

On the Human Canvas: A Novel Ontology of Tattoos

by

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Abstract

Some tattoos are artworks. This paper claims that art-tattoos have an interesting ontological feature: their artistic properties are partially determined by the people they are tattooed on. In other words, tattoos are artistically contextualized by their recipients. I further suggest that this contextualization is ongoing: that the artistic properties of a tattoo aesthetically change over time as the tattoo recipient changes. I present an ontology of tattoos that focuses on this feature of tattoos. The argument in this paper notably rests on an inference from aesthetic intuitions and art-historical facts about tattoos to claims about their ontological features.

Contents

Introduction.....	4
Chapter I. Groundwork: Assumptions, Identity, Persistence, and Essence	6
Chapter II. Tattoos	11
§II.i. The Recipient View.....	16
Chapter III. Persistence Conditions: Changes over time	21
§III.i. Persistence Conditions: Death of the Recipient.....	23
Chapter IV. On the Is-Inked-On Relation and Artistic Interpretation.....	27
§IV.i Tattoo Recipient Intentionalism and Un-intentionalism.....	32
Chapter V. Sizer’s-BV	43
Chapter VI. Tattoos and Street Art; You’ve Changed	56
§VI.i Riggle & Bacharach on Street Art.	56
§VI.ii Tattoos and Street Art; Refining the Analogy	63
Chapter VII. Conclusion:	71

Introduction¹

Some tattoos are artworks.² The goal of this thesis is to develop and provide an ontology of these art-tattoos (henceforth tattoos).³ According to the ontology of tattoos that I present in this thesis, tattoos have an interesting ontological feature: their artistic properties are partially determined by the people they are tattooed on (tattoo recipients). In other words, tattoos are artistically contextualized by their recipients. I further suggest that this contextualization is ongoing: that the artistic properties of a tattoo aesthetically change over time as the tattoo recipient changes. I present an ontology of tattoos that focuses on this feature of tattoos.

In Chapter I, I lay some groundwork. I state some assumptions that I make and provide the definitions of artistic and aesthetic properties, identity, persistence, and essence that are operative in the thesis.

In Chapter II, I introduce and outline three views that could each be developed into an ontology of tattoos: the Skin View, the Body View, and the Recipient View. I advocate for the acceptance of a Recipient View according to which a tattoo's artistic properties are partially determined by the intentions and public persona of the *person* (the tattoo recipient) it is on. In §II.i, I develop a novel ontology of tattoos by precisifying the recipient view. According to the precisified recipient view, tattoos essentially

¹ I would like thank Carl Matheson for his constant encouragement, time, comments, and conversations on this project – this project would not be what is without you. I would also like to thank Adam Murray for his time, conversations and comments, Simone Mahrenholz for her comments and time on my committee, the folks at the U of M Philosophical Friday talk, James Mock and the crowd at the 2020 ASA annual meeting for their questions, comments and suggestions, and my colleagues, Ivy Madden, Christine Hildebrand, and Damian Melamedoff for their comments and suggestions on the earlier drafts. Finally, I would like to thank Janet Rechik, Joe Rechik, Carolyn Roch-Bruun & Larry Minarik for the inspiration for the project, and for sending me relevant news articles throughout my time writing.

² This claim has been argued for extensively elsewhere. See: E. M. Dadlez, “Ink, Art and Expression: Philosophical Questions about Tattoos,” *Philosophy Compass* 10, no. 11 (2015): 739–53, <https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12258>; Clancy Smith, “My Tattoo May Be Permanent, But My Memory Of It Isn’t,” in *Tattoos; I Ink, Therefore I Am*, ed. Robert Arp, Philosophy for Everyone (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 109–20; Nicolas Michaud, “Are Tattoos Art?,” in *Tattoos; I Ink, Therefore I Am*, ed. Robert Arp, Philosophy for Everyone (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012); Laura Sizer, “The Art of Tattoos,” *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, August 1, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/aesthj/ayaa012>.

³ Whenever I use ‘tattoo’ I am referring to tattoos that are artworks. Tattoos have also been used for medical, penal and ceremonial reasons, but I do not mean to refer to these kinds of tattoos. I will note any deviations.

instantiate a special relation is inked-on⁴ that they bear to their tattoo recipient *as a person*, which determines some of the tattoo's artistic properties.

In Chapter III, I outline the persistence conditions of tattoos according to the precisified recipient view. I argue that a tattoo's artistic properties can change over time as its recipient changes as a person. In §III.ii, I argue that a tattoo cannot survive the death of its recipient.

In Chapter IV, I say more about how the special is inked-on relation features into our artistic interpretations of tattoos. In §IV.i, I determine the relationship between the tattoo recipient's intentions and the artistic properties of their tattoos – specifically, I discuss how much the recipient can change the artistic properties of their tattoos by simply changing their intentions towards them.

In Chapter V, I present an alternative ontology of tattoos that I develop from Sizer's definition of tattoos. I compare the precisified recipient view to the body view that I develop using Sizer's definition of tattoos. I then offer three arguments for why the recipient view I present is preferable to the ontology I attribute to Sizer.

In Chapter VI, I use street art as a case study to demonstrate how the precisified recipient view can be operationalized to provide insights into the ontology of art outside of the debate on tattoos. In §VI.i, I defend an analogy that has been proposed between street art and tattoos. In §VI.ii, I suggest that we can extend the analogy between street art and tattoos in a way that applies only to the precisified recipient view. This extension suggests that street art can change as the social properties of the street change.

In Chapter VII, I conclude by briefly reviewing my arguments and discussing questions for the future.

⁴ I use a sans serif font to indicate properties and relations.

Chapter I. Groundwork: Assumptions, Identity, Persistence, and Essence

In this section, I define the terms that I use and present the major assumptions that I make in this thesis. First and foremost, I will define some important aesthetic terms: ‘art-content’ and ‘artistic properties’. The art-content of an artwork (a tattoo) is the collection of properties instantiated by that artwork that is relevant to appreciating it *qua* artwork.⁵ The artistic properties are any properties that are a part of the art-content of the artwork. There is occasionally a distinction made between aesthetic properties such as *beauty* or *sublimity*, and artistic properties, or art-relevant but non-aesthetic properties such as *impressionistic* or *ironic*. I include both kinds of properties in the tattoo’s art-content, call them all ‘artistic properties’, and ignore the distinction. I also assume the art-content of a tattoo entirely depends on the non-art-content properties of the tattoo, including relational and non-perceptual properties.⁶

With those definitions in place, I can now state my first assumption. I accept David Davies’s Pragmatic Constraint (PC) on the ontology of art:

PC: “Artworks must be entities that can bear the sorts of properties rightly ascribed to what are termed ‘works’ in our reflective critical and appreciative practice.”⁷

PC is a meta-ontological assumption – it concerns our methodological approach to the ontology of art. In short, it states that the ontology of art must accord with artistic practice. What this means in practice is that we should be suspicious of any ontology which claims that the artworks under consideration are metaphysically (or artistically) different than our artistic practices suggest they are.⁸ For example, if our musical practices tell us that musical works are the kinds of things that are created, then we should be

⁵ Jerrold Levinson, “What Are Aesthetic Properties,” in *Contemplating Art; Essays in Aesthetics* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 341–43.

⁶ I am not going to say what this dependence relation is. Levinson thinks the relation between aesthetic and regular properties is one of emergence, but McLaughlin and Bennet note that the relations has also been characterized as supervenience. Supervenience seems like an odd choice: the relation between aesthetic properties and their determinants seems clearly asymmetric (Levinson calls them ‘higher order’ properties) whereas supervenience is non-symmetric. Brian McLaughlin and Karen Bennett, “Supervenience,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2018 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2018), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/supervenience/>.

⁷ David Davies, *Art as Performance* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2003), 18.

⁸ The alternative is to examine whether our intuitive conception of an artistic practice actually accords with that practice.

suspicious of an ontology of musical works that claims musical works are simply sound structures, which are not created entities. PC is an assumption that underlies the work of many philosophers of art in the Western analytic tradition.⁹ This assumption is not overly controversial – as ontologists, we want to take the underlying metaphysical intuitions of artistic communities seriously. That said, my explicit acceptance of PC is worth stating because it is important to the argument I present in this thesis. For one, PC provides me with reasons to be suspicious of the ontologies of tattoos that I reject. It does so because I argue these suspicious ontologies suggest that tattoos lack properties that, upon reflection of our artistic practices, tattoos intuitively have. Second, I leverage PC as a reason for favouring the ontology of tattoos I accept because the ontology I accept is motivated by arguments from intuitions which concern artistic practice.

I will now define some metaphysical terms: ‘identity’, ‘persistence’, and ‘essence’. I will begin with identity. Identity (numerical identity) is a relation that something can *only* bear to itself. To say that some entity x and some entity y are identical is to say that they are the exact same thing: x just is y . These are intuitive notions of identity, but they do not tell us much: they are ultimately circular – they rely on a notion of sameness (which just is identity). More precisely, identity is typically taken to be the relation that satisfies Leibniz’s Principle of the Indiscernibility of Identicals (PII). According to PII, if x and y are identical, then they have the same properties – this includes relational and spatiotemporal properties such as x ’s exact distance from the sun. PII can be formally stated as follows, taking P to be a variable for an n -adic property or relation and x (and y) to be a variable for an object (in our case a tattoo):

$$\text{PII: } \forall x \forall y (x = y \rightarrow \forall P (Px \leftrightarrow Py))^{10}$$

⁹ David Davies, “The Primacy of Practice in the Ontology of Art,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 67, no. 2 (2009): 161. This meta-ontological assumption is found “...in the writings of those who number among his principal targets—such as Currie, Levinson, Guy Rohrbaugh, and me [Davies]. Each of these writers develops and defends ontological claims only after an appeal to broadly epistemological considerations concerning our appreciative and artistic practice.” 161. Similar assumptions are also found in Thomasson: Aime L. Thomasson, *Fiction and Metaphysics*, Cambridge Studies in Philosophy (Cambridge University Press, 1999); Amie L. Thomasson, “Debates about the Ontology of Art: What Are We Doing Here?,” *Philosophy Compass* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, May 1, 2006), <https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.uml.idm.oclc.org/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1747-9991.2006.00021.x>.

¹⁰ The Indiscernibility of Identicals is the converse of the Identity of Indiscernibles: $\forall x \forall y \forall P ((Px \leftrightarrow Py) \rightarrow x=y)$. The combination of the two laws is often referred to as Leibniz’s Law. Some philosophers reject the Identity of

Going forward then, if tattoos are identical (the same tattoo) then they have exactly the same properties.

Persistence is defined as identity across time: an entity x *persists* if that entity x at an earlier time is identical to an entity y at a later time. You persisted through reading the previous paragraph by being the same person you were one minute ago. This seems straightforward, notice, however, that a definition of persistence relies on a definition of identity: persistence is *identity across time*. Earlier, I defined identity as PII. PII claims that if some things are identical, then they have the same properties. However, many things experience a change in their properties over time – and so, according to PII, cannot be identical across time. Although PII does a good job of defining identity *at a time*, it intuitively fails to define identity *across time*. Here is an example: Buster the cat is presumably a persistent object, so he can lose a couple of pounds and not fail to be the same cat he was pre-weight-loss. Say Buster the cat (x) at t_1 has the property portly (P). Say as well, that between t_1 and t_2 Buster lost some weight, so Buster the cat (y) at t_2 has the property not-portly ($\sim P$). However, according to PII, Buster (x) at t_1 and Buster (y) at t_2 cannot be identical, because if they were, they would have the same properties, which they do not; Buster x is portly and Buster y is not-portly.¹¹ This problem is known broadly as the problem of change.¹²

A popular solution to the problem of change is to make identity across time conform to PII by indexing all properties to times. To index properties to times, is simply to make every property into one that is held with respect to a time: portly becomes portly-at (some time). If properties are indexed to times, then Buster neither gains nor loses properties over time, he just has two different properties with respect to different times. Buster (x) can hold the dyadic property (P_2) portly-at with respect to t_1 and the

Indiscernibles, given Black's objection. See: Max Black, "The Identity of Indiscernibles," *Mind* 61, no. 242 (1952): 153–64, <https://doi.org/10.1093/mind/LXI.242.153>. pp. 156-157.

¹¹ There's technically a step missing: that something cannot be simultaneously portly and not-portly, call this rule 'No Contradictory Properties' or NCP: $\forall x \forall P \sim (Px \wedge \sim Px)$. Here is the fully argument: (P1) the properties attributed to Buster x and Buster y , (P2) PII, (P3) NCP, (C) Buster x is not identical to Buster y .

¹² The problem of change is referred to by Lewis as the problem of temporary intrinsics. David K. Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford, UK ; BBlackwell, 1986) 202-205.

dyadic property ($\sim P_2$) not-portly-at with respect to t_2 .¹³ Formally: $(P_2xt_1 \wedge \sim P_2xt_2)$. The only way Buster (x) at t_1 could differ from a Buster (y) at t_2 is if Buster (x) and Buster (y) had contradictory properties *with respect to the same time*; if Buster (x) was portly-at with respect to t_1 (P_2xt_1) and Buster (y) was not-portly-at with respect to t_1 ($\sim P_2yt_1$). Formally: $(P_2xt_1 \wedge \sim P_2yt_1)$. This is not the case, so the contradiction dissolves.¹⁴ I will assume this solution to the problem of change but substitute your favourite solution as you fit. Ultimately the right answer to give here will be the same answer offered for the problem of change more generally.¹⁵

There are, of course, some changes that entities can survive (persist through) and some they cannot. The essential properties of some entity x are those that it must have (necessarily), in every world where (and at every time when) it exists:

$$a \text{ is essentially } P \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \Box(\exists x (x = a) \rightarrow Pa)^{16}$$

For some x to exist, it must have all of the x's essential properties – those essential properties cannot change. For example, an essential property of my blu-ray disk of *Face/Off* might include that *Face/Off* can still be played from it; if it loses that property it is no longer exists.

With identity, persistence, and essence defined, I can now state one last assumption. I assume that *artworks* (including tattoos) are historically embedded artifacts that are individuated by artist, and time of creation. This assumption is often called ‘aesthetic contextualism.’¹⁷ Levinson describes it best:

¹³ Indeed, this requires that Buster has vastly more properties than we might think he does. If t_1 - t_2 is some time interval and Buster is portly-at with respect to t_1 and t_2 then it seems like Buster must also be some way with respect to each time within that interval, such as portly-at $t_{1.1}$, portly-at $t_{1.2}$, and so on. Buster therefore holds the property portly-at with respect to infinitely many times.

¹⁴ The missing bit NCP (see footnote 11) should then be modified for dyadic properties: **NCP-dyadic:**
 $\forall x \forall t_n \forall P_2 \sim (P_2 xt_n \wedge \sim P_2 xt_n)$

¹⁵ A reason to reject this solution is that intuitively monadic properties should be monadic rather than dyadic; intuitively, Buster is portly (a one-place property), not portly-at (a two-place property).

¹⁶ This definition is controversial, but it is the easiest to formally present. Sub the definitional view of essence if you must. Kit Fine, “Essence and Modality,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 8 (1994): 1–16.

¹⁷ Aesthetic contextualism is often contrasted with aesthetic empiricism, according to which only the perceptible properties of an artwork (and perhaps its category) are relevant to its artistic properties. For more information on aesthetic contextualism see: Davies, *Art as Performance*; Jerrold Levinson, “Aesthetic Contextualism,” in *Aesthetic Pursuits: Essays in Philosophy of Art* (Oxford University Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198767213.001.0001>.

“Contextualism is the thesis that a work of art is an artifact of a particular sort, an object or structure that is the product of human invention at a particular time and place, by a particular individual or individuals.”¹⁸ What this means in practice is that the artistic properties of an artwork are determined in part by the context in which it was created; If Van Gogh had painted *Skull of a Skeleton with a Burning Cigarette* in 1889 instead of in 1886, then it would have been a different artwork, even if it were perceptually indistinguishable. This assumption is critical to understanding the view that I present in this thesis because what I do in part is propose an expanded contextualism for tattoos. I argue that a tattoo is not only contextualized by its artist or time of creation but is also contextualized by the tattoo recipient.

¹⁸ Levinson, “Aesthetic Contextualism,” 4.

Chapter II. Tattoos

It is now time to discuss what tattoos are. Tattoos are material artworks – they are (in part) designs made by inserting ink into the dermis of the skin. I also assume that tattoos are non-repeatable: this should be explored, but I do not have space for it here.¹⁹ Finally, I further assume (as mentioned above) that *artworks* (including tattoos) are historically embedded artifacts individuated by artist, and time of creation.

If tattoos are ontologically just ink-paintings (like regular paintings) in skin, then we get a basic view of tattoos that can be called the Skin View (SV):

SV: tattoos are material art objects (ink-designs in skin) that are individuated by, and that have their artistic properties determined by: (i) design and ink, (ii) artist(s), (iii) time of creation, including art historical context, and (iv) skin tone, texture, and elasticity.²⁰

Any difference in (i-iv) between tattoo x and tattoo y *at a time* is sufficient to make x and y non-identical. Furthermore, properties (i-iv) collectively determine the artistic properties of a tattoo.²¹ However, what little literature there is on tattoos explicitly rejects this picture.

¹⁹ I think this is a fair assumption, but it should be explored more. Some might argue that flash works are repeatable: for example, Doreen Garner’s Black Panther flash tattoo might be an abstract type with many instances. See Chapter VII: Conclusion in this thesis for a longer discussion. “Tattoos, Black Bodies, and the Invisible Man Project with Doreen Garner – ZINE,” accessed June 28, 2020, <https://philaprint.wordpress.com/2018/02/08/tattoos-black-bodies-and-the-invisible-man-project-with-doreen-garner/>.

²⁰ It is worth noting here that there are a fair number of problematic myths about tattooing on black skin. The persistence of these myths seem to be primarily a result of artistic underrepresentation. “Good Tattoo Artists Aren’t Afraid to Tattoo Black Skin,” accessed August 17, 2020, <https://www.themarysue.com/black-skin-and-tattoos/>; “For Tattoo Artists, Race Is In The Mix When Ink Meets Skin,” NPR.org, accessed August 17, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2016/12/01/503014301/for-tattoo-artists-race-is-in-the-mix-when-ink-meets-skin>.

²¹ Depending on the degree of change and the style the artist is working in, the aesthetic properties may or may not change when the base properties do. In certain artworks such as a Pollock painting, or for tattoos with minimalist line work, even small variations in a drop of paint here or an extra line of ink there can lead, according to some, to profound changes in the aesthetic properties of the work; Shepherd Steiner, *Skènè for '51 Pollock and Nietzsche*. Presentation (March, 2018). Luke Frankenberger (Minimalist tattoo artist), Personal Correspondence, Winnipeg (October, 2018); Jerrold Levinson, “Aesthetic Uniqueness,” in *Music, Art, & Metaphysics* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 107–33.

Eva Dadlez and Laura Sizer note that tattoos are notably on bodies, not just flat canvases.²² Call this the Body View (BV). The proponent of BV recognizes that the ‘undulations and curves of the body and the placement of the tattoo can contribute to its artistic properties.’²³

BV: tattoos are material art objects (ink-designs in skin) that are individuated by, and that have their artistic properties determined by: (i) design and ink, (ii) artist(s), (iii) time of creation, including art historical context, (iv) skin tone, texture, and elasticity, and (v) body shape and placement.

Any difference in (i-v) between tattoo x and tattoo y *at a time* is sufficient to make x and y non-identical. Furthermore, properties (i-v) collectively determine the artistic properties of the tattoo.²⁴

I wish to reject both SV and BV. SV and BV both ignore something important about tattoos; that tattoos are on *people*.²⁵ Skin, body, and person are different sortals – where a sortal is understood as a designator for kinds with distinct essences, identities, and persistence conditions.²⁶ Persons are materially constituted by bodies, but they are not identical with them; persons have social lives, fears, and hopes (etc.) that mere bodies do not.²⁷

More precisely, I wish to argue that tattoos are *artifacts on particular persons* – this should be understood as a claim similar to the contextualist one that artworks are *historically embedded artifacts*. What I mean by this, is that tattoos bear an important relation to the person they are on and therefore must be interpreted within the context of that person. It is worth clarifying here that I am suggesting tattoo recipients impose a context on their tattoos by simply being the recipient of their tattoos. In other words, I am claiming that it is in virtue of their role as the tattoo recipient that persons contribute an artistically

²² Dadlez, “Ink, Art and Expression”; Sizer, “The Art of Tattoos.”

²³ Dadlez, “Ink, Art and Expression.”

²⁴ It is worth emphasizing that, as far as I am aware, no one has officially proposed an ontology of tattoos. The views that I presented above are the basis of ontologies that I think someone could reasonably hold given the current literature in Western analytic aesthetics on tattoos and their properties.

²⁵ Laura argues that tattoos are on *living bodies*, but this is not the same thing as tattoos being importantly related to *people as social and personal individuals*. See Chapter V for a more detailed discussion.

²⁶ Richard E. Grandy, “Sortals,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2016 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2016), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/sortals/>.

²⁷ I am relying on a real metaphysical distinction between persons and their living bodies. I prefer this version, but my view would still go through on a more conservative reading that said there is only a distinction between a person’s physical being and social being or social life.

relevant context to their tattoos. One must distinguish the role of the recipient *qua* recipient of the tattoo from the other possible roles they might play in the tattoo's creation, such as being a co-artist. On SV and BV the tattoo recipient could contribute to the artistic properties of their tattoo as a co-artist.²⁸ A tattoo recipient is a co-artist if they drew the tattoo design, they tattooed themselves, or (on a liberal definition of co-artist) they choose a design with the clear intention to represent some specific person or event in their life.²⁹ What I am claiming is that the tattoo recipient provides a context against which the tattoo must be interpreted, artistically influencing their tattoos by simply being the recipient because tattoos are *artifacts on particular persons*. What exactly it is for tattoos to be artifacts on particular persons is not yet clear, I will say more about this below. At this point, however, it is clear enough that I can provide an argument for the claim that tattoos are on persons *rather than* mere bodies.

The claim that tattoos are artifacts on particular persons rather than on mere bodies needs motivating. I claim that tattoos are contextualized by their recipients because this best accords with our artistic practices concerning tattoos. More precisely, it accords with art-historical claims that tattoos are expressive of the people they are on (or otherwise for the person they are on) and it accords with further art-interpretative claims that we interpret tattoos in relation to their recipients – attributing artistic properties to tattoos that require reference to the tattoo recipient as a person.

Tattoos play an explicitly expressive or representative role; in most cases, expressing the intentions and personas of the persons they are on. If tattoos are not explicitly intended to be publicly expressive then they are often intended to be personally so. For example, many people get tattoos as expressions of personal commitments. Importantly, these expressions must be of persons, not of bodies – bodies do not have anything to express. Now, it is indeed the case that being a tool of expression does not necessitate that a tattoo's properties be determined by its recipient; I can express myself through my musical tastes, but those musical works do not have their properties determined by me. However, tattoos

²⁸ Eva mentions tattoo co-authorship, though her bar for co-authorship is set much higher than mine.

²⁹ This is not an exhaustive list of the reasons someone might be a co-artist of their tattoo.

are importantly only ever expressive of the recipient they are on, and that they are expressions seems to be a fundamental feature of them. In *Adornment* Davies highlights the historical use of tattoos as social signifiers³⁰, as does relevant archaeological research.³¹ Sanders and Vail argue extensively that tattoos are socially symbolic, providing information about the recipient's; "...personal interests, social position, relationships, or self-definition"³² Tattoos can also indicate co-membership,³³ artist Doreen Garner says that she *wants* her Black Panther tattoos to act as a community declaration.³⁴ The expressive function of tattoos is widely recognized: people choose their tattoos carefully, and if they do not, their carefree attitude towards body modification is usually a personal statement. Arguably that tattoos are expressive of their recipients *as persons* is a fundamental feature of the artform.

Our interpretive practices concerning tattoos also strongly suggest that we take tattoos to be contextualized by their recipients; either because they are expressive or because they are otherwise intimately related to their recipients. For example, we attribute to tattoos artistic properties that they would not have if they were merely on bodies. When we interpret a tattoo, we do not merely see the design in ink, we see that design in ink as realized through the person – as presented to the world by them. Michaud explicitly suggests that: "...every person acts as a unique and different canvas, which will display the work in different places and in different ways."³⁵ He states later that the person is the 'context' for the tattoo. We seek out this context when engaging with tattoos: we ask people what their tattoos

³⁰ Stephen Davies, *Adornment* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2020). 119, 125-126

³¹ Clinton R. Sanders and D. Angus Vail, "Introduction:: Body Alteration, Artistic Production, and the Social World of Tattooing," in *Customizing the Body, The Art and Culture of Tattooing* (Temple University Press, 2008), 1–35, 11.; Taylor Miatello, "Ritual. Identity. Obsession. Art. Tattoos," *ROM: Magazine of the Royal Ontario Museum; Toronto* (Toronto, Canada, Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, Winter 2016).; "Ancient Ink : The Archaeology of Tattooing," 16-17; Adrienne L. Kaeppler, *The Pacific Arts of Polynesia and Micronesia*, Oxford History of Art (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2008),.34.

³² Sanders and Vail, "Introduction," 2008. 21.

³³ Clinton R. Sanders and D. Angus Vail, "Conclusion:: Tattooing and the Social Definition of Art," in *Customizing the Body, The Art and Culture of Tattooing* (Temple University Press, 2008), 149–63, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1bw1j21.10>. 163. Though their study implied a deep misunderstanding of the artform, Loos and Lacassagne infamously used this same social belief to argue that tattooing and criminality were linked.

³⁴ "The Black Panther Project," Black-Owned Brooklyn, accessed August 14, 2020, <https://www.blackownedbrooklyn.com/stories/the-black-panther-project>.

³⁵ Michaud, "Are Tattoos Art?" 35.

mean to them and take their answers seriously. Furthermore, although many people have the same tattoos, we are still interested in what made that common design important to a particular recipient – in other words, we arguably attribute radically different properties to perceptually similar tattoos depending on who that tattoo is on. Artists recognize this connection between tattoos and their recipients as an important part of the artform, and often want to tattoo pieces that connect with the people they are on: Jodie Wentz in her artist bio says she ‘loves to create tattoos with a lot of meaning to the client’³⁶ and Kat Von D details the stories behind people she tattoos.³⁷

To ignore a tattoo’s relationship to its recipient would lead to a deficient artistic interpretation of the work. Taliaferro and Odden note: “...tattoo artists have defended their art as purely individualistic:... [tattoo reflect people’s] individual dreams, their particular loves ...”³⁸ Michaud argues that we *need* the tattoo recipient to tell us what the tattoo is or means to aesthetically interpret it.³⁹ This can mean accessing their co-artistic contribution, but it can also mean just determining their current attitudes towards their tattoos, as many people do not contribute to their tattoos as co-artists. Someone who has intimate knowledge of the tattoo recipient will often find more profound beauty in that recipient's tattoos in the same way that someone who has studied an artist will find more profound beauty in their work; a tattoo is artistically richer when one understands the tattoo recipient’s relationship to it, or when it seems to fit with or notably contrast their personality. That tattoos are fundamentally expressive, and that we often attribute artistic properties to them that require engagement with their recipients, are features of tattoos that are unexplained by SV and BV.

³⁶ TattooNow, “Jodie Wentz,” accessed August 13, 2020, <http://tattoosbyjodiewentz.com/artists.html>.

³⁷ Kat Von D, *The Tattoo Chronicles* (Harper Collins, 2010).

³⁸ Charles Taliaferro and Mark Odden, “Tattoos and the Tattooing Arts In Perspective,” in *Tattoos; I Ink, Therefore I Am*, ed. Robert Arp, Philosophy for Everyone (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012). 10.

³⁹ Michaud, “Are Tattoos Art?” 35. Michaud likens the relationship between the tattoo and its recipient to that of a painting and its title – a relationship which Levinson argues is often essential to the aesthetic interpretation and contextualization of a work of art. Jerrold Levinson, “Titles,” in *Music, Art, & Metaphysics* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 159–78.

§II.i. The Recipient View

There are good reasons to believe that tattoos are *artifacts related to particular persons*. In this case, the particular person is a tattoo recipient with a body, intentions, and a public persona, which includes their personality, behaviors, opinions, acts, and social status.⁴⁰ I, therefore, propose the Recipient View:

RV: tattoos are material art objects (ink-designs in skin), that are individuated by, and that have their artistic properties determined by: (i) design and ink, (ii) artist(s), (iii) time of creation, including art historical context, (iv) skin tone, texture, and elasticity, (v) body shape and placement, and (vi) the tattoo recipient as a person.⁴¹

Any difference in (i-vi) between tattoo x and tattoo y *at a time* is sufficient to make x and y non-identical. Furthermore, properties (i-vi) collectively determine the artistic properties of a tattoo. Of course, these are simply the individuation conditions for, and artistic contributors to, tattoos. Some finer metaphysical structure is needed.

Wesley Cray suggests that all material artworks can be conceived of as artifacts imbued with ideas, where imbued-with is a special relation.⁴² Cray defines imbuing as so:

an agent imbues an artifact *a* with an idea *i* just in case that agent presents *a* with the intention that, if *a* were presented to an appropriate artworld audience, *a* would elicit in that audience artistic or aesthetic appreciation of *i*.⁴³

Cray's suggestion is nice because they make no controversial claims about metaphysical composition and leave certain essential features of artworks open for interpretation. Notice also, that Cray's view can be easily modified into a contextualist one – we can simply add a special relation for each relevant context. In other words, it seems we can make sense of the contextualist's claim that artworks are *historically*

⁴⁰ From here on I will use 'tattoo recipient' and 'person' interchangeably.

⁴¹ A painting, given that it is not on a living thing cannot be *intentionally* affected by its canvas. However, it might be affected by it in some way. Goya's *Saturn Devouring his Son*, might have been a far less ominous artwork were it not painted on the walls of his home. However, this effect is far less potentially dynamic than the effect that I argue a tattoo recipient has on their tattoo.

⁴² Where 'artifacts' is taken to cover both made and found objects, events, tokens, and more. Wesley D. Cray, "Conceptual Art, Ideas, and Ontology," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 72, no. 3 (2014): 235–45. 239.

⁴³ The agent and the creator of the artifact need not be the same, for example, in cases of found art. CRAY. 239

embedded artifacts as a claim that artworks are artifacts that bear special relations to their artist and the art-historical context in which they were created. We can do this for my claim about tattoos as well.

The individuating properties that I selected for the tattoo above suggest that tattoos are *contextualized imbued artifacts on tattoo recipients*; they are designs that are inked by a particular artist(s), at a particular time in a particular art-historical context⁴⁴, and tattooed on a particular recipient. Modifying Cray's view for tattoos then, I get:

New Recipient View (RV⁺): A tattoo is (a design d designed-by designer x inked-by artist y imbued-with idea i by agent z at time t) that is inked-on (tattoo recipient r).⁴⁵

Here, the *contextualized imbued artifact* is everything in the first set of brackets, call this the 'inked-design' ('a design d designed-by designer x inked-by artist y imbued-with idea i by agent z at time t '), and the *tattoo recipient* is tattoo recipient r in the second set of brackets. The inked-design and the tattoo recipient are related by a special relation is inked-on. Importantly, only features of the tattoo contributed by the relations in the first set of brackets are individuator for the tattoo.

It is important to separate the recipient's role *as the recipient* (canvas) from their potential role as the imbuer, artist, or designer. If I receive a tattoo in memory of my mother, the idea that 'tattoo x represents Julia's mother' is imbued in the artwork at its time of creation by me *as an imbuer*, not as the recipient. If a recipient passively receives the work of an artist, they will not have any artistic influence on the work as an imbuer or artist. However, a recipient will always artistically influence the work *as its recipient*. The designer, artist, recipient, and imbuing agent may or may not be the same person(s).

⁴⁴ These individuating features (design, artist, time/art-historical context) can be built into the imbued idea on Cray's view, insofar as they affect the idea imbued or the imbuing date. I separate them from the imbued idea to make their presence more explicit, and to guarantee it.

⁴⁵ More precisely:

A tattoo is a (((design d) designed-by (designer(s) $x_1 \dots x_n$)) inked-by (artist(s) $y_1 \dots y_n$)) on imbued-with (idea i) by (agent(s) $z_1 \dots z_n$) at (time t)) that is inked-on (recipient r)

Where imbued-with is a quadratic relation between (((a design d) designed-by (designer x)) inked-by (artist y)), an (idea i), (agent z) and a (time t) and the other relations are dyadic. The brackets signify the things being related in each instance and the multiple variables are to indicate that there might be more than one artist, designer, etc.

To recap then, tattoos are *contextualized imbued artifacts on tattoo recipients*. This means that a tattoo is an artifact that bears special relations (designed-by, inked-by, imbued-by-x-at-t and is inked-on) to external influencers: the designer, imbuer, artist, time, and the tattoo recipient. Importantly, the external influencers (including the tattoo recipient), are *not* a part of the tattoo(s) in a mereological sense – the tattoo simply instantiates relations to those influencers.⁴⁶ The artistic properties of the tattoo depend on everything in RV^+ including these relations. The feature that is unique to tattoos is the special relation is inked-on. The special relation is inked-on is dyadic and relates an inked-design (‘a design d designed-by designer x inked-by artist y imbued-with idea i by agent z at time t ’) on the left to the recipient of that inked-design (tattoo recipient r) on the right. Some of a tattoo’s artistic properties then, depend on features of the recipient it bears the is inked-on relation in the same way that contextualists claim a painting’s artistic properties might depend on features of the things it is related to, such as its artist’s oeuvre. Almost any contextualist is going to agree that tattoos are minimally, contextualized imbued artifacts, the important part of my view is that they bear the is inked-on relation to tattoo recipients.

The relation is inked-on is importantly different than the other relations: it is a forward-looking relation as opposed to a backward-looking relation. Roughly, a forward-looking relation holds in virtue of some current relation and not in virtue of some past relation, whereas a backward-looking relation holds in virtue of some past relation. For example, the relation is-reading is a forward-looking relation and the relation has-read is a backward-looking relation. Cray makes it clear that imbued-by is backward-looking:⁴⁷ “[artifact] a has been imbued with [idea] i just in case there *has been* a time t such that an agent has imbued a with i at t .”⁴⁸ is inked-on however, is a forward-looking relation: is inked-on only holds at a given time t_n in virtue of the inked-design instantiating is inked-on with the relevant person *at*

⁴⁶ If anything, tattoos are probably parts of the tattoo recipient. Taliaferro and Odden, “Tattoos and the Tattooing Arts In Perspective.”11.

⁴⁷ Cray, “Conceptual Art, Ideas, and Ontology.”

⁴⁸ Added emphasis. Cray. 239-240

t_n and does not hold in virtue of the instantiation of some other relation from an earlier time t_{n-x} .⁴⁹ Like imbued-by, the relations designed-by and inked-by are also backward-looking.⁵⁰

Since inked-by, imbued-by, and designed-by are backward-looking, the artistic contributions from the imbuer(s), designer(s), or artist(s), including the intentions of the recipient insofar as they participate in one of those roles, are fixed at the tattoo's time of creation. This is consistent with my contextualist assumption – in some sense, the tattoo is historically embedded, it must be artistically interpreted with reference to its artistic context of creation. However, the *role of the tattoo recipient* does not end at the work's time of creation, is inked-on is forward-looking. Since is inked-on is forward-looking, the tattoo recipient is continuously providing an additional dynamic context within which one should artistically interpret the inked-design. One of the most important things to recognize about my view then, is that it establishes *dual contextualism*: tattoos are contextualized (i) like traditional artworks by their artist, designer, imbuer and their influences, and then subsequently (ii) by the person they get inked on, in a continuous, dynamic fashion. I say more about this in Chapter IV, but I will leave it for now.

An interesting result of the forward-looking nature of is inked-on is that the artistic properties of the tattoo that are determined by the is inked-on relation may change over time: as the tattoo recipient changes as a person, the context provided by tattoo recipient will change and the tattoo will potentially lose or gain artistic properties. For example, say at t_1 I am an even-tempered ballet dancer and I have tattoos of thin lines running down my arms which have the aesthetic property of elegance. Then, at t_2 I quit my job as a dancer, get a job as a personal trainer and the stress of the job causes me to yell a lot. Given this change, any aesthetic properties I hold with respect to t_1 such as elegance, may no longer be

⁴⁹ Where x is some positive number.

⁵⁰ Though a tattoo recipient's intentional attitudes towards their tattoo at the time we are interpreting it may be aesthetically relevant, they will still be held up against the time of creation intentions – which always remain if the tattoo recipient was the idea imbuer.

present. Perhaps at t_2 my newly aggressive persona makes the lines on my body artistically brutal as opposed to elegant.

What the above result suggests is that tattoos can change *artistically* as their tattoo recipients change. Properties like those that the tattoo will gain or lose in virtue of bearing is inked-on to the tattoo recipient (and that will subsequently affect the tattoos artistic properties) are typically disliked because their ‘relational character’ implies that the object which instantiates the property can change (gain or lose properties), despite intuitively not being the object of change. Francescotti says:

...Socrates undergoes [change] when he becomes shorter than Theaetetus simply by virtue of the latter's growth... Socrates acquires a new property (the property of being shorter than Theaetetus)... However, the change that occurs does not seem to be a genuine change in Socrates; Theaetetus is the real object of change.⁵¹

However, I am arguing that it is a defining feature of tattoos that they change in virtue of a change in a related entity: a tattoo changes because the recipient it is definitionally related to changes.⁵² Socrates is not definitionally related to Theaetetus, so this is no objection to my view.

⁵¹ Added emphasis to be consistent with my font changes when referring to properties. Robert Francescotti, “Mere Cambridge Properties,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (1999): 295–308. 295.

⁵² The change is not literally indirect, Socrates has in fact gained and lost a property, but he has done so *in virtue of* a change that Theaetetus has undergone, so it is indirect in that sense.

Chapter III. Persistence Conditions: Changes over time

I have argued that tattoos are individuated by and artistically influenced by their recipient. I have also provided the machinery needed to claim that a tattoo artistically changes as its recipient does. I will now argue in support of the claim that tattoos artistically change as their recipients do.

Some philosophers have argued that artworks cannot change – that they cannot gain or lose *artistic* properties over time (or hold different properties with respect to different times) – even if the material things they are dependant on can change over time through a process like deterioration. The view that the artistic properties of artworks are fixed comes from a metaphysical claim about what artworks *are*. The view is described by Richard Wollheim in *Art and its Objects*:

... out of the indefinitely many sets of properties that qualify the physical object over time, [there is] one privileged set, which reflects the optimal state of the object...[from this privileged set we] posit an aesthetic object [the artwork] and make this object the bearer (atemporally) of these, and only these properties.⁵³

In other words, Wollheim claims that works of art are incorruptible aesthetic objects, and the artifacts they are associated with are not; the artifact is simply the thing we use to determine what the artwork is.⁵⁴ Levinson has also proposed a similar view which fixes the artistic properties of artworks to prevent them from losing or gaining artistic properties in virtue of later art-historical developments⁵⁵, such as a musical work losing its gracefulness in virtue of later works being more graceful.⁵⁶ De Clerq endorses a view like Wollheim's and Levinson's in his paper on restoration.⁵⁷

Notice, however, that there is nothing about the nature of artistic properties *qua* artistic properties that implies they are unsusceptible to change. Views like Wollheim's are motivated by an aesthetic desire

⁵³ Richard Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects* (Cambridge University Press, 1980). 180

⁵⁴ Wollheim. 181.

⁵⁵ Here, any change imposed on the artwork would seem to originate from external factors. Alan H. Goldman, "ART HISTORICAL VALUE," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 33, no. 1 (January 1, 1993): 17–28, <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjaesthetics/33.1.17>. 18.

⁵⁶ Levinson clarifies that a work has future-oriented properties such as being art-historically influential, at its time of creation, even if it is not *recognized* that the work has this property until some later time. Jerrold Levinson, "Artworks and the Future," in *Music, Art, & Metaphysics* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 179–214.

⁵⁷ De Clerq primarily writes about restoration, but my responses to Levinson and Wollheim will work in response to De Clerq as well.

to preserve the artistic integrity and the art-historical significance of the artwork over time.⁵⁸

Considerations about when to derive the aesthetic object from are aesthetic ones, meant to preserve the artwork at its finest. For example, Wollheim, De Clercq, and Rohrbaugh offer cases where the ideal point in the development of a work happens sometime after its time of creation, such as after metal used in a building or a sculpture have obtained a certain patina.

If the reasons for fixing the artistic properties of artworks are *aesthetically motivated ones*, then the claim that we should fix the artistic properties of artworks faces obvious counterexamples if it is applied across the board. For example, Rohrbaugh notes that this view is unable to accommodate certain artworks that we do think gradually change:

... what of the modernist beach houses of Richard Neutra, whose railings were meant to erode continually in the salt air and are now, at places, delicate and paper-thin? Talk of their optimal design or thickness seems out of place. Nor is a painter forbidden to intend her painting to change over time in a similar, dynamic fashion by using, say, pigments she knows will continually oxidize.⁵⁹

Rohrbaugh also emphasizes cases where authors endorse a change in the work or themselves change the work, such as with later editions of literary works. Japanese aesthetics has also long embraced change as a central feature of artworks.⁶⁰ Notions such as *sabi* and *mono no aware* focus on the beauty of aging and the transience of being respectively. Replying that an artwork simply reaches its optimal point later in its life seems to miss the point. It is change itself that signifies transience.

Indeed, Rohrbaugh's objection and the acceptance of changing aesthetic properties in Japanese aesthetics do not challenge intuitions for fixing the properties of certain Western artworks such as paintings, but they do show that not *all* material artworks have fixed aesthetic properties. Deciding

⁵⁸ Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects*. 182

⁵⁹ Guy Rohrbaugh, "Artworks as Historical Individuals," *European Journal of Philosophy* 11, no. 2 (2003): 177–205, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0378.00182>. 187

⁶⁰ Graham Parkes and Adam Loughnane, "Japanese Aesthetics," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2018 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2018), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/japanese-aesthetics/>.

whether an artwork's properties are fixed then, seems to be an aesthetic matter – one that is relative to the artform being considered.

There are good reasons to think that the artistic properties of tattoos change over time. A tattoo recipient is a dynamic entity and part of the commitment to making art on a living, biological canvas is that it will age and change with time. Laura Sizer explicitly argues that the artistic properties of tattoos change over time as the tattoo recipient's body ages. Smith and Falkenstern explicitly claim that tattoos change as their tattoo recipients do, and many other authors in Arp's anthology also suggest this.⁶¹ Smith says tattoos are 'constantly being imbued with new, present meaning [by their recipients].'⁶²

Furthermore, Taliaferro and Odden note the fluidity of a tattoo's inked-design: "...the image may be permanent, but, contrastingly the meaning or interpretation of the image is fluid."⁶³

§III.i. Persistence Conditions: Death of the Recipient

I have argued that tattoos are contextualized imbued artifacts on tattoo recipients and their artistic properties can change over time as their recipient changes as a person. Typically, the persistence conditions of material artworks are simple because we can default to the persistence conditions of the artifact which constitutes them: if the material artifact is destroyed, the artwork is destroyed. A tattoo then, is surely destroyed if the inked-design is sufficiently destroyed – this includes when it is removed, or covered up, etc. Someone who endorses BV might also say a tattoo is destroyed when it is removed from the body or improperly mounted because the placement and shape of the tattoo are not preserved. The more interesting question is what happens if the tattoo recipient dies.

The death of the tattoo recipient can be construed as a partial destruction of the tattoo's canvas. However, tattoos and canvases are different sortals⁶⁴, the destruction of either the artwork or the canvas does not *traditionally* imply the destruction of the other. Preservation practices suggest that material

⁶¹ Falkenstern, "Illusions of Permanence"; Baltzer-Jaray and Rodriguez, "Fleshy Canvas."

⁶² Smith, "My Tattoo May Be Permanent, But My Memory Of It Isn't." 97

⁶³ Taliaferro and Odden, "Tattoos and the Tattooing Arts In Perspective." 8.

⁶⁴ Jerrold Levinson, "ZEMACH ON PAINTINGS," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 27, no. 3 (1987): 278–83, <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjaesthetics/27.3.278>.

artworks on canvases can survive without their canvas; the canvas transfer of panel paintings was practiced widely in the second half of the 19th century to preserve artworks from rotting away. Tattoos are occasionally removed from their recipients after they die and mounted as artworks.⁶⁵ Artist ex de Medici even has a deal with one of her tattoo recipients that she can display his body after his death to preserve the bodysuit of flowers she tattooed on him.⁶⁶ Despite these cases, I do not think a tattoo can truly survive the death of its recipient *as a tattoo*.

RV⁺ asserts that the tattoo instantiates a special relation the inked-design bears to the recipient; the recipient is not a typical canvas. When the tattoo recipient dies, this relation is destroyed: is inked-on takes only extant relata. At best, the inked-design will bear a new relation to the now-dead recipient: was inked-on. Of course, rather than saying the tattoo is destroyed by the death of its recipient, we might simply say that the tattoo is now (or always was) instantiating the relation was inked-on. What the question of a tattoo's persistence conditions on my account ultimately rests on is whether the holding of the relation is inked-on between the inked-design and the tattoo recipient is an essential property of the tattoo.⁶⁷

I think there are some good reasons to think that is inked-on is an essential relation of the tattoo. For one, I have been arguing that people change and that this is an important feature of what it is to tattoo on them. If the tattoo recipient died and/or the tattoo was instantiating was inked-on, the tattoo would not change since was inked-on is a backward-looking relation. Secondly, tattoo recipients are entities that die and recognizing this is part of working in the medium. The preservation of a tattoo's short lifespan is, I think, aesthetically valuable: "The blossoms of the Japanese cherry trees...are more highly valued because of their transience...It is precisely the evanescence of their beauty that evokes the wistful feeling

⁶⁵ I am not saying anything about a tattoo's persistence conditions here, though I use the term 'tattoos'. "Ancient Ink : The Archaeology of Tattooing." 133.

⁶⁶ Thanks to James Mock for this example in his conference comments. Whether a tattoo would be destroyed or just notably harmed by the lack of a full body preservation is unclear, but this is not relevant for my case.

⁶⁷ I think the relation is between the inked-design and the recipient it was initially tattooed on – in the formal presentation of the view this is the 'recipient *r*'.

of *mono no aware* in the viewer.”⁶⁸ Even though we can preserve an inked-design by cutting off the recipient’s skin and hanging it up, the removal starkly reveals the importance of the recipient to the tattoo; we cannot ask them what their tattoos are about or interpret them in the light of their personality.⁶⁹

An analogy to street art also suggests that tattoos should not be able to survive their recipient’s death: or at minimum, removal from their living body. Dadlez, Sizer, Sanders and Vail, and Botz-Bornstein all compare tattooing to street art.⁷⁰ Riggle suggests that street art is destroyed if it is taken out of the street. Both tattooing and street art consider their canvases to be aesthetically important to their works and reject strictly formal critique: they cannot be evaluated strictly with reference to their visual properties, they must be contextualized by their canvas.⁷¹ Both artforms also similarly commit to changing and ephemeral canvases. Riggle says explicitly that part of what it is to make street art is to accept that the art is in a public space and is therefore at the mercy of that space, including the changes made to it, and its lifespan.⁷² Similarly, art on a tattoo recipient is at the mercy of that person.

Dahl’s macabre fiction *Skin* ends with the suggestion that an old man’s tattoo was forcefully removed to be sold *as a painting*. I think that Dahl got something right: the tattoo is no longer a tattoo when it is removed from its recipient, it has become different artwork – a gruesome painting of sorts.⁷³ There is so much missing that we are reduced to treating it like it is a member of a different artform - a mere painting in an unconventional medium rather than the most intimate of artworks. This, of course, requires further attention that I cannot give it here.

⁶⁸ Parkes and Loughnane, “Japanese Aesthetics.”

⁶⁹ Julia Minarik, “Skin; On Living Canvases and Their Artworks,” in *American Society for Aesthetics 77th Annual Meeting*, 2019, 1–11.

⁷⁰ Thorsten Botz-Bornstein, “Female Tattoos and Graffiti,” in *Tattoos; I Ink, Therefore I Am*, ed. Robert Arp, Philosophy for Everyone (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012) 58-60 ; Sizer, “The Art of Tattoos” 9-10; Sanders and Vail, “Conclusion” 161-62; Dadlez, “Ink, Art and Expression.” 748. Riggle distinguishes between street art and graffiti, the other authors do not make the distinction. Insofar as one endorses a distinction between street art and graffiti, art-tattoos and graffiti-like tattoos might be similarly ontologically separable. Nick Riggle, “Street Art: The Transfiguration of the Commonplaces,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 68, no. 3 (2010): 243–57. 252.

⁷¹ Riggle, “Street Art.” 249.

⁷² Riggle.

⁷³ Roald Dahl, “Skin,” in *Skin and Other Stories*, 2000.

In summary, I have argued that tattoos can *change*. More precisely, they change as the tattoo recipient they are on changes both physically and socially. No existing arguments against change in artworks suggest otherwise, as these arguments tend to depend on aesthetic arguments about the artform under consideration. Furthermore, I have suggested that the holding of the relation is inked-on between the inked-design and the tattoo recipient is an essential property of the tattoo. This means that a tattoo is destroyed when the person it is essentially related to dies.

A tattoo then, is this: ((a design d designed-by designer x inked-by artist y imbued-with idea i by agent z at time t) that is inked-on (recipient r)), where is inked-on is an essential dyadic, forward-looking relation (an essential property of the tattoo) and is such that the tattoo is liable to change as the recipient changes.

Chapter IV. On the Is-Inked-On Relation and Artistic Interpretation

I have argued that tattoos instantiate a special relation is inked-on. So far, I have primarily described the formal features of is inked-on: it is a forward-looking, dyadic relation between an inked-design on the right and the recipient of that inked-design on the left. I must now say more about how the is inked-on relation features into our artistic interpretations of tattoos. In this section, I describe more precisely what the is inked-on relation is in practice, and how it is that a person determines some of the artistic properties of their tattoo(s) simply in virtue of being the tattoo recipient.

For a relation to hold is for its relata to be interacting in some way. For instance, consider the relation is-reading: for is-reading to hold at some time t_n is for the reader (left-hand relatum) to be performing a complex interpretive action directed towards something readable (the right-hand relatum) and for the left and right-hand relata to therefore be of a certain kind (a reader and a readable thing respectively). Although I have presented the is inked-on relation, including some of its formal properties, I have yet to say in this sense, precisely what it is for the is inked-on to hold.

What it is for the is inked-on relation to hold is this: at the time t_n at which it holds, the inked-design (left-hand relatum) is being ***both physically and socially presented by*** (contextualized by) the tattoo recipient (right-hand relatum). To be presented by something is to be situated within a context by it: to be displayed to viewers *in a particular way*. To present something is to direct the way we look at that thing by dictating what features of it we should direct our attention to and the way that we should interpret those features.⁷⁴ The right-hand relatum (the entity doing the presenting) directs the way we see the left-hand relatum (the entity being presented). For example, a line can be harsh or elegant depending on the way it is presented (the context in which it is situated). Presentation is determined by the right-hand relatum and constrained by the left-hand relatum. What the is inked-on relation tells us then, is that

⁷⁴ Any contextualist view must accept this. Although, the exact notion that is at play here can perhaps be developed further. For example, Wittgenstein is well known for his similar notion of seeing-as. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953). 195^e

the tattoo recipient presents the inked-design and therefore determines the way that the inked-design must be seen at any given time.

Here you might be wondering why I use the phrase ‘presented by’ rather than ‘contextualized by’ when I earlier compared the is inked-on relation to other contextualist relations – I still maintain that they are comparable. I use ‘presented by’ to highlight the forward-looking feature of the relation as well as the fact that the tattoo recipient may be actively or consciously contextualizing their tattoos, *as well as* passively doing so. Importantly, the tattoo recipient is always *passively presenting* their tattoos, although conscious actions can also affect presentation.

At this point, an important question arises: how do we determine which aspects of the recipient factor into the presentation of the inked-design and affect the artistic properties of their tattoos? Not every intention or feature of the person’s persona should affect the artistic properties of their tattoos. For example, it should not turn out that my intention to have soup for lunch features into the presentation of the inked-design of a sunflower that I take to represent my mother – although my intentions concerning my mother ought to.⁷⁵

Based on the explanation of the is inked-on relation that I just offered, I have an easy reply to the above concern. The intentions and features of the recipient’s persona that affect the presentation of the inked-design are *constrained by* that inked-design since it is the inked-design as originally created that is being presented. By ‘constrained by’ I mean that the intentions and features of the persona that affect the artistic properties of the tattoo are only those that are relevant to the content of the inked-design – they are only those that can affect the way it is presented or seen. This constraint explains why we do not have free reign over the meanings of our tattoos. It also explains how we might unintentionally affect them. The inked-design can be seen in different ways, but the field of possible ways is limited by the original set of

⁷⁵ One might notice that the question I just answered is similar to one that David Davies must answer on behalf of his performance account of artworks. The version of this problem for performance accounts was initially articulated by Gregory Currie and then by David Davies. David Davies, *Art as Performance* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2003). 128-129 & 153.

properties ascribed to the work. If the original inked-design is vague, then the range of features that can affect the way that it is seen is broader.

One might wonder at this point whether there is a tension between the fact that the inked-design is historically contextualized and the fact that it can then receive more context from the tattoo recipient over time that might change its properties. I do not believe that there is tension here. Yes, some of the tattoo's properties are indeed fixed at its time of creation, for example, that the design is of a certain art-historical style or that the tattoo recipient initially received it for some reason. However, the tattoo itself is that historically contextualized imbued artifact *as presented by the tattoo recipient* - in other words, both contexts must be taken into account to properly interpret the tattoo. Here is an example: Say Damian receives a tattoo of a cross when he is 18 and claims that it represents his religious commitments.⁷⁶ Later on in life, Damian becomes disillusioned with the church and no longer considers himself to be religious, he has lost the faith that the tattoo originally symbolized for him. When Damian loses his faith, the tattoo no longer represents his current religious commitments, it must now be seen as a tattoo that – both represents his previous religious commitments and his now-lost faith or perhaps it represents his personal experience of losing his faith. There is no contradiction here, nor is the historical meaning undercut, that meaning in fact must be understood if one is to recognize and fully understand the new meaning of the tattoo.

It is also worth emphasizing that the artistic properties of a tattoo are not viewer-relative. The artistic properties of tattoos are determined strictly by the tattoo recipient, including that recipient's intentions and persona. It is not the case that the ways a tattoo can be seen are different for each viewer. The exact properties had by the tattoo will also differ over time and each independent evaluation may afford different properties to the tattoo, but this is not a result of individual viewers, rather, it is simply a result of changes the tattoo recipient herself will undergo over time. That said, the ways that something can be seen are partially determined by social facts at certain times – so perhaps they are somewhat

⁷⁶ Thanks to Damian Melamedoff for this example.

audience relative in a broader sense. For example, a symbol may be possibly seen as socially acceptable at one time and only seen as unacceptable in another – in this way tattoos may be susceptible to changes in the social world. Furthermore, the public persona of the tattoo recipient may be grounded by social facts and may be derivatively dependant on the social world in that sense, insofar as our personas are developed within a social context. Notice, however, that it is the actual persona of the tattoo recipient, not the perceived persona of the recipient that matters to the presentation of the inked-design.⁷⁷ Unfair biases towards persons, therefore, should not affect how a tattoo is presented; people can wrongly interpret tattoos if they do not know the person whose tattoos they are admiring.

Another concern one could have about the account I have just offered is that it is unclear whether someone analyzing a tattoo, who had all the information before them (including knowledge of the tattoo recipient and their intentions) would be able to describe what is relevant to the inked-design's presentation by their recipient at any given time. I think this is true, there is going to be some indeterminacy about exactly which properties of the tattoo recipient are relevant to their tattoos. Furthermore, it is unlikely that anyone aside from the tattoo recipient will ever have complete epistemic access to the properties of the tattoo recipient that could determine the artistic properties of their tattoos; determining the exact properties the tattoo has as a result of its relation with its recipient will regularly face epistemic barriers. That said, I do not see these concerns as being a problem for my account. I think this indeterminacy and epistemic inaccessibility is present and important to capture.

The final point I wish to discuss here is whether a presentation is a kind of performance. Some philosophers such as Michaud have suggested that "...it is possible to consider a tattoo as a piece of performance art..."⁷⁸ Although Michaud does not argue for that claim, he follows it up with a suggestion

⁷⁷ I do not think that a tattoo is a rational reconstruction of how its inked design is presented. If it were, this would mean that one could rationally reconstruct a tattoo after the death of their bearer (assuming they knew the bearer well enough) and the tattoo would presumably survive. I think this is false. It also seems wildly unclear what would be reconstructed.

⁷⁸ Sizer in a forthcoming piece also suggests that flash tattoos are 'more like performances than prints.' Nicolas Michaud, "Are Tattoos Art?," in *Tattoos; I Ink, Therefore I Am*, ed. Robert Arp, Philosophy for Everyone (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 34.; Laura Sizer, "From Flash to Flesh: Flash Tattoos and Repeatable Artworks," 2021.

similar to my own, calling the person the ‘context’ for the piece. The problem I addressed above concerning what features of the tattoo recipient factor into the tattoo is also similar to a problem faced by Davies’s performance account of artworks.⁷⁹ That said, I do not think Michaud is correct to say that a tattoo is a piece of performance art.

Presentation, as I have described it, is not performance. For one, performances are self-contained, intentionally initiated events which presentation is not; presentation is ongoing and passive (it need not be intentionally initiated). I suppose one could say the ‘event’ of presentation can be taken to begin at the point of evaluation and end at the conclusion of the evaluation – but this will always be a *mere proxy*. Second, while performances themselves are often considered artworks presentation is more akin to a set of instructions concerning how the work must be interpreted in light of the person it is on.⁸⁰ Third, traditional performances are of something that is a repeatable work. I do not think that the person walking around is performing their tattoo in this way at all times, nor do I wish to say that tattoos are repeatable. Finally, if we look at a performance view of artworks like Davies’s, he claims that artworks are performances (events) that result in a focus of appreciation (the physical art-object) and my view says that tattoos are focuses of appreciation (the inked-design) that are presented by their recipients. Performance generates the artwork, presentation only contextualizes it.

To sum up this section: the is inked-on relation is a relation between an inked-design on the left and a tattoo recipient on the right. When an inked-design is inked-on a tattoo recipient, it is *presented by* that tattoo recipient both physically and socially. A tattoo is an inked-design as presented by its recipient. This presentation is of the inked-design and is therefore constrained by the features of the inked-design. If the tattoo recipient changes as a person both physically or socially, they can change the artistic properties of their tattoos if those changes happen to affect the way their tattoos are presented.

⁷⁹ See footnote 75 above.

⁸⁰ The only way to access that set of instructions of course, is to examine that person themselves at a given time, since the instructions the person provides are constantly changing (since the person themselves is constantly changing).

§IV.i Tattoo Recipient Intentionalism and Un-intentionalism.

I have argued that a tattoo is an inked-design that is inked-on (presented by) a tattoo recipient.

The intentions of the tattoo recipient are a major contributing factor to the presentation of the inked-design, and therefore to the artistic properties of the tattoo. The purpose of this section is to determine how a tattoo recipient's intentions affect the presentation of the inked-designs on them. The intentional power that one has over the artistic properties of their tattoos will depend in part on the existing artistic features of the inked-design that constitutes the tattoo. Here are some examples of *kinds of* inked-designs that will help situate the following debate:

Tattoo 1: A word or name in a language with a predetermined semantic meaning

Tattoo 2: A socially charged symbol

Tattoo 3: A basic image (such as a butterfly, flower, or skull)

Notice that I am focusing on the role of the tattoo recipient *qua recipient*. I am not making any claims about how a tattoo recipient's intentions might affect the artistic properties of their tattoos insofar as they are a designer, artist, or imbuer.

This section is fundamentally concerned with artistic interpretation. I assume a few things about artistic interpretation and artistic meaning. For one, I assume that the meaning of an artwork includes evaluative components such as *beauty* and may be partially semantic or symbolic.⁸¹ Second, I assume that artistic interpretation is concerned with identifying the meaning of an artwork by interpreting the artistic, semantic, and symbolic properties of that work. Third (and last), I assume it is at least possible that there can be many acceptable artistic interpretations of one artwork and I try to present an account of tattoo interpretation that can allow for this. These are reasonable assumptions.⁸²

⁸¹ For a defense of these features of artistic interpretation see Gaut. Gaut might take meaning to be one part of interpretation, and evaluation to be another. For ease, I take the meaning of the work to include evaluative properties. Berys Gaut, "Interpreting the Arts: The Patchwork Theory," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51, no. 4 (1993): 597–609, <https://doi.org/10.2307/431892>.

⁸² Kiefer discusses the implications of ontology for our definition of meaning. Alex Kiefer, "The Intentional Model in Interpretation," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 63, no. 3 (June 2005): 271–81, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0021-8529.2005.00207.x>.

A lively debate in the philosophy of art on interpretation concerns how an *artist's* intentions are related to the meaning of their artworks. Specifically, it concerns the relation between the following two claims:

(1a) the artist *a* intended some feature *f* to mean *m* in work *w*

(2a) feature *f* means *m* in work *w*

Call this, the 'artist intentionalism debate'. Strict artist intentionalists argue that (1a) and (2a) are logically equivalent. At the other extreme, strict anti-intentionalists argue that (1a) and (2a) are completely unrelated such that an artist's intentions indicate nothing about, or have no bearing on, the meaning of their artwork. Many philosophers now agree that the truth about how an artist's intentions relate to the meaning of their artworks lies somewhere in the middle of these extremes – although, they hardly agree on what the precise middle point is.⁸³

I am not concerned with the artist intentionalism debate. However, the artist intentionalism debate can provide the structure for the problem introduced above concerning how a tattoo recipient's intentions can affect the presentation of the inked-designs on them. Call this the recipient intentionalism debate. On one construal, the recipient intentionalism debate concerns the relationship between the following two premises:

(1r) the tattoo recipient *r* qua recipient intends their tattoo *x* to mean *m* at *t*⁸⁴

(2r) tattoo *x* means *m* at *t*

We *might* think that (1r) and (2r) are logically equivalent. Call this 'strict recipient intentionalism.' This means that the tattoo means *whatever* the tattoo recipient intends it to mean at the relevant time of evaluation *and nothing else*. Strict recipient intentionalism is plausible for the following reason: tattoos are importantly artworks that are expressive or representative of the people they are on –

⁸³ Hans Maes, "Intention, Interpretation, and Contemporary Visual Art," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 50, no. 2 (April 1, 2010): 121–38, <https://doi.org/10.1093/aesthj/ayp051>. 121.

⁸⁴ I add 'at *t*' to account for changes in the tattoo recipient's intentions throughout their lifetime, since tattoos change.

often in biographical ways – and biographical interpretations that favour the tattoo recipients’ intentions in artistic interpretations of their tattoos might be important for preserving the role of tattoos as expressive vehicles.⁸⁵ Note that the equivalence between (1r) and (2r) references the ‘tattoo recipient *qua* tattoo recipient’ in other words, the tattoo recipient as a person simply in their role as the recipient (canvas) of the artwork. This does not concern how or whether the tattoo recipient *qua* artist determines the artistic properties of the work.⁸⁶ Strict recipient intentionalism is incorrect but discussing why this is so is enlightening.

Strict recipient intentionalism is wrong because what a recipient intends their tattoo to communicate is not always what it does communicate. The argument for why strict recipient intentionalism is wrong runs like so:

(p.i) If some tattoos can be construed as artistic utterances then strict recipient intentionalism is false

(p.ii) Some tattoos can be construed as artistic utterances

(c) Therefore, strict recipient intentionalism is false.

The first premise (p.i) requires substantial explanation. David Davies says that we can think of literary artworks as artistic statements or utterances ‘*as articulated in a vehicle in virtue of an artistic medium*’⁸⁷ and take the relationship between artistic meaning and artist’s intentions to be largely analogous as the relationship between semantic meaning and speaker intentions – although artistic statements are much more replete with potential meaning than semantic statements are.⁸⁸ Davies calls

⁸⁵ This is often used as an argument *against* strict artist intentionalism called the biographer’s fallacy – it is fallacious to assume that our art-interpretive practices aim to treat artworks as ‘oblique biographies’ of the artist. Specifically this has been a charge against strict artist intentionalism for literary artworks such as fictions. Noël Carroll, “Art, Intention and Conversation,” in *Beyond Aesthetics : Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 157; Livingston, “Intentionalism in Aesthetics.” 833.

⁸⁶ In cases where the tattoo recipient is *also* the artist of their tattoo, the artist of their tattoo design (or the imbuer of the artwork, insofar as one takes the imbuer to be a kind of artist), that their intentions qua artist (or imbuer) will, if one accepts the strict form of artist intentionalism, entail that the artwork means what they intended it to mean.

⁸⁷ David Davies, “Semantic Intentions, Utterance Meaning, and Work Meaning,” in *Contemporary Readings in the Philosophy of Literature: An Analytic Approach*, ed. David Davies and Carl Matheson (Broadview Press, 2008). 178.

⁸⁸ Davies. 168 & 178.

strict artist intentionalism in the philosophy of literature ‘Humpty Dumptyism’, referring to Humpty Dumpty’s infamous exchange with Alice in *Through the Looking Glass*⁸⁹:

“When I use a word,’ Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, ‘it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less.’

‘The question is,’ said Alice, ‘whether you can make words mean so many different things.’

‘The question is,’ said Humpty Dumpty, ‘which is to be master — that’s all.’⁹⁰

The use of Humpty Dumpty’s quotation is supposed to show that it is ludicrous to take utterance meaning (and analogously artistic meaning) to be determined strictly by the speaker’s intentions (the artist’s intentions) because the pre-determined meaning of words (used in certain contexts) is needed to ensure that language is a useful tool for communication - ‘The speaker is obviously *not*, as Humpty Dumpty suggests, ‘the master.’⁹¹ This shows (p.i), if tattoos can be construed as utterances (like literary artworks are), then tattoos fall prey to Davies’s objection, and strict recipient intentionalism is false.

Strict *artist* intentionalism is a view that is almost universally panned by the participants in the artist intentionalism debate for the reason Davies provided.⁹² However, the rejection of strict artist intentionalism (of the equivalence between (1a) and (2a)) does not *logically* entail the acceptance or rejection of strict recipient intentionalism. Although they concern themselves with similar problems of interpretation, (1a) and (2a) are different premises than (1r) and (2r) and they contain different constituents: the artist and the tattoo recipient respectively.⁹³ The artist intentionalist debate has occurred primarily in the *philosophy of literature*⁹⁴ and Gover notes that many philosophers have skirted over

⁸⁹ Davies. 167.

⁹⁰ Lewis Carroll 1832-1898, *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (Chicago : W.B. Conkey Co., 1900), <https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/9910056743202121>.

⁹¹ Davies, “Semantic Intentions, Utterance Meaning, and Work Meaning”; Gaut, “Interpreting the Arts.” 597

⁹² Maes, “Intention, Interpretation, and Contemporary Visual Art.”

⁹³ The two debates are however, concerned with similar enough problems to justify the use of the artistic intentionalism debate to illuminate the recipient intentionalist one.

⁹⁴ Following Wimsatt and Beardsley’s famous challenge to strict artist intentionalism in *The Intentional Fallacy*. Most of the work has been focused on literary artworks. W.K. Wimsatt and M.C. Beardsley, “The Intentional Fallacy,” in *Contemporary Readings in the Philosophy of Literature: An Analytic Approach*, ed. David Davies and Carl Matheson (Broadview Press, 2008), 121–35; Livingston, “Intentionalism in Aesthetics.”; Maes, “Intention, Interpretation, and Contemporary Visual Art”; K. E. Gover, “What Is Humpty-Dumptyism in Contemporary Visual Art? A Reply to Maes,” *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 52, no. 2 (April 1, 2012): 169–81,

applying arguments from this debate to the visual arts.⁹⁵ Gover argues along with Kiefer that we cannot take the debate that has occurred in the philosophy of literature over artist intentionalism to be directly transferrable to the visual arts.⁹⁶ Bailey Szustak suggests that what determines the view on interpretation we need to take is the art form in question itself.⁹⁷ Considering that tattoo art is a visual art, we might think that typical reasons for rejecting strict artist intentionalism may not count as reasons to reject strict recipient intentionalism.

So then, the strict recipient intentionalist has a defense: not all visual arts (like tattoos) can be straightforwardly construed as artistic utterances.⁹⁸ In the literary arts, the vehicle for the utterance (the material that is used to make the statement) is words or parts of language, which despite being used for artistic purposes, still have their determinate meanings. In tattooing, the vehicle for the artistic utterance is the inked-design the meaning of which may not be pre-determined by conventions of communication. However, if the goal is to provide an account of interpretation for all tattoos, then we only need to show that *some* tattoos can and should be construed as artistic utterances in order to disprove strict recipient intentionalism.

In defense of (p.ii): even if you do not think all tattoos can be construed as artistic utterances, it is obvious that some can be: many art-tattoos are of words, phrases, or characters. For example, people often

<https://doi.org/10.1093/aesthj/ayr048>; Jerrold Levinson, "Extending Art Historically," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51, no. 3 (1993): 411–23, <https://doi.org/10.2307/431513>; Daniel O. Nathan, "A Paradox in Intentionalism," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 45, no. 1 (January 1, 2005): 32–48, <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjaesthetics/ayi003>; Davies, "Semantic Intentions, Utterance Meaning, and Work Meaning"; E.D. Hirsch, "Validity in Interpretation," in *Contemporary Readings in the Philosophy of Literature: An Analytic Approach*, ed. David Davies and Carl Matheson (Broadview Press, 2008).

⁹⁵ See footnote 27 in Gover where they goes over some examples. Lavendar assumes that the debate is analogous for visual arts, specifically dance. K. E. Gover, "What Is Humpty-Dumptyism in Contemporary Visual Art? A Reply to Maes," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 52, no. 2 (April 1, 2012): 169–81, <https://doi.org/10.1093/aesthj/ayr048> 179.; Larry Lavender, "Intentionalism, Anti-Intentionalism, and Aesthetic Inquiry: Implications for the Teaching of Choreography," *Dance Research Journal* 29, no. 1 (1997): 23–42, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1478235>.

⁹⁶ Gover, "What Is Humpty-Dumptyism in Contemporary Visual Art?"; Kiefer, "The Intentional Model in Interpretation."

⁹⁷ Gaut says we need a patchwork theory: a different approach to intentionalism for different properties of the same work. Bailey Szustak, "Pragmatic Intentionalism: A New Look at Art Interpretation," 2015, 57; Gaut, "Interpreting the Arts"; Gover, "What Is Humpty-Dumptyism in Contemporary Visual Art?" 28

⁹⁸ Gover, "What Is Humpty-Dumptyism in Contemporary Visual Art?"

get tattoos of words or phrases in a language foreign to them. Recipients of these kinds of tattoos could be mistaken about their true meaning if they do not know the language and were incorrectly informed of the meaning of the word or phrase.⁹⁹ Many tattoos of social symbols are also intended by their recipients to be artistic utterances, specifically indications of group membership, status, or biographical records. These powerful social symbols often have meanings that one's intentions cannot overcome: If I get a tattoo of a very well-known social symbol, perhaps one of a hate group, then I cannot, with my *mere* intentions trump the meaning of that symbol. In other words, a tattoo recipient cannot present (recontextualize) that symbol with a meaning other than the one that it has because it is simply too socially charged or significant. That the meanings of these symbols are fixed is evidenced by the fact that people get tattoos like these removed or covered up rather than just reinterpreting their meaning. Tattoos of social symbols, in order to act appropriately *as social symbols*, must also conform to the norms and conventions of communication. If our goal is to define all tattoos, and at least some tattoos can be rightly construed as artistic utterances then Davies's argument goes through.¹⁰⁰ The strict form of tattoo recipient intentionalism is false.¹⁰¹

The above example disproves strict recipient intentionalism – however it is worth highlighting that it is a specific version of a much more general problem: strict recipient intentionalism is incompatible with the account of meaning I have assumed. According to strict recipient intentionalism (1r) and (2r) are logically equivalent, so a tattoo means *whatever* the tattoo recipient intends it to mean. According to the account of meaning I have assumed, our interpretative efforts are directed primarily at the artistic properties of the tattoo and by proxy, whatever determines them. The artistic properties of the tattoo are

⁹⁹ I guess one could imagine an artwork where someone is trying to make a statement about utterances in languages and utterances in art, and the correct way to interpret their tattoo of some linguistic term would be to interpret it entirely in the light of their intentions, but perhaps this is the exception that proves the rule; one must've recognized the interpretative conventions and then intended to subvert them in order for the artwork to be successful.

¹⁰⁰ It is worth highlighting that this argument also applies to a modified version of strict recipient intentionalism that takes the relationship between (1r) and (2r) to be logical implication rather than equivalence.

¹⁰¹ If you don't like this version, there is also the evaluative version as presented by Gaut: if evaluative terms are built into the meaning of the work (which they should be and which I have assumed above) then strict intentionalism is obviously wrong because intending something to be beautiful surely does not make it beautiful. See Gaut on the falsity of the interpretation/evaluation dichotomy. Gaut, "Interpreting the Arts." 598.

not only determined by the recipient, they are also determined by the inked-design, including its artistic features such as styles (traditional, neo-traditional, blackwork, realist, new school, etc.) which the recipient could reasonably be ignorant of and of course, the *artist's* intentions. If both strict recipient intentionalism and my account of meaning were held, then the tattoo recipient's intentions would have to be the sole determiner of the artistic properties of the tattoo – which is simply false. Part of being a canvas is giving yourself up to the artist; allowing yourself to be a medium from which they can work their artistic magic. When we are interpreting a tattoo, although we care about the recipient's intentions, we do not care only about them.

So strict recipient intentionalism is wrong because tattoos can have semantic and symbolic meaning outside of what the tattoo recipient intends them to have, and that understanding the recipient's expression and intentions is not the primary aim of tattoo interpretation anyways. A logical equivalence between (1r) and (2r) was too a bold claim.

A far more modest claim can be formulated:

(3r) the tattoo recipient *r* qua recipient intends their tattoo *x* to mean *m* at *t* and *m* does not contradict *x*'s other meaning properties.

(4r) tattoo *x* partially means *m* at *t*

The new claim then is that (3r) implies (4r). Call this 'weak recipient intentionalism.' On this view, the tattoo partially means whatever the recipient intends it to mean, as long as that intention does not contradict the other meaning properties of the tattoo (to avoid Davies's objection).¹⁰² I also wish to reject weak recipient intentionalism.

Weak recipient intentionalism should be rejected because it allows for entirely unrelated intentions to affect the artistic properties of tattoos; as long as an intention *does not contradict* the other meaning properties of a tattoo, then the tattoo's meaning is partially determined by the intention. In other

¹⁰² I say semantic and symbolic only so that the recipient's intentions do not end up trampled by the artist's or designer's etc. If I said 'incompatible' meaning properties then the recipient's meaning contribution would have to 'vote last' or wait until all the other meaning of the tattoo was determined before contributing to it.

words, it cannot account for the fact that a tattoo's artistic properties are partially constrained by the inked-design that is being presented by the tattoo recipient. This charge is best clarified through the presentation of an example.

In Soul Survivor Tattoo in Winnipeg, there is an old candy machine filled with tattoo stencils. For \$80.00 you can 'play the vending machine' and you get whatever tattoo comes out of that vending machine for the \$80.00 price tag. Say I intend to accept *whatever* comes out of that vending machine and get it tattooed. Furthermore, say that I do not look at the tattoo while it is being tattooed. Importantly, I did not agree to accept the specific design of the tattoo – nor did my intentions seem to be contributing to the development of the tattoo in any way. In this case, I have intentions towards that tattoo, but those intentions are not anchored by anything relevant to the artwork, they are simply directed to some particular object in space – whatever was tattooed on me. My intentions towards the tattoo are entirely arbitrary; whatever came out of the machine would have been given the same meaning.¹⁰³ In this case, it would seem wrong to say that the tattoo should be interpreted in the context of my intention when I made that intention without knowing what was to be interpreted. We could create other scenarios more extreme than this one, cases for example where I draw the meaning of my tattoo out of a hat or change it every day based on the first line of a book I pick off of a shelf.

That the tattoo recipient's intentions towards their tattoo could be both entirely unrelated to the tattoo and contribute to its aesthetic properties seems problematic. Part of the reason for thinking that an *artist's* intentions are so important for the interpretation of a work of art is that those intentions guided the work's creation.¹⁰⁴ There is never a case where the artist will have arbitrary or unrelated intentions towards an artwork they create because the artist adds meaning to the work via the creative process; they

¹⁰³ This would never happen in the artistic intentionalism case – the artist's intentions are added to the work via their act of creation, so even if the artist has intentions that are seemingly unrelated to their work, one could argue that those intentions are still baked into the work in some way given that they entered the work through the process of its creation.

¹⁰⁴ Paisley Livingston, *Art and Intention: A Philosophical Study* (Oxford University Press, 2005). This is also obviously true in the case of tattoos which require a deliberate action.

use materials (ink) and realize the design on the tattoo recipient's body.¹⁰⁵ In order to justify weak recipient intentionalism, one would need some explanation for taking the recipient's intentions to be relevant to the work *in every instance* (where the intentions do not contradict other meaning properties). Although in the account I have presented, the intentions of the recipient in these cases might initially seem to be relevant to the presentation of the tattoo, if one had all the information it seems like they should not take the tattoo to mean what the recipient has arbitrarily claimed it does.

The above objection is part of my motivation for formulating the inked-on relation as I did; the recipient is relevant to the artistic properties of the tattoo insofar as they contribute to a *way of presenting the inked-design*. Here is a new formulation then:

(5r) the tattoo recipient r qua recipient intends their tattoo x to mean m at t and m does not contradict x 's other meaning properties, and m is relevant to the inked-design that constitutes tattoo x .

(4r) tattoo x partially means m at t

The new claim is that (5r) implies (4r), call this 'relevant recipient intentionalism.' This view is quite close, but it too is incorrect. What this implication fails to capture is that the intentions of the tattoo recipient do not always align with how the tattoo recipient actually presents the tattoo to the world. I will explain.

According to the above implication between (5r) and (4r), a tattoo partially means whatever the recipient intends it to mean, as long as the intention is relevant to the inked-design and does not contradict the other meaning properties of the tattoo. However, the implication between (5r) and (4r) cannot explain why knowledge of, or an encounter with, the tattoo recipient can occasionally change our interpretations of their tattoos in ways that challenge their explicitly communicated intentions. In other words, a recipient's intentions must not only be relevant to the tattoo or not contradict it, they must also actually accord with how the inked-design gets presented to the world by that recipient if they are to truly affect

¹⁰⁵ Szustak, "Pragmatic Intentionalism: A New Look at Art Interpretation." 23

the artistic properties of the tattoo. A person's intentions do not always accord with their public persona: that someone intends to be culturally sensitive does not always mean they are successful in their intentions. Given this, a tattoo may not necessarily mean what someone intends it to mean even if that meaning is otherwise relevant to the inked-design and compatible with the semantic and symbolic meaning properties of the tattoo. I will provide an example.

For example, say there are two persons with suns tattooed on their arms and both intend the sun to positively communicate optimism for the future. Now say person one is a typically optimistic person with a sunny disposition, and person two is a typically pessimistic person with a less than sunny disposition. I think in these two cases the artistic meaning of the recipient's tattoos differs. Importantly, I am not saying that one tattoo or the other is aesthetically *better*, it is only to say that they have different artistic properties. The difference in the artistic properties of these tattoos can be understood as a difference in symbolic contrast, where symbolic contrast is analogous to visual contrast: a tattoo has a low level of symbolic contrast if it accords well with the tattoo recipient's public persona and a tattoo has a high level of symbolic contrast if it seems to challenge or oppose the recipient's persona. Importantly the level of contrast that a tattoo has is not a good or bad-making property on its own – I do not take a tattoo with high contrast to be more valuable than one with low contrast or vice versa. I also do not mean to suggest that person two's intentions should not be taken into account when interpreting their tattoo – they just might not affect the artistic properties of their tattoos in the same way. There are features of the person other than their intentions which we might also want to take into account and which may alter the artistic properties of the artworks on them.¹⁰⁶

Notice that according to the argument I have just presented people can occasionally get features of their tattoos wrong. For example, I get a tattoo of the figure on the Uada album cover 'Devoid of Light' and claim it represents how involved in the metal community I am, but I am not involved in the metal

¹⁰⁶ Instead of saying there are other features of a person, one might recast intentions broadly like Wollheim does: *Painting as art* pp.8 see Gaut (pp.600) for objections to this move Gaut, "Interpreting the Arts." 600.

community at all, then that tattoo does not strictly represent how involved in the metal community I am. Perhaps it represents my future commitment to the community, or my desire to be a part of the community, but there will be an evident tension between my current lack of involvement in the community and my apparent commitment to it.

We can now formulate the view I endorse;

(6r) the tattoo recipient r qua recipient intends their tattoo x to mean m at t and m does not contradict x 's other meaning properties (semantically and symbolically), and m is relevant to the inked-design that constitutes tattoo x , and m does not contradict r 's public persona.

(4r) tattoo x partially means m at t

The new view is that (6r) implies (4r). Call this view 'recipient unintentionalism.' Recipient unintentionalism is the view that the is inked-on relation captures: an inked-design is presented by the tattoo recipient's intentions *and* public persona. Note that an *unintentionalist* view is *not* anti-intentionalist – it does not mean people have no intentional influence over the meanings of their tattoos.¹⁰⁷

The goal of this section was to determine the relationship between the tattoo recipient's intentions and the artistic properties of their tattoos, assuming that one has already accepted the arguments I provided for RV⁺. Ultimately, the answer that one should give to the recipient intentionalism debate will likely depend on the exact role they attribute to the tattoo recipient. I presented and rejected three views: strict recipient intentionalism, weak recipient intentionalism, and relevant recipient intentionalism. I rejected strict recipient intentionalism on the grounds that it could not accommodate the symbolic and semantic meanings of tattoos. I rejected weak recent intentionalism on the grounds that it has to admit that arbitrary intentions of the tattoo recipient were relevant to their tattoos. Finally, I rejected relevant recipient intentionalism on the grounds that it fails to capture is that the intentions of the tattoo recipient do not always align with how the tattoo recipient actually presents their tattoo(s) to the world.

¹⁰⁷ Many women get tattoos to take back or redefine their bodies, I do not want it to be the case that external perceptions of women cancel the meaning of the tattoo for them. Nancy Kang, "Painted Fetters; Tattooing as Feminist Liberation," in *Tattoos; I Ink, Therefore I Am*, ed. Robert Arp, Philosophy for Everyone (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

Chapter V. Sizer's-BV

In *The Art of Tattoos*, Laura Sizer lays the groundwork for an ontology of tattoos that differs from my own.¹⁰⁸ In this section, I will outline Sizer's definition of tattoo art and the ontology of tattoos that it implies. I offer three arguments for why my account (RV⁺) is preferable to the account I attribute to Sizer.

Sizer's core ontological claim – the backbone of her definition of tattoo art – is that tattoos are *essentially 'rendered on living bodies.'*¹⁰⁹ Sizer's paper motivates a definition of tattoos founded on this claim and employs it to distinguish tattoo art from other kinds of visual art. Since Sizer's goal is only to define tattoo art, she does not develop a refined ontology of tattoos. She notes in her conclusion that specific questions about the 'criteria for individualizing works of tattoo art', and 'their completion or survival conditions through add-ons, cover-ups, and removals' are unanswered by her paper.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, her core ontological claim is about an essential property of tattoos and should, if clearly defined, provide some of these answers for us.

We can present Sizer's claim about the essential properties of tattoos as a proposition ϕ

ϕ : <being on a living body is an essential property of tattoos>

This proposition ϕ formed from Sizer's claim entails propositions about the individuating properties and persistence conditions of tattoos. So, although Sizer's goal is not to provide an ontology of tattoos, her definition of tattoos should invariably lead to one.

However, correctly determining the ontological propositions that are entailed by Sizer's core claim relies on identifying the exact proposition that Sizer takes to be her core claim – in other words, it relies on confirming that ϕ is really what Sizer meant by her definition of tattoos. Understanding what Sizer's core claim is, is not as easy as it should be: she shifts between referring to the tattoo as being on 'living skin', a 'body', or a 'person' quite liberally and it is not entirely clear what she takes the

¹⁰⁸ Though Dadlez seems to offer a similar view, her paper does not explicitly aim to present an ontology, rather she discusses some features of tattoos from which one can draw a general ontological inclination.

¹⁰⁹ Sizer, "The Art of Tattoos." 10.

¹¹⁰ Sizer. 14.

relationships between the terms to be. For example, she says tattoos are: "...applied permanently to *living skin* – to people who go about their daily lives with this artwork on their body"¹¹¹ and later on she states: "...tattoo art invites viewers to see a *living body*, a *person*, as realizing a work of art."¹¹² This vagueness is problematic because it is unclear whether the proposition that Sizer is asserting about tattoos is ϕ , rather than:

ϕ_s : < being on living skin is an essential property of tattoos > or

ϕ_p : < being on a living person is an essential property of tattoos >.

Living skin, living bodies, and persons are all different sortals, meaning that each has different individuation and persistence conditions; living skin, living bodies, and persons cannot be equated. Specifically, I take 'living skin' to refer to skin that is a part of a living body but not identical to it. I take 'living body' to refer to the body as a living, changing entity that materially constitutes the tattoo recipient, but is not identical with them. Finally, I take 'person' to refer to the tattoo recipient as a social being who is materially constituted by the living body but that is non-identical to it. Whether a tattoo is essentially related to living skin, a living body, or a person has profound implications for the tattoo's individuation and persistence conditions.¹¹³

Sizer recognizes that living skin and the living body are different sortals, so implicitly, she recognizes the difference between taking ϕ or ϕ_s as her core claim.¹¹⁴ It is also clear enough that ϕ_s is not her core claim. She strongly justifies that tattoos are on bodies, not merely skin, stating that the shape of the body and placement of the tattoo are artistically relevant to the tattoo.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, she argues that a removed tattoo is destroyed because it becomes 'two-dimensional, static and fixed', the light will bounce off of the design in different ways than it would were it on a moving body. In other words, she

¹¹¹ Sizer. 2. My emphasis.

¹¹² Sizer. 14. My emphasis.

¹¹³ And the definition of tattoos in general that Sizer wants to give...

¹¹⁴ From here forward I drop the 'living' from 'living body', but I mean living body unless otherwise specified.

¹¹⁵ Sizer, "The Art of Tattoos." 6.

offers strong artistic justifications for the claim that tattoos have the essential property of being on living bodies (φ) and provides persistence conditions that can *only* be maintained if she accepts φ .¹¹⁶ We can safely eliminate φ_s which leaves my interpretative project with a decision between φ or φ_p : that tattoos are essentially on living bodies or persons respectively. It is much less clear whether Sizer takes φ or φ_p to be her core claim.

Sizer does not discuss the artistic differences between tattoos being on bodies or persons; between taking φ or φ_p as her core claim. φ and φ_p are propositions that refer to different entities - living bodies and persons, respectively - and that entail different things about the properties of tattoos as a result. People are arguably not identical to living bodies, they are *persons* with personalities, intentions, fears, loves, and lives in the social world. We conceptually separate our body and person all of the time, speculating about leaving our bodies through mechanical or ethereal means.¹¹⁷ Whether a tattoo is taken to be essentially on a body or essentially on a person has a notable effect on what the artistic properties of that tattoo are, as is evidenced by the arguments I provided for my own Recipient View.

I assume that <being on a living body is an essential property of tattoos> (φ)¹¹⁸ is Sizer's core claim. Sizer makes a point of providing clear and careful arguments for why tattoos are on bodies, she says that tattoos are often designed for the bodies they are tattooed on, that artists carefully consider how a tattoo will flow with the body of the tattoo recipient, and that these facts are artistically relevant to evaluating tattoo art.¹¹⁹ Sizer does not provide any direct aesthetic argument(s) for the claim that tattoos are on persons rather than living bodies. To do so, she would have to distinguish bodies from people, which she fails to do. Given this, Sizer's lack of discussion about how a *person* would affect the artistic properties of their tattoos (the truth and implications of φ_p) suggest that she favours φ . The alternative

¹¹⁶ Sizer. 9. This is another reason to think that Sizer core claim is definitively φ , since an endorsement of φ_p would entail that the tattoo was destroyed for other reasons that she does not address.

¹¹⁷ Recall: on my account, bodies are just the physical stuff whereas person includes one's persona, intentions etc, which are clearly gone when one is brain dead.

¹¹⁸ Sizer, "The Art of Tattoos." 10.

¹¹⁹ Sizer. 6-7

explanation is the uncharitable assertion that she failed to recognize the distinction between persons and living bodies. With this clarified, we can now move forward.

We now have enough information to attribute a rough ontological view to Sizer based on her definition of tattoos. Recall that I initially classified Sizer's view as a Body View (BV). Roughly, this tells us that Sizer takes tattoos to be ink-paintings on bodies.¹²⁰ BV as I originally formulated it omits two key features of Sizer's ontology: (i) that tattoos are on living bodies *essentially* and (ii) that as a result of being on *living* bodies a tattoo's artistic properties can change as the body the tattoo is on changes.¹²¹ BV can be modified by adding those two claims, call this modified view Sizer's-BV. Roughly this translates to the view that tattoos are ink-paintings that are *essentially on living (changing) bodies* – I take this to be Sizer's ontology of tattoos going forward. I have assumed that Sizer is a contextualist, and as such takes the artistic properties of tattoos to be partially determined by factors such as time of creation, and features of the artist's life – however, nothing I say going forward depends on this assumption.¹²² I will now outline the persistence conditions of tattoos that Sizer's-BV implies.

According to Sizer's-BV, tattoos are *essentially on living bodies*, so a tattoo is destroyed (or no longer a work of tattoo art) whenever it is no longer on a living body. It follows then (from ϕ), that a tattoo on a deceased body is no longer a work of tattoo art, as it is no longer on a living body.¹²³ It also follows that a tattoo removed from a living body and mounted flat is not a work of tattoo art – although it may still be a work of art of a different kind.¹²⁴ The cases of bodily death and removal are the most

¹²⁰ According to BV, tattoos are material art objects (ink-designs in skin) that are individuated by, and that have their artistic properties determined by (i) design and ink, (ii) artist(s), (iii) art historical context, (iv) skin tone, texture, and elasticity, and (v) body shape and placement.

¹²¹ Dadlez also endorses the idea that tattoos can change. She says they are more open to change than conventional paintings including physical changes and changes resulting from add-ons and expansions. Dadlez, "Ink, Art and Expression." 750.

¹²² I'm not sure if Sizer is a contextualist, she doesn't say anything on this point.

¹²³ Sizer cites Kawaguchi citing tattoo artist Horiyoshi III who says explicitly that when a person with a tattoo dies, so does that tattoo. However, she doesn't discuss this further. Sizer, "The Art of Tattoos." 7.

¹²⁴ Sizer. 9&10.

commonly considered, but there are at least two more cases worth considering: brain death, and the transfer or grafting of tattoos between bodies.

First, according to Sizer's-BV, a tattoo survives the brain death of its recipient - there is nothing in Sizer's-BV that implies otherwise.¹²⁵ We can imagine that I am tattooed and I write in my will that in the event that I am legally declared brain dead and my body is still functioning, that some portion of my estate be dedicated to keeping my body alive to save my tattoos, and assume this comes to pass.

According to Sizer's-BV, my tattoos survive as long as my body does - despite my brain death, they are otherwise intact and on a living body.

Second, according to Sizer's-BV, a tattoo can arguably survive being removed from the body it was originally tattooed on and grafted onto another living body - call this process 'grafting.'¹²⁶ We can think of grafting as analogous to the canvas transfer of a painting (just somewhat more gruesome). The tattoo arguably survives grafting because after it is grafted it still has its essential properties; it is still on a living body. Importantly, the 'living body' that the tattoo is grafted on need not be biologically human: Sizer says in a footnote that 'living body' can refer to a "...cyborg with synthetic skin, as long as the skin functions like biological skin in the way it holds the pigment, reflects light, moves, and so forth."¹²⁷

Recall that Sizer explicitly argues a tattoo removed from its original body is normally destroyed because it becomes: 'two-dimensional, static and fixed', and the light will bounce off of the design in different ways than it would were it on a moving body.¹²⁸ However, these artistic shortcomings are not present in the grafted tattoo. As long as the tattoo is grafted onto the same body part of a *living body* that is visually

¹²⁵ Again, more precisely, if Sizer's-BV is a set of propositions, than no proposition in that set implies otherwise.

¹²⁶ Skin grafting doesn't really work this way, only a very thin top layer of skin is taken, and it is often taken from the person themselves. However, one could imagine a case where the whole tattoo was removed, medically attached to another body, and miraculously the graft took - perhaps assuming much advancement in medical science or a suitable cyborg body being on the receiving end.

¹²⁷ Sizer, "The Art of Tattoos." 6, footnotes 23.

¹²⁸ Sizer. 9. This is another reason to think that Sizer core claim is definitively ϕ , since an endorsement of ϕ_p would entail that the tattoo was destroyed for other reasons that she does not address.

identical to the body the tattoo was originally on (perhaps a perfect cyborg duplicate), then on Sizer's-BV, the artistic properties of the tattoo are all preserved.

To recap, Sizer's-BV says that tattoos are essentially on living bodies. Alternatively, my view, RV⁺, says that tattoos are essentially related to tattoo recipients. There are three reasons to favor RV⁺ over Sizer's-BV. For one, RV⁺ maintains the unique relationship between the artwork and its owner – the tattoo and its recipient – for the right reasons. Second, RV⁺ denies that we must potentially treat the tattoo recipient as a mere means for artistic expression, while Sizer's-BV cannot. Finally, RV⁺ better explains the historical and contemporary use of tattoos as socially embedded artworks that are representative of their tattoo recipient's personalities. I will address these points in order.

Sizer says: “one of the most unique features of tattoo art is the collapse of the distinction between art owner and artwork.”¹²⁹ Of course, the tattoo and its owner are distinct entities, what Sizer means as she later explains, is that tattoos are “...*necessarily* bound to one owner” (their recipient).¹³⁰ Being necessarily bound to one owner means that in every world where the tattoo exists it has *one owner*, presumably the tattoo recipient. She quotes Kalinga tattoo artist Whang-od and her sister Od-chung who claim that tattoos *come with people to their graves*.¹³¹ I agree with this – tattoos are necessarily bound to their recipients. However, if tattoos are necessarily bound to their recipients, then we should think they are non-transferrable – they cannot be transferred from person to person. We should also think that tattoos should be destroyed when their recipients die, going with them to their graves. However, on Sizer's account, tattoos are possibly transferrable (they can be grafted onto cyborgs) and tattoos do not always die with their recipients (brain death case).

If tattoos are necessarily bound to their recipients as Sizer, Whang-od, and Od-chung suggest, we should think that tattoos are destroyed when their recipients die. On Sizer's-BV, however, tattoos do not

¹²⁹ Sizer. 11.

¹³⁰ Sizer. 11.

¹³¹ Sizer. 11-12.

always die with their recipients, the brain death case showed this. On Sizer's view, a body on life support is considered living – and so its tattoos survive – even if the person is technically dead and their brain cannot function to keep the body alive. Sizer cannot offer much of a response, she admitted that life support - however artificial - counts as life when she allowed that cyborgs with non-biological features can get tattoos. Perhaps she bites the bullet here.

The grafting case is more complicated. If tattoos are necessarily bound to their recipients, then they should be non-transferable. If a tattoo survives grafting, then tattoos are transferrable on Sizer's account and the owner/artwork distinction does not collapse as she suggests it does. If Sizer wants to preserve the non-transferability of tattoos, she could reject grafting by accepting the following metaphysical argument: (pi) if a tattoo is removed from the living body it was initially tattooed on, then it loses an essential property and is destroyed (pii) if something is destroyed then it is always destroyed. In other words, that preserving the artistic properties of the tattoo might not be the same thing as saving it from destruction. This is a somewhat questionable response. Grafting restores all the artistic (and on my view therefore aesthetic) properties of the tattoo, so according to Sizer's definition of tattoos, our aesthetic experience when we look at the grafted tattoo should be identical to our aesthetic experience of the ungrafted tattoo. Furthermore, we are looking at most of the same stuff – the tattoo design is causally continuous with the original tattoo. a better explanation seems to be that the tattoo was destroyed and then subsequently restored. Destruction does not have to imply eternal destruction: similarly, a person can be physically dead before being revived via resuscitation.¹³²

A better response for Sizer is to modify Sizer's-BV to say that tattoos are essentially on the living body they were initially tattooed on and therefore cannot be transferred via grafting. This move is justified by the need for an owner/artwork collapse rather than a metaphysical technicality. However, this move does not fix what has gone wrong either. Although my tattoo cannot be transferred on this modified

¹³² If you don't think someone is officially dead prior to the failure of resuscitation attempts, there is still the case of Lazarus syndrome, where the heart of a person spontaneously restarts after resuscitation attempts have been stopped and they have been *legally declared dead*.

account, it can not be transferred only because the particular body it is tied to *just so happens to be* my body. The owner/artwork distinction does not completely collapse: people are not (nor do we see ourselves as) identical to the bodies they are born in. We have odd relationships with our bodies, we constantly love them, hate them, and try to take them back, but we are always at a conceptual distance from them. To be tattooed is to lord power *over our bodies* – a tattoo is not something for our bodies, it is something *for us as people* that we have chosen to put on our bodies. Tattoos then are not non-transferable because they are essentially on certain living bodies, they are non-transferable because they are essentially related to certain people whom those bodies constitute.

According to my view, RV⁺, a tattoo is destroyed whenever it can no longer bear the is inked-on relation to its tattoo recipient (via removal, recipient death, grafting, etc.) because bearing that relation is essential to the tattoo. It follows from RV⁺ that a tattoo is destroyed in all the cases I outlined above: bodily death, removal, brain death, and grafting. This response is preferred to the one BV⁺ gives because it maintains the unique owner/artwork relationship that is characteristic of tattoos and it maintains it for the right reasons: because the tattoo bears an essential relation to its owner – the recipient.

The second objection to Sizer's view is taken from Dadlez. Dadlez raises a worry that when viewing a tattoo we must potentially treat the tattoo recipient as a mere means for the expression of an artwork.¹³³ Sizer rightly says in response to Dadlez that tattoos do not 'assert or necessitate' depersonalizing the tattoo recipient or otherwise seeing them as a mere means for the expression of the artwork.¹³⁴ Sizer's response would be alright if it stopped here, however, she desires a stronger response to Dadlez and concludes by saying: "When we appreciate tattoo art as a form of art that is realized in and works with bodies, we see that the point is not to bracket out or look beyond the body and person, *but to see the tattoo as realized through and part of the person.*"¹³⁵ I think this is the right answer to give to Dadlez, but Sizer cannot give it - Sizer's-BV does not get us here. On Sizer's-BV, properly appreciating a

¹³³ Dadlez, "Ink, Art and Expression." 741 & 746.

¹³⁴ Sizer, "The Art of Tattoos." 13.

¹³⁵ My emphasis. Sizer. 13.

tattoo involves appraising the *living body* of the person, but it does not involve appraising that person as a person. This is at least compatible with depersonalization – bodies are objectified all the time! For example, part of what is off-putting about the show Inkmaster is that they treat people like mere body canvases rather than people, speeding through tattoos or disregarding what the person getting the tattoo wants – this separation seems to us to be disturbing and inauthentic – something has been lost in the depersonalization of the process. In fact, Sizer’s view might require depersonalization if appreciating the tattoo requires focusing on the living body, rather than the person.

My recipient view RV⁺ handles Dadlez’s ‘mere means’ concerns better than Sizer’s living body view Sizer’s-BV does. Ideally, we want to reply to Dadlez that depersonalization is *always* wrong for artistic reasons.¹³⁶ RV⁺ provides this reply. According to RV⁺, one *must* appreciate the person as a person in order to artistically appreciate the tattoo properly. On RV⁺ some of the tattoo's artistic properties are determined by its relation to the tattoo recipient, so bracketing out the tattoo recipient would lead to being unable to properly observe the tattoo's artistic properties. Depersonalization is not simply ‘not necessitated’ on my account, it is a profoundly incorrect way to artistically appreciate tattoos.

The final blow against Sizer’s-BV is that it cannot account for the fact that tattoos can artistically express things about their recipients. By ‘artistically express’ I mean that a tattoo has artistic properties that are determined by its tattoo recipient’s intentions to express something with their tattoo. Sizer suggests that tattoos can communicate one’s life experiences and express aspects of the recipient’s identity; “A client can come to see their body as a work of art and a powerful vehicle for self-expression.”¹³⁷ This can be construed as a fairly weak claim: lots of art-kinds and almost any adornment practice can be vehicles for self-expression and communication if used as such. However, I think (and I think Sizer and others do as well) that tattoos are *uniquely* self-expressive, and what makes an artform

¹³⁶ Sizer might rightly argue that depersonalization is wrong for other reasons, that it is not necessary, or that it is sometimes wrong in cases where the tattoo recipient is a co-artist. That said, I think its wrong for artistic reasons.

¹³⁷ Sizer, “The Art of Tattoos.” 14.

uniquely self-expressive is that the relevant self-expression is an artistic feature of the artwork – a feature of the tattoo *as a work of art*.

That tattoos are uniquely self-expressive artworks is given credence by the current and historic centrality of their role as representative artworks. During the nineteenth century, Māori facial tattoos were used as signatures – legally tied to and representative of the person they were tattooed on.¹³⁸ Tattoos are frequently *received as* indicators of group membership, as cultural identifiers, and as tools for artistic self-realization.¹³⁹ That tattoos are artistically expressive of their recipients is considered to be a definitive feature of the artform.¹⁴⁰ Arp claims: “Your tattoo on your body expresses *your* thoughts, *your* beliefs, *your* experiences, *your* feelings and *your* past.”¹⁴¹

According to Sizer’s-BV, tattoos are tattooed on living bodies; Living bodies do not have personalities to express – it is the person who they constitute that does. Bodies are only *used to* express, in the way that a wall on our house is used to express the artwork we like. Of course, Sizer can say that bodies are *uniquely positioned* to become vehicles of expression (since they constitute us) and because of their unique position, the tattoos on them are uniquely positioned to be used as expressions. However, if we want a tattoo to be *uniquely* self-expressive, then the relevant self-expression should end up being an artistic feature of the artwork – a feature of the tattoo *as a work of art*. That tattoos are uniquely positioned to be used as self-expressive works still does not allow that tattoos to actually have artistic properties that are determined by their being expressive.

¹³⁸ Adrienne L. Kaeppler, *The Pacific Arts of Polynesia and Micronesia*, Oxford History of Art (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2008), 112-115. Kaeppler notes that various cultures have used tattoos as signifiers of social status and identity.

¹³⁹ “The Black Panther Project”; Davies, *Adornment*; Clinton R. Sanders and D. Angus Vail, “Introduction:: Body Alteration, Artistic Production, and the Social World of Tattooing,” in *Customizing the Body*, The Art and Culture of Tattooing (Temple University Press, 2008), 1–35, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1bw1j21.5>; Miatello, “Ritual. Identity. Obsession. Art. Tattoos.”

¹⁴⁰ Sizer, “The Art of Tattoos”; Davies, *Adornment*; Dadlez, “Ink, Art and Expression”; Falkenstern, “Illusions of Permanence.”

¹⁴¹ Robert Arp, ed., *Tattoos; I Ink, Therefore I Am*, Philosophy for Everyone (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012). Xiv-xvi.

As it stands, Sizer's-BV is compatible with the claim that tattoos communicate things about people without maintaining that they do so artistically. For example, say I hang a print of Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* in my apartment to remind me of my mother who loves sunflowers. It seems perfectly appropriate to say that the Van Gogh print successfully expresses and communicates something about me in virtue of hanging in my apartment, and yet, it is obvious that the print does not have the artistic property of representing myself or my mother – Van Gogh never had the pleasure of knowing either of us. On the other hand, if I get a tattoo that is design-identical to *Sunflowers* on my leg and take it to represent my mother, then I am inclined to say that the *tattoo* of *Sunflowers* does have the artistic property of representing my mother. Paintings are perhaps vehicles of expression for whoever hangs them, but this is only contingently so – the aim of painting was never so intimately tied up with the observer, but the aim of tattooing is (and always was) intimately tied up with the recipient. Tattoos are specifically created to interact with or represent the person they are on. My account takes this representative role of tattoos seriously by claiming that tattoos bear essential relations to the tattoo recipients they often express, Sizer's-BV on the other hand does not.

A possible objection to what I have presented is that I have misrepresented Sizer's view and that she actually endorses ϕ_p <being on a living person is an essential property of tattoos> rather than ϕ <being on a living body is an essential property of tattoos>. There is some textual support for a ϕ_p reading, she says: "...tattoo artworks are parts of *living persons*; they cannot be peeled off and sold; to do so destroys something essential about the tattoo artwork."¹⁴² She also says, "tattoo art invites viewers to see a living body, *a person* as realizing a work of tattoo art"¹⁴³ and that "...tattoo art..[is] realized through and part of *the person*."¹⁴⁴ These quotes suggest that Sizer thinks tattoos have the essential property of being

¹⁴² My emphasis. Sizer, "The Art of Tattoos." 11.

¹⁴³ My emphasis Sizer. 14..

¹⁴⁴ My emphasis. Sizer. 13.

on persons. However, if Sizer really did mean to take ϕ_p as her core claim, then I suggest she has inadequately argued for her definition of tattoos.

Sizer says: "...tattoo artworks are parts of living persons; they cannot be peeled off and sold; to do so destroys something essential about the tattoo artwork."¹⁴⁵ This quote is pretty straightforward, but if it is to lead to an endorsement of ϕ_p , we have to attribute to Sizer the claim that tattoo artworks are essentially on persons because they are *parts of living persons*.¹⁴⁶ The argument can be worked out as so:

- (P1) Every tattoo is essentially a part of a living body
- (P2) Every living body is essentially a part of a person
- (P3) if P1 & P2 then every tattoo is essentially a part of a person
- (C) Every tattoo is essentially a part of a living person.

On a modal view of essence, this argument is unsound. I will concentrate on (P2). Understanding why this argument is unsound requires some translating, following the modal view of essence, let us translate claims about essential parthood into claims about necessary properties. In other words (P2) should be now read as 'every living body necessarily has the property of being a part of a living person':

$$\forall x (Bx \rightarrow \Box Px)^{147}$$

Here 'B' is being a living body and 'P' is being a part of a living person. Put this way, (P2) is obviously false, it is not the case that living bodies are necessarily parts of living persons. This was already demonstrated above – a living body can exist without the living person in the case of brain death.

Although living persons may need living bodies to be alive (assuming we cannot upload our brains to the internet etc.) living bodies do not need people. There is an important direction of ontological dependence

¹⁴⁵ Sizer. 11.

¹⁴⁶ If I am not mistaken this may also explain why she jumps between the terms living skin and living bodies. She seems to suggest a similar argument for why tattoos are on bodies. "...a work of tattoo art is a tattoo resulting from using the tattoo process with the intention of creating a work of art in living skin... More than that, it becomes a part of a living moving body." Sizer, 6. However, she does subsequently argue for the claim that tattoos are on bodies – while she does not do the same for the claim that tattoos are on persons.

¹⁴⁷ This is a simplification, really it should read: $\Box \forall x \Box (Bx \rightarrow \Box (\exists! x \rightarrow Pa))$. Where $\exists!$ is the property 'exists.' However the above is sufficient if one doesn't care too much about the finer points of modal mereology and essence. Peter Simons, *Parts; A Study in Ontology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). 258.

embedded in this premise made obvious by the translation: the body does not have the tattoo as a part essentially, but a tattoo is essentially a part of a living body. If (P2) is true, then it must turn out to be true because of a fact about living bodies, rather than because of a fact about people; it is not often that parts are essentially parts, it is more often that composite objects have their parts essentially. Although a table may have all of its parts essentially (according to compositional essentialism) it is clearly not the case that the table's leg is essentially a part of the table – it could have been a part of any number of things. Sizer needs the leg (the body) to essentially be a part of the table (the person) for her argument to run.

It's worth emphasizing at this point that it is not clear whether Sizer makes this argument, she says that living bodies are parts of persons, but she might not think that they are essentially so. In this case, she might think it is enough that tattoos are, in most circumstances, parts of living bodies. This does not save Sizer from the second reason to prefer my view over hers at all, although it perhaps gives her partial responses to the first and third. The difference between my argument and Sizer's here is that I offer independent arguments in support of the claim that tattoos are related to their recipients as persons. These independent arguments are necessary in order to get the essence claim. They're also arguably necessary to claim that the recipient artistically influences the tattoo at all.

Sizer's-BV is admittedly the ideal alternative to my view: it captures that tattoos are artworks that change and that they are artworks that often die with their recipients. Nevertheless, a careful comparison between RV⁺ and Sizer's-BV only reveals how fruitful my view can be. RV⁺ can better account for the unique owner/artwork relation that characterizes tattoos by maintaining their non-transferability and attachment to their tattoo recipient. RV⁺ also provides a better response to Dadlez's mere means concerns and seems to better capture the expressive properties of tattoos overall.

Chapter VI. Tattoos and Street Art; You've Changed

Here is a work of street art that I would like you to reflect on: A well-known artwork in Toronto at Queen and Ossington reads 'You've Changed' in towering white capital letters, high along the side of a brick building. This work is, quite transparently, a commentary on the social changes that the communities in the area were experiencing before *and are still experiencing after* its creation. Most commonly, it is taken to represent the ongoing gentrification that has pushed artistic communities out.¹⁴⁸

An analogy has been drawn between tattoos and street art on the following ground: both tattoos and street art instantiate an essential relation to their canvas.¹⁴⁹ My goal in this section is to defend and further develop this analogy as it applies to street art and the recipient view of tattoos that I have proposed. More precisely, I argue that both tattoos and street art have artistic properties that can change over time in response to social changes experienced by their canvases. This section proceeds in two parts. In part one, I present Riggle's definition of street art which preserves the original analogy between street art and tattoos. I defend Riggle's account of street art from Sondra Bacharach's criticisms. In part two, I propose an extension of the original analogy inspired by my recipient view of tattoos. I show that this analogy applies to street art and how it reveals that the artistic properties and meaning of some works of street art change over time as a result of social changes.

SVI.i Riggle & Bacharach on Street Art.

In *Street Art: The Transfiguration of the Commonplaces*, Nicholas Riggle provides the following definition of street art: an artwork is street art if and only if its use of the street as an artistic resource "...contribute[s] essentially to its meaning."¹⁵⁰ Riggle's goal is to define street art, not to provide an

¹⁴⁸ According to Harris's site this piece was commissioned by the City of Toronto, but a lot of people refer to it as a work of street art: <https://coopercolegallery.com/artist/jesse-harris/>. Riggle's view doesn't rule it out as a work of street art, as it seems unobtrusive enough to have not turned the street around it into an institutional space.

¹⁴⁹ They've also been analogized on the grounds that they reject inclusion by the institutional artworld, but this is somewhat less important to my view. Laura Sizer, "The Art of Tattoos," *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, August 1, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/aesthj/ayaa012>, 10; E. M. Dadlez, "Ink, Art and Expression: Philosophical Questions about Tattoos," *Philosophy Compass* 10, no. 11 (2015): 739–53, <https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12258>.

¹⁵⁰ Riggle, "Street Art." 246. "The artistic use of the street must be *internal* to its significance, that is, it must contribute essentially to its meaning." Riggle's emphasis. Riggle also notes that to be internal to its meaning is for it to be 'ineliminable' from an interpretation of the work.

ontology, and consequently, the formulation of this claim is not the most ontologically precise. However, it can be modified into a claim about the essential properties of street art. I take Riggle’s core ontological claim about street art to be this:

S: <use of the street as an artistic resource *x* is an essential property of street art>

The variable ‘*x*’ is included to capture Riggle’s claim that it is the *particular use* of the street as an artistic resource that is essential to a given work of street art. *S* requires some unpacking.

The first thing to understand about Riggle’s core claim *S* is that it employs an unconventional notion of ‘the street’. Riggle defines the street *functionally* (rather than physically or spatially), as an urban space with a particular socio-cultural function.¹⁵¹ The socio-cultural function of the street is to facilitate self-expression “...along with the [actions and] interactions that can result when selves are expressive.”¹⁵² Since the street is defined by its function, any space which fails to facilitate self-expression is simply not the street. Being-the-street is a way of being for a space that comes in degrees: in other words, something can be ‘more-or-less the street.’ The degree to which something is the street depends on the degree to which that space facilitates self-expression. A space that facilitates self-expression to a higher degree is more ‘street’ than a space that facilitates self-expression to a lesser degree.¹⁵³ If we want to determine whether something is the street then, we must determine whether and to what degree the space functions to facilitate self-expression.

It should be emphasized that the line between being-the-street and not-being-the-street is vague.¹⁵⁴ This is made worse by the fact that being-the-street comes in degrees. For example, Riggle notes that his socio-cultural definition of the street bars highways and rural roads from being streets because

¹⁵¹ It is not clear to me whether being-urban is a required condition on something being the street or whether it is simply a reliable proxy for the socio-cultural function of certain spaces.

¹⁵² Nick Riggle, “Using the Street for Art: A Reply to Baldini,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 74, no. 2 (April 26, 2016): 191–95, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jaac.12280>. 192.

¹⁵³ Riggle. 193.

¹⁵⁴ Perhaps it is a genuine matter of aesthetic debate whether certain works are works of street art. Although, Riggle should have noted this if his goal was to offer a definition of street art. This also could be a mere epistemic problem – it’s unclear – Riggle gives no indications of the lower bounds of streetness.

they do not have the right cultural function.¹⁵⁵ Presumably, because these spaces are largely inaccessible to persons without cars, and therefore fail to *facilitate* self-expressive interactions between persons.

However, Riggle also notes in an endnote that one of his favorite works of *street art* is a project by REVS on the walls of subway tunnels that are, in his words, ‘practically unreachable and in the dark.’¹⁵⁶

The second thing to understand about Riggle’s core claim *S* is what it is to use the street as an artistic resource.¹⁵⁷ A use of the street may be a physical use of the street (material) or the use of the street for context (contextual). Three conditions must be met for a use of the street to qualify as a use of the street for the creation of street art. First, the street must be used by the artist intentionally in the creation of the artwork.¹⁵⁸ Second, this intentional use of the street comes with an implicit commitment to the ephemerality of the artwork¹⁵⁹ because the street is a space that the artwork may easily be destroyed in.¹⁶⁰ An artist who does not adopt this commitment to the ephemerality of their work has not truly *used the street*. This commitment to the ephemerality of the artwork is important: public art does not use *the street* as an artistic resource because it does not commit to the ephemerality that comes with a use of the street.¹⁶¹ Third, art can transform the function of the street from a space that facilitates self-expression to an institutional space that restricts it, so street artists must take care to use the street without destroying it.¹⁶² In order to use the street as an artistic resource then, the artist must not transform the street into an institutional art space (or another space that is not the street). If the artist does transform the space into something other than the street, then they are no longer using the street.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁵ Riggle, “Using the Street for Art.” 191.

¹⁵⁶ Riggle, “Street Art.” Endnote 11.

¹⁵⁷ Riggle. 245.

¹⁵⁸ Riggle. 245.

¹⁵⁹ The ephemerality commitment is important to Riggle but also somewhat confusing. For example, *Muto* a piece of animation that uses the street physically is still street art, even if the final product is not displayed in the street. However, if the final product is not displayed in the street, then it’s unclear how that artwork commits to ephemerality in any way. Perhaps Riggle means the ephemerality commitment to only be necessary for those works which remain in the street? Riggle. 245

¹⁶⁰ Riggle. 245.

¹⁶¹ “Serra’s use of the public space did not involve a commitment to the work’s ephemerality... As a result, Serra did not intend to *use the street* in the relevant sense.” Riggle. 254.

¹⁶² Riggle, “Using the Street for Art.” 194.

¹⁶³ Riggle. 194.

To summarize, Riggle's core claim is *S*: <use of the street as an artistic resource x is an essential property of street art>. In this claim, the street should be understood functionally as an urban space that facilitates self-expression. Furthermore, to use the street is to use the space that facilitates self-expression intentionally, while committing to the ephemerality of your work and not transforming the space. A work of street art then, is a work of art that intentionally and essentially uses an urban space that facilitates self-expression as an artistic resource without destroying that space.

Equipped with a better understanding of Riggle's account, one can easily see the analogy between street art and tattoos:

Original Analogy - both street art and tattoos instantiate an essential relation to their canvas such that if they are removed from their canvas they are destroyed.¹⁶⁴

My central goal in this section is to further develop the analogy between tattoos and street art. However, we must first ensure that this analogy rests on a solid foundation. The analogy between street art and tattoos depends in part on the truth of *S*: <use of the street as an artistic resource x is an essential property of street art>. In *Street Art and Consent*, Sondra Bacharach argues contra Riggle that *S* is false, threatening the analogy between street art and tattoos.¹⁶⁵

Bacharach's objection to Riggle's definition of street art relies on the presentation of several counterexamples – works that she thinks potentially qualify as street art, but that are supposedly excluded from being street art on Riggle's account.¹⁶⁶ Her counterexamples are: (a) Banksy's works that were secretly hung in galleries and museums,¹⁶⁷ (b) art on the walls of the Parisian catacombs, (c) art in the secret underground space of the *Underbelly Project*,¹⁶⁸ (d) art on the Israeli West Bank barrier, and (e)

¹⁶⁴ This relation is uses-as-an-artistic-resource for street art, is-inked-on for tattoos. Riggle, "Street Art." 245 & 246

¹⁶⁵ Sondra Bacharach, "Street Art and Consent," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 55, no. 4 (October 2015): 481–95, <https://doi.org/10.1093/aesthj/ayv030>.

¹⁶⁶ She says "If any of these cases qualify as works of street art, it is not because street artists are using the street as an artistic resource, or in any respect at all!" 485. Bacharach.

¹⁶⁷ Banky's works like *Peckham Rock*, *Banksus Militus Ratus*, & *Crimewatch UK Has Ruined the Countryside for All of Us*, to name a few.

¹⁶⁸ Bacharach, "Street Art and Consent." 485.

seed bombing by guerrilla gardeners. (a)-(d) are supposedly excluded from being street art on Riggle's account because their artists have not used *the street* as an artistic resource. (e) is supposedly excluded from being street art because accepting guerrilla gardeners as street artists would force Riggle to conclude that regular gardeners are also street artists. I think Riggle can offer good responses to these counterexamples (a-e). I address them in order.

Bacharach's counterexamples (a)-(d) can be handled in one of two ways: option one is to double down and deny that they are street art, and option two is to show that Riggle's account can qualify them as street art. I begin with (a) Banksy's works that were secretly hung in galleries and museums. Riggle should answer (a) by doubling down and denying that these works are works of street art. I am not convinced that the works of (a) are works of street art – and I am not convinced that Riggle needs to give a more robust answer than this one to (a). The reason to assume that these are works of street art, seems to be that Banksy is a street artist. Indeed, that Banksy is a street artist, is hardly a reason to think that everything Banksy produces is street art. Asserting the works in (a) are street art simply begs the question: if Bacharach is going to claim that the works of (a) are counterexamples to Riggle's view the onus is on her to rationalize why these works should be counted as street art, which she does not. Bacharach simply says that *if they are* then Riggle's account is too narrow: a looming threat perhaps, but no more than any conditional with a conspicuously unproven antecedent.

I address cases (b) art in the Parisian Catacombs and (c) in the *Underbelly Project* underground gallery together, as they can be given the same reply. Bacharach notes that both the Parisian Catacombs and *Underbelly Project* gallery are 'closed to the public'¹⁶⁹ implying that these spaces are not the street according to Riggle. I agree that these spaces fail to make the functional requirements for being 'the street' on Riggle's account, and I am also intuitively inclined to accept that the works in both spaces are

¹⁶⁹ Bacharach. 486

importantly art-historically related to works of street art.¹⁷⁰ That said, I think Riggle offers a satisfying explanation for why (b) and (c) cannot count as works of street art but are importantly related to street art.

In short, I think Riggle can reply that art beneath the street is created in an effort to avoid the institutionalization of the art above it. Riggle claims that street art is ‘fragile’ because it has the power to transform public spaces; “Street art’s power lies in its ability to harness the function of the street *without destroying it.*”¹⁷¹ A street might be ‘destroyed’ when street artists become famous and their artwork is treated as if it were institutional. Both (b) and (c) feature works from artists who are attempting to avoid the institutionalization of their art. The New York Times article that Bacharach cites about the *Underbelly Project* says this:

...as the vogue for street art has lead to “anything that could possibly appreciate in value being ripped off the street by those looking to cash in” the old sense of adventure and punk-rock energy has faded... *he [street artist Workhorse] feels strongly that something fundamental has been lost.* PAC and Workhorse saw the Underbelly Project as a way to recapture that feeling and evade the whims of the marketplace.¹⁷²

It is clear from this quote that the *Underbelly Project* was an overt reaction to the institutionalization of the space above the ground as street art’s popularity grew – a reaction to the fragility of street art.

Artwork in the catacombs can also be construed as both a pre-emptive avoidance of or later a reaction to, this same institutionalization. Importantly, only Riggle’s account can explain why Workhorse feels as though something fundamental has been lost: the work he was making above ground was no longer street art, it had become institutionalized through its artistic power – transforming the street. Although Bacharach’s account would qualify (b) and (c) as street art, it does so by failing to distinguish it from above-ground art, and so it must ignore the core motivation for the *Underbelly Project* in the first place.¹⁷³

Not only does Riggle have a good response to Bacharach, he arguably has a better one than she can offer.

¹⁷⁰ Although, given his endorsement of REVS work, perhaps Riggle would offer a different response than the one I give here.

¹⁷¹ My emphasis. Riggle, “Using the Street for Art.” 194.

¹⁷² Jasper Rees, “Street Art Way Below the Street,” *The New York Times*, November 1, 2010, sec. Arts, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/01/arts/design/01underbelly.html>. My emphasis.

¹⁷³ Bacharach, “Street Art and Consent.” 481. Bacharach’s necessary conditions for street art are that street art must be “(i) aconsensually produced and... (ii) constitute and act of defiant activism designed to challenge (and change)

Bachrach does not provide any reasons for thinking Riggle's account excludes (d) art on the West Bank barrier from being street art. I imagine the claim is that the area surrounding the West Bank barrier is not a space that facilitates self-expression, and therefore the space is not the street according to Riggle. Indeed, movement in front of the barrier is forbidden or in many cases greatly restricted, however, this case is arguably just an extreme case of graffiti on private property – the barrier still faces the street and according to Riggle, is a part of the street as a result.¹⁷⁴ Even if the area surrounding the barrier does not facilitate self-expression enough to count as the street, Riggle can still relate the work to street art insofar as it might indicate an attempt to use the space *as a street*. Much of the graffiti on the West Bank barrier has been frequently interpreted as containing an intention to transform the space to make it more 'for-the-public' or like the street: "...work created by Palestinian artists can serve as both radical reminders of resistance and messages of hope for the Palestinian community, especially since the art is on the 'inside' of the wall (the side facing the West Bank)."¹⁷⁵

Lastly, Bacharach's counterexample (e) requires a slightly different response. The entirety of her argument for (e) is this:

Seed-bombing is the practice of throwing home-made balls of seeds into abandoned lots or public spaces in order to grow flowers and to beautify large areas of dirt. If these guerilla gardeners secretly throwing seeds onto lots use the street as an artistic resource, then so too are homeowners busy landscaping their front yards on the weekend.¹⁷⁶

the viewer's experience of his or her environment." Illegal above ground street art is still defiant activism and necessarily changes the viewer's experience of her environment if it changes it to an institutional one – there is nothing to explain the tension Workhorse experiences.

¹⁷⁴ Riggle, "Street Art." 246. "The street is composed largely of surfaces and objects owned by the city and other people."

¹⁷⁵ ByBahira Amin, "Apartheid Art: The Stories Behind 14 Striking Pieces of Graffiti on the West Bank Wall," SceneArabia, accessed April 6, 2021, <http://www.SceneArabia.com/Culture/apartheid-art-palestine-israel-graffiti-separation-wall-west-ban>. See also: Rich Wiles, "Palestinian Graffiti," accessed April 6, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2013/11/26/palestinian-graffiti-tagging-resistance>.

¹⁷⁶ Bacharach, "Street Art and Consent." 485.

Bacharach's argument is that both the guerilla gardeners and home-gardeners are using the same kind of space as an artistic resource to garden, so if one is using the street, then both must be.¹⁷⁷

Although both home-gardeners and guerilla gardeners are using the same kind of space, Riggle can argue that home-gardeners are not using the street as an artistic resource, and guerilla gardeners are. Bacharach here has failed to recognize that the same space can be used with different intentions. Recall, that whether something counts as a *use of the street as an artistic resource* on Riggle's account depends partially on the relevant agent's intentions. While the guerilla gardeners are intending to beautify a public space that facilitates self-expression (the street), home-gardeners are intending to use *what they consider to be* their personal space. This is evidenced by the fact that they are not committing to the ephemerality of their work. Guerilla gardeners are surely recognizing that their flowers may be removed, but the home-gardener is hoping that people respect their personal property. Home-gardeners are not using the street as an artistic resource because they have the wrong intentions.

What I have shown in the preceding arguments is that Riggle can offer reasonable responses to all Bachrach's supposed counterexamples. From this, it can be cautiously concluded that *S: <use of the street as an artistic resource x is an essential property of street art>*, is true.

§VI.ii Tattoos and Street Art; Refining the Analogy

The original analogy between tattoos and street art is now on solid ground. I think there is more we can learn from comparing tattoos and street art, but this requires saying more about how they are analogous. The remainder of this section proceeds in the following way: First, I restate the existing analogy between tattoos and street art as it was originally proposed by Dadlez and Sizer.¹⁷⁸ I propose an extension of the analogy between tattoos and street art that applies only to Riggle's account of street art and the recipient view of tattoos that I have presented. I argue that the new analogy can tell us something

¹⁷⁷ It is not obvious how the frequent illegality of street art meshes with Riggle's functional definition of the street. I assume it is enough that the surfaces used for street art face the street or otherwise contribute to the street that does facilitate self-expression.

¹⁷⁸ The analogy was suggested by Dadlez as well as Sizer. However, Dadlez never explicitly proposes a definition of tattoos, so I refer only to Sizer's view for the rest of the section.

interesting about the artistic properties and persistence conditions of street art. More precisely, I argue that some of the artistic properties of street art are determined by social facts and that street art can survive some changes in its artistic properties that result from changes in these social facts. It will turn out that street art survives fewer artistic changes than tattoos can.

Recall the original analogy between street art and tattoos:

Original Analogy - both street art and tattoos instantiate an essential relation to their canvas such that if they are removed from their canvas they are destroyed.

The minimality of this claim should be emphasized. This claim analogizes street art not only to tattoos as defined by my recipient view but to tattoos as defined by Sizer's view as well; we both agree that tattoos instantiate essential relations to their canvases – what we disagree about is what that canvas is. While Sizer thinks that the canvas of a tattoo is a living body, I think that the canvas of the tattoo is a person who is materially constituted by a living body.

I have just shown that the original analogy is minimal, but I think it can be developed further. Further developing the analogy is good because it has the potential to reveal things about the metaphysical and artistic structure of both tattoos and street art. If we return to the recipient view of tattoos that I have presented, there are two generalizable features of a tattoo's relation to its canvas that are not captured by the original analogy that street art might plausibly share. Both tattoos and street art are on canvases of a particular *kind*, namely, *socially dynamic entities*, and furthermore, their artistic properties arguably change as their canvases change. We can extend the analogy:

Extended Analogy – Original analogy + the canvas is a social entity & the artistic properties of the artwork can change as the social properties of the canvas change.

This requires some unpacking. By 'social entity' I mean entity that metaphysically depends in some way on the actions and/or psychological, social, and mental states of persons. This dependence, whatever it is,

should be reflexive such that persons themselves are also social entities.¹⁷⁹ Social entities have social properties, defined as properties that depend in some way on the actions and/or psychological, social, and mental states of persons.¹⁸⁰ Social entities have social properties internally¹⁸¹, that can change as a result of changes in the social world.¹⁸² By ‘social world’ I mean the human social community as made up of persons and their relations. For example, corporations, persons, and human artifacts are all social entities, with internal social properties that can change as the social world (or a part of it) changes.

If the new analogy is correct, then Riggle’s account of street art is importantly analogous to my account of tattoos, rather than Sizer’s. Sizer argues that tattoos are essentially on living bodies that are physical entities. I argue that tattoos are essentially related to *persons* who are materially constituted by living bodies, but who are also social entities. Living bodies are not social entities. Although bodies are often ascribed social properties like race and gender¹⁸³, these properties are not internal properties of bodies (although they may often be ascribed physical correlates), they are internal properties of *persons*. In a similar vein, being a monetary unit is not an internal property of a piece of paper that looks like a \$1 bill, but it is an internal property of the human artifact \$1 bill materially constituted by that piece of paper.¹⁸⁴ Only the persons who are materially constituted by the bodies are social entities.

Since the extended analogy rests on the street being of a certain kind – a social entity– then, if I am to say the extended analogy holds, I must show that ‘the street’ for Riggle, is that kind of social entity.

¹⁷⁹ Jenkins seems to think metaphysical dependence is reflexive. C. S. Jenkins, “Is Metaphysical Dependence Irreflexive?,” *The Monist* 94, no. 2 (April 1, 2011): 267–76, <https://doi.org/10.5840/monist201194213>. Whether persons are social entities is contentious. Since the existence of social entities is taken to depend on the mental states of persons, were persons social entities they would depend for their existence on themselves. Brian Epstein, “Social Ontology,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2018 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2018), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/social-ontology/>.

¹⁸⁰ Epstein, “Social Ontology.”

¹⁸¹ I am avoiding the term intrinsic here.

¹⁸² If you don’t think persons are social entities, you might still think that persons are *socially dynamic* meaning that they, like social entities, have some social properties internally that can change as the social world changes. This is all I need for my view to go through.

¹⁸³ Ásta Kristjana Sveinsdottir, “The Social Construction of Human Kinds,” *Hypatia* 28, no. 4 (2013): 716–32.

¹⁸⁴ Both Baker and Evnine, along with others suggest that artifacts are something over and above their material constituents, they are importantly intention-dependant. Lynne Rudder Baker, *The Metaphysics of Everyday Life: An Essay in Practical Realism* (Cambridge University Press, 2007) 32.; Simon J. Evnine, *Making Objects and Events: A Hylomorphic Theory of Artifacts, Actions, and Organisms* (Oxford University Press UK, 2016).

This is quite simple to do, Riggle himself distinguishes the material body of the street and the street as a socially dynamic entity (materially constituted) and presents a definition of ‘street’ that is explicitly sociocultural rather than a physical, ‘spatial or logistical.’¹⁸⁵ He recognizes that the street is a social entity when he defines the street in virtue of its social function; the street is an “[urban, basically for-the-public] space whose function it is to facilitate self-expression...”¹⁸⁶ Whether something is the street then, depends on norms of action and interaction that are facilitated by the space – on social facts about the relevant space. It should be uncontroversial that the street as Riggle defines it is a social entity.

It is evident that the street is a social entity according to Riggle. However, it is not yet evident that the artistic properties of street art change if the social properties of the street change. In other words, it is not yet clear whether using the street as a canvas implies committing to artistic changes as a result of social changes experienced by that canvas. I think it does, I also think that Riggle agrees. Although, on Riggle’s account how much change a work can tolerate depends on the way that the artwork uses the street as an artistic resource. I will explain.

To show that the artistic properties of street art can change as the street changes socially, I must first show that the artistic properties of street art are at all affected by the social properties of the street. Riggle seems to think so, he argues that street art can ‘harness and augment’¹⁸⁷ the social properties of the street. He uses Bruno Taylor’s *Bus Stop Swings* as an example, describing them as “...swings installed at boring bus stops...”¹⁸⁸ presumably to make the space more fun, and argues that they “...show us forms of urban life that are within our grasp.”¹⁸⁹ Artworks like this must be understood as commenting on the social properties of a space in order to be made sense of; ‘being boring’ is a social property of the space, not a physical one – it is about our human social interactions within the space. So it is clear then that the artistic properties of street art can depend on the social properties of the street on Riggle’s account. Now

¹⁸⁵ Riggle, “Using the Street for Art.” 192.

¹⁸⁶ Riggle. 191.

¹⁸⁷ Riggle. 193.

¹⁸⁸ Riggle. 193.

¹⁸⁹ Riggle. 193.

that we know this, I must show that the artistic properties of street art can change as the social properties of the street change.

According to Riggle, both the social and physical changes a work of street art can persist through depends partially on the artist's intentions, and exactly how they used the street as an artistic resource in the work. I will elaborate. Riggle distinguishes between general and specific uses of the street. A general use of the street is the 'use of a public surface for its publicity.' A specific use of the street is a use of a specific kind of street space or particular street space – any brick wall or particular brick wall x respectively.¹⁹⁰ These examples concern the street as a physical artistic resource, but the division between a general and specific use of the street can be extended to the social properties of the street. A general use of the street might be using the street as the street – as a social entity that facilitates self-expression. A specific use of the street might be the use of a kind of social space for its kind social features like a park, or a particular social space for its particular features, such as boring bus stop x. This new distinction can help us understand why Riggle's core claim is formulated with a variable in it. Recall:

S: <use of the street as an artistic resource x is an essential property of street art>

The variable 'x' in *S* should be substituted with the way the street is used (generally or specifically) in the work. This means that the persistence conditions of works of street art vary, depending on the artist's intentional use of the street as an artistic resource; some can survive social change and some cannot.¹⁹¹ I will provide an example.

A work of street art like Taylor's *Bus Stop Swings* uses a particular social property of the street such as its boringness *essentially*. Since it uses a particular social property essentially, if that particular property of the street changes, the work of street art will be destroyed. For example, if a theme park was

¹⁹⁰ Riggle, "Street Art." 252.

¹⁹¹ "...for street art, the artistic use of the street must be internal to its significance, that is, it must contribute essentially to its meaning." Here, whether the general or specific use is the one internal to its significance will have to be determined by looking at that particular use (on an individual basis). Riggle. 246.

built near the bus stop, then Taylor's original commentary might be lost because the bus stop would no longer be boring; it is a bus stop before a theme park – it is filled with excitement! People are likely to mistake the swings as a gimmick on the part of the park, rather than a commentary on the ownership and use of public space. In this case, *Bus Stop Swings* might be destroyed, since the particular social feature (the boringness of the bus stop) that was essential to it was destroyed. Alternatively, if the area surrounding the bus stop deteriorated, perhaps the meaning of Taylor's work would simply be amplified rather than the work being destroyed. Whether street art changes as the street changes then, depends on how the change in the street affects the essential use of the street by the artwork.

In summary, I have just shown that the extended analogy is well-applied: both street art and tattoos are a certain kind of socially dynamic entity, and that the artistic properties of the street can change as the social properties of the street change. However, what the analysis above revealed is that Riggle's account and mine diverge with respect to how tolerant the artworks are to social change. This deserves an explanation.

According to my account of tattoos, the tattoo instantiates an essential relation to its tattoo recipient that partially determines the artistic properties of the tattoo. This relation is, in Riggle's terms, *general*: a tattoo instantiates a relation to a particular tattoo recipient, but not any particular social feature of the tattoo recipient's persona. Given this, the tattoo can persist through all changes in the persona of the tattoo recipient. This is the case for *every* tattoo: it is always the *general* use of the person as an artistic resource that is essential to the artwork. For street art, the artistic use of the street socially is an essential property of the work because the artist intended it to be so. In other words, although the extended analogy is true of tattoos and street art, tattoos use the person as an artistic resource generally, street artists can use the street as an artistic resource generally or specifically.

The extended analogy reveals that the artistic properties of certain works of street art change as the social properties of the street change. What, if anything, is interesting about this discovery? As I mentioned earlier, there has historically been resistance to the idea that the artistic properties of artworks

can change over time. I argued that whether an artwork can survive changes depends in part on the kind of artform it falls under. However, at the time I was more concerned with showing that the artistic properties of artworks could change at all. That the artistic properties of artwork could change as a result of social change is more interesting, and it is this that I suggest is important about the extended analogy and the ontology of tattoos that I have provided more generally.

Levinson explicitly and strongly denies that artworks can experience change as a result of social changes, independent of whether they can experience physical change or deterioration. He says “I want to deny that artworks change over time...I want to deny that the meanings, the aesthetic qualities, the artistic attributes, the proper effects of artworks are subject to evolution, expansion, even revision as time goes by *and as subsequent culture develops.*”¹⁹² Given that Levinson’s claim is about artworks in general, street art and tattoos challenge his argument.

The core intuition driving Levinson is that what is put into the artwork when it is created is all the properties that the work can have, and insofar as it may *seem like* the work develops new properties like being influential, those properties were always ones the work had, they just weren’t recognizable at the time.¹⁹³ What Levinson fears, I think, is a viewer relativism of artworks: that an artworks artistic properties could be determined by the current state of the viewer in some way – that Beethoven could be rendered truly ‘boring’ because of our 21st century ears.

Importantly, the account of tattoos and street art I have presented here does not cave to the viewer relativism that Levinson fears entirely. In fact, it should be thought of as more akin to the physical change undergone by a metal sculpture rusting from exposure. A work of street art comments on a social feature of the social space by literally using those features as an artistic resource, like a sculpture uses metal, and inserting itself into the social community. When that community changes, the artwork must also change along with it because it has used that community artistically. It is these fundamentally embedded social artworks that Levinson glossed over with his account. Although other artworks may comment on the

¹⁹² My emphasis. Levinson, “Artworks and the Future.” 179-180.

¹⁹³ Levinson. 203-204.

social community, few literally use the social community (or parts of it) in the way street art and tattoos do.

In this section, I provided an argument for the claim that some street art changes as the *social properties* of the street change. I began by distinguishing the street as a physical entity and a social entity. I then argued that Riggle's definition of the street is of the street as a social entity. I described Riggle's distinction between a general and specific use of the street and argued that the kind of use of the street (general or specific) will determine whether a work of street art can change or is destroyed when the social street it uses as an artistic resource changes.

Chapter VII. Conclusion:

I have presented what I hope is a compelling metaphysical and structural account of tattoos that takes their intimate connection to the human social world seriously, and that embraces the rich oddities of their unconventional canvas. I have argued that tattoos are inked-designs that bear the relation is inked-on to their tattoo recipients, essentially. I have suggested that, according to this special relation, tattoo recipients contextualize the inked-designs on them, presenting them to the world in a certain way. I have argued that the way the inked-design is presented changes as the tattoo recipient changes, and so a tattoo's artistic properties can change over time. Furthermore, since the relation is essential to the tattoo, tattoos cannot survive the death of their recipients. In addition to building this novel ontology of tattoos, I have opened the door to the conversation about tattoo interpretation, notably concerning the role of the tattoo recipient in artistically contextualizing their tattoos. I have shown how the ontology I provided here serves us better than the ontology of tattoos that Sizer's definition leads to. Finally, I have illustrated how my ontology of tattoos can be applied to other areas of aesthetics – in this case by extending an existing analogy between tattoos and street art in a way that illuminates interesting features of both artforms.

Philosophical work on tattoos in analytic aesthetics is still in its infancy, and many questions remain unanswered. What I have presented here barely scrapes the surface, although, I hope it has set us up nicely for future explorations. With that in mind, it is worth taking a moment to briefly address what this investigation did not have the space to cover more completely, and set the stage for future exploration into the ontology and artistic interpretation of tattoos.

The first matter that deserves further investigation is the ontology of American-traditional flash tattoos. American-traditional flash tattoos are tattoos of archetypal designs such as an anchor or heart, in red and black ink with high contrast or block shading. Given that these flash tattoos are mass-produced (often ordered in bulk online by tattoo shops) and require little to no creative input from the artist, one might argue that an ontology of flash tattoos should mirror one of repeatable artworks like prints, rather than one of non-repeatable original artworks. At the beginning of this investigation, I assumed that tattoos

were non-repeatable artworks. Although there are perhaps enough artistic reasons to distinguish flash tattoos from regular tattoos, I both want to and should reply that flash works are just like regular tattoos. Despite the repeatability of flash *designs*, flash *tattoos* will still have different artistic properties insofar as they are tattooed on different recipients because they will be contextualized differently by those recipients. To do this question justice though, would require far more careful investigation.

The second matter that deserves further investigation is what I will roughly call the composition of tattoos.¹⁹⁴ This is the topic that I think is most regrettably neglected by this thesis. Broadly, the composition of *tattoos* concerns the conditions under which groups or sets of tattoos compose things (mereological questions), why they compose them when they do, and what the art-status of those composites is.¹⁹⁵ This topic is particularly interesting because compositional problems might be uniquely prevalent in the discourse on tattoos: tattoos are often collected together in curated arrangements and added to over time – far more often than regular artworks.

Here are some questions that concern whether individual tattoos compose some further thing:

1. Are the quantifier tattoos on either side of my neck one thing or two?
2. Does *any* collection of tattoos on my body compose something?
3. Do all the tattoos on my body compose one thing (a collection of tattoos)?
4. Are the individual word tattoos from Shelley Jackson's *Ineradicable Stain* individual one thing or many?¹⁹⁶ Are they both?
5. Can any collection of tattoos across persons compose something?
6. Do the tattoos on my arm compose a sleeve (whatever this is)?
7. Can two sleeves compose a serial artwork (or something else)? Can two sleeves and a chest piece (or back piece) compose a tattoo-triptych (or something else)?
8. Is the 'tattoo' I started at time t_1 and completed some years later at t_2 one thing?

Once we have decided whether something is composed in each of these cases (it might turn out to be trivial that something is composed in all of them), the more interesting questions might concern their art-

¹⁹⁴ These questions are primarily mereological ones, however, mereology is technically just the formal theory of parts of wholes. In the case of tattoos we should also wonder what the resulting art-status of those composites is.

¹⁹⁵ Under some conditions this matter might also be partially rephrased as a problem about the individuation of tattoos.

¹⁹⁶ "Shelley Jackson's INERADICABLE STAIN : SKIN PROJECT GUIDELINES," accessed September 27, 2020, <https://ineradicablestain.com/skin-guidelines.html>.

status. We should wonder what the art-status of each composite is, when composites get art-status, and whether that art-status is as a tattoo or as another kind of artwork, and perhaps what aesthetic justification there is for calling some collections of tattoos composites like sleeves artworks, over others.¹⁹⁷

The third subject that deserves further investigation is the tattoo recipient themselves and their role(s) in the artistic life of their tattoo(s). The tattoo recipient can play multiple roles in the artistic development of their tattoo(s); co-artist, commissioner, curator, and canvas (recipient). Important work can be done to carefully distinguish and develop an understanding of these roles.¹⁹⁸ I have spent the majority of this thesis focused on the role of the tattoo recipient *qua canvas*, however, each role deserves equally in-depth investigation. I think the most potentially intriguing and fruitful path is in detailing the role of the tattoo recipient *qua curator*. The curatorial arts are underexplored in aesthetics in general. Furthermore, the tattoo recipient potentially occupies a rare curatorial role in the selection and arrangement of tattoos on her body; curators are often artistically fettered by artists, but the tattoo recipient has complete control over the curatorial process – the display is the exterior of their own body. We should wonder what this curatorial role looks like and how it relates to the compositional questions I outlined above: does the tattoo recipient *qua curator* determine when groups of tattoos form composite artworks?

The fourth matter that immediately requires attention is tattoo criticism, specifically what tattoo criticism is directed at. Noel Carroll argues that criticism is criticism of what the *artist* has done or achieved in the creation of the relevant work.¹⁹⁹ Typically we tend to think that the object of criticism is the entire artwork since that is what the artist has presumably done. However, in the case of tattoos, it

¹⁹⁷ We might turn to literature on serial artworks. Serial artworks are *artworks* composed of a series of other artworks: poetry collections, albums, and literary series, to name a few. Christy Mag Uidhir, “How to Frame Serial Art,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 71, no. 3 (2013): 261–65. 262.

¹⁹⁸ For example, Dadlez suggests how one might begin to investigate the role of the tattoo recipient as a co-artist by utilizing Bacharach and Tollefsen’s account of co-authorship. Dadlez, “Ink, Art and Expression” 749; Sondra Bacharach and Deborah Tollefsen, “‘We’ Did It: From Mere Contributors to Coauthors,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 68, no. 1 (2010): 23–32.

¹⁹⁹ Noel Carroll, *On Criticism* (Routledge, 2008). 51.

seems like the object of criticism only ends up being part of the artwork: the design as inked. Importantly I do not think there is a tension of any kind between Carroll's idea of criticism and the ontology of tattoos I have proposed. If anything, I think it does well to explain the incongruity we experience when we attempt to apply regular aesthetic criticism to tattoos. Tattoo criticism tends to focus on linework, design, and placement to the seemingly *extreme* detriment of context. There is always an awkward distance between the inked-design as an object of criticism and the tattoo proper, this distance is frequently acknowledged by those who offer tattoo criticism and those whose tattoos are the object of criticism. Perhaps this inability to apply typical tools of criticism to the whole tattoos indicates the distance between tattoos and the traditional artworld.

Finally, the broader applications of the view I have presented should be explored. A large part of developing this ontology of tattoos has been developing the is inked-on relation which claims that a tattoo recipient, in some sense *the canvas* of the artwork, presents the tattoos on them. This notion of presentation by a canvas, and in particular a *social canvas* is easily generalizable: we might think that other canvases present their artworks in similar ways. This is most elegantly revealed by the comparison to street art. In fact, it seems we can elegantly draw analogies between tattoos and other forms of artistic adornment on social entities, such as interior design, jewelry, and makeup. This question and the others I have outlined above, beg to be answered.

Philosophical investigations into the nature of tattoos are a recent affair in Western analytic aesthetics. As I have just shown, the project I have presented is the foundation of a far more monolithic one that I can only fail to do justice to in such a condensed space. That said, I have built an important foundation for what I think is a socially and artistically faithful, albeit somewhat metaphysically idiosyncratic, ontology of tattoos. Although I am certain more metaphysically simple explanations could be offered, my investigations here have been primarily based on aesthetic intuitions derived from artistic practice and I worry that if I were to deviate from these intuitions I would be forced to leave behind the social and artistic richness of tattoos that my view has so proudly upheld.