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Book Review:

Remake, Remodel: Women's Magazines in the Digital Age by Brooke Erin Duffy
Published by University of Illinois Press, 2013

Author details:

Dr. Sharon Patricia Harper
Centre for Fashion, Art & Photography
University of Gloucestershire
Hardwick Campus
St. Paul's Road
GL50 4BS
sharper@glos.ac.uk
@DrSharperPhoto

Biographical Note:

Sharon Harper is Senior Lecturer at the Centre for Fashion, Art & Photography at the University of Gloucestershire. Her two recent articles "The Commercial Elephant in the Room" (Take on Art) and "The World's Most Amazing 100% Awesome Photography Theory" (Photographies) both aim to address the need for greater theoretical engagement with commercial photography. Her current work includes her accepted paper "More than the object: The Importance of digitalisation and context", and "'As creative as I want': The shifting sands of power and control in creative decision-making for commercial photographers" currently under peer-review. She will also be delivering a paper as part of a panel on commercial photography at the upcoming MeCCSA conference in London, January 2018.

Title: Players in a Changing Game: Book Review of *Remake Remodel*, University of Illinois Press

The consumer magazine industry, like so many other media sectors, is in a high state of flux. Dropping circulation figures, disappearing ad revenues and migrating readerships to digital platforms suggest that traditional consumer magazines – glossy printed pages filled with colour-saturated imagery and 'soft' journalism – are threatened by social media and web-based content. Framed within the context of magazines' struggles to adapt to the digital world, Brooke Duffy asks the central question plaguing many in the industry, "what is a magazine?" (2).

In order to address this deceptively simple question, *Remake, Remodel* (University of Illinois Press, 2013) takes what Duffy describes as a "mezzo-level approach that foregrounds the processes of media production" (14). Unlike women's magazine studies of the 1980s and 90s, which focused on ideological meanings and relationship with readers or, less frequently, industry structure and its relationship with capitalism, she employs a framework that considers the form and content of magazines in relation to the production context in which it is made. In particular, she unpicks the complex relationships between print production and the new publishing world of digital forms through a focus on the shifting professional roles and identities of publishing personnel. She gathers her primary data from

in-depth interviews across a range of roles in “three of the largest publishers: Hearst, Condé Nast, and Time” (15) as well as trade press and industry conference material.

Duffy’s study is part of a larger return of interest to the magazine publishing industry at a defining moment. Other relatively recent studies, such as those by Doyle (2011) and Cox and Mowatt (2008), have examined contemporary industry concerns (albeit within the UK) through an economic or business structures lens. So, for those academics interested in the form and content output of the magazine industry, including those interested in the commissioned content that contribute to consumer magazines such as graphic design, illustration and photography (as in my own research), Duffy’s focus is welcome. She provides valuable insight into the difficulties facing many personnel in reconceiving of their roles as creative producers and their relationships with their readers as they get to grips with the fundamentally different means by which digital platforms facilitate the packaging, delivery and reception of content. She also adeptly integrates the modes in which digital forms of content impact on decision-making, priorities, and even loci of power in the production process. What emerges from this book is the complex, semi-coordinated and sometimes outright chaotic ways in which production personnel attempt to adapt both the product and themselves to a world in which the future of magazine production and consumption is uncertain.

Part of her analysis involves the role of gender in magazine production identities. Gender issues are apposite partly because the media product in focus is women’s magazines, but the real significance lies in the fact that, as Duffy highlights, “since at least the eighteenth century, women have been involved in magazine production as contributors, writers, editors, and more.” (25) Thus, when considering their professional identities and the relationships to both the product and other professionals with whom they work, she includes gender as part of that identity composition. And, what is clear from subsequent published material – for instance, her most recent book *Gender and self-enterprise in the social media age* (2017) - the role of gender and identity in professional and semi-professional roles has proven to be central to her developing research. In *Remake Remodel*, however, the role of gender feels like a slightly awkward addition to the main study rather than a central feature. Although gender’s role in professional identities is put forward by Duffy as significant, there are large sections of the book where it plays little role in the analysis and feels rather tangential. The overall consideration of gender in relation to professional identity in the magazine publishing industry is less illuminating than the broader professional identities in relation to production.

Overall, *Remake, Remodel* provides valuable insight into the production context and professional identities of an industry that has been a substantial part of the media industries and yet has had limited recent academic attention, particularly when seen next to studies of film, music and television. In keeping with media studies and sociology’s production of culture perspective, it attends to both social agents and organisational context when considering the form and content of the magazine. The book’s most valuable contribution lies in the consideration of these relationships.

Works cited

Cox, Howard, and Simon Mowatt. 2008. "Technological Change and Forms of Innovation in Consumer Magazine Publishing: a UK-based Study." *Technology Analysis and Strategic Management* 20 (4): 503-520. doi: 10.1080/09537320802141494.

Doyle, Gillian. 2011. "Magazines." In *Handbook on the Economics of Leisure*, edited by Samuel Cameron, 453-469. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.