



# THE EGO AND THE SKIN

## Psychoanalytic and Feminist Perspectives on the Formation of Self through Touch

55-01.192.412, Hauptseminar Spring/Summer 2019  
Wednesdays 12:15-13:45, Raum Ü35 - 03080

This course on the philosophy of touch draws on perspectives in psychoanalysis, feminist philosophy, phenomenology, critical race theory, and queer theory. We will explore the dual character of skin: the organ that allows two bodies to join together in touch and the organ that serves as a barrier between myself and the other. We first experience pleasure through the caress of a caregiver across our skin. However, our skin is also the site of our first sensations of discomfort or pain. In these first experiences of touch, the infant cannot initially distinguish where her skin ends and caretaker's skin begins. Our readings and course discussions will probe the following questions:

**How do we first grasp our skin as our own?**

**How does our relationship to our own skin shape our sense of self?**

**What kinds of experiences take away our sense of our skin as our own?**

**How can we reclaim our skin from the grasp of the other and restore our sense of self?**

### READINGS

#### Unit 1. First Experiences of Touch

1.

Freud, S. (2001a), "Note upon the 'mystic writing pad,'" S.E., 19, 1923–1925, New York: Vintage, 225–32.

Freud, S. (2001b), "Findings, ideas, problems," S.E., 23, 1937–1939. NY: Vintage, 299–300.

2.

Klein, M. (1975), "The Importance of Symbol-Formation in the Development of the Ego," *Love, Guilt, and Reparation: And Other Works 1921-1945*. New York: The Free Press. 219-232.

3.

Anzieu, D. (1989), "Notions of a Skin Ego," *The Skin Ego: A Psychoanalytic Approach to the Self*, Naomi Segal (trans), New Haven: Yale University Press. 39-48



## Unit 2. In Search of an Original Skin

4.

Plato. (1989), "Aristophanes' Speech," *Symposium*, Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (trans.), Cambridge: Hackett Publishing. 189c-193e

Lacan, J. (1988), *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Alan Sheridan (trans), NY: Norton. 197-200.

5.

Kafka, F. (1948), *The Penal Colony: Stories and Short Pieces*, Willa Muir and Edwin Muir (trans), New York: Schocken Books. (optional)

Lyotard, J.-F. (1991), "Prescription," *L'Esprit Créateur*, Christopher Fynsk (trans), Vol. 31, 1. 15-32.

## Unit 3. Reclaiming My Lived Skin

7.

Audre Lorde. (2007) "Scratching the Surface" and "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power." *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde*. Berkeley: Crossing Press. 45-59

8.

Roxane Gay. (2017) *Hunger: A Memoir of (My) Body*. New York: Harper.

9-11.

Ahmed, Sara & Jackie Stacey (eds) (2001). *Thinking Through the Skin*. London and New York: Routledge. Selected essays.

12-13.

Workshop for Term Paper Topics.



## **GRADING**

Class participation and preparation: 50%  
Presentation & Final Paper: 50%

## **READINGS**

PDFs of many of our readings will be made available on Stine. You will be required to bring hard or electronic copies of the readings with you to class. I expect you to read the text, mark your copy, take notes, and prepare thoughtful questions and comments for class discussion.

You are encouraged to read material in the original language. However, class lectures and discussions will be held in English. We will compare English translations with the original texts when relevant.

## **FINAL PAPER & PRESENTATION**

Final paper: June 19  
6,000-words, English or German, double-space, Times New Roman, 12 font, 2,54 cm margins, include 100 word abstract, Chicago citation style (further details will be discussed in class).

Presentation: date TBA

We will host a mini-conference on interdisciplinary perspectives on touch, the details of which we will decide as a class. This will be an opportunity to share your final papers and engage in discussion.