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## **Your Sofa Awaits: Getting Carried Away By Experiential Consumption**

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## Your Sofa Awaits: Getting Carried Away By Experiential Consumption

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper explores the interweavings of romantic love, experiential consumption and consumer desire. To do so it takes us on a journey through the dream world of women's genres and women's magazines, a journey that ultimately brings us to a particular television advertisement for a woman's magazine called Red. The advertisement, entitled 'Me-time' then takes us on another journey, during which we encounter the promises and penalties of the Cinderella narrative, and take discursions into realms of seduction, castles of romantic dreams, sites and seats of pleasure, and finally, monadic gift-giving and self-love.*

*'Her godmother just touched her with the wand and instantly her clothes were changed into a cloth of silver and gold, embroidered with jewels. Thus bedecked, Cinderella climbed aboard the coach. Above all else, her godmother told her, she must not stay out past midnight. If she stayed at the ball even one second longer, the coach would change back into a pumpkin, her horses into mice, her footmen into lizards, and her clothes into the dirty old rags she had worn before.'*  
From Cinderella or The Glass Slipper, Charles Perrault, 1729.

### INTRODUCTION

This is a study of the power of romance in contemporary consumption and the 'castle of romantic dreams' that we may choose to inhabit (Campbell, 1987, p. 227). Some commentators regard romance as the very essence of contemporary consumption (Campbell, 1987, Holbrook, 1995), and it is indeed a compelling metaphor in consumer behaviour. It is made manifest in the joys and sorrows of consumption, the quest for the perfect product, the dissatisfaction when the object of our love proves unworthy of our attentions (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982, Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982, Holbrook, 1995; Campbell, 1987, 1997; Brown, 1998). The quest for fulfilment is never-ending, the search for satisfaction inexhaustible. Romantic love is a journey towards an object of desire, but often, if this object is possessed, it turns to ashes in our hands. Consummation is both the destination and the demise of romantic love.

Holbrook (1995) describes the romantic spirit as 'embued with subjective intuitions, personal revelations, and introspective insights'. It is also a way of thinking and feeling that invites and

invokes intimacy and self-involvement, enriching our consumption experiences, and opening 'multiple windows' on the human condition (p. 188). When this 'spirit' is manifested in consumption it is characterised by daydreams, fantasies, and the meanings and images that can be associated with a product (Campbell, 1987, p. 203). The so-called 'romantic ethic' substitutes imaginary for real stimuli, manipulating illusions or imaginary experiences or emotions in order to construct an ideal, pleasurable environment. Above all it is characterised by longing, and as such it may be never-ending (Lury, 1996).

The romantic longing to become an *other*, to achieve a union with an object of desire, motivates much contemporary consumption (Campbell, 1987). According to Belk (1998) romantic love is essentially a recognition that there is something worth pursuing, a purpose that is greater than oneself and that takes one out of oneself, enabling one to merge with the object of one's love: It is 'a desire to give ourselves over to something greater than the self and to thereby become a part of the enchanted object. The enchanted, extended, engulfed self ... is the supreme goal.' (p. 41).

Whilst romanticism has the power to elevate us and intensify our experience of consumption it also has a darker side in that its joys also bring sorrows (Holbrook, 1995); it makes us unhappy and unsettled, dissatisfied and obsessive (Campbell, 1987). The restless, disacquiring aspect of modern consumption leads us to lose interest in the object of our love once consummation is achieved (romance, after all ends in marriage), and thus the romantic spirit must perpetually seek new states and more perfect experiences: 'In effect, the person

becomes the ideal consumer, never finding sufficient satisfaction in who one is or what one has and continually participating in the market, seeking new products for a different experience.' (Firat, 1991, p. 73).

The romantic ethic addresses itself to the gap between the real and the ideal, which McCracken (1988) writes is 'one of the most pressing problems a culture must deal with.' (p. 105). Goods, he argues, serve as bridges to hopes and ideals through both the anticipation of ownership and the ideal circumstance it will provide. Consumers are thus engaged in a continual process of hope and renewal of hope, in anticipation of distant ideals, because the good, which has been 'long sought', is 'swiftly devalued,' and thus another 'bridge' is sought. Once the object of desire has been found a consumer looks forward 'to a life that is, finally, fulfilled, satisfied, replete. But no sooner is this purchase made than the consumer transfers anticipation to another object.' (p. 112). Thompson & Holt (1997) express this consumer experience as 'a cycle of anticipatory desire and experienced disappointment' (p. 22).

It goes without saying that romantic love is gendered. The quest is usually male, the essence of courtly love being that the man worships and serves a woman he can never possess. She is the object of love, he its subject; she is passive in love, he is active. Man is, after all, a quester, a warrior, and woman his idealized object (Stevens et al, 2000). In fairy stories our hero fights his way through thick thorns to find his fair maiden, locked in a hundred year's sleep; he slays the dragon and rescues the damsel imprisoned in the tower; he searches the land for an enchanting dancer, with her glass slipper in his hand. But what is woman's quest? According to this discourse she is

always rooted to the spot, but forever reaching out to others, casting brief but meaningful glances in the direction of the object of her love, but modestly evading his eyes, his advances, until he 'wins' her hand.

This paper argues that the romantic quest is quite different when women of a certain age and at a certain life-stage, become its servants. Whilst they may not go out in search of an external object of desire, they may undertake a kind of journey via consumption, but this is a journey that takes a woman to herself. She, her self, alone, is the object of her desire, her destination, her romantic quest.

Romanticism brings enchantment to our lives, and with it transcendence, beauty, and desire (Belk, 1998). Not surprisingly, it is a discourse that is most likely to be found in the marketing and consumption of luxury goods, and it is a form of consumption that is more usually ascribed to women, as indeed is consumer desire itself. This may be because its essence is 'a hope for something better' (Belk, 1998, p. 51).

Women's identification with desirous consumption is both a blessing and a curse, as it fuels men's fears of women's closer connection with untamed nature (Paglia, 1992); with latent, unbridled passions; and with excesses and self-indulgence. Women, after all, are perceived as 'consummate consumers' who are ruled by their bodies and, as such, are less able than men to resist the lure of bodily pleasures (Belk & Costa, 1998).

Thus women must suffer the bittersweetness of seductive marketing communications for 'feminine' products, a good example of which is provided by advertising for chocolate, as discussed by Belk & Costa (1998).

Advertisements for chocolate are all located within the experiential paradigm and focus on emotional and sensual pleasures, aesthetics and the imagination. Indeed, as Belk & Costa argue, chocolate consumption is by its very nature 'emotionally charged' (p. 189) in both a positive and a negative sense, and it is of course highly romantic, a gift of love. This latter aspect is illustrated in the current ad for Galaxy's 'Inspirations' box of chocolates: the climax of the ad is when the woman, after some playful deliberation, chooses a particular chocolate. As she puts it in her mouth, the text in the ad describes this act as 'the kiss', the traditional climax of the romance narrative. Whilst it is undoubtedly the case that women suffer a relentless onslaught of tempting advertisements encouraging them to over-indulge in sensuous pleasures, it is also true that these advertisements may be experienced by women as celebratory, playful, and entirely pleasurable, in themselves.

The romance discourse is an important one in advertising to women, and it is equally important in other texts by and for women, particularly texts that reflect 'women's culture' (Showalter, 1982). The following discussion of women's genres, particularly women's magazines, will seek to demonstrate this.

#### WOMEN'S GENRES: ONE DAY MY PRINCE WILL COME

Romanticism, which in popular media takes the form of escapism and fantasy, is a defining characteristic of genres for women (Geraghty, 1998). Romance fiction, soap opera and women's magazines offer women a rich source of fantasy and escapism, which often bear little or no resemblance to women's everyday lives and their 'real'

experience. And women may enjoy being seduced by such genres precisely because they don't have any 'reality value', as they enable women to more fully escape from the shortcomings of the present (Ang, 1996). The romance genre describes courtship, and it ends with marriage (Voaden, 1995). What ensues after marriage is no longer romantic, or as Heilbrun (1988) expresses it: 'Women are allowed this brief period in the limelight ... [courtship] ...to encourage the acceptance of a lifetime of marginality' (p. 21). Reality, after all, may bite; but romantic longing may persist, albeit its focus may shift and evolve.

To compare real with ideal worlds, however, may be to miss the point. Ang (1996) suggests that both may be complete in themselves, arguing that fantasy is 'a reality in itself, a fundamental aspect of human existence which enables us to evoke alternative and more attractive scenarios than those experienced in real life.' (p. 93). Elsewhere she writes that fantasy is 'a necessary dimension of our psychical reality.' (in Storey, 1998, p. 529). The symbiotic relationship between the real and the ideal is one that inspires realistic dreams and imaginary realities (Mattelart, 1986), and Radway (1987) suggests that women's genres, whilst they appeal to a 'cultural myth', offer realistic benchmarks, enabling the reader to believe that the dream is attainable.

Women's genres are implicitly utopian (Ang, 1998), and this is particularly true of the romance, which Frye defines as 'a wish fulfilment or utopian fantasy' (in Jameson, 1975, p. 138). Jameson, however, makes the point that whilst the romance delivers the reader from reality, it still contains that reality; it is a utopianism that offers 'a secure space' where a utopian state can be perpetually

imagined (in Storey, 1998, p. 529). Taken together, women's genres offer women utopian possibilities of 'abundance, energy, intensity, transparency and community', together with entry into ideal, utopian worlds, and they give women an experience of what these ideal worlds 'feel' like, with their intense focus on feelings, emotional experience and personal relationships (Geraghty, 1991 in Hollows, 2000, p. 94). Modleski (1982), referring to the addictive nature of women's genres, suggests that they may also be symptomatic of a kind of passive resistance to the current social order (Modleski, 1982), 'a utopian wish-fulfillment fantasy', the reading of which is also a persistent gesture of 'dissatisfaction, longing and protest.' (Radway, 1987, p. 215).

Women's romantic fiction has traditionally typified all that is perceived as trivial and mindless in the context of mass culture in general and women's genres in particular, and Wilson (1985) writes that feminists have always had an uneasy relationship with the whole concept of romanticism, angry that it has a psychical dimension that cannot simply be rejected as 'false consciousness'. Clearly, in the face of difficult realities, the appeal of escapism for many women is a very real one in fact, and this needs to be considered. The breakdown of the high culture/low culture dichotomy, however, has led to a reappraisal of texts previously denigrated as having no cultural significance (Hollows, 2000). Janice Radway's book *Reading the Romance* (1987) focused on romance readers, and romance reading as an important cultural practice. Likewise Tania Modleski's *Loving With A Vengeance* (1982) sought to understand what women's genres such as soap operas meant for women and what they did for women. She

identified elements of protest against male behaviour and a 'utopian' longing for a better world, albeit one in which the heterosexual quest was still central. Radway (1987) observed that romance reading offered a valuable means of 'escape' for women, enabling them to block out the surrounding world and its demands on them. Perhaps Hollows (2000) sums it up best when she writes that romance reading is about dreams, imagination, hope, possibilities, and change. After all, she asks, 'what's wrong with a happy ending?'

#### THE DREAM WORLD OF WOMEN'S MAGAZINES

Another important women's genre, and one that is directly relevant for this paper, is that of women's magazines. Throughout their history women's magazines offer a 'dream world' within which women can look, dream and perhaps decide on purchases (Scanlon, 1995). They have always had the power to draw women into another, ideal world, a dream 'of a better and different life but, significantly, one that remains well within a spectrum of familiar possibilities' (Winship, 1987, p. 14). The promise of transformation is a key aspect of magazine consumption, whereby its reader is rooted in the present whilst being directed towards a better future (Ballaster et al, 1991, Beetham, 1996).

In her 1991 study Winship notes that women's magazines have two functions: to provide a service, and to offer entertainment. Contemporary women's magazines contrive to strike a balance between practical realism on the one hand (information) and unadulterated escapism (delight) on the other. Ballaster et al (1991) refer to this as a tension between women magazines' function as a disseminatory

vehicle of fantasy and aspirational 'ideals' and as a means of representing the reality of women's lives 'in all their diversity, difficulty and confusion.' (p. 173). Interestingly, this dual role is made explicit by *Red* magazine whose television advertisement forms the core of this paper. *Red* carried out market research before its launch in 1998. This revealed that women, as ever, wanted a magazine that was 'useful and informative', but they also wanted 'indulgence and escapism' from a magazine.

In the eighteenth century women's magazines offered women a varied mix of 'quality' fact and 'quality' fiction, but the nineteenth century saw the dawn of a much more 'insipid' and sentimental emphasis in women's magazines. Whilst the staple ingredients of women's magazines, their practical and prescriptive advice to women, remained, they also specialised in a great deal of romantic fiction. Romanticism persisted up to the end of the nineteenth century, and 'profoundly influenced' the development of the women's press, with fantasy privileged over realism, and fiction privileged over fact (White, 1970).

The balance, however, has now tipped away from fantasy to reality (Ferguson, 1983; Winship, 1987; McRobbie, 1984). Women's magazines have become 'overtly factional', and nowhere is this more apparent than in the demise of fiction in women's magazines and a concomitant rise in factual pieces. McRobbie (1984) argues that the growing trend towards informationalism and the increasingly fragmented nature of reading in Western culture is reflected in a concentration in women's magazines on 'problem pages, and problem based stories, an over-abundance of facts, snippets and informational fragments ...

and a preference for material which claims to deal with ... real lives' (p. 144). Ferguson (1983) suggests that romance gave way in the 1980s to a focus on self rather than on an other, to 'aspirational feminism' and 'self help'. This perhaps reflects women's heightened consciousness and the second wave feminist belief, espoused by prominent writers such as Germaine Greer, that the heterosexual romantic love myth kept women in chains.

But on another level this transformation in women's magazines from fiction to fact is perhaps curious, given the central role escapism and romance has always had in women's magazines throughout their long history. And indeed a closer look reveals that the romance discourse is as important in women's magazines as it ever was, but it has adapted itself to a new milieu, and has taken on many and different hues, becoming multi-dimensional, complex, and played out in a variety of ways.

Ferguson (1983), for example, suggests that the primary (romantic) goal for women continues to thrive, albeit in a more covert form. These more covert forms may include true stories of readers' lives, the mini-narratives of advertisements, reader makeovers, and so on, all of which are examples of the romantic ethic, albeit in a less obvious form. Indeed the romance narrative continues to have 'pervasive power' in women's magazines, but this narrative is more usually served by observing commodities rather than in consuming romance fiction (Ballaster et al, 1991, p. 171). This brings me to the following, a description of a television advertisement for a woman's magazine, which shows that the romance discourse is very much alive, and indeed it continues to thrive in texts for women:

#### PICTURE A SCENE:

*An advertisement for a woman's magazine called Red, aimed at women of 'middle-youth', that is to say women in their 30s and 40s, entitled 'Me-Time'. The opening scene: centre stage is an elegant but contemporary-looking scarlet chaise-longue, a lounging sofa for one. It has outward curving arms and a curved back, suggesting the curves of the body; a shapely and voluptuous woman's body, a mother's or a lover's arms, ready to embrace us and envelop us. The chaise-longue is placed in the midst of a lush meadow, a white butterfly dancing around it, the meadow strewn with a profusion of violet, white and red flowers. We see a close up of the flowers, gently swaying in the breeze.*

*The next scene is an urban one. There is a modern building with many windows, a large glass-panelled façade at the centre, probably its entrance, flanked by concrete on either side. The scarlet chaise-longue is in front of the building and large red, white and blue balloons, of assorted sizes, float above it, some of them reflected in the mirror-like plate glass behind them, which also reflects a blue sky with fluffy white clouds. There is no movement visible in the frame, the coloured balloons suspended in the air, a still-life image.*

*In contrast, the following scene is full of movement: glistening bubbles floating against a dark background. One of the spheres dilates and merges into the next frame, the focus sharpening to reveal a full moon, its silvery reflection sparkling on dark water gently lapping along a sandy shore-line. On the beach is the red chaise-longue, a circle of candles surrounding it, like a fairy ring that both imprisons and protects, the sofa's scarlet colour almost luminous*

*against the silvery moon and the golden orbs of candlelight.*

*The scene blurs, the moon dilates and becomes a blurred image of numerous silver spheres, perhaps drops of water or prisms of light, or sunlight through tears, and the music seems to sparkle too, with the sound of tubular bells, reflecting the glittering roundlets before our eyes. The dancing prisms of light, of water, then dissolve into a scene of blue, white-streaked sky, luscious, green woodland, craggy hillside, and the scarlet chaise-longue placed on a rocky promontory above the dark water of a lough.*

*More blurring, and this time we are looking at the frothy, white, spouting water of a fountain, slowly coming into focus. We see through the water to an Italianate sunken patio, with the elegant arched columns of a terrace beyond that. The camera moves out from behind a pillar to reveal the red chaise-longue, placed on the terrazzo of the patio, a circular pool with an urn and fountain at its centre, a solitary rose bush at its border.*

*The final image is of a woman, sitting on the red chaise-longue on the terrace, above the patio, the carved pillars visible beside her. She has dark hair, is dressed in dark trousers and she sits, her bare feet drawn up beside her, engrossed in a copy of Red magazine, a smile on her lips. There are more blurred orbs of light, dancing about the screen, in shades of red and pink. A woman's voice says 'Red magazine - your sofa awaits' and we are shown the current issue of Red, against a scarlet, lush, satin background.*

#### Going Round in Circles

Images of water and spheres pervade the *Red* advertisement. Water is

traditionally associated with our emotions and feelings, and spheres are symbolic of womanhood itself, suggesting feminine experience and the female body, the circles and cycles of women's lives. Their roundness seems to encompass and capture the moment, a complete experience of pleasure, a magical closed circle that excludes all without, an inner space within which pleasure can be indulged. Perhaps most importantly, that pleasure is a private one, an inviting solitude.

Paglia (1992) writes that women's lives and women's experiences are circular: 'Nature's cycles are women's cycles. Biologic femaleness is a sequence of circular returns, beginning and ending at the same point. Women's centrality gives her a stability of identity. She does not have to become but only to be.' (p. 9). According to Paglia, then, women's dreams do not take her away from herself, since 'she is that cycle' (p. 10).

#### Your Sofa Awaits

Clearly the chaise-longue is a symbol for, and a site for, pleasure, signifying *Red* magazine, or rather the experience of reading it. The sofa and the magazine go together, and the two combined have the power to transport women to a better, more idyllic place. Like Cinderella's fairy godmother, the sofa and *Red* magazine are endowed with magical properties. Just as a pumpkin can become a glass carriage, so too can a sofa become a magic carpet, carrying its passenger off to far away, exotic places, places of privacy and beauty, of peace and quiet, where solitary pleasures can be enjoyed.

Your sofa awaits, your carriage awaits, Walt Disney's *Cinderella*, cinders and ashes, the chaise-longue, the chaise, a carriage for one, an enchanted journey.

## THE CINDERELLA STORY

In 1815 the Brothers Grimm published their collection of *Fairy Tales* to wide acclaim; indeed it was regarded as a masterpiece of the Romantic movement in Germany (Campbell, 1815). Their somewhat dark version of Cinderella had the wicked sisters sawing off their toes in order to prise their feet into Cinderella's slipper. They also had both their eyes pecked out by Cinderella's avenging birds at the end, which was quite different from the more famous version by Charles Perrault, a version popularised in our own time by Walt Disney. Perrault was a member of the royal court of Louis XIV of France at Versailles, and the clothing he describes in his book was the very latest fashion in France.

The story of Cinderella is in fact an ancient one, dating back to around the year 850 AD. It is a Chinese tale of a girl called Yeh-h-Sien, who has a wicked stepmother and a wicked stepsister, and who is helped out of her misery by magical forces. Two thousand years ago, however, a Greek writer told of Rhodopis, whose sandal was stolen by an eagle and dropped into the lap of the King of Egypt. The woman was eventually traced, and she was brought to the King, who promptly married her (Sierra, 1992). The three key aspects of the Cinderella story are an oppressed and unhappy young woman and her rescue, via magical (female) forces, by a more powerful man.

### The Cinderella Complex

Writing in 1982, at the height of the second wave feminist movement, Colette Dowling argued that the Cinderella complex was 'the chief force holding women down today'. She

argued that women had a debilitating desire to be protected, supported and buoyed up by another (man), and that this stemmed from a fear of being alone and of having 'an authentic existence' (a phrase taken from Simone de Beauvoir, in Dowling, p. 17). Dowling suggested that like Cinderella, 'women today are still waiting for something external to transform their lives.' (p. 28). But the Cinderella complex is also about hope (or hopelessness?): "Maybe things will change", said Cinderella, endlessly sweeping the ashes from the hearth.' (p. 66).

Beyond Dowling's modernist, liberal feminist perspective, however, one can perhaps see the emergence of a postmodernist feminist stance towards the end of *The Cinderella Complex*, when she writes 'The things I had come to recognize I wanted were not material but emotional, not quantifiable but tantalizingly evanescent: the freedom to do and be, symbolized by yearnings for more light, more air, months at the ocean, a house in the country.' (p. 192). The sense that life might offer more is combined with a celebratory and life-affirming tone, it seems to me, a tone that is echoed in the *Red* ad, written some eighteen years later. Perhaps, far from being *afraid* of being alone, women, with greater demands on their time than ever, crave, perhaps more than anything, the pleasure of solitude, at least sometimes.

### The Imaginary Realm of Seduction

Winship (1991) writes that women's magazines are a screen on which women's yearnings and ideals are projected, and the 'Me-Time' ad very much addresses itself to women's 'yearnings' and 'ideals'. Consumption unfolds in the realm of seduction, where goods act as 'objects of fantasy' (Gabriel, 1995), and Ang (1996)

observes that the pleasure of women's genres has everything to do with 'the process of seduction' (p. 93); thus pleasure resides in the experience of reading, the journey itself. 'Me-Time' demonstrates this emphasis, in terms of its suggestive, impressionistic style and the 'fantasy' aspects it contains. In modern consumption goods acquire an aura and become objects of desire (Tomlinson, 1990; Featherstone, 1992). The greatest legacy of romanticism for contemporary consumption is that 'passionate desire has become an end in itself' (Belk, 1998), and it is this that is made manifest in the ad.

How appropriate that 'Me-Time' gives us no practical information, but instead focuses entirely on experiential aspects, offering us a proliferation of 'dream images' (Haug, in Featherstone, 1992, p. 270); of 'mentalistic hedonism', to use Campbell's (1995) phrase; of consumption as an 'imaginary realm' (Falk, 1994). This very much also illustrates Hirschman & Holbrook's (1982) argument that sensory-emotive stimulation is particularly important if that which is being consumed is a media form.

#### The Castle of Romantic Dreams

'Me-Time' can be considered as a very romantic ad according to definitions of romantic. It is certainly 'characterized by, or suggestive of an idealized, sentimental, or fantastic view of reality; remote from experience ... (of style in art, music, etc) concerned more with feeling and emotion than with form and aesthetic qualities; preferring grandeur or picturesqueness to finish and proportion.' (Concise Oxford English Dictionary). It clearly evokes an idealized view of reality with its idyllic, slightly fantastic settings, none of which places the chaise-longue in a realistic site. It is also a highly aesthetic

and picturesque advertisement, which evokes certain desirable feelings and emotions. It is the stuff of 'romantic dreams', certainly not the 'iron cage' of economic necessity (Campbell, 1987, p. 227), and as such is a shining example of a romantic text. The 'Me-Time' ad is also a good illustration of how the marriage of two objects, a magazine and a chaise-longue, can be used as a bridge to hopes and ideals (McCracken, 1988).

Romantic discourse requires us to focus on the attractive meanings and images that can be associated with a product, and in choosing the red chaise-longue, the ad's creators have selected a perfect vehicle for such associations. The chaise-longue, which essentially means a long chair, has associations with a 'day-bed', a 'sun-bed' and with a chaise, a carriage for one; a place of relaxation and security; of comfort and purpose; of indolence and luxuriance, for one. It is the place for daydreams and fantasies, where the boundary between reality and dreams merges, and where time and place are traversed. Above all, it is a perfect example of how modern consumption is utterly 'enmeshed' in daydreams and fantasies (Campbell, 1987).

#### The Seat of Pleasure

The chaise-longue also appeals as a site for seduction, a day-bed where a woman may be carried away by a daring and amorous lover, a pleasure zone for men and women together, for erotic encounters generally. Alternatively it is a space that a woman can have to herself, her boudoir or her salon, a space that she doesn't have to share, where she can be self-contained; an exotic Cleopatra, languishing luxuriously, being waited on hand and foot. The delightful sensations the ad engenders bears testimony to the allure

of romance, and its never-ending attractions. As such the symbolization of the chaise-longue with *Red* magazine is in many ways an inspired one.

The going out into the world, the search that takes the subject away from (him)self is memorably described by the irrepressible Paglia in *Sexual Personnae* (1992) when she uses urination to illustrate her thesis that man is projective and woman is centred: 'A male dog marking every bush on the block is a graffiti artist, leaving his rude signature with each lift of the leg. Women, like female dogs, are earthbound squatters. There is no projection beyond the boundaries of the self. Space is claimed by being sat on, squatter's rights.' (p. 21). To sit or recline, then, is perhaps women's natural posture, in Paglian terms, and where better to do so than on a luxurious chaise-longue, far away from the hurly burly, the cut and thrust, of the man's world!

#### The Precious Gift of Me-Time

The central concept of 'me-time' is one that is dear to many women's hearts, particularly women in their thirties and forties who may have young and dependent children, and who may also work full-time outside of the home. Sherry, McGrath and Levy (1995) write that self-gifts, monadic gifts, are essentially bittersweet, 'a dialectic between desiring and deserving, between entitlement and perquisite'. The most precious self-gift, for women who have 'juggling lifestyles' (Thompson, 1996), may be that rare and elusive one of time to themselves, and they can spend that time, and share that time, with a magazine. Sherry, McGrath and Levy write that monadic gift giving is 'volitional ceremonial self-care.' (p. 408), and 'me-time' is women's gift to themselves, an offering on the altar of

self.

Romantic fiction is described as offering 'an important emotional release for women' in lives that may offer 'little room for guilt-less, self-interested pursuit of individual pleasure.' (Radway, 1987, p. 96), and women's magazines seem to offer something similar for women. 'Me-Time' is a celebration of women's desire for the precious and rare journey offered by magazine consumption, an imaginative journey, a winged flight of imagination that takes the reader away from the clay-groundedness of reality. It is a journey that is a celebration of choice, of freedom, and of self, a journey whose only limits are the limits of our imaginations and the pull of reality.

Alone I walked the mists that hung over the summit of Sainte-Victoire, and trod along the ridge of the Pilon de Roi, bracing myself against a violent wind which sent my beret spinning down into the valley below. Alone again, I got lost in a mountain ravine on the Luberon range. Such moments, with all their warmth, tenderness, and fury, belong to me and no one else.' Simone de Beauvoir, quoted in *The Cinderella Complex*, p. 210.

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