

Do specialty mags signal death of mass media?

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the last of 15 articles on popular culture in American life. The series was written for Courses by Newspaper, an extension program of the University of California, San Diego, and funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The articles constitute the text for an Oakland University course taught by Prof. Jesse Pitts. The views are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect the views of the universities, the funding agencies or this newspaper.



Alvin Toffler is best known for his prize-winning best seller "Future Shock." A former associate editor of Fortune Magazine, he has also written "The Culture Consumers" and "The Eco-Spasm Report." He is a lecturer and consultant to foundation and industry.

By ALVIN TOFFLER

Are we witnessing the death of the mass media?

Starting nearly 200 years ago, the media—newspapers, magazines, radio, television and the movies—have increasingly influenced daily life in all the industrial nations.



Mirror of American Life

Filling our ears with mass-produced music, our eyes with mass-produced graphics and our minds with mass-produced folk tales about football heroes and Hollywood stars, they form the sea of popular culture in which all of us swim.

Their basic principle was simple: Like a factory that stamped out products, they stamped out images, then disseminated them. Sets of images, carefully engineered by professional writers, editors, artists, newscasters, actors or copywriters, were packaged into programs, articles, or films, and then pumped wholesale into the mind-stream of the nation, or for that matter, the world.

THE RESULT was a standardization of the culture of the world's industrial societies, the homogenization of ideas, values, and life styles. The mass media helped create what sociologists came to call "mass society."

The Ladies Home Journal, for example, was the world's first truly mass magazine, achieving a circulation of around one million at the turn of the century.

When the LHM carried an article on how to decorate your living room, it influenced taste (and furniture sales) from California to New England, helping to create a national market for standardized, mass manufactured goods.

Even today, the mass media retain enormous mind-shaping power.

NEVERTHELESS, there are signs that the mass media are in their death

throes and that a revolutionary new information system is being born.

What we are witnessing is nothing less than the de-massification of the mass media.

Since the 1950s some of the world's largest magazines—Life, Look, and the Saturday Evening Post, to name a few—have died or shrunk into ghostly reincarnations of their former selves.

Some media gurus declared that his was because people were no longer reading, that television produced a "post-literate" generation.

Yet after a decade or more of so-called post-literacy, people are reading as much as, if not more than, ever before. Ask the publishers. People are reading.

But their word-diet is no longer limited to standardized messages aimed at a universal, mass audience. The place of the great mega-magazines has increasingly been taken by hundreds of mini-magazines carrying highly specialized messages to small segments of the public.

On one newstand in Omaha, not long ago, I found 15 different magazines aimed at aviation enthusiasts alone.

In addition, the stands are filled with cheaply produced, offset printed, specialty magazines for hot-rodgers, scuba-divers, ecologists, collectors of antique cameras, UFO freaks, religious cultists, political splinter groups, ethnic subcultures, businesses, professions, and for every age group from

toddlers to those in their "golden years."

LONG BEFORE we had national magazines at all, we had regional and local magazines that reflected the regional and local basis of our technology and economy.

As technology grew more powerful, and national markets emerged, these local and regional publications disappeared and the national magazine took their place.

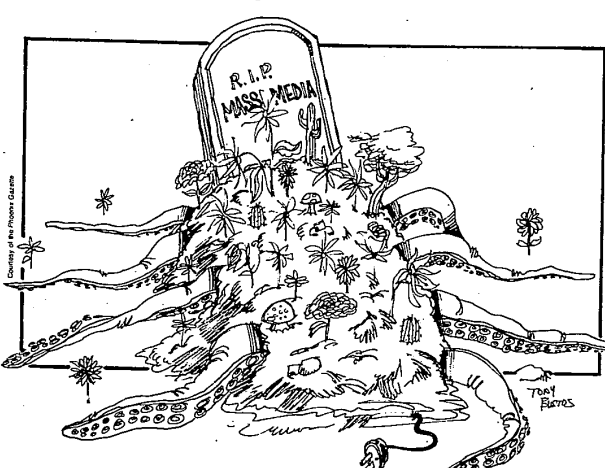
Today, we see a revival of regional and local publications in every part of the country. There are even magazines that slice up the reading public two ways at once: by region and by interest. Thus we find, for example, South, a magazine aimed exclusively at Southern businessmen.

What does all this mean? The death of the mass-interest magazines heralds a basic change in our popular culture.

The decline of the mass magazines and the proliferation of specialized magazines means that fewer standardized, culture-wide messages are flowing into our minds, and that more specialized messages are flowing into our minds, and that more specialized messages are reaching different sub-groups within the society.

This is accelerating the breakup of the old mass society and the formation of a new social, political, and cultural diversity.

With the arrival of cheap copying machines, as media critic Marshall



"What we are witnessing is nothing less than the de-massification of the mass media," according to Alvin Toffler.

McLuhan has suggested, every individual can be his or her own "publisher," and we are now freely circulating images, messages, signs and symbols to very small groups, indeed.

The Xeroxed Christmas message that goes to family and friends is an example of this form of "personalized" publishing. It represents the ultimate de-massification of the mass media.

BUT PARELLEL trends are racing through the audio media as well.

Take, for example, the tape recorder. The radio broadcaster operates a "sound factory" distributing the same sounds to millions of ears simultaneously.

The tape recorder makes each of us a broadcaster, or more accurately, a narrow-caster. We choose what we wish to record, of all the sounds around us, and we can duplicate them and pass them around to friends or through chain-letters, if we like.

Radio, putting us in the position of passive listener, and carrying messages from the few to the many, is inherently undemocratic. Tape recorders are inherently democratic. Soviet dissidents—poets and singers who cannot get on the state-controlled airwaves—pass messages along the tape-line.

TELEVISION remains today the

great standardizing medium, and Barbara Walters can still command \$1 million a year because it is thought she can maximize the mass audience for her network.

But television is still a primitive technology. (We mistakenly think TV is more "advanced" than printing, but it has gone through fewer successive generations of improvement.)

As we move toward wider use of cable and video cassette, the number of channels and the number of different messages will rise, just as it is already doing in both print and oral communications.

Here, too, we shall increasingly generate images, ideas, and symbols to be shared by a few, rather than by the culture as a whole.

THESE CHANGES in our media and in our popular culture reflect even deeper shifts in our society.

Industrialism produced a mass society. We are now swiftly moving beyond industrialism to a new stage of civilization that will be technological, but not industrial. This new society will be the mass society de-massified.

We see this de-massification taking place at many levels. We see it in the rise of ethnic consciousness, in the rise of secessionism in Quebec, Scotland or Brittany, in the breakup of monolithic Communism into nationally oriented Marxist movements, in the growing

sectionalism in the United States, and in many other social, political, and artistic manifestations.

This centrifugal process will undoubtedly bring with it many problems. But it will also open vast new opportunities for us to reach toward greater individuality.

Popular culture, instead of being mass-machined at a few centers, then mass-distributed to passive culture consumers, will take on a new richness and variety, as we become producers as well as consumers of our own imagery and symbolism, our own values and life-styles.

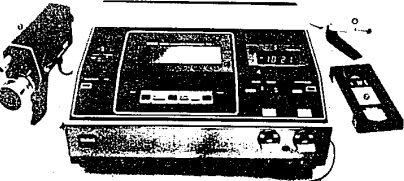
SURELY SOME powerful national mass media will survive this long-term shift.

No doubt there will continue to be some national or even global hook-ups to spread certain important ideas, news and metaphors simultaneously to us all.

But instead of getting most of our popular culture from the mass media in pre-packaged form, as it were, we will increasingly design and create our own culture, as communities did in the distant, pre-industrial past. We are moving swiftly into the future.

We are about to witness the death of the mass media as we have known them.

(Copyright 1977-78 by the Regents of the University of California.)



A technological development such as this RCA video cassette recorder may provide greater individuality in our culture. It includes a camera (upper left) for production of home shows, cassettes with four hours of recording time and an electronic digital clock-timer for unattended recording.

Fitness & Fun—a new way to celebrate
NEW YEAR'S EVE
 at the superb
FRANKLIN RACQUET CLUB
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 31, 9 PM 'til 2 AM
TENNIS & RACQUETBALL and continuous **DISCO**
 featuring the **DISCO BONNIE & CO.**
 High Energy Show
BUFFET & BEVERAGES • SAUNA • DANCING & MUSIC • HOUR OF COURT TIME
 Beer & Wine
 An Ecoterra Personal Service Agency Event designed to introduce you to new friends
 and a good time.
 Price per Person *\$30.00 • **TICKET INFORMATION CALL**
 851-9584 or 626-7450

THE FOLLOWING
BIRMINGHAM SHOPS
WILL BE OPEN
FOR YOUR CONVENIENCE
SUNDAY DECEMBER 17 & 24

| | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|
| The Birmingham Bookstore | For the Prestige Woman |
| Continental Watch & Jewelry Shop | R. B. Shop |
| Hansel & Greel | Andrew Rismann |
| Harrison Luggage | Roberta Shoes |
| Here & Now | Sherman Shoes |
| Kay Baum | Stalker & Bous |
| Mark Kellar | The Table Setting |
| Kresge's | John Thawley Courtier |
| Lake's Jewellers | What's Upstairs |
| Phillip Layne | Wright Kay |
| Midtown Cafe | |

Store Hours:
 Now 'til Christmas
 open until 9 every
 week day night.
 Saturday until 5:30
 Sunday Noon 'til 5

DEFINITELY BIRMINGHAM

Birmingham Bloomfield Chamber of Commerce Retail Division

SINGLE?
 You say you don't have things to do, places to go, or new people to meet? So why haven't you joined People, Places and Things?

You'd like to meet new friends, have places to go and be with people who like the same things you do. People, Places & Things is an exciting concept for singles. We are your personal reservationist for events, activities and travel with people of similar interests.

Meet others while participating in many interesting, exciting and enjoyable opportunities available monthly for your choosing.

PEOPLE PLACES & THINGS
 29540 Southfield Rd.
 Suite 100A
 Southfield, Michigan
 48076 (313) 559-5620

For more information call 559-5620 or mail this coupon.

I want to know more about People, Places & Things. Please send brochure.

Name _____ Phone _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

LET
CHRISTMAS MUSIC
 RING OUT ON YOUR OWN

YAMAHA
ORGAN
 or
PIANO

Come see & hear our outstanding pianos & organs. We have grand pianos available for Christmas delivery in all sizes from 5'3" to 7'4" for your selection—and prices start at a low \$3995.00

Professional Keyboard
 43907 VAN DYKE, STERLING HEIGHTS
 739-8500
 DAILY 10-9
 SUN. 1-5 'til Christmas

SHOP BIRMINGHAM
 where your Christmas present can be found in our Christmas past

This year Christmas shopping in Birmingham will be a very special stroll through the past. Birmingham's quaint village feeling, twinkling lights in the trees and variety of shops have always added to the true spirit of the season, but this year our store windows and special events around town will be a reminder of Christmas past.

The week of December 10th
 you can view this photo along with many others of Birmingham's past at the Detroit Bank and Trust, on the corner of Woodward and Hamilton, and during the month of December enjoy the sound of Christmas carolers in the streets of Birmingham.

So come and join us this holiday season in Birmingham where you'll find friendly merchants, extended store hours, safe, lighted parking, and an atmosphere that is truly a Christmas present out of the past.

Store Hours:
 Starting December 1st
 open until 9 every
 week day night.
 Saturday until 5:30

The above photograph of West Maple Street from Woodward (approximately 1925) compliments of Manley Bailey Funeral Home, Inc.

DEFINITELY BIRMINGHAM

Birmingham Bloomfield Chamber of Commerce Retail Division