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7

Extended Body Hypothesis (EBH)

Prelude

Abstract

'Inorganic Skins.' This *prelude* highlights how mental health and wellbeing is spread beyond the *organic* body using examples of graffiti and tattoos which came up in conversation quite a few times within the WiC inquiry group. So, the author followed this line of affect. As a result, the Freudian model of psychodynamics is contested as these skins—skin of a city, skin of a human—became more material than symbolic.

Inorganic Skins

As well as the urban graffiti that we witnessed on our outings, tattoos came up in conversation quite a few times within the WiC research group and two tattoos in particular caught my attention as they were spoken about by the owners of them with more emotional elation than conversations surrounding them. 'The body is [...] directly involved in a political field; power

Portions of this chapter have been published previously in the chapter 'Embodied Walls and Extended Skins: Exploring Mental Health Through Tattoos and Graffiti' (Mcphie, 2017)—in the book, *Street Art of Resistance* (edited by Sarah H. Awad and Brady Wagoner, 2017, pp. 223–250) and as such is reprinted here with kind permission by the publishers Palgrave Macmillan.

relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, *mark it*, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs' (Foucault, 1995, p. 25, emphasis added). So, in rhizoanalytic fashion, I followed this line of affect. The result was nothing less than an Extended Body Hypothesis (EBH) where urban spaces of dominance and resistance became topologically distributed inorganic skins. I'll give you a few examples from 'Blondie', 'Dolly' and 'BBS'.

Blondie

Blondie's daughter is inscribed on/in/of her skin as a tattoo, part of her body, for as long as it lasts, perhaps until death (or even beyond her death, by about six months). *She is marked to her circumstances in her life*. Her mental cognitive realm is externalised yet still very much embodied as there is a certain mental physicality and literal *depth* to an inscription in the skin. But we can share in this, although it is guarded. I don't know the full story of the 'event' that was Blondie's disassociation from her child, I never asked why or how her child was taken away from her and she never told me. At a later date I asked Blondie if the flowers tattooed above and below her daughter's name were of any significance. She replied, '*because it makes it look like she's layin' in a bed of flowers*' (Blondie). At a later date, when I plucked up the courage to ask Blondie why she had a tattoo of her daughter's name inscribed on her arm, she replied, '*it just reminds me of her.*' She went on, '*when you die it'll still be with you 'cause you can't take it off [...] so she's with me in this life and the afterlife*' (Blondie). 'Yet the tattoo is more than just a representation of the dead [...] A memorial tattoo is an image but it is also (and most importantly) a narrative' (Troyer, 2009, n.p.). Blondie's daughter isn't dead but she doesn't know where she is. This is how Blondie copes (and doesn't cope) with having her daughter taken away from her by social services.¹ The concept and percept of her daughter are embedded, embodied and lovingly entrenched in her seemingly porous flesh. Troyer (2009) reports that '[t]attoo artists have a popular saying within their profession: Love lasts forever but a tattoo lasts six months longer' (n.p.).

As the most deeply inscribed tattoo, when speaking of suicide bombers, Gayatri Spivak (controversially) said, '[s]uicidal resistance is a message inscribed in the body when no other means will get through' (Spivak, 2004, p. 96, cited in Amar, 2011, p. 316). Although on a very different scale, I would say the same for Blondie's tattoo. When oppression is forced upon us and control taken away by denying us accessibility, whether physical or psychological (not that there's a concrete *quiddital* consistency in either of

¹ The University of Lancaster reported that 2018 babies were 'taken into care' in 2013, a 'huge rise' from previous figures (Berg, 2015).