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Beauty Up: Exploring Contemporary Japanese Body Aesthetics. *Laura Miller.*

Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006. xiv + 256 pp., illustrations, tables, notes, bibliography, index.

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“*Up* is a good word for beauty advertising; it is optimistic and full of promise” (p. 182). As readers can see in *Beauty Up*, the promise is not only for customers but also, maybe even more so, for the prospering beauty industry itself. Laura Miller offers an exploration of the Japanese beauty and aesthetic industry from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s. Through Miller, who chooses to participate by becoming the object of beauty services, the reader gets familiar with a variety of facial and body works offered mainly to women, but also to men, in clinics and aesthetic salons. These body corrections include eyelid surgery, leg slimming, breast and penis enhancement, nipple bleaching, and so forth. Although the research is partly based on fieldwork, it is not a “traditional” ethnographic study. Miller prefers to present her work as a “collection of essays in which [she] takes a cultural studies approach” (p. 15). This approach is, indeed, appropriate for this mature and experienced anthropologist and scholar of Japan, and Miller encourages

some younger, enthusiastic anthropologist to write an ethnography of the Japanese aesthetic-salon industry. A careful ethnography of this kind could add valuable details about the industry and, especially, about its customers, including information about age, marital status, and level of education. In addition, it could explore customers' lives and the specificities of the social and cultural contexts in which they seek beauty modifications.

Each of the empirical chapters of the book is dedicated to a different sphere of aesthetic treatments, including a careful study of aesthetic salons, changing views and attitudes toward female breasts in Japan, male beauty work, the diet industry, and the language of *Esute* (Japanese aesthetics). Miller attempts to avoid a unidimensional theoretical line and seeks to offer “multiple explanations, meanings and interpretations” (p. 15). At least three general themes run through the book. The first relates to Miller's critique of the view that body modifications, especially cosmetic surgeries such as eyelid surgery or breast enhancement, are simple manifestations of Western influence. Miller suggests a more complex view of the ongoing relationship between Japan and the foreign and attempts to show that the emulation of the foreign is certainly not the only perspective from which to observe the growing popularity and interest in body modification in Japan. The second recurring theme relates to the question of the universality of beauty. As Miller notes, “Beauty is culturally and historically molded and is never obvious or ‘natural’ ” (p. 205). Although this point may not be as generally innovative as she presents it, Miller suggests that studying beauty in a non-Euro-American culture is a corrective to the increasing tendency of English-language media to present beauty in “scientific,” universal terms. The third theme, which underlies Miller's

main argument, relates to the body becoming a focus for capitalist expansion. Miller emphasizes the power of the consumer market and the media, which urge the Japanese to seek new bodies around which to frame their personalities.

This rich and stimulating study is valuable in offering new ideas about gender identity and its relationship to new forms of consumer capitalism. Miller's perspective also offers a complex prism for the study of globalization and the cultural and commercial "flows" of ideas of beauty and the body in the globalized era. She also poses more significant questions, such as whether the pursuit of beauty is a form of empowerment or total enslavement to the media and the capitalist market.

Another contribution of the book is more locally related to the study of gender and of concepts of femininity and masculinity in contemporary Japan. One of the most absorbing chapters in the book is that on male beauty work. The chapter teaches the readers much about new forms of masculinity, as well as about the impact of female desire on masculinity, and about the domination of market forces, which does not stop at the female body. This rich material opens many more fields for "traditional" ethnographies. Among the assertions that the latter should attempt to reexamine is that young men respond to a new kind of female desire by dyeing their hair and plucking their eyebrows but nevertheless "still expect the women in [their] lives to fulfill traditional and subservient gender roles" (p. 157).