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Strategies of Containment and Avoidance: A Discursive Analysis of Some Contemporary Magazines for Aging Women

Barri Cohen

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ABSTRACT

Strategies of Containment and Avoidance:
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Barri Cohen

Our culture and society retain, at best, ambivalent feelings about aging and being old. Founded on the historically privileged notions of personal autonomy and control, this ambivalence has been observed to be a particular problem for women where their social power is often narrowly conferred according to privileged physical attributes that inevitably change and wither with age. At this particular conjuncture however, owing to the demographic fact that individuals are living longer, in greater numbers and with a higher standard of living, we are presently witnessing a flux of meaning around aging. In this context, several mass circulation magazines have recently arrived that explicitly address the concerns of older women. A discursive analysis of a sample of these was thus carried out with the intention of understanding the nature of the identities constructed out of this address. It was also useful to look at a more general

magazine about aging, in order to understand what is presently at stake for both women and men in the struggle over its meaning. It was discovered that while the magazines appear to function in various ways as challenges to long-standing negative, socially shared myths about aging, they nevertheless enact certain discursive strategies that preclude notions of tolerance and interdependence upon which other stances toward, and positions within aging might be imagined. They also, moreoever, preclude understanding the way aging functions to locate women in the system of cultural difference.

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This paper is dedicated to Nancy A. E. Erickson, Martha Högnas, and Rose Nesbitt.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

> She began once more -- a beginning. After that, there was the early middle, then middle middle, late middle middle, quite late middle. In fact the middle is all I know. The rest is just a rumour.
>
> Saul Bellow, "Leaving Yellow House" (1957)

One of the fundamental aspects of our subjective and social identity is the category of age. From the time we are born it never ceases to draw our attention. We often measure the development of children by how old they are; children themselves will always delight in reporting their age as a personal triumph. We often secretly compare our accomplishments, appearance, and health with those of others according to age. How often have we heard, or even said, that someone looks good for their age? Undeniably we carry certain expectations about what constitutes appropriate age and gender-related behaviour, dress, and achievement.

There are also prohibitions around age. We are often warned that it is rude to ask someone's age, particularly a woman's, as though the chronological fact of our lives can somehow embarrass us. Indeed, as we age, such prohibitions

against speaking about age or referring to the age of others, increase, as though age can be a de facto cruel reminder of diminishing years and/or health. Such prohibitions may also mark an implied knowledge of how marginal old people -- women and men alike -- become to the dominant tendencies and processes of society, a position few wish to occupy. As a United Nations report acknowledged over fifteen years ago,

> strongly competitive societies in which too much emphasis is given to an individual's worth in terms of productive work and achievement, in which inactivity is somewhat suspect and leisure is highly commercialized, and, therefore, expensive are not congenial environments in which to grow old (United Nations, 1975: 11).

Few dispute the fact that our contemporary culture is profoundly ageist; that it exalts the experiences and productive capacities of youth while virtually ignoring and erasing the experiences and personal histories of the aged.[1] In Old Age, for example, Simone de Beauvoir exhaustively explored Western culture's ambivalence and horror towards aging, decrying that "old age exposes the failure of our entire civilization...society cares about the individual only in so far as he [sic] is profitable" (1972: 543). As a heterogeneous social group however, older adults and the aged are receiving increasing attention in North American mass media, chiefly because they are living longer, in greater numbers, and with a greater standard of living and health than those of former generations. While aging was once traditionally more of a private or family matter as the United Nations report contends (op. cit.), it has, since the

late nineteenth-century, been constituted as a burdensome process to the economic and social resources of society, as the quotes above make clear. And yet, this traditional problematizing of aging has shifted somewhat in the late twentieth-century owing to apparent improvements in the social conditions of aging which have affected the longer and healthier life spans of many older adults.

Although hardly a corrective over the often noted paucity and negative character of media coverage of the elderly (Powell and Williamson, 1985), a casual survey of both Canadian and American government reports, mass circulation magazines, books, newspaper articles, television sitcoms and dramas, current affairs reports and talk shows, does attest to a growing awareness of an undeniable demographic fact: the bulk of the population is aging. In Canada alone, for instance, most estimates agree that by the year 2031 the population will be comprised of 7.5 million individuals over the age of 65 (an increase from the present estimate of 2.7 million [National Council on Aging, 1988]). What this awareness symptomatically reveals, I think, is some attempt to come to terms with what we think about aging and how our medical and related institutional practices manage aging.

Thus, at this particular historical conjuncture, we have a diverse set of representations and discourses that attempt, on the surface at least, to account for society's lingering ageism in the context of an aging population: Prime-time

television shows like The Golden Girls and Empty Nest try to re-define from within the sitcom format, some commonly held negative assumptions about aging; articles and news reports bring to our attention the veil of silence around abuse of elderly poor women (e.g. Chatelaine magazine, August, 1987); the lifestyle sections of newspapers like the Toronto Star and the Montreal Gazette offer weekly columns of advice and information on aging; a national monthly features a story on how aging is currently mythologized (Saturday Night, January, 1989); and national weeklies like Time, Newsweek, and Mclean's have each reported in extensive features on the future social, political, and economic changes that must accompany our aging societies.

Finally, and most telling, certain entrepreneurial gerontologists are writing books for mass consumption heralding the new "age-wave", exhorting private enterprise and the state to organize public policy and the production of new technologies around meeting the particular consumer demands of the aging population (cf. Dychtwald, 1989). This was anticipated by Carroll Estes (1979), who coined the phrase "aging enterprise" to describe the vast array of technologies, programs, bureaucracies, health-care providers, interest groups, and industries that are presently being formed and organized together to extend the life span and/or increase the quality of later life. Consistent with a market-based economy, this enterprise will develop increasingly sophisticated demographic tools to find and

produce a new market of older, healthier, and wealthier consumers. Clearly, the growing aging population is, as one gerontologist ruefully observed, "the newest exploitable growth market in the private sector" (Minkler, 1989: 17).

It should hardly be surprising that culture industries are becoming increasingly enmeshed in this process, exploiting this growth market and installing in the process, a set of representations of the intricate biological, psychological, and social experiences that constitute aging and being old. The general awareness that we seem to be witnessing of late presents certain opportunities for shedding light on the process of aging for women, since it is too often ignored that the majority of what we conventionally call the aged, are, in fact, women. Women, for example, outlive men by an average of 7 years (Cohen, 1984: 12), and in the category known by gerontologists as the "oldest-old" (i.e. those over the age of 85), women outnumber men by over 100% (National Council on Aging, op.cit.).

The implication of this, as Leah Cohen forcefully argues, is that to be old is very often to be a woman and to be poor, despite observations of wealthier older adults, since many of today's older women were housewives or low wage earners who never garnered the comfortable pensions that accrued to their spouses. As one gerontologist bluntly put it, aging women constitute the "silent majority", characterized in patriarchal culture as "poor, dumb, and ugly" (Rodeheaver,

987: 744). That our culture often elides this fact is taken as evidence by feminists of the deadly entwining of ageism and sexism under patriarchy (MacDonald and Rich, 1983). Rosalind Coward argues, for example, that the centrality of the woman's body as the site of social empowerment and identity -- in terms of sexual attractiveness and domestic labour through the bearing and rearing of children -- entails that the aging body will inevitably represent automatic failure for women in social and sexual terms (1984). By this logic, the body becomes an enemy, and woman's social contribution is seen as having passed by the age of 40 or by the time of menopause (Faulkner, 1980). For many feminists, this is the end result of a confluence of powerful discursive and institutional practices that mark out older women's lives as inherently diminished and loathsome.

One of the chief tasks of this thesis then, is to extend this feminist analysis in order to ask in more precise terms how contemporary North American culture represents the process of aging for women, a process that seemingly threatens a feminine identity in the terms described by Coward. As I argue in this thesis, women's magazines are an interesting site for such an analysis because it is a cultural form that both popularizes certain forms of feminine power, and is often simultaneously blamed by many, including feminists, for overdetermining women's negative response to their own aging bodies. In fact, one of the popular cultural challenges to the negativity around aging for women can be

found in the recent arrival of mass circulation magazines that explicitly attempt to mark out a space for older women in which the psychological and bodily dimensions of aging can be talked about. Of these, I have chosen as my primary analytic site, Lear's and Moxie magazines. While not geared for that category of the "oldest-old", they nevertheless offer certain procedures for becoming old, and in the process, attempt to circumscribe a self-contained world that speaks to the woman reader between 40 and 65-years-old, a world "for the woman not born yesterday" as Lear's subtitle (in the 1988-89 issues) puts it.

The choice of these magazines specifically has been determined by a number of factors. First, and most obviously, by the subject of aging women, and the audience thereby targeted. Secondly, they are in mass circulation with a high profile, and therefore easily accessible. For instance, a sponsored magazine like Modern Maturity, published by the American Association of Retired Persons, is sent by direct mail to A.A.R.P. members and is consequently not widely available. But Lear's and Moxie are different commodities than Modern Maturity, for they must compete in a magazine saturated market with all of the technical and economic determinations that being organized as popular implies. They must, in other words, offer themselves up as pleasurable forms of both entertainment and enlightenment in order to guarantee regular advertising revenue, newsstand and subscription sales. Situated in the market this way, Lear's

and Moxie make specific contributions to the cultural struggle over the meaning of aging in general, and in particular for women. These magazines outline, I will argue, an identity of the older woman around which a set of procedures for what could be loosely termed "successful" aging is organized.

From a random selection of issues from 1988, 1989, and 1990, I have attempted to address a number of related questions. I have been most interested in the kind of feminine identity constructed in the pages of these magazines, both in its bodily and psychological dimensions. Since most women's magazines privilege a woman's sexuality and the appearance of slender youth as constitutive of her social power, it has been important to ask how Lear's and Moxie re-figure this discourse in the context of common sense understandings about aging. To what extent must it re-define either or both femininity and aging in order to maintain their respective "up-beat" tones, their very pleasurableness? How, therefore, is the body figured, if at all, and how is the phenomenological fact of aging represented? What indeed does constitute appropriate aging? Upon what set of assumptions does it rest?

There is a complication involved in a critique of the discourse of aging and femininity that must be noted at this point. For instance, it would be tempting to pose that, like the category of "woman", aging too is an empty signifier, as

Kathleen Woodward has recently put it (1991: 19). That just as "woman" is discursively produced out of a biological fact, (as the feminist post-structuralists have often argued [cf. Brown and Adams, 1979]), so too is the identity of being old. But as Woodward goes on to point out, correctly I believe, aging cannot be wholly argued in this way because of its quite obvious intimate link to biological processes, to the very undeniability of changes brought by time.[2] I would add that there is no exact equivalent as yet to the sex-gender system for aging, though being "old" may approximate it. Nevertheless, there are various discursive and representational practices that try to explain, contain, and struggle over -- indeed, struggle to represent -- the exigencies of age which are, in themselves, increasingly determining of experience over the course of life. What is socially and historically thought about these changes will no doubt affect the conditions of aging. My point is that there is an inherent bodily limit imposed on discourse, where physical changes, eventual frailty and death cannot be completely re-thought nor imagined away. They can, however, be variously denied, avoided, or embraced.

The challenge thus presented in a critique of these magazines is discovering how these facts and forms of avoidance are played out in a contradictory fashion, structuring the parameters around which an identity for older women is framed. If, as Jacqueline Rose asserts, femininity is "neither simply achieved nor...ever complete" (1986: 7),

then we can ask further of these magazines how they make possible other positions in the incompleteness of femininity. In this sense, I will argue that the magazines offer their readers particular ways of becoming older.

Or can aging and death be re-thought? Undoubtedly, one of the long-standing assumptions made of aging is that it is a disease, one that with the right bio-technologies, medicine will one day do away with altogether. This is expressed across a wide range of representations, institutional practices and discourses, and is found as often in medical and gerontological discourses as it is in cultural practice. It is a representation of aging overly marked by a profound hostility to the physical impact of aging, even though it paradoxically gives great importance to health maintenance and what is currently termed by many health care professionals as "wellness". As Christopher Lasch has summarized (1979), this hostility stems from modernity's excessive privileging of the values of personal autonomy and individualism, where reliance on the resources of the self to control and master all aspects of life and one's environment, is the optimum mode of ensuring pleasure, success, and happiness. In this schema, aging is a problem not so much because one's youthful look has diminished, but because it is a priori an indication of weakness and dependency.

In many ways, a science and health magazine like Longevity expresses these beliefs. Launched in the mass

circulation market in 1989, this magazine comes out of a different genre than Lear's and Moxie. It is not addressed specifically to women but to a general audience, and is concerned primarily with communicating information and speculations about longevity science. It is thus not interested in addressing itself in any explicit way to a gendered identity, but is concerned with assuaging general fears and anxiety shared by both women and men about aging; fears, that in the magazine's terms, can be "fixed" with the application of life enhancing techniques and technologies. But as I'll argue, this logic emanates from a gendered discourse precisely because aging is offered as a dense signifier of all that threatens forms of mastery and control over the mind, body and social environment; forms, in other words, that have been historically engendered as masculine.

I have therefore tried to interrogate this magazine according to the strategies it privileges for attaining an endlessly youthful life that must guard itself against disease, decrepitude and death. As we shall see, it bears closest resemblance to Moxie magazine since both take the physical body as the predominant site for controlling the process of aging. Lear's relies on notions of mastery and control as well, but re-produces such terms in the realm of the inner, creative and psychological self as a way of personally empowering the aging woman. Consequently, I sketch out in the thesis some of the historical roots to the dichotomous relation between aging and progressive

individualism in order to understand how these underpin the ideology of aging-as-disease.

The movement between these different genres -- women's magazines and a popular bio-science and health magazine -- may appear at first glance a little ill-fitting. But this strategy rests on the key assumption that our contemporary forms of popular epistemology around aging are not unified nor wholly contained in one magazine, but hinge on the play of other dominant meanings and historical relations. This thesis is meant to analyze only several of these from the cultural field and is, of course, by no means comprehensive. The points of correspondence and divergence between the two genres are thus assessed by how they help us understand some of what is at stake in the wider frame of knowledge about aging in general and for women. My level of analysis will therefore involve the beliefs, values, and definitions of aging in all three magazines as they arise in feature stories, news items, beauty and health tips, advertisements, etc.

A related assumption is that there is some relationship between cultural practice and the real power society has over the aged. I want to suggest that whatever role these discourses have in the constitution of knowledge about aging, they do enter into effects on self-representation, and on, say, actual health care practices and their potential for social management and control. I don't mean that these

effects are simple or direct; rather, I want to suggest that they offer the terms in which we struggle towards thinking about aging. In so far as I consider this thesis an initial mapping of these terms, my assumption here is that however much such meanings are taken up, resisted, denied, incorporated, translated and transformed, they do offer powerful claims on the present and future reality of older women which must be accounted for. In this sense, I take seriously Teresa de Lauretis's proposition that representations are related to subjective construction and self-representation in mutually defining ways (1987). At the very least, these discourses historically affect, and are affected by others.

In defining this further, it must be said that this kind of discursive approach stems from an epistemological position which holds textuality to be productive of "experience itself", as Lawrence Grossberg claims (1984: 409). As I am not concerned with comparing discourse with some notion of the "real", I maintain that the real itself is conditioned by cultural processes, and not something pre-given. In this sense, I follow what Grossberg calls the conceptual slide of the "social into the cultural" (Ibid.), in a refusal to conceptualize any clear division between culture processes and social practices.

I consider this at some length in chapter two. It begins with a critical review of some of the dominant research done

in the area of aging and communication. Virtually without exception, this research emerges from the hypothetico-deductive epistemological cluster, and can be found in either content analysis (e.g. Aronoff, 1974; Signorielli and Gerbner, 1978; Gerbner et al., 1980; Hollenshead and Ingersoll, 1982) to indicate the frequency, direction and possible effects (i.e. positive or negative) of images of the aged in television and magazines; or in survey methods (e.g. Wenner, 1976; Frank and Greenberg, 1979; Davis, 1980) which investigate media use by older adults according to certain a priori defined "needs" as a function of the aging process. While the former method holds as its chief premise the belief that messages can directly function to socially control the aged through marginalizing and trivializing their experiences, the latter, characterized by "uses and gratifications" research, sees media messages as so polysemous as to be unproblematically free of ideological closure. As David Morley (1980) has suggested, this functionalist approach is more concerned with the motives and interpretations of individual users of the media, and with the relations between interpretations, media use and intra-psychic or social processes, than it is with any dynamic conception of culture. Content analysis, as I argue, scrutinizes messages by creating extensive content categories which nevertheless reduce the text and pull it out of its wider cultural context. While messages are deemed problematic in configuring certain "stereotypes", they are still presumed to be easily recognized if not transparent.

Clearly, such analyses have their import, but they fail overall to consider problems attendant to the very instability of meaning itself, of how fluid and contextual or connotational meanings are.

In elaborating this critique, chapter two stresses that such work has its descriptive value as initial ways of signalling a problem around the issue of representation of aging, but I argue that an interpretative approach offers us a way of going considerably beyond these by employing a more dynamic consideration of how meanings are produced out of, and circulate within, a wider cultural field.

In taking up such an approach, chapter three begins with a critical assessment of some of the analyses of women's magazines produced by feminist cultural studies, notably exemplified by the work of Angela McRobbie (1982) and Janice Winship (e.g. 1978, 1987). In so doing, I try to distinguish my own critique from such work and I pull out some of the arguments I have found relevant for looking at how Lear's and Moxie produce the figure of the older woman. Chapter three seeks to understand the terms in which "successful" aging is constructed out of two levels of experience -- the mind and one's psychological health, and the self as an embodied subject. This roughly corresponds, as we shall see, to the discourses of Lear's and Moxie respectively. Aging is figured in these magazines as a time in a woman's life for the actualization of her self -- her talents, creativity, and

desires. As I argue in reference to Lear's, this self rests on liberal feminist notions of individuality, the importance of which Janice Winship's work makes quite evident. Moxie relies on similar notions of personal empowerment, but these are primarily articulated to the body. For Moxie, aging is a process in a woman's life that requires more attention to, and therefore information about, the aging body and the risks of illness than would be found in a women's magazine aimed at a younger market.

Chapter four situates the dominant trope of aging-as-disempowerment as a gendered one through a critique of Longevity magazine. Inspired by Michel Foucault's analysis of power's inscription on the body (1977, 1980), this chapter assesses what is involved when the deployment of bio-technologies is sought as a solution to the "problem" of aging; put in more explicit terms, this site represents one in which, to borrow Donna Haraway's rather Foucouldian assertion, "communication technologies and biotechnologies [sic] are the crucial tools recrafting our bodies" (1985: 82). What Longevity makes clear, and hence its importance, is that the bodies in question need to be recrafted. Aging and death are considered by the magazine as natural processes that are nevertheless wholly inadequate and deeply threatening to one's independence and mastery. Under the sign of life, Longevity offers a utopian world of proliferating life enhancement techniques where science may even one day help us maintain our youth forever.

As this discourse is an extreme, symptomatic version of what is often called gerontophobia, I trace out some of its historical roots. Weakness, frailty, decay and dependence may not be automatic to the aging process, but they are eventualities, even for short periods of time. Nevertheless, historically they were once valorized within a religious order that made sense of them in universal and transcendent terms. Much of the debasement of aging in the twentieth-century is therefore located in the modernization of the life cycle. Some of the ways aging is made sense of today are not, however, completely negative; they are of course contradictory, involving the organization of apparati for the management and alleviation of suffering while simultaneously allowing no specificity nor heroics for the exigencies of aging.

The concluding chapter summarizes the popular knowledge schemas about aging as derived from these magazines, and considers more closely their implications for women. In this context, I try to address one of the unanswered questions of this thesis: The extent to which alternative representations may affect the contemporary struggle over the meaning of aging. I also consider of what these may be comprised through a brief reading of Yvonne Rainer's recent film on women and aging, Privilege (1990).

Finally, I want to address here one other epistemological issue that has become increasingly central in cultural

criticism and this concerns the motives of research and the position from which one speaks. Grounded in the analysis of cultural difference, this issue emerges from a particular epistemological assumption that to analyze the dimensions of race, gender, and class (and I would add, age) should necessarily entail an intimate identification with the subject of one's research, else one risks speaking for others and hence, by implication, possibly distorting, or reinscribing the very dominant assumptions one wished to critique at the outset. I would like to propose here that these concerns, while highly valuable, are somewhat misplaced with respect to aging, and the reason for this is, in the end, simple. Aging is an issue that implicates all of us. This does not permit us to assume, however, that everyone's aging is the same. How aging is made to mean for a middle-class white woman fails excrutiatingly for those overwhelming numbers of women and men who age with suffering and in ignoble poverty. But while cultural differences and the terror of aging affect how one ages, the brute fear of it cannot be disavowed, even though the nature of these fears are articulated differently across the boundaries that presently comprise the social hierarchy.

The pleasures, discomforts, and challenges of aging hail us all, and not just at some arbitrary point in the years between 45 and say, 90 years of age, but also directly throughout our lives in relation to our families and friends. All this to say that the subject of aging should

not be left only to the aged, because being old is, if we are lucky to get there, our future selves. Much the same point is made by Woodward when she reminds us that aging is the one difference "which we will ultimately all have in common" (op. cit.: 23). Hence our interest in it should be present always in the continuum from youth to old age. This thesis is an initial move to critically direct this interest.

NOTES

1. Aware that my own "consciousness of exclusion through naming is acute" (Haraway, 1985: 72), a note on my alternate use of the terms aging, aged, older, and elderly is in order. "Aging" is used throughout the thesis to represent a process; "aged" and "older" and "elderly" refer variously to the advanced state of being at or around a particular chronological age. For strategic reasons, some feminists use phrases like "old age" and "old woman" precisely because they are the words everyone seems to fear (as Barbara MacDonald and Cynthia Rich rightfully acknowledge [1983]). "Elder woman" is also used, with "elder" designating a state of dignity, grace, and knowledge. There are other kinds of distinctions made between, like those between young-old, middle-old, and old-old. As arbitrary as these terms may seem, they do highlight that aging involves no proper terms; dichotomous language merely fixes what is in fact a heterogeneous continuum of experiences and changes, as older women and some gerontologists continue to remind us (cf. Minkler, 1989). These different terms underscore the insufficiency of language -- a condition I acknowledge in my shift between them.

2. Without delving into the complex debate about the theoretical status of sexual difference(s) and the biological processes of the female body, it can be said that the biological fact of being sexed female may nevertheless permit forms of control (e.g. around reproduction, though not necessarily mensturation), despite the overwhelming social and cultural constraints against their deployment. My point is that aging, in contrast, involves few choices in its progress.

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CHAPTER TWO

CRITICAL REVIEW AND THEORETICAL ELABORATION

In this chapter I want to situate my research problematic through a critical review of some of the major work on the relationship between communication and aging. I will argue that the paradigm which frames this research has suffered from an undynamic conception of social and cultural processes, which has had particular consequences on the production of knowledge. Specifically, I will give attention to the liabilities involved in an absorption of gerontological knowledge and its normative constructions about aging, which have, among other things, permitted absences around talking about aging women. My critique will be assisted by the notion that knowledge itself operates in a field of interests and power; hence much of the work done in the area of aging and communication has reproduced certain patriarchal assumptions about women. In its place, I will argue that an interpretative-discursive approach offers more explanatory power for understanding the construction of representations which have meaning in a specific context, made to resonate beyond the texts in which they emerge. Moreover, I will argue that the concept of representation can be made more useful if we cease to think of representation

as a "false" copy of social reality, but plays a constitutive role in it. The notion of identity is taken here as a particular kind of representational practice which is never whole or complete, but is the result of a struggle over particular meanings made possible by the way the discursive and non-discursive interact. As such, the meanings that collect around the identity of aging women, can be interrogated with respect to what gives it its coherence, and what implications may issue from the installation of certain ways of talking about aging women over others.

Critical Review

In her reflections on aging, Doris Marshall (1987) recounts the post-war era's formation of the disciplines of gerontology and geriatrics. She reminds us that despite the vast heterogeneity of experiences, ages, and social locations that comprise the aged as a social group, they live a set of generalizable conditions considered social problems in the context of rapidly expanding (post)industrial economies of the West which have no use for their labour and no use for them socially. Thus for social theorists of aging, a set of objects of inquiry have emerged around such questions as: what is the proper role in society of elderly individuals? What do the elderly do when they retire? What should they

do? These questions of course have gendered implications. Put in other terms, they mean: what do old women do when they no longer have nor care for children or for their husbands (presuming, as the research does, that aging individuals are part of families in the conventional sense), and what do old men do with their new found leisure time?

In this context, it is not surprising that since the early 1960s, coincident with the rise of gerontology as an organized discipline, older adults as a social group have increasingly been the focus of research within mainstream North American communication studies. Much of this research has concerned itself with explaining two key phenomena with respect to the questions above: the extent and type of aged people's media use (their "uses and gratifications"), and the presence of negative images or "stereotypes" in television programming, which in turn are thought to cultivate social reality in terms of framing what society thinks of its aged groups, and what the aged think of themselves.

A cursory survey of the empirical evidence flowing from these sites of analysis reveals a number of consistent findings: that older adults have a great deal of leisure time, and are consequently heavy users of the media because they need information (Schramm, 1969; Comstock, 1978), surrogate companionship, entertainment, and emotional stimulation (Meyersohn, 1961; Kubey, 1980; Powell and Williamson, 1985); as a function of the "natural" losses

attending to the social, biological, and economic changes of aging, the aged have been found to embrace the media indiscriminately as their "window on the world" regardless of socioeconomic status (Wenner, 1976; McAvoy, 1979; Oltman, 1983), prompting many researchers to characterize the relationship between older adults and the media as one of extreme dependence, not unlike that of preschool children (Kubey, op.cit.).

An analysis of images and messages has revealed that while television fulfils a set of needs for aged people, it does so rather inadequately, except perhaps as a marker of "unstructured" time (Davis, 1980: 42-43). This lack of fit, if you will, between needs and messages has been concluded from several important studies of the content of American prime-time television, studies which have been guided by the presumption that "the lower the status of a sub-group, the lower the visibility of that group on television and the less favourable the image when the group is visible" (Kubey, op cit.: 21). Thus in the mid-seventies, Aronoff (1974) and Northcott (1975) revealed prime-time television shows to be dominated by mature adult males below the age of 55, with under-representation particularly striking for older women. Moreover, Aronoff observed from a random sample of network dramas (between 1969 and 1971), that the frequency of older males cast in the role of "bad guys" was much higher than younger males, with older women more likely to be cast as "failures" than younger women. Consistent with this is a

later study by Gerbner et al. (1977) which observed that television dramas disproportionately portrayed older women as victims, with ageist distortions highest when race, gender and age converge (i.e older black women are frequently cast only to be killed off). In an examination of 1,365 programs and over 16,000 characters on all three American networks (between 1969 and 1978) Gerbner et al. (1980) confirmed in more detail that only two percent of the dramatic characters had been cast as being 65 or over, and that over 80 percent of the elderly female characters and 70 percent of elderly male characters were mistreated or ridiculed as foolish, feeble and ugly. And while most of the research may be dated, and in any case, overly concerned with television, Hollenshead and Ingersoll (1982), and Gantz, Gartenberg and Rainbow (1980) have confirmed such findings with respect to print advertising, while one Canadian study (Goulet, 1986), looked at the image of the elderly in Canadian television commercials, noting that images per se were not unfavourable, rather there were just too few of them.

It is readily apparent from this brief summary, that the research presents some initial descriptive value in terms of noting the dearth of positive imagery of the aged. As well, it could be said that such research has been important within a larger field of activism, represented by the efforts of such groups like the Media Watch Group of the Grey Panthers and the American Association of Retired Persons, who have lobbied for more information and prime-time entertainment

programs for the aged, that in fact we have seen in recent years.[1] Apart from this however, it is worth looking briefly at some of the problems inherent in this research in order to distinguish it from the approach I wish to take in this paper. Clearly, the research cited falls within what is often called the "dominant paradigm" of positivist research, a paradigm that has been much derided and criticized for, among other things, its simple and deterministic causal conceptions of media influence and need, conceptions which possess an undynamic theory of social and cultural processes. It has also been criticized for an explicit scientistic view of human subjects as the possessors of measurable behaviour variables, who can and do have ready and full access to understanding and interpreting their own consumption needs, frustrations, and pleasures. Indeed, criticism of this sort has erupted from within the paradigm itself (cf. Adrén, 1981; McQuail, 1984) which observes methodological excesses that need correcting. Thus, for instance, content analysis needs to continually refine the definition of content categories and shore up the problems of inter-coder reliability, while survey audience research must deal with the problems of reifying individuals' responses as gratifications offered by media content, and guard against sliding into a functionalist value-free conception of this content.

My intention in this chapter is not to rehearse these arguments once again, nor to critique this research in detail

along epistemological and methodological lines. However, it is important to look at some of the theoretical implications of this research, especially in light of the fact that virtually all of the research questions concerning the aged and the media have occurred within this paradigm. As well, I want to point to how the theoretical underpinnings of this research has, in part, permitted the elision of aging women from its analysis.

Some of the early work of cultural studies, in fact, revealed the more fundamental epistemological and methodological problems and implications specific to cultivation analyses and "uses and gratifications" research, respectively. David Morley (1980) for example, has deftly pointed out that content analysis does not merely reduce and decontextualize the text in its analysis. For the broader problem is that the approach conceives of social reality and individuals' relation to society and culture in such a way that cannot account for discontinuities and ruptures in the communication of messages, nor can it account for larger interpretative frameworks operating in the media which escape the methodological coding of content categories and character types (e.g. "bad guys" versus "good guys" or "successful" women versus "unsuccessful" women). Several things are immediately apparent as operative assumptions within this level of analysis. First is the assumption that messages themselves are stable collections of semantic elements, where such concepts as the fluidity of language, connotation, and

the socially determined nature of meaning, are not amenable to statistical coding of discrete units. Second is the sense in which "stereotypes" are held up against something more "truthful" that is apparently readily accessible in reality. Moreover, there is a presumption of a simple correspondence between certain contents and their effects on the audience, particularly those seen as most vulnerable (typically women, children, minorities, and in this case, old people).

Morley further argues that "uses and gratifications", with its functionalist value-less conception of messages, also cannot contain within its research problematic any questions concerning the social determinations of messages nor their "uses" in other than the most crude terms, if at all. Indeed, the relations which buttress this approach's problematic are primarily those between media use and a set of a priori defined psycho-social processes and needs. As Stuart Hall has argued (1973), operationalizing the notion of the media in this way leads one to relativize texts and messages as so "open" that the dynamics of culture, the unequal distribution of power in society, and the possibility of messages being structured in "dominance" with varying degrees of ideological closure, are obscured. There are, of course, more difficult problems involved in this research which are specific, I believe, to approaching the understanding of cultural representations of disempowered social groups in this way. To posit for example, as Gerbner

et al. does, that "images of old age cultivate our concept of aging and the age roles we assume" (1980: 37), is suggestive of how discourses may produce reality, but it doesn't go far enough; it falls back on fetishizing TV as a reflective/ projective medium of social reality to the exclusion of the effects of other discourses that may also, in more complex ways over the life histories of audience members, have something to do with the identities elderly individuals, particularly women, take on and negotiate. If for instance, many elderly women are isolated from society, is it the case that television -- in Gerbner's words, network dramas are the most "vivid learning environment" (Ibid.: 39) -- is a primary contributor to this fact? Are there not other discourses, structures, and institutions in place which make this so? The slide over this question is best illustrated by the bold contentions made by Powell and Williamson in their extensive review of the literature:

> these [negative] depictions contribute to self-doubt and feelings of powerlessness among older adults, inhibiting the individual and collective responses to their social environment that might otherwise improve their conditions and relative social status (1985: 38).

For these authors, the locus of power behind such depictions is the political economy of the media itself, organized by an elite core of producers (white, middle-class, middle-aged men) whose "unconscious" sexist, racist, ageistinterests, assumptions and "rules of the game" can be read off across a whole range of mass media discourses and

forms. Here, negative depictions or "stereotypes" are analytically used to designate certain representations as somehow false which stands in contrast to something "true" or more "real" in everyday life, a distinction that is apparently not read as such by the aged or by any other audience group. The effects of such depictions are thought to operate by cultivating false ideas and identities over more true ones, thus making TV reality, as Gerbner would have it, a diminished social reality. It is not surprising then, what the corrective is: broadcasters will (or must be compelled to) change once they are made aware of the damage their prime-time programs have on the lives of aged people. This, of course, merely involves changing negative images for positive ones, in order, presumably, to better cultivate or match reality and thus, make some positive intervention in ensuring aged people won't be disempowered within society.

A tautology of sorts appears in this analysis, where the social isolation and feelings of disempowerment of a group is the reality reflected and further reinforced or subtly (negatively) transformed by the media, which in turn results in a further downward spiral of disempowerment and isolation. Within the terms of this loop, one wonders how any change would be possible. Clearly, what remains outside of elaboration is the analysis of fundamental and broader cultural meanings and ideologies in place which make such depictions natural or naturalizable and which are not solely created by nor contained within the mass media, but which

operate across a wider field, in other structures and institutions. Indeed, the field of communication studies itself has been affected by a set of common sense meanings about aging which has not come from TV, but has emanated from the field of gerontology which can be said to have some effect on structuring a set of practices and relations which the aged engage in (e.g. medical, social work) and which address them in particular ways.

It is therefore not enough to critique the dominant paradigm as problematic because its epistemology precludes consideration of complex and multiple or over-determining effects of other discourses; nor is it sufficient to berate such methods for the absence of ideological analysis. In any case, such critiques are not new. For it is also important to understand that this absence designates a functionalism through an articulation of terms and values about the very naturalness of the aging process itself. This is most obvious in the "uses and gratifications" work, where the process of aging, how it occurs biologically and socially -- knowledge in other words, generated from within the fields of geriatrics and gerontology -- gets <u>tout court</u> incorporated and reinscribed in the research. Kubey (1980) for instance, assessed reported viewing patterns of a sample of elderly Americans, noting that viewing increases with age (consistent with increased leisure time), and that the process of aging will determine one's social isolation and hence which type of media technology and forms will be preferred or used. In

short, Kubey gives truth to the three conditions outlined almost thirty years ago by Meyersohn (1961), by taking for granted gerontology's "disengagement" theory to explain what might predispose the aged person to television in particular: "he [sic] grows more sedentary; second, he has more leisure time; and third, he has few ties with the world...Its form can serve not only as a time-killer but even as time itself" (cited in Kubey, 1980: 19).

While "disengagement" theory has been the source of much debate, it nevertheless continues to be used in "uses and gratifications" research to posit the aged individual as one who will inevitably, as a course of nature, become more isolated because of the changes and losses of advanced age. Consequently, it has been used to envision the media as playing a key role in helping the aged socially adjust to changes, losses, and disengagement. Of course, incorporating gerontological findings may be a short hand, efficacious way of understanding who the elderly are and what their needs may be with respect to media use. But there are dangers associated with an uncritical incorporation. As many critical gerontologists have pointed out, much gerontological research is determined by a set of ideological frames which contain normative convictions about appropriate behaviour for the elderly. Faulkner (1980) has argued that such convictions are so thoroughly shot through with patriarchal assumptions, that the relationship between gender and social difference and the complex processes of aging cannot be

countenanced in other than the most crude terms. Zones, et al. (1987) demonstrated in more detail that major socio-historical events, conditioned by women's devalued status in society, have incontrovertably shaped their experience of aging. What society sees as the inevitable aspects of aging -- ill health, frailty, neediness, dependence, and poverty -- are in fact conditions that are very much the product of larger forces specific to women's location in society. They state that:

> Women's lives are overwhelmingly influenced by their roles in the family, their position in the labour market, and their treatment in the fluid expression of social policy, itself a socially constructed set of institutions (Ibid.: 299).

What this invites, the authors argue, is the potential "further medicalization of social conditions related to ageing" which of course are never addressed as such. Complicating matters enormously is the increasing awareness (among critical gerontologists in any case) of how there are few "hard facts" about the biological and psychological dimensions of aging (Esposito, 1987).

It is not surprising to discover that the research itself is embedded in problematic and not disinterested forms of data collection and analysis. Like Faulkner, and Zones et al., Rodeheaver (1987) argues that taken-for-granted assumptions about the dependency of women across the life course may have rendered aging women invisible in much gerontological research and the various policy interventions

that have emerged from it. The implications of this, he suggests, are clear: that what we often call problems of old age are in fact problems involving old women, and how we represent the process and experiences of old age, is inextricably linked with how we represent women. If aging, as Herbert Blau has said, is "an excretion of power" (1986: 29), then evidently this has not been perceived as much of a problem for those who have never had it.

Lest we think such elisions are specific to dated "uses and gratifications" research, I refer to a more recent study (Shinar, 1987), which draws on a set of categorized cognitive traits, personality features and psycho-social needs (as revealed by gerontology), in order to create an adequate supply of communication systems and contents. The vanishing role of the aged individual in social life is considered problematic but inevitable, thus no attempt is made to address how the culture mediates that fact. The process of aging gives rise to losses and changes that are conceptually re-configured as new communication needs and demands. The goal then is pragmatic: to create communication systems or services (supply) to meet these demands, in order to help the aged person adjust to the experiences of aging. And while Shinar is sensitive to the heterogeneity of the aged, such needs are nevertheless derived from socially constructed age normatives which are not questioned as such. The use of mainstream gerontological theory ensures that any lack of fit between the needs of the individual and society, will be caste as a problem of "supply"

and "demand", so that no major critique of the determining relationship between them is thought warranted. The level of intervention is strategic, not critical, and involves merely a more sensitive rendering of adjusting individuals to what is conceptualized as an ongoing normal social system.

My point from this gerontological digression is not that we have to determine the true facts about aging that could then, presumably, be put to use by communication or cultural studies. Rather, I have briefly tried to point out the theoretical implications of social functionalism by stressing that there are no simple causes nor truths about aging, and that, consequently, any normative claims about the naturalness of aging are suspect, particularly when such uses have rendered the specificity of aging women non-existent. What the debates about the "few hard facts" point out is that meanings that do get installed are in fact not as guaranteed nor as final as the truth counterpart to content analysis's "stereotypes" presumes, nor as a discrete period of inevitable suffering that calls for certain communication needs to be met. Having said this though, it must be pointed out how difficult it is to escape placing or positioning aging within certain normative statements about life stages; however, it is possible to do so critically, and in such a way that would entail acknowledging that powerful material and discursive conditions socially construct different positions for aged men and women. Acknowledging such conditions can help foreground that the meanings and

representations installed around aging are in fact struggled over, rather than smoothly accomplished phenomena reflecting reality. It is this characteristic of cultural processes to fix meanings around aging in a differential way for women and men that the approaches I have discussed above cannot countenance within the terms of their theoretical and methodological stances.

Representation and Identity

It should be clear from my critique that problematizing the terms of aging stems from broader epistemological interests arising from the intersection of feminist theory and post-structuralism, notably around the work of Michel Foucault. Both in his theoretical statements and in his historical interpretative work, Foucault has pointed to the discursive and non-discursive power relations which set statements of truth or knowledge, in place (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982). For feminists, where important areas of analysis continue to be focused around sexuality and the body, Foucault's work has been most suggestive in drawing attention to the regimes of power that operate through social and cultural practices that increasingly take the body as the object and subject of knowledge (cf. 1978, 1980). In this context, the loose nexus of theoretical positions that comprises feminist post-structuralism has certainly made important use of concepts like subjectivity, power, gender,

discourse, ideology and representation in analyzing the relationship between women and social/cultural processes. And yet, there is an absent presence in much cultural criticism and feminist analysis, for these terms have not (yet) been used to produce an analysis specific to questions concerning the discourses around aging women.[2] This absence is made more evident by current criticism that elaborates on the social and cultural dimensions of racial, ethnic, and class differences between women, and not just of sexual difference per se.

Of course, certain feminists have been concerned for some time about the social implications of aging for women. These are chiefly radical or cultural feminists who focus almost exclusively on speaking their experience of the deadly entwining of ageism and sexism within a political project of making manifest the essential qualities of woman's difference that are thought to be inherently superior to man (e.g. Rich and Macdonald, 1983; Alexander, Berrow, et al., 1986). This is unquestionably useful, but from the perspective of cultural criticism, to begin to understand the ageism/sexism couplet which these experiences speak, will necessarily take us in the direction of interrogating the features and implications of a cultural identity articulated for aged women. After all, so much of anyone's identity is indeed mediated by what society makes of one's chronological age -- the constructed set of generational categories and strata into which we may or may not "fit". Furthermore, the very

notion of age-ness and the set of gendered expectations that vary with the categories of age, are determined or mediated by a network of discourses and representations about what is or can be the appropriate way to live (and die) as one ages. What then is the function of such discourses? What makes their particular features now, for North American (middle-class) women, possible?

Following this line of analysis entails first of all, refusing an epistemology that offers representation as something which operates by excluding or distorting something essential or pre-discursive (like experience), or even that hinges on false consciousness (e.g. ideology), to posit in its place the possibility, as Stuart Hall suggests (1989a), that representations may in fact play a constitutive role in identity itself. In examining the relationship between new "Caribbean cinema" and cultural identity, Hall further specifies that identity may not be "an already accomplished historical fact, which the new cinematic discourses then represent" but instead can be thought of "as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (p. 68).

In this sense, cultural identity is not equivalent to lived subjectivities, but literally means a kind of national identity, in this case the sense of "Caribbeaness", which is never located in any one place, nor discoverable through a recovery or an archaeology, but is articulated from the

competing discourses arising out of the aspirations, imaginations and experiences of marginalized, colonized peoples. To paraphrase, cultural identity is a way of becoming (a future orientation) as well as being. Its construction is not an act of pure imagination but an act that marks the way subjects are positioned by the discourses of culture and power, even if we do not actually take up the positions marked out in ways exactly intended for us. This rests on the assumption that there are no clear, neat divisions between social identity or experience and cultural practices; one is not a refraction or a reflection of the other, instead they are mutually constitutive. If identity cannot be found or generated from any one place in the real, but is articulated to or within a series of texts (in Hall's example, new Caribbean cinema), then it cannot be said to operate as though it were false, or merely a stereotype. The true/false dichotomy is rightfully rejected by Hall in order to mark out a theoretical space from which to claim a constitutive role for the discursive.

For representations to be productive in this sense, however, tells us little about how they may also constrain. Put another way, refusing dualistic conceptions (grounded in a mimetic theory of representation), does not jettison issues of power. In order to specify this relation, we need to briefly recount some rudimentary features of discourse theory. First, as is commonplace by now, theories of enunciation have drawn attention to the fact that language is

not merely a system in terms of fixing meanings (in a seemingly effortless way) around referents in the real, but is, as Kristeva says, "generative" (1985: 211): it is a practice, a discourse between subjects. Within this relationship general rules can be discerned. For Foucault, there are rules of exclusion; rules of ordering and classification which govern the chance appearance of objects in discourse; and rules governing its use, or its conditions of possibility (1972). A discursive field bounds the first two in terms of which objects of knowledge, which "things" will be privileged in discourse and which things will not be, while rules of use determine the positions of speaking -- through which power and knowledge is exercised -- and of being spoken for, the position brought into existence by the exercise of power-knowledge. Foucault cautions however, that discourses themselves are never stable: they are "in continual process of modification...taking multiple and diverse forms in a given epoch" (Ibid.: 221).

With these analytic distinctions in mind, we can say that representations are made up of discourses actively making claims to refer to real experience, or to a way of being in the world. This is not the same as suggesting that they do refer to the world without mediation, with some representations more "false" than others. Indeed, the critical stance towards representation cannot be with respect to how "false" it is, but to its politics -- to the relations of power and knowledge set in place by representation. This

power relation hinges on the double meaning of representation, both in terms of speaking for someone by proxy, and by the ability to deploy some form of social power in drawing fragments of knowledge and experience into a portrait that is recognized as "true". But as feminists have long demonstrated, the one who is speaking, and the one who is spoken for (in the portrait as it were), rarely occupy the same position. However, it must be argued that this power relation is not unidirectional; if it were, discourses would be tantamount to something which operates on high, totally and successfully positioning us. Rather, a pull must be maintained, where the discursive and non-discursive can be thought as mutually constitutive; that is, the crosshatching of effects between discourses and the institutions and practices in which they find their place, i.e. what Foucault enumerates as:

> an institutional field, a set of events, practices and political decisions, a sequence of economic processes that also involve demographic fluctuations, techniques of public assistance, manpower needs, different levels of unemployment, etc. (1972: 57).

In this light, the reason for privileging discourse is that it is only within the discursive, subject to its essential rules, do these events or material conditions "have or can they be constructed within meaning" (Hall, 1989b: 27).

To briefly concretize these theoretical remarks, Foucault argues in The Birth of the Clinic (1975) that changes in nineteenth- century medical discourse were made

possible by a convergence of events, including the reorganization of the hospital, a new social definition of the patient, the increased social importance of medical knowledge, and the consequent rise of public assistance for health. These were achieved, Foucault claims, from an intricate relationship between "the requirements of political ideology and those of medical technology" (p. 38). Similarly, we notice that the discourse of gerontology to which I referred earlier, has breaks and contradictions owing to a set of historical events proper to its discipline (changes in demographics, in medical practice and technology; shifts in the redistribution of wealth; debates in social theory, etc.). Without these, something called "critical" gerontology and the knowledge it installs would not be possible. Nor would magazines like Moxie and Longevity, as I will later argue, be possible without, in addition to those events, the set of gendered discourses and practices around health, with its endless techniques for recrafting the female body. In contrast, Lear's draws on a discourse of inner discovery to shield one from the anxiety of aging, articulating this journey to the history and politics of liberal feminism. What this suggests is that representations have, as their condition of possibility, fields of meaning and materiality of power beyond the surface meanings of magazines and other cultural forms. They have, in other words, particular contexts which condition their meaning and effects. What matters, "is not the intrinsic or historically fixed objects of culture, but the state of play in cultural

relations" (Grossberg, 1986: 66).

And yet there is an excluded middle here. Obviously, discourses are active not just through events and practices, but require subjects to live them in some way. In a critique of discourse theory, Wendy Hollway foregrounds subjectivity, locating it in a question of agency:

> The advantage of the idea that current at any one time are competing, potentially contradictory discourses (concerning for example sexuality) rather than a single patriarchal ideology, is that we can then pose the question, how is it that people take up positions in one discourse rather than another? (1984: 237).

For Hollway, particular discursive configurations depend not only on changes in practices and material conditions, that is, not merely on the convergence of events, but how they are made powerful at any particular moment by individuals and the subjective investments they make in certain discourses over others. Clearly, this dimension of analysis has been crucial in cultural analysis (framed inevitably by such dichotomies as the subject and the social, or the social and the cultural) for understanding the politics of pleasure and of what is often called, the every day. But I bring these observations up here as a way of distinguishing identity from subjectivity, in order to specify the potential power of identity. As I have previously indicated, identity is a construct made possible by the constellation of discourses which have a common object (in this case, a woman's age-ness). While this construct may in part be constitutive

of subjectivity, or even of what de Lauretis calls "self-representation" (1987: 9), it cannot, of itself, be said to construct consciousness in toto. To claim otherwise would risk falling into what Hollway calls "discourse determinism" (op cit.). This trap we may recall, was precisely the problem of Screen theory -- reifying subjects ahistorically, regardless of age or social position, as though constructed anew within the positions of address opened up by the discursive (narrative) mechanics of the cinematic text.

The point is that the construction of identity is a complex practice that makes powerful claims to be invested in some way. It is but one level of mediation which should not be read as an a priori guarantee of subjectivity. On the other hand, before subjectivity is bracketed off altogether, it's relationship to the discourses of identity -- between the readers of Lear's or Moxie and the magazines' discourses that converge on "aging women" -- can be imagined in terms of how a culturally articulated identity -- its claims to truth and the subject positions it open up -- has a way of leaning on real subjects and bodies (Silverman, 1984). In this way, it isn't that discourses fully determine how women will age, but its surfaces do offer glimpses into the powerful pulls at work on that process. However much these may be invested, negotiated or resisted, it is, to echo Hall again, only within discourse and representation that such struggles are waged.

In framing my analysis this way, I acknowledge that indeed representations are never wholly powerful nor complete, but in process. This is particularly congruent with a variegated identity that attempts to be future oriented, for it is about becoming a "new" type of aged woman. Thus, while only one axis for the operation of power, such representations can still allow us to analyze its meanings, connotations and potential effects at stake in how women are "spoken for" differently along the dimension of age.

NOTES

1. I don't want to suggest that some of the changes in prime time programming, ("Golden Girls", "Empty Nest") or the arrival in the magazine market of Lear's can be directly attributable to such lobby efforts. There is no evidence to suggest this, rather it seems more likely that their presence may have more to do with changing demographics and advertisers' awareness of a small but significant segment of the aging population's wealth in North America (cf. "As USA ages, magazines want in on the market", USA Today February 9,1988).

2. Notable exceptions include the work of Kathleen Woodward (1986, 1988, 1991), Emily Martin (1988), and Margaret Morse (1987/88).

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CHAPTER THREE

THE DISCOURSE OF AGING IN "LEAR'S" AND "MOXIE" MAGAZINES

> There are video screens on which flawless complexions turn, preen, sigh through their parted lips, are caressed. On other screens are close-ups of skin pores; before and after; details of regimes for everything, your hands, your neck, your thighs. Your elbows, especially your elbows: aging begins at the elbows and metastasizes.
>
> Margaret Atwood,
> Cat's Eye, 1988

> Triumph and mastery are giving contemporary women an inner beauty that defines real beauty nowadays and sets aside, perhaps for all time, superficial beauty as the symbol of the Youth Culture, the icon of the unseasoned self.
>
> - Frances Lear, Lear's Magazine, (Oct.) 1989

The Dread of Women's Magazines

In the "Social Trends" column of the Toronto Globe and Mail, a feature article was published not long ago on the personal dangers and social implications for women undergoing cosmetic surgery (14 January 1990). The article was occasioned by the highly publicized death of a Toronto woman from complications associated with liposuction surgery performed on her three days before her death (a process whereby thin tubular rods are inserted into parts of the body to vacuum out fat). Why, the journalist asked, do women of

all ages have to constantly perfect themselves? While noting that this "obsession" with perfection likely begins for women in adolescence, the journalist paid particular attention to the social and psychological stresses many older women face when their bodies do not fit the rigorous standards of the ideal body image that saturate our culture, thus giving forc the words of one therapist who observed that "to be old emale is a marriage of the disenfranchised" (Ibid.: A-7). We are told the woman who died was a successful real estate agent in her mid forties, someone, the journalist noted, who perceived herself in "need" of medical intervention (and who obviously could afford it). This "need" was readily validated at a coroner's inquest by the cosmetic surgeon who performed the surgery: "it is only natural," he said, "for people to want to win the battle of skin versus gravity...aging is deterioration. There is nothing graceful about deterioration" (Ibid.).

Apart from the quasi-sensationalism invoked here, the article quite rightly points out a number of entrenched assumptions that have the force of naturalness in dominant culture. On the one hand is the concern that women's bodies are considered as the malleable site for certain perfection rituals which employ a set of (potentially dangerous) health and beauty techniques and regimes. Moreover, it suggests that these are premised on an inter-connected set of notions about femininity, beauty, health and identity which

do not fail to somehow pull at most women throughout their lives. By the logic of these assumptions, the outline of an overly familiar discourse is discernable: the perfect body is both beautiful and healthy in a mutually defining way; it is thusworth having because beauty and health guarantee sexual attractiveness and the consequent promise of a man and family; this in turn can help secure what is otherwise thought to be a woman's tenuous feminine identity and sense of self-esteem, thus saving her, for a time at least, from being "disenfranchised". Obviously, this takes work -- the self as a creation from the outside-in as it were -- and it involves complicity with certain apparati and forms of intervention, medical or otherwise.

Not surprisingly, this story lays blame at popular culture with particular animus reserved for women's magazines as originating or at least perpetuating these assumptions. The therapist is called upon once again, this time to tell us that some of her patients are so overwhelmed by the messages they read and the images they see that her whole therapy procedure involves "getting them off glossy magazines" (Ibid.). In this way, such magazines are accorded an ominous cultural and social role in defining or disturbing a woman's identity and sexuality. The relationship between representations, older women's self-loathing (regardless of social position), and the riskswomen often incur to transform their bodies, forms a tight causal knot. It is those beauty articles, glossy

fashion features and inches of seductive advertisements which consistently exhort readers to battle nature -- gravity and the ever compliant, betraying body -- piece by piece. In this way, the media is pitted as a seething social institution praying on the vanity of *a priori* vulnverable women. What is not countenanced is the possibility that such messages give a certain form to, or at least emanate from, a constellation of practices and ideologies -- the "technologies of gender" as de Lauretis says (after Foucault) (1987) --of both aging and femininity as they are wound together. That it is "natural" to want to win the battle of skin versus gravity, as the good surgeon says, has as much to do (perhaps even more) with medical perceptions of aging as it does with representations of women in popular culture. Nevertheless, what exists across representational practices, social institutions and ideologies, is that this naturalness is no more so than for women.

If all that can be located in these magazines is this tyranny of youth and beauty, then how does one begin to assess those magazines for older women like *Lear's* and *Moxie* -- magazines which look very much like the ones criticized by the *Globe* -- that try to pull away from this apparent tyranny? Indeed, this question foregrounds the more specific issue I want to address in this chapter: the cultural attempts to address older women from within the "dreaded" (from a feminist perspective) form of women's

magazines that editorially wish to empower its readers by attempting to transform, renounce, or in some cases merely extend some of the dominant meanings constitutive of what we typically understand as traditional femininity. Before exploring this in more detail, it is first important to briefly contextualize these magazines by pointing out some of the wider discursive and representational features typical of women's magazines.

The Context of Women's Magazines

While the Globe article conveys a sense of the dangers involved in the personal and cultural intolerance for aging, it is highly questionable whether women's magazines can be so summarily dismissed. This is no less true for those few magazines for older women than it is for women's magazines in general. The role of women's magazines in our culture has a long and complex history dating back at least to the 17th century. Carolyne White, for instance, has identified the various cultural and social roles women's magazines have played in this history (1977), suggesting that they have helped bind women to a limited range of social purposes held out for them by the changing demands of the social and cultural order. While the specificities of this history are too involved to detail here, it can nevertheless be noted that the first woman's magazine in Britain in the late seventeenth century was in fact dedicated to filling the

leisure time of an emerging middle class of predominantly literate young women with articles on science, literature, and mathematics. As well, in the 1950s, the post-war re-domesticization of women was articulated by a plethora of women's magazines aimed at nurturing the skills of homemaking and motherhood. As Majorie Ferguson argues (1983), women's magazines of this era dovetailed with the post-war solidification of a domestic scene replete with new homemaking technologies that required features and advertisements excitedly detailing their time-saving uses in the home.

Of course the appeal of magazines is much more complicated than that. In much of the feminist analyses on the representation of women in the media and popular culture, few have failed to locate the discourses of femininity and their component elements as a perpetuating or even generative source of female desire (cf. Coward, 1984). Nor have they failed to speculate on the ideological role played by many women's magazines in this process, where textual surfaces are found to offer consistent discursive patterns enframing and valorizing the traditional feminine world of hearth and home. To understand the challenge for feminists presented by such magazines, one need only recall the Ur-text of post-war American liberal feminism, Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique (1963). In it, Friedan derived part of her understanding of the social pervasiveness of the "mystique" on the contents of romance fiction in magazines for

middle-class women, prompting her to rhetorically question "[w]hy...does the image deny the world?" (p. 33).

More concerted efforts have addressed the relationship between social identity and cultural form. In a well known study, Angela McRobbie (1978/1982) examined the ideology of adolescent femininity offered by a popular British teen weekly, Jackie. Her analysis identified the main signifying processes and narrative forms which address its teenaged readers with a powerful, "falsely coherent" feminine identity specific to adolescence. Employing the method of content analysis, Marjorie Ferguson (1983) uncovered from British women's weeklies a "cult of femininity" that has endured with little substantive change from the post-war era to the early 1980s. In these studies, the implicit basis for critique is, like Friedan's question and the psychotherapist's despair, rooted in the concern for the tendentious unreality of most mass circulation women's magazines, and is accompanied by the prescriptive call for women's magazines to present a more faithful picture of the harsher realities women experience (cf. White, 1977).

In what is probably the only sustained attention to women's magazines, the work of Janice Winship has looked at the signifying processes involved in the relationship between meaning, consumption and the reproduction of femininity in capitalist culture (1978), and has charted the variegated forms the discourse of femininity has taken in recent years

as accommodating responses to changes in social conditions and the status of women (1985, 1987). But unlike some other analyses of women's magazines, Winship offers three main reasons why we shouldn't assess these magazines for how they measure up to reality. In her study of the British liberal feminist magazine Options (1983), Winship cautions first that it is inappropriate to do so when editors themselves do not appear overly concerned with presenting a picture of the "real" world. Second, if women's magazines' stock in trade is escapism and fantasy, then perhaps this in itself should be understood as a positivity to the extent that fantasy, is a fundamental part of experience. We need to ask, she suggests, "why these fantasies, this escape, and not others, and how does fantasy shape the magazine as a whole?" (Ibid.: 45). Finally, Winship argues, magazines can never really be simple reflectors of social reality so long as we understand them as representational forms which are already based in determinant ways on other representations and discourses at large in culture; "they cannot 'reflect' what they are [already] a part of" (Ibid.). As I've pointed out earlier, such representations and discourses are already recognizable outside the specific mass cultural form, and therefore draw upon a context which already embroils women. According to Winship, women's magazines represent "less a denial of the 'real world' than an affirmation of how much women and feminine concerns are neglected in that real world" (1987: 14).

What Winship's work has consistently emphasized, most notably in her early studies (1981, 1983), is the inseparable link between representations in women's magazines and the practices of consumption. In this, she has drawn attention to the simultaneous constitution of the common sensical and easily recognizable figures of "femininity" and "individuality" by the discourse and representation in magazines of modes of consumption. For Winship, these figures and their discursive frameworks are structurally linked to a capitalist ethic. We know, for instance, that such magazines as Flare, Chatelaine, Cosmopolitan, and Vogue amongst others, all exist within the production, distribution, and consumption structures of capitalist consumer culture. After all, as a cultural commodity, women's magazines depend not only on subscription and newsstand sales, but on ad revenue for a range of (primarily) women identified commodities. The necessity of consumption is determined however at yet another, more ideological level. Winship argues that the chief appeal of this culture involves the articulated assumptions of liberal notions of individuality, autonomy, and self-determination, the expression of which is encouraged under capitalism to mean the freedom to consume a vast array of commodities. As represented by this magazine genre, consumption becomes theprime mode of creating or producing oneself and one's identity through the accumulation of commodities. An individual in this context is one who practices consumption by exercising choice, over and again the very real economic

and social constraints to doing so (typically denied by the culture industries). Winship observes for instance, that the editorial stance of Options is not merely "you are what you buy", but "you are as unique as the products you buy" (1983: 46).

Consumption appears in women's magazines as the organizing, supporting, perhaps even empowering practice for a woman's social and sexual identity; and as the very covers of most women's magazines attest, the one seemingly unified and totalized identity imbued overwhelmingly with power and value is, of course, a feminine one. What feminine individuality actually means, however, is determined by the different inflections found across a range of magazines aimed at various markets in the social hierarchy (defined and segmented by age, class, education and only occasionally by race). Such meanings can not only be gleaned from the editorials, self-help tips, advice columns or feature stories, but by the way this particular subjectivity is tied to such commodities as clothing, make-up, toiletries, furnishings or appliances.

The key point from this is that modes of consumption become the key signifying link to subjectivity, creating a world for the reader -- circumscribed by what is presumed to constitute her personal life -- based on what she can be induced to purchase. For example, the appearance of the "Super Woman" in many magazines signifies one who juggles

many identities both private and public, domestic and social (wife, mother, career woman, lover friend, volunteer worker, gourmet cook, interior designer, etc.), with a set of commodities signifying and constituting each role, interlacing them with the threads of leisure, pleasure, fantasy, and the hope for personal happiness. To posit the historical moment of feminism as an influence on the rise of this "new" woman serves capital well, because, as Winship states, she is also now a new breed of (classless) consumer feasting "on dreams woven with commodities" (Ibid.: 55). In her argument, the social function of magazines does not involve reflecting or anticipating experience per se but is one symptomatic link in the political-economy of femininity under capitalism.

That this analysis may appear a little simplistic, should not be used as the condition for denying the power of this dimension, for Winship quite convincingly demonstrates the very real and substantial recuperative power involved in cultural commodities like mass circulation magazines. However, what should be underscored is that representations of commodities and consumption are not the only analytic forms to be found in magazines, nor can they be taken as thesole mediating site or optique through which identity is constructed nor through which the pleasures and meanings of magazines are to be assessed. If all that could be said about women's magazines were generated from this quasi-economistic framework, there would be little point in

analyzing them in any of their particularity. They would be no more than sophisticated marketing tools permitting different demographics of women access to more and more unique commodities under late capitalism.

In all fairness, Winship's later work, Inside Women's Magazines (1987), is more careful not to hasten a collapse on this dimension. She notes that while contemporary magazines may be based on universalized, hyperrealized articulations of the commodity form, personal identity, fantasy, and desire, it can also be said that certain historical moments give rise to and witness conditions under which new identities (new "individuals"), or at least the provisional and tentative exploration of them, are enabled through this articulation (Ibid.: 154). What this points to is the fundamental contradiction of women's magazines, where notions of femininity and individuality are not fixed, since the commodity status of the magazine need not prevent the effects of positive social change from registering in mass culture, even in compromised ways.

If economic, technological, social and cultural changes give rise to concerns and problems that get struggled over in dominant culture, how then does the demographic fact of our aging society figure in women's magazines, a genre so often organized around fears of aging? Since its launch in 1988, Lear's magazine, published by Frances Lear, has consistently resisted lengthy fashion features, breezy "how-to" youth

preserving health and beauty information, recipes and food articles; nor does it offer advice on romantic relationships (at least not directly). Rather, its heavy, glossy pages are dedicated to the older, wiser "inner self" that can be rebornto realize new horizons without overtly denying the passage of time. The same cannot be said of Moxie, launched over a year later in 1989. Owned by the publishing empire of former body builder Joe Weider, Moxie occupies what might be called the traditional terrain of women's concerns, offering up fashion/beauty features, exercise and diet information, celebrity profiles, decorating hints, and romance advice all with a heightened preoccupation with health and physical fitness.

In their own particular ways, as we shall see, while each magazine wants to represent aging with some positivity, they manage all the same to rely on a kind of health fetishism that substantiates what Susan Bordo identifies as our alliance with culture "against all reminders of the inevitable decay and death of the body" (1988: 100).

"Lear's" Magazine: Personal Power in the Monied Self

If the raison d'etre of more youth oriented women's magazines is the creation of a space for the concerns of femininity, then it can be safely said that Lear's is chiefly concerned with aging as a problem for femininity in our

culture. And if one can speak of the cultural construction of gender, then analogously, one can speak of the cultural construction of aging. Indeed, the constructive aspects derive from the reverberation between aging as imagined and represented, and aging as experienced. As Kathleen Woodward has put it, these reverberations "structure each other" (1988: 81).

How then does Lear's lay out the terms for a woman's "successful" aging? How does it structure and give form to experience for its (predominantly affluent and white) readers? The publisher, Frances Lear, is only too aware of the deeply ingrained negative assumptions and connotations associated with our culture's ageism and sexism (Advertising Age, October 23, 1989). In the prototype's editorial, Lear discerns some of the key terms of the struggle in which older women find themselves. Drawing on a naturalized, cyclical conception of a woman's life, Lear employs a liberal feminist discourse to narrate the possibilities opened up for middle-class women, envisioning the history of the women's movement as one which ushered in the passage from the private domestic world, to the discovery of the self and its capabilities in the world beyond the family and the home:

> It was only yesterday when I -- perhaps like you -- tended and nurtured and managed and felt a usefulness and worthiness about myself. Some of it came from me, but the greater part grew of the respect and measure I was given by my family. It was a sweet way to live...It seemed that on just one day the family sequence of my life was over...A laundry list of negatives routinely

> comes attached to the sequence in a woman's life which follows the years when families are young. The task, I later learned...was to change its negativity with a positive mindset and the know-how to unlock the best -- the most creative of oneself.

At 67, Frances Lear uses fragments of her biography as a mediating site for other women's empowerment. In fact, understanding the magazine is not possible without reference to her; she writes most of the editorials, and her well-coiffed image appears occasionally on the cover (March 1988, March 1989) and always in the short "Lunch" interview and editorial sections. From this position she clearly announces herself as having arrived to both represent and carve out a new position for women between 40 and 65. For Lear, older women need more advice with their financial portfolios than with their love lives or interior decorating conundrums. They need to know what is going on in literature, art (particularly its current market value) and politics. And the "Self-Centre and "Addiction -- Our Families Ourselves" departments tell us they need to know the latest approaches to reforming expectations about changing families and healing disturbing behaviour patternsthat stand between their inner most desires and their abilities.

For Lear's is about change, accommodating it and hastening it, not about losses. It is about the life cycle and the positive aspects it brings to the woman who is aging. In this, the fear of decline is altogether denied. No reference appears to "maturity" or "graying", to being

a "senior" or "elder". These are terms that, in the logic ofthe magazine, signify membership in a negative category shunted aside or negated by what is installed: the discourse of the liberated and progressing essential self. Discovering and actualizing this self forms the constant refrain in the magazine. As Grace Paley says in one article, this progress has a secret goal, since it witnesses the ability to relativize age and "upstage time" (January/February, 1989).

The consistent theme of Lear's editorials is the gains of women's liberation for older women today. By drawing on the historical narrative of 1960s liberal feminism, Lear draws attention to the notion that it is the individual "you" who must change -- as Lear herself had to -- and make hard choices, in order to reap the rewards of enhanced self-esteem and a realigned concept of beauty. The self must be nurtured, for "the new buzzword, the 'in' term in the '80s is self-esteem" (October, 1989), or as she has put it in an earlier issue, "[t]he word ego should be writ on paper or wood or steel and placed alongside toothbrushes and pasted above wall switches and taped on computer terminals" (May/June, 1988). In this context, the social conditions and power relations that may constrain women are recast as former problems that apparently no longer exist now that women have succeeded. In other words, the "political" appears as hollow, cut off from the "personal".

Lear's singles out the ages between 40 and 65 as a

unified, whole category. It is the time or cycle of life for the tapping of personal strengths and resources, for is is only the older woman who now has the wisdom to recognize these things in herself, now that the children are almost grown or have already left, now that the marriage has been renewed or failed. "Yesterday's mad housewives" we are told, "are today's sanest most creative, most interesting Americans...Lear's will tell the truth about your feelings, your past, your possibilities" (March 1988). In this sense, the discourse of the "individual" that Winship argues as a constitutive construct in all women's magazines, is indelibly etched in Lear's. Here, the cultural struggle over the representation of aging is staged not in the area of everyday politics, economics and health care, and not in terms of the inherent problems of the family, but in terms of a battle with the self over one's desire, creativity, spirituality, and intellect.

In light of this, it is not surprising the magazine offers only the occasional gesture to health and medical issues, or to the politics of aging. Debates about social security, mandatory retirement, and the grinding poverty of old women entail addressing areas of women's powerlessness and are thus thoroughly absent. Rather, the magazine wants to signify the positivity of aging through images of social power as evidenced by the many features and profiles about successful and/or famous women entrepreneurs, professionals, writers, artists, actresses and politicians.

For example, in its first year of publication, an impressive list of writers and personalities appeared in and/or contributed to the magazine, which included Betty Friedan, Germaine Greer, Maya Angelou (the only black woman featured), Anne Rice, Barbara Ehrenreich, Doris Lessing, Philippine President Corazon Aquino, actresses Joanne Woodward and Colleen Dewhurst, "Ms.Perfect" Elizabeth Dole, and the odd profile of some of the "good men" left in America, like Paul Newman and Dan Rather.

The invocation of liberal feminism is consistent with this image of personal power, since it functions to circumscribe a self that is not merely an "individual" in Winship's sense, but a transcendent one. This self must be that much better and stronger than its younger sisters to fend off the ravages of aging. Feminism gets yoked into Lear's as little more than what Winship has called an aspirational philosophy of rising expectations (1987: 115). It is deployed to form a narrative -- from the domestic realm to that of (paid) labour -- where social and personal history intertwine in the life cycle of women who are now entering middle and older age. As its June, 1988 editorial makes clear:

> After two and a half decades of breaking open equal opportunity -- the biggest loaf of bread in women's lives -- there still has been no leap, no pass, no grab at summing up...The hot baked goods are sweet. The records, the statistics about women, reveal that we are interested in and competent at work...Many are experiencing professional rebirth at 40, 50, 60,

> risking changing, in order to express their creativity (May/June 1988).

Being an older woman for Lear's involves more than loaves of bread and other "hot baked goods". Being rewarded for one's efforts is everything: after all, "inside most dependent women is a little girl yearning for financial independence" (Ibid.). Lear quotes literary critic Carolyn Heilbrun, that "the acceptance of a new challenge in middle or old age marks the end of fantasy and the substitution of...work" (January/February, 1989). Women would never be the same again, Lear intones, "after we smelled the smell of our own money" (October, 1989). In this, as with the regular 20 page front section called "Money and Worth", the self is linked quite explicitly to making money. This link of course, is crucial. It is not only signified by the plethora of advertisements for precious jewellery, customized cars, dyed furs and other expensive clothing, but it draws attention to the arrival of a new subject whose identity is secured by her ability to accrue capital. It is as though the rewards for the creativity and inner abilities celebrated by the magazine are really only worth talking about if they have exchange value in the more masculinist defined world of competitive capitalism.

Yet there is a subtle distinction between the values attached to consumption and those attached to capital. Obviously, the ability to accrue capital will guarantee

certain patterns of consumption. But, in fact the Lear's woman is not primarily defined by her patterns of consumption, but by the powers she has nurtured to maturity which will likely serve her quite nicely in making money. Emancipation of the self is yoked into an equivalence with wealth or at least financial independence. For Lear's, the process of growing older naturally endows one with the inner strength and wisdom to accrue wealth and thus, guaranteeing a woman's happiness. Consequently, any negative connotations to growing old are evacuated. Aging is thus enframed as a process to be exploited or commodified in the service of capital.

The link of the self to capital sets the terms in which certain aspects of femininity, like beauty, are redefined. As the opening quote to this chapter indicates, it is "triumph and mastery" -- "something more," she writes, "like men's work" -- that gives a woman a more important and enduring "inner beauty..that defines real beauty nowadays" (October, 1989). The Lear's woman here is still measured by a discourse of femininity -- the reliance on a certain form of beauty -- but it wants to affect changes in its traditional meaning, in spite of the constraints of publishing women's magazines that require the presence of fashion spreads (one per issue) and advertisements for lipstick, cold creams, blushers, anti-wrinkle creams, anti-wrinkle pillows, exotic health spas, rowing machines, and estrogen replacement pills. The message from the

regular "Addiction" and "Self-Centre" sections is one of bodily maintenance and emotional growth. Women are urged to accept and care for themselves, not re-sculpt themselves. In this there is some pulling away from the fetishization of the malleable body that must be fully aligned with culture in order to achieve true femininity.

Cloaking its address in the values of inner power, growth and wealth, Lear's comes perilously close to exulting a version of the "Superwoman" who, by virtue of her age, has learned to become not only everything to herself but to her family as well, despite any potential tension between the demands of the self and those from the family. In Lear's, aging has provided women with sophisticated tools for balancing this tension. She "cares more", "does more" for others and herself, she "understands more" and is not afraid of feeling more. The covers for instance, typically show a smiling, gently wrinkled and lithe actress, architect, or older model. These images are often of faces in close-up, though occasionally the subject is shown cupping her knees, hugging herself, or grasping the lapels of her jacket. We learn from the inside page the source of her happiness, her look of contentment and self-assuredness. For among the accomplishments listed are invariably the success in her career and the maintenance of her family. She typifies the woman who has reconciled the potential conflicts of personal desire and home life that one reads so often about

in, say, Redbook, or Ladies' Home Journal. The tensions that may arise between career and family become the site for constant negotiation, hence the often angry letters to the magazine for being ambivalent about which side of the coin -- men and family or the self -- the editors are on. The magazine has attempted to suggest that there need not be a divide between career and family in embarking on personal growth but that there can be multiple selves, though there are no revolutionary tilts against the centrality of family life. As one woman writes: "[f]amily makes up most of what I am. I do have another identity -- my job, a private niche that is mine alone -- but my family provides a sense of sharing, responsibility, and love."

While the magazine may heighten the importance of the family as something good and nurturing in its time, as the "Addiction" column reminds us, it is also a set of relations that do change with time, that must be let go of lest it threaten the development of the self.

In some respects, there is nothing atypical about this resemblance to the "Superwoman". As Winship has observed (1983, 1987), this figure is readily available in a host of women's magazines from the 1970s and 1980s. What is of interest however, is how Lear's reconfigures this identity -- the "woman for Lear's" -- as not available to just any woman, but almost exclusively to older women who have been privileged with years to learn how to be as independent as

men. Thus the premise of "having it all" found in many women's magazines seems finally realized in the pages of Lear's, since, again, the consistent assumption is that wealth can guarantee older women's rightful social position as a bulwark against being marginalized as "empty nesters" and widows, forever mourning the loss of husbands and family life. With respect to the wider context in which this magazine is situated, part of what makes this reconfiguration possible is the historical conjuncture of liberal feminism and entrepreneurial Reaganism, with the blotting out of constraints to such rewards for races and classes other than white, middle-class and educated upon which Reaganism predicated itself. Like other women's magazines premised on liberal feminism, such issues are entirely irrelevant since, as Winship has consistently argued, only "you the individual" are, in the final instance, responsible for your happiness and success.

Consistent with the emancipatory, individualist discourse invoked within its pages, there is no fundamental questioning of the social definitions of gender and sexuality, nor the structures in which they are embedded. Taken for granted are the norms of heterosexual relations, marriage and monogamy in which such definitions are materialized. Such norms are rarely constructed as a chief concern or "problem" for the emerging or changing self in the magazine, rather, they form a hierarchy of needs and desires which the older woman must order appropriately if

she is to age with little suffering. In a most telling article, "The UP [sic] Generation", Lear's reports on the results of its reader-survey (March, 1989), summarizing for us that "nothing appears to be as critical as a strong sense of self". One woman writes:

> Sense of self has different meanings for different women, but most agree it's something a woman grows into slowly, and sometimes painfully over the years -- a subjective development, having less to do with external achievement than with inner emotional clarity.

But it is acknowledged that this path has its perils, since "the most dangerous menace to their marriages, many women feel, is their own personal growth." To confirm this, one 60-year-old businesswoman confesses that she is growing at a rate that sometimes leaves her husband "in the dust", for she is "blossoming for a second time, discovering new resources and energies."

Lear's wants to hasten women along on this cycle of change, helping them break their apparent addictions to outmoded desires, pleasures, and pains. It summarizes that contrary to cultural expectations, growing older is a fundamental aspect of life that can unlock one's true essence, where time can imbue one with the ability to deal with almost any constraint to realizing this essence, such that "almost every positive self-perception increases with age -- sense of success, of eloquence, of courage, of serenity, of grace, and -- yes -- of attractiveness" (March,1989). By linking knowledge of the self, inner change

and growth with an appropriate way to age, Lear's carefully avoids addressing the body in transition. Apart from the four or five ads which appear on average in each issue for such products as estrogen replacement, anti-wrinkle creams and cosmetic camouflages, all connotations of bodily change and of the negative aspects of change (loss and decay) are almost entirely avoided. As I've previously indicated, this allows the magazine to avoid any sustained concern for health, medical technologies and their politics specific to aging women. Stories on how women maintain themselves are typically contained within the two or three page "Body Briefing" section of the magazine's "Self-Centre" department, though these are usually concerned with maintaining soft hands, yoga instructions or information on the "architecture" of the immunity system. Drawing any explicit relationship between these subjects and aging is discreetly reserved for the final paragraph of the article. It isn't that the body lacks importance, it is just that mental health, defined by the actualizing of the self, is more so, taking precedence over the body. It seems this particular form of health fetishism or obsession is given such focus as the zone of control because it connotes that, unlike the body, it is limitless.

There are two immediate dangers with this particular focus on the self. First, the search for the truth of one's talents and potentials, ecc., appear only realizable here within a fairly stable materialistic, masculine identified

middle-class form. There is little possibility of linking this self beyond its own pleasure to a set of political conditions which constrain the lives of old women. If the individual is celebrated, then the social forces which paradoxically create the conditions for such a magazine are rarely the stuff of its editorials. At best, social conditions are only acknowledged, as I've argued, in the historical narrative Frances Lear constructs and genuflects before in her account of American liberal feminism. Today the "Lear's Woman" is an "evolutionary", as one "Money and Worth" column exclaimed. As such, there is little or no solidarity with a range of aging women outside the median yearly income bracket of $54,000. Secondly, the mind over body emphasis obviously draws on our mind/body split heritage, where the body as confinement, limit, and enemy to one's potential is defined implicitly as an absent presence in the magazine.

Framing of the aging and aged self in this way appears strikingly paradoxical. For while Lear's wants to redefine aging for women by articulating an imaginary, transcendent self as a lever for resisting existing ways in which certain social and cultural systems constrain aging women, it leaves virtually untouched deeper concerns about why the decaying body frightens us so. By this absence, it sets in place a kind of silent paranoia about bodily changes and how they affect the inner self privileged by the magazine. Of course, it can be conjectured that underpinning this paranoia is a

long history of bourgeois fear of the aging body as inherently grotesque and thus associated with symbolic power requiring social marginalization (cf., Stallybrass and White, 1986). For the aging body as typically, negatively imagined would indeed threaten the affluent self Lear's so zealously marks out and celebrates, reminding it of certain limits to its social power and transcendence.

In a general context where social and cultural practices and meanings constitute aging as a war with/in the body and against time, Lear's draws on the intellectual and creative aspects of women's lives from which it traces an idealized subject. Self-actualization, a notion dependent on the hidden dialectic of growth versus stagnation, is mapped onto this identity as a privileged path to circumvent the ravages of aging, resembling survivalist strategies that preclude the forging of links between personal continuity and history upon which "wisdom" can be rooted. The idea in fact is to break links with the past, to embark on new careers, to take up new hobbies. One article for instance, profiles the experience of having a first baby after 40 in order to "experience" it and not, interestingly enough, as the result of facing questions about personal mortality.

The empowering grace note to this tracing is that a space is opened up for some of the concerns of aging for women, and it instructs us that positivities about aging are being actively sought and imagined however compromised and

contradictory these may be. In this sense, it is worth remembering that identity politics of this nature can be strategically useful whether they fit experience or can be actually lived out or not. This, despite certain postmodernist theoretical refusals of liberal, humanist conceptions of identity to which the Lear's woman bears more than a passing resemblance.

"Moxie": The Beauty of Health

If what characterizes Lear's is the attempt to articulate a set of practices and strategies of soul searching and self actualization, then Moxie stands in clear contrast by the extent to which it draws on the discourses of physical health and fitness. And if Lear's addresses the mind and soul of the Lear's woman, Moxie can be discerned as concerning itself with the scrappier, more middle and lower middle-class woman who has little time for feature articles on Simone de Beauvoir's love life (cf. Lear's, September, 1989), and few resources for investing in the perfect mutual fund. Their differences though, are most immediate in their respective appearances.

Compared to Moxie, Lear's has the look and weight of Architectural Digest. Moxie has a more conventional, thin, glossy format that contrasts sharply with Lear's colour-

coordinated underscored columns and minimalist design. The latter for example, offers matte finished black and white photo essays and eschews the asymmetrical and bold graphics and highlighted sidebars typical of many women's magazines, including Moxie. In Moxie, the mood conveyed is one of frothiness and energy, connoting the timeless youthfulness.

Both magazines have reported circulation figures of 350,000 per month, confirming Frances Lear's contention in various interviews (e.g. Advertising Age, October, 1989) that there is indeed a broad enough based market to encompass various incomes and interests in that designated nebulous region beyond "40 plus". As well, unlike Lear's which has an unusually high ratio of editorial to ad pages for a woman's magazine (an average of 65 out of 175 pages), Moxie has a more conventional ratio of 64 editorial pages out of 128 (Steinem, 1990).

While Lear's is oblique at best about the bodily process of aging, Moxie appears to tackle it head on and thus stands in contrast to Lear's by the extent to which it is concerned with both the inner and outer self, and by outer self I mean here the specular nature of aging, of how the aging woman should look. The splashy headline on its first issue boldly titled in purple "40 And Flaunting It", signals for the Moxie reader that there is very little about aging to be "down about", particularly for the generation of women who have "struggled courageously, if sometimes falteringly, over the

past decades toward change" (November, 1989). Like Lear's, Moxie wants to address an imaginary unity of women who, if not directly involved with the women's movement, were nevertheless implicated and perhaps even sympathetic to its broader goals. In this sense, the notion of change is the linchpin to elicit the attention of readers, for not only have older women lived through and initiated it, they will also need a guide to the personal physical and emotional changes in their lives as they age. Key phrases and euphemisms drained from the pool of popular feminism repeatedly surface like "taking charge", "taking control", and "coming on strong", which attempt to expunge the culturally engendered and depressing overtones that surround the inevitability of aging, setting the stage for controlling the progress of age.

Moxie draws on the assumption that how aging currently takes place need not be considered "natural" and that the consequent terror often bound up with aging for women, need not exist. In aid of this, the magazine combines a mood of positive action backed up by information to create a space from which to challenge the myths of aging for women, acknowledging, as Lear's does, that there is a cultural struggle taking place. As the very title suggests, Moxie is about verve, energy, guts, strength and personal power -- all qualities positively sanctioned in the work-out guides, diet and meal plans, preventative medicine features, make-up tips and travel profiles. This particular focus on the body

paradoxically releases the body from the constraints of time and space. Affixed to the "upbeat" attitudes about aging, are images of the Moxie woman in motion, pumping iron, speeding through air, hurling herself to new heights, luxuriating in the uncharted pleasures of her body. If she is weightless and physically free, then she can, by implication, experience herself as transcending the physical constraints of space and time.

Containing the threat of such constraints requires a set of facts, instructions, and procedures to service the need to constantly maintain vigilance when confronted with the body's changes over time. Such procedures and facts are buttressed by a cadre of health professionals prominently listed as the magazine's "Editorial Advisory Board". These include psychologists, sports medicine doctors and researchers, gynecologists, plastic surgeons, nutritionists, preventive medicine specialists, gerontologists, dentists, orthodontists, peak performance and sports psychologists, physiotherapists, oncologists, urologists and dermatologists, many of whom write the articles or at least serve as the accessed "experts".

The magazine's particularity in fact, lies in the way it frames all topics -- from relationships to health and beauty maintenance -- as requiring the benediction of one of these experts. Their very presence is reassuring, lending legitimacy and authority, thoroughly saturating articles,

tips and testimonials with the discourse of health and preventative medicine, thereby medicalizing all concerns of life. The first issue of the magazine (November, 1989) for instance, contains four items in the features section -- a long work-out guide, a checklist guide for debunking the myths of aging, an article about breast cancer, and a story about adapting to being single (again). The work-out guide is extensive, running to nearly 10 pages, a not surprising fact given that, as previously indicated, Moxie is published by the weight-training expert, Joe Weider, who also publishes a number of physical fitness magazines such as Shape and Muscle and Fitness. As the text to the work-out guide says, women no longer are content to "rein in [their] physical power." Coupled with detailed medical artist's renderings of muscle groups juxtaposed with photographs of an older model/ demonstrator, the text tells us that the time is right for women to take pleasure in physical strength in a way they haven't felt comfortable doing before.

This pleasure is woven with others. Readers are urged on the one hand, to take this new pleasure for its own sake, and on the other, because it can make "her man feel loved" when she wraps him in her "strong arms and heartfelt powerful hugs". It contextualizes these changes for us: "in our hip post-modern culture, society not only accepts strength in women, it places demands on them to develop their bodies for art and for fashion's sake." Thematic links are thus forged between personal power, the new aesthetics of the female

body, and the shifting sands of femininity itself. These are brought to the surface in the context of aging, pulling only subtly away from dominant meanings and positions held out for women, while still defining women in relation to the body which is, nevertheless, caught in the logic of spectatorship. The difference is that the power annexed to the body appears only discoverable by the demands of the body's changes. Maintaining or maximizing health merely registers here contemporary culture's conceptions of femininity since one's sexual identity can be enhanced in the form of the "stronger" woman.

Underlying the discourse of health is a level of anxiety around divergent and disparate approaches and alternatives to well being. As "Debunking the Myths of Aging" tells us (November, 1989), it is important to constantly have at one's disposal "facts" in order to separate biological truths from cultural lies. Given that such facts are always changing due to ongoing research, the magazine assures readers of its own importance in providing this information. Thus, we can develop a strong body into our 70s, we don't have to lose our breasts to cancer, our sex lives need not decline, we don't have to get fat, menopause won't make us suicidal, our mental functioning need not decline, nor must our bodies hunch to the ground, brittle with osteoporosis. There is a horizon of discovery once naturalized categories are peeled away, so that we can "Fuel [our] Fat-Burning Fires" (February, 1990), discover that "Lust Lives On" (January, 1990), take on the

Fortysomething Beauty Secrets" (Ibid.), realize the "Hysterectomy Alternative" (March, 1990), and resolve impotence in our mates ("When Old Faithful Flags", Ibid.). In applying these regimes to the traditionally feminine areas of sexuality, body-image and beauty maintenance, women are encouraged to re-discover the potential of their body in a number of contexts corresponding to a range of contemporary woman's social roles, where the Moxie woman may, in the words of the work-out guide, need "strength for elbow grease or embraces" (November, 1989).

The article on breast cancer, "In Charge: Taking Control of Breast Cancer," intensifies the relation between knowledge and personal power. It points out the tremendous, though no less worthy efforts required by women to ensure they not lose their breasts or their lives to cancer, providing they are not cavalier about their health or the choices they make in canvassing different opinions and seeking out different approaches: "we figure we will get breast cancer or we won't and there's nothing we can do about it. Wrong...." The article points to the necessity of early detection, and contains several highlighted sidebars, complete with medical renderings of the anatomy of the breast, how it ages, and how to do a proper exam. Treatment options are offered, as are the three first-person success stories, and a psychological guide to "staying sane"; as well, names and addresses of organizations and awareness groups are provided and tips on how to access them.

The holism of this approach situates mainstream medicine with suspicion and caution, addressing the social and psychological aspects of breast cancer by underscoring that one's health is a site of intense work, where no aspect of it should be taken for granted. Consequently, no stone is left unturned in discovering alternatives to "wellness". Similar articles are found in the "Preventative Medicine" section, -- all with a cheery, uplifting tone like "Outsmarting Osteoporosis" (November, 1989), "A Story With Teeth In It" (March, 1990), or the one on incontinence called "Holding It: When You Gotta Go, You Gotta Go" (January, 1990).

In ways similar to Lear's, Moxie relies on notions of autonomy, individuality, and self-determination. In other words, and not surprisingly, on the three prevailing privileged terms of personal life in Western culture. Moxie's contribution to the "problem" of aging for women is a set of knowledge practices in the form of accessing medical and bio-science experts as the redeemer of feminine attractiveness and health. In this way, it posits the processes of aging as a site for an intense investment of labour. Aging as work. This is consistent with what Margaret Morse identifies as the logic in physical fitness's address to women, since this work is offered as a form of labour which promises "to transform [the subject's] own body according to her will", thereby functioning as an "exorcism of age" (1988: 20).

It may appear tempting to pose, as Morse does, that this notion of physical fitness offers strategies of empowerment. It can be variously conceptualized for instance, as an antidote to the anxieties about aging, as the route to personal transformation, or as a form of resistance to notions of feminine passivity, physical weakness, softness and stasis. It can also be situated as a form of body-knowledge, where one comes "to know one's body as its acme and at its turning point toward decline" (Ibid.: 24), with two cultural antitheses held together -- beauty and strength. But celebrating physical fitness and health in this way merely reproduces the representation of strength and beauty already coded in contemporary culture, and not solely in magazines like Lear's and Moxie or in the aerobics videos Morse analyzes. Indeed, Morse is well aware that physical fitness for women is at least paradoxical in the sense that one can also exercise in order to approach a technologically mediated (i.e. the video) body ideal that promises to secure social value for women, but she fails more seriously to challenge this notion of personal empowerment and the ideology of independence and autonomy upon which it rests, upon which fears of aging are predicated, and upon which both Moxie and Lear's derive their common sensical appeals.

Like many women's magazines, Moxie requires its readers to observe their bodies for the telltale signs of age, and it provides a set of practices for effectively doing so in order that technologies of health, bodily maintenance or perfection

or perfection can be deployed. The problem is that for a magazine dedicated to the "older" woman, the ideals and standards are almost wholly defined by the capacities of youth. The expectations of youth are merely extended, offering no specificity about being older itself. In this way, the "woman of Moxie" articulates a long-standing campaign of intolerance for the vicissitudes of aging. Aging is an imposition for women that ultimately need not be debilitating nor worrisome, provided one keeps constant watch over the body and enlists the aid of the right medical expert at the right time.

If Moxie can be situated as celebrating activities of physical health as a way of holding off aging, as Morse has put it, and by implication holding onto a social position, then it would be fitting to situate Lear's as precisely attempting to stake a claim for that position in all its contradictions. But it must be said that neither denies the notion of a life cycle itself. Frequently, articles and stories in each magazine acknowledge the multiple identities for women as they age -- as daughters to their mothers, as possibly mothers and grandmothers themselves (to their own daughters and granddaughters perhaps). What is conspicuously absent for the most part is any concern about caring for their mothers. It is the one form of labour that doesn't figure along side the labours performed on the body and soul of the self.

At another level of abstraction, these labours translate into ways of becoming, and about influencing the practices and beliefs about aging as it progresses along the cycle. In this regard, they operate on the ontological paradox of aging as the continued struggle of being in the face of limit and eventual death. In these magazines, this involves holding on to forms of femininity, of vanity even, despite all that threatens it. To shore up this becoming, each privileges along the way strategies of medical and psychological intervention which help give coherence to a particular identity and to forms of knowledge -- through the body, through self-cultivation of creativity and wealth -- as ways of resisting tendentious positions of older and old women circumscribed by dominant institutions, practices and social relations.

This emphasis on becoming, on how women should age and be old, involves an implicit distinction between aging and actually being old. This distinction moreover, is figured in the magazines in the form of an historical frame, privileging the former over the latter, and is perhaps one reason why the very old woman is not addressed by either magazine. Liberal feminism's narrative of personal power hasn't implicated her, since, not only does she represent stasis or fixity, but moreover, it is presumed, she is already caught in a nexus of positions that have defined her, as Marilyn Bell says, as "a malicious force, inactive, unhealthy, asexual, and/or ineffective" (1982: 223). As represented by these

magazines, aging may appear as a stage for discovering new forms of personal power, but to this old woman, as to their old mothers, Moxie and Lear's say very little and seemingly deny nothing.

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CHAPTER FOUR

BIO-TECHNOLOGIES AND HISTORY: THE GENDERED DISCOURSE OF "ENDLESS YOUTH"

In Aging and Its Discontents (1991), Kathleen Woodward identifies the different aging bodies that have been represented in the literature and mass culture of modernity, noting that the most compelling for our culture, perhaps because the most gruesome for the imagination, is the specular body -- the physical, decaying body that is assessed and codified as an object of a horrified gaze. Woodward identifies this as the biological body, because it involves the representation of the status of one's health. But there are others. There is the chronological body (one's actual age), the psychic or personal (how one feels, the state of one's mind). For each there corresponds different representations and discourses. Moreover, between these different dimensions is the social body, the one that mediates between feeling, soma, and experience, and from which social constructions or representations circulate in the culture, influenced as it is -- as each dimension is -- by politico-medical, and economic forces. This may seem tautological. Rather, it is more useful to think of the meanings bound up with aging, both in a gendered and a general sense, as a set of mutually structuring forces. In

any case, the analysis of women's magazines in the previous chapter has been about this mediation, with each magazine emphasizing one dimension to the exclusion of others.

Summarizing the analysis of the magazines this way entails, for instance, thinking of them as constituting two di discursive responses to the "problem" of aging for women, particularly since, throughout our lives what is paramount is the specularity of our bodies. In Lear's, there is a positivity staked out on the claim that women should be concerned not with this dimension, but with their psychic states, with the capacities and desires that arise with chronological aging. As we discovered however, this construction is overdetermined by the terms of capitalism: the trajectory of later life is to exploit one's age in the service of accruing capital. Moxie, on the other hand, may appear concerned with all three dimensions of aging, but in the end, it circumscribes a world for women based on the ideals of a healthy, ageless, and hence, specular body; strategically masking, in other words, the chronological body while healing and containing the biological one.

There is little doubt that the experiential dimension of aging will eventually involve physical frailty or weakness, thereby necessitating dependency or at least interdependency in our familial relations and on health care apparati. It is little wonder that we all feel tremendous anxiety and fear about this inevitability. Consider then the following

proposition that femininity, as traditionally or ideologically defined, fits rather neatly into this scenario. That femininity, in other words, has a certain affinity or even conceptual equivalence to the negative connotations of becoming old. To restate this further, perhaps the specter of old age is an inherently feminine one, despite the paradoxical status of asexuality consigned by our culture to old women. Now, as I have argued, the extent to which notions of control and mastery have succeeded as privileged values in Lear's and Moxie, is the extent to which a liberal feminism has succeeded in providing psychological and physical strategies of empowerment as tools for confronting the exigencies of aging.

Of course, notions of control, autonomy and mastery have been historically sanctioned by patriarchy as positive attributes of masculine behaviour. Therefore to analyze discourses of avoidance of aging involves, to a large extent, confronting tenets of a masculinist response. If Moxie and Lear's are partly woven out of such patriarchal notions, then I want to explore further in this chapter one example of a more explicit masculinist discourse about aging. My example here will be Longevity magazine. I will then want to historically situate what is presently circulating in these various discourses, demonstrating some of the historical roots of their respective stances to aging.

"Longevity" Magazine: The Utopia of Youth

Indeed, Longevity magazine fits rather well here, and not simply because it is published by that 1970s defender of masculine privilege, Bob Guccione (who also publishes Penthouse and Omni magazines). For, as I'll argue here, its technological-utopian vision of aging and the construction of an eternally youthful physical and mental identity around which this utopia is organized, both issue from an intense hostility towards, and denial of, the threats to control and mastery that arise from the vicissitudes of aging. There is another reason too, and this involves the possibility that as fears about aging become more real, they subsume any overt concern for gender or sexual difference. Perhaps, as Kathleen Woodward has postulated, "in western culture age takes precedence over and may swallow up gender" (1991: 16).

In mass circulation since 1989, the presence of this magazine signals the coming onslaught of proliferating knowledges for denying the aging process in all its complex dimensions. As the magazine's masthead announces, Longevity is "a practical guide to the art and science of staying young". For Herbert Blau, the presence of technologies of longevity is one of the "troubling vanities" of our time (1986: 27). The problem, as Blau identifies it, is that the process of aging runs into what he calls "the ethics of an intolerable dying" (Ibid.: 28), for which our culture offers bio-technological solutions as the only response. In fact,

the process of physical decline and death itself are actively effaced by the magazine.

It should be noted that extension of the life span has been observed since at least the postwar period owing to changes in conditions of labour, higher standards of living (in industrialized countries at least) and with respect to public policy on hygiene and nutrition. This demographic history reveals that while the length and perhaps quality of life may be extended somewhat, there seems nevertheless, little doubt about the existence of an upper biological limit. This very limit is challenged by Longevity. As a popular bio-science magazine, it constructs out of a "panic science" (Kroker, 1987: 2), particular rhetorics of inquiry around the biological body which, as I'll argue, is conceived as a machine whose decline is the result of a faulty, genetic program.

In Longevity, one typically finds brief summary reports of research from the various scientific disciplines on the bio-chemical, environmental and psychological factors that hasten the aging process. Through cross-cultural profiles of aging, and in feature reports on controversial treatments for baldness, wrinkles, food allergies, depression, chronic fatigue, AIDS, cancer, stroke and heart disease, Longevity presents a dizzying array of information and correlative studies. Causal links are postulated between diseases and any one of a combination of the following: the immunity

system, "anti-aging" drugs, food and vitamins, diet and exercise programs, the mind's control of the body, death and the paranormal, and healing locations. Alongside these bits of knowledge, the magazine also cheerily proffers reports about cryonics, body and piecemeal brain replacement technologies, sophisticated cosmetic surgeries, and other medical/surgical techniques.

To take a random example, in the "Advances in Life Extension" section of the October, 1989 issue, we learn, amongst other things, that the phosphoric acid of soft drinks adversely affects bone strength; that a doctor has developed new implants to "unfurrow brows"; that excessive exercise may actually cause degenerative hip diseases; which foods are best for maximizing fitness (raisins, and cantaloupe); that researchers have found "the number one cause of face-lift failure" (the buccal fat pad of the cheeks); or that something as vague as "bio-rhythms" may actually be caused by longevity enhancing neural conductors of the hypothalamus.

Longer features are more nuaunced in addressing the ethics of aging and dying. One anthropologist writes in the "Open Mind" column that "with all the attention given to health matters now, many people still view a short life as their fate. We seem to feel that a quest to extend our longevity is a show of hubris...Yet consider, for a moment a different world: one in which people are encouraged to view health and longevity as wonderful opportunities rather than

as desperately sought ways to defer death." Opportunities for what? For personal growth for its own sake? Not quite. He writes:

> Let's think highly of who we are and, just as we would maintain something mechanical, work hard to maintain ourselves. And let's view our effort as a spirited mission for the planet we live on, not just a personal regime. If we begin to demonstrate that we care about our longevity...our environment and culture will respond in ways that let us live longer (Ibid.).

Notice here how nature and culture are collapsed together. How a stated concern for preserving nature (i.e. the environment) is used to shore up and legitimize the extension of human life, as though "the planet needs us". The assumption here is that we are on the brink of being robbed of our long lives by the very hidden toxicities of everyday life, though we are not offered any way to think of natural limits to our lives. Like much of the articles and science news reports, this editorial rests its argument on the blurring of the organic and the synthetic. There is a sad irony in framing the ethics of longevity this way, and it has to do with how the medico-technologies required to deliver longer lives are implicated, as are all such technologies, in the very "toxic" environment that is being decried in the article.

Blurring the distinction between the organic and the synthetic, between life and death, indicates how the magazine, like its sister publication, Omni, manages to push

the boundaries between science, science fiction, and New Age epistemologies. That the information offered may contradict other studies and stories in the same volume or from other volumes doesn't matter; if anything, the presentation of information is often fragmentary. What does matter is the surface appearance of continual progress in longevity science to quell the anxieties of contamination by decay.

The active blurring between life and death circumscribes a particular embodied identity. There is, for instance, a telling phrase in the quote cited above that encourages readers to think of their bodies as mechanical entities, or more specifically, as inherently cybernectic, where the fulfillment of an endless youth can be found in the "natural" extension of the body and its systems by technological means. Cosmetic laser surgeries, synthetic implants, cryonic technology, medicinal drugs and herbs, gene therapy, alternative healers, "creative imaging" and hypnosis, the complex coordination of exercise regimes, "anti-aging" vitamins, foods, and calorie blockers -- these techniques amongst many others enframe a particular representation of the body as an entity of flesh, bones and fluids whose complex changes need not be considered inevitable, least of all its register of time. In this context, the inner self, the psychic body, is encouraged to grow, not in the dimension advocated by Lear's but in ways to maximize both one's inner healing powers and one's attitudes about accepting life extension technologies.

Despite the fragmentary nature of information presented, a coherent inquiry does emerge with the tentative "results" proving that the body and all its functions, systems and component cells can be altered, re-wound, and tinkered with like a clock. In detailing the regimes necessary to maximize these seemingly innate qualities, the magazine portrays a technological utopia where the progress of aging can be halted by science and medicine, for it is through science that many of the secrets behind the ruse of inevitability (and thus of nature) can be teased out, releasing endless possibilities for alteration. The body is subjected in this context to a rigorous interrogation that simultaneously fragments it and systematizes it. Most issues, for instance, present a column called "Body Parts", where the aging of such parts as the "v-zone" of the neck, the skin, the teeth, bones, eyebrows, feet, as well as the senses and internal organs are profiled. On a more systematic level, the cells and blood of the immunity system and the cells of the genetic structure are emphasized as key components in the quest for longevity, where everything from food to lifestyle is linked to having an adverse or positive effect. Thus, food is considered medicine, and lifestyle not something lived for its own pleasures but for survival. Aspects of life thought to be mundanely capricious or individualistic are linked to scientific causes: "hating califlower" may be in your genes; being a working mother will enhance longevity; sleeping can help you live longer; being reserved will cause life-threatening hypertension and certain vitamins will

"boost" the immunity system, helping to fight the "free radicals" that roam the body looking to disrupt the normal regeneration of cells causing cancer. Above all, genetic engineering is framed as the ultimate "therapy" to extend life and outlaw death since "many scientists think that the aging process itself may be genetically programmed" (July 1989).

One article captures quite well how this mechanistic view of the body is coupled with the personal dimension of aging as a key strategy to avoid old age and death. In "Slowing How Fast Time Runs Out" (July, 1989), research is profiled that demonstrates that "no on needs to be a prisoner of time". Trying to impart a sense of the subjective nature of time, "every person's province to be conquered and controlled", readers are encouraged to use techniques of hypnotic time manipulation in order to travel backward in time to retrieve the memories of youth or forward "to tap the wisdom of old age". It is doubtful however, whether reaching the wisdom of old age will ever be necessary since one can re-perceive the passage of time, thereby "in effect, live longer" by slowing the aging process in general, or at least slowing the process of certain degenerative diseases. Indeed, one of the issues that links anxiety about aging, technology and the indistinction between life and death, is the fantasy of time travel itself, a subject at the heart of Longevity's discourse. In "Cryonics-- Science Meets Fantasy" (January, 1989), the process of being frozen only to be

"reanimated" at some future date is couched in terms that are scientific and rational, not, of course, moral. After all, reanimation occurs often in nature, "cases of cold-water drowning and revival have a scientific explanation"; the principle of cryonics is merely an extension of this. In the logic of cryonics, "old...is a relative term, one that changes meaning as time advances". Correspondingly, "death is not a single point in time"; it is a process, so much so, that cryobiologists prefer to call it "dying" (Ibid.).

In refusing at its most extreme, the necessity of death itself, when, how, and why it occurs, Longevity appears to question the systems of knowledge gathered in the disciplines of medicine and biology which, in its mainstream form, impart a certain naturalness to the progress of age and eventual death. In the "Outer Limits" section, Longevity makes necessary a re-thinking of the connections between mind and body, thereby implicitly demanding of these disciplines that they re-think their very conceptions of the body and the mind's apparent healing powers. At best, the magazine questions the knowledge but not the power of contemporary medical technologies. And yet, it may seem a little subversive to challenge how we age and die by suggesting that it is often the result of cultural and political influences -- poor maintenance, toxic environments, and shoddy, addictive lifestyles. No doubt, too many aspects of how we age have been considered natural or inevitable in our culture and hence used as a legitimizing pretext for marginalizing

older adults as universally useless to society. But the magazine manages all the same to affirm medical and technological solutions. Its critique seems aimed at medicine for not being radical enough. For, in the final instance, the magazine demonstrates how knowledge from the health sciences may permit forms of power that continually shift the relationship between nature and culture.

In this sense, aging is re-figured as progress, not in the service of personal growth as it is in Lear's, but as a stage of heightened body awareness, requiring the commodity exchange of knowledges, technological services and medicines. Its pages are filled for instance, with mail-order ads for body shaper machines, brain booster drugs, "megafood" vitamins, hair growth drugs, psychoactive soft drinks ("choline coolers"), muscle enhancers ("Ergogenic Pro-Formance"), and other quasi- medicinal forms of life extention. Many of these promise, in ways reminiscent of the patent medicine ads of the 19th century, to work their wondrous magic in secret ways suppressed by the medical establishment but long used by an elite "in the know" core of ageless individuals.

The Absent Presence of Women

I want now to address a number of questions that come to mind with this magazine. First is the relationship to gender;

though Woodward suggests the possibility that concerns bound up with aging may "swallow up" gender, she notes in a contradictory vein that almost all images of aging are of women. This is not true of Longevity, at least not entirely true. For there is one seemingly insignificant way that women figure, and this is on its cover. In fact, virtually all of the issues from January 1989 to 1990 that I have examined -- and even on the covers of issues at the present time -- bear the image of a young, beautiful woman. These images are coded in fairly restrictive ways. For instance, a vaguely soft-pornographic look is suggested by the July, 1989 cover which has an above-the-shoulder shot of a young woman, seemingly unclothed, who holds up slices of lime to her eyes (as though looking through binocculars). Her lips are red, moist, and slighted parted. Another cover, November, 1989 shows a woman holding up a skewer of vegetables that have been spray painted gold and silver. (Often food is represented in de-naturalized ways such as this.) Holding up or putting to the mouth glowing and seemingly electric vitamins and pills also contribute to the repetoire of cover images, as are side-shots of women holding weights, or engaged in some form of exercise. The only occasion when a woman has not appeared on the cover was for the January, 1989 issue which had as its lead feature, "The Super Longevity Diet".

The presence of these images shouldn't surprise us. On one level, they rely on the common sense understanding that

utopian hopes for a never ending youth prominently figure in women's desire since, as I've argued, women's social power is still defined by her ability to maintain attractiveness. On another level, using such an image for a general interest magazine about "staying young" indicates the extent to which a woman can so easily be made to stand in for this desire for both men and women. This connection, of course, hinges on a paradox. For though the covers signify flawless health and beauty, they also implicate desire here as a construction against the anxieties bound up with aging, thereby signifying these very anxieties. As I suggested at the outset, these anxieties involve the loss of personal and bodily control or autonomy. I would add as well that these losses are feared less because they involve physical pain (undeniably they do), and more perhaps because we know, as a matter of course, how awfully our society and culture treats dependent people. Longevity signifies a kind of timorous self, vulnerable to the ravages of aging, thereby solidifying the warrant that the technologies for controling the aging process are unquestionably necessary. In this way, it practically literalizes that to be old and female is not only a present statistical truth, but a truth that resides in the cultural imagination. The nexus of assumptions, desires, and fears about aging can be so short-handedly projected onto the body of a woman because their meanings are interchangeable.

This begs another question, of how autonomy and mastery and the assumptions of the free, voluntarily acting subject

are related to the discourse of youth as privilege. Admittedly, it is hardly a revelation to point out that the magazine addresses its readers as unified and unique individuals. Moreover, it cannot be denied that we all have interests in forms of control over the many dimensions of our lives. To echo Stuart Hall, whatever theories of the individual or subject we may theoretically engage, the undeniable fact is that some acceptance of the strategic fixity, even temporary fixity, of the individual must be acknowledged (1985). But what needs to be thought through is the specific way in which the values of independence, mastery or autonomy and youthfulness are conflated.

First, though it seems obvious, it must be said that the magazine articulates youth not in the adolescent sense, but in the adult sense of having and maintaining social power, at least for the white male population. Privileging youth in the context of a discourse about life-extension does not merely efface aging. For it also works to identify being young as one's true being, where to move biologically through time away from this state towards death is to be alienated from one's essence. By implication, it also means to be alienated from one's body, the very material fact about aging that cannot be naturally controlled, thus requiring mind control techniques (e.g. inner healing), and the many masking, "lifting" body part extension/replacement and genetic engineering technologies. This gives deeper resonance to Blau's observation that aging "is an excretion

of power" (1986: 29), for it asserts the naturalness of youth as power over those older.

Its techniques do not even suggest a restoration to youth as Woodward observes of many cultural discourses and representations (op cit.), since the readers addressed here (baby-boomers) are just now entering mid-life; there is nothing yet to restore. The aged reader will find no solace here. There are no testimonials or articles about being old except for the occasional reminiscence about one's deceased grandparent. The techniques privileged for "staying young" allow one to choose which chronological and biological body or age one wishes to have fixed or halted. Readers are encouraged to pick a personally optimum age as one's youthful ideal around which to organize strategies of maintenance and containment. Almost any point along the continuum is potentially up for grabs, so to speak. To be defined in terms of youth so rigorously, aging is denied its own terms. Put more bluntly, Longevity displays an explicit hostility towards accepting the aging process on any grounds. It is above all, exemplary of the discourse that presupposes aging as a medical disease and personal problem; one that requires the help now of "digital doctors" (i.e. computers), who by the end of the century will crack the biological "code" of aging, providing "cures for heart disease, cancer and even aging" (July, 1989).

The Historical Dimension of Progress and Mastery

Longevity wholly negativizes aging as a process against the power and mastery embodied in the category of youth. But as many have noted, in (North) American history this power also embodies notions of progress and possibility, with aging consequently on the side of stagnation. Lawrence Grossberg indicates the extent to which American post-war culture articulated youth precisely in this way. He writes:

> The baby-boom created an enormous population of children by the mid-fifties, a population which became the concretely defined image of the nation's future, a future embodied in a specific generation of youth who would finally realise the American dream and hence become its living symbol...Not only was its own youthfulness identified with the perpetual youthfulness of the nation, but its own generational identity was defined by its necesary and continued youthfulness...it was an ideological and cultural signifier, connected to utopian images of the future and of this generation's ability to control the forces of change and to make the world over in its own image (1988: 50-51).

A future orientation for the aging readers of Longevity is stridently and concretely realized as the progress of sustainable youth as the only way of being an individual, as though subjectivity and youth are co-terminous. Department titles like "The Open Mind", "Fit Forever", "Life In the Fast Lane", and 'Mental Powers" suggest speed, growth, change and endless possibilities. Aging is here the new concern in life to which one can further refine and exert the personal capacities and economic resources for control. The stakes in maintaining control are raised because the plethora of information presented on aging indicates that almost

everything in the everyday, as I've previously indicated, is a potential antagonist to life.

Bound up with presence and progress, and coupled by the historical moment that contains an aging generation that is healthier and wealthier (compared with previous generations) Longevity figures aging as an already lost war of attrition. Unlike Lear's to a limited extent, no space is made available for imagination, or even for the solace of personal and generational history and remembrance. Indeed, as Blau argues, one of the sources of anxiety abou the new omnipresence of the aged, particularly in America "is still our delinquent sense of history" (1986: 31). For Blau, it is in "the forgotten world" that one finds "a deference to the endurance of age" (Ibid.: 29).

Taken together, the responses found in Lear's, Moxie and Longevity variously attempt to construct boosterist meanings, giving expression to a desire for control, but these arise out of a history that pre-dates the era to which Grossberg refers or Blau castigates as deliquent. The emergence of the values of progress and control that are presently hitched to aging is not merely a post-war or postmodern phenomenon. Thomas Cole's analysis of what he calls the present "flux" of meaning around aging is instructive here (1988). Like Grossberg, Cole wants to link the meaning of a generation to its historical articulation; to the set of social and political conditions that give rise at any one moment to a

set of desires and values. Thus for Cole, the contemporary focus on aging evinces a heightened fear which owes much to a sense of declining empire, no longer exempt from the destinies of the Old World. He says that since the 1970s, "our awareness that America is an aging society has blended silently with fears of nuclear holocaust, environmental deterioration, military and economic decline, social conflict, and cultural decadence" (Ibid.: 14). The aging of the population is coincident with the aging of social institutions themselves which have been variously described in the postmodern metaphors of exhaustion and collapse. But Cole reminds us that fears of aging, while its articulations are different, are not, in themselves, unique. For there are vestiges of other meanings and other relations, historically carried over which find their expressions in cultural forms like the magazines analyzed here.

To understand the history of what constitutes the contemporary debasement of aging and old people, requires for Cole an understanding of what has been lost by the secularization and modernization of the life course. The model for the modern life cycle that emerged in the Enlightenment, the conception of life as containing discreet categories of age-related characteristics, abilities, plays an important role Cole argues, in the emergence of bourgeois individualism. He writes:

> People began to feel that they had more control over their own lives once they were able to conceive of them

> in long-range terms. This new perspective encouragedthem to develop individual virtues such as self-control and thrift. It also defused awareness of social inequalities based on class, wealth, gender, or political power. After all, the life cycle was most significant, and everyone, irrespective of class and sex, passed through it (Ibid.: 16).

For Cole, ancient understandings of the naturalness of the life cycle created a sense of stability and unity, a sense of belonging to the divine order of the universe. Debasing age debases this order and the traditional attempts to spiritually organize the sufferings of aging. He situates this debasement at the rise of the consolidation of a middle-class value system in the nineteenth-century. Before 1800, while the sorrows and infirmities of old age were acknowledged, the aged nevertheless remained socially relevant. "New England Puritans, for example, constructed a dialectical view of old age, emphasizing both the inevitable losses and decline that come with aging and hope for life and redemption" (Ibid.: 18). For Calvinists, if one survived without pain and chronic disease, one was favoured by God. Physical decay underscored human dependence on God, and was conceived as humanity's punishment for original sin. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, during what Michel Foucault calls the rise of "bio-power" (1980: 140), the primary virtues of Victorian morality --independence, health, success -- required constant control over one's body and physical energies. Thus, frailty, the inevitable trajectory of aging, symbolized the limits of self-control, signified "precisely what bourgeois culture

hoped to avoid: dependence, disease, failure, and sin" (Cole, op. cit.).

Any possibility of holding the old Puritan dialectic in tension -- between redemption and hope, acceptance of the ambiguity and contigency of life, and the link of hope and triumph to tragedy and death -- was virtually shattered by modernity, which found it necessary he states, "to seperate strength from frailty, growth from decay, and hope from death" (op. cit.). The commitment to progress, solidifying in the rise of industrialization in the late eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries, increasingly pulled away from the spiritual resources to make sense of biological limits and human finitude. Dichotomizing experience in this way, the Victorian values that fed into modernity rationalized experience in order to control it. Antinomies abounded; on the one hand, a "sinful" old age for the Victorians was one filled with decay and dependence, bereft of the values of self-control and the power of individual will, while on the other, a moral old age was marked by virtue, self-reliance and of course health. This is a more specific instance of what Focault identifies as the set of Victorian disciplines of the body and the rise of regulations of the population -- "the two poles around which the organization of power over life was deployed" (op. cit.: 139).

The progressive domination of technical and scientific forms of rationality complicate and overdetermine the

debasement of aging. Decline in old age may have been repugnant to the middle-class of the nineteenth-century, but it was the emerging professional and corporate classes of the twentieth-century that "found ample reason to acknowledge, if not exaggerate, the degenerative qualities of old age" (Cole, op. cit.). The increasing regulation of the capacities of the population and the constant need for young, productive labour required this exaggeration in a way reminiscent of what Foucault calls the reflection in politics of biological existence. In other words, a bio-politics of the population was organized "investing life through and through" (op. cit.). For Foucault, power over the life course of the population, or bio-power,

> was without question an indispensable element in the development of capitalism; the latter would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes (op cit.: 141).

From this admittedly sketchy history, we can see that the naturalness of the life cycle endures in very concrete ways, but it is now, as all things are claimed to be in postmodernity, merely evacuated of its former relation to a religious foundation. The contemporary categories marked out in the life cycle -- school, work and retirement -- operate discursively and non-discursively in the form of bureacracies of social control with their rules, demands, and hierarchies, and in the institutionalized spatial organization of individuals (e.g. in schools, work places, geriatric

hospitals, old age homes, retirement condominiums, etc.). Not surprisingly, people have increasingly viewed their own lives, Cole claims, as careers in the sense of a sequence of expected positions in each of these categories. It could be argued that the magazines evoke this to the extent that aging is considered if not a career, then certainly a form of labour performed on the self, and not so as to retire but precisely the opposite, to refuse to step into that position.

The Victorian split of aging into negative and positive poles, corresponding to a sinful decay or virtuous self-control, endures in late twentieth-century articulations of aging. It would be too easy to suggest that one magazine, for example, fits into this pole or that. Rather, they exist along a continuum. For obviously, Lear's, Moxie, and Longevity share features of each pole. All three evince the same preoccupation with the accumulation of weath and health which is conditioned by the demands for progress and self-control or mastery. But more specifically, Lear's appears closer to the positive virtues, emphasizing self-cultivation as a bulwark against the sorrows of aging while Moxie, and more so Longevity, hover more closely to the negative, where the body's decline, frailty, and dependence are, if not sinful, then thoroughly debasing to the self, and must be eradicated. For Moxie this is through disciplining the body and containing the "damage" of aging; in Longevity, disciplining the body uses techniques to outlaw aging altogether. Both are implicated in supplanting any former

spiritual resource with sustainable bio-medical ones. To the extent that the women's magazines champion a new "upbeat" way of thinking about aging, they nevertheless rely, as does Longevity, on what Cole calls the "coercive standards of health that have plagued middle-class views of aging for a century and a half" (op.cit.: 93). While health and self-control were seen as the province of the young, they are now demanded of older adults as well with a vengeance, reminding us that the proper domain of life, as Foucault would put it, is not religion, politics or aesthetics, but health. This shouldn't deny that the installation of power towards achieving health doesn't have its positivities like the alleviation of suffering, the opening up of social positions, the emergence of personal forms of empowerment. But it never manages to approach what might be called tolerance for the biological body which continues to elude what Foucault has called the "regulatory controls".

This history gives us some sense of the conditions of possibility for these magazines. It is a patriarchal discourse of mastery, making manifest what Foucault charts as modernity's full alignment with life-administrating powers, ensuring, multiplying, and sustaining life forces. In this context, aging can be nothing less than problematic. Christopher Lasch claims that you can morally assess the state of a culture by what it thinks about aging and how it treats its aged. For Lasch, the "campaign against old age" (1979: 351) is causally linked not to a youth cult but to

the cult of the all powerful, individualistic and narcissistic self that can only act aggressively to what threatens it. But I think he misses, as Cole does, something even more crucial, something which the magazines themselves speak -- and that is the triumph of power over life. This power in Longevity, corresponds to one of the forms Foucault identifies: the conception of the body as a machine, the optimization of its capabilities regardless of natural limits. "That death is so carefully evaded," Foucault says, "is linked less to a new anxiety which makes death unbearable for our societies than to the fact that the procedures of power have not ceased to turn away from death" (op. cit.: 138). But technology is not the only materiality that makes this possible. The cultivation of the "healer within" is also demanded.

I want now to end this chapter on a rather unorthodox note, a personal anecdote, my own mise en abyme, which I think captures quite well the constellation of discourses and their contradictory effects. I recently had the occasion to screen a video about aging for a group of older adults in their 70s, primarily women. This took place in a geriatric community centre, one of the spaces designed and managed to enhance the quality of old age. When I asked for their response, one woman, the youngest in the group who identified herself as 54-years old, said that she couldn't relate to aging or being old. She then told a story about the life-threatening diseases she suffered and cured. She had

had breast cancer and was to have both breasts removed; her right hip was degenerative, and was to have a hip calliper installed. This, she underscored, was the least of it. Crucial to her story was the fact that her husband is a Harvard University-trained scientist who availed her of the best of his and his colleagues' knowledge in curing her. She said she was only made worse, and thus set about curing herself by tapping into her unconscious. Everything cleared up -- the cancer, the fatigue, the hip disease -- much to the amazement of her husband who then changed, she claimed, his traditional scientific practice. This healing, she offered, provided her with the means to get younger every day. The powers within the self can eradicate disease and decline, can dispense with aging altogether. We don't ever have to get sick or old, she said, and this was why she couldn't relate to anything that demanded of people attitudes consistent with "graceful" aging. For her, this healing provided a way of becoming a new, ageless person; techniques she was teaching her children and grandchildren.

Here then was someone who crystallized some of what is at stake in the struggle over meanings around aging. Her story clearly has the weight of personal triumph; she did, after all, alleviate her own suffering. She endorsed personal empowerment -- the techniques of the healer within -- that, like Longevity, redefines aging by extending the terms of a youthful self, where aging and death itself are considered unnatural. And like the discourse of the magazine,

resistance must be launched at the disciplines of the life sciences and how their beliefs and apparati manage disease, degeneration, and aging itself. Unlike the magazine, however, this woman believed life-enhancing bio-technologies to be unnecessary interventions. The self can do it all. The contradiction implied in her story is that while her techniques resulted in the enhancement of her health by her own means, the underlying message was that those who cannot heal themselves are, as the Victorian moral code of aging would have it, weak and personally at fault for failing to do so, succumbing to the ideology of the inevitability of aging. There was another woman present, a 75-year old stroke survivor, who spoke well and walked with the aid of a walker. I had wondered whether she was now supposed to marshal her inner strengths and resources, tap her unconscious in order to regenerate her brain cells, overcome her partial paralysis. The woman who had healed herself had thus articulated what amounted to an insult to this woman and against the vicissitudes of aging. And yet there is a paradox: for the response of the triumphant healer, simultaneously empowering and severe as it is, perhaps issues from the implicit knowledge that society has no value or utility for frailty of any age. While it appears to revise accepted understandings of aging, the notion of "endless youth" as the proper way to live through time articulates a particular "right" to life (to echo Foucault) that must disavow the progress of time on and through the body, where aging and being old are bereft of any specificity.

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION: "ON THE OTHER SIDE OF PRIVILEGE"[1]

> It is not that life has been totally integrated into techniques that govern and administer it; it constantly escapes them.
>
> Michel Foucault

> [I]t is always the same factor that makes happiness happiness; the ability to forget...to feel unhistorically while it lasts.
>
> Frederich Nietzsche

At the outset I proposed that aging is not an entirely empty signifier because there are certain undeniable facts that constitute it; time increasingly inscribes itself on and through the body. On the other hand, what we make of these facts, how they are socially managed, and how they are discursively fixed and represented, implicates aging as one of the most complex experiential and conceptual issues around which culture and biology are tightly wound. To capture the complexity involved for women, Barbara Macdonald strategically employs a few negative examples that are worth quoting at length:

> It's as if suddenly, after 60 or 65, everything that happens to a woman is just "natural". Right now a huge amount of attention and money is going toward Alzheimer's disease. I'm not saying that there's no such thing as Alzheimer's, no diseases that are specific to people over 50. But nowhere near as much attention has gone to the

> recent revelations that many, many old women have been diagnosed as having senile dementia who in fact have brain tumors, or, more often, are overdosed with drugs or -- even more often -- are severely depressed. Loss of memory, poor concentration, fatigue, apathy, are classic symptoms of depression in a 20 or an 80 year old. What does it mean to be depressed because people's attitudes towards you are so annihilating, and then to have your depression diagnosed as hopeless senility? (cited in Swallow, 1986: 202).

For Macdonald, we cannot properly understand more specifically what the natural process of aging is until we address how it is socially represented in general and differentially for women and men (Ibid.). My intention here has therefore not been to uncover what is natural to aging; rather, I have been directed towards a prior concern in coming to understand some of the cultural constructions of aging for women that both directly speak about us and/or implicate us abstractly, and I have presumed aging as having a phenomenology that does exist prior to discourse. It is only in the constellation of discourses however, that aging takes on its meanings.

It would be amiss to ignore that the gradual changes of aging do indeed challenge a taken-for granted conception of one's self as a unified, whole entity throughout the life course. No doubt, some temporary fixing of the subjective self, as Stuart Hall has argued, is necessary for every day life (1985). In this sense, aging obviously delivers successive wounds to our narcissism, which has been so clearly tied to this conception of the subject in Western culture.[2] Moreover, as the quote of Nietzsche above

suggests, perhaps there is also a level at which some form of forgetting of time is necessary -- not merely to shore up a sense of ourselves as whole, but more importantly and relatedly, to contain the anxiety of physical difference and death. The patterns of discourse I have analyzed can be taken as instances of fixing the subject in the face of the paradox of aging so eloquently described by Simone de Beauvoir. She writes:

> There is an insoluble contradiction between the obvious clarity of the inward feeling that guarantees our unchanging quality and the objective certainty of our transformation. All we can do is to waver from one to the other, never managing to hold them firmly together (1972: 290).

What I think the magazines reveal are the various ways in which this wavering can be covered over and even denied. And as I've tried to sketch out, the discourses of aging in Lear's, Moxie, and Longevity do not arise ex nihilo but are the complex result of historical changes in which the contemporary experience of aging for women is made sense of and dealt with.

Each sets in place a popular ontology and epistemology about aging. By this I mean that the various discourses privilege a certain fundamental conception of life as essentially autonomous, which requires the organization of knowledges around both imagining the aged self and managing the vicissitudes of the aging body. As most women's magazines would have it, one of the most terrifying aspects

of aging for women is the visible marks of time on the body. To put it plainly, in the logic of dominant culture this is a terrifying state of affairs because women's identity is so deeply structured by being the object of male gaze and desire; when this is gone or threatened, so too is what constitutes being a woman. As we saw in chapter three, this is the chief preoccupation of Moxie magazine, where aging can deplete one's social power in so far as it is invested in the youthful, specular body. Aging is thus represented as a necessary series of labours to be performed on the body, labours that begin with surveilling oneself for the telltale signs of wrinkles, flabby flesh, and disease. It refuses the anxiety often invoked in growing older by marking out aging as the opportunity for maximizing bodily pleasures; these, in turn, are linked to personal, not social, empowerment in the form of acquiring knowledge about one's health. Moreover, this empowerment, coined in such phrases as "taking charge", is common sensical since it is articulated within a culturally shared historical narrative of liberal feminism in America. For Moxie, femininity and the "look"-- however defined in the particular historical moment -- must be shored up at all costs. Aging is, contrary to cultural "myths", nothing to be afraid of so long as women mobilize their resources to contain the damage. While this does not take the form of a simple or straightforward advocation for estrogen replacement and cosmetic nips and tucks, these strategies are nevertheless the subject of concern for Moxie in considering successful aging; it is something about which

the "individual" woman must decide.

Lear's grounds itself in the same historical narrative, but the terms of empowerment are different. It takes for granted that women won't be caught off guard so to speak, by the myth of the "empty nester" since the Lear's woman is one who can now, finally, after the work of family has passed, spend time actualizing herself and continue the gains in her personal life historically made possible by the second wave of feminism. Health in older age is thus defined by the extent to which a women can tap her inner resources and creativity in order to realize her true essence as a bulwark against the sorrows inherent in the life cycle. Lear's points to the possibility that aging can indeed be re-imagined as a time of growth, for accommodating change not counting losses. In this way, it tries to break from the dominant tropes of aging as progressive loss; menopause as a manageable disease; and aging tout court as automatic failure. In the space opened up it tries to imagine future possibilities that are more than what the traditional discourse of femininity offers, wherein failure to be a sexually attractive and available woman is inscribed. But as I have tried to argue, this positivity is seriously undermined by the way this location is reconfigured; aging is a site for the exploitation of the self in the service of entrepreneurialism, as a tribute to capitalism and progressive individualism. As with Moxie, the social dimension of aging is only gestured at as a collection of

"myths" that can be willed away and their material effects along with them. These two magazines stand in some measure as disproof to the claim that older women are invisible in mass culture. That each is about ways of becoming is suggestive of the possibility that perhaps there is more openness available in altering certain conceptions of aging in the middle -- or even late middle -- years of the life course than in the very later years, since, as Kathleen Woodward has suggested, with the passage of time the materiality of the aging body becomes more prominent in experience, pushing up against the limits of representability: "at critical points we will inevitably encounter the tension between the social construction of the body and the lived experience of the body" (1991: 194). Perhaps this too is why they are silent about the very old woman.

On its own terms, the unity of older women articulated by Lear's and Moxie is indeed over-extended, creating a set of expectations that are accomodating to the social conditions of aging which make it so intolerable for many women. There is no question, for instance, that through the feminization of poverty, aging occurs most horribly before its time; that class and racial differences create conditions where aging is more comfortable and healthy for some than for others; for the poor however, it is ghastly; the best services do not accrue to them, particularly in America (Cohen, 1984; Marshall, 1986).

The older, specular body and the progressive self are constructions that claim to organize and make sense of aging for women. Each is accompanied by instructions for the shaping and nurturing of the self in the process of aging. But they do not comprise the totality of what is at stake in the struggle over the meaning of aging and the life course. As my previous chapter indicated, the women's magazines exist in a general context that contains a long-standing ideology of aging as disease, the negative pole to life itself. This relies on the historically shaped assumption that aging is fundamentally against life and not integral to it, where life is rendered equivalent to the power invested in the productive capacities of youth. In Longevity magazine, this discourse foregrounds aging as essentially a trap of disempowerment. In the language of psychoanalysis, aging signifies in this context lack or castration. As is well known, such meanings have become historically equivalent to the gendered meaning of "woman" regardless of women figuring in its discourse or not. The hostility focused against aging masks a hostility towards frailty and weakness -- states of being which can be corrected through the deployment of bio-technologies.

Like Moxie, Longevity also requires self-surveillance, but its claims and assumptions for doing so are somewhat different. The labour involved in aging is technologically mediated, and rests on the assumption that the body and the life course are thoroughly malleable precisely because it is

represented as inherently flawed (e.g. flaws are written into our genetic code). More profoundly, this discourse barely conceals a disturbing repudiation of the body. The categories of aging, woman, and the body are then abstractions that converge on the same set of meanings: the uncontrollable, the flawed, and the weak. It is an old, persistent story.

As we have seen in Longevity, the maintenance of beauty or specularity is not terribly relevant; but like Moxie, the maximization of health, on the other hand, is. To a certain extent, the proliferation of health and life enhancing technologies is important. Who would deny the alleviation of suffering by any means when caught within its terrible solitude? But the magazine's privileging of healing strategies and technologies results in paradoxical effects. On the one hand, controlling one's health is all to the good; in any case, we are always already bound up in this process in various ways throughout our life. On the other hand, the demands for the maintenance of health in the aging process are uncompromising and short-circuit ways of coming to terms with conditions when "health" is not fully possible nor suffering completely controllable. By this inexorable logic, aging is thoroughly repressed and evacuated of any specificity. I suggest that Longevity knows full well -- as the other magazines do -- how disastrous our society is in dealing with phases of life that may require other than privatized social and familial relations in the form of

interdependence if not outright dependence on others. I would suggest further that the re-assertion of existing social relations is one of the unfortunate consequences of progressive individualism for both older women and men which neither Lear's, Moxie nor Longevity can re-imagine.

The critical trajectory of my analysis obviously leads me to consider the extent to which different representations and discourses can simultaneously affect the terms in which aging and older women are fixed, and the experience of aging itself. A simple inversion or "boosterist" representation is after all, what Lear's and Moxie affect and a highly compromised one at that. Michele Barrett indicates for us (echoing Griselda Pollack) that simple inversions, however, do not succeed for "representation does bear a relation to something which we can know previously existed" (1985: 70). More precisely, it doesn't succeed "because representation of women is linked to a broader chain, or system, of signification. It also occurs because representation is linked to historically constituted real relations" (Ibid.). What is required then, before changed representations are actively sought, is the intricate historical analysis of the debasement of aging and the experiences of the aged. Perhaps, in other words, there are certain forms of forgetting (pace Nietzsche) that we cannot afford to live with.

Aging cuts across all institutions and social relations

and forces, thus analysis must begin deconstructing the ontological and epistemological foundations of real relations and experiences that are all differentially marked by gender. For instance, the medical discourse around menopause; the very unity of the life course and the parcelling of time into the spaces of school, work (domestic and paid labour), and retirement; the political-economic logic and forces at work in the very meaning of retirement; the social, political, and economic overdetermination of warehousing sick and old people and the medical apparati that sustains them there; the demands on older women and men to have "fun" while their histories and knowledge are rendered socially irrelevant; and the equal demands on women to maintain their relevance through an eternal femininity. These and many more must be thoroughly interrogated. Such interrogations of course, can be represented, alternatively theorized and narrativized and made culturally visible. Different and multiple expressions of such analyses can help inflect and transform the cultural field, working towards grounding other identities, positionalities and meanings around aging.

Yvonne Rainer's film Privilege (1990) is exemplary of such an interrogation, and what makes it so interesting is the way her analysis of aging dialectically poses the historical with fragments of the "real" -- that is, with women's experiences. I want to end this paper then, with a brief consideration of her film because I think it is

suggestive of what I've argued above. Another reason for doing so is that while Privilege stems from an avant-garde feminist film tradition, and hence could be considered analytically incommensurable alongside the popular culture form of women's magazines, it nevertheless quite clearly shares the same concerns and issues that emerge in the magazines. What it does, however, is take these concerns somewhere else, offering alternative positions for women and ways of thinking about aging.

Privilege takes as its starting point what the magazines already presume: that older women are made invisible at or around menopause because they have lost the "unearned privilege", as one of Rainer's texts says, of being the object of men's gaze and desire. Furthermore, it recognizes that this is a problem that has to be managed and dealt with in some way. But while Moxie seeks to re-assert ways of maintaining the gaze, Privilege -- and in this way it bears a surface similarity to Lear's -- wants to (re)privilege aging as a phase of life for growth and for re-evaluating one's life, one's assumptions, and the nexus of desires and discourses in which a (white, middle-class) woman's life is caught before and after menopause. But while Lear's returns women to the clutches of capitalism, Rainer, of course, wants to subject capitalism itself (amongst other things) to scrutiny, all the while recognizing that, paradoxically, the clutches of capitalism and patriarchy can loosen somewhat for older women. For by virtue of her age, the invisibility

imposed on an older woman can permit her to become a critically engaged "other", or outsider.

Privilege creates a kind of thick description of both the specificity of aging and of the varied discourses and practices which consign older women to silence and invisibility. Weaving in statistical information, theoretical, fictional, autobiographical, documentary, and medical-educational film texts, the informants, fictional characters, and fragments of theory all speak about aging as a personally and politically challenging stage in life, a process marked by paradox, nostalgia, marginality. The film's central concern is understanding what makes the loss of privilege, this being "on the other side of privilege" possible. The fictional discourse has a black documentary filmmaker (Yvonne Washington) filming older women about menopause. Jenny, her main informant, is a white middle class academic and former dancer (As Rainer herself was). From the vantage point of being older, Jenny recounts experiences of her youth, experiences marked by the status of being desired, white and middle class. Moving back and forth in time, her discourse and the re-staging of her youth serve analytically to address the social and sexual divisions conditioned by patriarchy. From the position of an older woman, Jenny realizes how the larger historical time of her particular youth (early 1960s) permitted the elision of these differences.

But the position of invisibility, painful and shocking thought it is, now makes possible the emergence of a critical awareness of how this position is related to others marginalized in the social hierarchy. So, for example, the analysis of racial difference is formally interrelated with the silence imposed on middle-aged women. Quotes from black writers are inter-cut with statistics about poverty in old age, sexual violence, and of the overwhelming number of hysterectomies performed in America (e.g. 31% of American women before the age of 50 have had one). Jenny recounts the various therapies foisted on her to smooth the way into a feminine menopause (her doctor wanted to perform a hysterectomy and had prescribed estrogen replacement).

These narrative fragments are historically contextualized by the presence of medical-educational films from the 1950s and 1960s. Here, older (white) doctors in official garb intone benevolently with instructions for women and their husbands on the correct management of menopausal "stresses". This, in turn, is counter-posed by a dialogic exchange between Yvonne (the fictional filmmaker) and Jenny on the historical debasement of the body (Jenny's particular feminism prevents her from wanting to talk about her body or women's biology). But Yvonne reminds us that women should continue to claim the body, to invoke biology in order to make present what is absent: the lived experience of aging for women.

Jenny's reminiscences serve to ground an older woman's stance as one which can be critically aware of the oppression of others. She re-thinks her past in terms of what, as a white middle-class woman, she could afford to ignore. She simultaneously recounts and reassesses her reactions to the beating of a Latina in her neighbourhood (off screen). Her lesbian neighbour is raped by a Latino (for whom the victim is idealized as beautifully off limits), and Jenny has an affair with the district attorney, retrospectively realizing how free she thought she was to be the object of his attentions and how this apparent freedom helped her ignore the oppression of her sex. She tells Yvonne it wasn't until menopause when she realized that "men's desire for me was the linchpin of my identity" (this is narrated over a black and white flashback of Jenny; dishevelled and sweating [from a hotflash?], she bolts upright in bed after the lover has departed).

If aging in fact does swallow up gender, then Rainer makes clear through multiple interrogations and representations how aggressively this takes place on a number of levels; how the pleasures of femininity -- being looked at, admired and idealized -- turn on the older woman, as a bomb set in one's youth waiting to detonate. But the paradox is that this loss and the initial disequalibrium it creates can permit critical knowledge (i.e. " hot flashes" of insight) about cultural difference in which the older woman is now doubly placed -- something distinctly socially and

personally empowering and counter to the health and self knowledge privileged in the magazines critiqued in this paper. Privilege manifests a multiple presence of older women to stand against much of the invisibility and silence that even Lear's believes itself to address.

Regrettably, I have reduced what is a very rich and formally intricate text in order to suggest what might be entailed in re-thinking representational and discursive practices around aging. As Privilege enacts it, the analysis of aging must relaunch similar kinds of analysis performed on the category of gender. (Indeed, one of the film's points is the woefully incompleteness of even that project.) In the process, Rainer demonstrates what women have known for some time: that even in this moment periodized as post-modern, history and memory must struggle to endure for they can permit a different kind of power and knowledge "on the other side" than is often permitted to speak.

NOTES

1. This is a quote taken from Privilege (1990), Yvonne Rainer's recent film on aging women and menopause.

2. Perhaps this is why aging has only been discussed in primarily psychoanalytic terms within the related disciplines and fields bounded by contemporary cultural theory. Here, I'm thinking of the texts I've repeatedly cited in this paper, the collection of essays in Memory and Desire (Woodward and Schwartz [eds], 1986), and Woodward's own work (1988, 1991). The project, if it can be stated in such general terms, is to address the subject of aging in the literary practices of modernism as a way of, on the one hand, charting the imaginary relations of the self to one's own aging body; and on the other, it involves theorizing the implications of the transforming self for culture and for psychoanalytic theory.

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