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Tattooing Ritual and the Management of Touch in Polynesia

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While tattooing primarily appears as a material practice involving technical skills, tactile experience, senses, aesthetical judgement, physical discomfort, pain and sometimes pleasure, most of the available literature on this topic has largely developed along the lines of "tattooing as an expression of the self / identity", tattooing as a "political discourse" or tattooing as a "statement", as monitored and reported by Benson (2000: 244). Considered so, it has been confined as a practice that is subordinated to language and mental representations. In this respect, it shared the same status as the one of which the material culture was brought out by numerous studies since the 1980s. Material culture studies showed that materiality was not only a mere expression of cultural representations but could be producing culture. In other word, as Keane wrote straightforwardly, "materiality is a precondition for the social circulation and temporal persistence of experiences and rules" (Keane 2008: 230). Thus, focusing one's reflexions and investigations on touch within the field of religious materialities suspend the understanding of material culture as material expressions of culture, or as a mere signs ultimately referring to an immaterial / collective mental representation, to rather engage in a more pragmatic approach to religious practices.

In this respect, the present volume represents a real challenge and opens research area to the extent that it brings to the growing field of religious materialities (Chidester 2018, Cohen & Mottier 2016, Morgan 2010) a new selection of case studies with the very specific agenda of exploring touch. And I hope the present contribution will shed an original light on the issues addressed in this volume.

I argued elsewhere (Galliot 2015a) that ritual efficacy not only rested on a postulated super-human agency, but could also be achieved and assessed on very tangible, technical and sensible criteria, by elementary actions on matter, by the making of tools, by the importance attached to the work devoted to specific materials such as boar's tusks and candle nuts. Eventually, by applying a methodology initially intended for the comparative study of technical processes (Balfet 1991, Creswell 1996, Lemonnier 1993), I was able to stress that ritual efficacy could also be chiefly achieved through the implementation of technical skill and efficacious actions which were usually confined into the domain of profane techniques.

Commitment to look at elementary actions, tools, hands and the social aspect of technological process has first developed in the margins of the French anthropological tradition concerned with making processes and with the description of *chaînes opératoires* occurring before the circulation and the handling of artefacts. Here, grasping the role of touch within tattooing rituals leads us through different pathways, and dialectical relation between what is touched and physically endured here and now, has a postulated effect on the untouchable, intangible, invisible world i.e. a domain of sociality that remains separate from material causality.

In this chapter, I will try to bring a culturally oriented answer articulated with a practice-centred approach - or to borrow the term from Sillitoe (2017: 1-4) an *ethno-*

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determinist framework - to the following question: what can tactility tells us about religious experiences as they are lived and mediatized by the body?

Tackling the maussian notion of "technique of the body" that encompass embodied scheme of action and tacit knowledge had to wait for several decades before being part of the anthropological agenda and before being re-injected in leading anthropological debates (Bourdieu 1998, Descola 2013: Chap. 4, Ingold 2013). On the other hand, material culture, a nowadays popular field of research, was first studied from the angle of consumption, use and biography of finished goods without a real interest for the technical process and even less for the question of touch. It is no exaggeration to say that body techniques, artefact and touch have first been interpreted from a symbolic angle.

For their part, religious studies have also developed and been influenced by a western logocentric and exegetical tradition proper to monotheists religions. To put in the nutshell, from the very beginning, anthropological approach to rituals has largely neglected to investigate how ritual activities can be shaped and transmitted through an engagement of the senses with various matters precisely because artefacts (for example) has long been considered from a symbolic angle, in a language-like system of communication.

While the role of tactile experience has long been a central topic of investigation in developmental psychology, cognitive sciences, neuro-sciences and psychoanalysis, its consideration by social sciences and in particular by ethnology and anthropology remains marginal. In 2007, the French journal *Terrain* did a significant move by bringing this topic under ethnographical scrutiny with the publication of a special issue entitled *Toucher*. In this volume, several contributions dealt with touch as a modality for the shaping of a professional culture and for the acquisition and the transmission of practical knowledge (Pouchelle 2007, Sola 2007, De Grave 2007). Bromberger (in the same issue, 2007: 8) and de Witte (2011: 149) both recalls that the hierarchy of perceptual modalities is context dependant even within a single religious tradition such as the Christian one in which, for example, the attitude toward religious icons can vary from a congregation to another as well as depending on the historical period studied[1]. As I will show below, this is also the case for tattooing practices which exemplifies how a relatively homogenous technique can imply a great cultural variability regarding the role of touch.

To follow the main line of my argument, the observation that can be made about the study of touch as a modality of religious practice appears either as a sub-section of the anthropology of the sense and material religion studies, or it is approached metaphorically through the symbolic meanings associated with it. While contributing to the study of the cultural and historical variability of the senses and stressing that tactility among other senses can be a key modality of collective and religious experience, authors like Chidester (2000), Classen (1993), Harvey & Hugues (2018) ,Howes (2003), Laplantine (2005), seemed, at the same time, to seem to have limited their scope to cultural values associates with touch or to explaining how the semantic field of touch and body perceptions serves to express religious belief and communication with divine and invisible entities.

[1] See also Whitehead (2018) for an illustration of that point.

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A few decades before the corporeal turn in anthropology that lead the discipline to follow Mauss's call and explore more systematically the culturally informed dimensions of body techniques, Michael Polanyi addressed the related question of tacit knowledge and human experience in a series of publications which remained at the margins of social science (1958, 1966). Yet, exploring touch within religious practice and belief also implies a dive into embodied and tacit domain of experience which attracted anthropologists' attention a little bit latter (Comaroff 1985; Csordas 1994; Jackson 1983; Rapport 2003; Turner 1994, 1995; Young 1997). The physicality of collective experience has resisted anthropological investigations precisely because of this supposedly implicit and tacit nature which Polanyi attempted to analyse, but also because of the primacy given to language over gestures within the practice of ethnography. Thus, while most of the craftsmen, or religious experts would certainly emphasize on the crucial role haptics play in their everyday activities, tactility remains the less investigated mode of skill learning and religious behaviour.

To put the matter differently, if one follows Morgan's assumption that "belief is what I know with my body" (2010: 9), then considerable ethnographic efforts need to be made in order to register the engagement of bodies in religious practices. Here I am far from pretending that we are facing a complete ethnographic void. In *The Pot King*, Jean Pierre Warnier (2007) has rolled out a very rich ethnography to show how, in Cameroun, political subjection to a sacred king essentially relied on the interaction between the subject's bodies, artefacts and substances. Drawing on African data, Roberts (2010) has also brilliantly showed the centrality of touch in mnemonic and divination practices, spirit possession, and spiritual mediation. Whitehead (2018) researches on the Virgin of Alcala in Andalusia again demonstrates how fertile an attention to touch can be for the understanding of devotional practices. Recent researches in Melanesia and Polynesia have also brought a new light on the constitutive blend of action, matters and invisible entities within religious experiences. This is exemplified by the ethnography of visual properties of the materials involved in the making process of Owa magical artefacts (Revolon 2012) or through the configuration of space in the *palo monte* rituals in Cuba (Kerestetzi 2017). In the same vein, the efficacy of a magic can also rests on the very manipulation of stones in the Abelam "yam cult" (Coupaye 2012). Ultimately, as Lemonnier stressed (2012), after 40 years of cultural technology and material culture studies, there is neither more valid reason to rely on the "opacity" of relationship between means and ends in ritual to ignore the work of the hands and the role of touch in religion, nor any reason to oppose technique, materiality to magic and religion. Thus, exploring the coupling of hands and matter in a religious context has not only never been an anthropological nonsense but is even more relevant nowadays in the light of the acknowledgment of the constitutive blend between matter and belief in religious practices around the world.

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Tattoo and (no) touch

If one looks at the ethnographic literature devoted to tattooing, the question of touch is purely and simply ignored. I do not intend to subject this literature to much by way of scrutiny here, since to do so will lead us too far from the present paper's focus. Suffice to say that most of the publications actually look tattooing as a direct / primal scripture, a form of registration of the self (Caplan 2000, De Mello 2000). The meanings of tattoo designs and the discourse of tattoo wearers are of prime importance in these cases. Other, tackle the history of the craft in Western and non-Western societies as well

as in relation with current indigenous tattoo revivals in various part of the world[2]. Still, recent researches including mine showed a special interest in the ethnography of tattooing skill transmission in Samoa (Galliot 2015b), in the Philippines (Salvador-Amores 2013), or in Switzerland (Rolle 2013).

That being said, this is unquestionably psychiatric, and psychological, and psychoanalytical approaches that articulated more systematically the question tactility and perception with tattoo practices and body art. There, the act of being tattooed, among other self-inflicted wounds and rituals involving inflicted pain is understood as significant biographical episodes for the construction of the psyche and the persona (Estellon 2004, Korff-Sausse 2004, Maertens 1978, Wiener 2004). But, if one expects Maertens, these studies relate to the examination of western individuals outside of a religious system strictly speaking. They appear of little help for the present chapter's focus.

In other words, two main difficulties arise when one attempt to gather data on touch within tattooing rituals. The first one relates to the scarcity of in-depth ethnographic accounts about tattooing rituals, which rather concentrates on tools and on the codification of designs than on elementary actions and perceptions of the bodies involved. The other one relates to the fact that ethnographies of tattooing practices are most of the time disconnected from their socio-cultural and religious context to the point they are described as an autonomous domain. Thus, for instance, it is nowadays extremely difficult to reconstruct how tattooing rituals integrate in a system of belief and by the same token be linked with the senses and tactility. First because where tattooing rituals existed, they have often vanished with the setting up of Christianity (in the English and French colonies) and Islam (in the Maghreb) as state religions, and also with the centralization of power during colonial times. Second because, where it has been studied by ethnographers, it was considered as an epiphenomenon classified in the "arts", "crafts" and "ornaments" category.

Tattoo, touch and transcendence

One the most exposed contemporary tattooing ritual is found in mainland Southeast Asia were a long tradition of tattoo has been documented quite thoroughly (Cook 2008, Lagirarde 1989, Scott 1896, Rajadhan 1964, Terwiel 1979, Tannenbaum 1987). Several categories of tattooing meant for different purposes are known in this area. Here, I will only focus on Thai protective tattoos (designated by the term *sak yant* or 'marking of sacred geometry') that are executed by experts such as revered laymen, monks and *sara* (traditional healers). By virtue of their religious status, these specialists can transfer power to their customer through the pigment and the tattooed image. To sum up very briefly Tannenbaum's detailed ethnography, these protective tattoos take the form *yantra* (magical figures derived from Buddha's teachings *katha*) that are written out or encoded in diagram, often combined with animal or divine representation and rendered efficacious with recitations of *katha* by the practitioner. They are meant for very down-to-hearth purposes such as providing attractiveness and luck in business, protection against diseases or invulnerability (which for example explains the

[2] There is a rich literature on these topics. Here is a selection of the most noticeable recent works. (Allen 2006, Diaz-Granados & Dieter-Wolf 2013, Krutak 2014, Krutak & Deter-Wolf 2017, Kuwahara 2005, Mallon and Galliot 2018, Mango & Utanga 2011, Te Awekotuku & Waimarie Nikora 2011)

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propensity of tattooed Thai boxers). The additional ingredients used to make the pigment (medicine or exfoliated monk's skin) are also crucial for the tattoo efficacy.

Sak yant is relevant to put into perspective our present concern as it is associated with Theravada Buddhism which rests on principles of renunciation and asceticism. Tannenbaum (1987) and Cook (2008) - who studied tattooing in different parts of Thaïland at different period (with a different theoretical agenda) - both emphasises on the very particular conception of the self this practice links with. Namely, a conception that is very far from the Western one which draws on tattooing to produce a statement on the self and to struggle against impermanence of worldly existence. The power transferred by *sak yant* produced by monks and experts to act here and now on others, on the bearer's skills and on his body envelope (Tannenbaum 1987: 696) depends on the number of Buddhist precepts and the level of asceticism the practitioner conforms himself to. And, these precepts imply the strict regulation of their bodily and daily activities that can be interpreted as a renunciation to materiality, even though its achievement actually needs a certain type of engagement with matter[3].

Still, paradoxically our discussion on touch and religious tattooing starts with a case that denies any importance to tactility and self-consciousness through body perception. Rather, as Cook wrote (2008: 22), conception of the self and corporeality, "are understood to be generative of power only when they are transcended". In addition, beyond reflecting a culturally grounded conception of the body namely the one that predominates in Theravada Buddhism, Sak Yant follows the same rationale than the making and the carrying of amulets (Rajadhon, 1964). Rajadhon also reports that after the tattooing ritual which took place within the sanctuary of a Buddhist chapel, the tattooer would "strike hard with his open hand on the tattooed *yantra* many times", until the designs emerge "distinctly and prominently on the skin" (op.cit.: 187). Without elaboration further on that specific point, the author underlines the fact that this step constitutes an even more painful ordeal than the tattooing itself. He goes on by reporting that the tattooed person or rather the efficacy of his protective tattoo was tested by being hit with a sharp instrument. This statement, as anecdotal as it may seem, shows quite clearly that even a theoretically disembodied ritual may manifest important tactile experience if one pays adequate attention to it. Unfortunately, none of the ethnographers of *sak yant* elaborate on that topic.

Tattooing in Polynesia

Now if one turns toward Polynesia, Alfred Gell made a significant move when he consecutively explored tattooing (1993) and the agency of art (1998). Doing so, he made relevant to re-orient researches on art and artefacts within a system of action and not only within a system of meaning (Beaudrillard 1996, Barthes 1964) or a system of value (Appadurai 1986, Kopytoff 1986).

I argue that combining Gell's two very different theoretical attempts to explain on one hand the cultural logic of tattooing and, on the other hand, the role of art in a system of social relations eventually offers a radically new perspective on tattooing in general. Precisely, it makes possible to see how the artefactual dimension of a tattoo articulates with its technical counterparts in a context of social relation.

[3] Of course, the mastery of tools and the embodied knowledge that an apprentice acquires through the repetition of gestures can only be gained through the interaction with matter and people's bodies.

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Without engaging himself in a Polynesian fieldwork, Gell drew on an extensive comparative reading on Polynesian tattooing, and on Sahlins hypothesis of a homology between the islands' size and the degree of social stratification (1958) in order to build an interpretative model which aimed at explaining the co-variance between islands' environments, cultural logics and tattooing techniques, meanings and positioning on the body.

Gell also based on Anzieu's psychoanalytical approach of the skin and the self (1989). According to Anzieu, the skin and the tactile experiences this organ allows provide the constitutive representation of the self and its mains functions. He goes on defining nine functions of the *Skin Ego* which were co-opted by Gell to explain what, in his analysis, can be understood as nine possible function for the tattooing. However, in the light of the available data, Gell had to restrict his analysis to only a few of the nine functions delimitated by Anzieu and retained his general statement that tattoo in general has the symbolic status of a body envelope just like a additional layer of skin. In our case, his most convincing argument regards the technical schema of tattooing (blood-letting → scarring /healing → wearing/displaying). Posited in an evolutionary scheme, he proposed that marginal Polynesian societies (the Maori and the Marquesan) according more symbolic significance on the last step (the tattoo as an artefact) manifested less standardization and more individual idiosyncrasy in their tattooing. Gell links it with devolved political aspects characterized with an agonistic ethos expressing themselves through displays of wealth and finery. In contrast, central Polynesian societies according much importance to blood-letting rituals and healing procedures (Society Islands and Samoa) were more consistent with ancient hierarchical systems where rituals were designed to channel the flow of blood. Understood in this ritual context, blood is a fertilizing substance and is the "basic currency of social relation". Moreover, Gell makes an analogy between tattooing and wrapping as technical means to seal the person and the potential dispersal of his *tapu*. By *tapu*, he actually meant sacredness. I would rather use the term *mana* i.e. the divine essence, the reproductive and political power. In many Pacific societies, the amount of *mana* a person is filled with can be lost, or contaminate others. For that reason, bodies has to be recharged, sealed, wrapped and protected. For Gell, tattooing links with "signalling the primary dispersal and subsequent containment of potentially dangerous *tapu*" (Gell 1993: 306).[4] Although, Gell mis-use and over-interpreted his Polynesia data (See Galliot 2019: in press), he nonetheless provided a very refreshing theoretical framework which does not have any competitor so far. He obviously did not elaborate much on the politics of touch in Polynesia. But his theoretical model acknowledges its relevance on considering the technical steps prior the finished tattooed image. As a matter of fact the marked steps in the making of a tattooed image produce very distinctive tactile perceptions through the skin. In this respect, I would add to Gell's analysis that it is not only relevant to look at the symbolic emphasis accorded to these steps (which do have an importance in psychoanalytical terms), but it would also be fruitful to investigate on the haptics of it. For example, to what extent the cultural importance of the scarring process during tattooing can be based on the perceptions that are associated with it (ichtiness, irritation, swollenness, inflammatory states, etc..). Which body handlings are associated with the different technical steps? And to what extent the tactile aspects of the ritual do contribute to its efficacy?

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[4] Gell mis-use the word *tapu*, as in Polynesia, it more often means a ritual prescription than anything originating from a person's body.

As I suggested above, the problem with religious tactility is first a matter of ethnographic focus. Haptics, interoception, exteroception do play a role in many religious ritual, sacred object manipulations, mediation practices and religious expertise. It just needs to be looked at seriously. Also, in order to begin to answer some of these previous questions, I will now turn to my own ethnography of the Samoan tattooing ritual.

Touch in the making of ritual tattooing in the Samoan community

Samoan tattooing is an emblematic ritual as most of its implementation involves bodies, and bodies only. In other words, this is a ritual which transmission and efficacy do not rely on language and, where everything is mediatised by the participant's bodies. Perceptions in question here varies from tactilo-kinesthesic (perceptions mediated by the touch of hands, or haptics strictly speaking) to somesthetic and proprioception.

Contemporary Samoan tattooing ranges from a ritualized production of a standardized assemblage of designs (called *pe'a* for men and *malu* for women) to more customized works based on the iconography of male and female abovementioned categories (fig. X). In order to produce these images, a hand tapping method relying on a mallet (*sausau*) and a set of small adze-shaped utensils (*autā*) ended with boar's tusks needles or steel needles of various widths is used. All this is supervised and performed by a *tufuga tā tatau* (commissioned expert, literally a "tattoo specialist") whose apprenticeship has been completed within one of the two traditional clans known as the 'aiga Sā Su'a and 'aiga Sā Tulouena. However, some *tufuga tā tatau*, who own a title from another clan are nowadays also acknowledged by virtue of a connexion between the origin myth of tattooing and one of their ancestors. This is the case for the Li'aifaiva title which is currently used as a tattooing title by one *tufuga* who has been bestowed this title last year in Safotu, the village where this title originates from.

Most of the *tufuga* as well as *pe'a* and *malu* wearers are of Samoan descent (living in Samoa or in diasporic communities in Australia, New Zealand and USA). However, as far back in history as we can go Samoan tattoo specialists have always been open to perform the ritual on non-Samoans. And in the late 1990's they have also started to take non-Samoan apprentices as a result of the intensification of their international travels in other Polynesian countries involved in ethnic tattoo revivalism, and in the Western tattooing scene in the late 1980's when they started travelling abroad and built professional relationships with western tattooists and customers.

It is here important to recall the fact that tattooing is a once-in-a-lifetime ritual, and not only a commercial operation of performing a tattoo on a customer. Samoan tattooing is a three stage collective male-focused initiation in the fashion of what has long been theorized by Van Gennep (1909), Turner (1969), or Bloch (1992). It involves the establishment of ritual relationships between participants, the settlement of a ritual space, its sacralisation by prayers, the separation of the recipients by prescriptions and proscriptions (*tulafono* and *fa'asa* in the Samoan language), and a closing ceremony during which initiates are released and allowed to carry on the normal course of their

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lives[5]. It very often integrates ladies in the same ritual space-time. Nowadays the main difference of treatment between male and female has to do with the length of the operation. It requires five to ten days in a row to complete a *pe'a* (which extends from waist down to the knees), whereas it takes only a few hours to cover women thighs with a *malu*.

Having a ritual tattoo done by a *tufuga* is a costly procedure. It also concentrates a wide range and variety of grounds depending on the social context of the wearer at the time of the operation. It can aim at entering the village council of chief (*fono*) to perform various kinds of duties (serving food, presenting valuable during inter-village ceremonial exchanges, serving the kava[6] in the appropriate fashion, along with other things designated by the generic terme *tautua* i.e. service). It can also be a celebration of an appreciated member of a kin group who is expected to serve his family and maybe in the future receive a chiefly title (*suafa matai*). It can also celebrate oneself's accomplishment as a successful individual in business or in executive function at a government level. In fact, while it was quite rare in the 1990's and early 2000's to meet members of the Samoan intellectual or financial elite sporting a ritual tattooing, it is fairly customary these days. Also, outside the context of interclanic ceremonial relationships and village life and politics, wearers of *pe'a* and *malu* are broadly considered as flag carrier, wearing a skin deep national cultural heritage and displaying their cultural pride occasionnaly.

The foregoing is, so to say, a necessary and voluntary superficial introduction to Samoan tattooing. Having spent a great deal of my fieldwork studying apprenticeship and ritual transmission, I had the opportunity to document in detail the technical aspects of it. Samoan tattooing is literally a ritual work as every step from the making of the tools to the final ointment of the initiates. It requires technical expertise and is locally called a *galuega* (work, in the sense of men's physical work). Thus the expression ritual work is not to be understood metaphorically. In the same vein, the very act of tattooing is not just a symbolic death but does represent a real threat to life, as until recently undertaking this ritual could be a cause of extremely serious skin diseases, and sometimes death.

The special features of this ritual are: 1) it is essentially speechless i. e. it doesn't involve any secret revelation or designs exegesis that would be part of a communicable verbal content. 2) ritual performance and apprenticeship of ritual expertise are consubstantial i. e. it is configured such that non-verbal and perceptual environment, gestures, and elementary actions are the privileged ways to access the knowledge that is being passed on. This modality of skill transmission is comparable to what Wenger and Lave has coined as "situated learning" (1991).

The **making of the tools** manifests a dichotomized use of the hands between the master and his apprentice. I won't details every making steps here but some operations are relevant for this chapter's topic. At the tool making stage, the *tufuga* is in charge of most of the expert gestures using both hands and sometimes his feet while the apprentice largely limit himself to hold on (*taofi* : stopping / prevent from moving)

[5] For a detailed description, see Mallon and Galliot, 2018.

[6] Kava (or *'ava* in Samoan) is a drink made of water and pounded *Piper methysticum* roots. In Samoa, Tonga and Fiji, it is ceremonially distributed and drunk at the opening of important gatherings. It can also be consumed on a daily basis as a socializing beverage.

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things for the *tufuga* (fig.X). The tufuga 's tools are intended for his use only, that is why its dimensions have to fit with his holding habits and to the shape of his hand. The handle, the choice of the right piece of boar's tusk, the right diameter of celluloid that will serve to fix the handle to the needles rests on his appreciation. He is also in charge of grinding the piece of tusks bones. This operation depends on an alternative use of sight and touch to assess the right thinness of the piece of ivory in which the needle will be cut. Hold with two to three fingers of the right hand, this piece is grounded horizontally on a hone and regularly soaked in a water recipient to remove the excess of grounded enamel and to cool the material (fig. X).

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After the section of tusk has been reduced to the intended dimensions, several tips are delimited with a knife and sharpened with a file made out of a sea urchin spine. This highly sensitive work necessitates to be interrupted and checked frequently. The *tufuga* controls the making of the needles by applying the tips to his cheek. This allow him to assess the sharpness of the group of needles by using a soft part of his body. Also, the efficiency of the completed tattooing tool (*autā*) is often tested on the specialist's own leg before being used in the ritual. Here somesthetic afferences channelled by soft part of the expert's body are central for the making of efficient tools, which in return are necessary to ritual efficacy. I argue that this constitutes a striking example of the disruption of material causality into ritual actions.

At the stage of applying the tattoo, work of hands, body movements and positioning in ritual space are also strictly controlled according to the same dichotomy between those who do something with their hands and those who attend the ritual in a more passive way. This contrasts with the customary management of space in other

Samoan formal gathering where bodies are regulated according to the status of the participants.

The ritual space can be settled in any kind of sheltered area. It is configured in the fashion of two concentric circles of participants. In this space, the central circle of the action is occupied by the initiate (*'o le ta'oto* = the lying down), the tattoo master (*'o le tufuga*) and his two or three assistants (*o toso :* the stretchers), while at the peripheral circle are seated the relatives of the initiate and other voluntary participants. Here again if one allows enough attention to it, a ritual management of touch is at work.

The centre of the action is again dichotomized between the expertise of the *tufuga* fine lines and intricate designs with a very complex tapping technique while the *toso* stretch the skin of the *ta'oto*. The work of the stretchers consists in positioning their hands in order to harden and flatten the skin it to the maximum of its elasticity, and at the same time hold the initiate's body to prevent it from moving and consequently compromise the expected visual result (fig.). Stretching is a very onerous task for the forearms muscles even though it does not requires any specific apprenticeship. It nonetheless necessitates a specific positioning of the hands while stretching, as well as an accurate hand-eye coordination between both assistants and with the *tufuga*. This is made manifest by most un-experienced assistants who do stretch with their fingertips and cannot anticipate the surface of the body which is going to tapped by the *tufuga* instead of the using the palm of their hands (Fig. Cahier corps1). After each sequence of tapping which rarely exceed thirty second the *toso* eased the pressure on the patient's skin and wipe the blood and ink with a soft piece of fabric before reiterating the same sequence of movements. The softness of the fabric used to wipe the blood is of course evaluated through haptic perceptions. It is soaked in a bucket of water and squeezedso that it is just wet enough to clean the work surface. Thus, it has to be spongious enough to absorb the excess of blood and ink, and dry enough to let to allow the skin of patient a certain grip to be stretched again.

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The peripheral circle occupied by other participants is characterized by inactivity and silent worshipping (*tapua'i*) which paradoxically is an essential part of the ritual actions' success. They seat cross-legged around the patient, wear no body ornaments such as

necklaces or flowers on the ear and are expected to silently encourage the initiate and the *tufuga*'s group by their presence. Close relatives do touch and apply small pressures on the patient's body (his/her head, hand or feet fig. cahier corps 4 & X). Occasionally, they wave a fan to keep flies away and ventilate the members of the tattooing group. This is a token of empathy and filial love (*alofa*) especially in the last steps of the operation when the patient is exhausted and sometimes nearly giving up. In that case, *tapua'i* equally participates in the completion of the ritual through body positioning, physical inaction.

The patient is expected nothing else than cope with the situation passively and reposition his body according to the *tufuga* and *toso* instructions. Somesthesic inputs, i.e. the nature and the severity of the perceived pain, depends on the portion of the skin concerned by the ritual work, and on the size of the tattooing tool in use. Tattooing the inside of the thighs, torso and knees is generally considered more painful. It also varies throughout the session, usually starting by a localizable acute pain to a more dull and less localizable one. At this stage of course, the brains has started to liberate endorphins and the patient feels numb and tired.

After each tattoo session (usually five hours a day), the *ta'oto* wounded skin is washed with soap and massaged (fō) by an assistant or a relative (fig. XX).

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Besides the daily sessions of tattooing, they have to stay unshaved, to refrain from sexual intercourse and to avoid going out at night alone as their sore, swollen and wounded skin would certainly attract an encounter with a malevolent being. This usually affects the healing process and symptoms of the looseness of the recipient in following ritual rules generally manifests through unusual scars and large skin infections.

The last sequence of significant touches during the ritual occurs at the *samaga*, or ointment ceremony. First, the focus of this gathering is to lift ritual prescriptions and proscriptions through a series of acts on the initiates' body. This is organized a few days after the last tattooing session. It gathers the initiates, the *tufuga*, his assistants, and senior members (close parents and title holders) of the patient's kin group. This meeting begins either with a moment of prayer said by a churchman or an elder from the patient's family, or with a formal distribution of kava. This sanctification phase (*fa'apāia*) is followed by two separate actions on the initiates' body.

After the *tufuga* has briefly acknowledged the end of the work in front of the audience, he gets up, comes to the back of the group of initiates and gently applies some egg white on the top of each heads. He simultaneously whispers a short and often inaudible formula that is locally interpreted has a blessing (*fa'amanuia*) to the initiates. Then, assistants go on in front of them with a recipient filled with a mixture of coconut oil and turmeric powder with which they anoint rapidly the tattooed bodies. While the first move recalls an ancient ritual action called *lulu'uga* that consisted in spreading green coconut water on the someone's head in order to lift taboos on his person, the anointment is more complex to understand because of its multivalence. In Polynesia and Micronesia, the combining of turmeric with coconut oil was (and still is a many islands) part of the major seasonal rituals (Kirch, 1994; Lessa, 1966; Sopher, 1964), birth and puberty rites, and funerals (Firth, 1967; Galliot, 2010b; Parmentier, 1988; Turner, 1884). In Samoa, it is also employed as a medicinal preparation and its use in the closing tattoo ceremony is indeed linked to its antiseptic virtues and the relief it affords from the physical discomfort caused by tattooing. However, as this mixture is absent from the operation itself, its presence at the end of the ritual is intended to neutralize the potentially harmful effect of the pigment and to give the pe'a or malu a lustre and unusual colour. In the contemporary Samoan context, can be interpreted as a ritual act ensuring a continuity between the ancient pre-Christian rites and ceremonies specific to the Polynesian region while at the same time allowing an analogy between *sama* and Chrism as sacred oils which have the power to make the individuals visible to the gods and integrate the newcomer into the community. Thus, whereas the inaugural prayer both Christianizes the rite and enables the opening of a sacred space, the oil, through its shininess, authorizes the presentation of the body in this space. The oil emphasizes the visual impact of the work, celebrates the person's successful initiation and guarantees

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they are correctly introduced to the ancestors incarnated by the titleholders attending the event.

This ointment is followed by a distribution of fragrant necklaces and by a short dance involving all participants, but focused on the newly tattooed individuals who are expected to display they shiny tattooed body parts. During this dance, men acknowledge their physical fitness by slapping their tattoo that will react by raising above the surface of the skin.

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The second phase, called *umusaga* involves a stereotyped sequence of speeches exchanges and gifts presentation. In contrast to the ritual work, this event is more loquacious since commissioned orators in charge of delivering speeches on behalf of both parties takes centre stage. This phase is not specific to the tattooing ritual but to the generic status of *tufuga* (expert craftsmen and ritual specialists). In this respect he is addressed with a special and formal lexical field reserved to his ritual office. Here, the purpose is the retribution of the completed work. Although a stereotype sequence of actions and speeches are delivered, we are now into a more political regime than a ritual one. Sensoriality, physical contact and haptics are not only no longer relevant, but also not prominent at all.

Concluding remarks

The Samoan ritual of tattooing here briefly described through the prism of physically and touch engages us to consider the notion of ritual technology literally as it involves a great deal of embodied skills. On one hand, this case contrasts with the current developments of professional western tattoo industry that manifests a gradual withdrawal of touch and of the body. The recent designing of a 3D tattoo printer monitored by software and requiring no human touch is a striking example of that current state. Also, the popularity of rotary tattoo machines in the tattoo industry together with the concern (from the tattoo milieu as well as from governments' health department willing to regulate the profession) to limit cross-contaminations also tend to decrease the use of skilled hand and the importance of touch within tattooing practices.

On the other hand, Samoan tattooing contrasts with leading approaches to ritual studies as the required expertise for its proper implementation neither rely on a divine intervention or on a revelation form a supra human entities, nor on the study of sacred scriptures sanctioned by a clergy. Rather it is a technical and relational skill that is acquired through the training of the senses, or as Ingold wrote through an "education of attention" (2014). It combines the habituation to strenuous postures (as sitting cross legged for several hours is not given at birth), to the right positioning of hands, to the evaluation of the pressure and the force adapted to various kind of skin's elasticity, to the sufficient strike force when using the mallet on the tattooing needles, to the numerous designs and complex assemblage of ornamental units which are stored nowhere else than on the initiates' bodies and which depends on the apprentice memory ability. However, the mnemonic capacities of the practitioner do not guarantee the efficacy of the ritual and quality of the image produced. Although the making of *pe'a* and *malu* are standardized, the *tufuga* and his assistants always have to rely on the tactile perceptions available in the flow of activity in order to constantly re-adjust their intended design to material constraints of the work environment. They first have to adjust the way they work to the recipient's body shape and skin type. They also have to adapt to the changing relational configuration of the rituals. Tattoo rituals feature variable categories of participants and recipients, i.e. people with variable status (untitled men and ladies, low titled men, high chiefs), variable level of expectations in terms of aesthetics, and variable economic capacity. All these criteria do have an impact on the material implementation of the ritual and is ultimately and subtly noticeable in the finished tattooed image.

In conclusion, as an alternative to Gell's symbolic emphasize on one of the tattooing universal technical step to understand how it articulates with the kind of social systems it is a manifestation, I proposed to rather look at the way the body perceives the tattooing process, in order to explore precisely if body perception could substantiate representations rather than the opposite. Taking a materialistic approach, I argue that from this kind of excruciating body experiences can emerge mental models and categories of social beings. The rare verbal occurrences during the tattooing sessions are all oriented toward bodies, gestures and tools. Participants who *tapua'i* the operation regularly utter short formula acknowledging the movement of the hands (*malo le a'ao solo*) and the movement of the mallet (*malo le sausau*). Also, one of the best examples from the Samoan data is found in the term *soga'imiti* that qualify a young man who have completed the tattoo ritual. Local etymologies of this term agree on the idea that it is formed of *soga* + *mitimiti* which is basically understood as "continuous itchiness", a sensation that universally occurs during the scarring of the skin after a tattooing.

The Samoan tattooing has the paradoxical effect of reinforcing the person by actually softening his skin. A *pe'a* covers half of the body and contains large solid black areas on

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the back and on the thighs. While the ink injected in the skin do have a certain thickness that can be revealed by slaps (during dance for example), the skin concerned by tattoo marks has the tendency to perceive tactile stimulations differently than the rest of the body. Thus, the effect this kind of ritual tattooing intend has more to do with a somesthetic shift and a validation of strength than with an inscribed statement of status in a Polynesian hierarchy.

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