

Jarrín, Alvaro and Chiara Pussetti (eds.). 2021. *Remaking the Human. Cosmetic Technologies of Body Repair, Reshaping, and Replacement*. London, New York: Berghahn Books. 290 pp. Hb.: \$130.00/£97.00. ISBN: 9781800730311.

Book review by

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The contributors to this volume, *Remaking the Human: Cosmetic Technologies of Body Repair, Reshaping and Replacement*, delve into bodily aesthetics and modification to tackle a fundamental question in anthropology: What does it mean to be human? In the introduction, the editors establish the concept of “uncanny aesthetics,” inspired by the “uncanny valley” theory from the field of robotics, to frame the volume’s central theme. Rather than critiquing or romanticizing a time before body modification technologies, the concept of “uncanny aesthetics” invites readers to consider the complex relationship between the human and nonhuman existing within our bodies. Each contributor examines how body modification practices shape and define what it means to be human in the contemporary moment.

The book is organized into three sections – *repair*, *reshape*, and *replace*, reflecting the intentions of the biotechnologies discussed in each respective section. The repair section focuses on procedures designed to restore the body to an idealized normative state. The reshape section examines individuals' motivations and implications for using surgery or pharmaceuticals to reconstruct their bodies. The *replacement* section conceptualizes the body as a machine, with interchangeable parts, analyzing how the promises of replacement technologies influence ideologies about the body and (dis)ability. Each chapter examines how the embodiment of varying aesthetics and technologies interact with power dynamics and aspects of identity, such as race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and nation.

The chapters within the *repair* section examine how ideologies of body normativity intersect with corporate messaging and national agendas. Wentzell's research in the US and Mexico, along with Camoletto's study in Italy, investigates how the medical industrial complex shapes cultural beliefs about masculinity and male sexual aging. Using interviews with patients and doctors (Wentzell) or solely with doctors (Camoletto), the authors reveal tensions surrounding perceptions of decreased erectile function—seen as an inevitable biological change or as a decline requiring repair. Both chapters illustrate how the healthcare industry influences societal understandings of normative aging. Schmitt analyzes a Brazilian government initiative to provide otoplasties for children with protruding ears, drawing parallels to early twentieth-century social hygiene and eugenics movements. This program seeks to address perceived deficiencies in children to enhance national well-being. The following piece by Carpigo, on the *Itinerant Beauty Brigade*, offers a refreshing counterpoint to the notion of repair tied to biopolitics. It presents a group of volunteer aestheticians in Mexico City who provide beauty services to low-income individuals as an act of mutual aid and social resistance, creating spaces for body repair that serve as refuges from urban conflict and uncertainty.

Authors in the following section, *reshape*, examine the motivations and ideologies behind body reshaping practices. Pussetti's interviews with Afro-Portuguese women and female immigrants to Portugal engaging in aesthetic modifications (primarily skin whitening treatments) reflect the circulation of colonial beauty ideologies within present-day Europe. The Colombian men in Arango-Londoño's study adopt traditionally feminine beauty procedures to reshape their body, enhance their masculinity, and access success and confidence. Both Grau's research in Catalunya and Beaudoin's investigation of bioartistic practices conceptualize body reshaping as a form of resistance. Grau's research focuses on political activists who challenge gender norms and resist gender surveillance. Beaudoin's exploration of bioartistic practices involves using human body parts to create art, offering innovative perspectives on a post-human future and the ways humans interact with the natural environment.

The pieces in the last section, *replacement*, explore how devices intended to surpass the body's biological limits interact with ideologies of disability, gender, and sexuality. Howe and Silva analyze mobility technology in Paralympic track-and-field. While this technology enhances many athletes' performances, it marginalizes those unable to use or afford them. Rather than uncritically celebrating these innovations, the authors urge a critical examination of how these technologies redefine what it means to be human. Similarly, Borodina critiques the ableist rhetoric surrounding biomedical understandings of

blindness, particularly regarding the promotion of retinal implant surgery aimed at normalizing the experiences of blind individuals in Russia. Manica, Nucci, and Paletta consider a different form of human-technological interaction, fertility and menstruation tracking apps. Through interviews with users, the authors argue that the data collected by these apps reshapes the norms influencing perceptions of how female bodies should behave. Rohden explores the prescription of testosterone as hormone replacement therapy in Brazil to boost women's libido. Her interviews uncover a gendered understanding of sexuality. Doctors portray female sexuality as complex and multifaceted, in contrast to the straightforward nature of male sexuality. The treatment of low sexual desire with testosterone, often viewed as a male hormone, reinforces existing gender boundaries.

The volume concludes with a short afterword reflecting on how technology, pharmaceuticals, and medical procedures have expanded the boundaries of the human body. This section challenges a binary view of biomedical technology, highlighting both its benefits for certain populations and its uneven distribution, which further marginalizes individuals with perceived deficits or diverse abilities, complementing the contributors' careful examinations of the complexities within body modification and aesthetic practices. In this section, Manderson summarizes each chapter using new categories—surgery, medication, and resistance—rather than the book's original organization of *repair*, *reshape*, and *replace*. While this approach offers a fresh perspective, its placement at the end of the volume and its brief discussion do not provide the depth needed for full integration with the rest of the text. Although the editors establish the concept of “uncanny aesthetics” in the introduction, they do not guide the reader in analyzing this term throughout the book. There are no introductory summaries for each section, and the concept of “uncanny aesthetics” is not revisited in the conclusion.

In both the introduction and conclusion, the authors emphasize the unique strength of ethnography in revealing human complexity and diverse experiences related to body modification practices. The contributions effectively exemplify this approach, providing rich ethnographic detail alongside thoughtful quotes from participants. They balance theory and ethnography, ensuring that theoretical concepts enhance, rather than overshadow, ethnographic insights. Readers interested in global issues pertaining to the biomedical and pharmaceutical industries will find this volume's breadth of information particularly valuable.