

can still be found in basements and garages, logging distant contacts and keeping up with regulars on the frequencies that remain available to them.

Haring, a historian of science and technology, takes an anthropological approach to ham radio culture that reflects the concerns and values of its denizens while acknowledging the realities of its male-dominated culture, in which female hams have been disparaged on the air and discouraged from joining the fraternity. Her emphasis, however, is on respectful description rather than critical analysis. The ham radio community will likely receive this book with accolades (part of it that was previously published won a prize from the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers). For the rest of us, though, the experience of reading it may sometimes feel like an encounter with Uncle Alvin, the ham radio enthusiast, at a family get-together. Our eyes glaze as we nod tolerantly, hoping that we don't have to trek yet again to the radio shack and pretend an interest in circuits, call signs, and wall charts.

Those seeking an account of ham radio enthusiasts' contributions to American broadcasting, an analysis of *why* technical pursuits are so frequently gendered, or an exploration of how ham radio operators' marginalization may have inspired other technological countercultures, such as pirate radio or computer hacking, won't find what they're looking for here. Instead, Haring has given voice to the hams themselves, trolling patiently through journals well known within the ham community such as *CQ* and *QST* along with texts as specialized as *Jobber News and Electronic Wholesaling* and *RCA Ham Tips* (not a cookbook). She also dusted off books with titles only a hobbyist could love (e.g., *Vacuum Tube Circuits for the Electronic Experimenter*).

Haring situates radio hobbyists not only in the technological realm but within the worlds of work and home, as consumers and as contributors to civil defense. A thread of domestic

tension runs throughout this history, as reflected in one ham's query soliciting "anyone [who has] managed to build a ham rig into a modern home and keep it unobtrusive." During the first half of the century, hams often faced government suspicion that they might be using their instruments to communicate with "foreign" agents, though in the World War II years they dubbed themselves the minutemen of radio and some joined the (tightly supervised) War Emergency Radio Service. By the 1960s, anxiety about what those tinkerers were up to in their backyard shacks had eased, just as the emergence of integrated circuits posed another threat to ham radio: If anyone could buy a prepackaged set and be on the air within hours, what made the hobby distinctive?

Yet ham radio remains popular in this era of cellular phones, CB radios, and the Internet. Why? Haring argues that in ham radio's heyday, men found fraternity, indulged a fascination with gadgetry, and gained the respect of employers through this community. Though today's advanced technologies have rendered much of their expertise obsolete and undermined the "powerful, skilled, precise, and manly" ham image, says Haring, an "emotionally charged technological nostalgia" lingers. This sounds like the same motive that drives others to collect records or attend *Star Trek* conventions. The technical side of ham culture, then, may be less relevant to its endurance than its hobbyist aspect—but that's a subject for another book.

—Michele Hilmes

## The Skinny on Skin

IF PLEASURE IS THE ABSENCE of pain, as Epicurus proposed, I might add that it is also the absence of itch. Such was my frame of mind as I approached Nina G.

Jablonski's treatise on skin while in the midst of a flare-up of seborrheic dermatitis. Dermatolo-

**SKIN:**  
A Natural History.  
By Nina G. Jablonski.  
Univ. of California Press.  
266 pp. \$24.95

gists aren't sure what causes this chronic skin condition or how to cure it, and so, since my teenage years, I have applied one cream and then another whenever my skin blooms with red, itchy patches.

The condition is an uncomfortable reminder of how mysterious a thing is the flexible body wrapper we call "skin," which is, in fact, our largest organ. In this exhaustive treatment, Jablonski, an anthropology professor at Pennsylvania State University, traces skin's evolution from a simple epidermis on early multicellular organisms to the complex layers that cover modern humans, composed of keratin proteins and melanocytes in our outer layer, the epidermis, and collagen fibers, nerves, blood vessels, and hair follicles in the dermis layer beneath. Along the way we also learn why snakes shed their skin (the individual scales cannot grow), why crocodile skin is so tough (it contains bones called ossifications), and why hippopotamuses have pink sweat (it acts as a sunscreen).

But Jablonski's focus is the human animal and the link between our skin and our behavior. For example, she makes a strong case that after we evolved into bipedal creatures who moved around under the African sun, we lost most of our body hair to make our sweat-based cooling process more efficient. The hair that remains on the tops of our heads, she suggests, protects the scalp from ultraviolet radiation.

Indeed, the sun, in Jablonski's estimation, has played an important role in our skin's development. Human skin must protect the body from the harmful effects of ultraviolet radiation even as it uses that radiation to produce beneficial vitamin D. Darker-skinned peoples living in tropical areas that receive high amounts of ultraviolet radiation find an evolutionary advantage to having lots of melanin to protect them from solar radiation, despite the fact that melanin greatly slows vitamin D production. By contrast, lighter-skinned peoples in cooler climates, such as Scandinavia, where solar exposure is limited, run the sun-damage risks attendant upon their lower levels of melanin in order to produce as

much vitamin D as possible.

Jablonski concludes with a look at what's ahead for skin, exploring how gene therapy and collagen scaffolding may help treat psoriasis sufferers and burn patients, how people may bleach or tan their skin by deactivating or activating melanin production, and how pollution sensors and identification chips embedded beneath the skin could make us physically safer—though more vulnerable to invasions of privacy.

Jablonski is sometimes perfunctory, as in the too-few pages she devotes to our sense of touch and to the wear and tear that skin endures. She's at her best when she plays to her strengths as an anthropologist, for example, in her persuasive later chapters on the various ways humans have modified their skin to express themselves—piercing it, tattooing it, scarring it, painting it, and injecting it with Botox.

I grew up listening to my chemist father chide my sister for applying eye shadow because it contained suspected carcinogens that could be easily absorbed through the skin. And he opposed piercing and tattooing less for aesthetic reasons than because such epidermal embellishments compromise the body's natural barrier against the hostile outside world. Like many fathers before him, however, he was railing against ancient, powerful desires. The frozen body of a late-Neolithic man, recovered from a glacier in 1991, shows that the practice of tattooing dates back at least 5,000 years.

—Aaron Dalton

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RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

## A Philosopher's View

FROM 1922 UNTIL HIS death in 1976, the controversial German philosopher Martin Heidegger often lived and worked in a three-room cabin in the Black Forest mountains. "Die Hütte" (the hut), as he called it, was a retreat as well as a source of inspiration. His

**HEIDEGGER'S HUT.**

By Adam Sharr.  
MIT Press.  
112 pp. \$24.95