

QUEERING BODIES

Transgender and Intersex Lives

A trans woman identified as Diane suggests the following: “One of the things that strikes me is this sense of being suspect. I think about what it means to be a *body* that’s suspect” (quoted in Shultz 123). While in some ways it might seem that the word *body* should be one of the easiest and most obvious words to define, it actually has a complex and layered set of possible meanings. In a sense, all queer people live in “queer bodies,” in physical entities that typically enact sexualities and sexual behaviors that stand outside the norms of heterosexual assumptions and expectations. For trans people, it is gender, rather than sexuality (or sexual desire), that is most queered.

So what is a **body**? At the simplest, most everyday level, most people would probably respond with what might be called a “materialist” definition, one grounded in the physical substance of the term: the physiological container for life and existence, including its actual components, such as water, protein, calcium, flesh, and so forth. So far, so good. But what, then, if someone were to ask if prosthetic devices that had been implanted on, grafted to, or added and removed from this combination of organic materials should be considered as part of the body, such as the increasingly sophisticated prostheses developed for amputees. Consider what is at stake in such an answer: What do different responses privilege as inherent in different concepts of body?

Another way of getting at the complexity of what may seem like such a simple term would be to try to answer the question, “What must a body have in order to qualify as a *body*, as we understand human bodies?” Again, most people probably begin with lists of “parts” (including life-sustaining organs): torso, head, arms, legs, eyes, ears, fingers, toes, heart, lungs, brain, and so forth. Indeed, there are philosophers and bioethicists who do engage in passionate and sustained arguments about the meaning of *human body* that are based on a kind of inventory of bodily parts. If a person is born

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING AND VIEWING

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