This chapter provides a close analysis of Didier Anzieu's concept of the 'skin ego' in order to rethink the relationship between the skin, the psyche and the literary text. Discussing Anzieu's account of the three primary functions of the skin as a 'container', an 'interface' and an 'inscribing surface', it examines the representation of the textual skin in Siri Hustvedt's What I Loved. Reading the numerous instances of 'dermographism' in Hustvedt's novel, alongside attempts by characters to generate a 'second skin', the chapter also considers the relationship between the surface of the body and aesthetic form, exploring the different ways that writing might perform literary contact. Interrogating Anzieu's description of a 'skin of words', it argues that a text, like a skin, is caught up in an endless process of destruction and renewal.

'The skin of words': trauma and skin in Watt
Michiko Tsushima

Michiko Tsushima’s chapter discloses the relationship between trauma and skin in considering Watt as a ‘skin of words’ woven by Beckett—a psychic skin that he tried to recover—and, at the same time, as something that reveals the ‘force and truth’ of trauma. First, with the help of Didier Anzieu’s concept of ‘the Skin Ego’, Tsushima explores the possibility that Beckett’s act of writing Watt can be considered an attempt to recover the psychic skin by weaving a ‘skin of words’. This act
of writing has a therapeutic aspect. She also argues that Watt explores the ‘force and truth’ of trauma which cannot be resolved or assimilated. Tsushima shows how the ‘force and truth’ of trauma manifests itself as a violence to the surface of language, a force that disrupts the apparatus of linguistic representation.

Each Word of Skin
Sarah Jackson

in Tactile Poetics: Touch and Contemporary Writing

The introduction to this book outlines a cultural history of the body and its senses and surveys the irreducible bond between the page and the skin. It addresses the turn from the debasement of touch in Western philosophy to the recent surge of interest in the surface of the body. Despite our current fascination with the skin, however, the relationship between text and tact remains overlooked. Drawing on Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey's account of the ‘writerly effect’ of the skin, this introduction examines the connections between writing and the concept of tact. Considering the ‘writing-effects’ of the skin, it also questions the ways that the text itself can be read as a skin, proposing that Didier Anzieu's concept of the ‘skin ego’ offers us a way of understanding the ‘textual skin’. At the same time, however, the introduction identifies the central importance of the work of Hélène Cixous, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy to the study, discussing how their disruption of the opposition between touching and not-touching contributes to the way we read the skin, and arguing that interruption and withdrawal always haunt literary tact.

Tactile Poetics
Sarah Jackson

While the field of haptic aesthetics has received significant critical interest in recent years, the intimate connection between touching and writing remains neglected. Contributing to current debates in deconstruction and psychoanalysis, this book offers a new critical perspective on the relationship between text and tact. Through close
readings of authors such as John Berger, Elizabeth Bowen, Anne Carson, Hélène Cixous, H.D., Siri Hustvedt and Michael Ondaatje, and the director Fritz Lang, the volume proposes a theory of ‘tactile poetics’ in order to examine the co-implication of touch and writing in a range of genres including the novel, poetry, short fiction, autobiography and film. Drawing on insights from Didier Anzieu, Hélène Cixous, Jacques Derrida, Sigmund Freud and Jean-Luc Nancy, Tactile Poetics: Touch and Contemporary Writing examines the ‘skin-effects’ of language and the ‘law of tact’ that always interrupts contact. Celebrating the intersections between creative and critical writing and exploring diverse literary textures, the book deviates from grasping and licking to false hands and phantom limbs, considering the effects of spectral contact on how we ‘hand on’ ways of thinking about reading and writing.

Animal Skins and the Reading Self in Medieval Latin and French Bestiaries

Sarah Kay

This book explores the relations between humans and other animals as they appear to a reader of medieval bestiaries, given that almost all of them are realized as parchment books and that parchment, although made from animal skin, looks much like human skin. Using Didier Anzieu’s concept of the Skin Ego and a theory of reading as assuming a second skin, the book explores how a supposedly human identity can be challenged by a reading process that inserts the reader into an animal skin. It examines the treatment of bestiary creatures in relation to the pages on which their entries are copied, showing how bestiarists’ teachings may be confirmed or undermined by the interaction between a text’s content, which is often focused on animals’ skins, their illustrations, which often outline or highlight those skins, and its material support, an actual instance of skin. The pages of many different manuscripts, transmitting numerous bestiary versions, are read closely in order to bring out possible interconnections between word, image, and parchment. Each chapter addresses an aspect of human-animal relations that is thematized both by medieval bestiaries and by modern theorists of the posthuman such as Giorgio Agamben and Jacques Derrida. In-depth coverage of Latin and French bestiary versions produces a new overall account of the development of the Physiologus tradition in Western Europe, one which attributes more importance to Continental traditions than previous Anglophone scholarship.
Ambrose’s account in his Hexameron of the mating habits of the Viper attests his conviction that human bodies functioned in the same way as the bodies of nonhuman animals as regards sex and the senses. Such a resemblance between human and animal continues to challenge and shape the idea of the human in the psychoanalytic theory of the drives. A patristic tag describing man as born “between urine and feces” was cited by Freud, reflecting on maturation as a process of becoming human, and then used by Anzieu as the title of a short story recounting birth as the passage from filth into a library. This chapter explores the tension between bodily orifices and the library as it is activated in bestiaries that provoke anxiety about sexuality as part of their appeal to the reader of a book. It links the notion of involucrum from the previous chapter to Derrida’s concept of invagination, as it follows the continuum between bodily recesses and the bestiary page. The chapter concentrates particularly on the presentation of the Hyena and Beaver, and the Weasel and Asp, especially in manuscripts of the Dicta Chrysostomi and the bestiary of Guillaume le Clerc.

Expeausition

Sarah Jackson

in Tactile Poetics: Touch and Contemporary Writing

Developing Didier Anzieu's account of the skin as a palimpsest that preserves traces of experience inscribed on its surface, this chapter reads the ‘palimpsestuous’ quality of Michael Ondaatje's work. Discussing his novels In The Skin of a Lion and The English Patient, it reads the co-implication of the body and the text as a means of mapping aesthetic movement and form. The chapter argues that in disrupting the conventions of the realist novel, Ondaatje presents a textual skin that is both mobile and mutable. Comparing this skin to Michel Serres's discussion of the syrrhèse or a cloud of dust, it suggests that Ondaatje's 'tactile poetics’ demand a different mode of reading. Rather than
focusing on the motif of inscription in Ondaatje's work, this chapter employs Jean-Luc Nancy's theory of exscription in order to interrogate the traces that are ‘inscribed-outside’ the text. Reading the skin-effects of Ondaatje's work, it demonstrates that language is subject to its own expeausition.