

However, in general the book appears to be well worth reading for a number of groups. Those who are in marketing or advertising will find more than enough evidence of the "problem" (for those who are still doubters), along with evidence of the effects of stereotyped and sexist advertising (that it is "harmful to our society...also harmful to advertising practice," p. 198). As well, they will find useful suggested changes which can be implemented without compromising advertising "effectiveness."

Those of us who are researchers will find the chapter on the role of research filled with ideas for needed research, and will find the 23 page bibliography, probably the most comprehensive available, to be extremely useful.

Those of us who are feminist activists will find two aspects of the book particularly useful: (1) the overwhelming documentation of "the problem" and its effects will provide all the evidence we could possibly need, and (2) the section on resistance to change which outlines the industry defenses, will help clarify what we're up against and how to counter the typical (false) arguments: advertising is a mirror of society, sexism sells, research does not indicate a problem, and protestors are not typical people.

The book is not radical and will certainly not please everyone. It is, however, well written, comprehensive and fair. As such, it is valuable and worthwhile.

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Women's Pictures; Feminism and Cinema Annette Kuhn. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul (Toronto: Oxford University Press), 1982. Pp. 226.; **Forever Feminine; Women's Magazines and the Cult of Femininity.** Marjorie Ferguson. London: Heineman (The Book Society of Canada, Ltd.), 1983. Pp. 256; **The Widening Sphere;**

Women in Canada, 1870-1940. Jean L'Espérance. Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services SA2-136/1982, 1982. Pp. 69. (Text in English and French)

Three excellent new books, two imported and the third a catalogue of the exhibition at the Public Archives in Ottawa, analyze the cultural and ideological content of "womanhood" in Europe and North America. While there are a number of previous attempts to chart women in film and in women's magazines, Kuhn's *Women's Pictures* and Ferguson's *Forever Feminine* are unique in that they provide us with a viable theoretical approach for the study of cultural artifacts. The writers agree furthermore that such an approach must combine insights gained from content analysis with information about production procedures, organizational setting and the economic viability of films and magazines. Both books are useful as texts in a variety of Women's Studies courses.

Annette Kuhn's *Women's Pictures: Feminism and the Cinema* is the most ambitious of the three books in that it scrutinizes feminist film studies as part of a larger body of work: feminist theory. The book develops a constructivist approach to using selected Marxist insights to fashion, a broad based "oppositional" feminist approach to cultural signification. Kuhn notes: "My basic objective in dealing with both feminist film theory and feminist film production, is to suggest some way in which the two are interconnected, either explicitly in their politics, or implicitly in the kinds of thinking that underlie them" (Preface X). The book is divided into four parts with the first surveying general writing in film theory and the second developing a feminist theory of film criticism and practice based on a gender specific "oppositional" approach to creating as well as reading film texts. Part III contains a historical account of feminist film theory as it has developed over the past ten years plus criticisms and suggestions based on a case study of two pornographic films: *L'amour violé* and

Dressed to Kill; part IV surveys feminist film production, and raises questions about relationships between films, filmmakers and audiences; the kinds of pleasures women may derive from watching films; and the nature and implications of representations of women constructed in different types of cinema. The book has an excellent and wide-ranging bibliography, is carefully written and though it deals with complex arguments, is a pleasure to read. It is particularly useful as a theory text for courses on women and culture.

Marjorie Ferguson's *Forever Feminine* uses a sociological approach to inquire into the social role of a specific medium, women's magazines. Like Robert Park, she views magazines as a social institution which has historical roots and is subject to change. The product purveyed by these media is more than mere entertainment, it is a cult of "femininity." Cults according to Durkheim (1976), comprise a set of practices and beliefs and can thus change and adapt over time. Ferguson analyses the organization and change of women's magazines in seven chapters. These cover the evolution of the women's periodical press in Britain; the most repeated and read messages of the cult, 1949-1974, changes in the message between 1970-1980; working profiles of the editors; organizational processes shaping the message, as well as readership and agenda-setting for audiences. Ferguson notes "the oracles that carry the messages sacred to the cult of femininity are women's magazines; the high priestesses who select and shape the cult's interdictions and benedictions are women's magazine editors; the rites, rituals, sacrifices and oblations that they exhort, are to be performed periodically by the cult's adherents. All pay homage to the cult's totem—the totem of woman herself" (p. 5). This book also contains an excellent bibliography of writings on women's periodicals in Great Britain and North America. There are, furthermore, tables of data on consumption patterns and readership which are useful for comparison. The book is relevant as a

model for research in women's and media studies courses.

The Widening Sphere evolved out of a 1979 idea of Maureen O'Neill, co-ordinator of the Office of the Status of Women, to create a documentary history of Canadian women between 1870 and 1940. The English and French exhibition catalogue notes: "In 1979 an article entitled 'The New Ideal of Womanhood' appeared in Rose Belford's *Canadian Monthly and National Review*. In it Agnes Marcher, under the pseudonym 'Fidelis,' discussed the role of education in forming the Canadian woman of the future. She believed that the clinging vine type, so long the ideal of Western society, had been superceded by a new woman, a woman who wished to make a contribution to Canadian society equal to that of men" (p. 1). The documentation includes letters from immigrant pauper girls and women journalists, wedding books and diaries, magazine articles, party documents, parliamentary discussions, as well as many photographs from the period. The first follows the life cycle of a woman who is born in 1870, passes her childhood and adolescence in the 1870's and 80's, and enters adult life in the year 1890. The second covers 1890 to 1920 and presents material documenting the public and private life of a generation of women who organized and fought for the vote, and lived to find themselves finally declared to be legal persons in 1929, when Judge Emily Murphy and her four associates from Alberta were able to prove that women are eligible for appointment to the Canadian Senate. The final section deals with the depression and pre-World War II period, between 1920 to 1940. Each of these sections is preceded by a general introduction, placing the documentation and the pictures into historical context. These introductions are very informative and easy to read and thus lend themselves as background material for women's history classes or as Canadian period studies for more general women's courses.

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American Beauty. Lois Banner. *New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983. Pp. 369.*

“The pursuit of personal beauty has always been a central concern of American women.” In fact, it was as central to the separate culture on nineteenth-century women as domestic chores or the rituals of childbirth. It transcended class and racial barriers, yet of all the elements of women’s culture, it has proven “the most divisive and, ultimately the most oppressive.” So argues Lois Banner in this major new work of feminist historical scholarship.

Banner charts the history of American fashions of face and figure between 1800 and 1921 and the concurrent growth of what she calls the “commercial beauty culture,” purveyed by dressmakers and designers, department store owners, hairdressers and cosmeticians. In doing so, she successfully challenges prevailing sociological interpretations based on Thorstein Veblen’s *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899). The analysis of fashion, she insists, “requires detailed historical understanding” and must be related to social and economic trends, political events, and developments in the fine arts.

American Beauty is a rejection of Veblen’s model which located the origins of fashion changes among social elites and implied a percolation downward through the class structure. It proposes instead that fashions evolved and spread through an interaction of classes, including workers and the middle classes as well as the very wealthy, and through the important influence of a “subculture of sensuality”—members of the sporting set, inhabitants of the theatrical world and frequenters of saloons and gaming parlours. Understanding this process of interaction requires detailed study of the major institutions of popular culture, including the theatre, the dance hall, the dime museum, the movies and the beauty contest.

Documenting changes in fashion and standards of personal beauty is a task which poses many challenges for historians. Banner has consulted a wide range of sources including novels, fashion magazines, diaries and autobiographies, beauty and etiquette manuals, travellers’ accounts, periodicals, and advertisements. The search for evidence was not an easy one, she observes. “Standards of personal beauty fall into the realm of cultural conventions that are so pervasive and are taken so completely for granted that commentators assume widespread familiarity with them.” Even though a dominant standard of beauty existed in every age examined, it was usually being challenged by several alternative models, and a fashion-conscious woman might incorporate elements of each into her personal style. Most importantly, our own very different standards can make it difficult for us to recognize beauty as it was perceived by nineteenth-century observers.

Banner has divided the years 1800-1921 into four distinct periods, each of which was dominated by a different idealized model of feminine beauty. The antebellum period witnessed the reign of “the steel-engraving lady,” the fragile and submissive maiden personified in the lithographed illustrations of fashion magazines such as *Godey’s Lady’s Book*. This figure embodied the spirit of the youthful Romantic rebellion, the American drive for high status, and the restrictive middle-class Victorian view of women’s role. She was succeeded in the 1860’s and 1870’s by “the voluptuous woman,” a more mature, sophisticated and much more ample model of beauty, originating in working-class and immigrant cultures that associated bulk with success. This model was popularized by actresses, particularly Lillian Russell, in the 1880’s. We learn, however, that Russell began dieting in 1896, following unkind reviews which compared her to a white elephant, indicating the growing appeal of “the natural woman.” This tall, slender and athletic model of beauty, a response to the “new woman” of the 1890’s and the popular health