35. My understanding of labor conditions and organizing in the New York area, and in the Paramus malls specifically, comes from two manuscript collections at the Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University: the papers of Local 1-S, Department Store Workers' Union (RWDSU), and District 65, now of the UAW, then of the RWDSU. I have based my analysis on the clippings, meeting minutes, and legal files in those collections, which I have not cited individually unless I quoted from them. Michelson quote from "NLRB Ruling Spurs New York Area Union: Target—50 Stores," Box 4, Folder 36, District 65; similar statement with two-thirds figure from "Report to General Council Meeting, Department Store Section, by William Michelson," January 12, 1965, Box 5, Folder 4, District 65. On department store efforts with part-timers, see "Part-Timer: New Big Timer," *Women's Wear Daily*, January 8, 1964, Box 4, Folder 35, Local 1-S; also see the records of a fascinating case that Local 1-S brought before the NLRB concerning the firing of a young woman employee who had shown interest in the union: Box 9, Folder 21, Local 1-S.

On industrial relations in department stores nationally, with a case study of the Boston metropolitan area, see Bluestone et al., *Retail Revolution*, 70, 80–119, 148–49, which provides an excellent analysis of the restructuring of the labor market in the retail trade. Also see Jacobs, *The Mall*, 49.

36. Bamberger's Paramus, "Welcome to New Friends and a New Career," Employee Handbook, 1957, Box 7, Folder 16, pp. 4, 9–12, Local 1-S.

37. "Amtrak Is Ordered Not to Eject the Homeless from Penn Station," *New York Times* (February 22, 1995): A1.

38. Article on passage of New Jersey Civil Rights Bill, *New York Times*, March 24, 1949; Marion Thompson Wright, "Extending Civil Rights in New Jersey through the Division Against Discrimination," *Journal of Negro History* 38 (1953): 96–107; State of New Jersey, Governor's Committee on Civil Liberties, "Memorandum on Behalf of Joint Council for Civil Rights in Support of a Proposed Comprehensive Civil Rights Act for New Jersey," 1948, 11, B 8, Folder "Civil Rights, New Jersey, 1941–48," NAACP Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; "Report of Legislative Committee, NJ State Conference of NAACP Branches," March 26, 1949, 11, B 8, Folder "Civil Rights, New Jersey, 1941–48," NAACP Papers. Other NAACP files on discrimination document the actual experiences of African Americans in New Jersey during the 1940s and 1950s.

39. "Closing of 'Last' Department Store Stirs Debate on Downtown Trenton," *Star-Ledger*, June 5, 1983; "Urban Areas Crave Return of Big Markets," *Star-Ledger*, July 17, 1984; "Elizabeth Clothier Mourns Demise of Century-Old Customized Service," *Sunday Star-Ledger*, January 10, 1988; "President's Report to the Annual Meeting, Passaic Valley Citizens Planning Association," Box A, Folder 3, Erber, NPL. On Newark, see for Raymond Mungin quotation, "Two Guys Will Be Missed," *Star-Ledger*, November 23, 1981. Also see "Last-Minute Bargain Hunters Abound as Chase Closes Up," *Newark News*, February 12, 1967; "Ohrbach's Will Close Store in Newark, Cites Drop in Sales and Lack of Lease," *New York Times*, December 7, 1973; and, in the *Star-Ledger*, "S. Klein to Shut Last State Stores Sometime in June," May 9, 1975; "Sears to Shut Newark Store," June 13, 1978; "Hahne's Bids a Farewell to Newark," June 18, 1986; "Macy's to Shut Stores in Newark, Plainfield," May 21, 1992; "Newark & Lewis Is Closing 11 Stores," October 15, 1993; Greater Newark Chamber of Commerce, "Survey of Jobs and Unemployment," May 1973, NPL "Q" File; Greater Newark Chamber of Commerce, "Metro New Jersey Market Report" [1991], NPL "Q" File.

Narcissism as Liberation

Susan J. Douglas

"I'm worth it," insists Cybill Shepherd in her brattiest, na-na-na-poo-poo voice as she swirls her blond hair in my face. Since I have to be restrained, physically, from hatcheting my television set to death whenever this ad appears (and every woman I know has the same reaction), it is amazing to think it actually sells hair dye. But it must, since this campaign has been harassing us for nearly a decade. "I'm worth it" became the motto for the 1980s woman we saw in television and magazines ads. Endless images of women lounging on tiled verandas, or snuggling with their white angora cats while wearing white silk pajamas, exhorted us to be self-indulgent, self-centered, private, hedonistic. In stark contrast to the selfless wife and mom of *The Feminine Mystique*, not to mention those hideous, loudmouthed feminists who thought sisterhood and political activism mattered, women of the 1980s were urged to take care of themselves, and to do so *for* themselves. An ad for Charles of the Ritz, featuring a gorgeous model dripping with pearls and staring off into space, summed up women's recent history. "I'm not the girl I used to be. Now I want to surround myself with beautiful things. And I want to look beautiful too. I've discovered that it's easier to face the world when I like what I see in the mirror."

By the 1980s, advertising agencies had figured out how to make feminism—and antifeminism—work for them. There had been a few clumsy starts in the 1970s, like the Virginia Slims "You've Come a Long Way, Baby" campaign, which equated liberation with the freedom to give yourself lung cancer. And feminine hygiene sprays like Massengill's pictured the product with a political button reading "Freedom Now" and touted the crotch rot in the can as "The Freedom Spray." But the approaches got more subtle and certainly more invidious as America's multibazillion-dollar cosmetics industry realized that all those kids who once bought Clearasil and Stri-Dex were now getting something even worse than acne—wrinkles. Here was an enormous market—the women who grew up with, who in fact made possible, a youth culture—now getting old. You could almost hear the skin cream moguls in their boardrooms yelling yippie-kiyo-kiyay.

The appropriation of feminist desires and feminist rhetoric by Revlon, Lancôme, and other major corporations was nothing short of spectacular. Women's liberation metamorphosed into female narcissism unchained as political concepts and goals like liberation and equality were collapsed into distinctly personal, private desires.

Women's liberation became equated with women's ability to do whatever they wanted for themselves, whenever they wanted, no matter what the expense. These ads were geared to the woman who had made it in a man's world, or who hoped she would, and the message was Reward yourself, you deserve it. There was enormous emphasis on luxury, and on separating oneself from the less enlightened, less privileged herd. The ability to spend time and money on one's appearance was a sign of personal success and of breaking away from the old roles and rules that had held women down in the past. Break free from those old conventions, the ads urged, and get *truly* liberated: put yourself first.

Narcissism was more in for women than ever, and the ability to indulge oneself, pamper oneself, and focus at length on oneself without having to listen to the needy voices of others was the mark of upscale female achievement. These were the years when we were supposed to put the naive, idealistic, antimaterialistic 1960s behind us and, instead, go to polo matches and wash our hair with bottled water from the Alps. Ralph Lauren, in his ads for sheets and oxford cloth shirts, used manor houses, antique furniture, riding boots, and safari gear to make us long for the days when the sun never set on the British Empire, when natives (and women) knew their place, and robber barons ran America. Huge museum exhibits celebrated England's "Treasure Houses" and the gowns favored by Marie Antoinette and her pals, each of which represented the work of 213 starving peasant seamstresses.[1] *The Big Chill* suggested that even radical baby boomers had sold out to Wall Street, a move portrayed as inevitable and perfectly understandable.

For women in the age of Reagan, elitism and narcissism merged in a perfect appeal to forget the political already, and get back to the personal, which you might be able to do something about. But let's not forget the most ubiquitous and oppressive anatomical symbol of the new woman's achievement that came into its own in the 1980s: the perfectly sculpted, dimple-free upper thigh and buttock. A tour through the land of smooth faces and even smoother buttocks and thighs makes one appreciate why the women of the 1980s who had reason to feel pride in their accomplishments still felt like worthless losers when they looked in the mirror or, horror of horrors, put on a bathing suit. Of course, these feelings were hardly confined to baby boomers. Nor are they confined to the past. Though I write about what emerged in the 1980s in the past tense, I feel awkward about doing so, because the ad strategies established then are still in high gear, and we watch their effects with sorrow, anger, and empathy. When I go to any number of college or university swimming pools, I see women twenty years younger than I, at their physical peak, healthy and trim, walk out to the pool with towels wrapped around their waists so their thighs will be exposed to the world only for the few nanoseconds it takes to drop the towel and dive into the pool. I have *never* seen a young man do this. Then they go back to the locker room and slather their sweet, twenty-year-old faces with Oil of Olay so they can fight getting old "every step of the way."

of them. Americans were becoming increasingly self-absorbed, he wrote, but not because they were conceited. On the contrary, Americans were desperately insecure, consumed by self-doubt and self-loathing, and totally obsessed with competing with other people for approval and acclaim. The "narcissistic personality," according to Lasch, was compulsively "other-directed" and consumed by self-doubt, even self-hatred. As a result, the narcissist craved approval and fantasized about adulation. Any sense of self-esteem was fleeting, hinging on things like whether someone looked at you funny or laughed at one of your jokes. This obsessive need for admiration prompted the narcissist to become skilled at managing impressions, at assuming different roles, and at developing a magnetic personality. Narcissists were always measuring themselves against others; being envied, for example, had become infinitely more important than being admired or respected. Narcissists had a strong belief in their right to be gratified and were constantly searching for heightened emotional experiences, for instant gratification, to stave off the fear that life is unreal, artificial, and meaningless. Narcissists were especially terrified of aging and death. Lasch particularly emphasized how the messages and ploys of American advertising had cultivated such narcissistic personalities.

When I read this book, I was struck by two things. First, Lasch kept using the pronoun *he* to talk about the narcissist, and this helped make the trend he was describing seem new. But for women, this wasn't so new, this was the story of our lives, of how we had been socialized since childhood. Second, it was in ads geared specifically to women, especially ads for cosmetics and other personal care items, that we saw advertisers applying, with a vengeance, the various insights of Lasch's book. Under the guise of addressing our purported new confidence and self-love, these ads really reinforced how we failed to measure up to others. Hanes, for example, in a classic campaign, skillfully resolved the tensions surrounding new womanhood in its series of ads titled "Reflections On . . ." A woman was pictured sitting across the arms of a leather chair, or in a wicker patio lounger, with her legs prominently displayed. She was usually dressed up in a glittery cocktail dress, exchanging smiles with a man in a tux. She was always white. In one ad, the admiring male voice said, "She messes up the punch line of every joke; can tell a Burgundy from a Bordeaux; and her legs . . . Oh yes, Joanna's legs." In another version, the copy read: "She does this flawless imitation of Groucho Marx; recites the most astonishing passages from Hemingway; ahh, and her legs . . Emily's legs."

Joanna's and Emily's nonanatomical achievements were impressive—they knew things only elite men used to know, like how to select a wine, and their favorite writer wasn't Edith Wharton or Alice Walker, it was Mr. Macho himself. They didn't imitate Mae West (too threatening), they imitated a constantly lecherous man. They had cracked the male code, but, because of Hanes, they were still ladies. These women were huge successes at managing the impressions they gave to others, coming across as distinctive, nonconformist women who nonetheless conform per-

are today. But without male approval and admiration, they would not have the acclaim on which narcissistic self-esteem rests. It was in campaigns such as this that the appearance of female self-love and achievement was used to reinforce female dependence on male approval. If you wore Hanes, in other words, you would feel the contradictions between feminism and prefeminism thread together smoothly as you pulled them up over your legs and hips and then strode confidently out into the world.

The cult of narcissism Lasch saw in the 1970s exploded in the 1980s, nurtured by Reagan's me-first-and-to-hell-with-everyone-else political and moral philosophies. Under the guise of telling women, "You're worth it," advertisers suggested we weren't worth it at all but could feel we were, for a moment, if we bought the right product. Here we were again, same as it ever was, bombarded by the message that approval from others, especially men, means everything, and without it you are nothing, an outcast, unworthy and unloved. We were right back to Tinker Bell and Cinderella, urged to be narcissistic yet ridiculed if it was discovered that we were.

The narcissism as liberation campaign found its happiest home in certain television ads, such as those that sponsored shows like *Dynasty*, and in women's magazines like *Vogue, Harper's Bazaar, Mademoiselle, Glamour, Cosmopolitan*, and the aptly named *Self*. These magazines, with their emphasis on clothes, makeup, and dieting, were much more hospitable than *Ladies' Home Journal* or *McCall's*, which acknowledged that women couldn't be completely self-indulgent since they still were the ones responsible for pureeing bananas for the baby and getting dinner on the table at night. *Vogue* et al. didn't contaminate their pages with such gritty reminders of reality, thank God. Instead, they created a narcissistic paradise, a luxurious daydream, in which women focused on themselves and their appearance, and in which any change was possible, as long as it was personal.

Now, before I get on my high horse about cures for what the fashion magazines call "orange peel skin" and subdermal rehydrating systems, let me be perfectly honest about my own vulnerability to these really preposterous ploys. Like a lot of women, I look at ads for things like Elizabeth Arden's Ceramide Time Complex Capsules, little gelatinous spheres that look like a cross between a diaphragm and a UFO, which claim to—get this—"boost [the] skin's hydration level over 450% after one hour" because they are "supercharged with HCA, a unique alpha-hydroxy complex," and I think—or sometimes yell—would you puleeze get real here. I know that in 1987 the FDA had cracked down on cosmetics ads then in print because they were, to put it euphemistically, inflated in their claims. I know that putting collagen on your skin does nothing. Nevertheless, there's this perfectly airbrushed model, young, beautiful, and carefree, her eyebrows the only lines on her face, and I sigh a longing sigh. Even when we are fully able to deconstruct these pseudoscientific sales pitches, which would have us spend [illegible]

where I have nothing more stressful to do than smooth on some skin cream, polish my toenails, and lie on the beach. But despite these soft spots, I'm here to say that deconstruction can make us strong, so let's be on with it.

In ads for personal care products in the 1980s, especially skin creams, makeup, and perfume, we confronted our ideal selves, eternally young, flawless, confident, assured of the envy of others, yet insulated from the needs of others. The Lutèce Bath, for example, created "your private world of luxury." In these ads, the contradictions that we'd lived with all our lives, the tensions between the need to be passive and the need to be active, were subtly and brilliantly resolved. Usually the women pictured were enjoying leisure moments, or what *Glamour* called "private time." They were sitting alone on their enormous porches, or reclining in beds of satin sheets, or soaking in bubble baths, sometimes with their eyes closed, in a state of relaxation and escape. In one of my favorites, an ad for something called Terme di Montecatini, we saw the profile of a woman at a spa, covered from forehead to rib cage with a kind of mud we assumed would make her even more beautiful while she just rested. Women like this are passive, inactive, supine. Yet make no mistake about it, these women are in complete control: they are dependent on no one, their time is their own, they are beyond the cares of the world, they long for nothing they don't already have. Those symbols of wealth—a huge veranda, the Riviera, art objects, unusual breeds of dogs, the omnipresent glass of white wine—convey comfort, luxury, insulation from the masses, and control.

It wasn't enough to put some Lubriderm on your face—my God, that was like consigning your skin to the soup kitchens of moisturizers. No, you had to spend money, and plenty of it, to be a discriminating, knowledgeable, accomplished woman. An ad for a product called Oligo-Major lectured, "No woman can afford to be without it." The cosmetics industry employed three main strategies to get women to buy the high-priced spreads for their faces instead of using the cheap shit, Pond's or Nivea—the building construction approach, the haute cuisine approach, and the high-tech approach, all intended to flatter the "new woman." They were designed to convey one basic message: you get what you pay for, and if you scrimp on skin-care products, you get what you deserve—crow's-feet, eye bags, turkey neck, the worst. Fail to spend $42.50 on one-thirty-second of an ounce of skin cream and the next time you look in the mirror, you'll see Lyndon Johnson in drag.

The building construction approach was best represented by a fabulous new product, Line Fill, a kind of Silly Putty for the face. Line Fill was also called skin Spackle—now we were supposed to think of ourselves as a slab of drywall—and was best used to "fill those character lines we can all do without." In the same age when "character," particularly for male politicians, became an obsession, women didn't dare look like they had any character at all. Chanel's Lift Sérum Anti-Wrinkle Complex [illegible]

naturals." The assumption here was that aging skin was merely malnourished; so in a gesture reminiscent of our new heroine, Marie Antoinette, the truly discriminating woman should say, "Let it eat caviar."

But without doubt the most prevalent approach was the high-tech approach, the one that introduced us to "delivery systems," "collagen," and lots of words starting with *micro-* and *lipo-*. What women's liberation really meant was that now the labs of America would turn to our real concerns: our crow's-feet. Science and technology, those onetime villains that had brought us napalm, the bomb, Three Mile Island, Love Canal, and the Dalkon Shield, were themselves given a face-lift for women. They were rehabilitated as our allies and our minions. Science and technology were the most effective agents of luxurious narcissism, and the various forms of white goop that we slopped on our faces had amazing names that cloaked the products in mystery while keeping supposedly technophobic and techno-dumbo females engaged and credulous.

Here we see another clever twist on feminism. The women's health movement of the 1970s, as embodied in *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, insisted that doctors not treat women like morons but that they talk to us as adults, provide us with information and choices, and give us more control over our bodies. Advertisers said OK, you want technical, medical information, we'll give it to you. They got to have it both ways—they flattered the "new woman" with all this pseudoscientific jargon, suggesting that this was the kind of information she wanted, needed, and could easily understand, and they got to make the goop they were selling sound as if it had been developed at Cal Tech.

In the 1980s, in nearly every cosmetic ad we saw, science and technology were women's servants, and servants not just to expedite domestic chores (as in the bad, selfless old days) but through which women could remake themselves, conquer time, and conquer nature by overcoming their genetic heritage. Here women's desires for more control over and more autonomy in their lives were shrewdly coopted. Naomi Wolf argues that the high-tech approach sought to speak to women whose work was increasingly dominated by computers and the microchip.[2] The words *performance, precision*, and *control* were used repeatedly, and products such as Swiss Performing Extract or Niosôme Système Anti-Age performed on you (you are passive) while performing for you (you are in command). One product's slogan was, simply, "The Victory of Science over Time." This product, like so many, contained "patented liposomes," which, in case you needed an explanation, were "micro-capsules of select ingredients of natural origin which fuse with the membrane restoring fluidity, promoting reactivation of cells in your skin." Niosôme produced "an exclusive action, 'Biomimitism.' " This was not supposed to make you think of conjugating spirogyra; it was supposed to make you feel privy to the world of the scientist. It was very important to feature microscopes, women in white lab jackets, and lots of footnotes about patents pending to suggest the weight

of the skin, increasing "microcirculation." Using only the most advanced "delivery systems," presumably inspired by NASA, the Pentagon, and Star Wars, these creams and lotions deployed "advanced microcarriers" or "active anti-age agents," presumably trained by the CIA to terminate wrinkles with extreme prejudice. So cosmetics actually became weapons, and the word *defense* began to proliferate in ads at the same time, interestingly, that the Pentagon's budget was going through the roof.

In copy sounding as if it had been written by Alexander Haig, our skin was put in a bunker or, better yet, behind Reagan's version of Star Wars, as "protective barriers" and "invisible shields" deflected "external aggressors." These muscular products relied on the same high-tech weaponry we saw in *The Empire Strikes Back* and had straightforward names like Defense Cream and Skin Defender. You could almost see Luke Skywalker, backed up by the Green Berets, zapping those wrinkles back to kingdom come. Turning on its head the feminist argument that the emphasis on beauty undermines women's ability to be taken seriously and to gain control over their lives, advertisers now assured women that control *comes* from cosmetics. Cosmetics were sold as newly engineered tools, precision instruments you could use on yourself to gain more control than ever over the various masks and identities you as a woman must present to the world.

But lest all this high-tech talk alienate women, cosmetics firms also made sure to give their products European-, and especially French-sounding names. System was usually spelled *système*; concentrated became *concentré*. Accent signs became essential, as did the pronoun *Le*. Several product names simply went for broke, as in this little gem, Crème Multi Modelanté bio-suractiveé, or Lift Extrême Nutri-Collagène Concentré. What were brilliantly brought together were the seemingly opposite worlds of advanced, ever-changing, American engineering technology and laboratory science (traditionally the province of men) and the preindustrialist, timeless, beauty-oriented cultural authority of Europe (which caters to women). For new beauty products to sell, it seems, the ads had to refer to and unite recent scientific breakthroughs and the language of engineering with references to France, Switzerland, or Italy. The words *extract, serum*, and *molecular* suggested both the lab *and* elements found in nature. Thus Niosôme, from Lancôme, is an antiaging "system" with a French-sounding name that "recreates the structure of a young skin." Cosmetics ads straddled the Atlantic, linking American technology with European culture, and the traditions of the old world with the futurism of the new.

With the union of science and aesthetics, women now could draw from the achievements of men in a world in which science and technology did what we always wished they would do—slow the passage of time, provide us with cost-free luxury and convenience, and allow us to remake ourselves. It was through the female form, and the idealized female face in particular, that science and technology were made to seem altruistic, progressive, relevant to everyday needs, and responsive to women's desires. They were made humane and romantic, and allied with the

privileged enough to benefit from a scientific enterprise designed specifically for elite white women. The linking of American science and technology with European cultural authority served to unite narcissism with elitism, to make elitism seem natural, legitimate, and inevitable, and to suggest that if you truly loved yourself, you had to aspire to the privileged, idle, self-indulgent world of the rich, who were the rightful beneficiaries of technology, and the true arbiters of high art. Here we had a new kind of magic. How could products that relied on herbal treatments, molecular biology, and chemistry fail to transform us into newer, better selves?

Of course, if you'd been derelict in your moisturizing duties, there were more heroic methods to combat the signs of aging. Article after article touted plastic surgery, so that no woman would ever have to go out in public again looking like Eleanor Roosevelt, Simone de Beauvoir, or Margaret Mead did in their later years. Experts from skin-care labs, their names trailed by twenty-eight initials signifying their degrees and affiliations, happily agreed to interviews for *Harper's Bazaar* and elsewhere, promoting the knife. They always said these really informative and logical things, like that the first part of the body people usually look at is the face, which is why you shouldn't have any lines on yours. So what if, after a few tucks, you were laid up for six weeks and looked like you'd gone eighteen rounds with George Foreman? It was true, some women did experience a little facial paralysis after a lift, and you might not look as Occidental as you used to or have enough skin to smile in quite the same way, but these concerns were all picky, picky, picky. Did you want to look like Cher, or not?

The other intermediate step was promoted in full-page ads by the Collagen Corporation. Here we met Sunny Griffin, "mother, building contractor, and former TV correspondent and model." Already I felt pretty inferior, but it quickly got worse. Sunny was ten years older than I and easily looked ten years younger. Sunny, it turned out, "didn't like those 'little commas' at the corners of her mouth, her crow's feet, or the lines on her forehead. So she did something about them." But, unlike me, she was a woman of action. She went to a doctor who stuck needles in her face, filling in those hideous lines with "injectable Zyderm© and Zyplast© Collagen." Now those wrinkles were "mere memories." Here were prefeminism and feminism beautifully reconciled in Sunny Griffin, Collagen poster girl. As a feminist, this superwoman had tackled male jobs and female jobs and combined them successfully with motherhood. This gave her permission to indulge her prefeminist side, the one still obsessed with little commas and crow's-feet, especially if she took decisive medical action to take control of her face and herself.

In the collagen ad, it was the beautiful, rich, and successful Sunny Griffin versus the rest of us. And that was the other important thrust of the narcissism as liberation campaign, the continuation of the catfight, the war between women. In all these ads, sisterhood was out, competitive individualism was in. It got worse if you

car salesmen. Using a combination of intimidation, pressure, and highly un ble assessments of your existing skin-care regimen, these women sought t you into buying everything they had, which could come to the equivale monthly car payment. The worst, and I mean the worst, thing you could sa of these women was that you mixed products—you know, used a cleans one company and moisturizer from another. Then they'd nearly croak fro peration at your stupidity and your self-destructive tendencies. Didn't yo these cosmetic lines were *integrated* systems; each component worked with t components as a unit. Mixing products was akin to putting a Chevy ca inside a Porsche engine and expecting the car to run. You'd wreck your mixing products; you had to buy into the entire system or risk waking morning to discover your face turning into melting wax.

The notion of sisterhood being powerful seemed a real joke under this on Fisticuffs seemed more appropriate. It took work to remember that the sal needed these jobs, that many of them were supporting kids with their salar that while we squared off against each other across the glass-cased counter, boys upstairs who didn't need face cream were getting ready for their three lunches and their affairs with women twenty years younger than they.

Tensions between technology and nature, between feminism and antife and between self-love and self-doubt were played out not only on the terrai flawless female face. Everywhere we looked, in the incessant "get-back-in TV ads and magazine articles, on billboards, in the catalogs that jamn mailboxes, and in the endless diet soda and cereal ads on the airwaves, the p smooth, toned buttocks and thighs of models and actresses accosted the w America. They jutted out at us from the new, high-cut, split-'em-in-two suits and exercise outfits, challenging us and humbling us, reminding all that nothing in the world is more repulsive and shameful than "orange pee a.k.a. "cellulite." They provided women, whether black or white, rich or po a universal standard of achievement and success. They insisted that the re should feel only one thing when we put on a bathing suit: profound mortifi

It's true that we also started seeing more female biceps, and every few *The New York Times* asserted that breasts were back "in." But, still, it slim, dimple-free buttock and thigh that became, in the 1980s and the 19 ultimate signifier of female fitness, beauty, and character. To make su couldn't hide them, the fashion industry gave us bathing suits with legs cu just below the armpit. Trim, smug models were positioned with their knees their bodies curled so that their superhuman hindquarters were front and And not just in *Vogue* or *Cosmo*, either: even in *The Village Voice*, betw exposés on racism and government malfeasance, ads appeared for products videotape *Buns of Steel*, which promised, "Now you can have the buns

bust creams, exercisers, and padded bras suggested that women could compensate for what nature forgot. Yet while less-endowed women might buy such products, and bemoan their lack of voluptuousness, there was also a basic understanding that, short of surgery, there was little a woman could do to actually change the size of her breasts. The thigh was different: this body part could be yoked to another pathology of the 1980s, the yuppie work ethic. Thin thighs and dimple-free buttocks became instant, automatic evidence of discipline, self-denial, and control. You, too, the message went, can achieve perfect thighs through dieting and exercise. As Jane Fonda put it, "Discipline Is Liberation."[3]

Emphasis on the thigh, which still harasses us, stems from the fitness craze of the past fifteen years, when increasing numbers of women discovered the physical and psychic benefits of exercise. I learned in graduate school, for example, that if I swam sixty-seven laps in the pool I was less likely to strangle the pompous white male professors making my life miserable, and I'd also sort out some problem with my own work as well. Plus, for inspiration to get off your butt, there were women like Billie Jean King, one of my heroes, a fabulous athlete and a feminist, and the first woman athlete to earn more than $100,000 a year. When she beat the living crap out of Bobby Riggs in the much touted "Battle of the Sexes" in 1973, as women like me screamed with delight in our living rooms, she not only vindicated female athletes and feminism but also inspired many of us to get in shape—not because it would make us beautiful but because it would make us strong and healthy.

What too many of us forget is that the fitness movement began as a radical reaction against the degradation of food by huge conglomerates, and against the work routines and convenience technologies that encouraged us to be passive and sedentary. The organic health food movement was, initially, at its core, anticapitalist. The women's fitness movement, too, was a site of resistance, as women sought to break into sports previously restricted to men and other women simply sought to get strong. But one of capitalism's great strengths—perhaps its greatest—is its ability to co-opt and domesticate opposition, to transubstantiate criticism into a host of new, marketable products. And so it was with fitness.

Corporations saw immediately that there was gold in them thar thighs. The key to huge profits was to emphasize beauty over health, sexuality over fitness, and to equate thin thighs with wealth and status. What had worked so well in the past was to set up standards of perfection that were cast as unattainable yet somehow within reach if only the right product were purchased. So we got a new, even narrower ideal of beauty that continues to bombard us from every media outlet and serves the needs of a host of corporations.

Yet there was much more going on here than just the media capitalizing on a trend or the standard let's-make-'em-feel-inferior-so-they'll-buy-our-product routine. The flawless rump became *the* most important female body part of the 1980s because its cultivation and display fit in so well with the great myth of Reaganism:

us: thin thighs and dimple-free buttocks meant you worked hard, took y
seriously, and were ready to compete with anyone. They were indicato
woman's potential for success. Any woman, so the message went, could
perfect thighs through concentrated effort, self-denial, and deferred gratif
the basic tenets of the work ethic. All she had to do was apply herself
course, be a discriminating, upscale consumer. "You don't get this far by acc
proclaimed one sneaker ad displaying a tight, toned rump; "you've worked
Another magazine ad, this one for a spa, also spotlighted a machine-toole
quarter, intoning, "When you work at it, it shows." Meaning, if you'v
slacking off, that will show too. Only "new women" had buns of steel; out-
women who had failed to have their consciousnesses raised didn't.

It didn't matter if you were healthy, exercised regularly, and weren't overv
If wearing one of the new, ultrahigh-cut bathing suits would reveal too
roundness, a little fat (what the cosmetics industry christened "cellulite"
1970s), you would be dismissed as slothful and lacking moral fiber and self-r
not to mention lazy, self-indulgent, insufficiently vigorous, lacking control,
tary, and old. (The only acceptable sedentary indulgence was to lie on a
longue, slathered from head to toe in sludge, à la Terme di Montecatini.) No
that the female hip area is naturally more fatty than the male (a functi
reproduction), or that most women's jobs require constant sitting, two factor
tend to work against developing buns of steel. Over and again we were told
real woman, whatever her age, would get off her butt and, by overcoming her
not just get in shape but conquer genetics and history. Her buns of steel v
instantly identify her as someone who subscribed to the new yuppie ethic
insisted that even in leisure hours, the truly tough, the truly deserving, never sto
working. The sleek, smooth, tight butt was—and is—a badge, a medal asse
that anal compulsiveness is an unalloyed virtue.

Perfect thighs, in other words, were an achievement, a product, and one
admired and envied. They demonstrated that the woman had made somethi
herself, that she had character and class, that she was the master of her body
thus, of her fate. If she had conquered her own adipose tissue, she could con
anything. She was a new woman, liberated and in control. She had made
buttocks less fatty, more muscular, more, well . . . like a man's. So here we
one of the media's most popular—and pernicious—distortions of feminism:
ambitious women want, or should want, to be just like men. The woman w
upper thigh best approximated a fat-free male hindquarter was the woman
entitled to enjoy the same privileges as men. Orange-peel skin should be a sourc
shame, not only because it's "ugly," but also because it's inherently femal
indicates that, as a woman, you aren't working hard enough, aren't really tak
responsibility for your own life. You aren't really liberated because you hav

men as well as women, could work toward buns of steel. Women could develop the same anatomical zones that men did, giving their muscles new definition, a definition meant to serve simultaneously as a warning and as an enticement to men. Buns of steel marked a woman as a desirable piece of ass, and as someone who could kick ass when necessary.

What made these thighs desirable was that, while they were fat-free, like men's, they also resembled the thighs of adolescent girls. The ideal rump bore none of the marks of age, responsibility, work, or motherhood. And the crotch-splitting, cut-up-to-the-waistline, impossible-to-swim-in bathing suits featured in such publications as the loathsome *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue could never reveal that other marker of adulthood, pubic hair. So, under the guise of female fitness and empowerment, of control over her own body, was an idealized image that infantilized women, an image that kept women in their place.

The upper thigh thus became freighted with meaning. The work ethic, the ethos of production and achievement, self-denial and deferred gratification was united there with egoism, vanity, self-absorption, and other-directedness. With the work ethic moved from the workplace to the private sphere, the greatest female achievement became, ironically, her body, her self. The message was that women were capable of remaking themselves and that this remaking required not only intelligent consumption but also hard work. Thus could women be, simultaneously, self-indulgent consumers, buying high-priced exercise shoes and spa memberships, and self-denying producers who were working hard to remake something—their bodies. They could be active subjects in control of their own images and passive objects judged by those images. They could be profeminists and new women at the same time.

By the middle of the 1980s, these buttocks and thighs were making me and all the other women I knew really hostile and defensive. Their sleek, seemingly healthy surfaces really demanded that we all be pathological: compulsive, filled with self-hate, and schizophrenic, and we were already schizophrenic enough, thank you very much. Aside from the impossible standards of perfection they imposed, these buns of steel urged women to never stop and to be all things to all people: to be both competitive workaholics *and* sex objects, to be active workers in control of their bodies *and* passive ornaments for the pleasure of men, to be hard-as-nails superwomen *and* vulnerable, unthreatening, teenage beach bunnies. Straddling such contradictions, even on toned, fat-free, muscular legs is, in real life, impossible. And buns of steel were meant to separate the truly classy, deserving women from the rest of the lumpy female proletariat. Buns of steel, like a Pierre Cardin label, were a mark of well-earned exclusivity. Lumpy thighs were Kmart thighs, not the thighs of Rodeo Drive.

The 1980s are over, but buns of steel are very much with us, in Di[illegible]

everyone involved in the campaign to make us think we need buns of steel. article inside, titled euphoniously enough "The World-Class Butt," accompanie exercise instructions and an enormous photo of a smooth, sixteen-year-old but white eyelet short shorts, lectured, "A toned, firm bottom has plenty to recomm it, as the photo on the right confirms." I also learned that the "flat bottom featu in those beach-blanket movies" was really out. "Now women want a defi sculpted look with higher, rounder cheeks." Yep, this has been an overarching g I've wanted to devote a lot of time to in the 1990s. But there's the same old hi "You have to work hard to firm them up. So get busy." No need to repeat wh expletives I use when reading an exhortation such as this.

So where do these buttocks and thighs leave the rest of us, the real women America who sit at desks or stand at sinks, who are over sixteen, and who do have the time, money, personal trainer, or surgical team to help us forge our c buns of steel? Even nonoverweight women, and women who do and should kn better, have been worked over so well that whenever we look at ourselves in mirror or, worse, have to be seen in public in a bathing suit, all we can fee disgust and shame. But it isn't just shame of our bodies. Buns of steel have tau us to be ashamed of the way we live our day-to-day lives; of the fact that whate we're doing, we aren't working hard enough; that we don't have that badge entitlement; that we don't really have enough self-respect and dignity; that we are enough like men; and worst of all, that we're adult females in a culture that s prefers, by and large, little girls. All it takes is the slightest roundness, the smal dimple, to mark a woman as a lazy, and therefore worthless, unattractive per whose thighs obliterate whatever other admirable traits or impressive accompli ments she might possess.

I'm tired of being told never to stop, and that some physical exertion, l pumping a Nautilus machine, is more valuable than some other exertion, such chasing a two-year-old. I'm tired of Cher's rump, Christie Brinkley's thighs, a countless starved, airbrushed, surgically enhanced hindquarters being shoved in face. I'm tired of being told that if I just exercise a lot more and eat a lot less too, can conquer biology, make my thighs less female, and thus not be eyed w derision. I'm *real* tired of the marquis de Sade "bathing suits" foisted on us by fashion industry. Most of all, I'm tired of the endless self-flagellation we wom subject ourselves to because of the way this latest, unattainable, physical ideal h been combined with the yuppie work ethic.

And I'm not alone. Backlash works two ways, and women, especially cran women my age, are really getting the fed-up-skis with advertisers' obsession w machine-tooled faces and thighs. I think that catalogs like Lands' End must making a fortune on this backlash against buns of steel. They sell bathing suits th

Kellogg's, Diet Pepsi, Biotherm, and all the rest of the buttocks and thighs cartel. Women know, in their heads if not their hearts, that buns of steel are not about fitness: they are about pretending that some anorexic, unnatural, corporate-constructed ideal is really a norm. Buns of steel are designed to humiliate women, and to make us complicit in our own degradation, and most women know this too. Silly as they may seem, buns of steel are worth being angry about because of the eating disorders they promote among young women and the general sexism they reinforce in society. So the next time some curled-up rump is forced into your field of vision, view it not with envy but with contempt. For it doesn't reflect hard work or entitlement so much as mindless narcissism, unproductive self-absorption, and the media's ongoing distortion of feminism to further their own misogynistic, profit-maximizing ends. Buns of steel are just another media Trojan horse, pretending to advance feminism but harboring antifeminist weaponry.

Narcissism as liberation gutted many of the underlying principles of the women's movement. Instead of group action, we got escapist solitude. Instead of solidarity, we got female competition over men. And, most important, instead of seeing personal disappointments, frustrations, and failures as symptoms of an inequitable and patriarchal society, we saw these, just as in the 1950s, as personal failures, for which we should blame ourselves. Smooth, toned thighs and buttocks obstruct any vision of social change and tell us that, as women, personal change, physical change, is our last, best, and most realistic hope. Women are to take control of their bodies not for political or health reasons but to make them aesthetically pleasing. The "new woman" of the 1980s, then, perpetuated and legitimated the most crass, selfish aspects of consumer capitalism and thus served to distort and deny the most basic and revolutionary principles of feminism. Narcissism as liberation is liberation repackaged, deferred, and denied. Again women felt pinioned, trapped in a web of warring messages. We were supposed to work harder than ever; in fact, the mark of success was having no time for your friends, your family, or yourself. But we were also supposed to indulge ourselves, and to know when and how to kick back, and to do so with style.

Let's take, for example, the politics of the face-lift. Baby boomers with sufficient discretionary income are starting to confront this one, and with the explosion in celebrity journalism, stars' face-lifts and other nips and tucks have become headline news, serving as an enticement and a warning. Cosmetic surgery is being presented as a perfectly natural, affordable, routine procedure, and increasing numbers of women are heeding the call. Cosmetic surgery is growing at a faster rate than any other medical specialty and grosses approximately $300 million a year.[6] The decision to get a face-lift or not is, inescapably, a political decision. Getting one means you're acquiescing to our country's sick norms about beauty, youth, and being "worth it." Not getting one means you're gonna tough it out, be baggy-faced, and

much any street was a nightmare. The incessant yells of "Hey, baby," and oth more anatomically graphic remarks, the whistles and other simianlike sounds sor men seem to spend an inordinate amount of time perfecting, all these infuriated r and kept me constantly on the defensive. Now that doesn't happen anymore—a I love it. I can walk—no comments; I can jog—no comments; I can walk along t beach—no leers. My eye bags and my "cellulite" are now my friends, my prot tors, my armor, and I love them for that. At the same time, part of me will alwa want to sandpaper them off.

Then there's the love-hate relationship with the eye bags. No woman wants look like George Shultz after a bad night, but a woman's facial lines are the st of her life. I got mine from pulling too many all-nighters in college, from smok pot, from drinking tequila with my brother and champagne with my husband, fr baking way too long in the sun, from putting in sixty-hour workweeks, from hav a child unfamiliar with the concept of sleep, and, of course, from growing ol They've tracked my joys and sorrows, my failures and successes, and I'm suppo to want to chop them off so I can look like an empty vessel, a bimbette? Besi my husband, who hates it when his favorite actresses get face-lifts and don't l like themselves anymore, likes them. They go with his; they're a team.

So here's the question, girls. And it's one you guys should consider too as Gre Formula, Clinique, and Soloflex eye your sagging faces and bodies greedily. W if every woman in America woke up tomorrow and simply decided that she happy with the way she looked? She might exercise to keep herself healthy, and some Vaseline Intensive Care from CVS to soothe her dry skin, but, basically, would be the extent of it. Think of the entire multibillion-dollar industries would crumble. This is one of the reasons lesbians are so vilified—many of t have already made this choice, thereby costing the beauty industry million women decided in the war between feminism and antifeminism being wage skin-care and diet soda ads that antifeminism had way too big an advant women might decide to shift the odds a bit. For example, they might decide to the $42.50 for skin caviar or skin Spackle and send it, instead, to the Fund fo Feminist Majority, the International Red Cross, the Children's Defense Fun some other organization that works for the benefit of women and children.

The reason this won't happen is that advertising, women's magazines, mo and TV shows have been especially effective in alienating women from their and bodies. Women of all ages, who are perfectly capable of denouncing s news coverage, or making their own empowering and subversive meanings o TV shows and films, find it extremely difficult to resist the basic tenet that a with lines or a thigh with dimples means you are worthless. The media's relentl coercive deployment of perfect faces and bodies, and the psychologically, politi and economically punitive measures taken against women who fail to be y

unlikely places—from Harry Reasoner's editorials to Krystle and Alexis's catfights—find nothing but self-hatred and disempowerment here. Of all the disfigurements of feminism, this, perhaps, has been the most effective.

NOTES

1. For a funny and very smart discussion of elite culture in the 1980s see Debora Silverman, *Selling Culture: Bloomingdale's, Diana Vreeland and the New Aristocracy of Taste in Reagan's America* (New York: Pantheon. 1986).
2. Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth* (New York: Doubleday, 1991). p. 109.
3. Ibid., p. 99.
4. Melissa Stanton, "Looking After Your Looks," *Glamour*, August 1993, p. 233.
5. "A Better Butt, Fast!" and "Why 15 Million Women Own Guns" in *Glamour*, May 1993. p. 270ff and p. 260ff.
6. Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*, p. 232.

Chapter Sixteen

"Young T'ing Is the Name of the Game"

Sexual Dynamics in a Caribbean Romantic Fiction Serie

Jane Bryce

In 1993 a new romantic fiction series appeared in the Caribbean, modeled on t British series Mills and Boon but specifically aimed at readers in the region. T English publisher, Heinemann, had spotted the potential for a local version of m market romance, and invited writers in the English-speaking Caribbean to try th hand. Caribbean Caresses were the result. Identical in format to Mills and Bo the titles of the six-volume series apparently challenge nothing in their bland in cation of stereotype (*Fantasy of Love, Love in Hiding, Merchant of Dreams, Hea aches and Roses, Sun Valley Romance* and *Hand in Hand*). The crucial differe is the covers. Where regular romance readers are accustomed to seeing white he ines, all the couples depicted on the front of the Caribbean Caresses are da skinned: of the six, four are obviously African, one obviously East Indian, and c of the couples shows the influence of the different racial groups which have histc cally occupied Trinidad. This simple difference alone signals innovation. But i when we proceed beyond the covers that really interesting deviations begin emerge.

Romantic fiction is the most conservative and stereotypical of literature for and at the same time one of the most potentially subversive. It is bound by ru which derive from the medieval European chivalric code, with its highly conv tional and idealized concept of the relationship between the sexes, known Courtly Love. Central to the convention is the idea of the Lady, who represents ideal version of femininity which, filtered through a repressive Victorian mora became in turn the Angel in the House—restricted to the domestic sphere, virgi or maternal, nurturing, forbearing, submissive and pure. This myth of desira femininity still, against all the odds, exerts its influence today, even in unlik contexts. The Jamaican writer Erna Brodber, documenting stereotypes in the Ca bean, describes the appearance of "Excellent Ellen" in the Jamaican *Daily Glea*