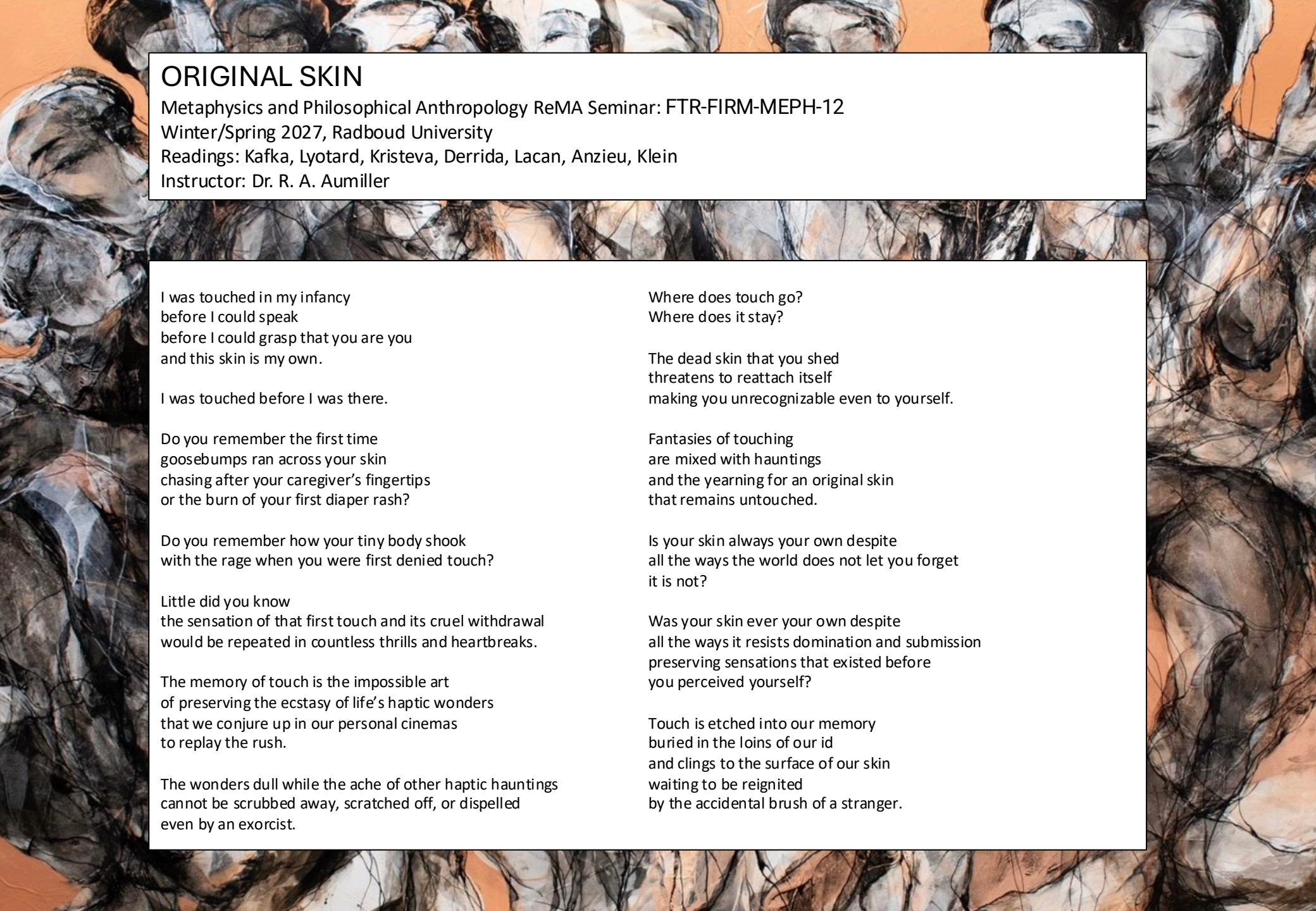


ORIGINAL SKIN

Metaphysics and Philosophical Anthropology ReMA Seminar: FTR-FIRM-MEPH-12
Winter/Spring 2027, Radboud University
Readings: Kafka, Lyotard, Kristeva, Derrida, Lacan, Anzieu, Klein
Instructor: Dr. R. A. Aumiller

I was touched in my infancy
before I could speak
before I could grasp that you are you
and this skin is my own.

I was touched before I was there.

Do you remember the first time
goosebumps ran across your skin
chasing after your caregiver's fingertips
or the burn of your first diaper rash?

Do you remember how your tiny body shook
with the rage when you were first denied touch?

Little did you know
the sensation of that first touch and its cruel withdrawal
would be repeated in countless thrills and heartbreaks.

The memory of touch is the impossible art
of preserving the ecstasy of life's haptic wonders
that we conjure up in our personal cinemas
to replay the rush.

The wonders dull while the ache of other haptic hauntings
cannot be scrubbed away, scratched off, or dispelled
even by an exorcist.

Where does touch go?
Where does it stay?

The dead skin that you shed
threatens to reattach itself
making you unrecognizable even to yourself.

Fantasies of touching
are mixed with hauntings
and the yearning for an original skin
that remains untouched.

Is your skin always your own despite
all the ways the world does not let you forget
it is not?

Was your skin ever your own despite
all the ways it resists domination and submission
preserving sensations that existed before
you perceived yourself?

Touch is etched into our memory
buried in the loins of our id
and clings to the surface of our skin
waiting to be reignited
by the accidental brush of a stranger.

Seminar Description

This research seminar draws on psychoanalysis, postmodern philosophy, phenomenology, and feminist philosophy to explore skin as both a site of contact and a boundary between self and other. How do we first grasp our skin as our own? How do experiences of touch, language, and bodily inscription shape our sense of self? What unsettles our bodily boundaries, and what might it mean to reclaim them? Through close readings of philosophical, psychoanalytic, and literary texts, we investigate how skin bears the traces of encounters that precede our capacity to remember or speak about them.

Seminar Schedule

1 Original S(k)in: Introduction to infancy, touch, and ego formation

Freud, S. (2001a). "Note upon the 'Mystic Writing Pad.'" The Standard Edition, vol. 19, 1923–1925. New York: Vintage, 225–232.

Freud, S. (2001b). "Findings, Ideas, Problems." The Standard Edition, vol. 23, 1937–1939. New York: Vintage, 299–300.

2 The Touch of the Mother Tongue

Augustine (1998). "Book One: Infancy." Confessions. Translated by Henry Chadwick. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Aumiller, R. A. (2019). "Fantasies of Forgetting Our Mother Tongue." Journal of Speculative Philosophy 33 (3): 368–380.

3 Before I Was There I Was Touched

Lyotard, J.-F. (1991). "Prescription." Translated by Christopher Fynsk. L'Esprit Créateur 31 (1): 15–32.

Kafka, F. (1948). "In the Penal Colony." The Penal Colony: Stories and Short Pieces. Translated by Willa Muir and Edwin Muir. New York: Schocken Books.

4 The First Cut

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

Lacan, J. (1988). The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Norton. With emphasis on pp. 197–200.

5 Haunted by a Foreskin

Derrida, J. (1993). "Circumfession." Translated by Geoffrey Bennington. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

6 The Ego & the Skin

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.

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

7 Skin Horror

Kristeva, Julia. Powers of Horror. Selected chapters.

8 Skin as My Own

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

Research Paper and Workshop

Students will develop an original philosophical question through close engagement with one or more course texts. The paper should advance a sustained argument, situate it within relevant scholarship, and demonstrate careful attention to the language and conceptual tensions of the primary material.

Students will submit a short proposal identifying their question, central texts, and preliminary bibliography. In a research workshop, they will present their developing argument and respond to a peer's project. The final paper should build on this exchange and the instructor's feedback.