

Cultural Sutures: Medicine and Media. Edited by Lester D. Friedman. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004. 408 pp. ISBN 0822332949.

In her explication of the 1931 film *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Stephanie Clark-Brown in her chapter “Frankenflicks: Medical Monsters in Classic Horror Films” remarks on the significance of the monster’s name. To *hide* a thing is to deliberately make it invisible. The body’s skin, its *hide*, makes invisible the vital processes of life. And yet, “[w]hat is hyde-ing inside Dr. Jeckyll is relocated and exposed at the epidermal surface” (p. 140). Viewers of this movie gazed upon the protagonist’s transformation. They watched as “the relation between the visible and the invisible . . . changed its structure, revealing through gaze and language what had previously been below and beyond their domain” (Foucault, trans. 2003, p. xiii). Mr. Hyde is the invisible made visible, drawn out by the cinematic lens. This process of *drawing out* is characteristic of the gaze, and it focuses the contributions in Lester Friedman’s engaging collection, *Cultural Sutures: Medicine and Media*.

What is interesting about this edited collection is that it explores the resonance between the *medical gaze* and the *media gaze*. It examines the myriad ways that media have represented, have *drawn out*, the world of medicine. Friedman’s introduction, aptly titled “Through the Looking Glass,” situates *Cultural Sutures* in an environment of information overload. He notes, furthermore, that media filter and frame medical information. In this sense, the editor is able to position his book at the intersection between media and medicine, and to argue for research that explores this symbiotic relationship.

Medical researchers rely on the media to publicize their work. Whether to curry favour with granting agencies (Friedman, p. 3) or to amplify public-health warnings (Teutsch, 1994), professional and popular media play a key role in the dissemination of medical information. The mass media have been central in elevating the medical profession to prominence (Freidman, p. 5). Just as mass media have been instrumental in constituting the medical profession, so too has the medical profession been an integral part in the constitution of media. The technological imperatives of the biomedical paradigm have pushed the development and deployment of various mass communications medium. Timothy Lenoir’s chapter, “The Shape of Things to Come: Surgery in the Age of Medicalization,” highlights how the emerging field of computer-assisted surgery, for instance, is attended by a vast research and development economy that fosters the growth of new media. The politics of this economy, and more generally of the relationship between medicine and media, admit a number of different interpretations, from a number of different perspectives.

It is fitting, therefore, that *Cultural Sutures* should take an interdisciplinary approach to the subject. With contributions from perspectives as diverse as cinema studies and bioethics, women’s studies and health-care education, philosophy and sociology, this book appeals to a broad audience. It is divided into six sections, each of which corresponds to a different type of popular communications medium: print, advertisements, fiction films, television, documentaries, and computers. Given that the text covers such a broad range of media, from such a variety of vantage points, it is not surprising that a couple of chapters are lacklustre. In the section that deals explicitly with advertisements, two of the three chapters tend toward matter-of-fact description, eschewing the opportunity to draw deeper insights. This tendency, however, is the exception rather than the rule.

As a whole, the book is impressively thorough. I thought, however, that Friedman could have strengthened its overall performance by offering a conclusion. He seemed to miss the opportunity to comment more broadly on the significance of the trends identified by his contributing authors. It might have been interesting, for instance, to remark on the way that various forms of mass media seem to be reflecting the disappearance of the doctor. Both Jonathan Metzl in his analysis of advertisements for psychotropic medication (“The Pharmaceutical Gaze: Psychiatry, Scopophilia, and Psychotropic Medication Advertising,

1964-1985”), and Marc Cohen and Audrey Shafer, in their analysis of physician portraits (“Images and Healers: A Visual History of Scientific Medicine”), observe the gradual disappearance of the doctor in visual media. Displaced by pills, in the former medium, and by visualizing technology in the later medium, this noteworthy transformation is left for the speculation of astute readers.

Notwithstanding these few hiccups, *Cultural Sutures* is a thought-provoking text. The balance of the material is insightful and entertaining, and there are lots of images to augment the analysis. As a sociologist interested in both media and medicine, I would consider using this book as a teaching tool. It has a comprehensive bibliography and is, for the most part, written in accessible language.

References

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Martin A. French
Queen's University