



Alison Hedley, *Making Pictorial Print:  
Media Literacy and Mass Culture in British Magazines, 1885-1918.*

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Alison Hedley's study of popular British illustrated magazines at the turn of the nineteenth century maps out an "evolution of design aesthetics" that allowed for greater engagement with these magazines' readerships, presenting opportunities for readers to participate in and contribute to popular culture (3). Hedley argues that, due to this shift in engagement, illustrated magazines continued to thrive even when print started to decline, and continued to inform the mass culture of the twentieth century to the point of still underpinning facets of popular culture today. This study's main argument is backed by an exploration of technological advancements in the production and distribution of periodicals at the end of the Victorian era, including the photomechanical image reproduction processes of the 1880s and 90s. These technological advancements allowed for an even greater number of images to be included in illustrated magazines.

This influx of imagery prompted periodical producers to develop a new set of aesthetics that drew readers' attention to "how the images, letterpress, page layout, organization, and material characteristics contributed to meaning" (6). Hedley's study is informed by two key concepts: "*print media literacy*" and "*print technological imagination*" (7). Print media literacy is tied to the "mediation of popular culture", prompted by readers' growing awareness

of “how the physical characteristics of a print object attested to its production history” and how these physical characteristics underpinned the print object’s “representations of cultural knowledge” (7). Print technological imagination refers to how periodical producers engaged with “aesthetic strategies” to encourage and foster “the imagination of whole readerships”, leading to the exercised imagination of individual readers based on “subjective priorities” (7).

All five chapters of this study focus for the most part on an individual magazine. Each chapter is underpinned by a specific theoretical framework. Chapter 1 looks at how the transition from wood-engraving to photomechanical image reproduction processes in the *Illustrated London News* led to the news weekly’s second birth at the end of the nineteenth century. Hedley cites André Gaudreault and Phillipe Marion’s theory of medium development, which notes that “a medium is always born twice”, when making this argument (22). This shift in the weekly’s design aesthetics was shaped by the rapidly changing media landscape. Hedley considers specific examples such as the *Coronation and Procession* number (1902), “Stories without Words” (1906), and “Fairy Stories by Photography” (1907). These examples spoke to readers’ technological imagination while informing their understanding of how the *ILN* represented popular culture. Hedley credits this shift in design aesthetics in news weeklies like the *ILN* as a reason why print media continued to dominate even after the rise of other technologies in communication.

Chapter 2 looks at the concepts of media literacy and technological imagination through an exploration of the advertising pages in the *ILN* and the *Graphic* between the years 1885 and 1906. Hedley argues that readers’ analytical understanding of mediation underpinned “their perception of consumer culture” (23). While aesthetic strategies such as kitsch and *mélange* could influence readers to combine reading with consumerism, this same readership could also use their media literacy and technological imagination to produce “counter interpretations” (23). To consider how readers were able to assign their own meanings to these advertisements, Hedley refers to “Michel de Certeau’s theoretical characterization of the interaction between the *strategies* of cultural producers and the *tactics* of consumers” (65). These tactics include curation and counter-interpretation.

Chapter 3 looks at “*population journalism*”, a term coined by Hedley to indicate the sort of journalism that “combined entertaining data graphics with narrative analyses of vital statistics about human populations” (89). This chapter is informed by Michel Foucault’s biopolitical theory, in which the biological features of humans were measured by their biopower or the qualities that were considered integral to their strength. Using this theory, Hedley argues that population journalism entwined statistical narrative with data visualization as a way for readers to position “themselves as statistical units within a delineated sociobiological population, the British nation” (92). Hedley considers the population journalism published in *Pearson’s Magazine* between the years 1896 and 1902, analysing two specific examples: “Is Suicide a Sign of Civilisation?” (1896) and “The Mathematics of Marriage” (1898). However, the article “Statistics Gone Mad” (1898), published in *Harmsworth Magazine*, attests to the backlash ultimately faced by population journalism.

Chapter 4 takes a different approach by examining a selection of scrapbooks. This case study on scrapbooks virtually completes the argument in Chapter 2 by proving that Victorian readers engaged with their media literacy and technological imagination by creating their own representations of design aesthetics. Hedley argues that scrapbooking not only gave readers the ability to position themselves within popular culture, but offered a way for them to use their media literacy to create personal media. Scrapbooking was also a means for makers to have agency as they became producers.

Chapter 5 looks at a specific feature in the *Strand Magazine*: “Curiosities”, which ran from 1896 to 1918. This feature allowed readers to directly contribute to the magazine through the new technical innovation of the hand camera. Readers could share curated snapshots and their thoughts on the photographic process. Hedley uses Patrice Flichy’s “theoretical framework for describing technological integration” when analysing this case study (143). Flichy’s framework considers the importance of consumers and producers when looking at how new technologies emerge and become part of “a socio-cultural context” (143). Hedley argues that “Curiosities” led to the formation of what Flichy calls the “socio-technological frame of reference” for snapshots (143). Looking at “Curiosities” as the last case study is an effective way for Hedley to end her study, because it allows her to examine the direct contribution of readers while demonstrating their increased engagement with print media at the *fin de siècle*.

In conclusion, this study ultimately aims to redress the gaps in cultural critique that have so far prevented scholars from assessing new media through the media literacy and technological imagination of illustrated magazines’ readers. Hedley emphasizes how the role of design aesthetics and the relationship between the periodical producer and the engagement of the reader through participation and contribution are significant aspects of new media. Her study also importantly points out how our own engagement with the digital media of the twenty first century is underpinned by certain characteristics of Victorian print media, and particularly by the ways in which magazines’ readers learned to participate in and contribute to popular culture via their magazine reading practices. This study would appeal not only to Victorianists working in a range of disciplines, but also to scholars and students interested in media studies, and how the print media evolution of the Victorian era continues to influence the field. Scholars of Victorian popular fiction in particular will appreciate the study’s dedication to popular illustrated magazines while considering a wide range of readerships.