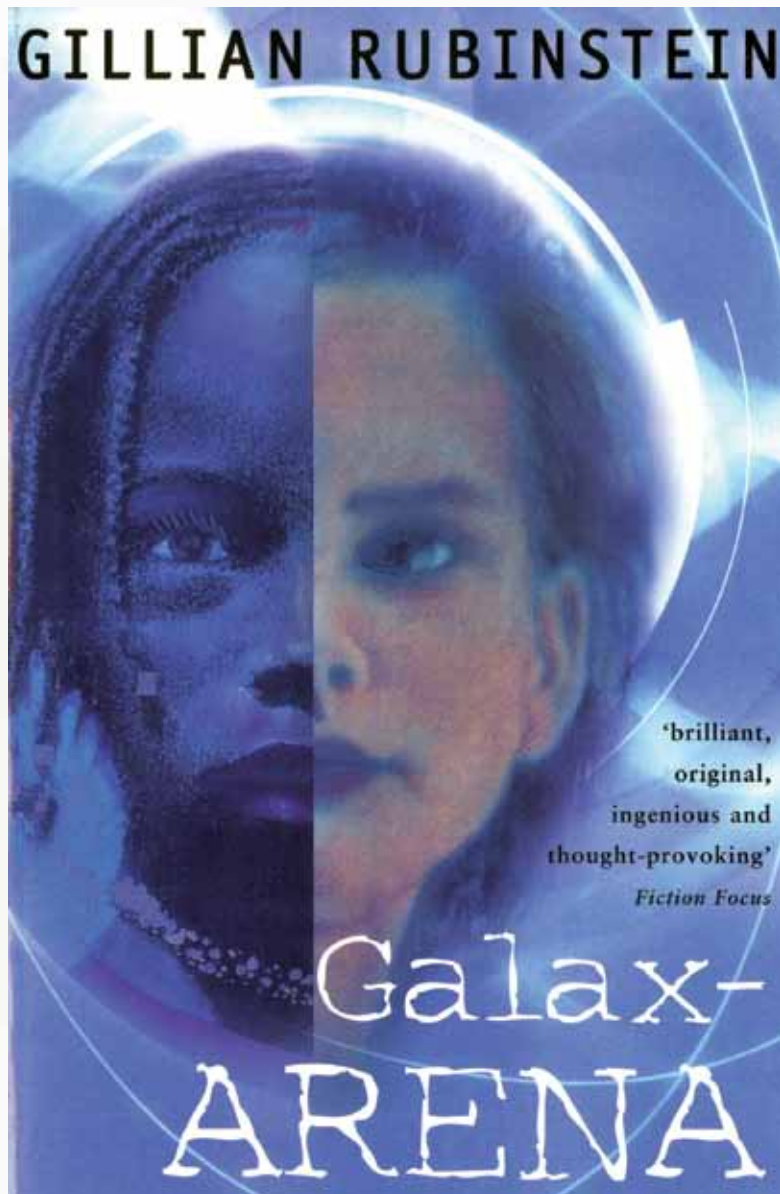


viewpoint

on books for young adults

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I love magazines.
Brainwash Magazine
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Confession: I love magazines. As a teenager, I was an avid reader of the early *Dolly* magazines but I consumed the English *Women's Weekly* and *National Geographic* with equal pleasure: the best quick reads in the world, in the brightest packages. I love *Frankie*. Newspapers may be shrinking, in more ways than one, but the magazine market seems to be expanding. Check out every newsagent displaying numerous titles catering to increasingly niche markets. Even so, to print one on this scale using a small grant and with no help from advertising, is an admirable undertaking. (*Brainwash* has an online presence as well.)

Everyone talks about the images of girls and young women portrayed by the glossy magazines, and the potential damage that they do, but one young woman is doing something about it. Jessica Barlow, Founder and Editor-in-Chief of *Brainwash Magazine* says: 'It is my utmost hope that this magazine helps to raise awareness of how magazines and media impact upon our self-esteem. I also hope that it encourages healthier practices in regards to photo editing and placement of weight-loss related advertisements in magazines targeted at teenage audiences. As well, I'd like to encourage the major players in women's magazines to start showcasing a diverse representation of beauty to reflect the reality that teens face every day.'

The 188 page magazine's title is in bold black on a matt white cover, with the words 'Don't Judge by Appearance' the only print on the back. The magazine opens with beaming paper people: simple but effective collaged self-portraits that contributors have made using 'ideal' features from a variety of fashion spreads.

Barlow was inspired to create *Brainwash* by her own memories of reading *Cleo* ('the most popular magazine when I was at high school'.) A description of her campaign to require them to 'stop using editing software to change the appearance of people' is the first article in the magazine.

Colour photographs illustrate articles on a wide range of topics. Opening it at random: a photographic journalism project, 'We Are The Youth', chronicling the individual stories of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in the US; profile of young designer Eve Walton-Healey, with pictures of her garments; 'Africa's Wildlife Angels'; 'An Ode to Trees'; and a profile of female skateboarders.

The content is mostly by teen contributors, and targeted at girls twelve and over. The articles come from Australia – great to see Western Australian and Australian territories represented in a Sydney-centric media market - and a number of international correspondents. The writing is as varied as it is in any publication of this size, and not everything will appeal to everyone: good editing is evident in the layout and design which ties it all together.

The July 2013 issue of *Cleo* has an article new columnist, Jessica Rudd, 'If the Shoot Fits'. The article begins with her reminiscing about how at her girls' school, *Cleo* was required reading, cutting out pictures of the guys, the fashion and the glamorous writers. But it takes an 'arsenal of experts, equipment and eyeshadow' to get that way. Rudd writes: 'The perfection that the magazine embodied was unattainable. I'd never be one of them. So imagine my surprise when I opened *Cleo*'s May issue to see that same girl on those same pages. And she didn't look half bad, either. Long, smooth legs – in dire need of a tan, but still. Clear, dewy skin. Flat tummy. A neat waist.'

She describes how the photographer set up for the optimum shots, the use of the right clothes and angles. The article then goes on to describe the shoot's outcome: of several hundred shots taken, only five were useable. As far as I can tell, this is the closest *Cleo* has come to responding to Barlow's campaign. It's a start.

Margaret Robson Kett

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