



the bureau magazine

In the first issue of *the bureau magazine*, the editor, Matt Derody, notes that the magazine ‘is about the detail, design and distraction that underpin our lives.’ Its website states that its focus is on art, culture and design yet its purpose is hardly traditional. Instead, ‘it seeks out and closely examines the objects, environments and weird shit that’s all around us’.

A survey of issues 1 and 2 indicates a fulfilling of the editor’s goals: the staple of regular topics includes an editorial, chairs, beer, sneakers, a comic — ‘The chook’, film reviews and Right to Reply — a two-person discussion of a chosen subject and The Last Page — an acknowledgement of people, difficulties and a tease for the next issue. ‘Features’, drawn from those ever present distractions, are interspersed amongst the ‘regulars’ and include topics such as mockbusters, muzak, bad driving, trains, future fashion, street art and urban development. Photo essays on chairs and kebab vendors, fashion sketches and drawings reinforce its urban feel and emphasis. The articles take a range of forms: essays, conversations and interviews. The palette of the magazine is muted, the fonts many — including the unreadably small — and the paper soothingly flat. The busy edges of inner suburban streets and lives are evoked and lift from the paper as one flips through its pages.

The tone of many of the intriguing features is ironic and this gives the magazine a particular and humorous flavour, a flavour spiced with street language and extended hyphenated adjectives. Both reinforce the idea of using the found stuff of daily life as a unifying concept. Generally the material is engaging and interesting. The ‘Beer’ reviews vary, for example. In ‘issue 1’, the review takes the form of an at-the-bar dialogue. In ‘issue 2’, the comments are overlaid with an editor’s red-penned corrections. The restaurant review, ‘Dining Out’, notes the overheard comments of other diners. The ‘Bunkers’ and ‘Kebabs’ photographs are a refreshing reminder that even defence calls on design and that our common daily experiences warrant as much attention as the frequently reworked high-art subjects of established magazines. The ‘regulars’ and ‘features’ tease the reader with new possibilities, alternative perspectives — they present a different view of the world.

However, the content and writing style of some articles bothers me. At times it is banal, trivial and almost abusive. To describe Scientologists as ‘kooky-ass mutherfuckers’ fails to summarize the more critical direction the film reviewer of ‘Battlefield Earth’ was attempting. Having abandoned any serious critique of the film to attack Scientology, the writer draws on the public-forum encyclopaedia, Wikipedia, as a reliable source of information. Peppered with street language, neither the review nor the digression, inform the reader of anything other than the emotional state of the writer. Equally, although the innovative conversational exchange, the form of the first beer article, is interesting the peppering of the second with editorial marks and comments is distracting and the discussion of the beers offers little by way of knowledge or understanding about the process of beer making in relation to taste.

There is a tension between the banal and sophisticated in *the bureau magazine*. The personal style of the writer of ‘Sneaker Dictionary’, which is embedded in a glossary of sneaker terminology, and the decision to include a sophisticated dictionary-like glossary that plays with the concept reflects this tension: ‘Swoosh: (swu:f) n. **1.** The official Nike logo. **2.** It is not a fucking tick.’ Chook’s request in the comic (issue 1), ‘to get me some cash bitch’, which I simply find offensive, is a further example. The laconic and ironic style of some contributors suggests that style equals commentary and therefore anything is acceptable. For me, harpoons fail to reach their mark when they are abusive and dismissive.

These examples reflect what I consider to be a problem for *the bureau magazine*. They made me ask, who is this magazine appealing to? While the critical and subversive elements and undertone suggest it is appealing to a young but culturally-informed reading audience, the frequent use of street language and the lack of thorough research in some articles suggests it aims to appeal to those seeking to be entertained by coarse humour. Further, the dominance of male writers and the chosen subjects also suggests the magazine is targeting a male audience. This is fine, if this is its purpose. However, the articles on ‘Mockbusters’ by Livia Albeck-Ripka and ‘The Rise, Fall and Plateau of Muzak’ by Atticus Bastow suggest the magazine seeks to do more, as do the insights into creative practice in the articles, ‘Graff vs Street Art — the interview with Andrew King, and ‘On Comics and Theft’ — the autobiographical essay by the cartoonist, Pat Grant. These articles were a stimulating read. Equally engaging were the photo essays on bunkers, trains and kebab vendors.

the bureau magazine seeks to look beyond the conventional and question the traditional content and style of magazines devoted to art, culture and design. These first two issues show that the bric-a-brac of our daily lives is interesting but that in itself does not necessarily make compelling reading. While avoiding the mimetic is laudable, any replacement of the traditional only gains credibility when the replacement is well-researched and well-written. This will depend on the rigour, insights and voice of each writer. Many of the features and regular columns in the first two issues fulfil these criteria, but not all. Further consideration of the intended audience and the nature of included writing could strengthen the appeal and potential of this magazine.

Dr Elizabeth Colbert
Swinburne University