



The Body Project of Girl Zines

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The term, "body," *New Keywords* tells us, is most often used to refer to the "material frame" of humans and other animals, and thus, it is regularly associated with concepts of matter, substance, or three-dimensional figures. The entry further notes that "body" is also used in a relational way, to indicate "the main or principal part" of something, as in "the body of a text," or to refer to a collective, as in "the body politic" or "the corporate body." What the entry doesn't explore, though, is that, however the term is used, it puts into play difficult questions about the operation of bodily boundaries and borders, and about the related conceptualization of the inside and the outside.

When thought of as things material and substantive, human and animal bodies seem to begin and end at the surface of the skin. When used metaphorically to refer to the essential part of some thing — the body of a text or the body of the book — that thing itself is understood to be bounded in some identifiable way. Corporate and collective bodies, however, are harder to delineate. What *is* the body politic? How do we locate it? Where? Who is included and who is not? In this usage, defining the border may be elusive, but that doesn't make it any less essential to the concept of the body.

I would like to draw your attention to the subject of girl zines precisely because they posit the figure of the girl's body as essential to their concerns, and because they respond angrily to the ways in which those bodies are traditionally violated in what their creators take to be a girl-hating, misogynist culture. But, compellingly, girl zinesters don't respond to such violation by shoring up or strengthening their boundedness from others or the rest of the world, nor by *simply* insisting on the integrity of individual bodies. Rather, they respond to the question of individual bodily violation by summoning, in opposition, an intersubjective, interpersonated body, a social body made through practices of connection, networking, and alliance, practices undertaken with great hope, excitement, and anticipation. They function as a critique of the marking and individuation of girls' bodies as *visible* — that is, as bounded objects that can be controlled through others' surveillance. At the same time, they constitute an alternative strategy for making girls present *to* and *with* each other, as choral voices united in response, performing with and in the presence of one another. As a result, girl zines challenge familiar ideas about the body as bounded, individuated, autonomous, and discrete.

For example, girl zines mark their refusal of simple boundedness formally. Although they look like pamphlets or little magazines, and therefore evoke the form of the book, they refuse the book's familiar limits in a number of ways. To begin with, where present-day published books call attention to the boundedness of the textual body by telling readers how to make sense of that text (with a set of back-cover blurbs that sum up what the book purportedly means), zines mark their openness to a range of

readers and readings with an empty space. That space is incorporated into the text and intended for the handwritten address of hoped-for future readers. It is the most evident sign of girl zinesters' desire to create a network of like-minded girls who might exchange zines, write back and forth in letters to each other, and respond in zines themselves by incorporating into the body of their own zines writings from others previously read. The space also marks a hope that the potential reader, in her role as zinester, might publicize the name of this zine, along with that of others in a *de rigueur* review section, helping to gather a collective of zinester writer/readers constantly engaged in recursive and generative conversation.

This open-endedness is more than a simple gesture or nod. Girl zinesters constantly implore their readers to "write back," "tell me what you think," "let me hear from you." And they routinely include excerpts from letters sent to them by others, just as they include writings from elsewhere — other zines, mass market magazines, and published books. These materials are never simply assembled as evidence of a primary author's assertions or observations, however. Through cut and paste collage, they are interspersed, intertwined, *joined with* the writer's writings — a dialogue that foregrounds both borders and bleeding over borders, as materials are at once marked off, by rendering in type amidst handwritten text or by use of a different font, and integrated into the overall design of a passage or a page by intertextual reference, continuity of subject, or even by explicit contrast.

Zines refuse linear reading as a result of their formal design. Indeed, it is often difficult to determine how any given zine *should* be read. One can move about the page as one likes and even move within a zine in a number of different ways. Zines often refuse pagination altogether, just as they employ elaborate fold strategies that confound the idea that one page necessarily follows the next. They try, in other words, to build into their only apparently discrete bodies the possibility of multiple and different readings, readings that mobilize and extend their collectively generated and assembled parts in a number of ways. Readers and writers are not marked off from each other as discrete beings of different types, each bounded by his or her body or by that individual body's experiences. Writers and readers are co-implicated in performances that defy the fixing made possible by boundedness. Girl zines gesture, or perhaps more accurately, *strive* to create different forms of subjectivity — dynamic, ever-changing, radically *social* ways of being, assembled not from internally coherent, integral, autonomous, discrete bodies, but rather through shared, mutually referencing, ever-changing patterns of *being-with*, forms of relationality in a movable world. In more ways than one, then, girl zines foreground the body as both prospect and problem. They invite us to think carefully about the possibility that "body" is a reification, a useful concept that has also worked to elide, and thus to erase, the fluidity, multiplicities, uncertainties, and possibilities of ever-present social process.