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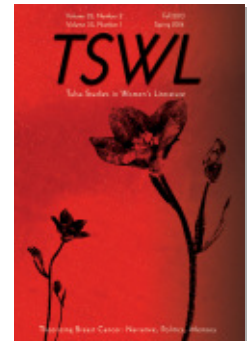
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## **From a Tarantula on a Banana Boat to a Canary in a Mine: Ms. Magazine as a Cautionary Tale in a Neoliberal Age**

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# From a Tarantula on a Banana Boat to a Canary in a Mine: *Ms. Magazine* as a Cautionary Tale in a Neoliberal Age

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Within the last year, the occasion of the 40th anniversary of *Ms. Magazine* has been resoundingly celebrated. *New York* magazine, which published the first-ever copy of *Ms. Magazine* as an inset in 1971, ran an extensive “oral history” of the magazine, a collection of remembrances by its founders, editors, and contributors.<sup>1</sup> Notably, the article was written by Abigail Pogrebin, the daughter of one of the founders of *Ms. Magazine*, Letty Cottin Pogrebin, and the frequent inspiration for her mother’s many essays on childrearing. The *New York* article has a decidedly exclamatory tone, as we can see in the title itself:

How Do You Spell Ms.: Forty years ago, a group of feminists, led by Gloria Steinem, did the unthinkable: They started a magazine for women, published by women—and the first issue sold out in eight days. An oral history of a publication that changed history. (p. 34)

The self-congratulatory tenor of the *New York* article—doing the unthinkable! changing history!—and the fact that the article was written by one of the founders’ daughters give credence to the point of view that *Ms. Magazine* was largely a group of Manhattan publishing insiders who erroneously claimed for themselves the struggle and victories of second-wave feminism. This is a point that Alice Walker, Susan Brownmiller, and Vivian Gornick refer to in their few critical remarks in Pogrebin’s oral history (pp. 104-05).

This question of whether *Ms. Magazine*, as the first commercial, feminist magazine in United States history, was either revolutionary in its use of the mass media to popularize feminism or an example of the degradation resulting when a political movement shifts into the commercial realm was the debate in which I immersed myself in my 1998 book, *Yours in Sisterhood: “Ms.” Magazine and the Promise of Popular Feminism*.<sup>2</sup> This debate has gained even more salience in the last decade as we have seen the ways in which the politics of neoliberalism have drawn from the rhetoric and critiques of second-wave feminism to legitimate policies and practices that have decidedly anti-feminist results. In her article “Feminism, Capitalism, and

the Cunning of History,” for instance, Nancy Fraser beautifully elaborates on how the feminist critique of the family wage as androcentric, heteronormative, and preclusive to women’s equitable participation in the work force became twisted into a justification of low-paying work for everyone, a “free” economy of service-sector employees, and duty-free maquiladora zones on the border between Mexico and the United States.<sup>3</sup>

Younger feminists, familiar with *Bitch* and *Bust* magazines, or more likely still with the online sites Jezebel or Feministing, are not aware of the struggles of *Ms. Magazine* to articulate feminism within the mass media. In a recent visit to my undergraduate alma mater, Ohio University, a student from the Honors College told me that she read the Feminist Majority’s online *Ms. Magazine* regularly, but she had never known that there had been an earlier, commercial, print version. While this anecdote certainly screams “generational divide,” for me it brought home what I had not anticipated while I was researching and writing *Yours in Sisterhood* in the mid-1990s. Although I resoundingly criticized the results of using advertisers to fund and popularize feminism—I referred to it as the “censorship of the commercial” in the conclusion—I nevertheless presumed that this was the mass media system (p. 196). That is, what I had not anticipated was that the end of *Ms. Magazine* as a commercial entity coincided with (or perhaps marked) the beginning of the end of mainstream media as we knew it. In that older formulation, magazines and newspapers—and thus presumably the reading public—benefited from an uneasy but prosperous alliance between reporters and writers who were decently paid for their research and writing through the monies provided by advertisers. Advertisers were willing to pay well because they sought access to consumers whom they could reach because of the well-researched articles and entertainment provided by those writers. Of course, the question of whether the public actually benefitted from the alliance is a more complicated one; indeed, it is the one I addressed in *Yours in Sisterhood*. Significantly, however, despite my major criticisms, I never imagined that the relationship between reporters/writers and advertisers would disintegrate so quickly and so fundamentally by the end of the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> It is as if the same logic that permitted the critique of the family wage to be twisted into a celebration of the maquiladora zone also allowed the powerful critique of commercial mass media to result in a justification for the demise of any substantial funding for journalism. The 40th anniversary of *Ms. Magazine*, then, calls for more than a celebration. It calls for a serious consideration of whether the commercial context and editorial gerrymandering necessary to facilitate that commercialism did more than stymie the exuberant hopes once expressed by its founders for a new kind of women’s magazine. Did it actually help to lay the groundwork for a new journalism that proliferates in voices but

lacks entirely in the resources necessary to fund in-depth research and to pay reporters and writers decently? This is the question that I explore in this retrospective essay on *Ms. Magazine*.

When *Ms. Magazine* originated in 1971, it promised in its masthead to be a “new magazine for women,” one that Gloria Steinem said women “would actually read,” an “open forum; a place where women of many different backgrounds can find help and information to improve their lives.”<sup>5</sup> Publicity articles described it as a magazine that would “communicate the commonality of feeling among women around the country. It will attempt to show them they are not alone in their anger and frustration and that the same feelings are being experienced by all sorts of women.”<sup>6</sup> They also described the publication as a “how-to magazine for the liberated female human being—not how to make jelly but how to seize control of your life.”<sup>7</sup> Implicit in these comments was the critique of traditional women’s magazines as creating a vacuous feminine ideal under which women suffered tremendously, a critique that Betty Friedan articulated so clearly in her 1963 *Feminine Mystique*.<sup>8</sup> By the late 1960s, many feminist activists strategically staged events to capture the interest of the media, including the decision to speak only to female reporters, a tactic that forced editors to assign women to political pieces previously closed to them. Such was the case with the New York Radical Women’s counterdemonstration to the Atlantic City Miss America Pageant, made famous when they tossed bras, girdles, and copies of the *Ladies’ Home Journal* into a Freedom Trash Can. Others urged a total blackout of mainstream media. These included the founders of the Washington D. C. based periodical *off our backs*, whose initial statement of purpose read:

It is time to call a halt to all dealings with the mass-media—no more interviews, no more documentaries, no more special coverage. We don’t need them and we don’t want them. In the interests of self-defense and honest communication we have begun to create our own papers and our own magazines. Our energies must turn now to the strengthening and expansion of our own media.<sup>9</sup>

By the beginning of the 1970s, there were hundreds of feminist periodicals, newsletters, and magazines in the United States, most much smaller and much shorter-lived than *off our backs*, completely woman owned and operated, often with pathbreaking critical analyses and reporting but with few resources and very small circulations.<sup>10</sup>

The desire for a separatist press among many feminists, however, did not stop others from demanding that the mainstream media adapt to the burgeoning women’s movement. The institution of women’s magazines was

perceived as simply too important and too powerful in shaping women's lives and experiences to be relinquished without a struggle. These struggles encompassed the content of the magazines but also the organization and labor practices of the magazine's publishers. In 1970, for instance, activists staged an elaborate sit-in at the *Ladies' Home Journal*. Taking over editor John Mack Carter's office for eleven hours, they called for day care for employees, an all-female staff, higher wages, and editorial content relevant to the movement.<sup>11</sup> One result was an eight-page supplement in the following issue, covering topics such as the politics of motherhood, sex discrimination in employment, and the dangers of beauty standards. Hardly a long-term victory, it nevertheless signaled the desire—and the limited ability—of the movement to re-shape dominant media institutions.

When Steinem, already a well-known media figure, began talking with feminist activists and writers in 1971 about the need for a national feminist newsletter, a sort of “connective tissue” among women, she was part of a much larger discussion within the second wave of feminism about the role of media.<sup>12</sup> Patricia Carbine, Elizabeth Forsling Harris, and Brenda Feigen Fasteau convinced her that a glossy women's magazine was what was needed, despite Steinem's preference for a newsletter. Carbine had recently left her position as executive editor at *Look* magazine to take over the editorship of the ailing women's magazine *McCall's*, a job she was doing admirably. She perceived a women's magazine as an “extraordinary medium,” one that could draw on the financial resources of advertisers and reach readers with its portable, visually pleasing, easy-to-read format.<sup>13</sup> It could reach the already as well as the not-yet politicized; it could establish a place for feminism on the newsstand, in the grocery store, at the doctor's office. It could be the kind of crossover magazine that writer Freda Kirchwey had imagined a hundred years earlier when she urged women in the immediate post-suffrage era to create a magazine that bridged the world of feminists and homemakers.<sup>14</sup>

By 1971, plans for the magazine were underway. Katharine Graham of the *Washington Post* offered \$20,000 seed money. Even more importantly, *New York* magazine's Clay Felker, for whom Steinem had written extensively in the past, offered to publish the first issue as an inset in the December issue of *New York*. In an interview for *Newsweek*, Felker explained his motives: “We owe Gloria a great deal, and wanted to help her get started. It isn't all altruistic, of course. We're going to make a lot of money out of it.”<sup>15</sup> *New York* and *Ms. Magazine* would split the newsstand profits, but *New York* would solicit all the advertising and take all its profits, for both the inset and the first preview issue, which was scheduled to go out in January 1972 but dated Spring 1972 in case the issue did not sell well. Concerns about the first issue of *Ms. Magazine* languishing on the newsstand proved to be unfounded; as the headline of the celebratory article noted above

reminded us, it sold out across the country in eight days! By the spring of 1972, Warner Communications invested \$1 million in the magazine, an amount relatively small for the launch of major magazines at the time, but sufficient enough that it clearly separated the new women's magazine from the struggling, separatist feminist periodicals. Warner's decision to invest in *Ms. Magazine*—despite the founders' insistence that the magazine remain women-controlled, that it would have stringent policies regarding advertising content, and that the editorial content would stray far from traditional women's magazine material—might at first seem incomprehensible. As Patricia Bradley points out, however, "By 1970 the most financially successful magazines—that is, those that attracted advertisers—were closely targeted at specialized audiences."<sup>16</sup> Warner was simply betting that this was another one of those specialized audiences—feminist readers.

The "new magazine for women" pictured a Hindu goddess-like woman on a bold red cover. Rather than holding weapons in her eight outstretched arms, she held the multiple accoutrements of a woman's life: a frying pan, a steering wheel, a typewriter, a telephone, an iron, a dustmop, and a mirror; a fetus danced in her womb.<sup>17</sup> The masthead highlighted key articles: "Gloria Steinem on Sisterhood," "Sylvia Plath's Last Major Work," "Women Tell the Truth about their Abortions," "Letty Pogrebin on Raising Kids without Sex Roles," and "Jane O'Reilly on the Housewife's Moment of Truth." With its discussion of the "click of recognition" that women felt at the first piercing of consciousness rising, O'Reilly's article proved to be one to which readers would refer for decades.<sup>18</sup> Inside readers found Judy Syfer's "I Want a Wife," Eleanor Homes Norton and Celestine Ware's "The Black Family and Feminism," Johnnie Tillmon's "Welfare is a Women's Issue," and Dorothy Pitman Hughes's how-to suggestions for starting child care centers. The title *Ms. Magazine* itself merited a long explanation by the editors, who noted its history as a term used by secretaries when the marital status of the recipient was unknown and its popularity among women who no longer wanted to be identified by their relationship to a man. The article further described how to pronounce it and how to use it:

In practice, *Ms.* is used with a woman's given name: *Ms. Jane Jones*, say, or *Ms. Jane Wilson Jones*. Obviously, it doesn't make sense to say *Ms. John Jones*: a woman identified only as her husband's wife must remain a *Mrs.* . . . The use of *Ms.* isn't meant to protect either the married or the unmarried from social pressure—only to signify a female human being. It's symbolic, and important. There's a lot in a name.<sup>19</sup>

The editorial tone of this preview issue—at once educative (how to pronounce "Ms.") and presumptive of an insider audience (the "click of recognition" described by O'Reilly)—would resonate throughout the history of *Ms. Magazine* as a commercial, feminist magazine. The philosophical

underpinnings established in this first issue would also remain the same: a pluralistic vision of women as “sisters,” a focus on the transformation of the person, and, finally, a belief in feminism as a humanizing force.

Throughout its history, editors did struggle between the discursive focus on plurality (“sisterhood”) and that of individualism (“transformation of the person”). Nevertheless, records from the editorial files indicate that the staff was generally amenable to allowing a wide range of perspectives to be published, even if they sometimes created a jarring cacophony of voices. In the first issue, for instance, Tillmon’s critique of the racism and sexism inherent in welfare policies certainly challenged the white and privileged position articulated by Syfer in “I Want a Wife.” The continual and more forceful disagreements among editors and writers were actually those regarding the pressure they were receiving from advertisers. When *Ms. Magazine* began, Steinem made a point of distinguishing the magazine from other women’s magazines, which she argued received much more pressure than “mainstream” magazines, such as *Time* or *Newsweek*, to shape editorial content to meet the advertisers’ desires for an environment conducive to the sale of their products. (Thus, for instance, the articles on gelatin-based desserts to complement the ads for Jell-O or the articles on applying eye make-up to complement the ads for mascara.) *Ms. Magazine* promised to reject ads that required such complementary copy or those that were “downright insulting” or “harmful”; in contrast, they promised to choose ads that would “reflect the real balance of our lives.”<sup>20</sup> Steinem and Carbine were very optimistic about their ability to harness the corporate world to fund their magazine, perhaps because of their own previous success in publishing—Carbine as the editor of *McCall’s Magazine* and Steinem as a New York City media celebrity.

The reality was, however, that advertising was always the major obstacle for *Ms. Magazine*. Being a commercial magazine meant that *Ms. Magazine* had a circulation ranging from 300,000 to 500,000, a readership estimated at 3 million, and an established place at the newsstand. That place at the newsstand and grocery store should not be taken lightly; as David Carr wrote about the failing New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, the “constancy of a daily paper . . . is a reminder to a city that someone is out there watching.”<sup>21</sup> In the case of *Ms. Magazine*, it meant that the entire country had a monthly reminder that a feminist watchdog was out there, breaking stories on sexual harassment, domestic violence, the Equal Rights Amendment, and female genital mutilation. However, the advertising needed to support this position proved difficult to get. The advertising staff told stories of being dismissed from corporate headquarters, being spit on in one case, and working tremendously hard to secure both the big ticket items like cars and air travel, which companies did not think women bought, and small ticket items like food and cosmetics, which companies did not think

feminists bought. Many of these companies insisted on the complementary copy that *Ms. Magazine* was unwilling to supply. Even when the advertising staff was successful, however, it came with a cost. While *Ms. Magazine* refused to supply explicit complementary copy (no recipes for food ads, for instance), it constantly needed to assure advertisers that the magazine provided an atmosphere conducive to the sale of their goods. They supplied advertisers with countless demographic details about the “good qualities” of their readers, meaning they were monied, educated women who were active consumers. The staff emphasized the editorial copy that would simultaneously attract those readers and assure the advertisers that these were the readers they were trying to attract. These assurances meant articles that would speak to and about poor women, women in jail, uneducated women, and women of color—all articles the editors themselves had no problem including in the pages—needed to be jettisoned or at least hidden. Steinem recalls trying to bury the most controversial articles with the hope that the advertisers would not open the magazine to actually see them. According to Robin Morgan, if the words “lesbianianism,” “witchcraft,” “abortion,” or “gun control” were to appear in an issue, then Proctor and Gamble would have to be notified—and presumably be given an option to pull out of that issue.<sup>22</sup> In 1986, Alice Walker resigned from her position as contributing editor, citing the failure of the magazine to cover stories on any but white women, a perception certainly enhanced by the magazine’s focus on attracting “quality” readers for advertisers (Pogrebin, p. 105). As a result of these constraints posed by advertisers, *Ms. Magazine* relied heavily on cigarette and alcohol advertising, both of which found *Ms. Magazine* a favorable environment and neither of which required any complementary copy. Even this was not without editorial consequences, however. Most obviously, such advertising contradicted the original promise to readers to refuse advertising for products dangerous to women. More critically, however, *Ms. Magazine* never pursued the groundbreaking stories on nicotine addiction and cigarette corporations, nor did it do any reports on women and alcoholism. Only as a result of a major outcry among readers did it finally do a rather tame issue entitled “Addictions” (February 1987). Promotional materials sent to alcohol and cigarette companies announced clearly when the issue would be running and allowed (encouraged) them to pull their advertisements for that month.<sup>23</sup>

Neither editors nor writers were happy with the pressure received from advertisers to narrow the identity of the *Ms. Magazine* reader. Significantly, neither were the readers. Editors shaped a magazine that explicitly fashioned an engaged readers’ community—signing the publicity letters “yours in sisterhood,” encouraging readers to send letters, and publishing an extensive series of letters each month. To say that readers responded enthusiastically is an understatement. The extensive letter collection held



at the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe College is testament to the tight relationship readers felt with *Ms. Magazine*. Indeed, they often experienced the magazine as a lifeline and a source of political and activist connection within a pre-internet historical context. In 1996 Lynn Cherny and Elizabeth Reba Weise published *Wired Women*, one of the first studies of activist communities in cyberspace; no such communities existed in the 1970s and 1980s when *Ms. Magazine* was a commercial magazine.<sup>24</sup> *Ms. Magazine* was the virtual community, the go-to google of its age. When readers became disappointed with *Ms. Magazine* for failing to live up to its promise to be an open forum for all women, they reacted vociferously. Readers challenged the magazine to be more inclusive, to publish more radical voices, to include more international perspectives, and to print more stories by Chicana, African American, and lesbian feminists. In response to a 1977 article about a stay-at-home mom deciding to go to law school, for instance, the Letters section in a following month included this reader's critique: "Such sagas of middle-class success and women bolstered by supportive husbands and sufficient cash belong to the domain of traditional women's magazines."<sup>25</sup> Editors also initiated a No Comment section, to which readers sent copies of advertisements they found offensive; this section published ads from magazines and newspapers across the country—for liquor, cars, photocopying machines, lingerie, men's clubs, foods, and drugs—all of which portrayed women in violent or demeaning ways.

Significantly, *Ms. Magazine* generated a relationship with readers that promoted and developed their critical perspectives. Several aspects of the magazine—the promises to be an open forum and to hold to a harm-free advertising policy, the extensive information published each month on feminist organizations and events in the Gazette section, and the No Comment and Letters sections that published readers' dissatisfied and critical remarks—all encouraged readers to be questioning in their approach to the magazine. As a reader from Delaware wrote in 1978, "Why can't I just read the articles and skip the ads like I do when I read *Newsweek*?"<sup>26</sup> *Ms. Magazine* readers were the original "post-modern" feminists, talking back to pop culture in ways that would later be celebrated in magazines like *Bitch* and *Bust*.<sup>27</sup> Rather than stopping with an ironic dismissal of the articles and advertisements that they found offensive, however, *Ms. Magazine* readers generally were *angry* at such material, and they wrote to the magazine en masse (even if all the letters were not published), sent advertisements they found in the pages of *Ms. Magazine* to the No Comment section (even if *Ms. Magazine* ads were never included), and threatened to cancel their subscriptions.

The editors of *Ms. Magazine* walked a narrow tightrope: soliciting advertisements from an increasingly narrow group of corporations willing to pay for space in the magazine; designing a magazine that highlighted the indi-

vidualistic, monied feminism on the front cover while hiding the diverse range of feminist perspectives and well-researched studies on the inside; and appealing to and giving space to readers' critically engaged perspectives while nevertheless limiting the exposure of those voices to certain pages and issues. The magazine was a veritable post-modern bricolage of the sort many scholars have examined as typical of more recent women's popular culture. This bricolage, however, existed long before contemporary popular culture and women's magazines, long before *Ms. Magazine* in fact, starting within the earliest women's magazines like *Godey's Ladies Book*, which began in 1830, and *Good Housekeeping*, 1855. This bricolage was always the result of trying to balance the pressure to include articles conducive to women's lives as *purchasers*, most forcefully articulated in Christine Frederick's 1929 book *Selling Mrs. Consumer*, with the desire to include articles conducive to their lives as *human beings*.<sup>28</sup> This struggle is why it is simply essential for scholars of women's magazines (or any commercial media for that matter) to pay careful attention to the financial underpinnings of the text. In a thoughtful article on feminism and femininity within contemporary women's magazines such as *Cosmo*, *O*, and *Redbook*, for instance, Natalie Taylor writes that the "relationship between advertising and editorial content" is "an interesting and important topic but cannot be pursued here."<sup>29</sup> This exclusion is similar to saying that an understanding of the Catholic Church is interesting but not necessary for an analysis of a Catholic Mass, a proposition most of us would find dubious. It might be difficult to trace the exact influence of advertisers, but this does not mean it should ever be relegated to a sidebar. The corporate context for mass media—the relationship between advertisers and the editors—is *fundamental* to the understanding of editorial content.

For *Ms. Magazine*, corporate support meant that the magazine's editorial content was consistently being narrowed to an individualistic focus on "successful" women. Cover stories on triumphant women—including many on Steinem—took over the challenging ones on domestic violence, body image, and sexual harassment that had appeared earlier in *Ms. Magazine*. It is not that *Ms. Magazine* was ever a "pure" space of feminist writing, but rather that as the years progressed the pressures on the editors to restrict their vision proved formidable. *Ms. Magazine* tried to circumvent these pressures with its clever use of readers' voices and criticism, and its ability to sandwich more radical articles between others more tame. Eventually, the situation became untenable. In 1987 the Ms. Foundation for Education and Communication sold the magazine to Fairfax, an Australian firm; within a few years the magazine went through a series of owners who promised advertisers that the *Ms. Magazine* reader had "grown up" and shed her political past. Nevertheless, the bricolage continued, and in 1989 *Ms. Magazine* published a cover story on the Supreme Court's anti-abortion

Webster decision. Advertisers pulled out en masse, and *Ms. Magazine* folded as a commercial magazine.

In 1990, *Ms. Magazine* re-emerged as an advertising-free magazine, owned by its original founders. Since 2001 it has been owned by the Feminist Majority Foundation. In the first ad-free issue, Steinem wrote “Sex, Lies, and Advertising,” describing the pressures *Ms. Magazine* faced from advertisers. She described the way that advertisers—and other journalists—perceived women’s magazines simply as “catalogs,” the editorial material serving only to foment consumer desire and deliver readers to corporations:

Except as moneymaking machines—“cash cows” as they are so elegantly called in the trade—women’s magazines are rarely taken seriously. Though changes being made by women have been called more far-reaching than the industrial revolution—and though many editors try hard to reflect some of them in the few pages left to them after all the ad-related subjects have been covered—the magazines serving the female half of this country are still far below the journalistic and ethical standards of news and general interest publications. Most depressing of all, this doesn’t even rate an exposé.

If *Time* and *Newsweek* had to lavish praise on cars in general and credit General Motors in particular to get GM ads, there would be a scandal—maybe a criminal investigation. When women’s magazines from *Seventeen* to *Lear’s* praise beauty products in general and credit Revlon in particular to get ads, it’s just business as usual.<sup>30</sup>

In the oral history with Abigail Pogrebin, Steinem made a similar statement, laying out the refusal of advertisers to buy space in a women’s magazine promising serious journalism. “You know,” she said, “I have made lots of mistakes all on my own, and I have done all kinds of things that I would like to change, but most of all, I would like to take back all the time I spent trying to sell advertising” (p. 104).

From the perspective of the twenty-first-century world of mass media—with newspapers failing at an alarming rate, advertorials dominating print and electronic media, and medical journals using ghost writers supplied by pharmaceutical companies—Steinem’s comments about the difficulty posed by advertising for women’s magazines are not incorrect, but they are incomplete. When *Ms. Magazine* began, there was still a pact between “mainstream” media and advertisers that allowed corporations to fund journalistic research (that is, the reporters’ and editors’ salaries and research funds) and to publicize that research (that is, the newspaper at your door or the magazine at the newsstand) in exchange for a space in that magazine. That relationship—limited as it was—had already begun breaking down by the time *Ms. Magazine* tried to gain entry into that pact in the early 1970s. All media would soon be subject to the same advertising pressures under which women’s magazines had labored, struggling to find sponsors for their

serious journalism. When I asked early in this essay, then, whether *Ms. Magazine* actually helped to lay the groundwork for a new neoliberal journalism, limitless in voices but deficient in funding, I must answer “no.” *Ms. Magazine* fought the advertisers, attempting to hijack the system and give voice to new perspectives and ideas. They were not successful, not because of a philosophical editorial ethos that pushed them to highlight viewpoints that meshed with a neoliberal celebration of the individual, but because of advertisers’ pressures to squeeze out any other type of article. Just as every major news source would soon find out, corporations would become less likely to fund anything that did not promote a particular consumer ethos. In terms of feminist publications, we now have a large range of blogs and online sources—from the contemporary *Ms. Magazine*, to *Bitch* and *Bust*, to Feministing and Women’s eNews, and smaller blogs like Angry Black Bitch and Pinko Feminist Hellcat. It is rather reminiscent of the spectacular flourishing of small feminist periodicals in the early 1970s, with *No More Fun and Games*, *Ain’t I a Woman*, and *The Furies*. Significantly, both sets of media—the small periodicals and the new online media—share the ability to speak out forcefully without much concern about advertisers’ wishes or publishers’ demands. They also share the fact of very small readerships and very few resources to pay for writers’ time, expertise, or research expenses. That is what made *Ms. Magazine* distinctive when it emerged in the early 1970s; not only did it promise to deliver feminist perspectives, it also had the platform from which to reach a broader audience and to intervene in the world of commercial mass media. Indeed, when *Ms. Magazine* first began publishing, Onka Dekkers, a writer for *off our backs*, exclaimed that the magazine would bring feminism, lesbianism, and other radical ideas to the world of conservative America, hidden in grocery bags just like “tarantulas on banana boats.”<sup>31</sup> By the late 1980s, however, the financial resources for a mass-media *Ms. Magazine* had dried up. Commentators, including myself, perceived this to be a result of advertisers being unwilling to support a *feminist*, women’s magazine. This is true, to an extent. What is more accurate, however, is that *Ms. Magazine* was the first in the line of casualties of any kind of media that promised serious journalism. Less a tarantula in a banana boat, then, the magazine proved to be a canary in a coal mine—the harbinger of bad news coming the way of journalism.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Abigail Pogrebin, “How Do You Spell Ms.,” *New York*, 7 November 2011, 34-105. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>2</sup> Amy Erdman Farrell, *Yours in Sisterhood: “Ms.” Magazine and the Promise of Popular Feminism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998). Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>3</sup> Nancy Fraser, "Feminism, Capitalism, and the Cunning of History," *New Left Review*, 56 (2009), 97-117.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of this model of journalism and its breakdown, see Alex S. Jones, *Losing the News: The Future of the News that Feeds Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Gloria Steinem, interview with the author, New York, 2 August 1990; and "Personal Report from Ms.," *Ms. Magazine*, January 1973, 97.

<sup>6</sup> Pamela Howard, "Ms. and the Journalism of Women's Lib," *Saturday Review*, 8 January 1972, 44.

<sup>7</sup> "For the Liberated Female," *Time*, 20 December 1971, 52.

<sup>8</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963).

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Maurine Beasley, Sheila Silver, and Sheila Gibbons, *Women in Media: A Documentary Source Book* (Washington, D. C.: Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press, 1977), 118.

<sup>10</sup> Anne Mather, "A History of Feminist Periodicals: Part 1," *Journalism History*, 1, No. 3 (1974), 82-85.

<sup>11</sup> See Ginette Castro, *American Feminism: A Contemporary History*, trans. by Elizabeth Loverde-Bagwell (New York: New York University Press, 1990), 189-91; and Sara Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 288.

<sup>12</sup> Steinem, interview.

<sup>13</sup> Patricia Carbine, interview with the author, New York, 1 August 1990; and Elizabeth Forsling Harris, interview with the author, New York, 8 June 1990.

<sup>14</sup> Freda Kirchwey, "A Woman's Magazine and Why," *The Suffragist*, 9, No. 1 (1921), 356.

<sup>15</sup> "Feminist Forum," *Newsweek*, 8 November 1971, 104.

<sup>16</sup> Patricia Bradley, *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism, 1963-1975* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), 169.

<sup>17</sup> This cover became so iconic that versions of it continue to be used to illustrate "feminism"; see, for instance, the 21 February 2005 cover of *Newsweek*, which used a similar image for its cover story "The Myth of the Perfect Mother" by Judith Warner.

<sup>18</sup> Jane O'Reilly, "The Housewife's Moment of Truth," *Ms. Magazine*, Spring 1972, 54.

<sup>19</sup> "What's a Ms.?" *Ms. Magazine*, Spring 1972, 4.

<sup>20</sup> "Personal Report from Ms.," *Ms. Magazine*, July 1972, 7. See also "Everything You Wanted to Know about Advertising and Were Not Afraid to Ask—Personal Report from Ms.," *Ms. Magazine*, November 1974, 58.

<sup>21</sup> David Carr, "A Doomed Romance With a Paper," *New York Times*, 28 May 2012, B1.

<sup>22</sup> Lorraine Calvacca, "Forbidden Four," *Folio*, 15 October 1993, 25.

<sup>23</sup> For a more detailed discussion of *Ms. Magazine's* relationship with alcohol and cigarette ads, see Farrell, *Yours in Sisterhood*, 175-77.

<sup>24</sup> Lynn Cherny and Elizabeth Reba Weise, eds., *Wired Women: Gender and New Realities in Cyberspace* (Seattle: Seal Press, 1996).

<sup>25</sup> Carol Zimmerman, letter to the editors, *Ms. Magazine*, January 1978, 8.

<sup>26</sup> Letter to the editors, May 1978, folder 204, carton 6, *Ms. Magazine Letters*,

Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women, Radcliffe College.

<sup>27</sup> Courtney Bailey, "Bitching and Talking/Gazing Back: Feminism as Critical Reading," *Women and Language*, 26, No. 2 (2003), 1-8.

<sup>28</sup> Christine Frederick, *Selling Mrs. Consumer* (New York: The Business Bourse, 1929).

<sup>29</sup> Natalie Fuehrer Taylor, "The Personal is Political: Women's Magazines for the 'I'm-Not-a-Feminist-But' Generation," in *You've Come a Long Way, Baby: Women, Politics, and Popular Culture*, ed. Lilly J. Goren (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 231n19.

<sup>30</sup> Steinem, "Sex, Lies, and Advertising," *Ms. Magazine*, July/August 1990, 19.

<sup>31</sup> Onka Dekkers, "Ms.," *off our backs*, September 1972, 19.