Sciences of the Flesh is a new chart of old territory. While many critical maps of the prehistory and early history of psychoanalysis have been drawn in the past, Dianne Sadoff argues that we need one that traces how “shifts in nineteenth-century medical and scientific theories of psycho-physical correlation enabled Freud to reinvent, as a means of understanding hysteria’s enigmatic symptoms and disordered subjectivities, ‘plausible bridges’ be- tween soma and psyche” (p. 4). Sadoff covers a vast terrain of relevant medical and scientific theories including premodern theories of hysteria, nineteenth-century debates about the ethics of animal experimentation, rest cures, neuropathology, and sexology. In critical readings of scientific writings, she excavates theoretical assumptions about the link between body and mind, and traces the emergence of psychoanalysis as a modern-ist theory of socially determined subjectivity.

The first half of this book lays out shifts from what Sadoff calls “reflex theories” toward “representational theories” of the mind-body link or “psycho-physical correlation.” Reflex theorists, such as Breuer, imagined the psyche as reducible to neurological phenomena such as reflex arcs. Rep-resentational theorists, such as Freud, imagined physical phenomena, such as hysterical symptoms, to be linked to the mind through representation. However, Sciences of the Flesh is more than an idealist history of the philosophy of mind. Drawing on science studies, Sadoff argues that reflex and representational theories, like all scientific claims, depend upon social prac-tice. For example, she argues that patients’ memories of dreams and childhood scenes provided Freud with the texts he needed to write a representational theory of mind in which hysterical symptoms became theorized as somatic representations of psychological phenomena. Sadoff similarly argues that Freud constructed his representational theory, in part, from the practice of teaching hysterical patients to adopt the position of spectator on their own constructed memories of childhood scenes.

Toward the second half of the book, Sadoff argues that Freud shifted his attention away from the female hysterical toward the male homosexual as the central figure of psychoanalysis. Again she draws on science studies to argue that Freud’s theory of sexuality allowed him to co-opt existing networks of sexologists to transmit psychoanalytic theory. She also claims that psychoanalysis was more successful than other sciences of hysteria precisely because it deployed sexuality to capitalize on these networks. Sadoff concludes that Freud’s own historical accounts of the psychoanalytic movement attempted to present psychoanalysis as distinct from the sciences from which it emerged by obscuring the historical importance of his early work on hysteria.

Although Sciences of the Flesh borrows concepts from several critical theorists, it owes its greatest theoretical debt to Bruno Latour’s diagnosis of the modern condition as constituted by practices of “translation” and “purification.” 1 “Translation” refers to practices that create hybrids of nature and culture, such as the translation of knowledge along scientific networks. “Purification” is the maintenance of the illusion that such hybrids can be easily separated out into their human and nonhuman components. For Latour, modern science constructs very real nature/culture hybrids, such as holes in the ozone layer and the AIDS virus, while modern subjects maintain the illusion that these hybrids can ultimately be purified into “natural” and “cultural,” or “real” and “constructed” parts. Of course, psychoanalysis is a component of modernity with which we, its inhabitants, cannot but be familiar. One could imagine several interesting ways to integrate Latour and Freud; Latour is, after all, describing the unconscious of the moderns and suggesting that it is more preoccupied with hybridity and less with sexuality than Freud suggested. Sadoff uses Latour to describe how psychoanalysis and

related sciences created nature/culture hybrids or “quasi-objects,” such as highly stylized images of female hysterics at the Salpetrière or narrative case histories of homosexuals. Throughout the book Sadoff faults Freud’s writings and those of his contemporaries and predecessors for “purifying” the hybrids they describe of the work of translation that constitutes them as epistemologically problematic figures.

In the first three of the book’s seven chapters, Charcot emerges as Sadoff’s unlikely hero. One of Sadoff’s goals is to rehabilitate Charcot, who she argues has been “demonized by twentieth century critics” (p. 20), such as Lacanians and feminists, for his studies on hysteria. Sadoff defends Charcot against his critics on the grounds that his theory of hysteria contained the rudiments of a representational theory of psycho-physical correlation and so was not an ordinary disease concept. Sadoff’s book “avoids a feminist program” (p. 17), arguing both that feminists are mistaken to see elements of female resistance in hysterical symptomatology and that hysteria is a debilitating condition beyond the explanatory limits of social constructivism. She also uses Latour to argue that while Charcot’s work was involved in the modernizing work of translation and purification, as such his work is typical of science and so not deserving of particular critique.

I was unconvinced by this use of Latour to defend Charcot, as I was by many of Sadoff’s attempts to appropriate contemporary critical theory. Latour describes translation and purification as part of a critique of modernity, but Sadoff uses these concepts to excuse a modernist project. Drawing on science studies, Sadoff treats psychoanalysis and related practices as “sciences” that generate knowledge in “laboratories.” Thus, Charcot’s theatrical demonstrations of hysterical symptomatology, Freud’s consulting room, and even the pages of Krafft-Ebing’s case histories are all theorized as “laboratories.” However, this analysis blurs a distinction that many science studies scholars would draw between the material technologies of laboratories and the literary technologies of scientific writing. By focusing on psychoanalysis and related practices as sciences, Sadoff’s text winds up giving scant attention to the power relations between physician and patient, and how they might be different from those that operate between a natural scientist and a specimen.

Sadoff’s map fails to attend to the broader sexual politics within which these scientific practices emerged. She analyzes moral and political claims in sexologists’ writings but says little about how political events were formed by sexology. For example, homosexual men appear only as the constructed “quasi-objects” of sexologists’ texts, and never as authors of texts who deployed sexology as part of their essentialist political strategies for homosexual rights. Latour is perhaps most valuable for showing how the tiny worlds of laboratories can shift the axes of very large debates within a body politic. However Sadoff fails to explicate the consequences of translation and purification practices in regard to psychoanalysis, sexology, etc. For critical historians who know that knowledge has something to do with power and who want to know about the human sciences for that reason, Sciences of the Flesh may prove to be a disappointing read.

In the acknowledgments to this book, Sadoff describes herself as “an academic, a critic, and a Victorianist gone theoretical” (p. viii). However, my dissatisfaction with her use of theory was not limited to her appropriation of Latour. Sadoff also invokes Canguilhem, Foucault, Starr, Haraway, Butler, Grosz, and others when their concepts assist her analysis but not when her own analyses go beyond those of other critical theorists. There is a lack of sustained engagement with other theorists, making it difficult for the reader to determine if Sadoff is saying something genuinely new about this well-worn territory. For example, Sadoff deploys Butler’s 1993 analysis of the terms “matter” and “matrix” to support her own reading of the sciences of hysteria, but she does not engage with Butler’s many deconstructions of Freud’s writings. Sadoff borrows Foucault’s term “the logic of sex” for a chapter title and argues
that psychoanalysis succeeded as a science precisely because it theorized a sexual etiology for hysteria. However, she does not explain how this argument relates to Foucault’s analysis of power in modern societies as operating through the development of sexual sciences. Rather, she writes off Foucault as a historical determinist. For these reasons, it is difficult to know exactly what Sadoff’s map of psycho-physical correlation in these sciences reveals that previous analyses have obscured.

Sciences of the Flesh is a difficult read. Sadoff’s chapters jump between very disparate scientific and clinical programs, and the thread of her arguments about psycho-physical correlation or the substitution of the homosexual for the hysteric becomes coherent only after several careful readings. Consequently, I would not recommend Sciences of the Flesh for classroom use; the book is unlikely to pique students’ interest in the history of sexuality or the history of psychology.