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New York: Routledge, 2016

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REFERENCES

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- 1 *Women in Magazines: Research, Representation, Production and Consumption*, edited by social and women's historians Rachel Ritchie, Sue Hawkins, Nicola Phillips & S. Jay Kleinberg, is somewhat of a "reader" on the program its title foreshadows, which is to study women in magazines, from various angles, during various periods of the 19th and 20th centuries and in various countries of the Western world. Because it offers several varied case studies enlightening how to use the press as a source in historical research, or how to fruitfully analyze magazines' networks of production and content, it should prove of particular interest to scholars in both media studies and women studies.
- 2 The book is composed of thirteen chapters divided into five parts and opens up on an informative and very complete introduction. These first pages, along with the first two chapters, should prove of use to magazines' researchers in general: they strongly articulate issues of methodology and of epistemology—how to approach one's sources?;

how to position oneself to study them?; how to consider them in context?—and provide clues to implement the solutions that they offer.

- 3 The introduction is crucial in laying out the scope and the goals of the project; it links the different chapters together and brilliantly summarizes their stakes, their key findings in terms of approaches used to study magazines, and the common conclusions which they come to—applicable to many magazine studies. Such a cohesive introduction proves to be especially needed, since most subsequent chapters present case studies on specific questions. Such various focuses are, in the preliminary text, justified: the book is indeed about analyzing magazines' relationships with women, including but not limited to women workers in the press industry, women's representations, women's education (or lack thereof) through magazines, and the bodies of women in a body of press works. Ritchie, Hawkins, Phillips and Kleinberg also make evident that the large geographic area considered (the UK and the US but also Czechoslovakia, Canada and Australia) aims at extending scholarly comprehension of the press' (internal) mechanisms, mostly through indirect comparison. In their own words:
- 4 A primary goal of this collection is to demonstrate this validity to a wider audience by showcasing the usefulness of magazines as an historical source. [...] Some of our authors are magazine specialists. Others use periodicals as part of a range of resources to research a wide variety of topics, such as women's employment or popular understandings of feminism. Whichever the writer's stance, these case studies add to our understandings of individual publications, magazines as a cultural form and the workings of the periodical press. [...]
- 5 A second aim of the collection is to highlight the tensions and paradoxes that both characterise the relationship between women and magazines and are inherent within the publications themselves. While there is great variety in terms of each author's area of focus, underlying the entire collection is a strong commitment to exploring the diverse and often conflicting evidence that emerges from such studies (at times even within a single issue of one title). (1-2).
- 6 Here, they lay solid foundations which the ensuing contributions build upon and, although case studies in the book chapters are necessarily limited by their format, the possibilities opened by a search for similarities and differences (between geographic and time frames, but also between targeted audiences and mechanisms at play) amongst them appear endless. Such a solid foundation also relies on a firm knowledge of classic references in magazine history and recent historiography. The reflection is enriched by an exhaustive bibliographical discussion, which invites to acknowledge and sometimes challenge an already stimulant intellectual background. Appreciation of the singularity of the magazine-object is even furthered by the authors' meticulousness in considering its essential components; such a thoroughness puts forth the constraints which shape the production and content of magazines, and fuels their analysis. Finally, let us note that this dense introduction pays particular attention to the interactions between magazines and their readers. In that way, the book takes a stand and positions itself within a new current of scholarship as it reconsiders the crucial, long-minimized aspect of audience agency, which—in line with other fields such as sociology or postcolonial studies—it finds to be far greater than many previous publications had assumed.

- 7 The historical contributions gathered in this book under the prism of gender are thus as useful to shed light on the present state of the magazine press as to uncover how much the dialectics between gender norms and the women producing, consuming and negotiating these norms are dependent on a context that the magazines under scrutiny shaped as much as reflected.
- 8 Chapter 1, “Fragmentation and Inclusivity. Methods for Working with Girls’ and Women’s Magazines” by Penny Tinkler is in many ways a continuation of these reflections and a call to put them into practice. Tinkler devises an actionable methodology to indeed “Think About Women Magazines” (as per the first part’s title). She urges researchers to look at magazines in context—historical but also specific contexts—, analyzing the press landscape around magazines and the multiplicity of elements which compose them:
- 9 Girls’ and women’s magazines are complex cultural products. They are part of the periodical industry and designed in relation to one another. Their content is diverse in format and incorporates different contributors. They are the product of negotiation, typically between publishers, editors, advertisers and readers. Their pages harbour diversity, inconsistency, contradiction and tension. (note) For all these reasons it is helpful to have a methodology for working with magazines that is inclusive rather than fragmentary (25).
- 10 While, much like in the introduction, the concepts Tinkler promotes are not new, they prove extremely helpful, in an interdisciplinary perspective, to envision magazines from as many angles as possible. Tinkler’s work is not only useful because it skillfully gathers information and ideas in one single place, it is also clearly written and engaging. As it becomes obvious by the end of the chapter, Tinkler has an agenda: “This chapter introduces and champions an inclusive approach to working with magazines. In doing this it challenges fragmentary research practices and encourages historians to be more open and reflexive about how they use magazines to learn about the past”, touching upon the topical but sometimes thorny issue of situated knowledge, which is of peculiar importance when looking at such protean objects as magazines.
- 11 Chapter 2, “Landscape for a Good Woman’s Weekly. Finding Magazines in Post-war British History and Culture” by Tracey Loughran, offers an effective transition from methodological concerns to their applications in case studies: Loughran also voices an agenda and develops a method, which she encourages researchers to expand upon, of looking at women’s magazines through their representations in popular culture. To do so, she observes “cultural traces” of magazines in their representations in books and films, that weigh on (often critical) academic as well as the general public’s views of such media. Loughran’s project entails implicitly questioning how a scholar positions him or herself in relation to one’s research object. In her case, she considers women’s magazines somewhat from the margins, and thus her chapter answers to the book’s call for various approaches in studying the press.
- 12 Following these introductory fifty pages, more specific case studies unfold. While they do read, to a certain extent, as an application of the questions raised in a more general manner in the first pages, taken independently, they will more likely speak to researchers whose areas of interest are close to theirs. Partaking in the “reader” textbook approach adopted in the whole book, each case study states rather clearly its object, its methodology and what it stands to demonstrate.

- 13 The second part, “Ideals of Femininity and Negotiating Gender Norms”, is concerned primarily with representations of women in magazines. In the four chapters, the press is used as a new, understudied source to widen research on gender and re-read history, all the while complexifying it. For instance, in chapter 3 (“Inter-war Czech Women’s Magazines. Constructing Gender, Consumer Culture and Identity in Central Europe”) Karla Huebner analyzes women’s weeklies in Czechoslovakia in a comparatist perspective, aiming to displace the usual geographical frames and open up the field of media studies. It is also what Sinead McEaney does in chapter 6 (“Righting Women in the 1960s. Gender, Power and Conservatism in the Pages of *The New Guard*”), by focusing on a seldom analyzed publication, the young conservative movement’s journal in the 1960s. In what she presents as a pendant to the researches led on the radical underground press of the period, McEaney posits that women of the right paradoxically gained a political voice and, in some cases, positions of power in the editorial team of a publication promoting a traditional gender-roles repartition, thus challenging pre-conceptions on a certain type of press.
- 14 This offers a good transition to the third part, titled “Women, Magazines and Employment”, is also rather programmatic. Chapter 7, the excellent “Getting a Living, Getting a Life. Leonora Eyles, Employment and Agony, 1925–1930” by Fiona Hackney, focuses on the production of the socialist writer in both the mainstream and the radical press. Hackney analyses the different components of a female journalist’s identity (political and personal). She is especially concerned with how her writings would develop an intellectual network, also comprising the women readers. Interactions between various spheres (individual, contextual, formal) are all taken into account in a remarkably balanced way and Hackney gives here a fine example of what the book as a whole is trying to achieve. Let us also note that the fact the “agony aunt” figure¹ is under scrutiny in this chapter as well as in several other contributions is in this regard enlightening: it bridges a gap between editors and readers, links women and/in magazines in yet another, unexpected way and questions well-established editorial hierarchies. The three chapters that follow look alternatively at remarkable personalities or landmark titles to present the press as a tool and, much more, as a *forum* where gendered and class relationships are enacted and sometimes negotiated. Usually relying on detailed accounts of the historical context (let’s recall that most contributors are historians), these case studies also use varied primary sources, ranging from personal papers to readers’ letters so as to offer documented, text-based conclusions regarding the ambivalence of the relations between the feminine press and women.
- 15 The fourth part, “Young Women in Magazines”, includes a fascinating study of *Honey* magazine, a UK publication aimed at the new “Single girl” of the 1960s: chapter 12, “A Taste of *Honey*, Get-Ahead Femininity in 1960s Britain” by Fan Carter successfully intertwines an analysis of production issues and textual/visual content, using important primary sources such as market studies from the period and showing good mastering of secondary sources around the topics of the fashioning of femininity. Carter, paying special attention to the historical context, thus demonstrates how economic imperatives, such as growing market segmentation, influenced new discourses shaping the development of femininity, (visual) discourses, which in turn shaped the propositions that the new market segment targeting the youth decided to

put forth. In that way, the chapter answers fruitfully to the methodological considerations which opened the book.

- 16 The fifth and last part, “Women’s Bodies from Second Wave Feminism to the Twenty-First Century”, is wide-ranged, covering matters of sexual freedom, health and Black beauty. Chapter 14, second to last, looks into the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, the only publication to be studied three times across the book. “How *Ladies’ Home Journal* Covered Second Wave Health, 1969–1975” sees Amanda Hinnant explore health-related articles throughout issues, to uncover how Second Wave feminism and a mainstream magazine may concur or compete to distribute information about health issues (at a time when they were scarce and when knowledge was, indeed, power). Here, the press is again seen as a platform, not as a tool. The profusely explained methodological approach, partly qualitative and partly quantitative, is clear and fruitful: it extracts the underlining meaning from texts in context, taking into account the upheavals of the period, the violent critics formulated against the feminine press by feminists at the time but also the magazine’s organization, to sketch the picture of a conflicted content, and of a magazine standing at the crossroads between various sensibilities and interests.
- 17 As seen through various examples, this book is as rich and diverse as the magazines it studies. This sometimes results in unequal material, since the common threads developed throughout the book are not always convincing, depending on the topics tackled. For instance, a recurring obsession with the spatial metaphor applied to magazines (as “sites”) runs throughout the different chapters. While it is a clever way of anchoring the publications into their materiality in the present digital age (an approach also imbued with the “spatial turn” and testifying to the inscription of most contributions into recent academic currents), it is not always subtle, nor even appropriate in certain cases. The non-reflexive use of such concepts, already well-implanted, can harm the general project and contradict its ambitions, pointing to a certain extent to its limits.
- 18 Yet, this book mostly upholds its ambitions: it is efficient, informative, pleasant to read, easy to quote and useful to think about, around and of magazines. The themes that run through its pages should resonate in many a research, as they do between the different chapters.

NOTES

1. “Agony aunts” is how writers answering readers’ letters in the advice columns were named. They provided guidance and reassurance to women and were key in articulating their concerns with other contents in the magazines.

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