

DESIGN CONTEXTS

Social Binds in Media

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[An analysis of three of Time magazine's covers, aligned with major global events to determine the impact they bare on its image]

I am going to be using Time Magazine, America, as an example of a long-standing media to try and determine how society effects the way all widespread media presents itself. Along the way I will raise related issues, such as 'profit or passion?' and 'does media influence its audience or vice versa?' I intend to use 3 significant moments in American history to show the impact global matters have had on the magazine's face. I shall look at covers from 1945, the end of the Second World War, 1969, the moon landing, and 1991, the end of the First Gulf War. I chose these 3 events because not only are they all turning points in history but everyone has heard of them, more than likely, through media.

Time is a weekly magazine, founded in 1923 by Briton Hadden and Henry Luce. Hadden was known to treat Time as a fun outlet for significant social issues. (TIME Archive, 2012) states "Editor Hadden liked to liven things up by scoffing..." He was often criticised for not taking major matters seriously. They didn't necessarily start out with a written manifesto but they would tell the news through the people involved and tell it from their point of view. There is a red border around every front cover, almost framing the featured person. A very unique approach for the early 1920s, a post World War One era, as it placed the reader right next to these great public figures in such an intimate way. This possibly explained Hadden's approach; America cannot place individuals on pedestals nor idolise them. They need to be united, as a country. 89 years on where do these beliefs stand now?

World War II was undeniably an ominous time for America ending on 2nd September 1945. I studied covers a few months prior to this date, so that I might be able to understand how the magazine coped and offered itself during this grim period. If you look at the issues up until 30th April 1945 (*Vol. XLV No.23, 1945*) there is definitely an order, everything has its place and it dare not leave a grid. There's

absolute minimal dynamics and the colours? Dull and drained. But Hitler dies on this day and the issue that follows shows a, post-modern influenced, image of his face with a spray painted cross going through it. (*Vol. XLV No. 19, 1945*) This cover is risky, bold and demonstrates a refreshing change from the predecessors. As time passes, the Germans surrender, and America get closer and closer to victory, and a direct reflection of this is the covers getting more and more bright and carefree.

This raises the question, is the newspaper influenced by society's disposition or is it possible that the newspaper could actually be the ones influencing it?

In a sense, we can never know without going back but we can apply this question to more recent affairs and be closer to an answer. Take Saddam Hussein's execution at the end of December 2006, for example. The covers on the issues leading up to this were slick looking, grey on white, technology focused (*Vol. 168 No. 19, 2006*). In January 2007, the focal point shifted towards the Marines and War again (*Vol. 169 No. 3, 2007*). It's still hard to determine whether the public influenced this choice or it was, in fact, the magazine that influenced their interest in the matter. But pushed for an answer in this instance, I would say that given that there is a 20 day gap between issues, the public have shown an interest in the story and so Time have had a while to deliberate and chose a topic in the public eye and, as such, shown it attention. Was this decision to utilise and exploit the situation for sales and profit, or because the magazine is passionate about the news? I would love to choose the latter but cannot help but feel decisions ultimately come down to profit.

The Moon landing in 1969 was unarguably the peak of American brilliance, at that time. It seemed like anything was possible. "Now their lives will depend on nine million bits of machinery working exactly right." (Donnelly, 1989, p. 8) This is a short extract from a children's book about the moon landing, I believe it really hits home the

true power behind entrusting yourself with technology, this was almost the crossing of a threshold into a new, technological world. But was this excitement and feeling of limitlessness reflected in the covers surrounding 21st July 1969?

My initial reaction was no as the cover directly after the Moon Landing was simply an image of an astronaut (*Vol. 94 No. 4, 1969*) but when you really break it down, there is a new found dynamic that cuts diagonally though the page. For what seems like the first time, the magazine hides the word "TIME" by making it a similar colour to the image. The focus is pulled to the words "Man on the Moon", almost humbling themselves to the astronauts and the technology that got them there. The issue before this (*Vol. 94, No.3*), for the first time, breaks outside of the red frame around the outside, suggesting a change and a sense of innovation. The choices of colours are bold and complimentary, installing a feeling of fresh control over design.

I can see that America's shared promise bared a weighting on how the magazine saw its potential, not only for the covers surrounding, but for the future ones too.

(*Mass Media Influences on Society, 2008*) states "In the last 50 years the media influence has grown exponentially with the advance of technology..." A snowball effect that started in the late 1960s. Technology did nothing but advanced from then on and in 1991 live satalite feeds became widely available resulting in the Gulf War becoming the first mass media covered conflict. Starting in August 1990 and ending in February 1991. Not the longest battle recorded but with 147 casualties in under two years, certainly momentous. In (*georgepeter, 2007*), John Holliman says the viewers stay "in touch" with this technology and he is right. The referenced video is a reporter talking to the CNN studio live from Iraq the night that the war began. The news was now almost instantaneously being fed to us and one would think that fortnightly magazines would wither in demand, surely a worrying instance for Time?

Taylor (1992, p. 4) states a quote by, British Broadcaster, Robin Day “Television has a built-in bias towards depicting any conflict in terms of the visible brutality. You can say, of course, that that is what war is – brutality, conflict, starvation and combat. All I am saying is that there are other issues which cause the things to come about, and television does not always deal with them adequately.” The way television seemed to have approached the Gulf War was with the angle of *mindlessness* and *greed*. I think that Time magazine engaged the question much more laterally and this is perhaps their saving grace, as it were. Time gave an angle that no one else gave, an angle stemming from its very first issue, grounded and real.

They began covering the Gulf War with a very stylistic cover, outlining the threat made by Saddam Hussein to go to war (*Vol. 137 No. 3, 1991*). It's a very different image to what we are used to, dark and menacing. However, unlike television it doesn't cause panic, rather it calmly identifies that there was a war coming. They then follow this up with a series of covers that are similarly laid out to each other (*Vol. 137 No. 3, 1991*) and (*Vol. 137 No. 5, 1991*). The word 'Time' is noticeably smaller to show the focus *has* to be on the unavoidable, bold and yellow headlines. But the cover that really sums up the magazine's mindset (not only for the Gulf War but for their entire existence) was “Kuwait Is Liberated” on the 11th March 1991 (*Vol. 137 No. 10, 1991*). This cover consisted of the American flag flying over the magazine's name and a joyous group of soldiers. This is a simple enough image to look at but, like much of these covers, when you really probe them you realise that they aren't really simple at all. Everything has been considered deeply and serves a message. This “simple” cover really hits home the power of America. Of course, this is really what Time is about.

I have given the question much consideration and after breaking down the events I am concluding that the magazine often loses sight of (what I believed to be) its original style, telling the news through the people involved. The reason I say this is because some issues, such as Dec 11 2006, don't have a focal person to tell the story through but, in fairness to the magazine, this was never an official manifesto so they are not technically deviating from anything, perhaps just trying new styles out and being bold?

I believe that the social impacts are definitely present and the influences are, from what I can see, nothing but positive. They may not always focus on a great American and their achievements, as in their first issue (*Vol. 1 No. 1, 1923*), but in a sense they still do the same job, only in a different way. They have progressed a lot since 1923, and even since 1945. As of 1969, what I referred to as the "threshold", society has become more daring and adventurous and in turn, so has Time magazine. If the planet held no power to how they presented themselves would we still be seeing timid gridded design?

Perhaps not, they were timid because society dictated that they had to be formal and abide to the rules. Who knows what media would look like without social order, but I will say I don't want to know. I discovered something humbling about the notion, I found through this investigative essay. The suggestion that media is in touch with its audience in such a receptive and sensitive way.

Time still holds the torch for America; they aren't always the voice of an individual, instead the voice of the people and they demonstrate a power as a country and the strength to voyage on, overcoming tasks and challenges.

To summaries what I have learnt, I think that I was wrong to begin with. I misread Time's intentions. I was looking to see if they still told the news through the people

but through exploring, deeply some of their covers, I realise that, although they are known to do that, it isn't their primary goal. Their primary goal seems obvious now: To sing praise to their country and its achievements and they *never* lose sight of that! Furthermore, I feel that '*influence*' is an irrational term to describe the correlations in media and society. I now believe that media are responsive to the audience, rightly or wrongly, for profit. They are a life force, adapting to survive.

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