

Academic responses to **THE SKIN I'M IN**

a documentary and Web initiative by Dr. Broderick Fox
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Dr. Alexandra Juhasz, Professor of Media Studies at Pitzer College and author of *Learning From YouTube*:

My students in Feminist and Queer Documentary were blown away by *The Skin I'm In*. There they found realized many of the preoccupations of our course: the production of an autobiographical, personal voice rooted in performance and transgression; a self-aware inquiry into the limits, liabilities, and necessities of self-revelation and healing; an artful and political queer adaptation of classically feminist ideas about body, body image and sex to the experiences of men. Moreover, by moving his more traditional feature documentary to a digital, educational home, Broderick Fox models for contemporary students of documentary new ways to think through distribution, allowing for political practices of reception, pedagogy and community building.

Dr. Thomas Waugh, Professor of Film Studies & Interdisciplinary Studies in Sexuality at Concordia University and author of *The Right to Play Oneself: Looking back on Documentary Film*:

This hybrid feature-length first-person doc is one of the outstanding works to appear in the current wave of autobiographical films about identity and life experience, ideal for teaching about not only sexuality and queer histories but also recent trends in documentary and essay film forms. A recovery narrative that is bold and inventive, *The Skin I'm In* takes artistic and personal risks and delivers a strong payload in terms of both affect and insight into the self, the body and the world.

Dr. Marsha Kinder, Professor Emerita of Critical Studies at the University of Southern California School of Cinematic Arts, Founder and Director of the Labyrinth Project, and author of *Blood Cinema*:

The Skin I'm In (2012) is a courageous documentary by Broderick Fox, which dramatizes his own multi-layered transformation after having been rescued in 2005 from the subway tracks in Berlin while in a drunken stupor. His chosen means of metamorphosis is a permanent full back tattoo whose acquisition requires extreme bodily pain that is emblematic of both the punishment and pride he imposes on himself. The tattoo allows him to embrace and hybridize both the native American culture that is source for the design and the individual artistry of Zulu, an edgy tattoo artist in LA who inscribes it on his skin. The newly tattooed Brody becomes merely another one of the multiple identities he has previously juggled—alcoholic, female impersonator, go-go-dancer, filmmaker and college professor—yet, unlike the others, it is a “permanent” identity he can never shed. It is the dual vision of this self-imposed ritual that makes the film (however stylized its aesthetic) and the experience it documents (however traumatic and redemptive) so mesmerizing.

The film's title immediately evokes a comparison with Pedro Almodóvar's *The Skin I Live In* (2011), which also uses the skin as the site of a powerful sex change that is imposed on a young man as punishment for his sexual crime. While the skin is the largest organ in the human body, the most visibly accessible to others and the most susceptible to change, it seems to seal off or protect the interior where consciousness and identity really lie. This paradox gives tattoos special resonance within the gay world, where the debate over whether one is born with a certain gender and sexuality or they are adopted as a masquerade is most crucial. While both films play with multiple identities, both of their titles insist there IS an essential “I” that is separable from the skin it inhabits. For Almodóvar, whose earlier films had performed a sex change not only on specific characters but also on Spain's national stereotype, *The Skin I Live In* finally admits the high price that is paid for such a transformation. Yet, he sheaths this transformative admission within the popular genres of the horror film and psychic thriller and on a literary source written by someone else. But Fox performs these changes, admissions and violations solely on himself—in a film he writes, directs and stars in. That's what makes the film so courageous.