



Transforming Bodies Makeovers and Monstrosities in American Culture

Heike Steinhoff

Heike Steinhoff is Assistant Professor of American Studies at Ruhr-University Bochum, Germany. Her main areas of research are gender studies, theories and representations of the body, and sexuality in American culture and cultural theory. She is the author of *Queer Buccaneers: (De)Constructing Boundaries in the PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN Film Series*.

"In *Transforming Bodies*, Steinhoff performs a detailed and insightful examination of the ways in which popular cultural articulations of transforming bodies function as sites upon which contemporary political, cultural, technological, and ethical concerns about the self and the social are played out. Her strategic appropriation of the ubiquitous makeover narrative, coupled with her innovative account of 'technologies of monstrosity', makes Steinhoff's engagement with oft-overlooked texts such as Chuck Palahniuk's novels, and Scott Westerfeld's youth science fiction series *Uglies*, a stand-out in the ever growing field of body modification studies."

- Nikki Sullivan, Macquarie University, Australia

"In language that is both accessible and rigorous, Heike Steinhoff illuminates the contours of a makeover culture gone monstrous. Through the figure of the excessive body mapped out across several iterations of US popular culture, Steinhoff lucidly demonstrates how efforts to govern the social body through control of the individual body both reproduce and undermine norms of embodiment, the self, and the aberrant. *Transforming Bodies* helps us see how transformation writes a new kind of beauty on the body, a beauty simultaneously gorgeous and grotesque."

- Brenda R. Weber, Indiana University, USA

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About the book

At the turn of the twenty-first century, American media abound with images and narratives of bodily transformations. *Transforming Bodies* investigates how these representations have become key sites for the negotiation of power. Focusing on the representations of 'extreme' forms of somatic transformations, particularly cosmetic surgery, this book examines iconic popular cultural texts from diverse media and genres. The reality TV show *The Swan*, the TV drama series *Nip/Tuck*, Chuck Palahniuk's (post-)postmodern novels *Invisible Monsters* and *Invisible Monsters Remix*, and Scott Westerfeld's young adult fiction series *Uglies* are read as expressions of the heterogeneous biopolitical discourses that are articulated in the American mediascape. In contemporary American culture, representations of body transformations are often part of a makeover paradigm that presents bodies as 'beautiful,' 'individual' and 'improved' if they adhere to normative constructions of gender, sexuality, class, race/ethnicity, and able-bodiedness. However, *Transforming Bodies* demonstrates that a number of popular cultural texts take up narrative structures, representational strategies and ideological underpinnings of makeover culture in order to re-write them. These texts link makeovers to images, practices, and narratives of monstrosity and thereby challenge cultural norms. At the crossroads of American, cultural, literary, media, gender, queer, disability and governmentality studies, the book presents a timely intervention into critical debates on body transformations and contemporary makeover culture.

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