

MW

# MAKING HER UP

*Women's Magazines in Slovenia*



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*Women's Magazines in Slovenia*

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## SUMMARY

In this collection of papers the authors highlight some of the most representative topics dealt with in women's magazines in Slovenia.

majda hrpenjak's study *The Bio-politics of the Body in Women's Magazines* is based on a survey of cosmetics advertisements published in *Glamur* in 2001. The author argues that in modern society women's magazines are effective vehicles for the disciplining of the female body and subjectification of the modern woman, who is seen as a consumer concerned with her image and herself. In fulfilling this task, women's magazines rely on scientific discourses (particularly those of natural sciences) while serving the interests of capital. The question that arises is what drives women to subject themselves, apparently of their own free will, to the mechanisms of the cosmetic disciplining of the body. The answer may be found in Foucault's conception of modern power, which is anonymous, non-institutionalized and widely dispersed. Moreover, these power relations lie at the very core of the subject's pleasure. Ads for cosmetics and cosmetic practices are a feature shared by all women's magazines. They offer women pleasure, comfort and the feeling of identity by defining and shaping the culturally exulted image of "real" femininity, while at the same time disciplining them and exerting control, or to be more precise, inducing women's self-discipline and self-control.

ksenija h. vidmar, the author of *Naša žena and the Image of the Mother*, examines a shift in the representation of women in women's magazines that occurred during the past two decades and has been evident also in women's magazines published in Slovenia. The stress is now placed on individualism, self-confidence and professional success of women who act and fulfill themselves outside the context of the home and family. The image of the mother, which used to dominate the "traditional" representations of women, has been retreating. Vidmar's paper is based on the analysis of *Naša žena* (Our Woman) issues spanning the decade 1991-2001. *Naša žena* is the first and the oldest women's magazine in Slovenia and therefore a particularly important source of the modern Slovenian iconography of woman's images. Vidmar points out that the disappearing image of the mother is a phenomenon with an ambiguous

and contradictory outcome. Women's presence in public life is recognized by both the scientific and the journalistic discourses on motherhood in *Naša žena*. Nevertheless, neither liberates a woman from her maternal role, but only redistributes her maternal tasks into the hours when she is absent from home. In this way a woman is disciplined in her new environment, primarily as a consumer. The author concludes that during the period of transition in Slovenia, women became liberated from motherhood only to be subjected to a new discourse on motherhood in a new social context dominated by consumerism.

zalka drglin, the author of *Message Received – Women Re-play?*, analyzes the issues of *Moj Malček* (My Toddler) published in 2000. She tests the thesis about the medicalization of everyday life that particularly affects woman because of her reproductive role. Drglin shows that articles in *Moj malček* mainly support the predominant trends, for example, the imperative of breastfeeding, medicalization of pregnancy and birth, and aspirations to deliver a "perfect child". The image of woman as painted by this magazine combines idealized traits of a devoted nursing mother and an employed woman who effectively combines family life with her career. The question that remains open is to what extent the magazine will succeed in transcending its current conformism.

In the article entitled *The culture of femininity: "Cosmo at work"*, valerija vendramin surveys the Slovenian edition of *Cosmopolitan*. She focuses her attention on the image of femininity and some basic contradictions that underlie *Cosmopolitan* (and similar magazines). She argues that these products of mass culture establish a variant of the world for which they offer orientation and socialization techniques and that they have concrete, though not necessarily direct, effects. Although declaratively *Cosmopolitan* is an emancipatory magazine that includes educational features presented in the spirit of popular feminism, its content is permeated by the beauty myth. The female subject of *Cosmopolitan* is uniform in terms of age, social class, visual appearance, and mental outlook, while its main determinant is the trio Sex-Beauty-Fashion.

jerca legan, the author of *Women's Magazines as Advertising Media*, concludes that advertising and editorial

material form a continuum, with these two types of content increasingly and imperceptibly merging. This influences not only the overall image of women's magazines, that is, the easily recognizable level of the graphic content (women's magazines appear as advertising brochures with occasional interruptions) but also, and more importantly, the textual level where advertising is not easily perceivable (editorial content is buried in purchased and non-purchased ads). The basic problem, and the question that this article attempts to answer, stems from the dependence of magazines (particularly women's magazines) on the interests of their owners (i.e. capital) and advertisers. Women's magazines follow market principles that cast women as consumers. Disregarding the diversity of women's private and public lives, they address them as the aesthetic gender – attractive women who must constantly care for their appearance – and “assist” them by offering products and services through advertisements. Recently this ostensible help has been increasingly assuming the form of covert advertising. In this case readers are convinced that they are reading editorial content when in reality they are the addressees of the advertising discourse. In the past, advertising material was subject to specific visual and textual grammar codes and was mainly carefully separated from other content. In this way the average reader could easily recognize advertisements and even avoid them. However, today's advertisements are disguised as editorial content and cannot be identified as such by the average reader.

urša skumavc, the author of the article *Fashion presentation in women's magazines*, analyzes fashion photography in Slovenian women's magazines and looks into the forms of fashion presentation and addressing of women readers. The magazines create the illusion of a real-life conversation through which they establish a dialogue with the women readers. In this way they arouse women's desires and conjure up images of a possible means of transformation, thereby directing women to adopt certain patterns of consumption. The presentation of fashion fosters the idealized image of woman and the accepted norms of dress while directing and regulating the lives of women readers.

## FOREWORD

"Psychologists point out that young women who take their mothers as models are more attractive physically." (*Kaprica*, July/August 2002, 88).

The reasons that led to the publication of this collection of studies are relatively simple. A welter of ostensibly harmless and neutral material available to the group monitoring women's (and men's) magazines, presented a temptation too big to resist. When an ordinary average woman today goes to a hairdresser, cosmetician or a doctor, she is greeted by a sizeable stack of colorful women's magazines (recently joined by men's magazines) displayed on the waiting room table. Their titles range from chic catchwords (*Glamour*, *Cosmopolitan*) to ordinary female names (*Eva*, *Petra*, *Jana*) to a simple *Ona* (She). All of them teach women in all age groups various techniques for women's survival in the contemporary world. You are not born a woman, you become a woman! Their main preoccupations are personal relations and the body. There is an answer to every possible question or anxiety a modern woman may have.

As their name clearly indicates, women's magazines are intended for women. However, the female gender is not an absolute category, as these magazines try to convince us, but a historically, culturally and individually variable one. To be a woman or a man does not mean anything specific or eternal, much less natural. Properties that constitute femininity or masculinity are symbolic constructs that are socially mediated through the family, education systems, science, religion, the media and politics, to mention just few of the main "ideological state apparatuses". Notwithstanding this instability and the resulting unreliability of the notion of gender, it is precisely gender identity that is the foundation of every social organization. Gender divisions are vehicles for effecting the division of social roles and the establishment of power relations. How is it possible that society could have been built on such dubious basis as the vague category of gender?

Things that are undetermined, undefined and unstable are easier to control, and gender relations are no exception. They are more easily manageable precisely because they are unstable, while control is ensured through various practices prescribing certain stable properties and meanings. In contemporary western history women's magazines represent an important cultural market for such images and

meanings. A study of this history of image trading reveals the complexity of the formation of the feminine gender in the age of capitalism. Since the emergence of women's magazines in the 17th century, at that time still mere supplements, through the boom in the 18th and 19th centuries when they became independent publications, women's magazines have been bringing to the homes of their readers – conceptualized as idealized middle class women – topics of public interest which women, having been excluded from the public sphere, could not experience directly. Throughout history their content has also been related to woman's position in society. The first publications for women broached proto-feminist subjects of women's education, political participation and social exclusion, but in the same breath they were constructing the area of the "weaker sex". Within this area woman is tied to the home and the family where she unselfishly creates a safe heaven for her husband and children. By the end of the 19th century a third component – woman as a consumer – was added to this controversial affiliation between the women's magazines and their readers. The social phenomenon of the "feminization of consumption", which in the US became evident during the last decade of the 19th century, singles out woman as an important unit of the capitalist economy and therefore a vital component of the economy of women's magazines. Excluded from public life, a woman reader became, paradoxically, the supporting pillar of its reproduction.

Women's magazines of the present day sustain primarily that third component of the constitution of the feminine gender. Both special and general interest women's magazines bring women readers together under the same category – that of consumers. The identity of a woman as a consumer becomes shaped through the construction of woman as the aesthetic gender. Regardless of her social role or status, knowledge, needs and wishes, woman is expected to continually care for the self and for others. In modern culture in which fashion and consumption play key roles in organizing everyday life, self-construction takes place through care for the appearance and a matching lifestyle. And how can woman achieve this? With the help of success formulas offered by women's magazines through advice, suggestion and, no less importantly, indirect sale of popular products and services. In this way women's magazines that during the past two decades evolved into complex advertorial systems, participate in the cultural history

of the female gender through new technologies of meaning. The most prominent feature of this culture continues to be the ambiguous image of woman – a modern, well-informed and independent consumer who by looking for mirror images in the fantasy world of idealized women's images voluntarily participates in her own social subjugation.

The authors in these studies have attempted to focus attention precisely on this ambiguous image of the modern woman, which is (un)intentionally shaped by the creators of women's magazines with the help of advertising mechanisms ruled by capital and of women readers themselves. Through the discursive and content analysis of various women's magazines published in Slovenia (*Cosmopolitan*, *Jana*, *Modna Jana*, *Glamur*, *Naša žena* and *Moj malček*), we highlight certain topics deemed to be representative. These range from the contradictory content of "universal women's culture", the phenomenon of covert advertising, to which certain types of women's magazines offer an inexhaustible source of possibilities, fashion as the main feature of all women's magazines, the disciplining of the mind through the disciplining of the body and the advertising of cosmetics, to medicalization of pregnancy and birth and the cult of motherhood that persists beneath the image of an independent, emancipated and successful woman.

The images of woman and man in post-socialist environments are partly a reproduction of western images and partly original creations. They still represent an answer to the experience of socialism which assumed the forms of conspicuous differentiation, the lack of solidarity, and depoliticized attitude towards a number of issues, gender issues in particular. Media creation of masculinity and femininity takes place through the purchasing and selling of individual identities. Men's and woman's wishes are not formed to enable anyone to act (politically) as a man or a woman. Magazines create the impression of activity based on gender divisions, but this is a conspicuous depoliticization. Even though today newly emerging men's magazines bear slogans promoting equality, they just toy with real political subjects/topics. In this respect, the creation of masculinity will make men as little equal as the creation of femininity has made women equal. Therefore, the work of the group which took on the task of monitoring women's (and men's) magazines, and which has been meeting regularly at the Peace Institute since last year, is far from being accomplished with this collection of papers.

majda hrpenjak

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## THE BIO-POLITICS OF THE BODY IN WOMEN'S MAGAZINES

theoretical and methodological basis

*From image to representation*

In the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s the analysis of gender role division in the mass media mainly focused on the predominant images of women in the media. Its methodological correlative was content analysis which enabled quantitative, comparative and systematic description of the evident content of media messages.<sup>1</sup> Research topics dealt with the manner and frequency of appearance of women in the media, and especially the social roles and physical and psychological characteristics the media most often ascribed to them. The initial conclusion was that women appeared in the media rarely compared to men. Furthermore, they were depicted practicing professions that require less education and therefore occupy a lower place in the social hierarchy than the so-called "male" professions. It was further concluded that on many occasions women were represented as stupid, passive, dependent and unbalanced, in contrast to men, who were shown as rational, active, independent and judicious. Women were often portrayed as conscientious housewives and caring mothers whose place is within the private sphere, in contrast to men, who control the spheres of politics, economy, sports, culture etc. An equally frequent counterpart of a mother and housewife was a beautiful, self-confident, sexually attractive and fatal woman, as featured especially by advertisements for cosmetics and fashion.<sup>2</sup> The end goal of this type of content analysis was a comparison between the woman's image created by the media and the so-called "realistic" image of woman. Naturally, such comparisons gave rise to the conclusion that the media portrayed women unrealistically, both in terms of proportional representation (women account for 51% of the total population) and with regard to their actual contributions to various spheres of social and cultural life.

<sup>1</sup> See Van Zoonen, L., *Feminist Media Studies*. London: Sage, 1994, pp. 68-71.

<sup>2</sup> Some classic works dealing with the image of women in the media: Irving Goffman, *Gender Advertisements*, 1979; Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, 1984; Jean Kilbourne, *Beauty and the Beast of Advertising*, 1990; Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used against Women*, 1991.



It is precisely the idea of the “realistic” image of woman that reveals the limitations of content analysis in this case, and of the accompanying approach to “woman’s image”. This approach rests on the thesis that the media, by reflecting an unequal division of power between genders, offer and reinforce false and erroneous images of woman, while true and real women are completely different.<sup>3</sup> Owing to the existing power relations in patriarchal society, which is not biased towards women, women are believed to have neither the means nor the opportunities for getting across their realistic image to the media.

However, the situation is far more complicated. It is not a situation in which men occupy one end of the spectrum, holding positions of power and producing false images of femininity, and women occupy the opposite end, subjecting themselves impotently to male predominance and resisting it without success. The basic problem is that “true”, “real” and “realistic” woman is already a representation, a controversial construction that is incessantly fashioned through discourses, and that this fashioning is largely unconscious. This thesis takes us from the “image of woman” to woman’s representation, or still better, to the “politics of woman’s representation”. In this approach the current position of woman as a subject is seen as a constituent effect of representation rather than its consequence. Or in simple words: no representation can “capture” woman unless a woman identifies with that image in one way or another and subjectifies herself through it.”<sup>4</sup>

The relationship between media representations of women and women themselves is therefore complex. More importantly, women are not passive victims of media images, but they actively identify with them despite the ambivalence of their attitude towards media representations. On the one hand, they find them attractive and find pleasure in them, while on the other, they perceive them as a threat and a means of subjugation. This ambivalence supports the thesis that women’s identification with media

<sup>3</sup> See Moi, T., *Sexual/Textual Politics*. London: Routledge, 1985, pp. 44-45.

<sup>4</sup> In connection to “images of women” we speak of the identification of women with specific media images, with this identification “going along with” identity on the level of imagination, apparently providing support, integrity and stability. However, in connection with the “representation of women” we speak of subjectification. It implies a deeper process of the identification of a subject with the deficiency of representation, represented by some point that is outstanding, for example, in some media advertisement seen as representation. Subjectification hence does not make female identity consistent or integral, but it splits it and turns deficiency into an essential category of subjectivity.

representations of femininity takes place on the subconscious level. In addition, we should not overlook the fact that the experts, editors, authors and creators of these media representations are women themselves.

The analytical methods most appropriate for such a concept of representation are semiotic and discursive methods.<sup>5</sup> In contrast to content analysis, they focus on the meaning instead of the image, or rather, on how the meaning becomes constructed. Rather than concentrating on the manifest content, semiotic and discursive analysis home in on the latent content by analyzing the structure of representation. The data obtained using these methods are qualitative. The basic difference between the semiotic and discursive approaches is that semiotics is primarily interested in how representations operate, how systems of signs produce meaning, while the discursive approach deals with the effects and consequences of representation i.e. the meaning. Hall maintains that semiotics deals with the poetics of representation, and the discursive approach with its politics.<sup>6</sup>

### *Foucault: body-power-subject*

For Foucault<sup>7</sup>, subjectivity is a product of discourse. This means that a discourse as a manner of speech and operation that is governed by specific rules enables speakers to take specific subjective positions from which they can imbue with meaning themselves and the world in general, while simultaneously observing the rules and discipline of a discourse. Discourses therefore have both a positive effect, since they create subjective positions, and a negative effect, since they subjugate the subject. The subjugation of

<sup>5</sup> In addition to Barthes' doctoral paper *Système de la Mode*, 1967 and his famous *Mythologies*, 1957, other classical studies in this field are Judith Williamson's *Decoding Advertisements*, 1978 and Varda Lymore's *Hidden Myth*, 1975.

<sup>6</sup> See Hall, S., (ed.), *Representation. Cultural Representations and Signifying Practice*. London: Sage, 1997, p. 42. For analysis of representation and labelling practices the most suitable are Lévi-Strauss's structural method and Lacan's psychoanalytical method as well as Derrida's deconstruction. All these methods were developed within French (post)structuralism.

<sup>7</sup> The theoretical basis and the basic hypothesis of this paper draw on the works of Michael Foucault, the French (post)structuralist, who studied and defined, in an innovative way, the relations between knowledge, power and the subject. In Slovenia the most popular is his last book, the trilogy *The History of Sexuality*, which was published in Slovene in 1992, 1993 and 1998 successively. Very informative is a collection of interviews with Foucault and selected articles in Vednost – oblast – subject (Knowledge – power – subject), Ljubljana: Krt, 1991. Also translated into Slovene was one of his fundamental works, *Discipline and Punish*, published by Delavska enotnost, Ljubljana, in 1984.

a subject to the rules and logic of a specific discourse is therefore an inevitable condition of subjectification. Foucault sees the disciplining of the body and of sexuality as a central medium through which modern power operates by way of scientific discourses. Modern power can no longer be perceived as being centralized or monopolized by a small circle of people or an institution. It is dispersed and permeates all levels of social life. It becomes realized through everyday interpersonal relations, not only in public and in the areas of economy and politics, but also, and primarily, in privacy, within the family and sexuality, through the relationships between children and parents, husband and wife, educators and students, doctors and patients, employers and workers, clerks and customers and so on. According to Foucault the “microphysics of power”<sup>8</sup> therefore does not operate through the repression of the “authentic body” and its sexuality, nor does it control the body through ideology or restraints. It operates in such a way that it produces, through scientific and popular discourses, the bodies of specific types, or bodies exhibiting specific traits, skills and qualities (e.g. slim body, trim body, fit body, depilated body etc.). This process takes place not solely through external control, but primarily through the techniques of self-control and self-discipline.<sup>9</sup>

Foucault was rather heavily criticized by feminists for neglecting the gendered aspect of disciplining techniques, since he treated the body as gender neutral and failed to underline the differences in men's and women's attitudes towards the disciplining institutions (for Foucault these institutions were primarily the military, the school, the factory, the hospital, and the prison). Despite this, his critical theory and discursive methods stimulated many feminist authors to place the body, as the main site of social disciplining and power relations, at the forefront of feminist thought while avoiding the pitfalls of essentialism and biologism.<sup>10</sup>

In formulating the thesis on which our study of Slovenian women's magazines rests, we started from Foucault's interrelation of the body (not the biological but “domesticated”

8 See Foucault, M., *The Will to Knowledge. History of Sexuality* 1. London: Penguin Books, 1990, p. 92, 93.

9 See Grosz, E., *Space, Time and Perversion. Essays on the Politics of Bodies*. New York, London: Routledge, 1995, p. 2.

10 Perhaps the most renowned studies of cultural and media practices based on Foucault are: Bordo, Susan, *The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity*, 1989 in Bartky, Lee Sandra, *Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power*, 1988.

body), discourse (seen as historically changeable sets of rules and practices which produce logical assertions about a specific object), power (decentralized and dispersed through the network of relations between people), and the subject (understood as a product of historically changeable discourses and techniques of body disciplining).

We believe that in today's society women's magazines are an effective medium in the service of capital that, by falling back on scientific discourses (primarily those of the natural sciences), serve to discipline the female body and through it to subjectify modern woman, turning her into a subject of consumption, image and "the care of the self".

To develop and support our initial hypothesis we will use content, semiotic and discursive methods to analyze advertisements that promote products for female body care and decoration published in *Glamur* (Glamour) throughout 2001.

### advertising for women

Women's magazines are quite specialized – each one is targeted to a particular type of woman's subjectivity, to woman either as a mother, or a housewife, or a young woman, a mature woman, a fashionable and smart woman, a business woman etc. In Slovenia, women's magazines are predominantly dedicated to mothers (for example, *Moj malček*/My Toddler, *Mama*/Mommy, *Otrok in družina*/Child and the family), mature women (*Naša žena*/Our woman, *Jana*), young women (e.g. *Smrklja*/Young Miss, *Eva*, *Cosmopolitan* can be placed in this group too), fashionable and smart women (e.g. *Lepota*/Beauty, *Glamur*/Glamour) etc. The question that arises is whether women's magazines are at all dependent on the sales figures, and by virtue of these, on the wishes of their readers. As a matter of fact, these magazines are characterized by a welter of advertisements ranging from those for cosmetics, fashion, watches and jewelry, to those for automobiles, home appliances, furniture, cooking utensils, (health) food, vitamin products, pet food, vacations and so on. It is not by chance that women's magazines in particular are saturated with advertisements, since women are the main consumers and main family shoppers in the modern, conspicuously consumer society.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, it is women who are

<sup>11</sup> See McCracken, E., *Decoding Women's Magazines*. University of Massachusetts: Macmillan, 1993, p. 5.

most frequently featured in these advertisements. Advertisements without women models are rare, regardless of which product is being advertised. A woman decorates a sofa, a half-nude young woman leans on the latest model car, and exotic places become truly attractive only with young women in bikinis lying on the beach. Women therefore advertise products for women. They are the instruments and the goal of advertising. What is paradoxical is that the layout of these advertisements presupposes a male view. Women are presented in such a way as to meet the male standard for femininity and female sexual attractiveness in particular. So by presenting images of women that please men, advertisers try to appeal to women to buy a product. In these advertisements women are subordinated to the omni-present authority of the male gaze, which is undoubtedly one of the basic techniques for controlling and self-disciplining the body.<sup>12</sup> The authority of the male gaze is not condensed in any specific person, but it is systemic in nature. It is a way of viewing which characterizes the entire social corpus, all the more so because it is not a view from the outside, but from within – a woman views and assesses herself through this external, male view “*there is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against himself.*”<sup>13</sup>

As regards the media in general, it may be true that women are under-represented and predominantly shown in the traditional roles of mothers, housewives and secretaries, and as passive figures<sup>14</sup>. But the same cannot be said of *Glamur*. It is not a typical women's magazine intended for a family-type woman. Its diverse content, including political and socially critical issues, trends, culture, travel and the like, makes it interesting for both sexes. Yet women appear on virtually every page – young, beautiful, seductive, slim, trim, and above all, fashionably dressed women.

<sup>12</sup> Foucault uses Bentham's panopticum to describe this technique. This is a central tower in a prison which enables prison guards to watch every cell and every inmate, but in such a way that prisoners do not know that they are being watched. However, since they suppose that they can be watched at any moment during the day, they adapt their behavior to the norms laid down by the guards. See Foucault, M., *Nadzorovanje in kaznovanje. Nastanek zapora*. (Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison) Ljubljana: Delavska enotnost, 1984, p. 195.

<sup>13</sup> Foucault in Ramazanodlu, C. (ed.), *Up Against Foucault. Explorations of Some Tensions Between Foucault and Feminism*. London: Routledge, 1993, p. 191.

<sup>14</sup> See Verše, D., *Medijska podoba spolov (Media images of genders)*. Ljubljana: Urad RS za žensko politiko, 1996.

Selfcontrol; *Glamur*,  
February 2001, No.  
49, p. 161.



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BOLJ  
ČVRSTE  
KOŽE**

**NEU**

**NIVEA**  
body

SPÉKÉPÉLÉ  
HAUT-STRAFFENDE  
KÖRPERLOTION  
Q10

REZULTAT DELOVANJA  
KOENCIMA Q10  
JE ČVRSTA KOŽA  
ŽE V TREH TEDNIH

Our count and analysis of various types of advertisements in *Glamur* showed that on average one third of this the most lengthy women's magazine in Slovenia – the average length of an individual issue in 2001 was 250 pages – is filled with advertisements for cosmetic products for skin, face, feet, hair, legs, arms, nails, in other words, the entire female body. Together with the accompanying text (special columns like Beauty, Beauty Tips, News, Health, Recreation), this amounts to nearly 50% of each issue being dedicated exclusively to the female body and its appearance. Add the pages dedicated to fashion and current trends and you end up with more than half the magazine featuring guidelines on how to adapt the female body and look to modern trends and dictates. Even though, as we pointed out earlier, the magazine's content is rather diverse, it includes few advertisements for other products, mainly those for watches, jewelry, cars, other magazines and radio stations, furniture and similar products. Each issue includes approximately seven pages of advertisements for men's fragrances and occasionally a page or two advertising men's shirts or sports equipment.

These figures reveal that despite being liberal, critical, well-informed, and positioned counter to stereotypes, taboos and prejudices, *Glamour* is a magazine concentrating predominantly on the disciplining of the female body. At least one third of the magazine, i.e. approximately 80 pages, is dedicated to disciplining practices whose aim is to produce a female body of a certain shape and size, and in addition, to the body seen as a kind of area for decoration. We can only guess that other women's magazines are not much different, or that they may be even more oriented towards the female body. This supports our thesis that in modern capitalist society woman is controlled, subjugated and disciplined precisely in the area of "the care of the self", that is to say, care of her own body, health and beauty. This is effected through the institution of women's magazines which apparently take sides with women.

semiotics of advertisements  
for cosmetics

One of the main features of advertisements is that their designers do not place as much stress on the applicable value of the products advertised as they do on their symbolic value created through those advertisements. To achieve this they ascribe meanings to the products which are different from those associated with other products in the same class. This approach is most evident in perfume advertisements. For example, the advertisement for Versace Woman: "*Who is Versace Woman? A mesmerizing woman whose mystic detachment and seclusion enchant. Serene, infinitely feminine and glamorous. Elegant and vital.*"<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, the purpose of buying a perfume is not to scent oneself with a specific note of fragrance. By yielding to the advertisement and buying a perfume you become a woman of a special kind: mystical, secretive, feminine and elegant. Perfume advertisers are very careful when choosing slogans, so the symbolic meanings attached to fragrances establish clear-cut differences between different types of women. For example, Manifesto is advertised with the slogan: "*Live up to your manifesto. Celebrate what you are.*"<sup>16</sup> The symbolic meaning of this perfume, created through the glorification of manifest qualities i.e., our visible qualities, imbues it with a meaning that is opposite to the mys-

<sup>15</sup> *Glamour*, 2001:48, p. 151.

<sup>16</sup> *Glamour*, 2001:50, p. 4, 5.

ticism and secrecy of Versace Woman. A woman who uses Manifesto conveys a message that she is open, outgoing and satisfied with what she possesses, that she does not conceal anything. Or, take the advertisement for Calvin Klein's Truth: "*The truth lies in what you feel.*"<sup>17</sup> Here the shape of the bottle together with the young woman shown in the picture suggests simplicity, naturalness and sensuality, which taken as a whole point to the youthfulness so desired among women. Gucci's Rush<sup>18</sup> is advertised without a slogan, but the picture itself is all the more suggestive with its bright red color and a woman with disheveled hair and her lips half open. It is a perfume for passionate women, those who wish and know how to let themselves go.

The various meanings attached to fragrances are by no means related to any specific ingredient of a perfume, but are entirely the product of imagination. However, they are not accidental. The selection is based on the logic of differentiation from the symbolic meanings of other perfumes on the market. Each perfume must offer something distinctive that sets it apart from other perfumes. While the differences between fragrances are based on imagined properties, their influence on woman's identity and feelings is realistic. The user of a specific perfume applies its imagined character along with the fragrance. So, for example, a woman who uses Gucci's Rush feels passionate; by spraying Calvin Klein's Truth she becomes youthful, while a woman who wears Versace Woman is secretive. The imagined meanings attached to perfumes thus achieve realistic effects by influencing women's feelings. This is an effect of symbolic illusion, with which advertisers play around and which producers exploit to make profit.

Influencing woman's feelings and identity is not the sole function of different brands advertising. Along with the differences between symbolic meanings of these products, the differences between users of specific brands are established too, with the feeling of identity arising from these distinctions. Woman's identity, like any other identity, is not a property stemming from the "internal life", but it is an effect of a system of differences acting on a woman when she is set against the backdrop of the environment in which she lives. To use a parody, women identify and classify each other according to the perfumes they

17 *Glamour*, 2001:51, p. 1.

18 *Glamour*, 2001:52, p. 41



wear. A. McCracken<sup>19</sup> termed this modern totemism. What is at work here is singular the “socio-logic” used by the members of various social groups to differentiate themselves from members of other groups, to communicate between themselves and establish borders by classifying themselves as various brands users. The use of a specific brand places a user into a distinctive social group. A brand is therefore a kind of emblem of a specific social circle, by way of which its members communicate with other social groups, similar to traditional societies in which discrete clans communicated with each other through the mystic properties of totem animals or plants.<sup>20</sup> Despite the capitalist ideologem of free choice, according to which a woman should freely choose between various perfumes, classification by the emblem of a specific brand is by no means a matter of free choice. The selection of a brand is undeniably determined by social differences, with social differences themselves being essential components of the messages communicated by various trademarks.

### domesticated bodies

As we have already mentioned when expounding our initial hypothesis, in the second part of this study we will attempt to show how the advertisements for body care and decoration products turn the female body into an object, submit it to (natural) scientific discourse and the procedures it uses to “cultivate” the body, and through this subjectify the female body. Foucault ascribes two meanings to the notion of subject: one is “subject to somebody else – through control and dependence“, and the other is “subjectification of identity – through awareness and knowledge of oneself.”<sup>21</sup> Subjection and subjectification do not therefore exclude each other, but they are two sides of the same coin. In Foucault’s sense, the terms “disciplining” and “subjectification” are thus synonymous.

Foucault identifies three ways, three “objectification modes” by which human beings are made subjects: divid-

19 See McCracken, E., *Decoding Women's Magazines*. University of Massachusetts: Macmillan, 1993, p. 78.

20 For more on traditional totemism and its structuralist interpretation, which makes it into the matrix of a number of phenomena in modern society, see Lévi-Strauss, C., *Rasa in zgodovina. Totemizem danes (Race and History: Totemism Today)*. Ljubljana: Studia Humanitatis, 1994.

21 Foucault, M., *Subjekt in oblast. Zakaj preučevati oblast: vprašanje subjekta*. (Subject and Power. Why study power: the question of the subject) In Dolar, M., (ed.), *Vednost – oblast – subjekt*. Ljubljana: Krt, 1991, str. 107.

ing practices, scientific classification and subjectification techniques by which people, through various techniques of self-observation and self-disciplining, turn themselves into subjects. All three modes can be found in women's magazines, particularly in the advertisements for body care and decoration products.

One of the methods the media use to discipline gender differences and related consumer habits is the differentiation of magazines with "women's" content, meaning those magazines that are suitable for women (exclusively), from other, "gender neutral" magazines. The predecessors of women's magazines were special sections, the so-called "woman's corner", that dealt with fashion, cosmetics, body care, healthy diet and the like. Some of them still persist (e.g. in Slovenia in *7D*, *Mag*, *Viva*) despite the increasing number of specialized women's magazines.<sup>22</sup> The dividing practices rely on certain "objective" physical or psychological properties, for example gender, race, ethnicity, lifestyle, and sexual orientation, to single out from the undifferentiated mass of people certain social groups and emphasize differences between these and the "normal majority." Through this process these differences become visible and consequently lead to social objectification, categorization and stereotyping of human beings. At the same time, they form starting points for differentiated groups on which they can build their social and individual identities, for example, "I'm a woman" "I'm a homosexual", "S/he is a psychiatric case". Dividing practices also work through specialization, within the genre. Women's magazines are not a homogenous group. It is possible to identify a whole spectrum of differently oriented magazines within this broad group, each objectifying a specific aspect of the feminine. They include magazines for mothers, wives, housewives, adolescent women and so on. Every woman's magazine addresses its readers in its own way. However, even a superficial scan of these magazines will show that their common features are the medicalization and the disciplining of women through indicating and emphasizing the importance of observation, correction of "flaws", training, body care and decoration of the female body. This is a sure indi-

<sup>22</sup> Recently, the "dividing practice" has affected men in Slovenia as well. We are witnessing an increase in the number of men's magazines (e.g. *Playboy*, *Mars*, *Men's Health*, *Polet*). It would be interesting to analyze whether in men's magazines the processes of medicalization and disciplining of the male body are at the forefront as the central medium of "true masculinity", or if modern capitalist society has accorded to them different modes of subjectification.

cation that an orientation towards the female body is a common denominator of women's magazines and that as such it must have a social role.

For Foucault, scientific (professional) classification is the second step in the transformation of individuals into subjects. To achieve this, various scientific disciplines and professions are employed which concentrate on close observation and classification of specific social groups. In the case of women, this amounts to paying close attention to the female body. Perhaps the reason for such scrutiny of the female body lies in the fact that woman has been traditionally represented, in the history of philosophy and in everyday understanding, as a body and matter, in contrast to man who has been related to the spirit and intellect as the opposites of physical qualities. Whatever its origins, it is experts in beauty, health and chemistry who produce professional classifications of various parts of the female body, with women's magazines readily promoting/encouraging them.

To tell the truth, the understanding of female beauty and the methods of influencing the female body have differed radically over time and from place to place, ranging from the Muslim custom of veiling the woman's body to African nakedness and body decorating, with a gamut of practices occupying the space in between. One could hardly find a society or culture which does not regulate attitude towards the female body in some way or other. The diversity of these styles reflects the obsessions of individual cultures expressed in ways which we still do not understand fully. When western feminists strive to liberate Muslim women from the veils that enshroud their bodies, they forget that they themselves are the victims of the imperatives of their own cultures dictating what is suitable and what not for the female body. For example, an ample, strong and abundant female body incites revolt in western cultures. In these cultures each and every part of the female body is subject to harsh analysis, or to classification and treatment aimed at improving that part of the body. And this is an infinite process. Virtually from puberty to death, women spend huge amounts of time, money and energy to cultivate their bodies. Women's magazines, through advertisements for cosmetics that make the bulk of their content, encourage us to spend even more.

For example: *"Let experts reshape your face and body. Cellular liposculpting system: an effective treatment which reinforces the elastin and collagen fibers. For vigorous, tight and smooth*

*skin. Cellular liposculpting face serum: helps remodel the definition of your face which becomes less pronounced over time. Cellular liposculpting eye gel: reduces the swelling of the eyelids, smoothes fine lines around your eyes, erases dark circles and soothes and refreshes delicate skin around your eyes. Cellular liposculpting body serum: firms body skin and tightens sagging skin. Your body contour will be more attractive than ever.*"<sup>23</sup> This brand makes use of a professional discourse to make diagnoses and classify "problematic parts" of the face and body (sagging skin, bags under the eyes, swollen eyelids, wrinkles etc.). It offers a miraculous chemical formula which can reduce, or even eliminate, difficulties if used regularly.

Or, take the following advertisement for preparations for impure skin: "Clinical tests confirm that this is the first creamy gel which balances skin and acts precisely where it is needed. The unique Follicle Targeting System acts on pouches and thus enables active lactic acid to penetrate the sebaceous glands where impurity and acne get formed. Eucerin thus acts on spots where it is most essential and provides care where the skin needs it most."<sup>24</sup>

Women's skin must be soft, smooth, volatile, delicate, hairless. There is a remedy for each problem. "Dry skin. Research shows that most people spend winters in excessively heated rooms... First of all, treat yourself to rich moisturizers. Lancaster's complex bio-milk technology based on plant milk extracts ... Sensitivity. Cosmetic shops survey shows that during winter months problems with sensitive skin virtually thrive. Try Orlane's B21 Oligo-vitamin collection. For mature skin use Age Management Stimulus Complex p.m. Delicate ... Apply cream at bed time. Price: 25,000 sit."<sup>25</sup> Furthermore: "Your tan is increasingly pale and dull. You cannot get rid of that "deathly pallor" no matter how much fresh air you get... Face peeling products offer an instant solution that restores fresh appearance. Apply a peeling cream containing tiny granules once a week to remove the outer layer of dead cells ... Try superb Japanese Annayake brand. Perfect Exfoliator, a peeling cream with triple effect. New on the Slovenian market. For an alternative treatment try products containing aha and bha acids, which act as mild chemical exfoliators, accelerate regeneration and improve skin color ... My face has an unattractive shine all over. Androgen, a male hormone produced by the ovaries, may be responsible for oily skin ... Use moisturizing creams without oils. We recommend those contain-

23 Glamur, 2001:53, p. 71.

24 Glamur, 2001:58, p. 231.

25 Glamur, 2001:49, p. 153

ing glycerin – a “source” of moisture without oil. Try Christian Breton’s collection for oily skin. For mature oily skin we especially recommend Orlane’s B21 Purete line which “retrains” mature oily skin by helping it restore its natural, physiological regulating cycle.”<sup>26</sup>

Women’s skin must not show any traces of time, worries, experience, pain or deep thought. “L’Oreal’s Plentitude Revitalift Slim. Experts from L’Oreal have succeeded in developing an innovative skincare product. Revitalift Slim achieves the aim pursued by many women over 40. It slows down the process of premature aging and at the same time visibly smooths and reinforces the definition of your face. Forget all about your biological age! An increasing number of women over 40 think that it is the best stage of their life, and even that the best is still to come. This new self-confidence arises from two facts: longer life-expectancy on the one hand, and on the other, extremely



Measurements;  
*Glamur*, April 2002,  
No. 62, p. 13.

26 *Glamur*, 2001:52, pp. 178-180.

*sensitive skincare products which help emphasize feelings of a modern woman: joy of life, vitality, energy and a fresh and radiant look. Revitalift Slim – twice a day. It doesn't take much time to apply it correctly. We do not discourage you from lively facial gestures, but here is a hint: your skin will be thankful for some mild pushing, pinching, patting, squeezing and massage. Always very gentle, keep that in mind. And another piece of advice: always apply first Revital Slim followed by Revitalift.*"<sup>27</sup>

Examples of this kind are countless. One feature they share is the fact that there are many cosmetic products for each part of the woman's body and many techniques for body care and transformation. Some are painful (e.g. cosmetic surgery and depilation with wax or electricity) and all are very expensive. What is implied by "body care", a term used by "beauty experts" who often draw on medical discourse ("To be a woman at 50. The opinion of the gynecologist Dr. Anne de Kervasdoute, who contributed her knowledge to the development of Lancome's Absolute cream")<sup>28</sup>, by far exceeds the limits of necessary hygiene essential for health, active life or a balanced diet. Female body care includes facial gymnastics, avoidance of strenuous facial gestures, regular use of numerous chemical products ranging from a myriad of powders (that "softly cover and care", "reflect light", "smooth", are "as light as air", give you "natural matte look", protect "against stress", are ideal "for oily skin")<sup>29</sup>, cleansing milks, refreshing lotions, deep exfoliating products and nourishing face masks, to countless creams including day, night and moisturizing creams, those that prevent the appearance of wrinkles, are made for delicate skin around the eyes, contain vitamin C, anti-stress creams and many more. In addition to being very expensive, application of these products exacts special knowledge, techniques and time management, since they have to be applied regularly and routinely, or should we say ritualistically and compulsively. "Correct use. First apply moisturizing cream which will facilitate the application of powder. To achieve the most natural effect, dab powder using your fingers. If you want to use a sponge, first moisten it a little with water. Be sparing – do not apply too much powder. Start with a small amount and add more if needed. Rub in thoroughly especially across the area of jaw and along the edge of your nose, that is, parts where blots usually appear. Whenever you think that your

27 Ibid, p. 199.

28 *Glamour*, 2001:56, p. 193.

29 Ibid, p. 187, 188.

*powder is too "strong", dilute it using a speck of moisturizing cream. Always test the powder in daylight, since artificial light alters its color...*"<sup>30</sup>

Beauty and health standards spell out in minute detail how a woman should take care of her body, by defining ideal flexibility, the allowable measure of spontaneity, a correct posture and adequate position, practices that befit the female body and those which are not appropriate. In so doing they define precisely the scope of physical freedom accorded to the female body. Needless to say, physical freedom stands in close relation to psychological, intellectual and creative development. It is actually so close that we can say that the disciplining of the body implies the disciplining of the mind as well. Guidelines and products for body care and decoration are part of the process through which the ideal female body becomes constructed and with it a special kind of female subjectivity, identity, wish and pleasure.

For Foucault, the third step in the process of the objectification of subjects involves the methods that people use to transform themselves into subjects by acting on their own bodies, minds, behavior or emotions, and the techniques they use in an attempt to control their bodies, get them into a specific shape, become aware of them, monitor changes, development and improvements.

Cosmetic treatment of the body exacts from a woman constant concentration on her body and image including close self-observation (watching for the appearance of wrinkles, gray hair, body hair, monitoring changes in skin color, increase of cellulite and fat deposits, the quality of nails, shine of the hair, etc.) and adequate steps that must be taken with the help of cosmetic techniques (half an hour in the morning and at night required if using three or more cleansing, moisturizing or decorative preparations, once a week peeling and a mask, daily brushing of the entire body with at least five minutes dedicated to problematic areas, regular depilation, massage and relaxing baths). This is accompanied by a beauty-conducive diet: "*In order to maintain firm and healthy nails, eat food rich in zinc, iron and essential fatty acids.*"<sup>31</sup> Regular gymnastics must be complemented by "mental hygiene": "*For your mind to be able to cope with the stress and fast pace of modern life, you must create the feeling of spaciousness and calm in your head.*

30 Ibid, p. 188

31 *Glamour*, 2001:53, p. 193.

*The therapy for the cleansing of thoughts, which is based on ancient Indian philosophy, concentrates, in contrast to other relaxing methods, on thoughts exclusively and through it “cares” for the brain.*<sup>32</sup> All self-care techniques in fact mean the regulation of the subject’s attitude towards itself, reinforcement of identity through incessant self-observation, with the help of a thorough knowledge about one’s own body and continual efforts to improve the image. Women do not assess themselves from within, but view themselves from the external, male perspective which is reflected in cosmetic and fashion advertisements.

conclusion: power - enjoyment

Our analysis of the quantity and contents of the advertisements that appeared in *Glamour* during 2001 confirms our initial hypothesis that women’s magazines in modern society perform the function of disciplining the woman’s body and through it subjectify the modus of femininity typical of an image-ridden consumer society. Bordo argues that it was not Foucault who showed that the defining and fashioning of the body was the central site of the power struggle in every society, but it was feminism instead. This revelation took place long before feminism became “married” to (post)structuralism, in the works of Mary Wollstonecraft dating from the distant year 1792.<sup>33</sup>

Whatever the case, the clarity of the situation is obscured by one key question – how and why do women subject themselves, apparently of their own free will, to all those methods of cultivating the body advertised in women’s magazines and some other areas of popular culture? What is it that compels women to subject themselves to these disciplining practices? The first answer that imposes itself is “power”. Owing to the absence of some formal institutional authority vested with power, which would carry out directives or implement sanctions, an impression is being created that this type of production of femininity is completely voluntary or even natural. However, Foucault’s conceptualization of the modern disciplining power is much more refined than the classical conception of authoritative power. The disciplining power which regu-

32 *Glamour*, 2001:55, p. 202.

33 See Bordo, S., *Feminism, Foucault and the Politics of the Body*. In Ramazanodlu, C., (ed.), *Up Against Foucault. Explorations of Some Tensions Between Foucault and Feminism*. London: Routledge, 1993, p. 185.



lates the attitude of woman towards her body and the glorified image of “true” femininity is both omni-present and non-existent. It is not institutional; it is anonymous and dispersed. It operates, for example, through “people’s opinion”. “People say that I’d have a good figure if only I lost some weight.” Therefore, today it is obvious that women’s conduct is apparently much less regulated than it was in the past. Women no longer have to play the roles of saints or virgins; their activity is no longer limited solely to the private sphere, home and household, and motherhood is no longer the only possible realization of a woman. Normative femininity is today focused on the female body, which must be “fit” and “trendy”. And the modern image of an ideal female body is fully in harmony with the need for a woman to be fully employed, for the cult of youth and health, and the imperative of developed capitalism to maintain the high level of consumption.

Despite this we cannot ignore the fact that cosmetic techniques of body care and decoration (disciplining of the body) represent a special pleasure for women, offer comfort and good feelings, even create the impression of power and autonomy and an enhanced feeling of femininity and identity. There lies the ambivalence of the process of subjectification as seen by Foucault, which implies discipline and autonomy, subordination and pleasure, all of them simultaneous and determining each other. The production of the “enjoying subject” is hence in itself a kind of regulation of subjectivity, since power relations lie at the very core of the subject’s enjoyment. The everyday understanding of the relation between enjoyment and power, according to which power suppresses a subject’s enjoyment, is therefore turned upside down – the subject is not only utterly free or even subversive in relation to society, but the site of its enjoyment is also the site of its deepest subordination and involvement in power relations. The production of disciplined femininity, in such a way that the disciplining of the body coincides with enjoyment and autonomy, is hence the most refined mechanism of power which implies the most economic form of control over and regulation of femininity – through a woman who enjoys her self-control and self-regulation.



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## NAŠA ŽENA AND THE IMAGE OF THE MOTHER: CONTRADICTIONS AND OPPOSITIONS, 1991-2000

The centuries-old archives of women's magazines are a treasure of diverse images of woman. Even though the emergence of women's magazines is related to the appearance of urban, middle class woman, their content and representations extend to various social and cultural environments. Notwithstanding the social differences which divide their female readers, these magazines create imaginary communities which transcend these divisions by creating affiliations that go beyond the ordinary woman's experiences and environment. These affiliations have more to do with a uniform class of females than any other social category. Marjorie Ferguson writes that, although women's magazines are specialized publications, they endeavor to attract the general public – everyone born female. “*The picture of the world presented by women's magazines is that the individual woman is a member not so much of society as a whole but of her society, the world of women.*”<sup>1</sup> Collective images arising from this world, therefore, operate primarily as social fictions of a classless society. Or, as Ferguson says, if there is a class, then it is “*that of woman, where the badge of belonging is supplied by sex and gender, not by status or income.*”<sup>2</sup>

Ellen McCracken also sees women's magazines as texts which represent the “women-centered articulation of the world.”<sup>3</sup> In modern history, a woman seen as a mother-housewife stands for one of the fundamental pillars of that articulation. In western culture in particular, motherhood seems to represent that inevitability of “anatomy” which in some way or other affects every woman. And while motherhood is inscribed in a woman's psychological portrait, culture takes care that it is reproduced through discourse. Women's magazines, which in the process of their emergence in the 17th century “discovered” a fair sex<sup>4</sup>, take part in this articulation in two ways. On the one hand, they undoubtedly represent one of the more important sites of cultural reproduction of the discourse on motherhood, and

1 Ferguson, M., *Forever Feminine: Women's Magazines and the Cult of Femininity*. Gower, 1985, p. 6.

2 Ibid. p. 168.

3 McCracken, E., *Decoding Women's Magazines*. London: Macmillan, 1993, p. 2; see also Hermes, J., *Reading Women's Magazines: An Analysis of Everyday Media Use*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995.

4 See Shevelov, K., *Women and Print Culture, The Construction of Femininity in the Early Periodical*. London: Routledge, 1989.

on the other, they simultaneously fulfill the historically important role of a “substitute sister”<sup>5</sup>. They are cultural products which help the modern mother, who is today left without the support that used to be provided by the networks of relatives and local community, to surmount difficulties that the maternal role imposes on woman’s day-to-day life.

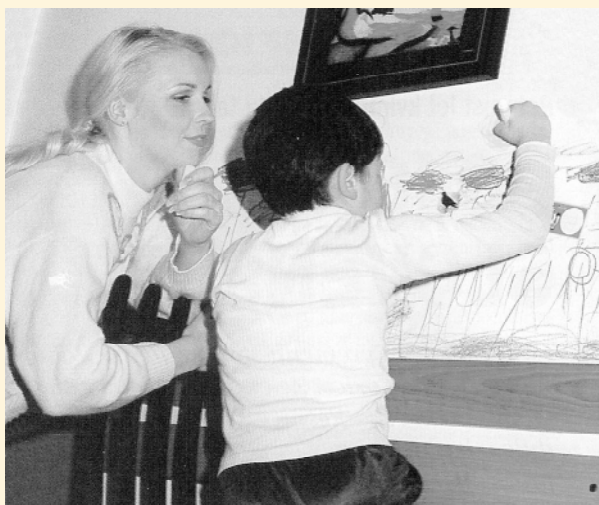
The heritage of this cultural support may be discerned in the proliferation of specialized, popular-scientific and instructive publications for parents and mothers. However, in women’s magazines themselves, the transparent mother image has been gradually disappearing. Traditions originating in post-war western consumer society, which have recently also gained predominance on the Slovenian magazine market, added to this repertoire of collective images the projection of a modern woman who is increasingly devoted to herself and to the fashioning of her ideal self-image. Rather than staying at home, this woman spends most of the day at work, where she pursues her professional ambitions. Her thoughts turn to the household only on the way back home, if at all. In planning her housework she seeks to satisfy her own interests, rather than solely the interests of the family as a whole. The image of a woman devoted to motherhood and the family has been retreating to the background.

Shifts in the politics of the representation of women are not voluntary but reflect to a certain extent social changes that have been re-defining the position of women in society and within the family. Slovenian women’s magazines are not an exception. In this respect, *Naša žena* (Our woman) is particularly interesting. Being the oldest woman’s magazine in Slovenia published since WWII, it may be categorized as a western model woman’s magazine with its own specific and rich history. *Naša žena*, similar to its western “sisters”, addresses readers through a number of diverse social portraits. During the post-war socialist period, these portraits were those of “mothers and wives”, “peasant women”, “women workers”, “women intellectuals” and “activists and political workers”.<sup>6</sup> In the last decade of transition they are “peasant women”, “peasant housewives”, “workers in factories” and “women intellectuals”.<sup>7</sup> In addition to the genre-determined delimiting of a socially heterogeneous female readership, which in this magazine fuses into a “class of woman”, in the 1990s *Naša*

<sup>5</sup> Ferguson, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> *Naša žena*, 1945, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> *Naša žena*, 1991, p. 1.



*Naša žena*, 1999:2.  
p. 32.

*žena*, like other western publications, broached the subject of changing women's roles and status. This development speaks of a new awareness that mother is a parallel, albeit increasingly underprivileged, form of the public presence of woman. In the April 1993 issue of *Naša žena*, the editor replies to women readers who ask why the magazine did not devote special attention to Mother's Day. "*Naša žena is a women's and family magazine*" replies Sonja Tramšek, the editor, "so throughout the year we address issues of which others take note only on specific days; these issues are part of the policy and concept of our magazine.... Motherhood deserves every honor, support and assistance. It is fine if on a certain day children with bunches of flowers pay tribute to it. But do not forget that woman is not just a mother, and that there is also the other parent – the father."

The image of the mother has been disappearing from the pages of women's magazines. However, does this mean that in the modern world, and in the period of transition in Slovenia in particular, women have been freed from the social ties which for centuries bound them to the story of motherhood as their social mission and personal fulfillment?

#### the fort-da of slovene mothers

A survey of *Naša žena's* content since 1991, the year when Slovenia gained independence, confirms the impression that the maternal image has been losing its domination<sup>8</sup>. It has been replaced by another image, that of a career

woman. Within *Naša žena*'s representations, woman has been displaced from the family circle and transposed into the public sphere where she has assumed the image of an ambitious, energetic, professionally successful and self-confident person. According to *Naša žena*'s 2000 supplement dedicated to gender politics and gender roles in transition society<sup>9</sup>, modern woman is "more self-confident, more self-reliant, and has more faith in her capabilities". Apparently, this new image of woman found an especially successful articulation in the figure personality of the woman-entrepreneur. An article for the February 1991 issue describes her as follows:

*"The average image [of a woman entrepreneur] reveals that she is a rather young woman who entered the world of business between the ages of 30 and 35, has a college or university education (secondary is the minimum), and is married with school-age children. Before she set off on her own journey, she generally spent several years in a public company, and in many cases she then ventured into private business. Most of these women are supported by their husbands, who are either their business partners or show understanding for them. It is also noteworthy that these successful women have at least some basic help in the household, with rare lucky ones having a domestic worker."*<sup>10</sup>

The article takes a critical look at the boom in female entrepreneurship and points out that, unlike women living in western countries, women in Slovenia enter the world of business from economic necessity rather than from boredom. Despite stressing the economic motive, *Naša žena* imbues the image of the business woman with a degree of fascination portraying female entrepreneurship as a quality arising from woman's reliance on her own potential and on creative intervention in areas still dominated by social barriers and discrimination against working women. In these areas women, who are "ambitious and devoted" workers, not only create profit from that which is "inherent in woman's nature,"<sup>11</sup> for example, "better observation and sensitivity,"<sup>12</sup> but they also turn social stereotypes to their advantage; in other words, with a measure of diplomacy, "being a woman can be advantageous."<sup>13</sup>

8 This study is based on an analysis of the 120 issues of *Naša žena* published between 1991 and 2001.

9 *Naša žena*, 2000:3, p. 16.

10 "Podjetnost je ženskega spola" (Entrepreneurship is female in gender), *Naša žena*, 1991:2, p. 12.

11 "Aktualno: Uspešne ženske med družino in poklicno kariero" (Current: Successful women between family and career), *Naša žena*, 1997:5, p. 13.

12 "Portret meseca" (Portrait of the month), *Naša žena*, 1991:2, p. 20.

13 Ibid.

The magazines further describes the transition to entrepreneurship as an experience that to a certain extent relaxes gender relations within the family and acts as a source of positive self-image. In a 1991 issue, for example, a business woman describes her route to entrepreneurship as the result of her husband's recognition during her maternity leave that "*it was pleasing to have a meal each day at the same time.*" In this story, it is the husband who decides to rationalize pleasure and convert it into a daily routine after the end of his wife's maternity leave, so he decides that his wife should stay at home. However, the wife starts a business and, slightly altering the outcome, now employs her husband.<sup>14</sup> Another woman adds to this picture: "*I never wanted to be glued to the cooking pots and broom, and luckily, I didn't have to. I am not ashamed to admit that I prefer to have somebody else cook and clean for me, just as somebody else does my hair or makes my clothes.*"<sup>15</sup>

Naša žena encourages the economic independence of women. It sees this as a way for a woman to liberate herself from the constraints of household and marriage obligations and to realize female potential and creativity. This attitude comes through in a story about an unemployed mother featured in the April issue of the same year. The young mother is not "*type of woman that could be happy as a mother and a housewife only. She wants to mix with people and would die if she had to spend her whole life alone between four walls.*"<sup>16</sup> Moreover, this woman defies female captivity by means of inventiveness and courage. She explains for Naša žena how she decided to test herself in business. "*Then it struck me. I asked myself why not start on my own. I am young, courageous and not lacking in drive. If the state does not want to help me, or cannot help me, or does not know how to do that, there's nothing else I can do but help myself.*"<sup>17</sup>

Even though Naša žena's portrayals construct the image of an enterprising and independent woman who is dedicated to her profession, in this narrative of the modern woman the professional engagement does not jeopardize family life. A woman architect narrates. "*It is true that I'm not the type of mother, wife and housewife who would spend time at the stove. Everything is done very quickly. But we have love and we are doing beautifully.*"<sup>18</sup> By reconciling profes-

14 "Podjetnost je ženskega spola" (Entrepreneurship is female in gender), p. 12.

15 Ibid. p. 13.

16 "Pomagaj si sam, če si lahko" (Help yourself if you can), Naša žena, 1991:4, p. 13.

17 Ibid.

18 "Portret meseca" (Portrait of the month), pp. 19-20.



sional engagements with family obligations, this woman delineates the ideal of a smooth alternation between her two “habitats”. In another issue, a tv presenter describes how she reconciles her professional timetable with that of the family. “I try and continually harmonize my own schedule with that of the family, so that I can be with my son Blaž, now in grammar school, and my daughter Polona, now in her final year of elementary school. My husband, who is a dentist, also spends quite a lot of time at work, and he always combines his with my schedule. We spend all of our spare time together and, to put it simply, we are a happy family.”<sup>19</sup> The architect portrayed in the February 1997 issue works throughout the week, while weekends are dedicated to the family.<sup>20</sup> The happy family motif also emerges in the story of a journalist portrayed in the December 1993 issue. “My family means a lot to me ... Of course, I am most proud of my role as a mother and of my daughter Ula. The role of a mother is responsible, so it’s not surprising that I devote a lot of time to my daughter, talk to her a lot, of course, about subjects that are suitable for her age.”<sup>21</sup>

However, through the stories in which a mother’s employment, far from undermining the harmony of the family, liberates the woman, a new rationalization of time and energy is imposed on women. “My first value is the family,” says a doctor portrayed in the November issue in 2000. “I know what it means to have an orderly family, a happy home, a partner who respects and supports you. The least I have to do is repay that, and in order to be able to do that, discipline and work are needed.”<sup>22</sup> The happy family motif underlying the portrayals in *Naša žena* often rests on that other aspect, that is, woman’s self-denial. The following is how a politician and an ex-journalist answered the question of whether she sometimes regretted that she was too busy and hence had less time for her child. “Many times. Because of that I try to have quality time with my child whenever we have time to be together.”<sup>23</sup> Motherhood interferes with woman’s time in such a way that it does not free her from other responsibilities but rather redistributes them into the hours when she is absent from home.<sup>24</sup> “Naturally, you have to take care

19 “Portret meseca” (Portrait of the month), *Naša žena*, 1993:4, p. 42.

20 “Portret meseca”, *Naša žena*, 1997:2, p. 15.

21 “Portret meseca”, *Naša žena*, 1993:12, p. 43.

22 “Naš pogovor” (An interview), *Naša žena*, 2000:11, p. 22.

23 “Portret meseca” (Portrait of the month), *Naša žena*, 1995:9, p. 17.

24 “The second shift”, as A. Hochschild and A. Machung named this redistribution (*The Second Shift*, Penguin 1989), could be an obstacle to motherhood as we shall see later in the text; see also T. Renner, “Politika materinjenja ali ‘Father Knows Best: For Him the Play, For Her the Rest’”, *Časopis za kritiko znanosti*, 1993: 162-163, p. 18.

of the child, sometimes you have to make sacrifices in order to provide everything you think they ought to have... It is most difficult if the child happens to wake up at three or four in the morning and you've just returned from a shooting or a concert, but the child doesn't care, it demands your attention and that's that! Yes, it used to be very wearisome at times!" recalls a singer-photographer.<sup>25</sup>

One casualty which the modern discourse on woman seems able to absorb without much trouble is housework, as the above mentioned story suggests. In the social representations of *Naša žena*, a housewife in its intact form now lives only in the countryside. For example, a housewife from Obrežje, the winner of the gold medal for a traditional local dish, is a well-informed woman who is interested in developments in the "wider social environment. But her main task is the managing of the household."<sup>26</sup> In this presentation of a peasant woman, a housewife's tasks are linked to the old techniques of food preparation "without special recipes", by which the journalistic discourse transposes the housewife symbolically into the past. The secret of cooking, which is rooted in patience, is just one among many things that divorce modern woman from her household. Patience is a virtue which a modern, urban working woman cannot indulge. "I am not a good housewife. I become aware of the mess only when guests come," says a doctor. And she adds. "But in general, I can say that women in Slovenia took too heavy a burden onto their shoulders. If we are successful in our professional lives, we immediately have – if only subconsciously – a guilty conscience if everything is not perfect at home."<sup>27</sup>

However, while a household stripped of a housewife can take the damage, a family stripped of a mother cannot. To neglect a child and devote herself to a profession is a psychological burden for a woman that cannot be evaded. "Did you feel "guilty" in a way when you were told that you were ambitious," the journalist asks the above mentioned doctor. "Yes, initially I was even harassed by that feeling and felt guilty, both as a mother and a wife, in front of others," answers the doctor. "Did you go to the US for a year of training without a guilty conscience?" "Why, no, not at all. It was precisely my guilty conscience that made me take along one of my daughters. But I spent the last three months in the US alone. I can tell you that during that time, for the first time in twenty

25 "Portret meseca" (Portrait of the month), *Naša žena*, 1994:1, p. 19.

26 *Naša žena* 1991:2, p. 49.

27 "Portret meseca", *Naša žena*, 1991: 10, p. 13.

*years, I could pursue all those things that I missed throughout those years of motherhood: I studied, exercised, went for walks, read, in short, I took care of myself. Very selfish, isn't it?"*<sup>28</sup> The decision to enter on a professional career means not only that the mother has to organize family life and housework, but it is also a source of guilty conscience which, like an invisible companion, pursues her on her journey taking her away from the home and the family.

Therefore, motherhood is an experience that, according to the American theoretician MaryAnn Doane, is a narrative with an ambiguous and a contradictory outcome.<sup>29</sup> However, judging by the iconography of portrayals in this magazine, motherhood is an inescapable part of woman's destiny – inescapable even when a woman is not actually a mother. Judging by *Naša žena* articles, once a woman decides to venture into the world of enterprise, motherhood becomes her investment in stimulating the atmosphere of family harmony, for example, in family businesses, in which the owner (a woman) is called "our mother."<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, for a childless woman total devotion to professional life turns the workplace into a site of substitute motherhood. "I admit that it was not easy and definitely I'd not be able to endure it all – and I'm not talking here only about pressures or non-understanding, but also about the actual work related to the establishment and operation of the institute – if I had a family" says a doctor who heads the Institute for Oncology.<sup>31</sup> However, journalistic discourse nevertheless bestows motherhood on her, a symbolic one, by calling her the "mother" of the Institute. This is also obvious from the concluding lines. "One must be devilishly self-confident and competent not to deviate from such a strictly determined life path. Perhaps you also have to be a little unlucky not to make a detour. Because, such a life in fact means living for others."<sup>32</sup> Apparently, living for others and living for oneself exclude one another, at least when such a life takes place outside the family context. In another example, *Naša žena* insists on attaching the mother's role to a painter who has, as can be concluded from the title, "time for herself and her dreams". As in the previous case, the journalist again cannot resist reaching out for the ultimate stock of reassurances that motherhood co-exists even within this scenario

28 Ibid. pp. 13-14.

29 Doane, M. A., *The Desire to Desire*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.

30 "Menedžerka leta" (The years of management), *Naša žena* 1991:11, pp. 20-21.

31 "Portret meseca" (Portrait of the month), *Naša žena* 1991:4, p. 19.

32 Ibid.

of woman's realization, at the level of a symbolic role. "You worked a lot with young people at the Academy. Isn't their company a kind of response to the wish to have a child?" she asks.<sup>33</sup>

In the social imagination outlined by *Naša žena's* discourse, the experience of a woman who follows her dreams represents a test of her femininity, of her devotion and of the understanding of the mother's role. The story of the "heroine of Mt. Everest" opens with a description of the expedition's homecoming. "I wonder what dramas were unfolding in the Himalayas as I look at the happy faces in front of Likar's house; Marija and Andrej in colorful Nepalese jackets, children by their side; the father ... offering mead, and mother Pavla cutting the cake, unable to hide her tears. She held out well while she trembled for her son and his wife and encouraged their children who remained at home, but now she lets herself go."<sup>34</sup> The national map of an imaginary home of a Slovenian family unfolds before the reader's eyes, along with the picture of a mother who does not desert her children even at the climax of her journey. "The feelings on the summit were wonderful," says the alpinist. "Andrej took with him a picture of the children, and I had an amulet cloth doll that Katarina and Anže (their children) made for us. They were with us on the summit..."<sup>35</sup> However, the trial of the mother does not end there. "Don't misunderstand me, but many, especially wives and mothers – and many among them know the taste of the mountains – think that your decision was reckless, thoughtless, or at least a matter of prestige, taking such a dangerous journey together, both of you, both parents. It could have happened that you remained on the mountain, as many have done before you, and your children would have been left orphans. What can you say about these misgivings?" Marija answers: "I fully understand these considerations. However, those women who have sampled the mountains know them only up to the limitations set by their capacities. From that point on, mountains seem dangerous. My capacities are undoubtedly greater than theirs, and I myself best know my limits .... People are different. Not everybody is satisfied with this life. Maybe it is my destiny... It is true that a decision like this, to go on such an expedition, would not be taken by a woman at the stove. But that's my way of life... The children are here. But we are happy to live as we do, and we pass on this happiness to our children as well. I am convinced that they get more from us

33 "Portret meseca" (Portrait of the month), *Naša žena*, 1996:11, p. 15.

34 "Portret meseca" (Portrait of the month), *Naša žena*, 1991: 1, p. 11.

35 Ibid. p. 12.

*than do many children with "normal" parents who only scramble for material wealth.*"<sup>36</sup>

Even though it seems that *Naša žena* stubbornly denies the possibility that a professionally successful woman is a threat to motherhood and family happiness, it is precisely this persistence that points to social antagonisms which Slovenian society of the 1990s can decipher only with difficulty in an attempt to provide clear answers. "*Do you think that a woman-entrepreneur sooner or later starts to neglect her family, that owing to excessive work she destroys her family's happiness and splits from the partner?*" asks *Naša žena* in the supplement "Family businesses and women-entrepreneurs".<sup>37</sup> The images of successful women who remain committed to motherhood, prove that this is not the case. "*Although I like my profession and I do care about my career, the family occupies the most important place,*" declares an actress in the January issue of 1998.<sup>38</sup> A famous Slovenian singer expresses a similar view in the October issue of 1998. In an article entitled "Mother's role" she explains that "*the child is not a factor that influences your work. With a child, your world broadens.*"<sup>39</sup> The same holds true for a singer portrayed in the February issue of 1999 who "*proved that motherhood is not, and must not be, an obstacle to a successful career,*"<sup>40</sup> as well as for a star in the August issue of the same year who, after having thought that professional success was all one would want to achieve, finally recognized that "*she missed that which is most important – the warm shelter of the family.*"<sup>41</sup>

*Naša žena's* insistent emphasis on the role of the mother when portraying media stars clearly points to ideological struggles occupying the national consciousness at the end of the first decade of social transition. A celebrity is a "*locus of formative social power in consumer capitalism allowing for the configuration, positioning, and proliferation of certain discourses about the individual and individuality in contemporary culture*" says David Marshall.<sup>42</sup> A story about a celebrity mother who does not want to be a "top star but the top mother" to her child, attaches the motherhood discourse to the image of a career woman. By multiplying it and dispersing it across new social contexts, it not only reproduces

36 Ibid., p. 13.

37 *Naša žena*, 1992:1.

38 *Naša žena*, 1997: 7-8, p. 32.

39 *Naša žena*, 1998:10, p. 32.

40 *Naša žena*, 1999:2, p. 32.

41 *Naša žena*, 1999: 8, pp. 32-33.

42 Marshall, D., *Celebrity and Power, Fame in Contemporary Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p. 72.

the hierarchy of women's social visibility, but also restructures women's experience within the framework of the patriarchal economy of the family and motherhood.

*Naša žena's* stories about families similarly point to the social struggles embodied by a successful business woman (and her derivation, the mother-celebrity). In 1994 the magazine started the column entitled "Families talk" which introduced a new dimension into the narrative about women in the 1990s i.e., a collective focus on the child. "*The child is a gift,*" says a single mother, who "*several hours a day peels potatoes in a campus canteen, washes dishes, clears tables and the like, all in order to earn money.*"<sup>43</sup> Yet within transition culture, the motif of a mother's self-denial, which weighs on the modern Slovenian mind, has been transformed into the motif of a mother's sacrifice which, however, is not what it appears. In the article entitled "A bouquet of three girls", "mom Slavi" describes how she gave up her job and career and chose to stay at home because her youngest daughter Teresa, still in kindergarten, was frequently ill. "*That is not a sacrifice,*" says this young mother, a psychologist by profession. "*That's our decision. If you have children, it is right to devote yourself entirely to their upbringing. It is recommended that a mother stays at home until the child's third year, if she is truly a good, loving educator. . . I don't find it difficult to spend all day with my children; that is nothing like martyrdom, that is a conscious decision.*"<sup>44</sup> Similarly Sonja, who takes care of her handicapped child on her own, does not want to be seen as "mother courage". Although it is true that she would simply "*shrug it off, she does deserve admiration. And by being around her and knowing her fate, you are confronted, whether you like it or not, with an alternative way of overcoming your own small difficulties.*"<sup>45</sup> "Children from kind families are happy," is the message offered by an article in the May issue of 1999, while in an issue from the previous year, "mom's bouquets" adorn the life of a musician.<sup>46</sup>

The image of the mother which emanates from the biographical family narratives dating from the mid 1990s reveals a stronger woman, who is more determined to stay by her child, is happier and more fulfilled through motherhood than a proletarian woman or bourgeois "idle lady"<sup>47</sup> ever was. According to a presidential candidate interviewed

43 "Pogovori z družinami" (Families talk), *Naša žena*, 1997: 2, p. 21.

44 "Pogovori z družinami", *Naša žena*, 1994:11, p. 26.

45 "Pogovori z družinami", *Naša žena*, 1994:12, p. 27.

46 "Pogovori z družinami", *Naša žena*, 1999:5, pp. 18-19; 1998:1, pp. 18-19.

47 The term is borrowed from V. Jalušič's text with the same title, *Naša žena*, 1991:3.

for one issue, that is where the hope for the Slovenian family lies. Under the previous system, which pressured women to work while simultaneously devaluing woman's biological function, the family almost lost its place within the system of (traditional) values, she argues.<sup>48</sup> Or is it a source of guilty conscience for a mother who in everyday life no longer knows how to remain a "loving educator" while devoting herself to her career?

the modern mother's dubious anatomy

A woman who has lost her motherly instinct and spends time outside the home instead, is given a distinct image within the professional discourse in *Naša žena*. In the section entitled "Shoulds and should nots" in the June issue of 1992, Dr. Ivo Leban gives his opinion after surveying expert views on women's employment, including that of the American anthropologist Margaret Mead, who does not see many difficulties in women being absent from home.

*"In addition, I would like to stress that certain experts' opinions could not fully convince me. If the material conditions of the family and other circumstances permit, I give my vote to the mother's spending the whole day with her child, day after day, at least until the child is 3. In my opinion, this is a period in which the child needs its mother the most. My heart sinks when I see mothers with children hurrying off to the kindergarten or infant nurseries on freezing winter mornings in order to be able to arrive at work on time. No expert can convince me that waking up a child early in the morning and taking it out of a warm bed does not cause unpleasant stress to those small, tender beings in their arms."*<sup>49</sup>

The motif of the mother's lap, a symbol of the child's protection and care, strikes one as being in stark contrast to the freezing morning that an ambitious woman here exchanges for the child's experience of a safe world. *"I know that many families could not survive otherwise"*, Dr. Belan reasonably concedes. *"But I assure you that just as many mothers could easily stay at home given the material circumstances of their families. . . So their children would be able to enjoy a warm mother's embrace at any time."* However, reducing women's employment to mere economic necessity conceals another reality of women who have chosen to go to work.

48 "Portret meseca" (Portrait of the month), *Naša žena* 1992:10, p. 21.

49 "Priporočamo/Odsvetujemo" (Shoulds and should nots), *Naša žena*, 1992:8, pp. 28-29.

*Naša žena*, 1998:10,  
p. 32.



As many women in *Naša žena* stressed, their decision to take a job outside the home is often related to a psychological burden experienced by women unconditionally tied to the home and the family. A similar experience is chronicled by the same author in his introduction to the text. “I can’t spend all my time at home with the child,” narrates his “case”. “Without external stimulation and an opportunity to use my suppressed energy, I start to feel bored at home and to be aggressive.” And later, when this woman goes to work: “Now that I am again at my workplace ... I don’t nag so much when I’m with my daughter and husband. So we are all more satisfied.”<sup>50</sup>

Cultural history has recorded a number of women’s testimonies similar to the one mentioned above, with women’s magazines playing a special role of the domicile of woman’s experience of motherhood in the isolation of her home. During the reign of the housewife-mother ideal in the 1950s, American women’s magazines, for example, published letters by desperate women who could not handle their exclusively maternal role and could not find a way around the pitfalls of the model which Betty Friedan named, after their stories, the “feminine mystique”<sup>51</sup>, a concept that has since become widely known. Today it seems that women have overcome these exigencies of motherhood owing to employment outside the home among other things. But their place has been taken by new tasks for mothers. Disregarding her heavy working schedule, these tasks fill the time she has for the family with a list of ac-

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. p. 28.

<sup>51</sup> Friedan, B., *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1963.



tivities which, following the model of streamlined industrial production, and in the 1920s and 1930s also that of the households, now rationalize child rearing.

In modern instructive discourse, child rearing and child care cannot be left to chance. The June 1993 supplement titled "To a child with love and knowledge" describes in stages the rules of the *"lifestyle which to the greatest extent possible ensures that you will raise a healthy and happy child."*<sup>52</sup> There is also a recommendation to read the book by Genvieve Painter *"to which we may surrender with ease of mind and whose instructions we can follow at home without attending any special course"*. The lifestyle recommended to parents in this supplement based on Painter's manual, advises "exercises in flexibility and physical activity" because both determine the iq. Since in this pseudo-scientific expert projection the iq is a biological (and not a sociological) factor, it is necessary to embark on exercising intensely and without delay *"especially when we know how little time is available for this: just few initial years of life."*<sup>53</sup>

Child rearing has thus become a guided project presided over by an expert, rather than a spontaneous activity. "The proletarianization of parenthood", the term used by Christopher Lasch<sup>54</sup> to denote the historical process of the transfer of authority in child rearing from parents to experts – psychologists, social workers, sociologists, doctors, pedagogical experts and others, finds its place within the Slovenian context in the recently thriving market of magazines dedicated to families and child rearing. In women's and family magazine such as *Naša žena*, proletarianization does not mean simply a shift in parents' authority, but also a proletarianization of motherhood which takes two forms: one is the medicalization of motherhood and the other (consequential) the use of instructive discourse.

According to *Naša žena*'s supplement "To a child with love and knowledge", baby care begins at conception. *"Through a healthy lifestyle during pregnancy, the mother ensures normal physical and psychological development of her fetus and a normal birth."*<sup>55</sup> The advice-kit that a mother receives even before the child's birth thus comes complete with a measure of guilt that later, in case of potential complications at birth or a child's disturbed development, may

<sup>52</sup> *Naša žena*, 1993:6.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* p. 44.

<sup>54</sup> Lasch, C., *Haven in a Heartless World*. Basic Books, 1977.

<sup>55</sup> *Naša žena*, 1993:6, p. 43.

be translated into a suspicion that the mother was indifferent or did not care sufficiently for her fetus. Looked at from the professional perspective, a healthy lifestyle implies not solely physical exercise and care for the healthy body, but regulation of the psychological state as well. *"The first condition that must be fulfilled if the child is to be satisfied and happy, is a satisfied and happy mother. A mother who is too worried, sad, nervous etc. transfers her fears to the child and the child responds by restless sleep, by crying and by being irritable."*<sup>56</sup>

The child's well-being and development as markers of (more or less successful) motherhood are historical constants in the educational discourse. "The child as a symptom", as this phenomenon has been conceptualized by Jacques Donzelot<sup>57</sup>, operates as a device for observation, regulation and supervision of the pathology of modern parenthood and the family. In the time of increased perception of the crises of family and family values, it is often used to monitor mothers and their psychological readiness to have a child, with the latter finding expression in the psychological state of the child. For example, in the post-war period, an "obese child" was a symptom of the lack of a mother's love which she compensated for by over-zealous feeding. A child who did not eat enough or one who had problems with metabolism signified the mother's uncertainty; for example, colic during the first three months of child's life was a sign of the mother's initial, cautious permissiveness; eczema in children, on the other hand, was taken to be the physical trace of the mother's anxiety.<sup>58</sup> Let us now see how these symptoms are described in the 1990s.

*Naša žena's* supplement describes an everyday feeding routine as follows. "Suppose that the baby is a picky eater; perhaps it is hardly even hungry or it does not like the food, but a mother, bent on feeding it and expecting that the child will accept food, is confronted with an unexpected obstacle". The scenario is then dramatized and turns into a conflict for the mother.

"How is it possible that it doesn't want to eat? She becomes frightened that the child will fall ill; additionally, she experiences something else which she cannot admit to herself: she experiences the refusal that underlies the rejection of the food: "I don't like your food, I don't like you."

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. p. 46.

<sup>57</sup> Donzelot, J., *The Policing of Families*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1997.

<sup>58</sup> Ehrenreich, B., and English, D., *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of Expert Advice to Women*. New York: Anchor Press, 1978, p. 204.

*"She becomes frightened, hostile and filled with feelings of guilt, since she loves her child. Most mothers gradually overcome this fear when they see that the child develops anyway, but some cannot get rid of it."*<sup>59</sup>

According to the author, what the child is telling its mother in this new constellation of motherhood is that it needs her love, and not the piece of cake waiting for it on the table. At the same time this means that the child is no longer a symbol of failed motherhood but a site of activation of the mother's dormant pathology. In other words, motherhood is invariably already constituted as pathological, so the only question is whether the child will activate this pathology or let it remain latent by being a good eater for example.

In order to avoid difficulties, a well thought-out and elaborate system of instruction and guidelines is needed to perform mothering tasks. "Try to breast feed your child for a sufficient amount of time" is the first instruction through which experts address mothers. But neither can subsequent activities that fall within the provenance of motherhood be left to spontaneous reactions – they must be carried out under the strict supervision of experts. These include the techniques of caressing (e.g. a picture showing a mother with the caption reading "*caress the child and hold him tight*"), temperature regulation by choosing appropriate clothes ("Mom, I am warm too"), and regulation of sleep ("*Many a mother is desperate because her child sleeps during the day and is awake throughout the night.*").<sup>60</sup> In the modern professional representation, motherhood has been turned into a profession that exacts training, skills, professional education, systematism and self-observation.

The deficiency of such a portrayal of a mother's care is the absence of complications; for example, complications during breast feeding that turn the idyllic image of a nursing Madonna decorating the pamphlets issued by pregnancy centers into a nightmare for many women. Or the strains of breastfeeding arising from a mother's premature return to work. Or battles against time owing to exacting hygienic regimes: "*cold shower in the morning and warm at night*"; cleaning the nose by "*alternatively sneezing through each nostril*"; providing "*always fresh and dry towels*"; fresh panties every morning which must be "*made from cotton*". Or fears

<sup>59</sup> *Naša žena*, 1991:5, p. 27.

<sup>60</sup> Supplement, *Naša žena*, 1993:6.

surrounding infant care, e.g. choosing the right air and water temperature; the right soap, the correct order of procedure e.g. *“first wash the arms starting with the fingers and proceeding towards the shoulders, then the chest and the back, followed by the legs starting with the toes and working up to the groin, and finally the buttocks”*; the correct clipping of the nails, all of which represent miniscule pitfalls and potential sources of maternal guilt (*“Finger nails should be cut in a curve and toe nails straight across. Take care not to harm your baby.”*)<sup>61</sup>

A yawning gap in this discourse occupies the place of the post-motherhood period. The professional discourse projects motherhood as a caesura between two stages in life that do not overlap or determine one another. Once the mother realizes that her child has grown up, she must let it leave the lap and then carry on her life as she left it behind after she first gave birth – a life filled with an undefined, universal care for herself and others.

*“I’m 60, I have a secondary school education, and I’m an old age pensioner. I gave birth twice. My children and grandchildren are more or less provided for. I live with my husband, who is two years older, in a two-room apartment in an apartment block. I lived through my “time of life” without special problems. But now I’m the picture of misery, for no special reason. As a matter of fact, I’m very pessimistic and I fear in advance what if something happens to them. .. In short, I see fears where there shouldn’t be any, and so harass those around me and myself.”*<sup>62</sup>

This is a passage from Ana’s letter to the “Advice/Answer” columnist. A gynecologist answers as follows. *“You would like to be a hen with all your chicks safely tucked under your wings. But that’s no longer possible: the chicks are now grown up, and each seeks his own “grain of luck”, while the hen may only look on and that in such a way that the chicks are not even aware of it.”* The diagnosis of the counselor on duty is “depression”, while the remedy is a systematic and detailed planning of life along with routine tasks and psychological behavioral formulas.

*“Plan work for the next day without delay or finish tasks that could not be finished on the previous day. And do not forget your “duty” to smile and say a kind word to a neighbor you meet on the staircase or to a child in the street.”*<sup>63</sup>

61 Ibid.

62 *Naša žena*, 1997:1, p. 28.

63 Ibid.

Motherhood is a gift with an expiration date, while any effects which may be emotionally painful, once a mother is prohibited from interfering with the lives of adult children, can be overcome only through self-denial and the transfer of love to a substitute mother's links with the environment outside the family. But even while receiving detailed instructions on how to handle herself and her child during the period when the "hen is still allowed to care for her chicks", she participates in the process that alienates family members from the family and transfers family relations to external institutions.

For the parents of a child who shows signs of stubbornness and overindulgence, there is an expert working at a "local community clinic for mental hygiene".<sup>64</sup> Relying on such institutions is a double-edged sword – it means not only that the family triangle composed of children and parents has been opened up to allow an expert to step in (e.g. *"What can children, parents, educators and medical professionals do to ensure the correct growth and maintenance of a healthy backbone?"*, a question posed in the supplement), but it also leads in the long run to a step by step expulsion of parents from this triangle. When later in the article the author moves to the subject of young people who seek help from advice centers for their adolescent and sexuality related problems, and often reproach themselves that they came for help when it was too late, there is a provoking question: *"But dear parents, isn't it unjust that they should blame themselves for it! Don't you think that you are the ones to blame?"*<sup>65</sup> In this supplement institutionalized substitute parenthood represents an exit for young people whose parents cannot offer them advice (*"If only more advice centers for happy and healthy adolescence were available"*). It is also the alliance between children and experts designed to help them cope with the "minor" offences in the process of growing-up away from the eyes of the parents.

The alliance between the expert and the child often moves out of the home and concentrates on the reproduction of practices which cultivate woman's dependence on experts and simultaneously an alliance between them. An adolescent girl is an especially suitable subject for the transfer of dependence which goes beyond the generation gap. In shaping popular-scientific visions of the child's

<sup>64</sup> *Naša žena*, 1993:6, p. 53.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* p. 53.

development, educators and reformers recognize the time loop which makes a child who is raised according to the currently valid professional discourse unsuitable for a future role as a parent which will be based on future theories that may have changed in the meanwhile. In other words, “*how could the parents who were themselves products of the “old” child raising ever hope to know how to raise the children of the “new” child raising?*”<sup>66</sup> The only authorities that could secure continuity of supervision within professional discontinuities are those that produce these discontinuities.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, more important than cooperation with parents is direct cooperation with the growing child, who will transfer that experience (not knowledge) to the future generations. Or, as this supplement suggests, advice centers may direct a young woman who is pregnant to the Clinic for Gynecology where she “*has the possibility of choosing a mini abortion without her parents knowing anything about it.*”<sup>68</sup> An adult woman who at some future point in time recapitulates the biography of her adolescent years will be able to recognize the helping hand of professional consultants, so once she has her own child she will know how to respect advice provided to mother.

In the professional discourse of the supplements of Naša žena, a mother is dependent on the complex and diverse body of experts. The knowledge she extracts from these supplements is not just the practical, instrumental knowledge used in the child’s upbringing, but it is also an instrument used to constitute her social role of consumer. The modern mother assumes the approach of a judicious, critical post-modern shopper who is environmentally and otherwise aware. When choosing food, she will pick healthy,

66 Echrenreich and English, p. 193.

67 Warnings about reliance on the previous generation in child rearing can be traced in early publications in Slovenia as well. *Vajino skupno življenje* (*Your life together*), a publication of Komisija za probleme družine (Commission for Family Issues) dating from 1961, clearly expounds this “problem”. “Young parents have a hard time establishing the right attitude towards advice and approaches practiced by their parents in handling the upbringing of their own children. .... Sometimes it takes courage, but if they see that their own parents’ approach does no good to their children (e.g. intimidating children with ghosts, stuffing them with sweets) it is wisest to tell them openly your own opinion.” (pp. 139-140) On the whole, discontinuities are emerging faster than one would expect. One mother writes about leaps in the American educational discourse from a scientific approach, to behaviorist and permissive approaches and how this was reflected in her household with small children. “I was serving a new vegetable to the boys. Suddenly I realized that I expected Peter, the oldest to clean his plate. Daniel, the middle one, didn’t have to eat it but he had to taste it. And little Billy, as far as I was concerned, could do whatever he wanted.” Quoted in Echrenreich and English, p. 192.

68 Ibid. p. 53.

chemically unprocessed food if possible. She will carefully read labels on children's clothes and will buy an item only after checking the quality of the fabric. She will devote her attention to the anatomic qualities of footwear, and plan ergonomic furniture for the child's working and sleeping areas ("Back to school in autumn" supplement).<sup>69</sup> Professional discourse is deaf to the testimonies in *Naša žena* by mothers from the lowest social levels, who speak of being unable to provide for their children not only "*clothes and shoes which are very expensive here, but also good and healthy food.*"<sup>70</sup> The child has been turning into a site of investment ("*Perhaps all these suggestions seem costly, but you should be aware that investments which sustain or even improve health, pay off with interest so you never regret them,*"<sup>71</sup>) and mothers into rational consumers who enter the realm of the national economy with the burden of responsibility – and of guilt when they fail in the role of the consumer.

#### conclusion: a collage of contradictions

The image of a woman from the repertoire of *Naša žena* and the image of a mother from scientific articles together paint a contradictory picture. The images of enterprising, professionally successful women construe the story of a modern woman who, while living her own life, can still spare enough time and energy for the family. In this new constellation society allows only one casualty – housework. The new middle class can treat itself to a domestic help or can choose to rationalize family obligations, if that will help the woman. But one thing that must not be victimized, at least judging by the portrayals of successful women, not even through discourses on sacrifice, is motherhood. A woman can have her professional career, but the key to the realization of her femininity still lies in motherhood. The rationalizing of housework in this respect can as well be read as the historical gift to a professional woman made in order to enable her to enjoy the role of the mother to an even greater extent.

In this ideal projection a woman is partially constructed as a "libidinal mother", to borrow an expression from Ehrenreich and English.<sup>72</sup> This is a woman with a supply

<sup>69</sup> *Naša žena*, 1998:8.

<sup>70</sup> "Otrok je dar" (A child is a gift), p. 21.

<sup>71</sup> "Jeseni bo spet šola" (Back to school in autumn), p. 14.

<sup>72</sup> Ehrenreich and English, p. 199.

of motherly instincts and emotional energy that is automatically activated the moment she gives birth. Libidinal motherhood helps a woman to overcome difficulties and common troubles and to fully realize her mother's role while, as Echrenreich and English emphasize through their historical example, not being over-burdened by motherhood owing precisely to reliance on internal "reserves" of knowledge. On the other hand, professional texts eliminate the aura of motherly love and care as unique biologically inherent features, and instead of "inner", instinctive feminine knowledge dictate narratives about the knowledge deficit that threatens the healthy development of the child. For them, the instinctive mother is a historical residue that can be found only in articles from the past, for example, in *Naša žena's* column "The great hearts of foster mothers".<sup>73</sup> In the past a good mother used to be a woman who unleashed all of her love and generosity, and who even enjoyed an excess of motherly love, which she was able to bestow on non-biological children. Today motherhood is a process of learning maternity techniques through pre-designed schemes involving emotional, psychical or physical development, while the technological mother is a product of this process. How to hold a child to her bosom no longer comes from the inner, libidinal voice, but is mediated by an expert.

Does this mean that the image of the mother has been disappearing from collective representations as the first and most important aspect of women's nature? Don't the flourishing of professional publications and discourses on motherhood constitute an attempt to revive it? Michael Foucault argues that in modern history the family, more than any other institution, is vulnerable to power technologies, while expert and professional discourse is the site of the disciplining and establishing of norms.<sup>74</sup> Uncertainty that is produced by a complex and heterogeneous body of experts through the added values and solutions to every type of problem, operates as a lubricant for the mechanism that depends on its self-reproduction. In women's magazines this reproduction takes place through various forms of address. By teaching readers to be dependent on professional opinion, magazines make them part of a complex webs of technologies of reproduction of knowledge in modern society.

<sup>73</sup> The column was discontinued in 2000.

<sup>74</sup> Foucault, M., *Zgodovina seksualnosti (History of Sexuality)*, Ljubljana: Škuc, 2000.



The same applies to motherhood. It would therefore be wrong to conclude that by devoting meticulous attention to the techniques of motherhood, these professional discourses transpose women back into the historical period when the mother-housewife role was a privileged and, in many cases, the only, socially valid role for a woman. On the contrary, the modern discourse on motherhood recognizes changes in the social profile of women, those recognized by *Naša žena* in its portrayals, and its occasional attempts to bind women to motherhood, at least temporarily (at least for three years as Dr. Belan advises), should rather be read as remnants of past discourses persisting in the modern professional articulation of motherhood. The novelty introduced by the modern view on motherhood is the recognition that women's role in the structure of social power is that of a subject of professional discourse and a consumer (of the discourse and the commodities).

The task is difficult for both mothers and experts. Social circumstances, individual biographies and social pressures contribute, each in its own way, to ensure that motherhood does not always progress in the way a wife-mother or her adviser would like. What one is then left with are social fictions, fictional images of motherhood, which through the idealized narratives of woman's alternation between the two worlds, the professional and the family world, exploit successful women's life stories as a promise that such transitions are painless and do not exact sacrifice from women. These are fictions that are, like any other literary narrative, and particularly those in women's magazines, silent about the place of their birth, so that they can address the class of women as a whole.



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## MESSAGE RECEIVED – WOMEN RE-PLAY?

*Motherhood, technology and medicine – fatal liaisons*

1. medicalization of pregnancy and childbirth? – an analysis of *Moj malček* magazine (my toddler), 2000

Pregnancy, childbirth and the post-natal period are important stages in the life of a mother. Anthropologists categorize events that accompany childbirth as transition rituals (some call them rites of passage), a category also comprising customs accompanying the initiation of a child into the community of adolescents as well as death rituals.<sup>1</sup> No culture views childbirth as a solely physiological function. On the contrary, every community has developed procedures and rules of conduct, and prescribed roles and behavior for everyone involved in the event – childbirth is a socially designated and determined event. The methods of organizing the birthing event differ. By learning how to read them we can learn much about a specific culture and about the status of woman in it, then about attitudes towards children, the female body and pain, and the status and value of certain knowledge about the body and its roles and purposes.

Today's critical attitude towards pregnancy and birth is based on the assumption that pregnancy and birth are medicalized, that some procedures and methods of managing pregnancy and birth have no scientific basis, and that the well-being of the fetus is prioritized over that of the mother.<sup>2</sup> Medicalization is a term used to denote processes by which common events or normal life situations are transformed into medical emergencies. As such they become a subject of medical supervision and definitions, with the stress being placed on risk, pathology, therapeutic intervention and control. The importance of introducing a new approach as a substitute for this narrow model of medical care is becoming increasingly clear, with the key issues to be addressed being the relationship between supervision and care, and between the autonomy of women and vari-

<sup>1</sup> See Jordan, B., *Birth in Four Cultures: A Crosscultural Investigation of Childbirth in Yucatan, Holland, Sweden, and the United States*. 4th ed., London: Waveland Press, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> See The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves for the New Century*, A Book by and for Women. New York: A Touchstone Book, 1998; Shorter, E., *Women's Bodies: A Social History of Women's Encounter With Health, Ill-health, and Medicine*. New Brunswick, London: Transaction Publishers, 1997; Enkin, M., et. al., *A Guide To Effective Care In Pregnancy and Childbirth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

ous regulatory principles of motherhood. It is important to examine how these areas are treated by the mass media in various campaigns and medical and scientific articles, and how various types of information relate one with another. By contrasting various discursive practices and drawing parallels between them, we are able to identify various degrees of (in)consistency. Do the representations of women in the media, patterns of relations between women and medical staff, forms of discourse and kinds of topics challenge our thesis about medicalization? How do the mass media respond to the need for change? Do they perhaps initiate changes themselves?

The focus of our attention is *Moj malček* (My toddler), a magazine intended for both sexes, or “caring parents” as its subtitle proclaims. We examined 12 issues published in 2000 (eleven issues plus a special edition entitled “Pregnancy”). *Moj malček* is a monthly and is one of the two leading magazines of this type in Slovenia (other magazines dedicated to pregnancy, childbirth and early parenthood are *Mama/Mum* and *Moj otrok/My child*, and, to some extent, *Otrok in družina/Child and the family*; other magazines treat these topics only occasionally or to a lesser extent). We shall identify and analyze various types of messages.

The topics dealt with in the issues analyzed related to the education of pre-school children, pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, baby care, child care and upbringing, kindergarten and parenthood, and occasionally to the roles of mothers and fathers. In addition to pregnancy and birth, other topics relating to the health of women included the introduction of an improved intra-uterine device, post-natal depression, introduction of an accessory for curing incontinence and an article on a cure for infertility.

Can we say that the results of our analysis support the thesis that pregnancy, childbirth and the child’s upbringing are being medicalized? Assuming that the importance of an article can be judged on the basis of its position in a specific issue, we were interested in who were the authors of the articles in the forepart of the magazine following the editorial. Analysis showed that mothers, or parents, are instructed by medical specialists, school teachers and educators. The leading articles concentrate on the child’s upbringing or health. It is partly understandable that doctors write about topics directly related to health or illness, for example, flu, chickenpox, cerebral palsy in children, problems with sight and the like. But the picture is

different when doctors advise on educational issues or on the organization of everyday life. Almost half the mothers posing questions in the Q&A section seek information about various illnesses, impairments or traumas in children. The other half, however, refer to dilemmas relating to the child's upbringing or everyday educational practices and the resulting predicaments. For example, one mother seeks advice on how to train the child to use the potty, and the answer is supplied by a pediatrician.<sup>3</sup> Another one asks about thumb sucking, and still another is worried because her child wakes during the night. In each case a specialist recommends certain approaches.<sup>4</sup> This advice involves in many respects disciplinary practices. Only two mothers wrote about their own health problems related to birth or to spontaneous abortion. This led us to conclude that mothers see medical specialists as authorities in the field of children's education. In so doing they support the trend in scientific practice which mandates that doctors oversee pediatric care and toddler education, which is a practice that has an important place in our thesis about the medicalization of education and motherhood. On the other hand, the "Parents to parents" section may be understood as a counterbalance to this trend. It is conceptualized as a place for the confrontation of various views on how to live with the child (e.g. articles entitled "Come to my bed"<sup>5</sup>, "Definitely against smacks"<sup>6</sup>, "I want a pacifier"<sup>7</sup> etc.). We must stress, however, that the various (lay) views in this section by no means challenge directly the views and standpoints of experts in the field. Does this mean that mothers are somehow addicted to medicinal practices? Analysis of *Moj malček* shows that such a dependence does exist.

## 2. encouraging breastfeeding – swimming with the tide

The essential feature shared by all articles dealing with nursing is the emphasis on the absolute priority of breastfeeding over the bottle. Pictures showing nursing mothers are frequent – several show a child sucking on the nipple with the mother's head not shown in the picture.<sup>8</sup>

3 *Moj malček*, 2000:11, p. 36.

4 *Moj malček*, 2000:2, pp. 44-45.

5 *Moj malček*, 2000:12, pp. 52-53.

6 *Moj malček*, 2000:1, p. 59.

7 *Moj malček*, 2000:10, p. 60-61.

8 See *Moj malček*, 2000:3, p. 48 and *Moj malček*, 2000:10, p. 46.



Breast feeding; *Moj malček*, October 2000.

The magazine also features a regular column entitled “Breastfeeding” by a consultant working with *La Leche League International*. The author starts from the assumption that certain types of motherhood (lengthy breast feeding, emphasis of the mother’s role in the baby’s life) have advantages over other types. In another section a pediatrician-psychiatrist answers a question from a mother who is worried about the potential “addiction” of her baby daughter to breastfeeding, and stresses the importance of terminating breastfeeding at a certain stage. The answer is obviously at odds with the views of the above mentioned consultant who encourages mothers to breast feed their babies as long as they both feel the need. Is it then possible to conclude that the concept of *Moj malček* implies juxtaposition of views on certain topics for which science has no definite answer?<sup>9</sup> The answer is “no”. The differences rather arise from inconsistency, or deficient editorial policy – neither of the mentioned assertions is called in question, nor are conflicting views opposed for discussion. Discussions or deeper deliberations on a subject from various points of view, or from various scientific perspectives (e.g. how significant is the duration of breastfeeding for mother and child), are beyond the scope of this magazine. The encouragement of breastfeeding is an obvious general trend among maternity hospitals in Slovenia. The majority of them have been designated as “Baby friendly,” where the criterion is satisfaction of ten tenets related to breastfeeding. The magazine does not subject these practices to examination. Only one interview with a public personality

<sup>9</sup> See Carter, P., *Feminism, Breasts and Breast-Feeding*. London: Macmillan, 1996.

contains a critical thought regarding breastfeeding. "... when I gave the bottle to Ema, I felt like a criminal, I had the feeling that I was a bad mother. But when I talked about it to other mums, I realized that I was not the only one with such difficulties, that some mothers cannot breast feed their babies no matter how strongly they'd like to do that".<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the same interviewee described certain other mixed feelings following the birth which are rarely expressed in this magazine. The strong encouragement of breastfeeding is a dominant climate in Slovenia which, unfortunately, as can be concluded from certain statements such as the one above, arouses feelings of guilt in mothers who cannot breast feed their babies, while simultaneously raising doubts about the quality of their motherhood.

### 3. reproductive health and technology

Women's reproductive health is important, but over-stressing it can be problematic. Furthermore, it is by no means the only issue worthy of attention. The focusing of attention exclusively on reproductive health goes along with the tendency to view women as being important (primarily) for their reproductive capabilities. This issue has been treated by some feminist authors. In our study special importance is placed on the analysis of articles which deal with the use of medicines, consumption of alcohol and smoking during pregnancy. Some feminist authors conclude that women are perceived as mediators responsible for the protection of the fetus, while woman's own health is relegated to the background. Quite often the subjects relating to reproductive health, as well as research and media messages, focus on the health of the child while neglecting the health of the mother.<sup>11</sup>

It is possible to identify a pattern which extends across various medical studies in the field of women's reproductive health. What we have in mind here is a tendency in medical research and practice to concentrate on technology, while practices that do not make use of advanced technologies remain unexamined. Since they are not evaluated, their use is uncorroborated, and whatever is not proven is deemed to be dangerous. As a result, alternative approaches are not employed regardless of whether or not

<sup>10</sup> Ema, vsakodnevni čudež življenja", *Moj malček*, 2000:12, p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> See Parrott, R. L in Condit, C. M. (ed.), *Evaluating Women's Health Messages: A Resource Book*. London: Sage, 1996.



they are safer than standard ones. Research into non-technological approaches should be equally stimulated. The results of these studies should be reckoned with and medical staff should present them clearly and in detail to expectant mothers to enable them to make informed decisions. We can assert with great certainty that in Slovenia non-mainstream practices in the field of pregnancy and childbirth are considerably underrated. Even in those areas where studies show that certain medical interventions are not beneficial for the mother, or are even harmful, the tendency among hospital staff to use them still persists. A good example is episiotomy which continues to be a widely used intervention even though studies indicate that its effectiveness is limited. In Slovenia, it is performed on slightly less than half of all birthing mothers (46% in 1996). The recommended percentage is around 20 or less,<sup>12</sup> while some researchers even maintain that this number should be reduced by half. Women in Slovenia usually cannot co-decide about this operation – as a rule, women cannot obtain quality information on which to base their decisions. Let us see what a woman who is not in the habit of reading medical literature can learn about episiotomy from *Moj malček*. The special edition “Pregnancy” featured an article titled “Episiotomy” describing the procedure and its purpose. It also explained which options are available to women who want to avoid the incision in the perineum – they should learn how to relax pelvic floor muscles, should be in the upright position during labor, and should massage the perineum.<sup>13</sup> A separate, translated article is dedicated to perineal massage during pregnancy, but it does not mention whether any research into its effects has been carried out. However, data on the effects of perineal massage during labor itself, which can be found in the scientific literature, show that there are no differences in the risk of perineum tissue tearing between the group that received massage and the group that did not, but there were differences in the degree of damage to the perineum.<sup>14</sup> We could not find any critical reflection on the frequent use of this operation nor on scientific findings regarding the advantages and disadvantages of this operation in any issue of *Moj malček* in 2000.

<sup>12</sup> See Wagner, M., *Pursuing The Birth Machine, The Search for Appropriate Birth Technology*. Camperdown: ace Graphics, 1994, p. 174.

<sup>13</sup> *Nosečnost (Pregnancy)*, Special edition of *Moj malček*, 2000, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Enkin, M., et. al., *A Guide To Effective Care In Pregnancy and Childbirth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 295.

#### 4. transferring and translating scientific achievements into practice

By no means is medical care simply forced upon women. Rather it has to do with the structuring of various conditions of living and with the ways in which various discourses engage with each other in everyday life through advice, prohibitions, dictates, recommendations, agendas etc. The relation between medical science and a woman is not linear: every woman follows doctors' advice in her own way and to a greater or lesser extent; she chooses how to care for her health, decides when to visit a doctor, controls her diet, takes care to have enough exercise etc. Each one also approaches self-care during pregnancy in her specific way. Information on health issues available to women contains important value components. It is a fact that numerous studies on various aspects of pregnancy and birth do not clearly explain to what extent findings may be regarded as controversial. Accordingly, what is important is how research findings are interpreted and how they are mediated. In the articles published in *Moj malček* during 2000, doctors often play the role of mediators of scientific data to the lay public. The filter used in the mediation of these reports depends on a specific expert and his/her point of view, or in other words, the presentation and interpretation of data are determined by the limitations of his/her knowledge and his/her viewpoint. The editorial policy of the magazine is clearly stressed by the message advertising the magazine: "Our authors are top Slovenian experts".<sup>15</sup> The influence of this message on women varies. To establish how frequently media suggest that doctors are in the right and women in the wrong regarding specific conduct, purpose or understanding we were interested in how various other media present both sides. Various surveys have shown that the media image of doctors was favorable, while women were depicted as irresponsible or were even ignored.<sup>16</sup> This could be inferred from various instances of advice and moralizing about smoking during pregnancy or evasion of pre-natal classes for women. There is no such conspicuous tendency in *Moj malček*. Our conclusion is that *Moj malček* encourages women to cooperate with medical staff and with the health protec-

<sup>15</sup> *Moj malček*, 2000:1, p. 44.

<sup>16</sup> See Parrott, R. L in Condit, C. M. (ed.), *Evaluating Women's Health Messages: A Resource Book*. London: Sage, 1996.

tion system in general. Indeed the authors writing for *Moj malček* do not guide women to critically assess individual approaches pertaining to pregnancy, labor and the post-natal period, but neither do they encourage them to be excessively servile. As regards emotional state during pregnancy, labor and the period following birth, women can obtain information on various moods and feelings, a situation which points to a certain shift away from idealization and closer to a more realistic experience of motherhood.<sup>17</sup> The content or organization of pre-natal courses for future parents and mothers is not problematized – these are invariably presented in a positive light in *Moj malček*.

How do various forms of message mediation affect concrete images of women? Do certain media equip women with the skills needed for critical and productive reading of the content? Each medium has its advantages and disadvantages. In the process of message translation from one discourse into another, certain elements are inevitably lost or distorted, meaning that the same information may yield opposing reports. Magazines endeavor to earn profit, and each has its own criteria for assessing priorities. An article that focuses on a new, controversial or topical subject may suffer from the lack of a broader perspective or fail to take into account all available knowledge about the subject. So when presenting the results of specific studies, the media may seduce readers into believing that (limited) results can be generalized. Some authors yield to the fascination with technological achievements, which are often presented as miracles. This trend is also noticeable in articles dealing with reproductive technologies, which too often emphasize technological solutions. Magazines undoubtedly have an advantage over newspapers because the longer span of time between publication of issues enables more balanced content and better information. Our study includes a comparison between the latest scientific findings and their presentation in articles which are aimed at shaping opinions and drawing conclusions. We start from the assumption that the comparison between the current discourses on pregnancy, labor and the post-natal period, on the one hand, and the research data on the other, can indicate the importance of active and critical evaluation of information and of the study of ways in which particular recognitions

17 "Depresija v nosečnosti" (Depression in pregnancy), *Moj malček*, 2000:11, pp. 44-45 ; "Strah pred porodom" (Fear of birth), *Moj malček*, 2000:12, pp. 42-43.

are translated into everyday discourse (construction of a science, shaping of information).

Several articles in *Moj malček* are problematic owing to the anonymity of their authors – the articles are not signed so it is not clear who states this or that – and to disregard for the actual circumstances (we assumed that these were mainly translated texts). For example, the article entitled “Depression during pregnancy” describes difficulties and recommends professional assistance, but fails to provide information about where one can turn for help.<sup>18</sup> In Slovenia, 1000 to 2000 women suffer from severe post-natal depression each year, but there is no organized network providing assistance in these cases. Usually, women suffering from post-natal depression turn to their general practitioner or gynecologist, but quite often they do not seek help at all. A mere guideline to seek assistance from a therapist is lacking and inadequate (the list of therapists does not include anyone who treats post-natal depression).

#### 5. the concepts of birth and birth management practices

Several well-founded treatises are available on the subject of how specific concepts of birth become shaped and how they influence the everyday life of a woman.<sup>19</sup> It is important to be aware that different understandings exist side by side. However, the decisive factor that determines the management of the birthing process and restricts the choice to a limited range of options is the power that a specific concept gains in a certain environment and at a certain moment in time.

Take, for example, positions for birth and labor. In cultures where child delivery is a central event that takes place within a restricted circle of women, with the woman giving birth being the center of attention, women usually squat, stand or take some other similar upright position during labor and birth. However, the concept of “western medicine” implies a lying position, the position of Kafka’s cockroach. It has been proved that lying on the back is not a suitable position for a birthing woman, since con-

<sup>18</sup> “You may happen to suffer from post-natal depression, in which case you will have to seek assistance from a therapist” in “Depresija v nosečnosti” (Depression in pregnancy), *Moj malček*, 2000:11, p. 45.

<sup>19</sup> See *Having a Baby in Europe*, Public Health in Europe, No 26. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe, 1985; Davis-Floyd, R., *Birth as an American Rite of Passage*. London: University of California Press, 1992.

tractions are more painful, the progress of birth is slower, and the flow of blood obstructed. The lying position clearly illustrates the role of a woman, who is obliged to cooperate and obey, as opposed to that of the hospital staff who are believed to know what is good for the mother and her child. None of the articles in *Moj malček* was dedicated to this topic, even though positions for labor and birth were mentioned in many of them. An article describing the lying position with raised knees as a “classic position for birth in Slovenian hospitals” was featured in the special edition. It is followed by a commentary saying that “*since such a position is uncomfortable for many women, in some maternity hospitals in Slovenia other positions are allowed too, for example, squatting, the use of the birthing stool, or underwater delivery. Such methods are allowable only if agreed in advance.*”<sup>20</sup> The pictures accompanying articles about birth, or illustrating gymnastics for expectant mothers, support the established doctrine which presupposes the lying position. A photo accompanying the article entitled “The second stage of labor”<sup>21</sup> shows a birthing woman lying on her back with her legs in stirrups, which is in fact an exaggeration since props for the legs are rarely used in Slovenia (in some countries, say, in the US, they are still often used). Even though the article does not describe the standard position, moving and changing positions are suggested as ways of speeding up birth. This mentioning of the alternative in fact explains that the accepted position is the lying position. In the column entitled “Gymnastics during pregnancy” there is a photo of an “ideal position” during the second stage of labor – lying on the back with raised knees, with the text running as follows: “*In the second stage of labor, you must push the child from the uterus. While pushing, be concentrated, muster all of your physical strength and follow the*



A birthing woman with legs in stirrups. *Moj malček*, September 2000.

<sup>20</sup> *Nosečnost (Pregnancy)*, Special edition of *Moj malček*, 2000, p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> *Moj malček*, 2000:9, p. 46.

*instructions of the midwife or doctor assisting with the birth. Before you start pushing, clasp your hands under your knees so that the whole length of your arms up to the elbows is under your knees. Take a breath, close your mouth and eyes, bow your head towards the chest and push where you feel the strongest pressure.*"<sup>22</sup> This description could well be part of Foucault's text on control and disciplining of the body.<sup>23</sup>

By and large, the descriptions of various positions for birth most often boils down to a simple recapitulation of the current state of things. For example, one author's summary runs as follows: *"In our hospitals, women lie on their side during the first stage of labor."*<sup>24</sup> In the special edition spring/summer 2000, both photos illustrating the usual position show women lying on their backs, one with the sensors of the electronic fetal monitoring device attached, and the other with a midwife at her side.<sup>25</sup> Articles often summarize the mother's activity, or rather passivity, in a manner that is characteristic of medical discourse, for example: *"To tell the truth, up to this moment your participation has been passive; everything has been accomplished by your body and your still unborn child."*<sup>26</sup> The same article describes different positions suitable for pushing, and mothers are advised to seek information from pre-natal schools. In other words, on the same page women are delegated the responsibility to obtain information on different positions (ignoring the fact that this information should also be provided by the hospital staff), while in the same breath it is claimed that the midwife will instruct them what position to take when pushing (meaning that they are left with no choice). *"Once the pushing starts, they will prepare the bed and then will give you detailed instructions."*<sup>27</sup> In oscillating between a simplified presentation of routine approaches in Slovenian hospitals on the one hand, and information about various options on the other, more often than not the simplified presentation prevails. Women are rarely encouraged to take an approach different from the one routinely used. Such an example occurs in the article entitled "The second stage of labor" instructing women to push when they feel the need rather than at the midwife's command.<sup>28</sup>

22 Šormaz, M., "Vaje za porod" (Exercise for birth), *Moj malček*, 2000:6, p. 46.

23 Foucault, M., *Nadzorovanje in kaznovanje. Nastanek zapora*. (Punish and Discipline. The Emergence of Prison), Ljubljana: Delavska enotnost, 1984.

24 Šormaz, M., "Vaje za porod", *Moj malček*, 2000:6, p. 46.

25 Nosečnost (Pregnancy), *Special edition of Moj malček*, 2000, p. 48 and p. 50.

26 Nosečnost (Pregnancy), *Special edition of Moj malček*, 2000, p. 51.

27 Ibid., p. 52.

28 *Moj malček*, 2000:9, p. 46.

These examples therefore suggest that scientific evidence about the advantages of upright positions is not systematically presented. The conventional position (lying on the back) is not problematized. Mere mentioning of experience with other positions and of the possibilities of taking such positions during birth represents just a first modest step, especially if we take into account the bulk of the content. Articles emphasizing the importance of trust in the hospital staff and the necessity of following their instructions are especially outstanding (unfortunately). These do not encourage critical consideration, let alone the possibility of informed choice and decision making. This attitude is further reinforced through interviews with public personalities featured in the early pages (which we suppose to be the dominant position) of the magazine. Interviewed mothers describe their experiences of and views on motherhood, parenthood and the family. These portrayals reflect accepted norms on how to behave during pregnancy, where to deliver the baby, who should take decisions, how birthing should proceed, and which birth techniques are appropriate. For example, an interview with a famous actress strikes a sensitive note about weight gain during pregnancy, and stresses the importance of a healthy lifestyle “... *I gained virtually no weight, and I stopped smoking on top of that.*”<sup>29</sup>

The medical profession is itself not unanimous on the issue of birth techniques – the concepts of birth and of woman’s role differ. Various incentives to change conventional birth techniques have been present in Slovenia for some time now, and staff in certain hospitals are willing to lend an ear to the wishes and needs of women. There are two obvious tendencies: one supporting the use of more effective technologies, for example, epidural analgesia to relieve labor pains, and the other favoring active birth with as few interventions as possible. Should we understand the latter tendency as a wish to return to “natural” birth methods? If we start from the hypothesis that each birth is culturally determined, the same as the body, then we can say that this trend should rather be read as a shift in the starting point: the right of a woman to choose a birth technique arises from her human rights, especially from the rights to decide about her own body, protect privacy and preserve personal integrity. Some women seek freedom in being as little dependent on technology as possible. *Moj*

<sup>29</sup> *Moj malček*, 2000:5, p. 14.

*malček* does not help women establish a critical distance from the accepted birth techniques in Slovenia. Even within sections presenting individual experiences relating to pregnancy and birth, critical opinion does not occupy an important place. In relating their experiences, women do not express any traces of doubt about the long-established practices. The only exception was an editorial criticizing long waiting times for pre-natal checks. The magazine does not include a readers' section where they could express their views or opinions. The survey of the whole year of issues of this magazine shows that birth in hospitals is presented as a norm, with just one article mentioning the trend in foreign countries to deliver the child at home or in a birth center. However, research shows that births at home and in birth centers have advantages over hospital births without compromising safety, provided that the medical system in general is suitably organized.<sup>30</sup> Birth at home is a prohibited topic in Slovenia, and everyone knows that any question relating to it is likely to meet with unanimous rejection. Take, for example, the following view of a retired midwife. Asked to explain her view on home birth, Matilda answered calmly but decisively. "*Ridiculous. Today women have ideal conditions to deliver babies at home: they live in bright, dry and warm apartments, they have bathrooms... but they still deliver babies in hospitals. And it is better that way. A hospital is still a hospital.*"<sup>31</sup>

Our analysis of *Moj malček* shows that hospital delivery under the supervision of a midwife is presented as absolutely preferred. Furthermore, we could identify only a weak strain of argument which could help women decide which birth technique to choose. All the women presented in this magazine gave birth in hospitals. In other words, the magazine does not present place of birth as a matter of choice and hospital birth is taken for granted. Care providers for pregnant women and women in labor are midwives and doctors, and the usual description of childbirth regularly implies the use of medicines and technological accessories. On the whole one could say that today the majority of women trust doctors and are ready to follow their advice for the good of their babies. The messages they receive from *Moj malček* only reinforce their trust. A more critical tone regarding the organization of a birth event

30 See Goer, H., *Obstetric Myths Versus Research Realities. A Guide to the Medical Literature*. London: Bergin & Garvey, 1995.

31 "Vsak ovinek ima svojega otroka", *Moj malček*, 2000:12, pp. 60-61.



can be discerned only in an article referring to birth methods of some ten years ago.<sup>32</sup> No optional birth techniques are stressed. The special edition presents the usual procedure at birth. The only article that dealt with a deviation from the “normal” concept of the birthing process is a presentation of a new delivery room entitled “A different delivery room”<sup>33</sup>. It was written on the occasion of the opening of a new delivery room in the Ljubljana hospital, for which equipment was contributed by members of the association “Natural beginnings”. The author stresses: *“However, delivery in this room will be different primarily because midwives will be in charge of the so called active birth. With this type of delivery, the mother is a continuous active participant in the process and co-decides about developments affecting herself and her still unborn baby, of course, to the extent that such co-deciding is deemed safe from the medical point of view.”* The stress on the active participation of women as being “different” actually indirectly alerts us to a lacking observation of the rights of woman during the usual birth procedure. The sidebar entitled “What is it like to have an “alternative” birth?” presents accounts by two women who actively participated in the birth process. All other issues in 2000 featured articles describing procedures that do not significantly deviate from usual practices.<sup>34</sup> In the interviews with public personalities, the choice of hospital or birth technique is not mentioned, with the exception of one interview in which a mother chose a hospital different from the one initially intended owing to experience with pre-natal care providers.<sup>35</sup> Our survey therefore shows that the average image of a pregnant woman in this magazine is that of a conformist who does not question the authority of medical professionals, and it seems that she dares raise her expectations only after a specific trend has been tested.

## 6. the role of midwives and birth attendants

*Moj malček* stresses the role of midwives – each year the magazine organizes a competition “Midwife of the year”. The magazine often features portraits of midwives and, unlike some other foreign magazines, it does not prioritize

<sup>32</sup> *Moj malček*, 2000:2.

<sup>33</sup> *Moj malček*, 2000:5, p. 54.

<sup>34</sup> *Moj malček*, 2000:6, pp. 37-39.

<sup>35</sup> *Moj malček*, 2000:12, p. 14.

obstetricians over midwives. Analysis of selected foreign articles on the management of the birthing process shows that these articles depict a midwife's role as based less on scientific reason and more on woman's intuition, while the work of doctors is viewed as reliable and rational. This especially holds true of the countries (e.g. the US), in which midwifery has been marginalized or in some cases even confined to illegality. Midwives in Slovenia receive professional medical training with the practices and discourses used in these trainings being not much different from those used in the education of doctors. One among the predominant images of women in this magazine is that of an educated midwife who is ready for skilful assistance at birth, is willing to make sacrifices and perceives her profession as a mission.<sup>36</sup>

We live in a time when women are willing to assume different roles and have control over delivery, but it is still too early to predict which course the changes will take and how decisive they will be. It is a fact that a certain percentage of women is not satisfied with birth techniques and organization in Slovenian hospitals. Experts such as obstetricians, midwives, and other medical staff do not like to hear complaints about deficiencies. They prefer to maintain trust in the illusion of the perfection and deliberation of their work. It is hard for them to take criticism that they are not capable of securing a safe and tender transition for all those whose life is placed in their hands. The trend to "medicalize" birth has been present since the middle of the 20th century, but today it is increasingly clear that pregnancy and delivery management should be individualized. Warmth, personal contact, the feeling of safety, intimate care, and attention to one's feelings, wishes and needs are so decisive during birthing that they can influence the outcome. As a matter of fact, it is not surprising that the assistance and support of a person close to a birthing woman speeds up birth, reduces the risk of complications and contributes to the feeling of satisfaction in women. Who should be birth attendants in addition to medical professionals? The child's father? We must be aware that in allowing fathers to attend birth a great step forward has indeed been made, but it should not be overrated. The articles in this magazine indicate that its editorial policy supports the trend that fathers should be present at birth. In one editorial the editor describes his experience of the birth of his second

36 "Poklic kot poslanstvo" (Profession as a mission), *Moj malček*, 2000:1, pp. 54-55.

child; in another issue two fathers relate their experiences. Other articles about birth often mention the importance of the father's presence. In Slovenia the number of fathers attending birth has been increasing. In 1999, 46% of fathers were present at birth, compared to just one third in 1996.<sup>37</sup> Fathers in Slovenia won their right to "be allowed" to attend birth only towards the end of the 1960s. It is undoubtedly an important element in the modern shift towards a more "human" or more "individualized" birth. But it is nevertheless necessary to point out that the presence of a partner or the child's father should not become a new rule or norm. The supporting concept in this case is the (frequently idealized) nuclear family, which is a predominant model typical of this magazine as well. "Medical" discourses in general equate persons who are allowed to be present at birth with fathers, which can be inferred from the titles of articles such as "Lectures for fathers" referring to pre-natal classes for parents, or from a certificate obtained by participants in those classes, where the masculine grammar form is in use. In some cases a woman is faced with an exclusive choice – either a father or no one; in other cases another person in addition to a father may be present. Research evidence shows that the presence of a person chosen by a woman has an important effect on her well-being during labor, birth and the period that follows, and even certain positive effects reducing complications have been established. Given the realistic circumstances, in which norms, workload and organization of work in many hospitals make it impossible for a midwife to devote all her time to one woman only, the presence of a chosen person seems even more significant.<sup>38</sup> The rules are not the same in all hospitals. In some, the staff are very flexible and they take into account the woman's wishes. However, these isolated examples of good will are not sufficient. Many pregnant women are not acquainted with the possibility of choosing another person besides their partner to attend the birth. They are not sufficiently informed about this option, and the presence of another person may be blocked by written or unwritten rules observed in various hospitals or wards. If the established advantages of the presence of another person at birth were strictly taken into account, this practice would be encouraged. None of

37 Pajntar, M., Verdenik, I., *Perinatologija Slovenica 1989 - 1996*, Ljubljana: Združenje za perinatalno medicino, 1998.

38 Wagner, M, *Pursuing the Birth Machine*.Camptertdown: ace Graphics, 1994, pp. 115-116.

the 2000 issues of *Moj malček* makes a note of the possibility of another person besides the father or a partner being present at birth. Only the special issue mentions this as an option. In some hospitals the presence of a partner is subject to special terms, for example, previous pre-natal training for parents, and in others a fee has to be paid which in 2002 ranges from 3,000 to 5,000 tolar. The authors of articles in *Moj malček* never dispute these terms, even though the preconditioning of a partner's attendance in this way is controversial. According to this, a father can be present at the birth of his child only if he has received a measure of medical instruction beforehand. These approaches may be interpreted as supporting our thesis that birth is medicalized – a chair next to the delivery bed obviously may be occupied only by a suitably initiated partner. The articles in *Moj malček*, therefore, simply mediate the role of the father as formulated by medical discourses. Rather than challenging this view, they support it and hence create the impression that it is something that should be taken for granted. But the father is not always the best assistant at birth, and quite often he himself is overcome by emotions preventing him from providing adequate support. On the other hand, we should not overlook other forms of the family (single women, lesbian unions) which should be treated on an equal basis. Yet in the magazine analyzed here, there is no mention of any other form of the family. We must be aware that that which is left out is an equally important indicator of a certain tendency as that which is included. A woman (or rarely a man) picked by an expectant mother from among her intimate circle to be her “lay assistant at birth” devotes to the mother exclusive attention through all stages of the birth, while a midwife often has to divide her attention between several women in labor. By being allowed to have another attendant, a woman can have all the attention she needs, while the medical staff can take care of the professional aspects of birth. In some countries the chosen person is called a “doula”, a term originating from the Greek word meaning “an experienced woman”. A doula is the counterpart of a relative or friend attending birth in many traditional cultures. Doulas are not mentioned in any issue of *Moj malček* during 2000. To sum up, in Slovenia it has not yet become the custom to allow a third, lay person to be present at birth in addition to a father. In spite of the compelling evidence that a third person's presence is advantageous, the techno-

logical approach that is today predominant in the medical model of care provision prevents the translation of these findings into reality, not to mention the stimulation of such approaches or their acceptance.

## 7. techno-culture

At first glance, many technological accessories and medical devices appear to increase safety and make birth more predictable. However, it is quite possible that future generations will view these as barbaric tools, just as we today view the early models of delivery forceps or accessories for craniotomy. During the past several decades research into and analysis of the efficiency of various methods have been radically improved, so today most methods may be quickly assessed against scientific evidence. Unfortunately, it is obvious that even well presented results of scientific studies proving the inefficiency of certain methods have only a weak influence on practical approaches, and that prejudices, opinions and individual (good or bad) experiences of medical professionals are overstated. Yet a doctor or a midwife can claim a scientific approach only if he/she employs methods whose efficacy has been proven. Science is constituted through the use of scientific methods and not through the status or expectations of those who practice it. The question that arises is why an increasing body of evidence on the inadequacy or harmfulness of certain approaches is so slow to induce changes, and why a science such as medicine is so irrational? Do the authors of articles in *Moj malček* make enough effort to obtain verified data on various types of pregnancy and management of the birthing process? Do they foster critical reading of the statements and behavior of medical experts? What is their attitude towards technology and what is the present relationship between women and various technologies? Unfortunately, we must conclude that neither independent checking of scientific conclusions nor confrontation of medical approaches is a part of the concept of this magazine. For illustration purposes we shall take the presentation of the electronic fetal monitor, a device that is indispensable during pregnancy and through all stages of labor and birthing<sup>39</sup>, which is a one-sided and exaggerated approach. In spite of evidence-based misgivings about the

<sup>39</sup> Nosečnost (Pregnancy), Special edition of *Moj malček*, 2000, p. 6.

justifiability of routine use of the efm, this magazine never mentions this. It seems that by simply relating to women which particular technologies are in use in hospitals, women can be “domesticated” and thus seasoned to accept the reality of the hospital environment without raising doubts about the justifiability of various methods. Being acquainted with the course of birth is one of the basic rights of a woman<sup>40</sup>, but if various practices are presented as taken for granted and definitely the best, women are misguided and have nothing like a good basis to make an informed choice. Something similar can be said about induced labor and the speeding up of the birthing process. An exception is an article describing the relief of labor pains, in which both the advantages and risks of epidural analgesia are presented, even though they are not sufficiently well-documented by expert citations because the article is a translation from a foreign magazine.<sup>41</sup>

#### 8. ideal fetus – ideal pregnancy and birth

An important advance in modern obstetrics has been the visual monitoring of the fetus.<sup>42</sup> Ultrasound was first used with pregnant women in the late fifties, and we have since been witnesses to its dramatic development and rapid spread to all segments of care during pregnancy. With help from state-of-the-art devices, a woman can observe the development of her child from the very early stages. The most innocent effect is that, on seeing their child on the monitor, some women feel more strongly bonded to the child. They report that the fetus feels more real, more like “my child”. Certain statements published in *Moj malček* also indicate this. In an article entitled “Three expectant mothers, three stories”, a woman describes her emotions on hearing her child’s heartbeat and during the first ultrasound examination. She describes it as the moment when she actually realized that she was pregnant and an abstract notion became palpable.<sup>43</sup> For some, the ultrasound examination is proof that the child is all right. Another woman became frightened when she first heard her child’s heartbeat, because she was not warned that the heartbeat

40 Thomas, P., *Every Woman’s Birth Rights*, London: Thorsons, 1996.

41 “Kdaj olajšati porodne bolečine” (When to relieve labor pains), *Moj malček*, 2000:2, pp. 46-47, and *Nosečnost*, special edition of *Moj malček*, 2000, p. 8.

42 See Adams, A. E., *Reproducing the Womb: Images of Childbirth in Science, Feminist Theory, Literature*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1994.

43 *Moj malček*, 2000:5, p. 45.

of an unborn child is faster. But it would be horribly wrong to assume that prior to the advent of ultrasound women did not feel ties with their unborn children, or that it was ultrasound devices which enabled them to establish early ties with the child, as some maintain. Perhaps the act of tilting the monitor screen for a mother to see her child and saying “see, this is your child”, should be viewed with a measure of uneasiness; perhaps it can be understood as a gesture of alienation which brings to view something inside the woman’s body which should be a secret for several more months.

Several facts point to the predominance of a climate which leads parents to expect a perfect child and the medical staff to feel responsible for enabling them to have one. In this context of rising expectations, a kind of a consumer approach to children, with all of its advantages and disadvantages, is being fashioned. A mother devoting herself to a newborn baby is in our society confined to a narrow family circle. She is often restricted by expert views and physical obstacles to mothering tasks that must be shaped in such a way as to satisfy the needs of a child, with all of this often taking place in emotional isolation. At the same time, demands and expectations regarding childcare and upbringing are also increasing. Today, it is trendy to improve one’s diet and stop smoking before pregnancy, the goal being the delivery of a perfect child. The quality of the mother’s experience is here marginalized. The concentration on a perfect child is a result of modern development. It is the result of an almost entirely technocratic stress on the child as a product that can be obtained through the use of new technologies which supposedly improve the quality of the fetus. Amniocentesis, ultrasound and various tests and measurements are often in the service of this drive for perfection, while, of course, their capacity to produce realistic effects is limited. *Moj malček* is not immune to these trends. For example, it acquaints its readers with the screening tests such as a test aimed at preventing premature births and the Down’s test. In both examples the authors stress the importance of quality information and choice.<sup>44</sup> Considerable attention is devoted to diet during pregnancy, where (surprisingly) vegetarianism is presented in a positive light (it has been a controversial issue among medical experts for a long time). There are many advertisements for dietary supplements and the like. Common troubles

44 “Presejalni testi” (Filtering tests), *Moj malček*, 2000:3, pp. 40-41.

during pregnancy also receive attention, and the non-suitability of alcohol, coffee, drugs and smoking is often mentioned. Quite often one can find advice on the importance of exercise – each issue carries a suggestion for exercises during pregnancy, stressing that the expectant mother should consult her physician about suitable techniques.

What is then the image of a modern expectant mother offered by *Moj malček*? One thing that we can assert with certainty is that the modern mother does not question the effects of “perfect ideals” on the daily life of a woman. Yet new options raise new questions and can increase frustration, fear and the feeling of guilt because some available option has not been pursued or some specific approach during pregnancy, birth or after, had some or other consequence.

Some feminist authors devoted special attention to the modern image of the fetus. In magazines dedicated to pregnancy and birth such as *Moj malček*, the development of an embryo and fetus is a standard subject. The issues published in 2000 carried a series that followed the development of the fetus through the entire pregnancy. The text was accompanied with photos of floating fetuses and there was also advice on what attitude one should take towards the fetus.<sup>45</sup> The embryo and the fetus are referred to as “small human being”, the fetus is ascribed various skills, and mothers are instructed to start “talking” to it when it is in its twentieth week. Other beliefs with regard to the fetus and the influence on it of the mother’s attitude are also indirectly expressed. For example, “*only those children who have felt safe all the time and on every occasion ever since the day of conception, will be able to develop self-trust and trust in other people.*”<sup>46</sup>

Technology, say, ultra-sound, is often used as a means of supporting or encouraging women’s dependence on medical staff. For example, the special edition “Pregnancy” says: “*An examination with ultra-sound is a final confirmation that you are pregnant.*”<sup>47</sup>

The thesis about the importance of pre-natal care, which underscores the well-being of the fetus, has been confirmed to a great extent. For example, one author says: “*The fashionable ideal of the woman’s figure is, unfortunately, a far cry from reality. Women on average weigh more and are*

45 See “Se zarodek dobro razvija” (Is the fetus developing well?), *Moj malček*, 2000:1, pp. 46-47.

46 “Vsak otrok je nova priložnost za svet” (Every child is a new chance for the world), *Moj malček*, 2000:11, pp. 16-17.

47 Nosečnost (Pregnancy), *Special edition of Moj malček*, 2000, p. 37.



*rounded differently from fashion models with childlike or even boyish figures. Also the ostensible praise that you “virtually put on no weight” and that your tummy is small, is not praise in actual fact... because a too low birth weight can cause your baby a whole lot of problems! It can also lead to premature birth; the same as abuse of drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, or general negligent care during pregnancy.”*<sup>48</sup>

## 9. conclusion: new conformism?

The concept of *Moj malček* does not encourage debate on essential questions related to motherhood – for example, pre-natal care, organization and management of birth, issues related to partner relations. There are very few critical approaches. The articles on pregnancy and birth are usually written by doctors or other medical professionals. Investigative journalists do not usually bring face to face the results of various studies, nor do they ask unpleasant questions, reveal contradictions within scientific development and practices, let alone place stress on them with the intention of provoking (with only rare exceptions). It is true that the editorial board of *Moj malček* has been working on some changes, but at second glance they seem to be rather cosmetic corrections. If we read the issues of *Moj malček* for the year 2000 from the perspective of one who wants to establish how this magazine presents women, their roles and tasks, we cannot get rid of the impression that a *Moj malček* woman is in most cases a successful working woman, who takes her dependence on medical experts for granted, as a rule lives in a romantic partnership with the future father of her child, and is strongly anchored in the circle of family and friends, kindergarten and workplace. Advice on the child's upbringing is usually addressed to both parents, not to mothers only, which is one step forward from the classical representation of woman as a mother whose husband merely helps with the child's upbringing to a greater or lesser extent. The implied concepts of parenthood, motherhood and fatherhood are often explicitly stated. When talking about the father's or mother's role, the authors lean on psychological theories about a mother's symbiosis with the child, and a father being responsible for the child's links with the outer world. For example, one psychologist states that every parent (mother and father)

<sup>48</sup> “Se zarodek dobro razvija?” (Is the fetus developing well?), *Moj malček*, 2000:1, p. 46.

should have his/her own educational function.<sup>49</sup> Another article suggests how to spend an ideal afternoon with a child, which is supposedly opposite to the model in which “... mothers are overwhelmed with the household chores, while fathers, who take care of the economic welfare of the family, often work in the afternoons...” In this example a mother makes lunch together with the child and waits for the father to have the meal together. They then go out for a walk, and later the mother listens to her son reading while she irons, and even the father stops working at the computer and joins for a while. Finally, after the bedtime rituals, they say goodnight.<sup>50</sup> Only one renowned media personality who is divorced presented her way of life with her children, while all other examples use the classic nuclear family. The most often mentioned ‘others’ are doctors, grandparents, and educators in kindergartens, while alternative family structures involving children and adults are only rarely mentioned. The cover pages of the issues from 2000 feature photos of children; only the special edition shows an attractive expectant mother. The issues from 1999 featured famous mothers or fathers with their children. In most photos the mother is shown caring for the child, holding it in her arms, and one can frequently see pictures of “happy families” doing various things; the editorial is accompanied by a picture of the editor with his children; photographs often show expectant mothers, and rarely men, who when depicted usually play with the children (ski with them etc.); quite frequent are the pictures of doctors next to the child’s bed, and one photograph even shows a man massaging the legs of a pregnant woman. Mothers are usually employed and the question that is often raised in interviews is how to “combine a career with the mother’s role.” Take the following question. “As we can read in the media, you were actively doing business while pregnant with Max. That could be harmful, or even dangerous, for both the embryo and the mother...” The interviewee answered: “I’m afraid I did not much change my way of life. Indeed my gynecologist alerted me to that, but each examination showed that the child was developing all right.”<sup>51</sup> The models of motherhood presented in the magazines hence occasionally deviate from the models prescribed by medical professionals.

49 “1+1=3”, *Moj malček*, 2000:11, pp. 18-21.

50 “Popoldan z otrokom” (An afternoon with a child), *Moj malček*, 2000:11, pp. 32-33.

51 “Materinstvo mi omogoča kariero” (Motherhood lets me keep my career), *Moj malček*, 2000:3, p. 13.

Typically, they still tend to interfere with matters outside their field of specialization. So, for example, a renowned Slovenian doctor who helps couples(!) who have difficulties with low fertility, asserts that substitute mothers in Slovenia are not a possibility, because that “changes women into birthing machines which is humiliating.”<sup>52</sup> This statement, which reflects his own belief, is presented, and since he is an authority it is also perceived, as a scientifically corroborated fact. However, the key issue is on what basis medical science can allow or prevent the institution of substitute motherhood, given that in this case medical services are of secondary importance. We can easily imagine that a woman who becomes pregnant and gives birth to a child as a service performed for another woman, needs no more medical attention than any other mother. But since the negative opinion on substitute motherhood has been presented as the opinion of a medical expert and has not been challenged by the journalist, we shall use it to support our conclusion, which is as follows. In *Moj malček*, the image of a woman-mother is a fusion of many complements to motherhood seen as a wonderful female experience exacting many skills, plans and deliberations, while (almost) unconditionally relying on medical experts and placing the well-being of the child in the center of the (family) world. Conformism as a character?

52 “Cilj ni vedno na dosegu roke” (The goal is not always at hand), *Moj malček*, 2000:9, pp. 53-55.



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## THE CULTURE OF FEMININITY: COSMO AT WORK

general comments on some issues related to women's magazines, their specific traits and criticism thereof

Criticism of mass culture can be boring, says Tania Modleski in the conclusion to her famous analysis of mass fantasies for women entitled *Loving with a Vengeance*, in which she focuses on some fictional genres in mass entertainment, or to be more precise, on the three forms of popular culture intended primarily for women. The subtitle of this work is interesting and meaningful in itself: *Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women*. The same conclusion could be applied to the criticism of popular culture or analysis of the models of femininity in women's magazines,<sup>1</sup> a category to which the study of *Cosmopolitan* presented in this paper also belongs. The criticism would be boring if we denounced these media solely for what they do not include or for their rigid "patriarchal" approaches. Similarly, it would be boring if we believed that these magazines were the products of a successful conspiracy among patriarchal capitalists who skilfully ascribe to women their traditional roles – for example, when offering advice on how to overcome dissatisfaction with relationships between men and women while never questioning the primacy of these relations.<sup>2</sup> In short, a measure of caution is certainly in order when studying "patriarchal" culture using the feminist approach, which is, admittedly, at times greatly simplified.

To return to Tania Modleski for a moment, the essential question related to the perception of these products is why people persist in living in oppressive circumstances even when shown them that what is best for them lies elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> In other words, why do women buy magazines promoting a glamorous look that hardly matches the real situation of any woman? Why do they persist in their subjugation through these typical products of mass culture?

<sup>1</sup> The term women's magazines comprises a broad range of magazines which share one common trait – all address women readers. In this paper we distinguish between fashion and life-style magazines (including *Cosmopolitan*, which in Slovenia is published by Motomedia), the latter being a category based on a certain life-style philosophy. Life-style magazines combine several functions, or in other words, they serve several purposes, among them to entertain and to inform. Yet probably their primary purpose is to "sell" a bold, active life-style, and an optimism that can be paraphrased as "Everything is possible."

<sup>2</sup> Modleski, T., *Loving with a Vengeance. Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women*. London and New York: Routledge, 1982, p. 113.

Obviously, the criticism of mass culture can also be a difficult task, particularly if, rather than dismissing these phenomena on account of them being inordinately inferior, we venture to analyze them at a certain level and attempt to understand and explain them, thus allowing what has been omitted or distorted to speak for itself. In other words, a void or absence of certain content is as strongly indicative as that which is present.

Many commentators ridicule women's magazines by stating that they are extremely trivial, which in turn may determine also judgments about their readership as being exceptionally masochistic or foolish. Even women themselves, as Naomi Wolf<sup>4</sup> writes, think that these magazines communicate the worst aspects of the beauty myth. Some even confess that they are ashamed but nevertheless buy them regularly and experience an ambivalent mixture of pleasure and anxiety when browsing or reading them. This is in line with the theory of the potentially liberating role of this type of women's "reading," thanks to the elements of resistance, i.e. the symbolic satisfaction they bring, as Tania Modleski<sup>5</sup> stresses. They address women's pleasures and desires by offering a dreamlike identity and pleasures that are often beyond the real or acceptable social options, while simultaneously addressing the problems pertaining to everyday life.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, Wolf points out that these magazines, through the topics they treat, popularized feminist ideas more widely than any other medium (and certainly more widely than the explicitly feminist journals), while, of course, avoiding the term "feminism." This thesis is arguable. As a matter of fact, if feminism were of some consequence (if the magazines popularized feminist ideas, as Naomi Wolf says), then its influence left traces solely in the choice of topics (a broader range of questions and prob-

3 This question can be answered with the help of the conceptual framework used in psychoanalysis. Only if we understand how deeply rooted are the fears and fantasies contained in these products can we explain why women favor symbolic satisfaction over real satisfaction. These products both increase and alleviate social anxieties, evoke desires and fantasies and symbolically satisfy them. See Modleski, T., op. cit., pp. 28-29. Therefore, they allow us to discuss popular culture while avoiding the pitfalls of moralization and dictates. See also Light, A., "Returning to Manderley' - Romance Fiction, Female Sexuality and Class," in Kemp, S., and Squires, J. (ed.), *Feminisms*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 337.

4 Wolf, N., *The Beauty Myth. How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women*, New York: Anchor Books, 1991, p. 61 ff.

5 See Modleski, T., op. cit. When analysing female desire both the texts in women's magazines and the modern novel may be put to use.

6 Christian-Smith, L. K., *Becoming a Woman Through Romance*, London and New York: Routledge, 1990, p. 9.

lems) but not also in the female readership,<sup>7</sup> who continue to accept the traditional image of femininity. The manner in which women's magazines deal with various subjects does not lead to a different image of woman. Moreover, the context in which these "politically correct subjects" appear also points to a traditional understanding of the social universe. This constitutes, as we shall attempt to show later in the text, the basic contradiction underlying this type of magazine, including *Cosmopolitan*. The feminist, educational and current social topics in them are permeated by the beauty myth, which is often criticized on the declarative level, but also reproduced and maintained in reality. Despite everything, we cannot deny these magazines a certain informational role, or credit for articulating certain topics and problems and therefore bringing them to the attention of the readership.

These products of popular culture frame our representations of the world and co-shape them, in this particular case, our understanding of the role and image of woman, gender relations, products that a woman 'must' possess if she wants to be desired, loved and happy. Altogether this amounts to the opening of the door to consumer culture and establishing the basis for a common-sense perception of ordinary life. However, there is more to it than mere "brainwashing" or manipulation. The key concept here seems to be the notion of power, one which tends to remain insufficiently discussed and reduced to an all-inclusive conception of the patriarchal order of western civilization, or the elusiveness of ideology, or the impossibility of defining it.<sup>8</sup> At any rate we should not be deluded into thinking that the men who sit on the management boards of the companies that publish such "products" of popular culture are omniscient and fully aware of the nature and effects of their creations, or know where mystification ends and the truth begins.<sup>9</sup>

It is precisely this boundary between mystification and the truth that is most difficult to define – it is the operating zone of ideology and one where women's magazines 'grab hold' of women. At the same time, women's maga-

7 Vidmar, K., "Nelagodni žanr: soap opera in ženska publika" (An uncomfortable genre: the soap opera and the female audience), *Delta*, 1999, 5, 3–4, p. 110. Vidmar discusses the soap opera but her main points can also be applied to the subject of our analysis.

8 Bahovec, E. D., "Žensko telo in oblast v mediju vizualnega" (The female body and power in the media of the visual), *Delta*, 1995, 1, 3–4, p. 26.

9 Modleski, T., op. cit., pp. 28–29.



zines create the feeling of a kind of impersonal female solidarity. They bring to light women's desire to chat – in the sense “what are other women really thinking, feeling, and experiencing when they are not exposed to the male gaze”. They use pseudo-intimate language that creates the impression that we are let into sharing an intimate knowledge.<sup>10</sup> This holds particularly true of magazines with several national editions such as *Cosmopolitan*. As Naomi Wolf says, all women are “dipping in the same bath of images” and all can participate in a world-wide women's culture. “*The beauty myth, paradoxically, offers the promise of a solidarity movement, an Internationale. Where else do women get to feel positively or even negatively connected with millions of women world-wide?*”<sup>11</sup> Where else can they find solutions to the problems and difficulties that supposedly plague all women? One way in which *Cosmopolitan* constitutes this interrelatedness and common identity is through its column titles, which have become a kind of brand name—for example, *Cosmo recept/Cosmo recipe*, *Cosmo moda/Cosmo fashion*, *Cosmopolitanka*—and through directly addressing the reader, for example, “convince yourself”, “imitate the look”, “make him a ...”, “be imaginative”, “your looks will catch him for you” and so on.<sup>12</sup>

Our starting point is that the products of mass culture must be taken seriously, both from the viewpoint of ideology and content (to which the major part of this analysis will be dedicated), as well as economics (which is not the subject of interest in this study). As a matter of fact, publishing is a big business, and women's magazines, including *Cosmopolitan*, cast women as consumers who “must feel the need” for a variety of products that help them create and maintain their images. The history of women's magazines is in fact the history of constructing women as consumers.<sup>13</sup>

Further hypotheses are as follows: these products create a variant of the world for which they offer various techniques of orientation and socialization; they have specific, even though not necessarily direct, effects; they mirror

10 Coward, R., *Ženska želja* (*Female Desire*), Ljubljana: Krt, 1989.

11 Wolf, N., *ibid.*, p. 77.

12 An interesting slip of the tongue (?) occurred in the ad for Kenzo D'Ete perfume. The fragrance is described as ‘feminine’ and was promised to the first 100 subscribers of the newly launched Slovenian edition. (October, 2001). However, the form of the noun used here was masculine (in Slovene nouns are marked for gender). The same form appeared on the subscription form, whereas normally the magazine strictly adheres to feminine grammatical forms when addressing readers.

13 Luthar, B., *Poetika in politika tabloidne kulture* (*The poetics and politics of tabloid culture*), Ljubljana: Znanstveno in publicistično središče, 1998, p. 24. (Samples of cosmetic products are often included in the magazine).

power relations in society; yet it is not possible to assert that recipients share a uniform perception of these products or that they accept them uncritically. In short, various forms of popular culture are important for what they are and because of the ways people use them – they have implications for the ordinary lives of people. As regards the context of this study, they can be described as being important for the shaping of gender identities, for constructing awareness of gender differences and understanding relations in society.

Foremost among the most important elements of this phenomenon is the promotion of the currently valid standards of the body and beauty, whereby the products of popular culture are associated with happiness, success and love. Second is the offering of choices to achieve these ideals – all these radiant images are presented as being attainable and realistic, or as windows on the real lives of real women. In addition, the trio Sex-Beauty-Fashion, which could just as well be understood as *Cosmopolitan's* motto, also determines the social universe, which consists of the intimate sphere of partners and the public sphere of colleagues at work.

The glamorous look radiating from these magazines arouses longing and a burning lust for various products. It creates the illusion that everyday life can be changed as if with a magic wand. The right choice of excellent skincare and makeup products on the bathroom shelf should therefore help us attain perfect hair and smooth, wrinkle-free skin. The wardrobe should contain outfits for all seasons and occasions, each of them complemented by shoes and bags in matching colours. The refrigerator should be filled with mouth-watering, gourmet vegetable dishes and bottles of (healthy) mineral water.<sup>14</sup>

Women are promised pleasure whatever they do, as Rosalind Coward says in her book *Female Desires* – pleasure when they lose weight, make a delicious meal or acquire something new (a new body, a new house, new clothes, or a new relationship).<sup>15</sup> Women are incessantly addressed and their wishes carefully attended to, while theories and opinions on what women really want have been pouring out of the media with no end in sight. And all the while women are promised that it is not difficult to achieve perfection, all they need is a strong will. Women's magazines continually present unrealistic ideals and establish

<sup>14</sup> Wolf, N., op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>15</sup> Coward, R., op. cit., p. 1.

norms for the female body and image. John Berger's statement<sup>16</sup> "*Men act and women appear*" has by now acquired an anthological value. Berger holds that the visual aspect determines most relationships, not only between men and women but also in women's attitude to themselves. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. Therefore, woman's self is split. A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself, says Berger.

In this study we will attempt to establish what kind of culture or model of femininity *Cosmo* (as *Cosmopolitan* prefers to call itself) creates; how this process influences the articulation of the topics dealt with; what kind of "material" it offers for the construction of identity (of course, there are other aspects involved, e.g. social class, race, sexual orientation, but the uniform female subject of this magazine excludes them). We will also try to answer to what extent *Cosmopolitan* breaks with the tradition upheld by certain other magazines that confines women exclusively to the private sphere. Can we talk here of the emancipation of women who, for example, may now freely enjoy sex and talk openly about it, or, despite these liberating approaches, does the image of woman at some level remain conservative and trapped in traditional relations? What kind of the image of "real" life does *Cosmo* present, and which contradictions does it portray? In attempting to answer these questions we will mainly focus on the representation rather than its reception and will try to point out the contradictory features of this representation. While in the category of magazines to which *Cosmopolitan* belongs these contradictions may be somewhat more hidden from the eyes of the readers, they are also more spectacular than in fashion magazines. Magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* assure their readers that they do not present solely the world of *haute couture* and elite society, but are presumably concerned with the realism of our ordinary lives in the first place. Therefore, our analysis covers both women's magazines on the whole (since some predominant elements are typical of the entire genre, or rather, they become constituted through it) and the special segment to which *Cosmopolitan* belongs.

Undoubtedly, many of our conclusions will not be restricted solely to *Cosmo*, but will also apply to some other

<sup>16</sup> Berger, J., *Ways of Seeing*, London: bbc and Penguin, 1972, p. 47.

magazines in the same category insofar as *Cosmo* is part of a category that deals with the same or similar areas (e.g. fashion, advice on various topics, the packaging and selling of glamour), or addresses its readership in a similar way, while preserving, as a life-style magazine, certain specific traits.

some background on *Cosmopolitan*:  
“*Cosmo* does not hide”?

*Cosmopolitan* is a monthly which first appeared in Slovenia in October 2001. The Slovenian edition joined tens of other local editions in national languages (43 of them altogether, as one can read in the October issue) read by 35 million women across the world. Therefore, *Cosmopolitan* is an example of a globalized magazine that deals with supposedly universal problems, difficulties and questions for women. Although global, these magazines endeavour to tune in to the local environment (we could add to this category men's magazines as well, for example *Playboy* and *Men's Health*, both launched in Slovenia in the same year as *Cosmopolitan*). This policy comes through in the columns such as “Drzni in lepi” (Bold and Beautiful), “Cmok, cmok” (Kiss, kiss) or “Za odrom” (Backstage) with a predominantly visual content, where American celebrities appear side by side with local public figures (e.g. presenters, beauty contest winners, even politicians). It is also evident from the fact that women discussing various topics have typical Slovenian names, e.g. Marija, Stanka, Ema, Maja (see “Izklepetajte si boljši seks”/Chatting for better sex, October, 2001) and are placed in a local setting (Majda from Kranj, Mira from Kamnik, Marjana from Solkan, April, 2002). The subject of our analysis is primarily the Slovenian edition; however, it cannot be dissociated from its parent magazine. Since constraints of space do not allow an integral survey of all topics, we will focus our attention on certain representative elements that in our opinion reveal *Cosmopolitan*'s priorities.

For the purpose of this study we surveyed seven issues of the Slovenian edition of *Cosmopolitan* published so far (inclusive of the April issue of 2002). In our opinion, quantitative analysis was not meaningful for the needs of this study, given that the magazine is published under license and must therefore satisfy certain demands imposed by the parent magazine, while our subject of interest was solely the Slovenian edition. Furthermore, topics are intertwined,

e.g. romance and sex, sex and fashion, fashion and career, etc. But even regardless of these characteristics, the criterion of quantity could prove to be insufficient in itself, since it does not say anything about the “content,” that is, the kind of female image presented and the kind of culture of femininity established. To put it differently, our basic hypothesis is that even articles with atypical content, for example those dealing with current social subjects like rape, prostitution, and suicide, are no less conventional in their representation of women than visual images of women in those magazine, or representation of women in the articles of a more entertaining nature.

The average length of the issue is approximately 140 pages. There are a number of regular columns, for example, *Cosmo* zvezde (*Cosmo* stars), *Cosmo* polica (*Cosmo* shelf, a presentation of a book), *Cosmo* vikend (*Cosmo* weekend, e.g. simple but unusual ways of spending a passionate weekend; having fun with friends without burdening your bank account), *Cosmopolitanka* (a presentation of a public figure), then articles on fashion, beauty and health, advice on how to enhance one’s career, sex life and the like, and cover page stories and informative articles on topics such as pre-menstrual syndrome, prostitution, suicide and health, including phone numbers or web addresses. Each issue includes approximately 30 mainly full-page advertisements (not including covert advertising, that is, advertisements for cosmetic labels disguised as advice columns on, say, how to obtain perfect hair, how to attain the image of the cover photo model, or “*Our test*” column). The most frequently advertised products are cosmetics, with ads for cars also being relatively frequent.

The main tone is that of a friendly conspiracy in which “girls” share secrets, or editors help them with advice (ranging from advice on contraception aimed at attaining pleasure free of worries, to that on perfect makeup or dress). Men also have their say, e.g. in readers’ letters, street polls, or debates on sex, and they even appear as editors of certain columns. The style is often sensationalistic, either pretending to reveal some secret (e.g. a woman on the cover photo confides the secret of her looks), or suggesting that the author hit upon a surprising discovery (e.g. our survey yielded surprising answers).

At first glance the magazine is daring, perhaps even somewhat provocative, given that a considerable part of it is dedicated to sex and women’s enjoyment of sex, seduction of a

partner, and accessories for and advice on gratifying sexual practices. It does not cultivate the conservative image of a woman in which she is “fulfilled” in some way or other only with a husband, at home or within the family. *Cosmo*’s guide to orgasm, for example, instructs women how to teach men what women want in bed, and then “*blame it on Cosmo*” (October, 2001).

As Wolf says, *Cosmopolitan* belongs to the new wave of post-women’s movement magazines (it appeared more than 30 years ago) and it was revolutionary compared to its predecessors. It launched the image of an individualistic woman, one who “can do it” and overcomes all obstacles on her way to attaining her goals; she focuses on personal and sexual relationships that affirm female ambition and erotic appetite; on the other hand, through its guidelines on diet, face and body care, it sells women the most deadly version of the beauty myth money can buy.<sup>17</sup> We can even talk of the philosophy of *Cosmopolitan*, which is an optimistic “Why not?” “Why not try to pursue your goals and desires and conclude that life has a point; that apparently impossible things do happen and may change your life”. (“*Cosmopolitankam za popotnico*”/A travel companion for *Cosmopolitanke*, the editorial in the first issue). The April issue repeats the same principle: “*Cosmogirl (a woman on the cover page), reminds us that we can achieve whatever we decide to achieve.*”

The first issue includes an address by Helen Gurley Brown (“the woman who “invented” *Cosmopolitan* 35 years ago”) written in the same bold optimistic tone as that of a Slovenian *Cosmogirl* mentioned earlier. In her address she explains that “*Cosmopolitan is intended for a young woman who admires men and children but nevertheless does not allow others determine her identity. She does not want to be solely a wife, a mother, a sister or a daughter ... she wants to be herself. [...] We are here in order to help you fulfil your dreams, attain your goals, and solve problems which all of us have to face from time to time.*” Gurley Brown then delimits the scope of topics by enumerating *Cosmo*’s subjects of interest, including relationships between men and women, politics, environmental issues, health, money issues, career, and travel. However, she believes “*that nothing can affect your lives as strongly as a love relationship. So when reading this*

<sup>17</sup> Wolf, N., op. cit., p. 69. Therefore, it declaratively exceeds the cultural stereotype which equates women with either beauty without intellect or its opposite pole, i.e. intellect without beauty (ibid. p. 59).

magazine pay special attention to the pages carrying features on emotional lives of young women and their attitudes to their husbands, lovers, friends, family and bosses....” She then proceeds to touch on the subject of *Cosmo*’s philosophy. “We will try to assist you (they say that we are great at this!), while encouraging you to attain precisely that which you desire in your life [...] Our aim is to inform, enlighten and entertain you, and definitely also convince you that with the help of will and a little effort you can attain a happier and more fulfilling life.” As she says, it is not the appearance of the cover page model that is important for good life, what counts is the effort one invests to achieve it. Of course, the beauty myth here is no less influential, only the packaging in which it comes is somewhat different.

For example, to attain the look of Jennifer Lopez, you do not have to have a really fat wallet; one who is interested in what *Cosmo* has to say about this (October 2001), and admittedly it often ensures us that we do not need loads of dough to enjoy life, will find a solution. In this dualistic image of woman, one end of the spectrum is occupied by a woman who cares and spares no effort while at the same time constituting the other, unacceptable pole represented by women who do not devote any, or not sufficient, effort to their appearance. But to achieve the look of the cover page model, or to imitate it, we need certain items from among the offerings of cosmetics manufacturers. The cosmetics labels of various corporations directly contribute to the fashioning of the culture of femininity in the symbolic, material and social environment.

#### conclusion: contradictions

The conclusions arising from our survey of the Slovenian issues of *Cosmopolitan* published so far are as follows. The basic contradiction that underlies this magazine assumes various forms. The assurance that “it is not necessary to look like the cover page model” appears side by side with the assurance that women who do not “fall for” designer’s labels are perceived as strong personalities, with all of this being accompanied by photographs of slim women (wearing designer clothes).

Even though the magazine denounces the beauty myth declaratively (e.g. “in order to achieve the good life you do not need to look like a cover model”) and is basically emancipatory (e.g. “*Cosmopolitan* women do not want others to determine

*their personalities*”), under the guise of a popular feminist premise lies a stereotyped image of femininity and in actual fact the magazine does not break with the tradition maintained by other women’s magazines.

The elements that essentially determine the image of woman in *Cosmopolitan* could be grouped into several units, semantic systems or codes.<sup>18</sup> These elements or themes (appearing in various combinations) are: beauty/beautifying/fashion, whereby a woman is cast as a consumer and presented with possible ways of attracting a male’s attention; romance as the basic organizing principle that comprises emotional aspects of relationships which constitute/reinforce power relations between men and women; sex, i.e. heterosexual relations as a standard (sex is the main topic in *Cosmopolitan* and in combination with the first two topics it is actually a predominant principle followed by this magazine).<sup>19</sup>

In addition to visual elements (e.g. *Cosmopolitan*’s fashion story, Cosmo fit, “*Clothes that make an impression*”) that can be easily pinpointed as being in the service of the beauty myth (even though criticizing it declaratively), the current topics that are recognized as educational by virtue of their content can be viewed as being even more indicative (e.g. articles on pre-menstrual syndrome, prostitution, rape, women in love with addicts, contraception, sexual harassment at the work place and the like).

The articles dealing with these subjects are problematic from another point view. Take, for example, the article on prostitution titled “*Would your partner go for a prostitute?*” The reasons that lead to prostitution, as this article presents them, lie in men’s incapability of accepting women as equal partners either in bed or in a conference room. In presenting this subject, the article creates a phantasm about the prostitute as a beauty ready to fulfil all male desires, who in this particular case is a woman with “*long golden hair and even longer legs*” (February 2001), even though the wives are no less “attractive”, “lively”, or “successful”. What we are dealing with in this case is a contradiction transposed to a different level – this article pretends to be a “cross-section” from real life, a report. It is precisely this

18 Christian-Smith, L. K., op. cit., p. 147. In reading codes we rely on Christian-Smith, who uses these codes to interpret another genre, that is, romance novels intended for teenagers (by the way, her research based on empirical data showed that teenagers, otherwise *reluctant readers*, were the most loyal audience).

19 “A place in the world” – public sphere, workplace, career and the like, could perhaps be regarded as a separate element. L. K. Christian-Smith uses just three.



covert perpetuation of stereotypes disguised as reports on real situations, and the creation of male phantasms, that lend extra power to the dominant ideas in this magazine.

One of the most problematic elements is, however, advice on heterosexual relationships. It is featured already on the front cover and, given the font size and content of these cover headlines, designed to attract attention, it practically “screams from the front cover”. All-pervasive stories about sex are presented as investigative journalistic articles. They are brimming with analysis and thus shape female readers’ attitudes to men and women, their relations, and orgasm. While these topics are avoided by strictly fashion or beauty magazines, in life-style magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*<sup>20</sup> they occupy a central place. Most of the problems addressed in these magazines are presented through these columns dealing with relationships and giving advice that is usually highlighted by quotations or statements from “real” women in a characteristic chatty style perpetuating “a constant state of potential sexuality.”<sup>21</sup>

These women almost invariably belong to one age group (young) and in the Slovenian edition their names are befittingly Slovenian; the complications that call for a piece of advice almost exclusively arise from heterosexual relations (exceptionally, Tjaša, who works for a public institution, reports her unusual sexual experience with her female boss and the April issue featured an article on women who are in love with women; however, we could hardly describe this as a deviation from *Cosmopolitan*’s typical image of a woman). The universe of normal and acceptable notions is very limited, even though, on the other hand, *Cosmo* offers daring and mischievous advice on how to enhance sexual life in a heterosexual relationship (“Playing with his balls”, January 2002).

Sex is undoubtedly a hot-selling item. Female sexuality is here at the forefront. It has replaced, as Naomi Wolf<sup>22</sup>

20 Featherstone, L., Faking It: Sex, Lies, and Women’s Magazines. *Columbia Journalism Review*, March 4, 2002, <http://www.cjr.org/year/02/2/featherstone.asp>. “Fashion and beauty magazines like *Vogue* or *Allure* seem to avoid sex, perhaps because it demands so many aesthetic compromises — inevitably messing up eyeliner or hair. It is the life-style magazines like *Mademoiselle*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Glamour*, *Marie Claire*, and others that most often run the most features dedicated to sex and relationship conundrums. Within these service-oriented magazines, the worst abuses seem to occur in a specific genre — the relationship/advice story (opposites attract, the seven-year itch), which is usually illustrated by ebullient quotes from supposedly real women.” Such was the article “Kaj želijo moški”/What men want, April, 2002).

21 Taylor, H., “Romantic Readers”, in Carr, H. (ed.), *From My Guy to Sci-Fi. Genre and Women’s Writing in the Postmodern World*, London: Pandora, 1989, p. 72.

22 Wolf, N., op. cit., p. 11.

writes, the myths about motherhood, domesticity, and passivity. Yet what we have here in actual fact is nothing like female sexuality, but a sexuality that is directly related to the beauty industry and beauty as a marketable commodity – it is rather “beauty pornography”. Women’s experiences of sexuality in *Cosmo* only rarely depart from accepted ideology and women’s sense of their self-images (which are still “buttressed” by plenty of advice, for example, what to do 72 hours before an important sexual intercourse, and by sexual guides, December 2001), and they never get rid of concerns about whether that image lives up to the ideal.<sup>23</sup>

In addition, readers’ attitudes towards magazines seen as products of mass culture may be added to these contradictions that make up the central part of the content orientation of *Cosmopolitan*. It is an entirely escapist attitude that lends legitimacy to the status quo. Both viewpoints are legitimate and could be further developed through the hypothesis that mass culture not only contains contradictions, but also functions in a contradictory manner: at first glance it appears solely escapist, simultaneously undermining and reinforcing traditional values, manners of behaviour and attitudes.<sup>24</sup> How?

Mass culture appears escapist because it offers images of a better world to which one may escape, or of things not available in our ordinary lives. This constitutes its utopian function which has several aspects of sensibility, for example, energy, affluence, transparency and community.<sup>25</sup> Obviously, all of them are most relevant for women.

Transparency is, for example, one trump card used by *Cosmopolitan* when advising readers how to achieve better relationships, better sexual life and better career – everything is open, direct and unambiguous, formulated along the lines “tell him ... talk to him ... fulfil his hidden desires ... tame your boss ... follow our advice and your man will lose his head” and the like. Relationships are never too complicated to be beyond resolution through a conversation. Complexities are reduced to simple relations with a partner, male or female boss. The social/public and the private/intimate worlds are portrayed as reflecting reality, where everything is documented, researched or personally confessed. This is intended to strike a note of fascination

<sup>23</sup> Coward, R., op. cit., p. 61.

<sup>24</sup> See also Modleski, T., op. cit., p. 112.

<sup>25</sup> Dyer, R., “Entertainment and Utopia”, in Altman, R. (ed.), *Genre: The Musical: A Reader*, London in New York: Routledge, 1981.

with “real life” stories or intimate relationships. Some of these revelations are found in confession columns which undoubtedly deal with real life dilemmas but in which letters, as Rosalind Coward says, much resemble the sexual prose genre (...) Letters use a surprisingly uniform form, language and details.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, answers often contain advice in the same transparent tone, for example, “*confide to your boyfriend/partner that you have difficulties/troubles*”, “*suggest to him...*”, “*talk to him*” and so on.

We can conclude that *Cosmopolitan*’s articulation of the image of woman is largely stereotypical. Its women are active, bold, optimistic, and independent (or they are at least encouraged to be like that) and devoted to carving out their careers. Yet they are also enshrouded in various images of the beauty myth entertained by women’s magazines in general. *Cosmopolitan*’s female subject is uniform in terms of age, social class, visual image, mental attitude, and most notably, it is sexualized.<sup>27</sup> Little room is left here for diversity, say, an individual psyche, or a social or cultural position that would suggest differences within this firmly established collectivity. Without this collectivity, solidarity and “the Internationale”, without a uniform female subject, the entire “life philosophy” of *Cosmopolitan* would be rendered inoperable.

While the image of woman offered by *Cosmopolitan* is illusory, its effects are realistic. As a matter of fact, what is at play here are not only verbal or visual representations of femininity, but also the meanings they acquire in the lives of real women who buy, read or leaf through the pages of these products addressing their pleasures and desires.

26 Coward, R., op. cit., p. 120. Particularly problematic is the agony column “V Precepu” (Dilemma) *Cosmo* agony aunt Irma Kurtz answers readers’ problems and dilemmas, including those posed by Slovenian readers. (Irma Kurtz is an agony aunt working for *Cosmopolitan* as a whole, not for the Slovenian edition only). Coward writes that agony columns think that they solve non-time-specific human problems, when in fact they are merely historically characteristic symptoms of the manner in which sexuality and its emotional consequences were catapulted to the forefront of our culture as the true expression of our most intimate selves. Coward, R., op. cit., p. 121.

27 Sexualization – or at least eroticization – extends to forever new body parts that must be processed and taken care of (this also implies “forever buy new products”) See also Coward, R., op. cit., p. 66.



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## WOMEN'S MAGAZINES AS ADVERTISING MEDIA

We imagine women's magazines as media in which advertisements are clearly distinct from editorial content. After all, such a distinction is prescribed by professional codes – advertising and journalistic codes – as well as media laws. However, increasing commercialization of both the electronic and printed media, and bitter competition on the media market, have fostered the obliteration of these boundaries between the two types of content even in most women's magazines. Moreover, advertisements and editorial material form a continuum, with the two types of content increasingly and unnoticeably merging. This is reflected not solely on the visual, immediately recognizable level, that is, in the overall design of women's magazines (because of the large number of pages exhibiting advertisements, these magazines appear as advertising brochures with occasional breaks), but on the textual level as well, one that is not discernible at first glance (editorial content is buried in purchased and non-purchased i.e. covert ads).<sup>1</sup> The printed media have created the phenomenon of covert advertising,<sup>2</sup> which has become an integral part of most media messages. Moreover, they are increasingly turning into a form of legitimate and legal cooperation of third parties in the creation of editorial content.

Even though when we talk of covert advertising we have in mind the western women's magazines that have been present on the western markets for centuries, we must point out that the (new) Slovenian media already closely approximate this established phenomenon. Moreover,

<sup>1</sup> Covert advertisements are messages which promote a product but are presented to the audience as journalistic articles, a guise which explains why they cannot be clearly identified as advertisements. Media law defines this as advertising which tries to convince us that it is not advertising. This type of advertising is prohibited under article 47 of the Mass Media Act, and penalized by high fines. But theory has not yet been put into practice. Article 46 of the same law actually erases the distinction between hidden and incorrectly marked advertising and in this way it additionally aggravates the procedure of verifying whether or not a given text is a hidden advertisement. In most cases, hidden advertising does not involve any specific written request or billing mechanism, but is the result of gentlemen's agreements that leave no traces behind.

<sup>2</sup> Some experts in market communication explain the popularity of hidden advertising, its use and abuse, by its "usability": it can be cheaper than overt advertising (the effect of a journalistic article is usually greater than that of an advertisement which costs the same); it can achieve certain effects that cannot be achieved through overt advertisements (e.g. praise in an article); certain information cannot be communicated through advertisements (e.g. promotion of products whose advertising is prohibited, e.g. alcohol, cigarettes, etc.) Mass, J. & Roman, K. *Kako oglaševati*, Radovljica: Zbirka Virgo Advertising, 1995.

they also strictly reflect media policy which, as Ellen McCracken<sup>3</sup> concludes, is invariably dependent on capital – at both the macro, global level, and the micro, Slovenian level.

Economic policy is therefore the authority behind editorial policy, and recent Slovenian women's magazines have not been an exception in this respect. On the contrary, trends relating to women's magazines and their discursive mechanisms which in foreign countries already represent established practices are presented in Slovenia with capital letters. This can be detected, for example, in the emergence of special-interest publications with smaller circulations that concentrate on carefully chosen areas of interest and are targeted at a specific audience. Women's magazines of a general type such as *Naša žena* (Our woman), *Jana*, *Ona* (She), *Viva*, *Pepita*, *Otrok in družina* (The Child and the Family) etc. have recently had to face the advent of specialized competitors, for example the youthful *Smrklija* (Young Miss), the emancipated and business-like *Eva*, the household-oriented *Anja*, the gossipy *Lady*, the fashionable and beauty-aware *Glamur*, *Modna Jana* (Jana Fashion), *Cosmopolitan* etc. (a similar trend has prevailed in the market for men's magazines, e.g. *Men's Health*, *Playboy*, *Mars*, *Polet* – but this is a subject that should be treated in a separate study).

The fundamental question which we will try to answer in this study arises from the dependence of various magazines – we will concentrate on women's magazines – on the interests of owners, advertisers and capital. In our analysis we will focus on an important trend which points to the increasing market orientation and commercialization of women's magazines, which today turn women readers primarily into consumers.

By analyzing various forms of address, we can pinpoint various methods for the social construing of women readers and (re)production of stereotyped divisions of social roles. Women's magazines mostly address women as workers, housewives, wives, mothers, educators, and less frequently as business women, politicians, professors, managers, entrepreneurs, and emancipated or single, career women. Disregarding the diversity of women's personal or

<sup>3</sup> McCracken, E. *Decoding Women's Magazines*, Macmillan Press, 1993. This is a thorough study of women's magazines. This book, in which McCracken analyses the mixing of editorial and advertising matter, and the increasing dependence of editorial content on capital, is here used as a theoretical framework for our analysis of covert advertising in Slovenian women's magazines.

public lives, they invariably understand women as the aestheticized gender – as being attractive and continuously burdened by care of their self-image. There is a direct link here between aesthetization and consumption, one which turns women readers into active consumers. In so doing magazines assist women by directly offering the products, commodities and services promoted in their pages. But the question that arises is whether this is really assistance or the incessant creation of new needs, or in other words, the directing of consumer behavior?

There is more to advertising in women's magazines than meets the eye. Its manifest forms change in accordance with the changing roles and nature of magazines. While in the past ads had a specific visual and textual grammar and were distinctly separate from other content, meaning that an average reader could easily recognize them, today they are disguised within the editorial content. With rare exceptions, for example, direct advertising, stand-alone articles restricted to dedicated sections or marked as "paid feature", women's magazines have become an increasingly attractive medium for indirect advertising. Since these ads are hidden, they are not easily perceived as such, but can be exposed only through concrete analysis.

The basic conclusion of our study, which proves the presence of discursive mechanisms that consistently obscure the boundary between advertisements and editorial content, is that women's magazines represent an attractive format for the promotion of commercialized popular culture which is based on "the cycle of publishing profit, advertising and women's role as the primary purchasers of consumer goods."<sup>4</sup>

As Joke Hermes concludes, ever since the emergence of women's magazines this link has been enabled by the genre format she has dubbed "easily put down".<sup>5</sup> Women's magazines enabled easy reading with interruptions that most often took the form of advertisements. Owing to its impact on the overall image of these magazines, covert advertising as a growing trend in modern advertising is a new phenomenon that is worthy of critical study. The following analysis looks into the phenomenon of covert advertising by comparing the "traditional" type of women's magazine – targeted at housewives, mothers and wives – and a modern model that addresses the reader as an individual and an active consumer.

<sup>4</sup> McCracken, E. *Decoding Women's Magazines*, Macmillan Press, 1993, p. 10.



## case study: a weekly companion vs. a fashion monthly

In order to illustrate the point at issue, we have chosen to analyze two women's magazines, *Jana* and *Modna Jana* (Jana Fashion). Both are undoubtedly representative magazines on the Slovenian market, owing to their permanent presence (*Jana* is a weekly published since 1971, and *Modna Jana* a monthly published since 1995), their standing on the media market (their reach and readership), and stable fiscal policies (circulation, sales figures and permanence of advertisements). Although there are many new women's magazines on the Slovenian market (five new monthlies appeared in 2000), they do not yet have their firm place on the Slovenian media market, which is the reason why their future, which is dependent on their profitability, is dubious for the time being.

We analyzed 10 issues of *Jana*<sup>6</sup> and 5 issues of *Modna Jana*<sup>7</sup> published in 2001, more precisely, the issues published in February, April, July/August, November and December. By comparing the weekly *Jana* and the monthly *Modna Jana* that appeared in the same month, we could pinpoint the similarities and differences between their contents from the perspective of covert advertisements. We were interested in the following aspects:

- which subjects were treated by both magazines; for example, general subjects in *Jana* – topical social subjects, children's upbringing, care for the household, cooking; fashion-related topics in *Modna Jana* – cosmetics, fashion, image care etc.
- to what extent were particular subjects treated with respect to the “commercial bias” of each magazine; for example, the February issue was influenced by the approaching spring and hence featured “seasonal” fashion topics, the April issue was dedicated to the season of weddings, the July issue

5 *Easily put down* – this is a format for women's magazines enabling light reading. Its structure is based on short editorial texts with smooth passages between columns that are related to various overt or covert advertising messages. This format corresponds to the everyday life of women who want to relax between everyday chores, and one way to achieve this is by reading articles, advice, reports, and recipes. Once a woman reader gets the needed psychological support, she can put down the magazine and continue with her work. Hermes, J. *Reading Women's Magazines*, Polity Press, 1995, p. 29.

6 *Jana* – identification: Slovenian family magazine; brief description: published since 1971, a weekly; publisher: Delo Revije d.d.; circulation: 60.000, reach: 221.000 regular readers (Source: Raziskava Mediana bpg 2001), *Dosje – Dossier: Velika knjiga slovenskega oglaševanja 2001*, Ljubljana, Marketing Magazin, 2001, p. 178.

7 *Modna Jana* – identification: fashion trends; brief description: published since 1995, a monthly; publisher: Delo Revije d.d.; circulation: 12.500; reach: 48.000 regular readers (Source: Raziskava Mediana bpg 2001)

was dominated by summer topics, while in December attention was devoted to preparations for the festive season.

- how were selected topics integrated with the magazine's discourse (the mechanisms of blending advertisements with the editorial content).

The conclusions arising from our analysis of *Jana* can serve as "sample" conclusions relating to other similar weekly magazines as well, those addressing families and targeting the widest readership, primarily women, but also men, of all age groups and education categories. Such magazines are *Ona* (She), *Naša žena* (Our Woman), *Otrok in družina* (Child and Family), *Viva* and *Pepita*. Conclusions pertaining to *Modna Jana* should similarly suggest the overall characteristics of special-interest women's magazines with narrowly defined readership and subjects i.e. editorial content and advertisements adapted to that specific readership. These magazines include *Glamur*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Moda In* (fashion, beauty, and advice for emancipated women)<sup>8</sup>, *Cukr* (for primary school children), *Smrklja* (for adolescents), *Eva* (for business women between 20 and 35), the bi-weekly *Anja* (practical, instructive, for housewives primarily).

### the phenomenon of the covert

"The continuum of advertising that now underlies nearly 90 per cent of the pages of most women's magazines has not always been a structural constant. Like radio broadcasting in the early twentieth century, [...] magazines began with very little advertising. [...] [advertising] was confined chiefly to the covers of expensive magazines or to four- or eight-page inserts. [...]"<sup>9</sup> This is how Ellen McCracken invites us to critical consideration of the sources of covert advertisements in her study entitled *Decoding Women's Magazines*. In this book Ellen McCracken looks at the development and mechanisms of advertising discourse in women's magazines, which "virtually ended the editorial independence of most publication."<sup>10</sup> Owing to the predominance of advertising material, including ads disguised as editorial features or blending with fashion reports, descriptions of the latest fashion collections and new products in the offering of prestigious brands, McCracken suggests that a more appropriate name for these

<sup>8</sup> Own description, *Dosje – Dossier: Velika knjiga slovenskega oglaševanja 2001*, Ljubljana: mm, 2001, p. 178.

<sup>9</sup> McCracken, E. *Decoding Women's Magazines*, Macmillan Press, 1993, p.64.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 65.

publications would be “*women’s advertising magazines*”. In her opinion they play an important role in the development of consumer society, especially through special-interest editions addressing specific readership and their particular interests. The content of a magazine is categorized according to the targeted readership, potential consumers, while advertising shapes the cultural attributes of a magazine.

Ads in women’s magazines assume two forms: one is direct and the other indirect advertising, with another sub-division being purchased and non-purchased advertisements. In our study we do not pay special attention to this sub-division, since our subject of interest was not actual revenue, that is, whether the ad was paid for and at what rate, whether it was a form of compensation (e.g. advertising of a brand name because the producer contributed products that were featured in a fashion session, fashion report or fashion trends section) that often stands behind covert advertisements. We instead focused on the forms of covert advertisements and the discursive mechanisms in use.

For our comparative analysis we selected those elements of women’s magazines that are recognized as basic vehicles for implementing discursive mechanisms used in covert advertising:

- The front cover
- Editorial policy and editorial pages
- Advice columns
- Reports

The discursive mechanisms of covert advertising are a subtle tool used to communicate a message that operates through visual grammar and a specific rhetoric. They are a vehicle used to transfer predominant patterns from these magazines into everyday life, behavior and views.

The editorial policy and the strategy for addressing the readership depend on the funding sources, and in the case of women’s magazines most funds come from advertising. In Slovenia, revenues from sales contribute minimally to overall expenses, owing to small circulations. Survival strategies employed by most Slovenian media prove this to be true. The small size of the market often compels the Slovenian media to streamline their operations under the roof of one publishing house,<sup>11</sup> while others are forced to

<sup>11</sup> Delo Revije d.d. – *Jana, Smrkija, Eva, Anja, Lady, Modna Jana, Ambient, Stop, Mars*, etc. Motomedia d.o.o. – *Playboy, Cosmopolitan, Men’s Health, Avtomoto, Nova*, etc..

defer to commercial sources i.e. advertising. Another typical method is “package-advertising”.<sup>12</sup>

### the front cover

The front cover is where everything begins, including covert advertising. Lively colors, aesthetic photographs, promising titles, fantasy images – these are some of the elements of a complex semiotic system through which women’s magazines address regular and would-be readers from news-stands and store shelves. “*Like many other forms of mass culture, the women’s magazine is a commodity bought and sold on the market. The cover helps to establish the brand identity of the magazine-commodity; it is the label or packaging that will convince us to choose one magazine over the competitors.*”<sup>13</sup> The front cover is therefore the magazine’s most important self-advertisement, but also, and more importantly, an advertisement for the products, commodities and services featured inside the magazine. The graphics and accompanying text compose a recognizable public image created by the producers of a magazine. For example, when Delo Revije media company had to define their editions for the needs of an overall media register in Slovenia, by giving them additional subtitles as part of the public identification of magazines, they chose “Slovenian family magazine” for the weekly *Jana*, and “Fashion monthly” for *Modna Jana*. This identity is first reflected on the front cover.

*Jana* is distinguished by its logotype, whose color changes from one issue to another. Other headlines on the cover page point to content characteristic of a family type magazine<sup>14</sup>. Accordingly, *Jana*’s front covers are only exceptionally<sup>15</sup> covert advertisements for specific products or services – unlike those of special-interest magazines, as

12 Package advertising means that customers constantly advertise in bigger magazines and, since money goes to the same publishing house, they are entitled to special quantity discounts or “compensations” in the form of covert advertisements that are not paid for. They secure this through gentlemen’s agreements with the media company director, while the editors of individual editions must fulfil such agreements within a certain time period on command from the top. In this way, the media increase revenues from advertising, either through direct payments by advertisers or through encouragement of producers that would not otherwise advertise in their media or would advertise on a smaller scale. For example, L’Oreal advertises its products in *Modna Jana*. In addition to distinct whole-page advertisements, the columns *Lepota* (Beauty) and *Obvestili so nas* (Our sources say) carry descriptions of and recommendations for selected L’Oreal products. “*Nutri Confort L’Oreal is a new skincare product containing nutri ceramides for dry skin. It soothes the skin and creates a comfortable feeling. Your skin will be palpably smoother each day...*” (*Modna Jana*, November 2001).

13 McCracken, E. *Decoding Women’s Magazines*, Macmillan Press, 1993, p. 13.



Covert advertising on the front cover: *Jana*, 13. February 2001.

we shall see later in the text. *Jana*'s target audience is families and primarily stereotyped women such as mothers, housewives and wives in the working or middle class. At the same time, women are addressed as representative consumers in their families.<sup>16</sup> The main stress in photographs is therefore placed on their content (joy, love, family) rather than on aesthetic features.

- 14 For example, *Razjasnjena skrivnost v Arji vasi: Duše ne najdejo miru* (Mystery of Arja Vas resolved: souls cannot find peace); *Bojan Krajnc: Od urednika do playboya* (Bojan Krajnc: From an editor to a playboy); *Otroci s povečano ščitnico: Vsak deseti z golšo* (Children with enlarged thyroid gland: one in ten has goiter); *Uspešnica za srečen zakon: Kakor ti rečeš srček!* (A best-seller for happy marriage: Whatever you say, sweetie!) and *Neverjetne zlorabe kreditnih kartic: Nevarno udobje* (Unimaginable abuse of credit cards: Dangerous comfort). (*Jana*, 13 February 2001) The cover page photograph shows a boy and a girl kissing – alluding to Valentine's Day.
- 15 Two such exceptions are the issue of the 10th April 2001 and of the 18th September 2001; in the former, the credits frame on the back page gives the names of the photographer and clothes designer (dress: Center 42 – Sportina); similarly, in the latter example, in addition to the name of the photographer there is a credit reading "Make-up: Salon Natasha, Bežigrasjski dvor".
- 16 Woman, as a wife and a mother, usually shops for the entire family, with the items ranging from clothes, cosmetics and cleaning agents to cooking utensils and various household items.



Covert advertising on the front cover: *Modna Jana*, 15 February 2001.

Unlike *Jana*, the front covers of specialized magazines strive for perfection and effective aesthetics (beautiful bodies, trendy apparel, a sexualized image of woman). *Modna Jana*'s front covers are almost invariably covert ads for cosmetics, jewelry, clothes, and brands, all of which are generally found in advertisements inside the magazine.<sup>17</sup> *Modna Jana* is targeted at successful and educated people, that is, people higher in the social hierarchy, while the typical woman's image purveyed is that of a business woman, an emancipated career woman, a professor, and the like. These women are the biggest consumers of products and services designed for a "better life" or "more beautiful looks". The photographs appearing on the front cover are in many cases

<sup>17</sup> For example, the front covers of *Modna Jana*: a new image of Simona Weiss and an explanation under the editorial: "Leather items: Akultura, T-shirts Emporium, hairdo Mare Dresura frizura, make-up Tatjana Eberl; the attractive image of a young woman fronting the July issue was attained with the help of the "swimming suit from Lisa and jewellery by Romi Bukovec.

challenging,<sup>18</sup> pointing to the trend-setting orientation of the magazine's editorial policy. In addition to the recognizable logotype, the texts on the front cover include headlines alerting readers to the magazine's distinctive content that sets it apart from other magazines on the market.<sup>19</sup>

J. Williamson draws attention to the importance of color, or "chromatic text",<sup>20</sup> which often reproduces a shade of clothes, lipstick or similar products advertised inside. Our conclusion is that *Modna Jana*'s front covers are always defined in terms of color (with one color prevailing in order to achieve a better visual effect); these are harmonized with the color of advertised clothes or other leading content and are most frequently determined by season (bright colors for summer issues, darker tones for autumn). *Jana*'s front covers, on the other hand, are also often dominated by a "theme" color alluding either to a holiday (Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Christmas etc.) or to a specific season (summer, winter, autumn, spring). Chromatic text provides a "visual montage,"<sup>21</sup> meaning that the viewer combines verbal and photographic texts and, using her previous knowledge, creates a higher dimension of meaning. McCracken, working from Eisenstein's theory of visual montage, attributes to the viewer the primary ability to recognize or assemble the magazine's title and cover photo, and the secondary ability to recognize inside content through short cover lines.

Therefore, front cover advertising has to be analyzed taking into account at least two factors. One is that the front cover is a magazine's self-advertisement (it is designed to attract readers and enable them to identify with the magazine; for example, *Jana*'s front covers included a portrait of a child, an anonymous young lady, a celebrity; the cover lines serve as content summaries). The other is that the front cover is a covert advertisement for specific

18 The front cover of the February issue of *Modna Jana* featured a new – fashionable and aesthetically elaborate – image of the singer Simona Weiss dressed in leather clothes and with a new hairstyle, which is not her usual image.

19 For example, New fashion lines: Spring 2001; Culprits: Manca Košir, Franci But, Vinci; Igrica s Simonom Weiss (A game with Simona Weiss); Politik in svetovljan s stilom: Ignac Golob (A politician and a cosmopolitan with style: Ignac Golob); Dosje hujšanje: Nove diete (Slimming dossier: new slimming diets) and in small print just above the lower margin: Responsible: Gucci and Prada 200DEM each; Slovenci o spodnjem perilu (Slovenes on underwear); Na obisku pri Lombergarjevih (A visit to Lombergars); Kronike: družabni dogodki pod stilskim drobnogledom (Newsletter: a stylish look at social events through the magnifying glass); Izžrebanci velike nagradne igre (Winning tickets in a draw). (*Modna Jana*, 15 February, 2001).

20 Williamson, J. *Decoding Advertisements*, Marion Boyars Publishers, 1978, p. 38.

21 Eisenstein, S. in McCracken, E. p. 27.

products, either those featured on the front cover itself (aesthetic visualization attracts the view and kindles interest in readers who think along the lines “*who is responsible for this image?*”); the answer lies inside the magazine) or those found inside the magazine (either presented as overt, recognizable advertisements or disguised within some ostensibly editorial content).

The front cover is therefore that recognizable, established and distinctive sign encouraging one to look inside, helping readers to position themselves, while at the same time understanding them as consumers of these products. In other words, the front cover constitutes a “code of commonality”<sup>22</sup> influencing perception of the specific magazine and helping to generate expectations in readers about standard characteristics of the magazine.

### editorial policy and editorials

Women’s magazines are mainly the result of the (non)harmonization of interests that converge even before the magazine is produced as well as later during its publication. These are the interests of media owners, funding sources, directors, editors and authors of specific articles, with the last mentioned having the least influence on editorial policy. The most important link in this chain is occupied by the editors in chief, who again and again find themselves in the role of receivers of directives from “the top,” while at the same time being active co-producers of the content. On the one hand, they are representatives of editorial policy, which is in most cases a result of compromise and economic pressure, while on the other they endeavor to maintain editorial autonomy which should reinforce the credibility of the medium. But since theory is not yet translated into practice, the latter remains an ideal not yet achieved in Slovenia, similar to the situation elsewhere.

Even though the Mass Media Act clearly stipulates that “the customer and editor in chief are responsible for covert advertising”, this is not of any help when it comes to the use and abuse of advertising disguised as editorial material. Editors often act as proxies for the leadership of a media company responsible for the publication. They cooperate with them in the media race for profit, instead of attempting to protect those rare places where they could publish objective, quality editorial messages independent

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p. 20.



from media owners, directors and capital whose interests are reproduced precisely through advertising.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, editorial policy is frequently dedicated to satisfying the demands and wishes of advertisers, since most women's magazines would not be able to survive without close cooperation and good relations with this source of finances. Undoubtedly the cultivation of good relations often exceeds basic goals, a factor which is obvious in editorial pages where editors top off their policy by suggestions and advice intended to direct readers to features secretly promoting special products or by guiding them to adopt consumer behavior.<sup>24</sup>

As a representative fashion monthly, *Modna Jana* typically carries – in addition to a whole page advertisement on the inside front cover or open page – a frame listing front cover credits: who is responsible for the “perfect looks” of the woman/young miss on the front cover and which products were used in beautifying her.<sup>25</sup>

*Jana*, on the other hand, upholds its established public image of a family circle weekly whose editorial policy is in favor of editorial content. In most cases *Jana* tries to protect editorial material from the intrusion of advertisers, so its advertisements are correct, marked and if possible, separate from other content. This ideal is now and then violated by the clever insertion of advertisements into journalistic articles. However, even more serious breaches involve those advertisements which are covert by definition and typical of magazines with predominantly commercial content – fashion, beauty, health, culture, film, and culinary features. The greatest number of covert advertisements and instances of subordination of the editorial policy to advertising was observed in the specialized supplements published on special occasions.<sup>26</sup>

23 Ibid. pp. 38 – 42.

24 One example of such an editorial suggestion pointing to consumer behavior is an editorial dealing with the leading topic: “*Katero blagovno znamko boste vzeli s seboj, ko bo konec sveta?*” (Which brand would you take along after the end of the world?), or a concluding suggestion by the editor in the New Year's issue: “*Once the lights go down and Santa Claus and Father Christmas are gone. Once the charity concerts and generosity of people are over. It's time for sales.*” (*Modna Jana*, November 2001, p. 4)

25 For example, a frame with credits in the November issue of *Modna Jana* featured, among other things: “*Makeup: Tatjana Eberl, Hairdo: Borut for Mič Styling, Dress and gloves: Akultura, Handbag: Marjeta Grošelj, Boots: Čevljarstvo Lopatec Rudolf.*” (*Modna Jana*, November 2001, p. 4). This is a representative example of covert advertisement typical of specialized magazines like *Modna Jana* which are dependent primarily on advertisements by the cosmetic and fashion industries.

26 For example: supplements *Gremlin!* (Let's go), *Vaš šolar* (Your schoolboy), *Valentinovo* (Valentine's Day), *Velika noč* (Easter), *Nova jesenska moda* (New autumn collection) and the like.

*Jana's* editorials differ from those found in *Modna Jana*. Its editorials often carry the views of various authors on selected topical social subjects<sup>27</sup> and do not contain hidden steering of readers towards consumerism.

Therefore, under the dictate of editorial policy makers, women's magazines have been turning into the producers' medium for communication with potential consumers. The majority of these producers depend precisely on their presence in the media. The two categories that are advertised most extensively are food and cosmetics, and their share of advertising in women's magazines is also the biggest.

Yet it should be pointed out that magazines targeted at the wider public, such as *Jana*, contain fewer covert advertisements than specialized magazines like *Modna Jana*, at the level of both editorial policy and introductory editorial addresses. In traditional women's magazines, correctly marked advertisements are prevalent and separate from other material. On the other hand, special-interest magazines primarily live off advertising matter, with its forms ranging from advice columns to reports, which are skillfully, overtly or covertly, integrated into editorial content.

#### advice columns

The primary role of women's magazines is to offer their readers endless pleasure and to ensure their satisfaction while reading such content. Since readers "need help" when making a decision or choice, various advice columns are the most handy solution. Columns carrying advice on how to get married, what to cook, how to apply make-up, how to find a job and the like form an important part of the content of every women's magazine, which assumes the role of "substitute sister"<sup>28</sup>. They almost invariably contain covert advertisements with verbal or visual images indirectly selling products, even though marketing interests are disguised. In this case advertising relies on various discursive approaches, for example, the rhetoric of advice, attractive photographs, assertive statements by well-known public figures etc.

27 For example, *Incident (Incident)*, *Slovenski psiho (A Slovenian psycho)*, *Zaljubljeni v kubike (In love with cubic meters)*, *Lekcija s sredincem, narod nergačev (A lecture, a nation of grumblers)*, *Odpad človeštva (Human junk)*, *Pozor, punce prihajajo! (Watch out, the girls are coming!)* and the like.

28 A concept from the theorist M. Ferguson. *Forever Feminine: Women's Magazines and the Cult of Femininity*, London: Heinemann, 1983. The content of advice columns in women's magazines fulfils the "substitute sister" role by giving diverse advice for everyday life and by taking care of a "sister-reader. Advice often includes a suggestion about a product, commodity or service, mainly as a covert advertisement.

In *Modna Jana*, for example, each issue offers advice columns pertaining to various areas. Some of these columns are regular, but the majority are tied to a season or to current topics as determined by the editors. These columns invariably contain covert advertisements.<sup>29</sup> They address woman as the aesthetic sex for whom care of the self is both a necessity and a pleasure<sup>30</sup> These descriptions have direct effects and are disguised as advice to readers who identify with the problem under discussion. As we have already pointed out, the formula of covert advertising is detectable only through concrete analysis. In such examples there are three elements: the name of the product, the brand name and the product's market price. This type of advice column<sup>31</sup> – they advise on how to dress, where and how to shop, how to decorate an apartment – is so frequent that we can say that specialized magazines live off them.

*Jana* contains fewer advice columns because the magazine is targeted at a wider public and covers essential subjects interesting to all family members – these range from stories of common people and interviews with politicians to fashion and culinary pages. Advertisements are mainly distinct or marked as such, while the editorial policy tries to avoid having covert advertising interfere with editorial content. Nevertheless, in some columns we can discern deviations from this standard.<sup>32</sup>

Advice columns are usually filled precisely with advice related to covert advertisements, in most cases promoting cosmetics and fashion industries that primarily depend on their media presence. R. Williamson talks of the “magic of

29 For example, columns *Moda: Styling* (Fashion : Styling), *Trendi* (Trends), *Priporočamo* (Our recommendations), *Nakupovalni vodnik* (Shopping guide), *Modne novice* (Fashion News), *Po nakupih* (Shopping); *Lepota: Dosje* (Beauty : Dossier), *Laboratorij lepote* (Beauty Lab), *Zdravje* (Health), *Izbrano ta mesec* (This month's choice), *Moški pogled* (Male view); *Ideje za življenje : Na obisku* (Lifestyle ideas : A visit), *Kulinarika* (Cooking), *Obvestili so nas* (Our sources say), and the like.

30 “Winter is often merciless. Skin suffers as well. Especially when its unprotected parts are exposed to unfavourable weather conditions, for example face, mouth, hands. How can you protect them?” (*Modna Jana*, December 2001). This is followed by a two-page article containing descriptions of different skin types and product recommendations by the author: “Extremely dry skin: Hydra Protection, a cream for extra moisture and oxygen supply (Christian Breton, 4.239 tolar) smoothes and protects dry skin and strengthens its... A complete daytime care for unpleasant winter days.” (*Modna Jana*, December 2001).

31 Advice columns include various Shopping guides (listing products, prices and shops), columns listing new products on the market (including clothes, footwear, cosmetics, décor items, and gifts), then *Izbrano ta mesec* (This Month's Choice), *Lepotni dosje* (Beauty Dossier), and the like.

32 For example, *Lepotni kačipot* (Beauty guide), *Za lepoto in dušo* (For beauty and soul), *Za usta in oči* (For mouth and eyes), *Muze lepih umetnosti* (Muses of the beaux arts), *Visoke pete* (High heels) and the like.

advertising”<sup>33</sup> which is intended not only to sell products, but also indirectly promises women male attention if they use the right fragrance or shampoo, or better jobs if they choose the right dress, and so on. By possessing frequently recommended products, meaning those which are frequently covertly advertised, seen as a means of expression, as identity symbols, women present their inner selves and as such communicate with the environment. The authors of advice columns, on the other hand, use established mechanisms of covert advertising to promise a better life, primarily through shaping new identities that are based on canonized images, which should mean that by buying an advertised product a person buys a new “self”.

**ZNANE SLOVENKE**  
v akciji

**Čisto pravi  
"šoping" v  
supermarketu**

Super cene. Super ponudba. Super, če kupujete banane in mehčalec za perilo. A dve super puncici s stilom sem tokrat v supermarket povabila na lov za modnimi izdelki.

Tekst: Mojca Maver  
Foto: Jolanda Suhadolnik  
Foto izdelkov: Sasa Hes

**Bruto:** Tri zadovoljive puncice in trije kapažini.  
**Posetna zaloga:** Hipermarket Mercator  
Center: Šiška, Cesta ljubljanskih brigad 33,  
Ljubljana

## Anja Rupel

Anja se je odločila za komplet spodnjega perila v modnih zelenih odtenkih (3.809 tolarjev). "Ugodno in prav nič slabše od dragih modnih znamk. Čisto v redu so tudi črne bombažne tangice (1.426 tolarjev) in nedrček (1.634 tolarjev), super za teletvado. Za poletne piknike v naravi ali tople večere v dvoje sem končno našla tudi primerno odejo (2.269 tolarjev). Sponka, s katero si bom splela lase (257 tolarjev), je veliko cenejša kot striženje pri frizerju v teh poletnih dneh." V vozček zadovoljno vrže še rižavo senčilo za uke (785 tolarjev). Osnova vsakega dobrega ličenja.

**Skupaj: 10.180 tolarjev.**




Covert advertisements  
in reports; *Modna  
Jana*, July-August  
2001.

33 Williams, R., *Advertising: The Magic System* in McCracken, p. 68.

## reports

A typical trait of modern, so-called hybrid advertising<sup>34</sup>, is the intertwining of numerous media contents, that is, a rearrangement and recontextualization of the subject of communication in such a way that a fresh and new meaning is communicated.<sup>35</sup> This is obvious in reports, to mention just one type of this material, which are used in women's magazines as a special kind of discursive mechanism for covert advertising. This is generally typical of special-interest magazines such as *Modna Jana*, in which we can trace constant communication of fashion, beauty and

PO NAKUPIH

zanjjo

# V barve in vzorce!

Kam drugam lei! Pa še z obema nogama v poletne norosti. Bolj ko je tkanina tanka in lahka, več barv, pretrjavaj z vzorci in kombinacij prenese. Privoščite si jih!

**Priljubljeni: Maja Vinder**  
Foto: Gaba Ars

V rožnem vrtu

• Torbica (33.000 tolarjev) **Beverly Feldman** iz trgovine **Stiefelking**  
• Uspetna torbica (138.000 tolarjev) **Doice & Gabbana** iz trgovine **Baldini**  
• Torbica (23.590 tolarjev) **Max & Co.** iz trgovine **Max & Co.**  
• Uspetna torbica (55.000 tolarjev) **Vicari** iz trgovine **Stiefelking**

Barve in lesketanje

• Pas (26.700 tolarjev) iz trgovine **Vam**  
• Uspetni pas (20.750 tolarjev) **D&G** iz trgovine **B**  
• Pas iz kamnov **Swarowski** (44.000 tolarjev) iz trgovine **Baldini**  
• Pas (4500 tolarjev) iz trgovine **Sportline 42**

• Kopalka (21.890 tolarjev) **L&A Jo** iz trgovine **Corner**  
• Kopalka (36.990 tolarjev) **Versus** iz trgovine **Corner**  
• Kopalka (17.890 tolarjev) **Versace Jeans Couture** iz trgovine **Sportline 42**  
• Kopalka (32.800 tolarjev) **Doice & Gabbana** iz trgovine **Vam**

Morski sadeži na stopalih

• Nalika (113.000 tolarjev) **Doice & Gabbana** iz trgovine **Vam**  
• Nalika (168.800 tolarjev) **Roberto Cavalli** iz trgovine **Vam**  
• Nalika (168.000 tolarjev) **Baldini** iz trgovine **Baldini**  
• Sandali (29.900 tolarjev) **Beverly Feldman** iz trgovine **Stiefelking**

72

Covert advertisements  
in reports; *Modna*  
*Jana*, July-August  
2001.

<sup>34</sup> Hybrid advertising is a term denoting a special form in which advertising material blends with the editorial content to form new, flexible and compound forms of market communication.

35 Watson, J. & Hill, A. *A Dictionary of Communication and Media Studies*, London, ny: Arnold, 1997, p. 21.

cultural messages using various established journalistic formats. For example, the summer issue (*Modna Jana* July-August 2001): fashion news<sup>36</sup>, big interview (questions and answers also touch upon fashion topics);<sup>37</sup> culture – recommendations for books, CDs, movies and other events; in the Fashion section, engineered fashion pages, fashion trends and participating brand names (who and where);<sup>38</sup> reports on fashion shows;<sup>39</sup> announcements of fashion news;<sup>40</sup> a shopping report entitled “*Famous Slovenian women in action: real supermarket shopping*” and credits listed in the frame;<sup>41</sup> a social bulletin occasionally listing famous brands worn by people from the world of entertainment or citing famous personalities’ statements about specific products or brands which they use; a column entitled “*Shopping for her/him*”; a beauty column<sup>42</sup> which presents the latest products on the market; a visit to a culinary center with a description of the dishes<sup>43</sup>, and so on. The last example is very illustrative of covert advertising masked as journalism, which the majority of readers do not recognize as such. Using rhetorical means that arise from the intertwining of advertising and editorial context, the reports strike one as being intimate accounts while indirectly suggesting consumption. *Jana* features fewer reports of this type, and if it does, they are found in sections dealing with the subjects mentioned earlier – beauty, fashion, cooking, culture – or in certain regular columns that use established discursive mechanisms. In both cases the editorial material mixes with covert advertising through addressing readers using specific rhetorical means.<sup>44</sup>

Reports therefore belong to the group of typical rhetorical mechanisms which in most cases covertly promote individual products and services. This is especially characteris-

36 For example, Gucci’s oversized glasses, Diesel jeans, MiuMiu sandals, *Jana*, July-August 2001, p. 6.

37 For example, Roberto Cavalli, *Modna Jana*, July-August 2001, p. 8.

38 For example, a caption under an engineered studio photograph “*Lisca d.d – modna oblačila Sevnica, Prešernova 4 – the swim suit made for the show “The Best Dressed”, bracelets: Romi Bukovec, helmet and boots: trgovina s konjeniško opremo Equus*”. *Modna Jana*, July-August 2001.

39 For example, the column *Priporočamo: počitniška moda* (Recommended : vacation fashion). In an article with plenty of graphic material the author describes fashion trends as announced by famous fashion designers, for example “*Treat yourself to a trendy look. Exaggerate with gold, accessories and colors. Tanned skin can take it all. (Roberto Cavalli)*”. *Modna Jana*, July-August 2001.

40 For example, in the column *Nakupovalni vodnik: počitniška moda, sončna očala* (Shopping guide: vacation fashion, sun glasses).

41 Credits: “*Hipermarket Mercator, Center Šiška, Cesta ljubljanskih brigad 33, Ljubljana.*”

42 For example, *Obvestili so nas* (Our sources say).

43 For example, *Poletno razvajanje v dvorcu Zemono* (Summer indulgences at the Zemono mansion).

tic of special-interest magazines such as *Modna Jana*, in which the greatest part of the editorial matter consists of reports on news presented at fashion shows, then engineered fashion stories, reports on social gatherings etc. The language used in reports relies on various rhetorical means which may allude indirectly, i.e. covertly to consumerism. This creates the impression of "good will," since the messages ostensibly inform women of the latest fashion trends, choices of famous people, latest products on the market, possible special dishes, etc. Of course, in all women's magazines (including *Jana*, which is targeted at a wider readership) these reports use discursive editorial and journalistic forms which are skillfully combined with advertising. In such cases, as a rule, they serve the function of covert advertising.

conclusion: women readers – the best consumers

The continuity of covert advertising is most obvious precisely in women's magazines, which have been evolving from a general type of magazine directed at a varied readership to specialized media for a select, narrow circle of readers. Regardless of the type, all women's magazines sustain one common and most representative category which addresses all groups of women readers: care for the self communicated through fashion and beauty content. It is precisely this thematic field that is most closely linked to advertising in these magazines, meaning that it is exposed to research concerned with covert advertising. J. Berger says that "*women are usually treated as subject and objects that survey their own femininity through modern consumption*"<sup>45</sup>. In our age of modern – consumer – society every medium features advertising materials which, along with the editorial content, steer women towards adopting

<sup>44</sup> For example, the column *Muze lepih umetnosti* (Muses of the beaux arts) usually carries short summaries of new books and brief reflections on cultural shows that "are worth seeing": the fashion session *Escadini modni asi* (*Escada's fashion stars*) uses characteristic rhetoric "At its spectacular fashion show Escada was the first to present its ... to the seven hundred invited guests ... the climax of the evening was an extravagant red dress ..." (*Jana*, 24 December, 2001). The regular column *Moda* (*Fashion*) is mainly dedicated to fashion trends, which a priori suggest consumer behavior and occasionally contain covert ads (e.g., the editors select a specific brand). In the end pages of the magazine are columns dealing with health, beauty, cooking, etc. usually with covert ads for cosmetics, cookbooks, food etc. The last page features a regular column *Visoke pete* (*High heels*), also with covert ads inserted between pictures of famous personalities, in the form of descriptions of what the featured people wear and recommend, and especially in the form of detailed descriptions of what was on the menu and who was the host.

<sup>45</sup> Berger, J. *Ways of Seeing*, London and Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972, p. 63.

consumer behavior. The texts lead us to adopt fast and effective lifestyles supported by quality purchases of certain products and services. The ideal image of a woman (already visible on the front cover), promises that any woman can achieve this look if she decides to buy the product advertised.<sup>46</sup> According to some statistical data, women do as much as 80% of the total family shopping, so most advertisements are directed at women.

In line with this, in reading advice columns women readers look for the “formula to improve the quality of everyday life”. Information or rather covert advertising and direct consumption of entertainment products creates the “society of the spectacle” as Baudrillard named it, whose essence is a commodity. In the world of commodities everything takes place within the “register of offer and demand”.<sup>47</sup> This also applies to editorial matter containing advice on how to achieve success and happiness in all areas of life by using covertly advertised products and services.<sup>48</sup>

The function of covert advertising is therefore clear: (co)shaping of consumer’s needs and visions. In women’s magazines this assumes the form of shaping women readers as consumers. Since woman belongs to the aesthetic gender, she is attractive, or rather, she has to take care that she appear attractive. By providing advice, suggestions and finally, by directly selling specific products and services, women’s magazines help women fulfill this task of permanent self-construction which implies care of one’s looks, emotional state, and an appropriate lifestyle.

The main goal of covert advertising is therefore clear – consumption. Women’s magazines here assume the role of a shopping window. This is the type of sales that is mediated through themes that play on “human anxieties”<sup>49</sup> and frustrations. Using specific rhetoric they influence the decisions made by women: “*your colleagues at work observe you, trim your nails with new Revlon... trim appearance is your mirror – use Nivea ... of course you are not going on a*

46 Berger in McCracken, E. *Decoding Women’s Magazines*, Macmillan Press, 1993, p. 36.

47 Baudrillard, J. *The Consumer Society*, London, New York: Routledge, 1988, p. 112.

48 For example, “*Nove jesenske pričeske (New hairstyles for the autumn)* (in addition to advice on hairstyles, there is an ad for Keune products; *Dišite modro ali rdeče? (Do you smell blue or red?)* (giving names of the latest fragrances on the market in the form *Blue, we recommend Lancome Oxygene, Davidoff cool water*), *Viski pod drobnogledom (Whiskey through the magnifying glass)* (a book recommendation), *Gobje jedi za jesenske dni (Mushroom dishes for autumn days)* (in addition to recipes there is an ad for *Zvijezda mayonnaise*) ...” (*Jana*, 18 September 2001).

49 McCracken, Ellen. *Decoding Women’s Magazines*, Polity Press, p. 67.



*sailing tour in the same clothes in which you will indulge in the exploration of a desert – Lisca has a solution...*<sup>50</sup>

In presenting the behavior of modern men/women, C. Campbell uses the Veblen-Simmel model of “modern consumption”<sup>51</sup> in which fashion and consumption play key roles in organizing everyday life. Consumption is a type of behavior through which a “status war” between the working and elite classes is established. One possible expression of achieved status is reading women’s magazines through which a profile of a stereotypical woman is created and articulated. This stereotypical woman is a housewife and mother, on the one hand, and an enterprising and educated professional, career woman on the other. Both are consumers of advertised products. For example, if a woman is focused on consuming cheap and mass produced household products, she is assumed to belong to the working class. If she mainly consumes prestigious products (ranging from the higher-class brands of clothes and cosmetics to expensive furniture), it is assumed that she is a member of the higher, elite class.<sup>52</sup>

Primary and secondary meanings construct the stereotypical image of femininity that is most obviously idealized precisely through advertising mechanisms. “*Advertisements serve as mirrors for idealizing women appearance and for visualising the fantasies of everyday life*”<sup>53</sup> says J. Berger. Also J. Baudrillard understands modern advertising in a similar way, as a meaningful labeling of consumer products

50 For example, a text in the column *Dosje: Special skincare* in *Modna Jana*: “*Chicken soup mask for the soul ...*” (*Modna Jana*, November 2001); in this article the author advises how to attain a healthy and trim appearance using various cosmetic products.

51 Campbell, C. in *Consuming Technologies* (ed. E.Hirsch&R.Silverstone). Routledge, 1992, p. 48.

52 McCracken, E. *Decoding Women's Magazines*, Macmillan Press, 1993, p. 135 and p. 196. For example, if the readers of *Jana* are mainly working and middle class women, supposedly with a secondary school education and only rarely with a university or college education, then they spend mostly on status symbols that match their low income (if they have any income, e.g. workers' wages, pensions); these include cheaper clothes, cheap household items and the like. In contrast, the readers of *Modna Jana* are generally assumed to have a university education, meaning that they can spend more on status symbols because of their higher income (managers, professors, doctors, businessmen); they buy expensive clothes, jewellery, makeup, perfumes, fashion accessories, cars, travels etc.

53 Berger, J. *Ways of Seeing*, London and Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972, p. 132.

as lifestyles.<sup>54</sup> The media co-fashion the needs, visions and behavior of every consumer. While “traditional” women’s magazines of the general type (e.g. *Jana*) appeal to a wider range of less demanding readers, who buy cheaper and more accessible products and services positioned lower in the status hierarchy, the more demanding readership of specialized magazines such as *Modna Jana* is composed of potential consumers of more prestigious, more expensive, and less easily accessible products and services. The advertisers follow suit, so they appear in both types of media with differently articulated interests. Of course we must not overlook the intertwining of editorial and advertising materials. Advertisements are not always in harmony with the assumed buying power and habits of potential readers, but they are presented as fantasies full of unattainable ideals in which women find pleasure. It is when women assume the role of mirrors and by explaining how “life could be” they attempt to gradually shape the consumer. In most cases this is effected through advice to use covertly advertised products, even though the majority of readers/potential consumers cannot afford to buy the products advertised.<sup>55</sup> The suggested elements of a quality life, therefore, remain an illusion for these readers, with the only way to fulfill these illusions being the reading of women’s magazines and identification with their advertorials.

<sup>54</sup> Advertising has always reflected and co-shaped changing social relations, and has therefore changed itself over time. At the beginning of the 20th century an ad answered the question “What does this product offer to me?”; in the 1930s the ads began to present non-practical aspects of products, while motives for shopping were linked to the pleasures that could be attained by buying a product; in the 1980s ads began to promote consumption as a method of attaining a fantasy life. And finally, modern, hybrid advertising mainly tends to infringe on the editorial content, whence it covertly appeals to potential buyers, while the products thus advertised are presented as part of a lifestyle.

<sup>55</sup> For example, *Jana*’s readers can hardly afford to buy prestigious products in the higher price class. Disregarding this, years ago the magazine launched a series of four articles entitled *Luksuz v Ljubljani* (*Luxury in Ljubljana*) (*Jana*, July 2000), that presented Escada, Damiani, Fendi, Cerruti, Baldinini, Lancome and Max Mara brands. These articles did not appear to be indirectly selling products, but were rather framed as a kind of a projection of selected fantasy items.

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## FASHION PRESENTATION IN WOMEN'S MAGAZINES

### introduction

Women's magazines are products of a consumption-ridden mass culture. In addition to presenting the "concept" of a "women's world", they also direct and generate wishes. Given that in some cases as much as 90% of women's magazines are dedicated to advertising, and that many editorial items have an advertising ring to them (either intentionally or unintentionally), we could say that these magazines address women primarily in their role of consumers – ones who, guided by dominant social standards (the myths of beauty and femininity), will take notice of "advice" in the media and will buy recommended products.

As Breda Luthar<sup>1</sup> writes, consumption has shifted from "consuming from need" to "consuming from desire". Purchased goods do not reflect needs but life orientations. By purchasing products people stage self-performances which have the value of experience. Creation of a lifestyle which primarily rests on image rather than content is necessary in order to function and find one's place in modern society.

Women's magazines are a kind of guidebook in shaping one's lifestyle. They inform and articulate marketing interests and are a fusion of economic and cultural tendencies; they reflect social and cultural changes and needs which shape and sustain the identities (the socially constructed 'self'), and the subjectivities (self-perception and self-thematization) of women. Therefore women's magazines reflect and reproduce "women's spheres" or in other words, that which we understand as being feminine.

Fashion co-creates lifestyles so this study is concentrated on the presentation of fashion in selected Slovenian magazines published throughout 2001. These include *Naša žena* (Our woman), *Jana*, *Ona* (She), *Glamur*, *Viva* and *Smrklja* (Young Miss). Our interest centers on the various ways of addressing the readers, the semantic structure of the texts and the style of the narrative. Our analysis comprises texts found in fashion sections (Fashion *Viva*, *Glamur*, *Jana*, *Ona* Styling/*Ona*, Fashion Trends/*Naša žena*) and those which contain the features of fashion columns (e.g. *Fashion Mir-*

<sup>1</sup> Luthar, B., *Poetika in politika tabloidne kulture* (Poetics and Politics of the tabloid culture). Ljubljana: Znanstveno in publicistično središče, 1998, p. 70

ror/Jana, Not just for young people/*Naša žena*). It does not deal with advertisements for specific brands or shops in the fashion sections (e.g. a Prize contest in *Naša žena*, Fashion News in *Jana*). Another disputable feature on which we concentrate is the presentation of fashion through the description of fashion events. Since in these texts the description of the event plays a secondary role, with the stress being placed on fashion information, we decided to include these items in the analysis. When analyzing photographs we concentrated primarily on standardization and narration.

### fashion communication

Fashion columns are an inevitable part of all women's magazines and are among the more important vehicles for creating the self-image through which we communicate with the environment.

As Alison Lurie<sup>2</sup> argues, clothes are a language, a non-verbal means of communication, while dressing itself is a display of our intimate thoughts. In this way, every individual has his/her own manner of "speech" through which he/she communicates his/her ethical and political beliefs, lifestyle, national identity, economic and social status, in short, everything that makes up a personality and locates an individual in society. Fashion is space and time specific; it reflects economic changes and is determined by gender and age. Clothes change under the influence of fashion (trends, a need to express political or social changes) and of changing habits (the practical aspect of clothing).

According to Baudrillard<sup>3</sup>, fashion is an innovation in signs. It is a sign of status, creativity, the contemporary time, season, trend, and novelty. On the other hand, as Walter Benjamin<sup>4</sup> points out, fashion trends themselves do not change. In the modern age fashion stands for constant repetition of things while it relies on social oblivion. In this process, fashion trends are not restricted, on the contrary, they are formed within the mainstream culture as well as sub-cultures, or still better, they arise from the combination and circulation of these two spheres. Creators

<sup>2</sup> Lurie, A., *The Language of Clothes*. London: Bloomsbury, 1981.

<sup>3</sup> In Jobling, P., *Fashion Spreads: Fashion Photography since 1980*. London: Routledge, 1999, p. 83.

<sup>4</sup> In Arnold, R., *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety: Image and Morality in 20th Century*. Oxford, New York: Berg, 2001, p.56. MacRobbie, A., *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*. London: Routledge, 1995, p. 113.

borrow ideas from all social and cultural circles and historical periods and adapt them, while trying to make the impression of being unique and original.

### typography of fashion pages

The image of women's magazines mainly depends on visual components. The characteristics that Breda Luthar<sup>5</sup> describes as being typical of popular journalism, are typical of fashion pages as well. Colorful boldface headlines extend across several columns or several pages and are followed (if at all) by highlighted introductions. The layout is not linear but the text is organized in columns and in many cases it appears along the edge of a page. Shorter texts, serving as captions, are placed next to photographic material. If a fashion page contains both elements, texts and photographs, the latter occupy the central position or are positioned nearer the top of the page, so that our attention is first captured by photographs and only then moves to the text. The image is accorded primary importance and the text comes after the image. The photograph is designed to catch the reader's eye and to generate the greatest possible number of ideas, representations and symbolic meanings within the shortest time possible.

In most cases, the length of actual information on fashion amounts to two pages, but since it is often enveloped in reports on fashion events and cosmetic advice columns (especially fashion accessories), it may be either dispersed across the entire magazine or condensed into a thematic block.

### textual analysis

#### *Layout characteristics of written presentations*

By and large it is possible to say that fashion pages do not much differ in terms of design. The structure of the text is composed of the "main" or "introductory part" and accompanying short commentaries scattered around the graphic material. The main text is usually dedicated to the description of general trends and fashion dictates, while shorter texts refer to visual images of fashionable clothes. Column headlines are heavily highlighted. Various typographic styles and colors blend in columns, some of them

5 Luthar, *ibid.* pp. 27-35.

with shorter introductory sections printed in boldface to attract the view and entice viewers to read on. Through this fragmented typography they imitate the liveliness of real-life conversation.

### *The style of fashion texts*

Fashion texts use the techniques of popular journalism in which information and facts are presented in such a way as to imitate a real-life conversation, implicit dialogues and pleasant chats. As Breda Luthar<sup>6</sup> concludes, news is the “product of journalistic institutionalized routine”, where the most important role is played by the “nature of a medium and institutionalized discourse of the media company.” Popular journalism exploits the consensus on unity (it addresses readers as a uniform group of people, e.g. we, our society and so on), through which it obscures social differences between various social groups and maps of meaning. This apparent consensus is based on the use of “common sense” and hegemonic ideology which determine what a common sense or natural look in a certain situation actually means. In other words, every magazine establishes a specific manner of addressing its assumed readers, and in so doing it makes use of their frames of reference, understanding, behavior and manner of speech. Using the text the magazine thus *“establishes a community through joint, more or less uniform experience and consensus on issues that are natural, that transcend changes that take place over time and are culturally and socially universal”*<sup>7</sup>. The illusion of a real-life conversation is created through the graphic image of a magazine, through the conversational style of writing (an impression of informality), specific vocabulary (impression of familiarity, directness), syntax and morphology (short and incomplete sentences), temporal and spatial marking of the texts, and modality (expressing objectivity which draws attention to a person behind the text).<sup>8</sup>

Women's magazines make use of all these tools. The text usually starts in a modal tone and with clear indications of space and time. By using modality (*“we embarked on a shopping tour to ... especially for you”*, *“in our editorial office”*), they draw attention to the magazine itself and its role in relation to the readership. Space and time are mainly

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 148.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 153.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 160.

mentioned in relation to season-specific clothes (e.g. “coats for this winter”), or when reporting a certain event to specify when and where the event took place (e.g. “Max Mara on the Ljubljana catwalk”, “in the marvelous atmosphere of Andor palace”). Conversational language and vocabulary permeate the entire text. A conspicuous use of young people’s slang is more frequently found on fashion pages for young people (e.g. “Hhmm, I’m getting curious, dear girlzz, what colors are your favorites for lying in the sun”). The purpose is to approach young readers, establish colloquial closeness and hence appear more agreeable.

Informality, a melodramatic effect and the atmosphere of a conversation are further created through the intermingling of fashion news and various social activities and personal feelings. Colors are frequently presented in such a way that readers associate them with various moods, environments or seasons of the year; this is achieved primarily by using a number of adjectives which give the text a “poetical and romantic touch” and create an atmosphere of narration. They play the role of a kind of filter, or a filler. Short, punchy sentences contribute to the atmosphere of “conversation”; they can be viewed as dynamic dialogue or as the narrator’s stream of thought (“So...once again”, “Make the best of the winter time!”, “Sun glasses? A must!”). The texts use personal confessions and theatrical presentation of the author’s experience (e.g. “...loaded with shopping bags ... when something orange in the Toko’s shop window caught my eye”), or they relate personal opinion (e.g. “...shopping for a new swimsuit is one of the biggest and the worst nightmares”) which sounds like a general statement, or like something experienced by all readers. This personal, conversational style of writing creates an impression that the speaker is confessing personal thoughts to the reader. It strikes one as being a(n) (intimate) friendly dialogue between the magazine and the imagined reader, which maintains the illusion of the existence of “that reader” for whom the text has been written and who is assumed to understand it.

Djurdja Milovanović<sup>9</sup> says that the “language of fashion is artificial, as it most frequently restricts itself to descriptions and practical representations of fashion and fashion trends, while neglecting the social circumstances in which fashion comes to life”.

<sup>9</sup> In Legan, J., *Moda v množičnih medijih. Diplomaska naloga (Fashion in the mass media, a diploma paper)*. Ljubljana: fđv, 2000, p. 75.



### Content characteristics

Clothes, colors and patterns are loaded with associations that create specific moods. Clothes are always assigned positive moods whose purpose is to arouse in readers pleasant feelings and through these the desire to possess a product (e.g. *"Headwear creates a sense of boldness and self-confidence"*, *"... accessories made from the softest leather, wool and furs. They not only keep you warm, they are also extremely feminine, sensual and alluring."*). Clothes therefore symbolize individual emotional states matching the environment in which these clothes are worn.

In many examples, fashion features are combined with the kind of advice which might as well be the "holy commandments" telling us what is suitable. Certain cuts agree with certain types of body. What we are dealing with here is educating readers how to camouflage "the flaws" of the body. Talk on fashion is hence often linked to physical "irregularities". Cellulite, excessive kilograms, problematic skin and other traumas of the fetishized and objectified fragments of the woman's body always carry negative connotations; they are sources of frustration for the entire feminine gender, while women's magazines only stress them and sadistically expose them to view.

The text hence directs us to a photograph of a model with radiant face and firm buttocks. Clothes alone do not make us trendy. Before we can hope to be fashionable we must take care of that which is being concealed with the help of clothes, that is, the body. Fashion is very selective; in many cases, it is the body that must be adapted to fashion trends and to the overall fashionable appearance. It is not only fashion photographs that draw our attention to the desired overall appearance, but also the texts that complement them. As a matter of fact, the clothes as material objects, that is, the cut (style) of clothes, fabrics from which they are made (texture), and the feeling of the fabric or the image of the style are not much talked about, even though these are precisely the features that change and are re-shaped to create fashion.

If we concentrate on the informative and applicable aspect of texts and yield to words that in the widest sense of the word serve to fulfill these functions, it is the appearance of the fabric, primarily colors and patterns, that is most often mentioned. Colors and patterns have no functional value but are free floating elements; the descriptions

of these reckon with their “psychological” influence.

As we have already mentioned, colors blend with the real world. What we have in mind are primarily associations (feelings and images) aroused by specific colors. This effect is partly involved also in the mentioning of particular fabrics. They are either suggested (e.g. *soft*, *transparent*), or are referred to by names (e.g. *tweed*, *wool*, *fur*). The purpose of fabric specification is two-fold. On the one hand, by specifying a material one asserts the value of a clothing item, since some fabrics are more valued than others because of the treatment, processing and acquisition methods involved. This gives to a specific clothing item a stamp of value and turns it into a status symbol. On the other hand, it may highlight and stress the functionality of clothes (e.g. *cotton is a natural fiber, it breathes and is suitable in warm weather*) and their practical usability.

The magazines analyzed here are very sparing with words when it comes to descriptions of styles and cuts, with the terms used covering a broad range of meanings. Expressions such as “elegant sports look”, “functional”, “sports look” and “classic look” can be understood in many different ways. “Sports look”, for example, may imply a “casual” dress, men’s clothes or an outfit for recreation. Thus in this case magazines use language that is not restrictive and allows for personal interpretations.

We must also remember that different people variously interpret the term “style” i.e. everyone uses a personal interpretive code. Magazines are careful not to restrict us in this sense, so they leave the area of interpretation open. Descriptions of cuts (e.g. *wide*, *short*, *flared skirt*, *A-line skirts*) are rare; they are used only with special, unusual, explicit or completely new styles, so such description actually serves to draw attention to a dress and that “important detail”.

Information on fabrics, colors, patterns and styles, or rather, shapes enables the readers to form an objective visual and sensual image (even without photographs), meaning that it is essential in descriptive texts on fashion. Particularly good are descriptions of fashion trends in *Naša žena* and *Jana*. Their readers, unlike those of other magazines, are instructed that fabric is no less important than colors and patterns, because it determines the quality and usability, and so is the cut i.e. style, which presupposes the presence of a mood or purpose (in other magazines these elements are present to a smaller extent). In this case, women are assumed to be intelligent, curious, well-in-

formed persons who do not devote attention to their appearance exclusively but take care of the quality and of how they feel in specific clothes.

All magazines extensively suggest emotional states. For example, they suggest that certain clothes stimulate specific feelings (nonchalance, comfort, boldness, self-confidence), all of them positive, sought after and often desired in women (sexy, feminine).

## analysis of photographs

Presentation of fashion is certainly one of the ways to advertise products, either explicitly or covertly. In order to communicate the desired meaning, women's magazines bring together symbols and myths, just as fashion photographers do.

Fashion photography contains visual signs and is based on particular rules through which a specific language emerges. Usually, there is a specific social context or objects that mediate messages and create contexts into which a certain dress (object) and model (subject) are placed. Photographs present emotions and moods; they link the unattainable to the attainable and communicate desired images that relate fashion to the wider social environment. Therefore, fashion photographs, similar to advertisements, are compendiums of the styles desired by readers. This type of addressing and creating an image for the reader is necessary if a photograph is to achieve its desired effect. The product is thus attributed a personality (a subject portraying us) that is beautiful, self-confident and successful. A photograph that has succeeded in arousing the desire to possess a dress or image, or to identify with a model, has fulfilled its purpose.

Fashion photography is found on the front covers and inside magazines. It is used for advertising purposes, when presenting selected individuals or people from the world of entertainment, and in columns dealing with health, cosmetics and other subjects treated in women's magazines. So fashion photography is not just intended to present fashion attractions, news or consumer products, but it significantly influences the overall image of a medium.<sup>10</sup>

It is the photographic or other graphic material that is at the forefront of fashion presentations. Fashion photographs are overall presentations of fashionable clothes,

<sup>10</sup> Legan, *ibid.* pp. 82-88.

while “descriptive” fashion texts fragment them (description of the fabric, cut, patterns etc.) and usually position them in space and time. Photographs bring the object nearer to the readers, confirm the reality of clothes, fix them and therefore imprint them in the memory of readers. In the contemporary, rapidly changing fashion world, fashion photography is a medium capable of capturing a fleeting moment and making it eternal.<sup>11</sup>

### *Standardization of fashion photos*

Barthes<sup>12</sup> distinguishes three types of fashion photography: the objective, consistent type (a randomly chosen scene, an un-posed model); the romantic type (posing in specific contexts); and the caricatured, exaggerated type (a model does not appear natural). Various types of fashion photography serve to present various ways of viewing a model and of fashion perception.

The models – mainly women – shown on fashion photographs in women’s magazines are mainly just clothes dummies. The dress itself is at the forefront and should speak for itself. Clothes themselves are a stand-alone sign. That may be the reason why models are so expressionless. The purpose of traditional fashion shows is to present collections by specific fashion designers, or a specific label. When top models do appear at such shows, the purpose is to additionally stylize the clothes by lending fashionable bodies to them. The concept of using non-celebrity models undermines and defies the traditional concept of a fashionable body, which enables fashion creators to animate viewers beforehand.<sup>13</sup> Even though some designers have made attempts to reshape the fashion system, these fashion shows are intended primarily for people from the fashion industry and the media and they do not have any significant impact on the wider public.

Photographs usually do not betray the political or social content of certain non-conventional fashion magazines. Through them fashion designers express their viewpoints, beliefs or resistance. Fashionable clothes are in such cases a designer’s statements; the magazine is its creator’s monologue, whereby the (atypical) space itself is a part of

11 Sontag, S., *O fotografiji*. Ljubljana: Študentska založba, 2001.

12 In Legan, *ibid*, p. 85.

13 Khan, N., *Catwalk Politics*. V Bruzzi, S., *Fashion Culture: Theories Exploration and Analysis*. London, New York: Routledge, 2000, pp. 114-127.

the message. So it often happens that a fashion show conceptually broadens the area of fashion and turns it into a happening or a spectacle.

Models featured in photographs made for advertising purposes (with logotype or other recognizable sign), become a part of the message. In this case we are talking of the presentation of a specific label. A specific fashion label introduces a specific style whereby the selected model plays a representative and recognizable role. A model is a person who assures that we will become like her/him, that we will acquire all the attractive physical and personal traits he/she radiates, if we come into possession of the presented product. Models placed in concrete contexts have a similar function. Their environment refers to the functional aspect of the clothes presented and their practical use. Leisure clothes are shown in natural settings, and suits in urban or office environments. Body language and facial gestures indicate recognizable personalities suitable for that environment or style. The properties of the clothes, the person and the environment, complement and define one another. This establishes and sustains certain norms and dress codes – what is suitable for one or the other situation or environment and what is expected from us.

Elliot Smedley<sup>14</sup> draws attention to an interesting trait of the 1980s when models were captured in motion. Motion suggests life, playfulness, liberation, dynamism. We could not trace anything like that in the magazines analyzed. Models depicted in a simulated common environment, indeed one that never departs from the conventional idea of beauty and the image of woman, now mainly remain motionless or sit. They are like sculptures, petrified, listless, alienated and untouchable.

The presentation of fashion using celebrities does not belong to the same type of fashion presentation as has been so far treated. In this case, a model is not a model but a person recognized by readers for his/her profession or presence in other media. These are usually people from the world of movies, theater, television or entertainment. They either acquire fashionable character through their popularity or a magazine ascribes it to them. The clothes worn by such a person are a matter of random choice and they express his/her personal taste. This is a coming together of the fashion and celebrity systems which take advantage of

<sup>14</sup> Smedley, E., *Escaping to Reality: Fashion Photography in the 1990's*. Ibid. pp. 143-156.

one another. In such a case, a women's magazine attributes to the clothes worn by a famous personality the meaning of the fashionable. The message communicated by such a photo is a confirmation that a person wears fashionable clothes so that the reader may identify with that person seen as an idol and consequently adopt his/her style of dress.

Certain magazines (e.g. *Smrklja*), combine photos of separate clothing items and of the model. Fashionable items pictured lying around create the same effect as a catalogue, a rack in a shop, or a shop window. A model is then added to enhance mental representation, so the initial objective presentation without connotations is destroyed and the clothes are associated with a figure and a voice. As expected, *Smrklja* employs young models, who are its readers' peers. Despite differences between generations, the world of fashion more or less obliterates them. Even fashion for teenagers emphasizes and reveals the seductive parts of the body, so women can learn from their earliest youth how to become attractive and visually pleasing, and how much to slim or round their bodies.

#### *Content deviations or visual narration*

In the presentation of fashion, the image of woman and femininity are expressed as the functionality of clothes and the environment. Women assume typical roles. They are pictured in a cold office environment (at the office desk or computer) or in urban or natural environments. The first mentioned environment is cold, formal and pure, connoting ambition, a business attitude and independence. The second is associated with warmth, relaxation, and greenery. A woman depicted in a natural setting such as a garden, seaside, or a forest, obtains a romantic overtone of dreaminess and calm; on another occasion, she may acquire "natural", beastly traits, may become a fierce Amazonian woman who defends her territory, or a tame cat looking for shelter. Here typically feminine qualities are evoked: woman as a mother with children or as a romantic companion to a male partner. This delineates the private and the public spheres in which women assume everyday positions and matching dress codes and behavioral patterns.

The more the women's body is revealed or stressed by means of clothes, the more seductive are models' gazes and postures. The self-infatuated woman feels strong, sexy and attractive, and the woman reader assumes the male view.

Through their facial gestures models emanate self-control, self-confidence and satisfaction. Serious faces express resolution and commitment to goals. In other words, they express the idea of modern femininity and modern woman. They are satisfied because they have found success in their organized, ambitious, autonomous and independent lives, while at the same time they have fashioned their behavior and visual appearance in such a way that they fulfill hidden male desires.

Models mainly stare straight at the reader, a gaze which creates a feeling of observing oneself in the mirror.<sup>15</sup> This is the concept of identification with the idealized mirror image as developed by Lacan. The woman's ego is satisfied by looking at a woman's image, because it represents her ideal ego which she attempts to approach and with which she tries to identify. This image is a woman's image in a mirror: it is a better and more beautiful image that enables a positive experience of one's self and one's body. Once again, the model and the viewer may exchange places. The direction of the gaze used as a communicational and emotional tool, serves to communicate a feeling. Feminist film theory<sup>16</sup>, which, among other things, deals with the function of the gaze on a movie screen, can be applied to fashion photography. Woman functions as an erotic object in the eyes of both external viewers and people in the movie (photo). She is passive and observed, created for the male's voyeur's view<sup>17</sup> which viewers adopt themselves. Woman in a fashion photo functions in the same way.

Joint presentation of men's and women's fashion is rare. However, articles combining men's and children's fashion are more frequent. The man is typically a bachelor, sometimes he looks a bit vulnerable or sensitive, but he is mainly self-indulgent, wears a satisfied smile and adopts a relaxed posture. The question that arises is why men's fashion is presented in women's magazines. We cannot but conclude that women's magazines impose additional tasks on women. Women's task is to keep up with the trends in men's fashion

15 Stone, R., A., *Semiotic Analysis of Four Designer Clothing Advertisements*, <<http://www.aber.ac.uk/~ednwww/Undgrad/ed30620/rbs/701.html> (6 August 2000)

16 Mulvey, L., *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. V *The Sexual Subject: a Screen Reader in Sexuality*. London, New York: Screen, 1992.

17 This is a metaphoric concept in film theory and the main mechanism of film control aimed at the scopophilia instinct. As Mulvey says, there are three different male looks associated with the cinema: that of the camera (directed by a man) which sees a woman as an object; that of the man in the movie; and the look of the audience who, owing to the manner of shooting, voyeuristically identify with the camera i.e., assume the actor's male view from within a movie.

and to dress their partners (and children) according to fashion dictates. If women did not take care of men's fashionable appearance, men would not be fashionable. The presentation of children's fashion points to the established reasoning that the mother is one who takes care of children. Fashion for children cannot be found in any men's magazine.

The controversial politics of the body in the world of fashion is conspicuous. The desired body is androgynous, it is a female body without female curves, a pre-puberty body, one reminiscent of an undeveloped boy's body. It seems that this is aimed at obliterating gender divisions and at concealing women's maternal and reproductive roles. On the other hand, a fresh and healthy body presupposes a healthy diet, self-denial and limited participation at savory dinners, meaning less social life and more obsessive devotion to sports activities, firm will and discipline. All of this brings both frustration and depression. The representation of the body as an object that must be decorated or exposed, made attractive or sexy, encourages the use of cosmetic surgery, the purchasing of fashionable clothes, makeup, fashion accessories and so on. This means that the body rather than the person, wears clothes, shows them off, shapes and imbues them with meaning.

These are the beauty and body standards that produce ideals and generate demands that affect the entire society and "infect" every individual. At the same time, this generates discrimination against and rejection of individuals who do not satisfy these criteria. The world of fashion adopts a similar attitude towards non-whites. Fashion models are predominantly white, while non-whites are presented as being exotic.

conclusion: a portrait of the implicated  
reader of fashion magazines

The assumed reader of women's magazines and their fashion pages is a successful (business) smart woman from an urban environment. She does not lack money, so she can afford the top of the line. She is well-informed about foreign and domestic fashion labels. She is always suitably dressed for both work and leisure time. She also takes care that her children and partner are dressed fashionably. She chooses clothes that match her figure, while paying less attention to the quality of the fabric; she skillfully conceals physical imperfections and stresses and reveals attractively



shaped parts of her body. She is aware that a specific dress can create for her a feeling of freedom, self-confidence, tenderness, and warmth. These are the feelings that she wants to experience and embody. She is an incorrigible spender, for which she cannot be blamed, since she earns her own money and has the right to spend it as she wishes.

The presentation of fashion supports the socially established idealized image of woman, which our supposed reader is trained to detect. Her curiosity and interest are first encouraged through typography. Photographs then conjure up the possibilities of transforming the self and stimulate desire and lust for consumption, while the text, by using the seductive “illusionary” properties of clothes, convinces her to make a good investment that will enable her to experience the feelings she has always wanted to experience. An aestheticized and ostensibly discreet “advice” conceals social criteria that one should follow, while at the same time they create constraints and burden life.

