

FOLKLORE IN AMERICAN WOMEN'S MAGAZINES

Elizabeth Baker

April 11, 1994

In no other place is American folklore more evident and more pervasive than in the media, particularly in advertisements that appear in magazines aimed at women. Note the ads I have clipped from February and March issues of magazines such as Vogue, Elle, Cosmopolitan, Glamour, Harper's Bazaar, and Mademoiselle.

All ten ads attempt to catch the attention of the normal female reader with money to spend by using common folk speech in the form of proverbial phrases and figures of speech. One uses the traditional "Hold Your Horses," meaning wait a minute, take your time to buy our product, to sell handbags. Another uses the old "Have Your Cake and Eat It Too," meaning you can enjoy life and still have more, to sell a brand of lipstick. Still another uses "Right on the Kisser," which originally meant a blow to the face, to sell another lipstick. This same use of folkspeech is obvious throughout: "Your Skin Doesn't Have to Act Its Age," "See You Later, Alligator," "A Real Shiner," "Which Came First," "Two of a Kind," "Go the Distance," and "Great Big Wet One."

Another use of folklore in the ads is the evocation of traditional stereotypes. Five of the ten use models that apparently epitomize what American culture thinks and even dictates the American woman should strive to look like. There are two ads that show the ideal American man, the stereotype that women should set their caps to catch. For example, the question "Having a Bad Skin Day?" makes us think that if we have acne or any sort of blemish we will not look like this lovely model and that Neutrogena can set us back on the right path. "Now Your Skin Doesn't Have to Act Its Age" makes it clear that age is ugly and that Revlon can make us young again. "Lips That Go the Distance" reminds us that we must

have moist, painted lips, this in order to look young and healthy enough to attract the ideal stereotype of American manhood to want to kiss us. The message is not hidden: Max Factor, of course, will give us such lips.

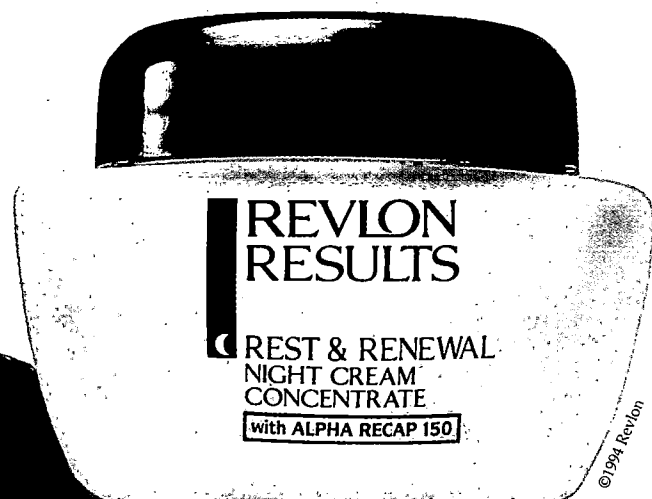
The ten ads also abound in a variety of folk belief. The simple fact that each of the ads is selling a beauty product or a form of ego-boosting accessory tells us that certain looks and possessions make us better, more desirable and better loved people. The ad for Vicenza leather bags and belts, for example, tells us that the way to be superior to other women is to wear and carry things that cost more than theirs did. The woman with expensive accessories is better than the woman without them. The Lace perfume ad reminds us that to smell good is to seem clean and therefore better than to smell either bad or neutral. Cleanliness is, after all, next to godliness. The Max Factor ad features lipstick and nail polish in cases of gold; and women know that these are beauty enhancers likely to be spotted by other women when they are used in public. The centuries-old belief that the person who has gold is queen of the realm still sees the light of day in selling the American women those things she is supposed to need in order to be highly respected in today's job and romance markets.

This is but a brief glimpse of the contemporary American's advertising scene. It features only a two-month offering from only a few publications. Yet it is more than sufficient to demonstrate how often American folk speech, stereotyping, and folk belief are used to sell products to women. Madison Avenue has read folk culture well and understands how to capitalize on its power over the American woman's mind.

VOGUE FEBRUARY, 1994

NOW YOUR
SKIN DOESN'T HAVE
TO ACT ITS AGE.

(OR LOOK IT!)



REVLON RESULTS™

The first-ever Corrective
Moisturizer with Alpha Recap.

This patented, ours-only
formula "re-trains" your skin
to act more like younger skin.
Carries away dulling surface
cells. Reveals fresher skin,
with new glow—new life.
A dramatic moisture surge.
Less visible damage, fewer
fine dry lines and wrinkles.

And unlike some fruit
acid products, Revlon Results
works without stinging!

MEASURABLE
RESULTS
IN LABORATORY
TESTS:

INSTANTLY
SKIN'S MOISTURE
IS BOOSTED
BY OVER

600%!

IN JUST
ONE WEEK,
FINE DRY LINES
AND WRINKLES
ARE REDUCED
BY OVER

38%!

AFTER 2
WEEKS,
SKIN'S SURFACE
CONTOUR IS
MORE THAN

36%
SMOOTHER!

AFTER
3 WEEKS,
90%
OF WOMEN
TESTED
FOUND
IMPROVED
"BRIGHTNESS"
AND CLARITY!

**GUARANTEED
RESULTS:**

GET SKIN
THAT ACTS
AND LOOKS
YOUNGER
IN JUST 3 WEEKS,
OR GET YOUR
MONEY BACK!

DETAILS
ON PACKAGE.

REVLON

Revolutionary

PROFILE

charges Ross with an array of legal and ethical misdeeds—everything from having Mafia ties and being disloyal to friends to stock manipulation. Although often praising Ross, Bruck nevertheless ends up burying him. She concludes that Ross's genius was in making people believe the larger-than-life image he created of himself. But, she insists, the image was a lie. "The truth was that his extraordinary generosity was funded to a great degree by the company," she writes, completely undercutting the very virtues that inspired such devotion from his admirers. "His loyalty, in many cases, endured as long as people were useful to him; and—driven by a compulsion to win—he tended to put his own interest ahead of others', in situations large and small."

That Ross died of cancer just three years after the Time Warner merger and was only briefly able to preside over the empire he had brought to fruition was widely judged a tragedy. This, however, was before

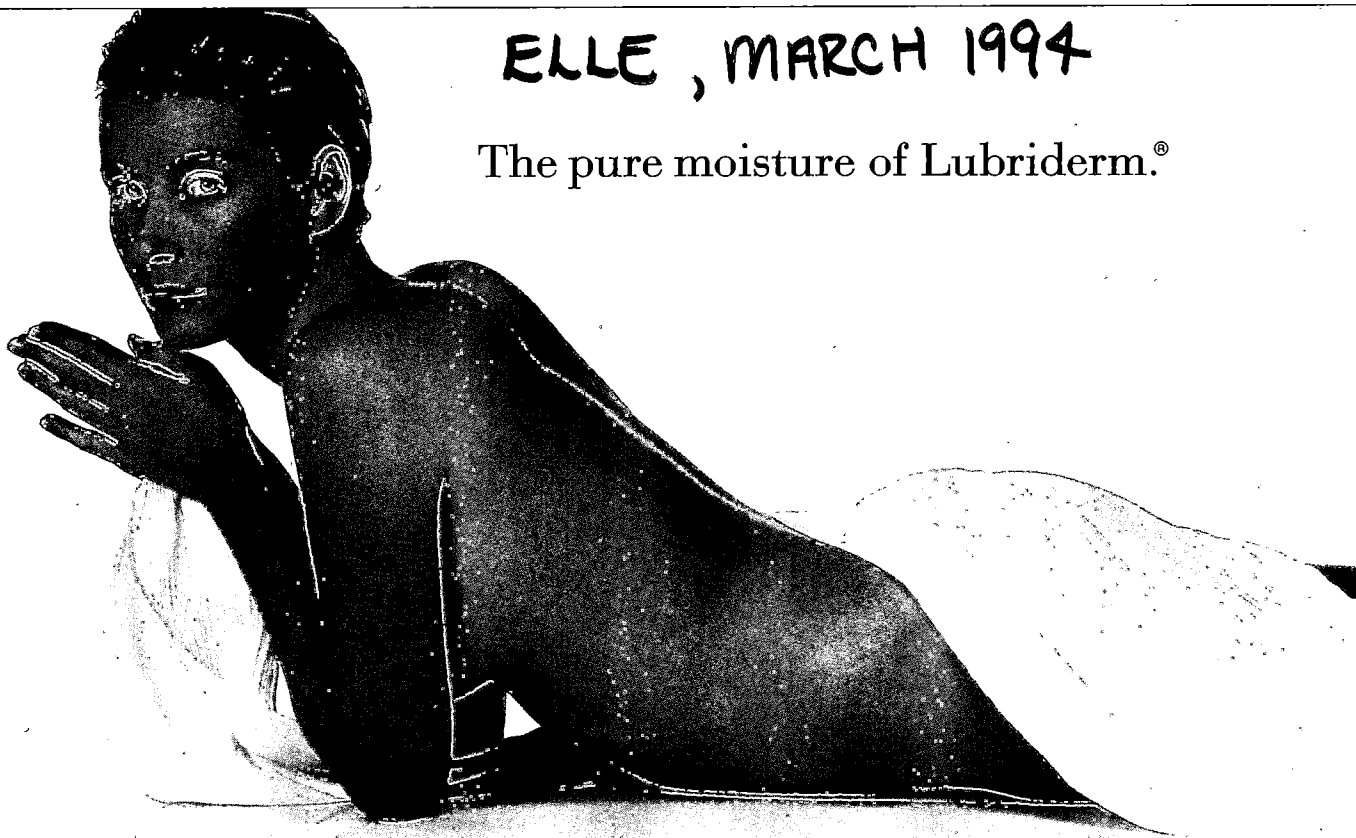
Bruck's unsparing portrait appeared; one now wonders whether Ross's premature death was actually an example of his impeccable timing. But Bruck wishes he were still alive. "Part of the allure for me was to write about a figure at the height of his powers and discover things about him nobody else knew. I had hoped the book would jar him. It was very difficult for me when he died."

Difficult for her? A sadness creeps into Bruck's voice as she discusses Ross's death—something deeper than the sound of a writer who is disappointed that her story has taken an unfortunate turn. After she had worked for years to uncover the very things Ross had spent an entire lifetime hiding, the only person who would *really get it* was now dead. Others might admire or loathe her portrait, but only Ross would know how accurate it was, only he could be truly shaken by it. For Bruck, the smartest student in the class, this would have been the ultimate affirmation.

The most damaging of Bruck's discoveries was that Ross was far more involved than had previously been

thought in a 1982 scandal surrounding a Mob-controlled theater in which Warner Communications owned an interest. Protected by the sacrifice of two colleagues (his best friend was one), Ross just barely escaped being prosecuted, and the scandal, which also involved Frank Sinatra and a host of unsavory characters, was a question that lingered over him for years. "The theater scandal was the part of the book I cared about most because nobody else had ever gotten to the bottom of it before," Bruck says. It also required some truly intrepid reporting, during which Bruck received two or three hang-up phone calls each day at her home and office. She was told that one Mob figure "would just as soon kill you as look at you if he knew you were asking these questions." Despite such dangers, Bruck knew she couldn't fathom Ross's character until she got to the core of the affair.

In the scandal's aftermath, Bruck's longtime mentor, Steven Brill, wrote a piece in *The American Lawyer* titled "Trading Up—How to Hang a



ELLE , MARCH 1994

The pure moisture of Lubriderm.®

Tycoon," in which he defended Ross as having been unjustly harassed by prosecutors who didn't have a case. Thereafter, Ross used Brill's article as a public certification of his innocence. In a dazzling act of journalistic patricide, Bruck devotes a sizable chunk of *Master of the Game* to deconstructing Brill's article point by point, arguing that he was misled by Arthur Liman, Ross's lawyer, and that he failed to look behind Ross's flimsy defense. When Bruck is finished, the dark clouds have turned stormy, and both Ross and Brill are soaking wet.

In fact, few people in *Master of the Game* are portrayed in a flattering light, which may say as much about Ross as about Bruck's savage style. Liman comes off as a duplicitous lackey whose personal loyalty to Ross outweighs his professional integrity; Ross's third wife, Courtney Sale, is seen as an imperious brat who fancies herself the Jackie O. of the media world; and Ross's successor, Time Warner chairman and CEO Gerald Levin, is depicted as an unscrupulous, Machiavellian schem-

er who lies, stabs a colleague in the back, and makes his final grab for power before Ross's body is even cold.

Although Bruck doesn't think of herself as a moralist, her often unrelenting judgments are what give her writing its bite. Some people, however, wonder whether since moving to *The New Yorker* she has gone too far. "Connie is a brilliant writer, but these days she is less concerned to restrain her impulse to pile on," says Brill, who had read only a published excerpt from the Ross book. "Journalists, unlike juries, don't always have to vote yes or no. They can sometimes vote gray."

More than Bruck's edge, it is her self-described "pathological honesty" that causes her to come down so heavily on her subjects. But while her opinion about someone's innocence or guilt is uncompromising, her literary rendering of it is anything but heavy-handed. "That most people have mixed emotions but believe, often passionately, that their intentions are good ought not to cloud the picture," she writes of the ambiguous conclusion to the Time Warner

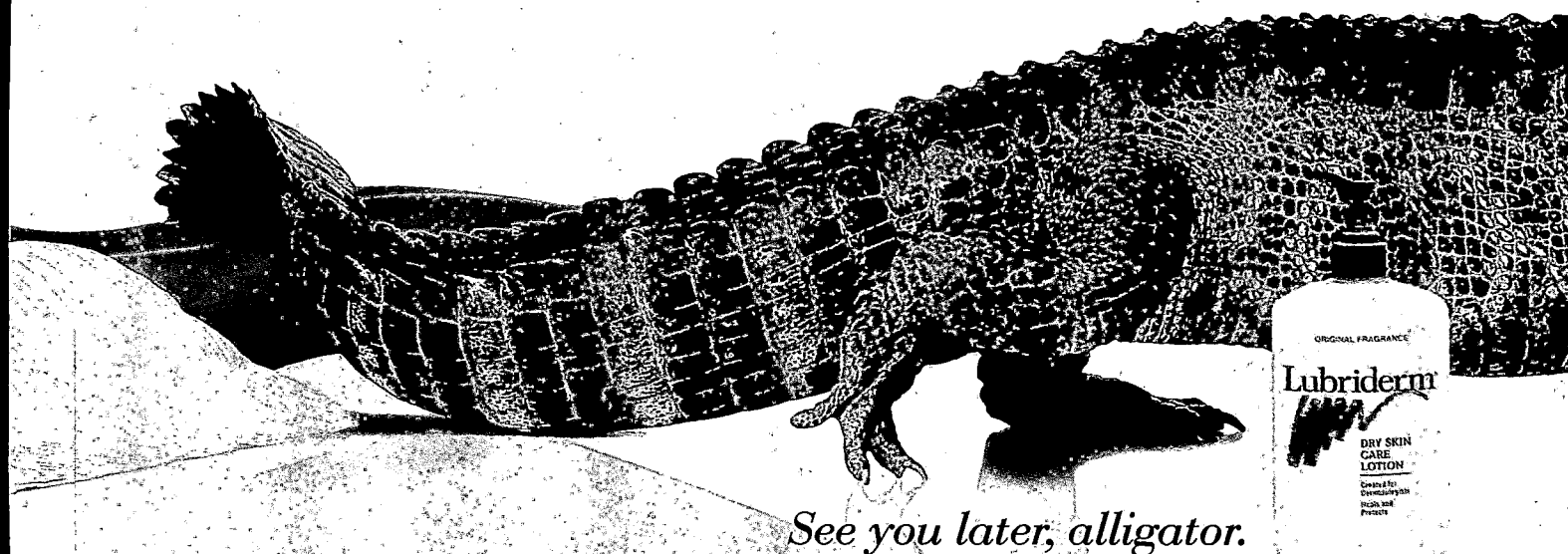
merger. "The deal that Time's managers were able to strike was not solely seigneurial, but it was seigneurial; it was not solely self-interested, but it was self-interested; it was not solely venal, but it was venal."

Currently at work on a piece about Hillary Clinton, Bruck has been dividing her time between Little Rock, Arkansas, and Washington, D.C. "She is such an inspiration to so many women, but it is not clear to me exactly who Hillary is," says Bruck, in between flights. "Nothing I have read about her even begins to satisfy my curiosity."

In her voice I hear all the ingredients of a classic Connie Bruck profile: high hopes and praise for the underdog, extreme inquisitiveness, a certainty that the real story has not been told. I find myself thinking: Whatever you do, Hillary, be careful when she asks you to "just walk her through" the comprehensive health plan. □

Robert S. Boynton frequently writes about business and media.

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AMOUR MARCH 1, 199

1-6

RIGHT IN THE KISSER

When she picks her target,
he's down for the count.

A mouth like that
is hard to ignore.

MAYBE SHE'S
BORN WITH IT.

MAYBE IT'S
MAYBELLINE.TM

A REAL SHINER

Moisture Whip Gloss Stick.
Sheer color madness and shine.
Moisturizes and conditions.
Never sticky or heavy.
Next victim, please.

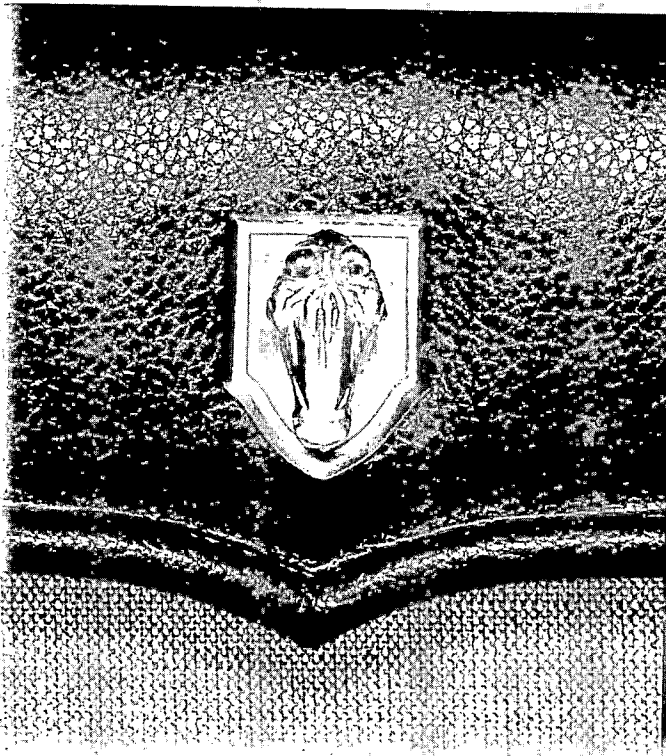
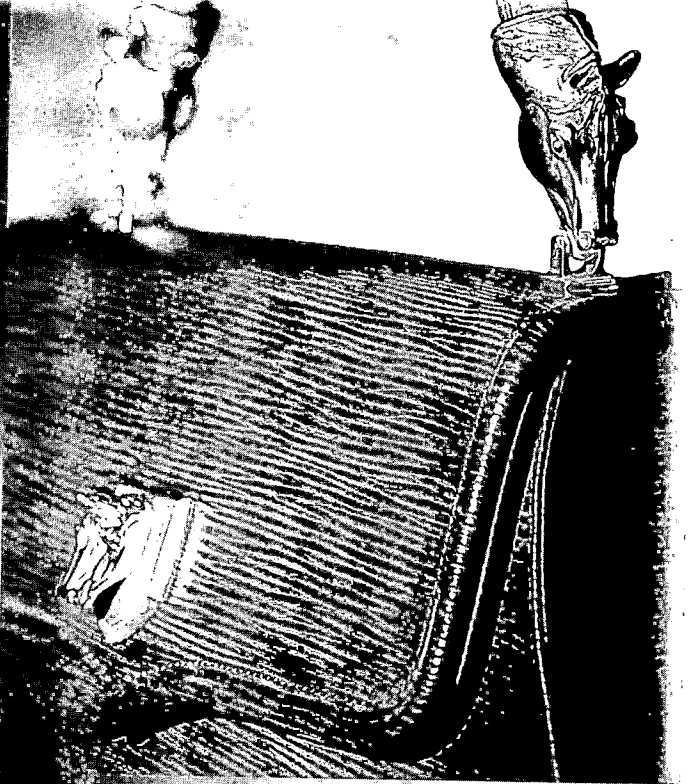
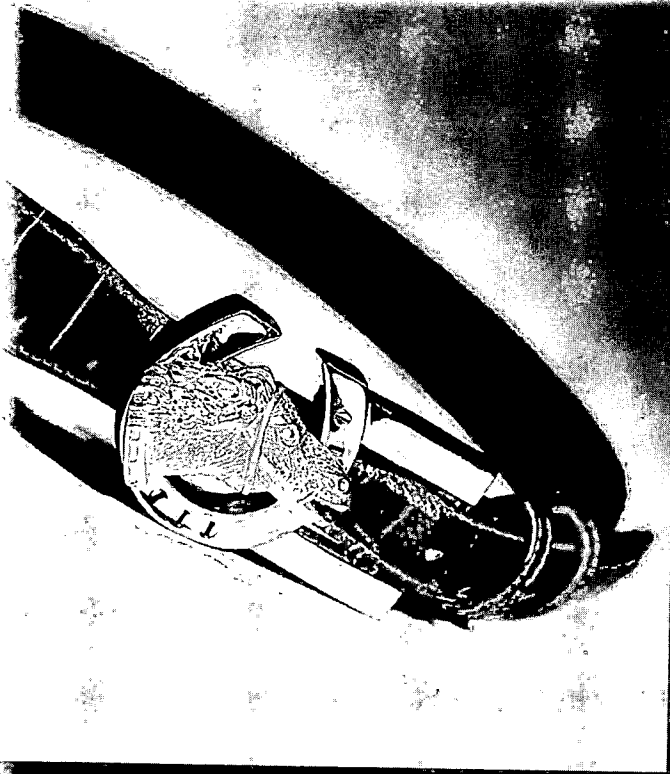
MOISTURE WHIP[®]
GLOSS STICK
by Maybelline[®]

Christy is wearing: Barely Wine Moisture Whip Gloss Stick and Long Wearing Nail Enamel in Romantic Mauve.

ELLE MARCH, 1994

1-7

HOLD YOUR HORSES



VICENZA.
BELTS & HANDBAG

SAKS FIFTH AVENUE

For the Vicenza retailer nearest you call 1-800-932-BELT

MEET AN MARCH, 1993

© 1993 COTY INC. AVAILABLE IN CANADA.

A beautiful fragrance is unveiled.



Which came first
true love or
TRULY LACE?

To receive a free sample of Truly Lace® .25 oz. Cologne, send \$1.00 (check or money order) for postage and handling along with your name and mailing address to: Truly Lace Sample, P.O. Box 5567, Newtown, CT. 06470-5567. Please allow up to twelve weeks for shipment. Limit one sample per person or address. Offer expires 12/31/94.

To find this romantic boutique collection of personal and home fragrance at a store near you, call 1-800-528-7228.

GLAMOUR MARCH, 1994

1-9

Two of a kind? Not quite.

The big difference is in the clothing colors they're wearing. "Warm" soft peach. "Cool" hot pink. Would you know which makeup shades to wear with each? Your Mary Kay Beauty Consultant does. And with the exclusive *ColorLogic*™ system, she can help you not only choose the right shades, but learn how to apply them. To complement your features. Your coloring. And your wardrobe. With Mary Kay, you can look like a million. Or two.

Call 1-800-455-1190 for your free warm or cool makeup samplers and a full-color beauty brochure. Or for more information, call your Beauty Consultant.

Choose a warm or cool sampler kit.

Warm



Eyes:
Honey Glaze



Truffle



Cheeks:
Coral



Lips:
Pumpkin

Cool



Eyes:
Whisper Pink



Iris



Cheeks:
Wild Rose



Lips:
Plum Blossom



1-800-455-1190

MARY KAY®

GLAMOUR MARCH, 1967

110

Having a
**Bad
Skin
Day?**

Try these
up-to-the-minute,
on-the-spot
solutions!

Neutrogena[®]

F O R A C N E - P R O N E S K I N

MADEMOISELLE MARCH 1994

L11

© 1994 Chesebrough-Pond's USA, Co.



Even after a great big wet one, your lips stay sealed with Color Splash™.



Cutex Color Splash seals on color and seals in conditioning.
Because only Color Splash has Water Seal™ conditioners.

Model is wearing Hot Tomato lipstick.



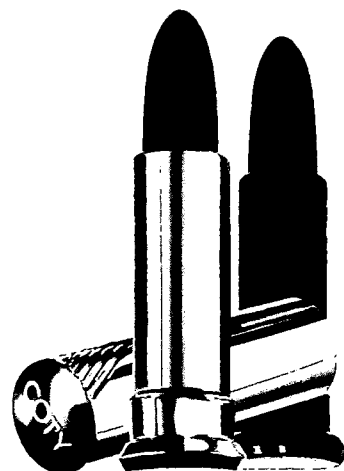
CUTEX

BAZAAR

MARCH, 1994

112

COTY



COTY '24'
LIPSTICK

HAVE YOUR
CAKE
AND EAT IT, TOO

YOUR LIPSTICK WILL STILL BE ON.
COTY '24' LIPSTICK. WON'T SLIP, SLIDE,
TRIP YOU UP OR LET YOU DOWN.
WITH COTY '24' IT'S A PIECE OF CAKE.

1994

H-13

lips that
go the distance

Now,
the creamy
formula of Lasting
Color Lipstick has
Colour Reserves to keep
the rich colour looking
just-applied-new for
hours. That's
impact.

LASTING COLOR LIPSTICK
DIAMOND HARD NAIL ENAMEL



MAX FACTOR
INTERNATIONAL

MA

3