,* (1889), pp. 71-72. Translated from the French:
Il était, en effet, extraordinaire que la balle trouvée dans le larynx n'ayant heurté aucun corps dur fût creusée selon son axe d'une sorte de sillon ou de gouttière que nous retrouvions aussi sur la balle logée dans l'épaule [...] C'était, en quelque sorte, une marque ou un signe d'identité du revolver.

[405] Mechthild Fend, 'Emblems of Durability. Tattoos, preserves and photographs', in *Performance Resesearch*, Volume 14, No. 4, (December 2009), p. 46.

[406] Caplan,'"Speaking Scars"', p. 107; see also Johann Ludwig Casper, 'Über Tätowirungen. Eine neue gerichtlich-medicinische Frage', in *Vierteljahrsschrift für gerichtliche und öffentliche Medizin,* Vol. 1, (1852), pp. 274-292.

murderer accused. Doubts about the victim's identity were particularly problematic, however, as the body had yielded no clues, and witnesses gave conflicting accounts of his appearance:

> Some, including two surgeons who had treated him several years earlier, testified that he had a cupping-scar on one wrist and red tattoos of a heart and his initials on his left forearm. His wife and sisters, on the other hand, claimed that they had never seen any tattoos on him, nor had the pathologists observed any marks during the autopsy.[407]

These contradictory descriptions of the presence or absence of Ebermann's tattoos were to become a central issue in the case. The prosecutor decided to consult an expert on the matter of the indelibility of tattoo, appointing Berlin pathologist Johann Ludwig Casper to investigate whether it was physically possible for a tattoo to spontaneously disappear or to be removed without a trace. Casper conducted his own research to establish whether or not tattooing was an irreversible and permanent operation: From his study of thirty-six army veterans resident at the Berlin Invalides, all of whom reported having been tattooed between 1798 and 1845, he claimed to have found a number of cases in which these tattoos had spontaneously disappeared.[408] This 'evidence' was enough to suggest the possibility that the un-tattooed corpse was Ebermann, and brought about the successful closure of the case, which resulted in the conviction and execution of Schall. In this episode, the medico-legal belief in the character of the tattoo as a sign of identity endures *despite* the doubts raised about the permanency of the mark itself; thus the tattoo was still mobilised as authenticating evidence of identity, even in its absence. In accepting the possibility of the erasure of the tattoo, however, the reliability of the mark as a permanent distinguishing characteristic was inevitably called into question.

The Schall case caused something of a stir within criminological circles; in France, Mathurin Félix Hutin carried out his own study into the indelibility of tattoos in order to test the veracity of Casper's claim of 'spontaneous disappearance.'[409] Hutin studied three hundred and twenty-four tattooed patients at the Paris Invalides in 1853, analysing the appearance of different tattoo pigments within the skin and correlating his observations with the age of the tattoos, as reported by the patients. He found that in forty-seven cases, the tattoos had completely disappeared over a period ranging from between twenty-eight to sixty years; of these tattoos, the most marked fading occurred

[407] Caplan, '"Speaking Scars"', p. 107.
[408] Ibid., p. 108.
[409] Mathurin Félix Hutin, *Recherches sur les tatouages*, (Paris: Baillière, 1853).

in red tattoos. Based upon these observations, Hutin concluded that tattoos could not be considered indelible in all cases, since very old tattoos could eventually disappear entirely, and this erasure could occur over an unpredictable period of time. Auguste Ambroise Tardieu did not consider the age of the tattoo to be the determining factor in the 'disappearance' of the tattoo, however; instead he quite accurately attributed a gradual process of fading to a combination of the material composition of pigments and their shallow introduction into the skin.[410]

By the 1880s the permanency of the tattoo, and therefore its stability as a durable mark of individual identity, had been challenged within the field of forensic science. It was at this point that criminologists began making new claims for the tattoo as a kind of 'self-selecting' physiological characteristic of the criminal in general, thereby re-coding the identification potential of the tattoo from specific criminal bodies to criminal *types*. Alexandre Lacassagne was at the forefront of this research in France. The criminological study of tattoos produced an effusion of drawings taken directly from the skin of prison inmates as well as soldiers and marines in barracks - the conveniently confined populations accessible to researchers. In the 1881 edition of the *Dictionnaire Encyclopedique des Sciences Medicales*, Lacassagne's collection methods are described in detail under the entry for *tatouage*:

> The transparent fabric is applied on the [tattooed] part. The design appears very clearly, and it is easy to follow the contours with an ordinary pencil. This provides a mathematical reproduction of the image which becomes very visible when the fabric is placed on a sheet of white paper. One then goes over the traits with blue and red ink following the colour of the tattoo itself. This done, the fabric is glued on card of dimensions varying with the size of the tattoo. Overleaf, the cardboard is inscribed with the following indications which constitute the observation:
> 1. sequence number; 2. surname and first name; 3. place of birth; 4. profession and education; 5. date and age of tattooing; 6. process used; 7. number of sessions; 8. duration of sessions; 9. information on the tattooer; 10. description of tattoos; 11. body location; 12. colouration; 13. changes in colouration; 14. observations of inflammation following tattooing; 15. length of time to heal; 16. current condition of tattoos; 17 effacement of tattoos; 18. voluntary effacement; 19. additions made to tattoos; 20. morality of the tattooee.[411]

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[410] See Auguste Ambroise Tardieu, *Etude medico-legale sur le tatouage, considere comme signes d'identite*, (Paris: J.-B. Baillière, 1855). As previously discussed in chapter two, fading of tattoos can occur as a result of shallow tattooing (see p. 86), as well as due to the composition of pigments. Non-cinnabar based red pigments in particular are susceptible to fading, based on comparisons of nineteenth-century tattooed skin samples.

[411] Lacassagne and Magitot, *Du Tatouage,* pp. 39-40 Translated from the French:
De la toile transparente est appliquée sur la partie. Le dessin apparaît très-nettement, et il est facile d'en suivre tous les contours avec un crayon ordinaire. On a ainsi une reproduction mathématique de l'image, qui devient très-visible lorsque la toile est mise sur une feuille de papier blanc. On passe alors les traits à l'encre bleue ou rouge selon que le tatouage présente l'une ou autre coloration. Ceci fait, la toile est collée sur un carton de dimension qui varie avec la grandeur du tatouage. Au verso du carton on inscrit les indications suivantes qui constituent l'observation:

Catalogued and stored on individual card files, the tattoos could then be categorised according to their putative symbolism, and motivations read in turn from the symbols: they could signify desire for vengeance, group allegiance, whether regimental or criminal organization, vanity, imitation, idleness, and their crude 'hieroglyphic' style read as evidence of the 'primitive writing' of the criminal. Through this method, Lacassagne built up an extensive archive of tattoo imagery, whose motifs could be closely correlated with the 'morality' of the tattooed individual, as well as providing more 'statistical' information such as the average age of tattoo acquisition, occupation and place of birth. However, there is a conflation within this recording system between information about the tattooed individual and information about the tattoo itself. The 'morality' of the criminal subject, for instance, was frequently infered from the placement of tattoos on particular parts of the body, as well as their pictorial content or linguistic sentiments. One such example cited by Lacassagne describes tattoos placed on or near the gentials, which were 'very frequent' among men in the penal batallions he studied in Algeria:

> On the abdomen, below the navel, are almost always lewd subjects, and pornographic inscriptions such as: *cock love*, *ladies' pleasure*, *come ladies*, *the love tap*, *she thinks of me*. On the penis eleven times I found tattooed boots: Hessian boots, spurred boots. [...] This design on the penis is very frequent, and I have fifteen in my collection [...] It is not, as some have thought, a sign of pederasty. All the men interviewed on this point have agreed, saying that they had this tattoo in order to make that awful pun: 'I'll put my boot in ...'[412]

Lacassagne's method of recording and storing tattoo images and inscriptions on cards has striking parallels with Alphonse Bertillon's technique of 'signalment': In Bertillon's system, criminal subjects were photographed in front and profile views, and eleven body measurements taken and recorded as a numerical series, as well as a shorthand description of distinguishing marks such as scars, deformities and tattoos. This information was recorded on single card, or *fiche* (see **Figure 138**), and entered into a filing system for ease of retrieval. This system was intended to facilitate the rapid

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1. Numéro d'ordre; 2. noms et prénoms; 3. lieu de naissance; 4. profession et instruction; 5. date des tatouages, âge; 6. procédé employée; 7. nombre de séances; 8. durée des séances; 9. renseignement sur le tatouer; 10. description des tatouages; 11. siége; 12. coloration; 13. changements survenus dans la coloration; 14. Y a-t-il eu inflammation apres les piqûres; 15. quel temps a mis le tatouage pour s'installer; 16. quel est l'état actuel du tatouage; 17. est-il effacé; 18. effacé volontairement; 19. surchargé; 20. moralité du tatoué.

[412] Lacassagne, *Recherches sur les Tatouages*, p. 293. Translated from the French:
Sur le ventre, au-dessous du nombril, se trouvent presque toujours des sujets lubriques, des inscriptions pornographiques telles que: Robinet d'amour, Plaisir des dames, Venez Mesdames, au robinet d'amour, Elle pense a moi. Sur la verge, onze fois j'ai trouve tatouees des bottes: bottes a l'écuyere, bottes éperonnées. [...] Ce dessin sur la verge est tres frequent; j'en ai quinze dans ma collection [...] Ce n'est point, comme on l'a cru, un signe de pédérastie. Tous les hommes interrogés sur ce point ont tous été d'accord a dire qu'ils n'avaient ce tatouage que pour faire cet affreux jeu de mots: 'Je vais le mettre ma botte au...'

identification of repeat offenders, as well as to 'break the professional criminal's mastery of disguises, false identities, multiple biographies, and alibis.'[413]

> For Bertillion, the mastery of the criminal body necessitated a massive campaign of *inscription,* a transformation of the body's signs into a *text*, a text that pared verbal description down to a denotative shorthand, which was then linked to a numerical series.[414]

The data-gathering projects of Bertillon and Lacassagne shared similarities in so far as their respective work focused upon measuring and recording the surface signs of the criminal body, which could be translated into a kind of 'text' through processes of inscription and punctualization.[415] However, the purposes towards which their efforts were directed, and their 'reading' of these 'texts' were entirely different. The inscription of the tattoo within the police archive was a nominal part of a wider technical operation, in which the tattoo was regarded as a physiological characteristic that had potential practical use in the identification of individual criminals. From the perspective of criminalistics, the criminal body in itself expressed nothing: 'no characterological secrets were hidden beneath the surface of this body. Rather, the surface and the skeleton were indices of a more strictly material sort.'[416] For Lacassagne and other criminologists writing on the tattoo during this period on the other hand, the tattoo represented a particularly compelling outward sign of inner psychological tendencies, desires and beliefs. Thus the work of *criminologists* sought to examine the criminal body's expressive repertoire in order to gain knowledge and mastery over the inner criminal 'soul', a process which reflected a broader shift in the regime of power during the nineteenth century, away from 'punishment and vendetta', and towards 'surveillance and discipline'. According to Michel Foucault, it is no longer merely criminal deeds which are the focus of punishment in this new configuration, but rather,

> [...] judgement is also passed on the passions, instincts, anomalies, infirmities, maladjustments, effects of environment or heredity; acts of aggression are punished, so also, through them, is aggressivity; rape, but at the same time perversions; murders, but also drives and desires.[417]

The tattoo was thus one sign amongst many that could reveal these dangerous inner passions and 'criminal instincts' to the criminologist. Lacassagne's system for recording

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[413] Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive', p. 27.
[414] Ibid., p. 33.
[415] See chapter four, p. 172 for detailed discussion of inscription and punctualization processes and the involvement of collecting practices in the production of knowledge-objects.
[416] Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive', p. 30.
[417] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 16-17.

tattoos became something of a benchmark in criminological methods, and was still being used by the police official Jacques Delarue during the middle decades of the twentieth century.[418] In 1933, the French criminologist Le Goarant de Tromelin acknowledged that although the tattoo could not be regarded as a reliable means of establishing individual identity, it nevertheless represented a unique kind of 'anatomical-legal stigmata', whose identification with certain social groups meant that it would be 'wrong to devalue' its semantic potential altogether. Writing on methods of recording and preserving tattoos, he makes intriguing distinctions between the preserved specimen, the trace and the photograph:

> [...] the Lyon School, which occupied itself in many medico-legal studies on tattoos, still sees [the tattoo] as a valuable sign that often speaks longer than the subject [...] The Lyon School advises their collection for observation. The removal from the corpse and subsequent mummification enables the preservation of interesting tattoos in laboratory collections. Photography seems to give rather poor results. Drawing tracings through a piece of cloth or transparent paper is an old process that remains excellent.[419]

In this passage, Le Goarant explictly relates the harvesting of tattooed skin from cadavers as a valuable scientific tool for the 'observation of tattoos'; photography, on the other hand, is regarded as a mediocre method of recording tattoos, suggesting that it is not merely the iconography of the tattoo which is of value to the medico-legal scientist, but the material artefact itself.

Perhaps unusually for a police technician, Delarue's study of the tattoo, treated primarily through the compiling of photographs of tattooed criminals, follows Lacassagne's approach to the interpretation of tattoo iconography. In particular, the cropping of Fromain's name out of the photograph in Delarue's book is significant, since it erases the link to his identity, rendering the image an anonymous body-portrait (see **Figure 139**). Although the photograph was taken in order to identify *this* criminal body with a specific individual, the image reproduced in Delarue's book has been disconnected from the archival system that produced it. Thus the photograph is re-enlisted into an entirely different identificatory scheme, in which the signification of the

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[418] Delarue reproduces a number of tracings of tattoos from his own research in *Le Tatouages du "Milieu",* (1999). Examples of these drawings can be seen in **Figures 58, 59, 61,** and **64.**

[419] G. Le Goarant de Tromelin, *Le Tatouage: Considérations Psychologiques et Médico-Légales*, (Lyon, 1933), p. 203. Translated from the French:
[...] l'Ecole lyonnaise, qui s'est beaucoup occupée d'études médico-légales sur le tatouages, y voit encore un précieux signe qui en dit souvent plus long que le nom du sujet. [...] l'Ecole lyonnaise conseille-t-elle de les collectionner pour les observer. Le prélèvement sur le cadavre et la momification ultérieure, permet de conserver les tatouages intéressants dans des collections de laboratoire. La photographie semble donner d'assez médiocres résultats. Le dessin décalqué à travers une pièce d'étoffe ou un papier transparent est un vieux procédé qui reste excellent.

tattoos is foregrounded. The configuration of the tattoos over the surface of the body, and their iconographic signification, becomes the new focus of a discourse which is no longer concerned with the identification of individual criminals, but with criminal types.

Atavism & Degeneration

With the emergence of the 'new' criminology in continental Europe during the 1880s, tattoos developed a particular significance for researchers who were concerned to identify reliable visible signs of criminality within their populations. The antecedent 'classical school' of criminology, or penology, came under criticism from the new 'positive' school, which challenged the prior emphasis on the nexus of legal code, criminal act and penalty.[420] The classical school's formulation proposed a 'typology of crimes', which Italian Lawyer and positivist sociologist Enrico Ferri termed a 'juridical anatomy' of deeds. This was rejected by the positive school in favour of a typology of criminals, which sought epistemological grounding in the scientific measurement of 'dangerous bodies' and the construction of an 'anatomy of deviance'.[421] According to this new discourse: 'Crime [became] a "risk" that human scientists proposed to manage through knowledge of statistical laws and a new attention to the bodies of the criminal.'[422] Citing Cesare Lombroso, who was undoubtedly the most famous criminologist of the positive school in his day, David Horn puts his finger on two central aspects of the new discipline's approach: 'Numbers had shown crime to be 'an unfortunate natural production, a form of disease, which demanded treatment and isolation rather than penalty and vendetta'.'[423]

The analogy drawn here between criminality and disease is intriguing: according to Lombroso and his contemporaries, criminality was a pathology located *within* the criminal body, dangerously hidden from the forensic specialist unless one knew how to apply the appropriate statistical tools to get at the truth within. Moreover, the signs of latent criminality could be read from the body's surface, in much the same way that the morphology of cutaneous skin infections could provide evidence of underlying disease. Physical features of all kinds, from skull measurements to peculiarities of the ear and anomalies of the palm, were scrutinised by criminologists in the careful construction of their taxonomies of deviance. Of all of the supposed outward

[420] David Horn, *The Criminal Body: Lombroso and the Anatomy of Deviance* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 9.
[421] Ibid., p. 10.
[422] Ibid., p. 8.
[423] Ibid.

signifiers of atavism, however, tattoos seemed to hold a particular fascination. Tattooing was at this time frequently associated with the 'primitive' body and the art of the 'savage', familiar through both colonial encounters and the visual display of the native imported to Europe to be put on public exhibition in fairs and anthropological exhibits. The apparent popularity of tattooing amongst certain groups and classes within European society was viewed by some as a dangerous regression, or sign of degeneration, within their populations. In his essay *The Savage Origin of Tattooing*, which appeared in *Popular Science Monthly* in April 1869, Lombroso takes on the 'fashion' amongst prominent women of London society in no uncertain terms:

> Tattooing is the true writing of savages, their first registry of civil condition [...] Nothing is more natural than to see a usage so widespread among savages and prehistoric peoples reappear in classes which, as the deep-sea bottoms retain the same temperature, have preserved the customs and superstitions ... of the primitive peoples, and who have, like them, violent passions, a blunted sensibility, a puerile vanity, long-standing habits of inaction, and very often nudity. There, indeed among savages are the principal models of this curious custom.[424]

Thus Lombroso translates the 'savage' and atavistic character of the foreign or prehistoric tattooed peoples into the 'criminal' nature of the tattooed European. This view is representative of the Italian school of criminology in particular, which was known for its theories of the 'inborn' nature of criminality and for its emphasis on atavism. However, similar approaches to tattooing and criminality are found in numerous studies published on the subject during the late nineteenth century in various European countries. Much of the continental debate revolved around the relative popularity of the concepts of atavism and degeneration in the explication of theories of criminality. The French school, championed by Alexandre Lacassagne, advanced the theory of *dégénéresence*, which placed its emphasis on the social aetiology of crime. For Lacassagne and his followers, it was the *milieu social* which was the determining factor in criminal behaviour: 'The social milieu is the breeding ground of criminality; the germ is the criminal, an element which has no importance until the day where it finds the broth which makes it ferment.'[425]

The criminological preoccupation with tattoos may be elucidated through a consideration of two factors pertaining to the peculiar nature of the tattoo itself; firstly, the tattoo mark occupies an intriguing boundary, both physiologically and socio-

[424] Cesare Lombroso, 'The Savage Origin of Tattooing', in *Popular Science Monthly* (April 1896), p. 802.
[425] Alexandre Lacassagne, 'Les transformations du droit pénal et les progrès de la médecine légale, de 1810 à 1912', in *Archives d'anthropologie criminelle*, Lyon (1913), p. 364.

culturally. It appears at the body surface, but is suspended indelibly *within* the flesh; as Julie Flemming writes, 'lodged on the border between inside and outside, the tattoo occupies the no-place of abjection.'[426] Thus embodying an internal-external dichotomy paralleled in the new criminological formulation of atavistic character and stigmatised body, the tattoo may be viewed as the ultimate symbol of abjection, in the context of nineteenth-century criminological discourse - a self-imposed stigmata which scholars themselves found both abhorrent and irresistable. Moreover, as a socially *acquired* yet permanent physical mark, the tattoo seems to articulate something of the relationship between social atavism and corporeal 'degeneration', to which I will return in my discussion of tattooing and skin disease.

As Lombroso succinctly put it, the study of tattoos; 'serve a psychological purpose, in enabling us to discern the obscurer sides of the criminal's soul.'[427] Moreover, they could provide reliable, self-selecting evidence of social pathology. Thus a further aspect of the new disciplinary approach is revealed in a shift away from the 'penalty and vendetta' which focussed punishment upon the body, and towards 'treatment and isolation' which sought to manage the 'criminal soul'. The emerging technologies of power-knowledge, which read, interpreted and catagorised the surface signs of the body, isolated these characteristics in their data in a process paralleling the physical isolation of criminals in prisons and asylums.[428]

An illustration from Henry Havelock Ellis's 1895 work *The Criminal,* which drew heavily on the work of Lombroso, is exemplary of the kind of visual data gathered by criminologists during this period (**Figure 140**). A drawing of two disembodied arms is presented, floating on a flat, featureless ground, with numerous tattooed figures drawn over the surface of each limb. The primary purpose of the image is to illustrate the distribution and relative coverage of tattoos over the arms of an anonymous criminal - the tattoo marks in this case are not so significant in isolation as in their cumulative effect, and indeed the claim was made that the extent of a criminal's tattoos often marked him out from his non-criminal tattooed contemporaries, such as sailors and ordinary working class men. Moreover,

> Lombroso's presentation displayed the criminal's body as if it were an unmediated text narrating the story of his self, and this theme was taken up in the scattered attempts to read the multiple tattoos as a kind of visual autobiography, as intimate clues to the bearer's personality and psychology.[429]

[426] Fleming, 'The Renaissance Tattoo', p. 64.
[427] Lombroso, 'The Savage Origin of Tattooing', p. 802.
[428] See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 195-228.
[429] Caplan, '"One of the Strangest Relics of a Former State"', p. 359.

Havelock Ellis[430] followed the pictorial conventions found in Lombroso's work *L'uomo delinquente*; the isolation of the arms in the pictorial space, and the almost complete two-dimensionality of the image, has the effect of conceptually abstracting the tattoo from the three-dimensionality of the body. This abstraction made it possible to devise a visual taxonomy, which in turn facilitated the shift away from the 'anatomy of crime' and towards the 'anatomy of the criminal' that the positive school advocated.

Interestingly, this pictorial strategy is paralleled in the dermatological imagery of the nineteenth century. In a watercolour sketch drawn by Mabel Green in 1901, for example, care has been taken to focus on the specific part of the body affected by the disease: a right arm infected with a skin disease described as *Lichen variegatus* (**Figure 141**). Although this sketch was certainly drawn from a living patient, the arm appears like a neatly dissected specimen in which the patient becomes generic whilst the disease is afforded a greater specificity. Writing on dermatological illustrations of this period, Mechthild Fend points out that the particular visual strategy deployed in the production of images of skin disease helped to facilitate the development of dermatology as an independent discipline in the nineteenth century.[431] The creation of 'characteristic morphologies', which could be used for comparison and diagnosis, allowed physicians to perceive diseases as discrete entities, whilst making an important contribution to the process of standardisation. This would have been particularly significant in the case of the 'Great Imitators' such as syphilis and tuberculosis, whose visually palpable symptoms and effects could be easily misread and misdiagnosed prior to the advent of serological testing.

Whilst the tattoo was mobilsed as a kind of socio-pathological signifier within the context of continental European criminology, medical professionals in France and across the channel and the Atlantic turned their research efforts to the question of tattooing as a risk factor in the spread of disease. In one context the tattoo was re-coded as social disorder; in another it appeared as corporeal malaise.

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[430] Havelock Ellis was unusual amongst British criminologists, in that he was influenced by Lombroso's theories of criminality. However, as James Bradley notes, 'his approach was marked by an ambivalence towards Lombroso's crude determinism [...] Ellis's account [...] separated the 'pathological tattoos of the hereditary criminal, and the 'normal' environmental tattoos of the rest - a perfect example of the English intellectual tradition of finding the 'middle' or 'third' way.' 'Body Commodification? Class and Tattoos in Victorian Britain', in Jane Caplan (ed.) *Written on the Body*, p. 139.

[431] Mechthild Fend, 'Portraying Skin Disease: Robert Carswell's Dermatological Watercolours', in Jonathan Reinarz and Kevin Siena (eds.) *A Medical History of Skin: Scratching the Surface* (London: Pickering Chatto, 2013), p. 147-164.

The Tattoo and Medicine: Risk and the Inoculation of Disease

One of the earliest sources linking disease transmission to the practice of tattooing can be found in Mathurin Félix Hutin's *Recherches sur les Tatouages*, published in 1853. He relates the case of a tattooed soldier, allegedly still a virgin, who had been admitted to the hôpital du Val de Grâce suffering from Syphilis. His tattooist was apparently to blame; when the tattoo ink had dried up in the shell he used to contain it, he had re-moistened the dry powder by mixing it with his own saliva. His needles thus loaded with ink and Spirochaetaceae, the unfortunate soldier was simultaneously tattooed and inoculated with Syphilis. The resulting infection was so bad, Hutin tells us, that the arm almost had to be amputated.[432] Whilst there was indeed scientific interest in the risk factor of disease transmission through tattooing in France and Germany continuing into the late nineteenth century, the continental context was nevertheless more remarkable for the extent of its criminological scholarship on tattooing and discussions of tattoo removal, which I will return to. The relative absence of such debates from the British and American discourse, by contrast, invites further investigation of the medical literature in which reports of tattooing exist in these contexts. From these short studies a picture of an otherwise historically obscured tattooing practice, though partial, begins to emerge.

Of the cases specifically dealing with skin disease inoculated by tattooing, there are two that stand out in the literature, both of which are illustrated. The first report appears in *The British Medical Journal*, dated 1889, and is entitled, *Notes Of Cases On An Outbreak Of Syphilis Following On Tattooing* by Army Surgeon F. R. Barker. The images are of particular interest and are highly unusual amongst the medical literature concerning tattooing and disease, as they clearly illustrate the tattoo itself as the site of infection. Barker's report describes an outbreak of syphilis at the Portsea Army barracks in Hampshire in 1888, in which twelve soldiers were infected with the disease by a single tattooist, who is referred to simply as 'S'. Barker took care to track down the tattooist, who was said to be a discharged soldier of the regiment and a 'hawker in the barracks'. After interviewing him about his health and working methods, it was established that he was indeed infected with syphilis. The article goes on to briefly describe the tattooing method which undoubtedly led to the transmission of infection - the tattooist had used his saliva variously throughout the process, either using it to mix his inks, moistening his needles in his mouth, or rubbing saliva directly onto the skin before, during and after tattooing. In all, twenty-three men where tattooed by S. over a

[432] Mathurin Félix Hutin, *Recherches sur les tatouages* (1853), pp. 10-11.

three month period, though only twelve showed signs of infection. The first four cases presented were photographed, and these images appear in the article.

The first two image plates in Barker's text show the flexor and extensor surfaces of the forearm, with large ulcerated sores emerging from the margins of the tattooed lines. The first of these illustrations, shown in **Figure 142,** is identified as 'Case I' and shows the flexor surface of a left forearm tattooed with a flag and a clothed female figure, the lower portion of the tattooed figure corroded by two large syphilitic ulcers. This image bears the typical features of cropping and isolating the affected limb in space common to medical illustrations of skin diseases of the period, and in this respect shares formal similarities with Mabel Green's watercolour of a the skin disease *Lichen variegtus*. In contrast with the sketched tattooed forearms in **Figure 140**, however, there is a distinct voluminous three-dimensionality to the limbs in these images, which have been reproduced from photographs. The third image plate presents a much more abstracted image of the infected tattoo, which fills the pictorial space (**Figure 143**).[433] The syphilitic eruptions have a greater specific character, appearing to 'bloom' out of the tattooed images of flowers in a pot. It is interesting to note the subtle aesthetic judgements which Barker makes in his description of these particular syphilitic manifestations:

> The rupiæ were very perfect, like limpet-shells. The ulcers were situated over the site of a flower and a flower pot tattooed by S. on the flexor surface of his left forearm.[434]

Barker's description of the rupial sores as a perfect representation of a morphological type suggests an important linkage between the production of medical imagery and diagnostic standardisation; particularly in the case of syphilis, whose surface manifestations are varied and may be confused with other conditions. This image demonstrates a different visual style, in which we are essentially presented with an isolated symptom on a flat surface; the skin only becomes legible as such through the surface sign of the disease, and in this case by the inclusion of the tattoo beneath the surface. Similarly, in the work of criminologists of the same period, the surface sign of the tattoo is flattened out and 'removed' from the context of the body in the collections of drawings that accompany numerous criminological texts on tattooing.[435] It may be

[433] This image is also reproduced in Bradley, 'Body Commodification?', p. 145.
[434] F. R. Barker, M.B. Lond., Medical Staff (Surgeon), 'Notes Of Cases On An Outbreak Of Syphilis Following On Tattooing', in *The British Medical Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1479 (May 4, 1889), pp. 985-989.
[435] See, for example, Alexandre Lacassagne, *Les Tatouages Étude Anthropologique et Médico-Légale* (1881).

argued that these acts of visual abstraction and isolation contribute to the construction of visual taxonomies within the disciplines of medicine and criminology alike.
James Bradley comments upon Barker's report of the outbreak with reference to anthropologist Alfred Gell's metaphor of the 'epidemiology of tattooing' as follows:

> We see the quasi-dermatological illness of the tattoo spreading plague-like through a segment of the regiment, followed swiftly by the real disease of syphilis, which asserted its ascendancy by transposing its own mark upon the crudely etched tattoo patterns.[436]

Gell's formulation, adopted here by Bradley, is based upon his observation that tattooing has an observable 'pattern of occurrence, which resembles the uneven, but at the same time predictable, incident of an illness.'[437] Though he seems to suggest that this pattern is metaphorical, he nevertheless refers to the somewhat empirically impoverished and theoretically tenuous work of Lombroso, who had identified 'imitation' and 'idleness' to be two of the primary motivating factors amongst criminals who acquire tattoos, and suggests that in this historical case there may be some veracity in his ideas. This metaphor, which proposes a mechanism of 'social contagion' for the spread of physical stigmata (the tattoo), reproduces many of the questionable assumptions made in the work of Lombroso. Yet it is also intriguing, in light of these assumptions, to consider the ways in which tattooing was represented and understood by medico-legal professionals of the period, as a risk factor in the transmission of disease *associated with* disreputable behaviours.

The second source from the British medical literature that I will consider presents a particularly interesting case in light of the above, and also deals with the tattoo as the site of skin disease - in this case tuberculosis. This extremely short report is accompanied by two images, which share stylistic similarities to those of the case of syphilis, though they are clearly engravings rather than photographs. The transmission agent in this case is also saliva, employed in the same manner as by the tattooist S. during tattooing, though the tattooist is a fifteen-year-old boy who had died of pulmonary tuberculosis shortly after tattooing his younger brothers, who were aged ten and thirteen. He is said to have used Indian ink 'rubbed up with his saliva in the palm of his hand'. In the first of the images presented with the case notes, the tuberculosis infection has destroyed the lower portion of the tattoo, which is described as a rose design, heavily scarred and covered with a mass of pustules.

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[436] Bradley, 'Body Commodification?' p. 143.
[437] Gell, *Wrapping in Images*, p. 20.

The second image plate shows the flexor surface of the forearm, which had been tattooed with a heart crossed by two flags, and is described in the report as 'leaving in lines of the pattern deep ulcers with hard, round, smooth edges and granulating bases. The whole design was raised and surrounded with an erythematous border.'[438] (**Figure 144**) The infection has completely engulfed the tattoo such that the disease itself has taken on the pattern of the tattoo design. Thus, according to Bradley and Gell's formula, we are able to visualise the tattooed sign and symptom of infection merging into one single stigmata of social and physical disorder. It is possible to imagine the tattoo during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a kind of doubly pathological signifier, inflected with the spectre of social disreputability or even criminality in one social context, and stigmatised disease in another. There may even be overlap between the two; highly visible diseases such as syphilis were implicated in the spread of social degeneration through the transmission of infectious diseases.[439] Thus, in response to reports of such outbreaks as those described, some medical and military professionals were lead to conclude that tattooing may pose a significant enough threat to be banned outright:

> Tattooing, we think, might well be forbidden in the army and navy, as a useless and perhaps pernicious practice, one which may injure the men and prove an expense to the government, by bringing into hospital and on the pension lists some who might otherwise be in active service.[440]

Anatomy of the Tattoo and Tattoo Removal

As mentioned above, medical interest in the anatomy of the tattoo during the nineteenth century was primarily concerned with questions of the indelibility of the mark, which had significant implications for the forensic potential of the tattoo as an identifying feature. However, doctors were also interested in practical methods of tattoo removal, which necessitated studies of the structure of the skin and the processes

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[438] Collings and Murray, 'Three Cases of Inoculation of Tuberculosis From Tattooing', in *The British Medical Journal* (June 1 1895), p. 1200.

[439] Syphilis is a particularly good example to illustrate something of the connection between concepts of degeneration, disease and criminality in the nineteenth century. Precisely because the visual effects of the disease were so horrific and appeared at the surface of the body, syphilis was a highly stigmatised condition which was also associated with amoral social behaviours such as prostitution based on knowledge of its transmission. In fact, one of the symptoms of tertiary syphilis observed in suffers who had gone untreated for many decades, was dubbed 'Prostitute's pupil' (known as Argyll Robertson, or 'AR' pupils today). This peculiar symptom, which is highly specific to neurosyphilis, causes the pupils to become non-reactive to bright light, but does not affect a patient's ability to focus on near objects. This gave rise to the observation that like a prostitute, the pupils 'accommodate, but do not react'.

[440] F. F. Maury, (M.D.) and C. W. Dulles (M.D.), 'Syphilis Communicated by Tattooing', in: *The American Journal of the Medical Sciences* (Jan 1878), p. 62.

through which the tattoo is formed. Microscopial studies of cross-sections of tattooed skin were carried out on cadavers in prisons and hospitals in order to establish where precisely the ink particles lay in the dermis. Of all the practising physicians with an academic interest in the tattoo and its removal during the later nineteenth century, Dr. Gaston Felix Joseph Variot is the most frequently cited regarding methods of tattoo removal. This may at first seem unexpected, given that his primary area of expertise was paediatrics, infant nutrition and obstetric health; however, aspects of both Variot's academic work on tattooing and his biography are especially interesting in respect of the Wellcome tattoo collection. Although he was never formally a member of the Paris Faculty of Medicine, Variot appears in connection with a number of episodes relating to the excision and preservation of human skin, as well as his experimentation on tattooed human skin, most notably the Pranzini affair, which unfolded at the Paris anatomy school in 1887.[441] In 1888, Variot published a study co-authored with Dr. Morau, in which he set out to explain the colouration and indelibility of tattoos, using microscopic and experimental techniques. He writes:

> The reason why tattoos are *indelible* was found to lie, on the one hand, in the topography of the colourant introduced into the thick dermal tissue, where it is very well tolerated and fixes itself, and on the other hand, in the very nature of the colourant, which is resistant to fading and stable, despite being made up of fine particles.[442]

Variot verified these methods for himself by first 'carrying out experimental tattoos on the skin of the stomach of a young dog',[443] and then excising several strips of skin for microscopial analysis. Variot did not limit his experiments to the skin of dogs, however, but also carried out work on the excised skins of cadavers, noting that the topography of pigment within the dermis is markedly different in *old* human tattoos, as compared with his freshly healed experimental tattoos. He describes how,

> At the Central Infirmary of the Paris prisons, we collected a forearm tattoo which was approximately thirty-two years old, according to its bearer, a prisoner. The tattooed image, which was quite well preserved, depicted a steam ship with a French flag on its stern. This tattoo had been done using Indian ink during a sea crossing. We have also studied, with the aid of a microscope, other

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[441] See chapter two, pp. 68-70 for an overview of this affair.
[442] Gaston Variot, 'Les Tatouages Européens', in *Revue Scientifiqu*e (12 Mai, 1888), p. 594. Translated from the French:
La raison de l'indélébilité des tatouages, nous la trouvons d'une part dans la topographie de la substance colorante incluse dans l'épaisseur du derme cutané où elle est parfaitement tolérée et fixée, d'autre part dans la nature même de la substance colorante qui, bien que divisée en fines particules, est inaltérable et stable.
[443] Ibid.

> blue tattoos of indeterminate age from the Practical School of the Faculty of Medicine.[444]

In his article, he also reproduces a drawing of a microscopial cross-section of old tattooed human skin, indicating the distribution of black ink particles in the dermal layer (see **Figure 145**). The above remarks are intriguing, since they suggest that Variot was engaged both in the surgical removal of tattoos from living patients (who were able to verbally confirm the age of their tattoos), as well as the excision of tattooed skin from cadavers; at least some of which he received from the Paris Faculty of Medicine, where Professor Paul Poirier was apparently assembling a 'curious collection of tattooings' for the practical museum.[445] However, his interest appears to have been primarily concerned with determining the physiology of the tattoo, in order to develop efficient methods of tattoo removal. He makes no such suggestions along the lines of Le Goarant, that the collection of tattoos could be of value for purposes of scientific 'observation'of tattoo imagery.

Methods of tattoo removal were explored by a number of French medical professionals during the nineteenth century, including Ernest Berchon, Mathurin Félix Hutin, Auguste Ambroise Tardieu, and Albert Le Blond. Le Blond dedicates a whole chapter to the subject in his 1889 monograph *Du Tatouage chez les Prostituées*, describing a variety of methods employed by both physicians and the tattooed themselves, who were often 'desperate' to remove these 'dreadful and stigmatizing' marks, resorting to applications of caustic substances, which frequently caused scarring worse that the original tattoo.[446] Among early available methods were surgical removal of the entire tattooed section of skin (suitable only for small designs), vesication, punctures followed by suction over the tattooed area,[447] as well as various combinations of chemical solutions and abrasion techniques, which mechanically removed the pigmented areas of the skin. Perhaps most unusual of all was the method proposed by Chardin et Foveau de Courmelles, described by Le Blond as 'electrical acupuncture', which involved the introduction of a solution of tannin and silver nitrate into the tattooed area using electrolysis. This method, according to Leblond, gave

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[444] Ibid., p. 595. Translated from the French:
Nous avons recueilli à l'infirmerie centrale des prisons de Paris un tatouage de l'avant-bras datant de trente-deux ans, d'apès le témoignage du prisonnierqui en était le porteur. La figure tatouée en bleu, assez bien conservée, représentait un bateau à vapeur avecle pavillon français à l'arrière. Ce tatouage avait été fait avec de l'encre de Chine pendant une traversée. Nous avons également étudié, à l'aide du microscope, d'autres tatouages bleus provenant de l'École pratique de la Faculté de médecineet dont l'ancienneté ne nous était pas conne.

[445] See chapter two, p. 68; also Pascal, *Pranzini*, p. 273.

[446] Albert Le Blond and Arthur Lucas, *Du Tatouage chez les Prostituées* (Paris: Société d'Éditions Scientifiques, 1899), pp. 77-88.

[447] Gaston Variot, 'Le Détatouage', in *Revue Scientifique*, 3rd Series, Vol. 17 (Jan-Jul 1889), p. 972.

effective results, leaving only 'small, almost imperceptible whitish scars'.[448] However, it was Variot's work in this area which came to be accepted as the standard method, and which is in fact still used as a 'DIY' removal method by contemporary tattooists[449]. Variot himself seems to have tried several different techniques before arriving at his recommended method, including surgical removal and 'ignipuncture', involving the cauterisation of the tattooed area with hot needles:

> In August 1887, at the request of a patient at the Hôpital Saint-Antoine, we tried to destroy an obscene tattoo on his chest using ignipuncture. With the exception of a few areas where our punctures were very deep, the overall design did not change.[450]

The use of needles in the removal of tattoos, described both by Le Blond in the 'electrical acupuncture method', and in Variot's attempt at cautery, is intriguing, suggesting a correspondence between the methods and tools of tattooers and physicians. The method for which Variot became known involved the re-tattooing of the pigmented area utilising tattooing needles after the fashion of the tattooers themselves. In his 1889 article on tattoo removal methods, which appeared in the *Revue Scientifique*, Variot even suggests that 'we believe that the involvement of a tattoo artist is the best way to meet this criterion,'[451] although whether or not he actually enlisted the assistance of any professional or amateur tattooer is not clear from his work. It is clear,

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[448] Ibid., p. 84.

[449] During my time working in tattoo studios in Chester and Manchester, I came across this method on a number of occasions - it always left a very conspicuous scar, and was described as an extremely painful procedure by colleagues who had self-administered the treatment. Chemical removal methods such as Variot's are now seldom used in the contemporary age of laser removal technology. However, many old tattooists are still familiar with the procedure, and in fact these removal techniques were a part of the early twentieth century tattooist's professional repertoire. In a recent conversation with London tattooist Lal Hardy, he described removal techniques as follows: 'The old tattoo removal method - as I used and tried on myself too - was thus: the area to be removed would be tattooed with a diluted tannic acid solution (mixed with water) using the regular tattoo machine - some old timers advocated really working the skin or as they termed it 'chopping the skin up' or 'opening up the skin'. The area tattooed with the solution would then appear a white-ish colour [...] the area would then be rubbed with a stiptic pencil used to stop bleeding on shaving cuts. These were made of silver nitrate and would be rubbed vigorously over the tattooed area making the area then appear black (and stopping any bleeding). A fabric plaster was then applied to the area and left on it (yes, the same plaster!) for two weeks, in which time the plaster could not get wet. After two weeks the plaster had to be ripped off, taking the scab, skin and hopefully the tattoo with it! The wound could often be deep and messy, and I used to make clients apply a fresh paraffin dressing daily until the skin returned to some kind of normality. This method varied in its success in both removal and healing/scarring. The solution of tannic acid used to appear as a white liquid so old time tattooists, who were fiercely secretive of [...] methods, tools, solutions etc., they would tell the uninformed they were using 'milk'. This was the way of the old timers, to label solutions with fake names: ferric chloride was used as a coagulant and was often labelled as 'snake piss' or 'monkey piss' because of its deep yellowish colour. Sometimes tattooists, rather than using tannic acid, would tattoo over an area to be removed with a dry needle, Dettol antiseptic or Milton sterilizing fluid.'

[450] Variot, 'Les Tatouages', p. 597. Translated from the French:
Au moins d'août 1887, sur la demande d'un malade de l'hôpital Saint-Antoine, nous avons tenté de détruire, à l'aide des pointes de feu, un tatouage obscène placé au devant de la poitrine. Sauf en quelques points où nos piqûres de feu ont été très profondes, l'ensemble de la figure n'a pas été modifié.

[451] Variot, 'Le Détatouage', p. 298.

however, that he learned the basic techniques of hand-poke tattooing using a bundle of fine needles, with which to apply his chemical reagents to the tattoos he sought to remove.

It is interesting to note that Variot was not the only medical practitioner to take up tattoo needles as a therapeutic medical tool. A number of dermatologists were beginning to explore the use of tattooing for therapeutic and cosmetic procedures from as early as the 1890s. Several interesting accounts appear in the historical literature, which describe the ways in which medical professionals adopted the techniques and tools of contemporary tattooing for their own medicinal purposes. These accounts reveal little of the moralising attitude frequently encountered in the continental criminological literature on tattooing during the period; rather it seems that some medical professionals had a genuine interest in the new technology of tattooing developing in Britain and America. The electric tattoo machine in particular, which was invented in 1891 by the American tattooist Samuel O'Reilly, presented a novel method for the introduction of substances other than ink into the skin in a relatively controlled manner. One such article exploring this possibility was published in *The British Medical Journal* in 1899, entitled 'Hypodermic Medication in Skin Disease', and made the case for therapeutic tattooing. The author, Dr. C. Butler Savory, describes his own 'original method' for treating certain forms of skin disease, which involved tattooing a solution of carbolic acid into the affected area. He writes:

> For localised patches of ringworm, etc., this method of treatment proves eminently successful. I have not as yet tried the treatment for skin diseases depending upon constitutional conditions, but I see no reason why the result of tattooing some of the chronic localised rashes of syphilis liq. hydrarg. perchlor. should not prove successful.[452]

Variot experimented in counter-tattooing using a range of substances, including finely pulverised white enamel powders, cantharides tincture, phenol oil, tannin and papain, all without success. In arriving at his final method, Variot explains the necessity of re-tattooing over the coloured mark for reducing potential scarring, and in order to achieve a 'graduating penetration' of the caustic agent. His method is described as follows:

> I coat or paint the tattooed area of the skin with a concentrated solution of tannin, then, using a set of needles like those produced by tattoo artists, I make

[452] C. Butler Savory, 'Hypodermic Medication in Skin Disease', in *The British Medical Journal,* Vol. 1, No. 1998 (Apr. 15, 1899), pp. 904-905.

> punctures very close together all over the surface of the skin from which I want to remove the colour, taking care not to encroach on the uncoloured skin. I introduce a certain amount of tannin into the superficial layer of the dermis. The tannin used in the first stage of the procedure has the advantage of being aseptic and haemostatic and it acts as a mordant for the caustic agent.
> I then use an ordinary silver nitrate pencil to rub firmly on all the areas which I have pricked with tannin. I leave the concentrated silver salt to act on the epidermis and dermis for several seconds, until I see the puncture mark standing out in dark black. I then wipe off the caustic solution; silver tannate has formed in the superficial layers of the dermis, turning the tattooed area black. It is necessary to check that the eschar has dried up in the first three days by dusting it several times a day with tannin powder. This is the best way to prevent the scab from coming away prematurely and any ensuing suppuration. The two stages of this technique can be carried out very quickly and are only mildly painful. The follow-up treatment is very simple. In the first two days after cauterisation, there is slight inflammatory reaction with a varying degree of sensitivity. In the following days, all the areas pricked with tannin and cauterised with silver nitrate become dark black, forming a sort of scab or thin eschar which is firmly attached to the deeper areas and then on the third or fourth day, they become colourless.[453]

Variot's method, though widely accepted among physicians (and professional tattooists) as an effective technique of tattoo removal, nevertheless caused some controversy. Reports of his prison experiments leaked to the press, which denounced his techniques as unnecessary and - despite Variot's words to the contrary - evidently painful experiments on his living charges at the prison infirmary. Emile Laurent mentions the public reaction to reports of Variot's experiments in his 1890 monograph *Habitues des Prisons de Paris*:

> Tattoos were removed from a number of inmates at the prison hospital by this method with full success. This discovery made some noise in the political press. Hypocritical and malicious employees denounced M. Variot as an inhumane

[453] Variot, 'Le Détatouage', p. 299. Translated from the French:
J'enduis ou je badigeonne les parties de peau tatouée avec une solution concentrée de tannin, puis à l'aide d'un jeu d'aiguilles, comme en fabriquent les tatoueurs, je fais des piqûres très serrées sur toute la surface de peau que je veux décolorer, en ayant soin d'empléter sur la peau incolore. J'introduis ainsi dans la partie superficielle du derme une certaine quantité de tannin. L'emploi du tannin dans ce premier temps de l'opération a l'avantage d'être antiseptique, hémostatique, et de servir de mordant au caustique.
Je passe, en frottant fortement sur toutes les parties que j'ai piquées au tannin, le crayon de nitrate d'argent ordinaire. Je laisse pendant quelques instants la solution concentrée de sel d'argent agir sur l'épiderme et le derme, jusqu'à ce que je voie la piqûre se détacher en noir foncé. J'essuie alors la solution caustique; la surface tatouée est devenue noire par la formation d'un tannate d'argent qui s'est produit dans les couches superficielles du derme. Il convient d'assurer la dessiccation de l'eschare pendant les trois premiers jours, en la saupoudrant plusieurs fois dans la journée avec de la poudre de tannin. C'est le meilleur moyen d'eviter le détachement prématuré de la croûte et la suppuration qui s'ensuivrait. Les deux temps de cette petite opération peuvent se faire trés vite et ne provoquent qu'une douleur modérée. Quant aux suites, elles sont fort simples. Dans les deux premiers jours qui suivants la cautérisation, il y a une légère réaction inflammatoire, avec une sensibilité variable. Puis, les jours suivants, toutes les parties piquées au tannin et cautérisées au nitrate d'argent prennent une teinte noire foncée, formant une sorte de croûte ou d'eschare mince, très adhérente aux parties profondes et deviennent, le troisième ou le quatrième jour, tout à fait incolores.

> doctor who tormented the inmates and was operating on them 'as on rabbits and guinea pigs, giving them phlegmons[454] and fevers.'[455]

Moreover, some of Variot's detractors pointed to the deleterious effect that his efforts to erase the tattoos of criminals might have on police work, since it was assumed that, for the criminalist, the tattoo could be a useful identifying mark in the pursuit of recidivists. The scandal at La Santé prison where Variot carried out his work resulted in an inquiry, at which Variot called upon the expert opinion of Alphonse Bertillon in support of his defence. Emile Laurent, who was also present at the inquiry, recounts Bertillon's testimony, which stated that contrary to popular belief, the tattoo was not a reliable sign of identity, since it could be altered or effaced by the clever criminal; on the other hand, the inevitable scarring left behind after the tattoo was removed could be an 'equally convincing' sign.[456] Most interesting are Bertillon's concluding remarks, which Laurent paraphrases: 'Before attempting to purify the criminal soul, [...] we must first try to purify their bodies and get rid of the obscene or seditious tattoos that they wear.'[457] This incident clearly made an impression on Variot; in an 1889 article in which he outlined his successful tattoo removal methods, he was also careful to underline the social and moral importance of this work, appealing once again to the expertise of Bertillon on the matter of identity:

> Tattoo removal can serve a genuine social function. Alphonse Bertillon put it very well when he said that there are savages in our civilisations bearing grotesque or obscene designs, or hate-filled inscriptions on the skin of their limbs and even their faces. All these visible marks mean that decent folk close their doors to people who are branded by the mark of penal servitude. The rehabilitation of these unfortunate men is impossible without tattoo removal. Finally, how many idle people, sailors and soldiers are ashamed on returning to civilian life because they are tattooed like prisoners or prostitutes!
> Can tattoo removal impede the legal pursuit of criminals? Alphonse Bertillon, the Head of the Anthropometry Department can provide us with the answer. Tattoos are deceptive identification marks, as they can be altered. Even if they are not removed, they can be covered by over-tattooing. When a design has fallen from favour, it is possible to draw another one over the top or simply to shade it out. A tattoo artist can correct skin, just like a painter correcting his canvas. Since the identification department in Paris has been established on a

[454] An acute suppurative inflammation affecting the subcutaneous connective tissue.
[455] Emile Laurent, *Les Habitues des Prisons de Paris* (Paris, 1890), p. 532. Translated from the French: *Un certain nombre de détenus furent détatoués à la prison la Santé par ce procédé et avec un plein succès. Cette découverte fit un certain bruit dans la presse politique. Des employés hypocrites et malveillants dénoncèrent M. Variot comme un médecin inhumain qui martyrisait les détenus et opérait sur eux "comme sur des lapins ou des cobayes, leur donnant des phlegmons et des fièvres."*
[456] Ibid.
[457] Ibid., pp. 532-533.

> scientific basis, i.e. anthropometry, tattooing as an identification technique has been relegated to a position of secondary importance.[458]

This episode points to a tension between nineteenth-century conceptions of the tattoo as a mark of individual identity on the one hand, and as a generalised sign of deviance on the other. This tension played out in Variot's work on tattoo removal and the subsequent public backlash, manifesting a contradiction between the desire of the physician to erase the stigmatising mark in order to rehabilitate the criminal, and the imperative to 'fix' the tattoo as an identifying mark in order to detect dangerous individuals in the fight against crime. Variot's motivations for developing a successful method of removal for tattoos thus derived from the aforementioned broader criminological codification of the tattoo as a 'primitive' mark which was associated with disreputable groups such as prisoners, sailors, soldiers and prostitutes. His approach, also reflected in the testimony of Bertillon who spoke of first 'cleaning' the criminal body in order to rehabilitate the soul, is characteristic of the French criminological approach, which viewed the causation of crime and moral 'degeneration' as primarily environmental. According to this perspective, the criminal or deviant individual could be 'remoulded' through education and disciplinary management of the body.[459] As Mechthild Fend writes:

> The trust in the potential betterment of an offender corresponds with [...] medical efforts to render the criminal or prostitute immaculate again in removing the tattoo.[460]

Variot led an extremely active and varied medical career, not only working as the chief medical officer at La Santé and being retained as a military doctor, but also undertaking significant research into infant nutrition, milk and child health, which took him on an extended research visit to England in 1889. This work culminated in his

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[458] Variot, 'Le Détatouage', p. 300. Translated from the French:
Le détatouage peut rendre de réels services sociaux. Il y a, comme l'a très bien dit M. Alphonse Bertillon, des sauvages de notre civilsation qui portent sur la peau des membres et même sur le visage des dessins grotesqies quand ils ne sont pas obscènes, des inscriptions haineuses. Toutes ces marques visibles ferment les portes honnêtes devant ces hommes qui gardent l'empreinte du bagne par leurs tatouages. La réhabilitation de ces malheureux est impossible sans le détatouage. Enfin, combien de désœuvrés, de marins, de soldats qui, une fois rentrés dans la vie civile, rougissent d'être tatoués comme des prisonniers ou comme des prostituées!
Le détatouage peut-il entraver la recherche des criminels par la justice? Laissons répondre M. Alphonse Bertillon, le chef du service anthropométrique. Le tatouage est un indice d'identification trompeur, car il est modifiable. S'il n'est pas enlevé, il peut être masqué par un tatouage surajouté. Quand un dessin a cessé de plaire, on peut en tracer un autre par-dessus, ou on peut simplement l'ombrer uniformément. Le tatoueur, comme le peintre surcharge sa toile, surcharge aussi la peau. Depuis que le service d'identification est établi à Paris sur des bases scientifiques, c'est-à-dire sur l'anthropométrie, le tatouage, comme moyen de reconnaissance des criminels, ets relégué au second plan.

[459] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 135-169.

[460] Mechthild Fend 'Emblems of Durability. Tattoos, preserves and photographs', in *Performance Research*, Volume 14, No. 4 (December 2009), p. 46.

publication *Goutte de lait* (A Drop of Milk), which became a seminal work in the field of paediatrics. In this context, it seems feasible that Variot would have been exposed to milk advertising in the UK, such as the image from the Ridge's Patent Foods advertisement (**Figure 21**). Could it be that his two professional interests were combined when he recognised this very same image tattooed onto the body of one of the prisoners under his care at La Santé? Could he, like Lacassagne, have been so taken with the iconography of this image, which had personal relevance for him, that he was unable to resist having the skin preserved after Fromain's death? Of course, such possibilities remain entirely speculative, but many of the details of Variot's professional biography have remarkable symmetry with other historical material, and correspond with the scant clues offered in Johnston-Saint's writings: he worked in military and prison hospitals; he had a professional interest in the tattoo and wrote about their removal; he was known to have experimented on tattooed skin removed from cadavers; and he himself writes of the ease with which one may tan human skin in his discussion of the autopsy of Pranzini, perhaps suggesting a familiarity with such processes.[461] Interestingly, in his biography of Henri de Rothschild, medical historian Harry Paul mentions the Pranzini affair and suggests that professional rivalries between Variot and Poirier within the Faculty were at the root of the scandal:

> Following an established custom, students in Poirier's laboratory, who were doing a dissection of the executed murderer Pranzini, made wallets from the cadaver's skin. Anthropodermic bookbindings were more common. *La Lanterne* used news of the practice (and the fact that the police also received a wallet) to stir up politicians and to sell papers. It is probable that Gaston Variot was behind the articles. Variot had lost to Poirier in the competition for the single available *agrégation d'anatomie*, an event that led him to hate the faculty and Poirier; Variot later recognized that there was no basis for the accusation against Poirier.[462]

In the final analysis however, it is clear that neither Variot, Cornil nor Poirier could have been the man calling himself 'Lavalette', with whom Johnston-Saint met on the 15th of June, 1929. Both Cornil and Poirier were already dead; and although Variot lived for another year, dying in 1930, Johnston-Saint met with Lavalette again later that year, and on at least one more occasion in 1936. Thus, whilst it is more than likely that multiple individuals working at the Faculty of Medicine in Paris and La Santé were involved in the collection and preservation of tattooed human skin in the late

[461] See chapter two, p. 70; also Variot, 'Remarques sur l'Autopsie', p. 45.
[462] Harry Paul, *Henri de Rothschild, 1872-1947: Medicine and Theatre*, (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), p. 70.

nineteenth century, it seems that another unknown individual ultimately sold the collection to Sir Henry Wellcome in 1929.

After Lacassagne: Interpreting the Tattoo in the Twentieth Century

Writing in 1960, Jean Graven still maintains that the tattoos of criminals, whilst being motivated by all the usual factors - vanity, frivolity, whim, idleness and boredom - may also be related to the so-called 'criminal mind-set', which may be a 'direct source of inspiration'.[463] He even describes certain types of tattoo as 'eloquent and conclusive signs', although how one might distinguish precisely which tattoos, and on whom, are the most incisive in revealing this criminal mentality is difficult to determine. In respect of this problem, he suggests that 'especially those [tattoos] indicating affiliation, provocation, rebellion, vengeance or obscenity'[464] may be regarded as reliable indicators of the underlying pathological psychology of the criminal, adding that:

> There is no doubt that frequently 'a criminal's tattoos are a reflection of his abnormal psyche' and that if we can read this 'emblematic and metaphorical language' of criminals, then what we will term their 'immoral morality' or antisocial nature can be read like an open book on their bodies.[465]

Twentieth-century writers such as Delarue, Le Goarant de Tromelin and Graven continue to elaborate the work of criminologists such as Lacassagne; describing an extensive range of tattoo iconography and reporting on their received meanings, some of which are judged to be more or less ambiguously deviant in character. Particularly interesting examples are found in the varied depictions of women, wine and cards (or sometimes dice), which when grouped together are said to encapsulate a whole ideal (presumably criminal) way of life. Delarue recorded the image of a naked woman, a dice and four playing cards with the inscription beneath: *La vie d'un homme* (A man's life),[466] and Graven cites an example given by Dr. Solowjewa in Russia of 'the special lifestyle of vagrants with its triad of wine, women and cards [is] reflected in the tattoos of some criminals'. Interestingly, two of the elements that typify this collection of motifs appear amongst Fromain's tattoos (see **Figures 2** and **20**). The tattoo depicting a domestic or

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[463] Graven, 'Le Tatouage et son Importance en Criminologie', p. 85.
[464] Ibid.
[465] Ibid., p. 99. Translated from the French:
Il n'est pas douteux en effet que fréquemment "le tatouage du malfaiteur est le reflet de son psychisme anormal", et qui, si l'on sait lire ce "langage emblématique, souvent métaphorique", des délinquants, ce que nous appellerons leur "morale d'immoralité" ou leur antisocialité se déchiffre comme à livre ouvert sur leur corps.
[466] Delarue and Giraud, *Le Tatouages du 'Milieu',* p. 48.

cafe scene over the abdomen features a clothed woman sat at a table, which is set with a wine bottle and glasses, as well as a meal and what appears to be a letter, although the usual gambling symbols such as dice or cards are conspicuously absent. This does not prevent Graven from reproducing a cropped photograph of this particular tattoo in his article, along with the caption *L'ideal de la "bonne vie", le vin, les femmes, et le jeu* (The ideal of the good life - wine, women and gambling).[467] As previously discussed in chapters one and four, Fromain's torso tattoos are an exceptional case within the Wellcome collection, as the survival of a range of archival materials connected to his tattoos provides a unique opportunity to critically examine the criminological discussion of tattoo iconography. In Delarue's text, we have seen and critically deconstructed the framing of the female portraits on his chest and abdomen as essentially erotic and personal in nature. Graven's analysis interprets the tattooed abdominal scene according to assumptions about the criminal nature of the subject, and the presumed anti-social or irresponsible lifestyle of the criminal, represented by the 'trinity of vices' - women, alcohol and gambling - despite the fact that one element of this triumvirate is entirely absent from the scene. This particular constellation of motifs - described by Graven as 'the bust of a woman with a bottle of wine and glasses to one side and playing cards on the other, or a woman's leg, a bottle, glasses and cards'[468] - is still familiar today, although it is not associated with an ideal 'criminal lifestyle' as he suggests, but rather with hedonism. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this motif typically appeared with the tattooed phrases *Les troix maus* (The three evils) or *Ne t'emballe pas* (Don't get carried away),'[469] but is today far more likely to be accompanied by a scroll bearing the familiar phrase 'Man's Ruin'. London based illustrator Vince Ray produced a well-known contemporary representation of this 'classic' tattoo design in the 1990s: as well being a highly popular piece of tattoo flash, it has also been reproduced on various household items such as ceramic ashtrays and mugs[470] (see **Figure 146**).[471]

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[467] Graven, 'Le Tatouage et son Importance en Criminologie', p. 90.
[468] Ibid.; citing Le Goarant de Tromelin, *Le Tatouage*, p. 139.
[469] Ibid.
[470] One cannot fail to appreciate the parallel between these contemporary mass-marketed items and Lacassagne's personal collection of 'tattooed' dinnerware (**Figure 106**).
[471] Examples of 'Woman's Ruin', the female counterpart to this tattoo, also exist in the contemporary context. The design by graphic artist A. V. Phibes (**Figure 147**) employs a particularly interesting gender reversal, consisting of a muscular tattooed man with a black eye, in place of the usual sexualised female figure. Whilst all the accoutrements of drink and gambling are also represented, it is the male figure who clutches the bottle, as well as a gun, suggesting that it is her attraction to the wrong 'type' of man - a drinker and a gambler who is prone to violence - which is the source 'woman's ruin', rather than a drinking and gambling lifestyle indulged in on her part. The tattoo on the male figure's shoulder, which reads 'Heartbreaker', reinforces this interpretation.

Fromain was arrested for an unknown crime and his tattoos were photographed as part of established identity recording procedures; thus the connection between his tattoos, the milieu of the prison and criminality have already re-coded the iconography of his tattoos as deviant or pathological. Graven's interpretation of the tattooed abdominal scene thus reflects a preoccupation in the field of criminology with establishing reliable meanings of tattoo iconography, which persists well into the 1960s. He concludes:

> When all is said and done, one can dispute the validity of Lombroso's criminological explanation for tattooing only on its merits as a fundamental thesis, since many of the observations made by the leader of the positivist school of anthropology remain judicious, profound and true, while sharing Tarde's view that 'even supposing that the assimilation of the criminal to the savage ever had any sound basis, it loses some of its credibility every day as crime draws fewer and fewer recruits from backward rural populations and ever more from the corrupt and sophisticated milieu of the cities.'[472]

[472] Graven, 'Le Tatouage et son Importance en Criminologie', p. 93; citing Gabriel Tarde, *La Criminalité Comparée* (Paris, 1886), p. 42. Translated from the French:
On ne peut, en définitive, que s'incrire en faux contre l'explication criminologique lombrosienne du tatouage, dans ce qu'elle a d'essentiel en tant que thèse - car nombre des observations du maître de l'école positiviste anthropologique restent toujours judicieuses, profondes et vraies, - non sans observer, comme le faisait Tarde, que, "en admettant que l'assimilation du criminel au suvage ait jamais pu avoir le moindre fondement, elle perd chaque jour de sa vraisemblance, à mesure que le crime se recrute de moins en moins parmi les populations arriérées des campagnes, de plus en plus dans le milieu corrompu et raffiné des grandes villes."

CONCLUSIONS

On the afternoon of Monday 13th of May 2013, I paid a visit to the Weiner Library for the Study of the Holocaust and Genocide on Russell Square in London, at the invitation of the Director, Ben Barkow. He had contacted me the previous week, seeking advice on 'what to do' with a preserved tattoo in the library collections, and had invited me to come along to the archives to see it. The tattoo had been donated to the library many years previously, and was a unique item within their collection. On my arrival, I was taken down into the basement, where the tattoo was kept in a small, dark storage room crammed with mobile shelving. The tattoo was stored in a box, wrapped in a kind of light calico sack. I was surprised to see that the box was quite large, I judged approximately 50cm long by 30cm wide by sight; I hadn't expected the skin fragment to be so large, and at first assumed that it must be a sizable fragment taken from a torso. When I commented on this, the Director told me that the tattoo wasn't especially large, but that the case it was kept in was. I thought nothing of this remark until we took the bag and its contents into a small office for viewing: As Mr. Barkow unwrapped the box, I saw that this was not merely a cardboard storage container, but was a purpose-built display case constructed from dark-stained wood, with a hinged glass front. A large sheet of heavy-bodied white cartridge paper was taped over the upper portion of the glass, presumably in order to hide the unsettling contents of the case. I was immediately reminded of the storage cabinets in the human remains room at the Science Museum; the glass door-panels covered with white paper shrouds in order to instil a sense of dignity and decorum in the viewing and handling of the human relics inside. The paper sheet was taped onto the glass front of the case at the top corners, such that I had to lift it up in order to see the tattooed skin inside:

The interior of the case was lined with a deep, red velvet; I was struck by the visceral and highly tactile quality of this ground. The velvet lining seemed to invite my touch whilst also possessing an unsettling corporeality, reminding me both of the lining of a coffin and the interior of a jewellery box; containers designed to cradle treasured things. The tattooed skin fragment was approximately five inches long by three inches wide and rectangular in shape, mounted on a separate cushion of red velvet in the upper portion of the case, and fixed to the backing at the corners with red stitches. The first and most striking aspect for me when encountering this piece of tattooed skin was the familiarity of this *kind* of specimen - at first glance there was nothing to distinguish it from any of the tattoos in the Wellcome Collection. It was dry preserved, with very carefully cut straight edges, similar to the small parchment piece professing undying

love to *Henri Faure* (**Figure 69**). The skin had evidently been prepared with skill and precision; appearing as a neat piece of human parchment. The tattoo was a crudely executed image of a male bust - a common enough motif amongst the nineteenth century tattoos that I was familiar with - made with coarse, thick black lines, hand-poked. The tattooed figure had a large distinctive moustache and a medal of some description pinned to his breast. A small amount of vivid red ink adorned his collar. The figure's head turned to look directly toward the viewer. But there was a small detail on the surface of this specimen that I had not seen before - a stamp, in an elaborate black script on the upper right corner of the skin, which read: 'Dachau'.

My encounter with this particular fragment of tattooed skin underscores two significant and recurrent themes within my research: The uneasy ethical and political status of collections of tattooed human skin, and the ambiguity of their historical origins and purpose. More than any other kind of human remains, these entities seem to invite narrative speculation; both in cases in which their provenance is unknown, as in the example of Bonheur, and where there is at least some contextualising historical information available, as in the example of the Weiner Library tattoo. In the latter case, the ethical entanglements and ambiguities surrounding these remains arise from the especially mythologised status of Nazi tattoo collecting practices during World War II. As well as the well-documented Nazi practice of tattooing inmates at Auschwitz concentration camp with serial numbers, American Intelligence officers also reported the removal of tattoos from the bodies of concentration camp prisoners, in order to fashion various objects of use such as wallets, belts and lamps, during the late 1940s. Ilse Koch, the wife of SS Colonel and Buchenwald concentration camp commandant Karl Otto Koch, was especially implicated in these 'extraordinarily sadistic acts', having allegedly ordered over forty prisoners killed for their tattooed skins.[473] Reports describing the collection of human skin trophies by members of the SS were sensationalised in the American press, including stories of Ilse Koch's supposed penchant for handbags made of human skin.[474] Whilst these stories were not entirely unfounded, the specific association of Ilse Koch with these activities could not be proven in court. Specimens of human remains recovered from Buchenwald camp pathology laboratory during American liberation in 1945, including fragments of tattooed human skin, were well documented in photographs. These images appeared in popular American news publications such as *Time* and *Life*; the photograph of an American soldier holding up two large dry-prepared specimens of tattooed skin for the

[473] Przyrembel, 'Transfixed by an Image', p. 369.
[474] 'German Civilians Forced to See SS Horror Camp by Patton', *Washington Post,* (4th June 1945).

camera, which appeared in *Life* magazine in 1945 is typical of these images, which display the human remains recovered as 'evidence' (**Figure 148**). However, these specimens disappeared soon after American forces arrived, possibly taken by the soldiers who recovered them, ironically, as macabre liberation souvenirs. The collection and preservation of tattoos at Buchenwald thus became an iconic and highly publicised symbol of Nazi dehumanisation and atrocity, with which Ilse Koch's name became synonymous. Alexandra Przyrembel writes:

> Although a US Army laboratory report of May 1945 identified three pieces of skin found in Buchenwald and described the tattoos on them, thus confirming the real background to the accusations, her role in the skinning of inmates could not be proven in the American and German trials of 1947 and 1950/1.[475]

At least some part of the 'real background' to the accusations of tattoo collecting involved the criminological study of tattoos. Buchenwald camp physician SS Dr. Erich Wagner carried out research which involved the registration of tattooed inmates, photographic documentation of their tattoos, and the collection and preservation of tattooed skin post-mortem. Thirty photographs of various body parts, such as tattooed arms and torsos, as well as full-length photographs of tattooed prisoners, and two examples of preserved tattooed skin, are included in the appendices of his doctoral thesis.[476] Wagner's dissertation tried to establish a causal connection between criminality and the desire to acquire tattoos: Thus his work elaborated on a tradition of criminological scholarship on the tattoo begun in the late nineteenth century, and re-framed within the context of Nazi conceptions of social and racial hygiene.

Framed within this historical context, the Weiner Library tattoo becomes an especially abject entity. Ben Barkow related to me the story of this 'sad relic' during our meeting: The tattoo and case had been donated by a Mr. H. H. Alexander, who had apparently been an interpreter with the International War Crimes Commission, according to the letter had he sent with the artefact. Mr. Alexander had been involved in tracking war criminals, and claimed that the tattoo was one of three that he had acquired from an undisclosed individual suspected of war crimes. The tattoo was allegedly one of three that had been incorporated into a lampshade, as decorative panels. One of these tattoos had apparently gone to Luxemburg to a government official; he couldn't recall what had become of the third tattoo. Whilst the 'Dachau' stamp on the

[475] Przyrembel, 'Transfixed by an Image', pp. 369-370.
[476] See Erich Wagner, *Ein Beitrag zur Tätowierungsfrage*, Inaugural Dissertation (1940), einer Hohen Medizinischen Fakultät der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität zu Jena, pp. 59-68.

skin surface has been authenticated according to Mr. Barkow, the account furnished by Mr. Alexander's letter is far more difficult to verify.

Aside from the 'Dachau' stamp, the tattooed image and the preserved skin are in themselves indistinguishable from dry-prepared tattoo specimens originating in nineteenth-century collections, which problematises assumptions about the provenance of such remains. Nazi prisoner identification tattoos, by contrast are far less ambiguous in their provenance, though still unsettling when encountered in museum collections. UCL pathology collections, for instance, contains such a tattoo; a small lozenge-shaped fragment of skin printed indelibly with the number 'A-25374' (**Figure 149**). From May 1940, prisoner numbers were introduced for all concentration camp prisoners deemed capable of work at the Auschwitz concentration camp complex – those sent directly to the gas chambers were not registered and did not receive numbers. These numbers were initially sewn onto prisoner uniforms; however, as the daily mortality rate increased and clothes were removed, this soon proved impractical as a way of identifying the dead. Tattooing of prisoner numbers was thus introduced at Auschwitz in the autumn of 1941. Tattoos were applied to either the inner or outer side of the left forearm on registration at the camp. More than 400,000 inmates were forcibly tattooed in this way at Auschwitz. The SS introduced number sequences beginning with 'A' in mid-May 1944 – 20,000 men and 30,000 women were assigned numbers in this series. The inscription of these tattoos were thus an unambiguous means of registering identity within the Nazi concentration camp system; preserved tattoos such as the one stored in UCL pathology collections retain the possibility[477] of identifying this entity with a specific individual. There is no such possibility with the Weiner Library tattoo - not simply because the tattoo design is itself a generic image chosen by the bearer, rather than forcibly applied, but because unlike the Auschwitz tattoo its provenance cannot be conclusively established. The display case in which this tattoo is presented in particular presents some doubt as to its origins and purpose. The attention to the display of this skin fragment is striking: the small red velvet relief mount is attached in the upper portion of the case, which is vastly oversized for the scale of the specimen. In the lower portion of the case, a yellowed card label is glued to the backing, which reads:

> *Tattooed human skin that was stripped from the body of a prisoner at Dachau Concentration Camp, where it was used for decoration.*

[477] This is by no means a straightforward process, however. Many Nazi records were destroyed at the end of the war, and the many thousands of files that do remain are scattered across Europe – even today, it is difficult to trace the identities of inmates based on their tattooed prisoner numbers.

It is interesting to note that the label is printed in two languages: in English first, with a French translation beneath. This would seem to suggest that the display case in which the tattoo is contained is very likely to have been constructed post-World War II, presenting two possibilities: 1) That the tattoo *did* originate from Dachau concentration camp, where is was incorporated as part of the lamp described by Mr. Alexander, and it was later re-assembled and re-presented as a new kind of 'liberation trophy', most likely by Allied American, British or French forces; or 2) This preserved tattoo may be a much older specimen, contemporary with the Wellcome collection tattoos, which was re-purposed post-war as a kind of morbid curiosity, in light of Nazi atrocities. Whatever the case may be, the survival of the display case underscores the potential ways in which these entities may be enlisted in a political, as well as in a scholarly or aesthetic field. The historical literature on tattoo collecting and preservation remains largely silent on their use and display, but the Weiner Library tattoo presents a particularly intriguing set of possibilities for the enactment of the post-mortem tattoo: It may be an object of knowledge, a war/liberation trophy, an aesthetic object, morbid curiosity, or politicised human remains. It may be any or all of these things throughout the course of its post-mortem life. In the context of my visit to the library, the ambiguous political and ethical entanglements were foregrounded; this entity was considered too problematic to remain within the library's collections; so much so, that the Library was seeking to de-accession it.[478]

The example of the Weiner tattoo thus illustrates the multiple, ambiguous and historically shifting status of preserved tattoo specimens, as well as uniquely suggesting some of their potential purposes as collection pieces. The potential narratives surrounding this entity are multiple; a quality it shares in common with the Wellcome Collection tattoos. The absence of consent, the presence of an institutional power relationship, and the trace of underpinning concepts of degeneration and of the sub-human disreputability of the tattooed classes, haunts the Weiner and Wellcome collections alike. The Weiner tattoo also registers a significant high-watermark for tattoo collecting in Europe: Following the Second World War, tattoo collecting largely seems to cease.[479] The brutality witnessed in the Nazi concentration camps exerted a powerful influence on the popular conception of tattoo collecting, reviving the horrors

[478] After our meeting, Ben Barkow followed my advice to contact Dr. Robert Budd, the Keeper of Science and Medicine at the Science Museum, who is now in the process of accessioning this tattoo into the Science Museum collections.

[479] With the notable exception of the Medical Pathology Museum of Tokyo University in Japan, tattoo collecting seems to continue only sporadically throughout the latter decades of the twentieth century, and is pursued as a fairly idiosyncratic practice within pathology laboratories by individual doctors. The collection of preserved butterfly tattoos held in UCL Pathology Collections dating from 1954 are a good example of this kind of collecting (see **Figures 133** and **134**).

of folk-memory in which human skin could be fashioned into clothing, decorative items and furniture. Re-invested with associations of Nazi dehumanization and trophy-collecting, preserved tattoo collections largely disappeared from public view, coinciding with a decline in the scholarly interest in the tattoo as a serious object of criminological study from the middle of the twentieth century onwards.

Situating the Wellcome Collection Tattoos

This thesis has set out to explore a specific collection of preserved tattooed skins through a combination of interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological approaches, which is reflected in the structure of the thesis itself: Beginning with my own ethnographic experience of the collection within the museum context, I have examined their contemporary political and ethical status as human remains, explored their sensory and affective presence, and closely analysed their material substance in an attempt to reconstruct their multiple post-mortem lives. These material and affective observations have in turn led to a close reading of a broad range of historical and archival sources, within which their histories and potential enactments are contextualised.

The material substance of the tattooed skins reveals a complex coagulation of multiple biographies, collecting practices and potential purposes, suggesting close connections with nineteenth-century criminological studies of the tattoo in particular. An analysis of the type and range of tattoo iconography within the Wellcome Collection, demonstrates close affinities with the collections of tattoo imagery amassed by criminologists such as Lacassagne, as a part of their studies of the tattoo, suggesting that this collection was assembled according to similar principles and preoccupations. The geographical specificity of some of this iconography suggests a military context for many of the tattoos, although this is not necessarily also a penal context. The connection between the tattoos of Fromain and the photograph held in the police archives in Paris, however, shows that in at least one instance, the context of the prison is relevant to this particular collection. Moreover, the disparity between the geographic locale of the military tattoos, and the Parisian police context of records relating to Fromain's tattoos, further suggests that this collection was assembled over an extended period of time, and drawn from a diverse range of sources and unknown individual doctors, criminologists and collectors.

Thus it is reasonable to conclude that Lavalette's 'unique' collection of tattoos was very likely amassed from different contexts, and though the unknown doctor may

well have prepared many of these specimens himself, what emerges from a close material and iconographic analysis of the collection is a disparate selection of tattooed skin fragments, preserved according to differing methods and with varying degrees of skill. The preservation of tattooed human skin in late nineteenth-century France, whilst connected to scholarly preoccupations with the tattoo in the fields of criminology and anatomy, nevertheless appears to have been a marginal practice within these disciplines. For doctors such as Gaston Variot, who sought to erase the 'stigmatising' tattoo from the surface of the criminal body, it was the material substance and anatomy of the tattoo which was of primary concern; whilst for Lacassagne and other criminologists who probed the deeper meaning of the tattoo, it was the symbolism of the tattoo itself which held the greatest potential for understanding the criminal 'soul'. As a surface sign of the body, the tattoo seemed to invite analysis and interpretation by criminologists 'almost irresistibly', the marks themselves appearing as a form of encoded 'argot' or idiographic language, that the criminologist sought to master through the systematic amassing of tattoo imagery and physiological data. But this obscure 'language' was not so readily translated. Whilst criminology monopolised discourse *about* the tattoo, the tattooed body itself was not so much rendered 'docile' and manageable through this discourse as 'mute'; as we have seen in the case of Fromain, the meanings ascribed to particular tattoos or arrangements of tattoos by criminologists and police scientists could in fact be entirely at odds with the personal biographies of the tattooed themselves, who may attach entirely different significance to their tattoos.

Through a combination of ethnographic, visual and historiographical approaches, this thesis has explored the different kinds of entity that tattoos may become during their post-mortem lives, via the various discourses in which they are enmeshed, and their movement through multiple collections assembled for varied purposes. These entities are not mute, passive objects within these flows of language and things, but rather their obstinate materiality imbues them with a loquacious presence that compels interpretation, generates discussion and invites closer analysis. Thus the notion of the *enactment* of these entities has been foregrounded - as political materials, curiosities, criminological objects of study and signs of deviance, foreign bodies and vectors of disease, sources of anatomical interest or offending marks to be erased, fetishised trophies or aestheticised objects - in each instance engendering a new episode in the afterlife of the post-mortem tattoo.

The Future of Tattoo Collecting: The Tattoo as Art

The presence of preserved tattoos within contemporary museum collections inevitably raises questions of display, interpretation and aestheticisation of human remains through public exhibition. As discussed in chapter four, the 'reshuffling and re-combination' of different kinds of objects on display, and their framing within the context of museum exhibitions, enacts new meanings of the preserved tattoo. The aesthetics of display have also been mentioned in relation to the Weiner Library tattoo and the collection of butterfly tattoos in UCL pathology collections (**Figures 133** and **134**); thus the issue of framing and display can be seen as a central feature of the enactment of the meaning of these entities. The apparent aestheticisation of the tattoo presented by these examples invites consideration of the value of the tattoo as an art form, and brings me a to a final, contemporary enactment of the post-mortem tattoo. The contemporary tattoo is increasingly viewed by tattooists and the tattooed alike as an art form worth documenting and preserving for future generations, almost as one would conserve a painting or sculpture. Throughout my research, I have been in contact with a number of tattooed informants who have expressed a desire to have their tattoos preserved post-mortem. One of these individuals explained her interest in tattoo preservation to me as follows:

> My personal interest in preserving my tattoos are [*sic*] – first and foremost – to document the art work, style and medium of tattooing. I've had work done by seven extremely talented artists, and the idea of their work dying with me seems cheap. Their talent and dedication should be timeless. Secondly, I think the evolution of tattooing is an interesting field of study. From ancient cultures, the old days of WWI and WWII, to the underground NYC days, to the surge in popularity from the 90's to now – the spectrum of work, techniques and applications have changed so dramatically. Like any fine art – it evolves and changes over time. I hate to see that kind of history lost to the grave, so to speak. Not that my tattoos are more special than any others – but I will have close to a full torso by the time I am done, a collaboration of so many different talents. Perhaps photography is the way to go, but in all honesty – there is a morbid part of me that wants the skin preserved, and the tattoos shown how they should be – on skin.[480]

All of the informants I have exchanged communications with regarding post-mortem tattoo preservation have expressed the same conception of their tattoos as significant art works, and of their tattooists as significant artists, whose work should be documented. The historical value of this work is frequently emphasised. Whilst most people, like my informant quoted above, acknowledge that photography perhaps offers

[480] Personal communication, March 11th, 2013.

a more practical means to document their tattoos, the desire to preserve them after death seems to reflect a concern for the authenticity of the 'original' art work, as well as the sense that they are participating in the documentation of a personal and social history.

These sentiments were also echoed by Geoff Ostling, a heavily tattooed retired Australian schoolteacher, who I met in early 2012. Geoff had for many years been working with Australian artist eX de Medici on a complete body suit of tattooed flowers, which he now plans to have preserved after he dies. What is unusual about Geoff's case, is that the National Gallery of Australia (NGA) have agreed to accession his tattooed skin into their collections post-mortem - a decision that has been widely documented by the press and media. In 2008, he appeared in a documentary film entitled *Skin,* which explores some of the reasons behind his decision, as well as the practicalities entailed in removing and preserving his skin post-mortem. Geoff carries a copy of his will everywhere he goes, which sets out his wishes for his remains should he die unexpectedly. He has a team of people ready to execute those wishes when the time comes, including his personal doctor, funeral directors and a taxidermist, all of whom are interviewed in the film. During our meeting at Blythe House archives in January 2012 and in subsequent communications, Geoff told me about the verbal agreement he has made with the current curatorial staff at the National Gallery of Australia, who have agreed to accept and display his preserved skin after he dies. He reflected that the situation may well change by the time of his death; should he die twenty years from now, changes in staff at the museum may mean that they no longer want to display his tattooed skin:

> Although they are happy to accept the donation of my tattoos if I were to die tomorrow, this may not be the situation in the year 2033. The National Gallery will have a new director and a new staff. The Gallery may have taken a completely different direction and may not want to accept my skin. Maybe they will accept it but not allow it to be put on show. It will be stupid if they did accept it and then failed to display it from time to time.[481]

Despite this, Geoff is committed to the process of post-mortem preservation, and plans to offer his preserved skin in the first instance to the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, and secondly to Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) in Hobart. If no Australian Art Gallery or Museum is willing to accept his tattooed skin, he intends to offer it to the Wellcome Collection in London. If Geoff's tattooed body suit were to end up in the Wellcome Collection, it strikes me that this would be an interesting, if slightly

[481] Personal communication, April 17th, 2013.

incongruous, footnote to the history of tattoo collecting. Both Geoff's attitude towards tattoos and his motivations for having them preserved could not be more different from the context in which the nineteenth-century specimens were collected - but they are nevertheless a source of inspiration to him. To Geoff, the crude tattoos preserved in the Science Museum are art too.

The contemporary rise in the popularity of tattooing, along with an influx of artistically trained tattooists to the profession, have resulted in significant innovations within the art form in recent decades, with many tattoo artists exhibiting their work in the form of drawings, paintings and photographs in art galleries around the world. Geoff's tattooist, eX de Medici, is one of these artists, whose drawings and painted works on paper have been collected and exhibited by the National Gallery of Australia (NGA). Within this context, Geoff's body art becomes part of a broader collection of visual works by an institutionally recognised artist. In a photograph of Geoff taken at the NGA with one of eX de Medici's paintings, the relationship between body surface and painted surface becomes blurred (**Figure 150**)**.** The photograph is taken from a low angle, such that Geoff's body is enclosed within the frame of the painting hanging on the gallery wall behind him. This quite deliberate framing sets up a relationship of equivalence between the tattooed surface of Geoff's body and the painted surface behind him, with which his body almost appears to merge. The stylistic comparison made between eX de Medici's tattooing and her work on paper is striking in this image. His body becomes part of a larger body of work, a process that is supported and facilitated by the National Gallery of Australia through their agreement to accession his preserved tattooed bodysuit post-mortem. Should this agreement be honoured at the time of Geoff's death, this will be the first case in history of an art institution collecting tattoos on human skin as works of art. Thus in this future context, we may encounter the post-mortem tattoo anew as an *objet d'art*, encouraging a new type of collector in the form of the art collector and gallery curator.

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