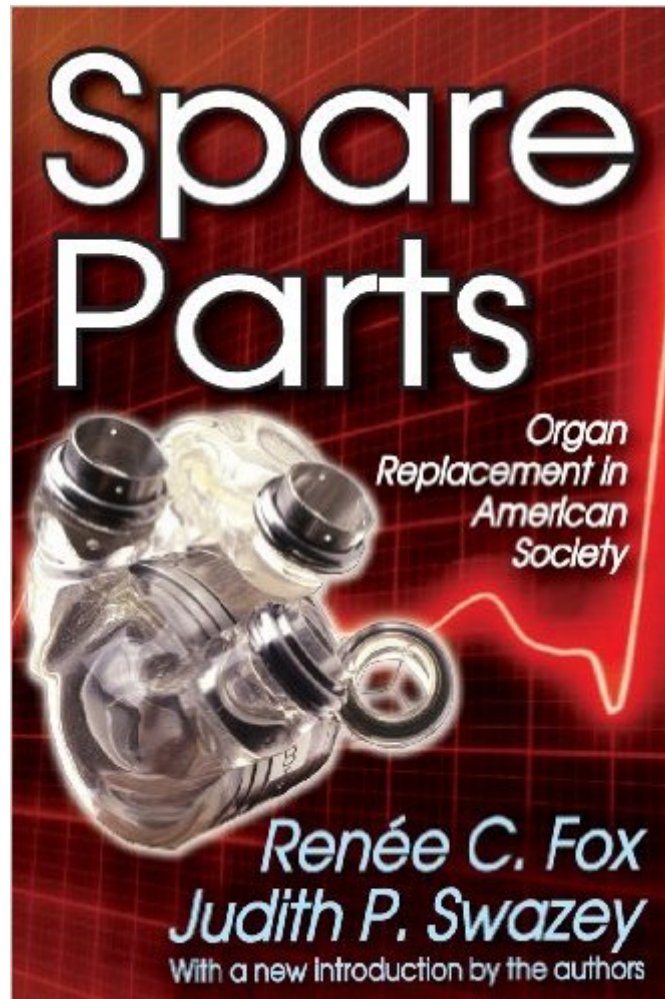


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Spare Parts: Organ Replacement In American Society



Synopsis

Spare Parts examines major developments in the field of organ replacement that occurred in the United States over the course of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. It focuses upon significant medical and social changes in the transplantation of human organs and on the development and clinical testing of the Jarvik-7 artificial heart, with special emphasis on how these biomedical events were related to the political, economic, and social climate of American society. Part I examines the important biomedical advances and events in organ transplantation and their social and cultural concomitants. In Part II, the focus shifts to the story of the rise and fall of the Jarvik-7 artificial heart in the United States, its relation to American social institutions and cultural patterns, and its bearing on social control issues associated with therapeutic innovation and the patient-oriented clinical research it entails. Part III is a personal conclusion, which explains why the authors left the field of organ transplantation after so many years. Spare Parts is written in a narrative, ethnographic style, with thickly descriptive, verbatim, and atmospheric detail. The primary data it is based upon includes qualitative materials, collected via participant observation, interviews in a variety of medical milieu, and content analysis of medical journals, newspapers, and magazine articles, and a number of television transcripts. The new introduction provides an overview of some of the recent developments in transplantation and also underscores how tenacious many of the patterns associated with organ replacement have been. Spare Parts should be read by all medical professionals, sociologists, and historians.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Organ replacement brings unhappiness on everyone. This book is a narrative of the development of organ replacement in the United States during 1968-1990. After these many years of field research, the writers have given up this field of study because it is too emotionally rending. Their closing complaint is of "...an overly zealous medical and societal commitment to the endless perpetuation of life and to repairing and rebuilding people through organ replacement"(210). Organ replacement, being a life-and-death technology, has plunged the symbolic act of giving into social norms that bring unhappiness on donors, personnel, and recipients. Organ replacements have come from problematic sources and have had problematic results. Animals, anencephalic infants, cadavers, living donors, and artifices (like the Jarvik artificial heart) were the sources to date. In results, the body rejects transplants, whether single or multiple organs, transplants within the body, or transplants among bodies. Anti-rejection drugs like Cyclosporine and FK506 had effects that interact, disable, and kill the recipients. Moratoria on natural and artificial replacements resulted. Suffering and death in organ replacement raise religious and ethical problems. A universal cultural complex is the "gift complex," first described by Marcel Mauss in the 1920's. Gift-giving everywhere in the world has these social norms: one must give, accept, return, and redouble a gift. Plunging this symbolic act into the normative system of organ replacement contaminates both donors and recipients. First, the obligations to give and to receive bring pressure to cooperate in the process. But, second, the obligations to return and redouble a gift are impossible to fulfill.

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