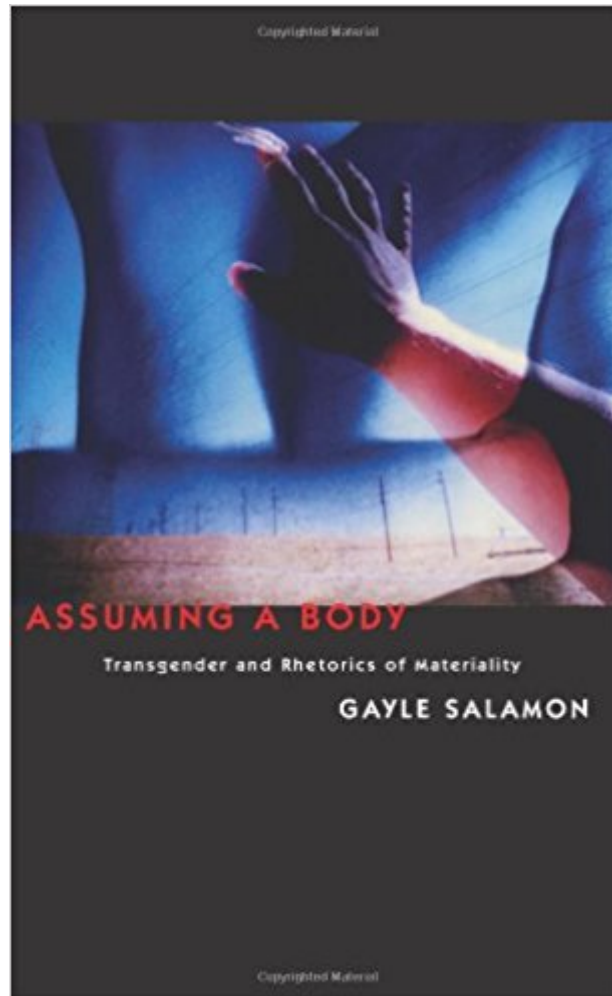




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Assuming A Body: Transgender And Rhetorics Of Materiality



Synopsis

We believe we know our bodies intimately; that their material reality is certain and that this certainty leads to an epistemological truth about sex, gender, and identity. By exploring and giving equal weight to transgendered subjectivities, however, Gayle Salamon upends these certainties. Considering questions of transgendered embodiment via phenomenology (Maurice Merleau-Ponty), psychoanalysis (Sigmund Freud and Paul Ferdinand Schilder), and queer theory, Salamon advances an alternative theory of normative and non-normative gender, proving the value and vitality of trans experience for thinking about embodiment. Salamon suggests that the difference between transgendered and normatively gendered bodies is not, in the end, material. Rather, she argues that the production of gender itself relies on a disjunction between the "felt sense" of the body and an understanding of the body's corporeal contours, and that this process need not be viewed as pathological in nature. Examining the relationship between material and phantasmatic accounts of bodily being, Salamon emphasizes the productive tensions that make the body both present and absent in our consciousness and work to confirm and unsettle gendered certainties. She questions traditional theories that explain how the body comes to be; and comes to be made one's own; and she offers a new framework for thinking about what "counts" as a body. The result is a groundbreaking investigation into the phenomenological life of gender.

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Customer Reviews

As a transwoman, books about transgender theory typically make my skin crawl with the anticipation of the author's short-sighted and prejudicial stance. We get beat up alot by our critics and they come

in all ilks, academics included. Gayle Salamon takes a somewhat meandering perspective using the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty (not Hegel) and some psychoanalytic theory from Freud to critically deconstruct the sometimes polemical views of others on the subject of trans-embodiment and meaning. I found the book to be a bit uneven - it sometimes resorts to the linguistic density of Judith Butler and at other times (especially from chapter four on) is perfectly understandable and coherent. Salamon appears to use critical theory and the dialectic to extract appearance from essence ala Horkheimer and Adorno, surgically removing the masks of bias from the face of existing separatist and essentialist theories. The book does introduce some interesting concepts and arguments which hopefully will stimulate new thinking about what trans-people mean, especially to feminists who refuse to take responsibility for our existence. I do think that the author places an over-emphasis on sexuality and sometimes drifts into metaphysical territory that exists on the plane of a dream-scape. Education and ideas in support of the gender-possible are always appreciated, although the paradox lies in watching a debate unfold over our right to exist, something that we already take for granted. I do recommend this book with the single caveat that it isn't specifically about trans-folks but a serious theoretical and philosophical perspective regarding the subject(s). For a primer on being transgendered look to Kate Bornstein.

I disagree with some of the criticisms in the prior review since this is one of the most clear-headed, lucid, and radical books I've read on this subject in the last years. For those of us who have worked in the trans community for years, this book actually gives us so much of what we have been needing. It shows that what we are about has everything to do with theory, and that we need theory and philosophy for our lives. There are so few books that really rock you in this way, and Gayle Salamon's extremely smart readings of Freud and phenomenology and the body image open me to new worlds and make me see that intellectual work is really nourishment for the soul - which is the body after all. Here is a really perspicacious and radical author who thinks carefully about what it means to be a body in this world and how we become one. How rare is that!

I purchased this book for a "Sexuality and Culture" topical seminar and thoroughly enjoyed the content. We spent on average a week in the class per book so not a lot of time was spent with each text. However we were able to discuss quite a bit and apply the concepts to daily life and many of the issues surrounding transgender politics, primarily the issue of bathrooms since this is the hot topic at this time. Overall an excellent book that discusses various topics surrounding trans-bodies and what it means to be transgendered (as approached from many different angles). Salamon's

writing is clear and to the point but at times things get a little muddled and becomes a little difficult to understand at times. Some of the chapters read easily while others are reminiscent of Judith Butler (not a bad thing). Salamon's book opened my eyes to many things that I had not previously considered and I would recommend this book to any person who wants to expand their understanding of the materiality of the transgendered body and deeper concepts to ponder when creating a discourse with others.

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