INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MAGAZINE STUDIES (2025) Vol. 2, Nº. 1 pp. 10-22

ijms.ulusofona.pt
doi: 10.60543/ijms.v2i1.10546

THE MAGA AND THE ZINE

TIM HOLMES
CARDIFF UNIVERSITY (UK)

Tim Holmes is Reader Emeritus of the School of Journalism, Media and Culture of Cardiff University, UK, where he taught for 25 years as Director of the MA programme in Magazine Journalism and the MBA programme in Media Management. He founded the conference series Mapping the Magazine, running three editions in Cardiff before co-hosting with colleagues in Sydney, Chicago and Lisbon. He has written books and book chapters, and edited a number of volumes, including *Mapping the Magazine* (2008), *The Handbook of Magazine Studies* (2020), and *Transforming Magazines: Rethinking the Medium in the Digital Age* (2022).
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9065-2050

Corresponding author
Tim Holmes
holmesta@cardiff.ac.uk
Cardiff University
UK

I first came across the word "MAGA" thanks to my grandfather. It was not his political stance that brought about the encounter –although that was indirectly relevant–more his literary bent. A devout Jane-ist (that is, an admirer of the works of Jane Austen), he also allowed himself a subscription to *Blackwood's Magazine*, which had acquired the nickname MAGA.[1]

Blackwood's Magazine was first published as *The Edinburgh Monthly Magazine*[2] in 1817, when publisher William Blackwood founded it as a Tory-leaning[3] counterweight to the *Whiggish Edinburgh Review.* Despite its political leanings, from the outset it embraced controversy and was not afraid of publishing work by unconventional, and certainly un-Tory, writers such as theoretical-revolutionaries like Percy Bysshe Shelley and drug-addled visionaries like Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The magazine encountered some setbacks (there was, for example, a fatal duel caused by its publication of libellous statements), and from the mid-1820s began to incorporate tales of horror–which, like the political content, were categorised as "articles"–in an attempt to increase sales. In this it was sufficiently successful to reach the notice of Edgar Allen Poe, who wrote a piece called "How To Write A Blackwood Article", supposedly based on a conversation between Mr Blackwood and an author-manqué named Signora Psyche Zenobia. Poe's story, which included an interesting explanation of the "cut-up" writing style, later famously used by William S Burroughs and David Bowie, can be read here[4]. And if you have access to JSTOR, there is a scholarly exegesis of it (dos Reis, 2010).

The Maga may not be as widely known as other progenitors of the form such as *The Gentleman's Magazine* (1731-1922) but it occupies an important space in the canon of literary-political publications, and it is heartening to see that, as magazines become a respectable field of study, it is gaining deserved recognition. William Cairns, in his review of British literary periodicals that published work by American authors between 1815 and 1833, called *Blackwood's* "the most important of the magazines" (Cairns, 1922). More recently, John Strachan in his Introduction to a scholarly edition of critical prose from *Blackwood's* characterised it as "the most brilliant, troubling, acerbic and imaginative periodical of the post-Napoleonic age", further describing the magazine's "tonal registers: judicious and scurrilous, sober and satirical, generous and unscrupulous, partisan and open-minded, reactionary and avant garde" (2016, p. xii).

I wish I could say I agreed, or disagreed, with these points but I have to confess that I hardly ever looked at my grandfather's copies of his beloved Maga, even when copies were left to hand in the guest bedroom where I slept when visiting. But I did inherit at least some of his love for the literary magazine, because in 1977 when *Granta* had a major relaunch under the editorship of Bill Buford, I subscribed. *Granta* had been founded in 1889 by students at the University of Cambridge as a place to publish student politics, student humour and student literary efforts–although when those literary-minded students included people such as Arthur Conan Doyle, AA Milne, Ted Hughes, Sylvia Plath, Stevie Smith and Michael Frayn, it does show the original *Granta* in rather a different light. However, despite such contributors, over the decades of the 20th century interest in the magazine declined and its future seemed doubtful. Enter Cambridge graduates Buford,

1 I remember reading *somewhere* that this nickname was a result of William Blackwood's slight speech impediment. The story was that he would greet the arrival of each issue with, "Ah, here is my Maga ...", getting stuck on the "zine" part. But, of course, I cannot find a reliable source for this, so let it stand as an anecdote.

2 Editors' note: From October 1817 to December 1905, the magazine was titled Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, later adopting Blackwood's Magazine until its final issue in 1980.

3 In British politics the Tories have always been associated with the right-wing, even before the formation of the Conservative Party in 1834. In 1817, the main rivals of the Tories were the Whigs, who later became the Liberal Party.

4 https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/How_to_Write_a_Blackwood_Article

Peter de Bolla and Jonathon Levi. Buford quickly established himself as the leading editorial voice (as Simon Garfield's article in 2007 from *The Guardian* makes clear) and *Granta* became a showcase not just for literary writing, but for long-form narrative non-fiction–a pattern established when the tenth issue was devoted to travel writing. (Its fifth reprint is still available[5] from the publisher!)

The first issue of new-look *Granta* was devoted to new American writing and on the other side of the Atlantic, it may have been that Dave Eggers was taking notes (it seems quite a Dave Eggers thing to do). Eggers came to fame with his quirky novel *A Heartbreaking Work Of Staggering Genius* (2000) but by the time that book achieved global acclaim he had already founded *Timothy McSweeney's Quarterly Concern*, initially as a journal in which to publish work that had been rejected by other magazines, but soon developing into a "vibrant home for contemporary fiction and a living temple to the possibilities of print." (Lependorf, 2015, p. 3). That latter point is certainly true–when I ran the postgraduate magazine journalism course at Cardiff University I used various paper-based issues of *McSweeney's* to inspire students to think outside the box when it came to the "possibilities of print".

The temporal and cultural distances between "Tory-leaning" *Blackwood's* (1817), the "self-destructive calamity" (Garfield, 2007) of *Granta* (1889/1977), and the "urbane, cultured, inquisitive and hip" (Lependorf, 2015, p. 3) *McSweeney's* (1998) are considerable but there are several elements that link them. Most obviously–and perhaps most importantly–they are all the product of a single editorial vision; each one was founded or relaunched with a clear intention, and although actual editors may have changed and editorial/production teams may have shared responsibility for assembling the material, the original intention still managed to resonate at a cellular level.

They also share a genre, as examples of what is commonly categorised as the "little magazine". In the case of *Granta* and *McSweeney's*, with their global circulation and, in *Granta*'s case, international editions, using a description like "little" may seem inappropriate, but the term has been applied to literary publications for decades. The little magazine is a genre that has been studied and written about by fans and academics alike, and there is a corpus of work that is well worth exploring. What is a little magazine? Hoffman, Allen and Ulrich (1947), whose book *The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography* set a standard for scholarly study of the genre, described it as a vehicle for "artistic work which for reasons of commercial expediency is not acceptable to the money-minded periodicals or presses" (p. 2).

However, like many generic terms, this one has evolved to mean different things in different contexts. In *The Handbook of Magazine Studies* (2020), that I co-edited with Miglena Sternadori, Gwen Allen gives us an original and exhaustive review of the little magazine as a locus of artistic experimentation in *Magazines as Alternative Sites of Artistic Practice* (pp. 263-277), while Nithila Kanagasabai in *Case Study: Little Magazines and Local Feminisms* (pp. 333-341) examines the social and cultural role of Tamil-language little magazines in India that have, amongst other things, "enabled women from marginalized communities–such as the Muslims and Dalits–to find a space to articulate their anti-hindutva and anti-caste stands" (p. 334). For Kanagasabai, little magazines are "fiercely anti-establishment … usually run without the patronage of mainstream advertisers".

Little magazines per se are not the main focus of this essay, but they provide several key principles that I want to explore, namely–a creative vision, focus on a very specific niche, controlling the means of production, and controlling the means of distribution. Long life and financial success? Not so much. Ian Morris and Joanne Diaz, in their preface

5 https://granta.com/products/granta-10-travel-writing/

to an edited collection of papers about the little magazine, cite no less a literary figure than T. S. Eliot (who was also a banker and thus presumably well acquainted with the need to remain solvent): "T. S. Eliot believed that a magazine should have 'a single editor, a small circulation, and a short life span, rarely exceeding that of the founding editor'" (Morris & Diaz, 2015, p. ix).

If some of the above rings a bell of recognition, it may be that the term *little magazine* also applies to the other end of the key word; we have met the *Maga* and we will later be meeting the *Zine*[6] . Before then, I want to look at the first of the principles I listed–a creative vision. In its purest form, this will be the property of a single person. Since its invention and popular uptake, the world wide web has proved an excellent place for individuals to express themselves ("The Power To Publish!"), and numerous services have been provided for those who wish to do so–UseNet, bulletin boards, Blogger, LiveJournal, Medium, Wordpress, etc. When Google bought AdSense and AdWords it became easier to monetise blogs, thus allowing some people to make a living, or part of a living, from their writing. YouTube has been the most successful visual equivalent, and it is more than possible for a popular channel to provide an income for its creator, whether an "influencer" or a more conventional content provider.

As the list above shows, platforms for creative expression come and go. The current hot favourite is Substack, which describes itself, not at all grandiosely, as "a new economic engine for culture" (Substack.com[7]). More prosaically, it is an online platform that allows authors to publish articles, collect subscription payments, pore over analytics and deliver newsletters. It has been around since 2017 and in the intervening years more than 50 million people have signed up as (free) subscribers–so there is a big potential audience. (Of that 50 million, five million have chosen to sign up for paid subscriptions to individual writers.)

Thus, anyone looking for a facile way to characterise Substack (someone writing an essay like this, for example) could categorise it as a site of *micro-zines*–the littlest magazines imaginable, each being the elaborated product of a single mind, delivered one article at a time. Those providing content are able to avoid gatekeepers (Lewin, 1943) (the spoilsports who spike or edit one's stories) by becoming gatewatchers (Bruns, 2005) (the good sports who provide different perspectives on mostly known topics). As a collective entity, Substack has the potential to offer an enormously varied magazine-like experience, provided that one is prepared to put in the work of collating everyone and everything that might be of interest. And in the end, it's another platform not owned or controlled by the "publisher"–Substack is owned by Chris Best, Jairaj Sethi and Hamish McKenzie, who have raised a significant amount of venture capital from Andreesen Horowitz and others. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but if there is one truth of which we can be sure it is that venture capitalists want to get their money back, preferably with an extra whack on top. As of November 2024, Substack had not turned a profit; it is a private company so it does not have to disclose financial results, but an internet search returns a revenue figure of $29 million in 2023. The business model is that writers can publish for free, or they can set a fee for access to their work, of which Substack takes 10% (plus another 4% to pay Stripe for processing payments). Should the three owners, or their investors, suddenly feel the need for a greater return, there is no guarantee that the currently reasonable commission will not jump–nor that the whole platform will not change the way it works.

6 Definitions of "zine" frequently include the words "self-published", "small scale", "non-commercial", "booklet", "printwork" and "magazine".

7 https://on.substack.com/p/switch-blog

If there is an overall guiding principle for modern publishing it must be the need to be constantly alert to changes–changes to whatever platform one is using, changes in the way the fish are swimming so you can follow them to the next new thing, changes in the consumption needs of your audience (more on this below).

It follows that any pundit or academic writing about publishing also has to be aware of changing circumstances. I have written previously (Holmes, 2020, p. 3) about the concept of the "metazine", citing instances of Facebook groups and pages that operated in a way that accorded with my General Theory Of Magazines (Holmes and Nice, 2012, p. 7), essentially that they were serving specialised content to a specialised audience–but in this case an audience that could contribute (or, perhaps, "co-create") directly through the comments section. The pages I cited all still exist and operate, but since I wrote that chapter the underlying platform (Facebook) has made some significant changes to the way it works, to the powers of administrators and to the way that Facebook subscribers can interact with it. Good groups/pages already have vigilant admins but their roles and powers are subject to potential whimsical change by the corporate owner of the platform (Meta). It is also possible for bots to infiltrate the admin roles, as the 376,000-member *Home Studio* group found in January 2025, causing a former admin to post:

The bots have taken over, folks.

They infiltrated the admin list, and removed [name redacted] and myself, as well as apparently all of our moderators from the admin list and we can no longer access the activity logs or any of the admin tools.

The admin list for the page looked like this:

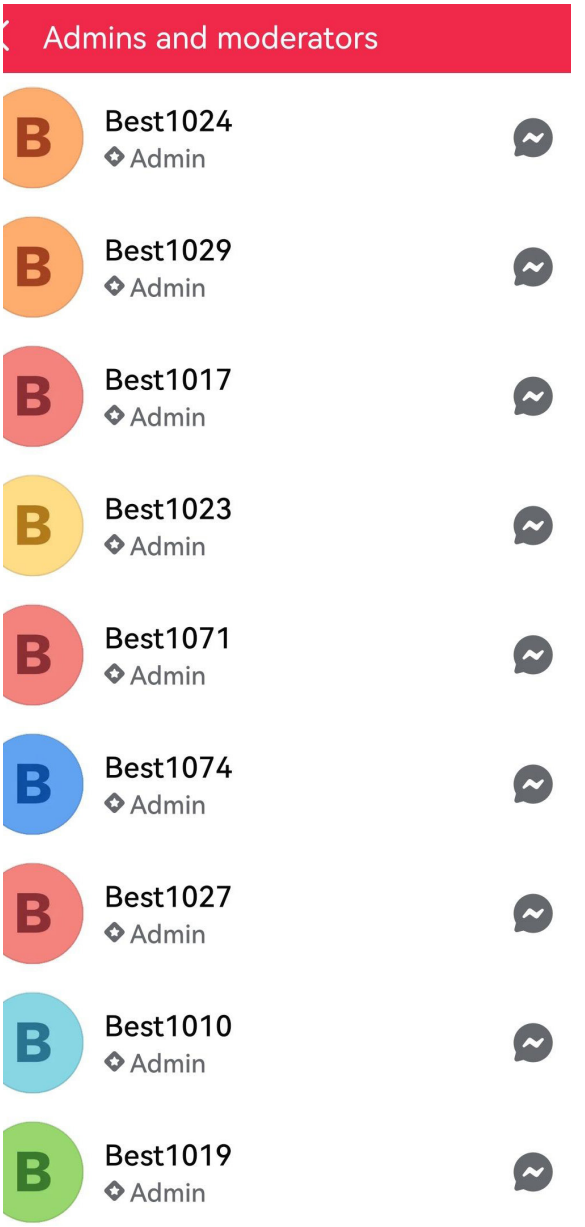

Fig. 1 Screenshot of the Facebook's Home Studio group admin list (January, 2025).

Once that has happened it is very difficult, if not impossible, to find a way back. *The Home Studio* page is still operational and appears to be sticking to its interest area, so there is no immediately obvious reason for the infiltration–it just happens as a consequence of using someone else's platform; they make the rules and the user suffers the consequences.

The individualism and focused view available to a writer on Substack is one thing, but is it ever possible for an editor to fully convey a creative purpose to the team on a mainstream magazine? I would argue that it is–think of *Vogue* under Anna Wintour or *Vanity Fair* under Graydon Carter. I would also argue that these are exceptions that do not necessarily prove a rule. When men's magazine *Loaded* launched in 1994 under the editorship of James Brown it had a clear creative direction that, sadly, did not endure, and what began as a blast of irreverence became a cliché of sexist self-indulgence. It did, however, open a new sector, or at least sub-sector, in the men's magazine market (or, if it didn't do that, it re-set certain parameters to serve a new generation of men). As is generally the way, other publishing houses scurried to add their own offering. EMAP, then the UK's second biggest magazine publisher, bought *For Him Magazine*, which had started in 1985 as a high fashion journal sold in clothing shops, shortened the name to *FHM* and proceeded to copy the new formula (girls, football, flash cars, crisps …). Fortunately, they also installed Mike Soutar as editor–fortunately because Soutar is a great example of where working in magazines can take you if you are an intelligent, thoughtful person. He began his magazine career in Dundee, Scotland (the city famous for "jute, jam and journalism"), at DC Thomson. Like many other talented Scots,[8] he made his way to London and the editorship of EMAP's flagship *Smash Hits*, then *FHM*, then to the US as editor-in-chief of *Maxim,* then back to the UK as group editorial director of the magazine division of IPC, which was the UK's largest magazine publisher. There is more to say about Mike Soutar later, but it is his editorship of *FHM* that is important here–under his command the title reached circulations of over 500,000 per month, which was unheard of for a men's magazine. In an interview with *Press Gazette*, Soutar explained that he had concentrated his editorial vision for the magazine into three words: funny, sexy, useful. That is, every piece of content had to match one of those criteria. As a mantra it could hardly be simpler and, for a while at least, it seemed to work. That said, it is impossible to overlook other attributes of publishing–you can't sell more copies if you have not printed enough or if they are not in shops, so those other factors in the creation of a successful product, production and distribution, must also be given due credit.

FHM was a good-looking magazine and the production side, which starts with processing copy and finishes when the issue rolls off the press, clearly played a key role–even funny, sexy and useful content is not going to play well in a dull and drab layout with clichéd images and error-strewn copy. In other words, quality also played an important, if unspoken, part. As anyone who has taught on a practice-based journalism course will know, teaching professional-level "quality" is fundamental, even if it can initially lead to students grumbling about harsh grading. In this context the concept of "quality" is inextricably combined with the concept of "professionalism"–after all, we (the instructors/teachers/lecturers) are moulding the students into "professionals", so that they can fit seamlessly into a newsroom, radio studio or television gallery, having absorbed all the necessary indoctrination. But of course, "professionalism" itself is not an unproblematic concept; I have discussed elsewhere (Holmes and Nice, 2012, p. 55) competing theories of professionalism, including John Hartley's asseveration that journalism is not a profession, but a "craft defined principally by its practice (a practice that cannot be professionalised since journalism remains a trade where the employer regulates entry)". (Hartley, 2000, p. 39)

8 As Dr Johnson said (very unfairly) in *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland and The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (1775): "The noblest prospect which a Scotchman ever sees, is the high road that leads him to England!"

This statement is now itself problematic as there are multiple points of entry for self-appointed journalists.

Regardless of professionalism, one mutable aspect of "quality" is that the criteria by which it is judged change with technology, so over time teaching students or apprentice workers (probationers) about the traditional values of a medium is not constant and thus not always useful and sometimes positively harmful. By the time I entered journalism, no-one used the terms *brevier*, *minion* or *nonpareil* to specify typefaces or sizes, but I do remember anguished discussions about the options for screening halftone images to suit the printer's skill and the paper stock's qualities. In time this changed to arguments about the best system of colour proofing (Ozachrome vs. Chromalin, etc.) and the limitations or otherwise of digital scanners. Likewise, the rules of grammar and usage are not fixed, or at least not in English, which has no equivalent of the Académie Française or Instituto Internacional da Língua Portuguesa to keep it on the straight and narrow.

In fact, it seems that "quality" as a criterion of acceptability in a media entity is not just shaped by our journalistic concepts of professionalism, nor by technological determinism—it is also shaped by cultural expectations engendered by the audience. Doug Shapiro (former Chief Strategy Officer at WarnerMedia) published an essay on (where else?) Substack that examines the concept of "quality" through a different lens—the "algorithm" of consumption. This is not the place to précis the piece, but one of the key quotes is,

"It is clear today that consumers are redefining quality in media. Creator content usually has none of the traditional markers of quality, but it keeps taking share … Consumers must be drawn by something else" (Shapiro, 2025).

I adjure anyone involved in producing, teaching or analysing media content to read it and think about what the ideas and findings mean in their specific context. Shapiro urges producers to believe consumers when they say what they value and prefer, rather than dismissing or denying it. I think this statement can be modified or expanded to make it clear that consumers "saying" what they prefer includes the idea of noticing where they put their money or attention. My enduring memory of this lesson came when my wife and I were publishing a start-up magazine dedicated to old motorcycles; the market leader ran very much more content in colour and the in-person feedback we got from customers and potential customers at, for example, shows and exhibitions was that they did not believe so much colour was needed or warranted, the aesthetics of old bikes could be captured in black and white, just like magazines in the old days. Yet they continued to buy the magazine with all the colour, so we listened to what they were "saying" and upped the colour content. As Shapiro notes, "consumers are not necessarily aware of all the attributes they consider", but he does offer practical ways for producers to make some kind of assessment.

One of his suggestions is that companies with a large enough dataset could use machine learning to identify attributes that consumers consider important. Machine learning is a subset of AI and AI is a huge discussion point in media now—not that you would necessarily divine that from what high-ranking media executives contributed to the end of year "predictions" rounded up by B2B publications like *Press Gazette*. An awful lot of them came up with half-baked nostrums about keeping close to the reader, creating content that the reader would value, and so on—the kind of thing that magazines have been saying for decades (latterly followed by newspapers). I am sure there are all sorts of plans for using AI in all sorts of scenarios, but media executives should bear in mind that people do not trust AI (as reported by Kylie Robison in *The Verge* in April 2025) and that AI is yet another platform that can be altered at the whim of an owner trying to court favour with, for example, the President of the United States.

In his essay, Shapiro also touches on distribution, specifically on how the internet disrupted old models, although he does not see it as the most important element in play for the concepts he is discussing. For that we must turn to another Substacker, Ted Gioia in his essay *Why Creatives Will Win By Thinking Small* (2024). Gioia has had a varied career, ranging from stints working for the Boston Consulting Group through being a musician and producer to founding Stanford University's jazz studies programme. While he was studying for his MBA at Stanford Business School he came across the works of Peter Drucker, an almost legendary management consultant and author. Gioia's essay was inspired by the news that several top name film directors and producers (JJ Abrams, Christopher Nolan, Steven Spielberg, et al.) had clubbed together and bought a film theatre in which they could show whatever films they want to a physical audience. "We have reached a point," writes Gioia, "where even the people in power at the top of the industry want to bypass the system. Even the gatekeepers are sick of dealing with the gatekeepers." This then leads him to recall his discovery of one of Drucker's insights about a commonly overlooked aspect of doing business–distribution, i.e., the process of actually getting your product to the consumer.

Gioia says he first came across this idea in the 1990s, but Drucker had been thinking about it for a lot longer, because back in 1962 he had published an article entitled *The Economy's Dark Continent* in the April issue of *Fortune* magazine (Kelly J. Thomas has an entertaining article on the Worldlocity website that explains how and why he tracked down this copy of *Fortune*.) Essentially, as the somewhat-of-its-time title suggests, Drucker believed that many CEOs had no idea of what happened in the distribution departments of their businesses and just did not care. The solution, he suggested, was for "businessmen to look at their business in a new holistic way–by seeing distribution … as an integral part of the manufacturing process". (Schechter, 2002).

Gioia frames his precis of the version of Drucker's theory he read as, "The most powerful distribution model of them all was finding a pathway directly to the consumer, or as close as you could get" (2024), and he adds the usefully relevant thought that, "The key thing is that the Drucker strategy is the right one for creatives." In other words, it applies to individual creators[9] who want or have to think small, not just corporations that want to conquer the world.

Substack *almost* manages that–their About page includes an encomium from Diana Butler Bass that emphasises the "direct relationship with my readers" and another from Dan Gardner appreciating the "direct relationship between me and my readers"[10]. This seems to be a key point for Substack and it is a valid one–but it has to be remembered that the relationship between creator and reader is mediated via the highly-venture-capitalised platform, and thus subject to the potential drawbacks discussed above.

For a better example of thinking small about distribution consider the history of *Crack* magazine. Founded by Tom Frost and Jake Applebee in 2009, *Crack* began as a free cultural what's on style magazine for Bristol before expanding its remit to Cardiff, London, Manchester, Berlin and Amsterdam. Distribution was done in-house–somewhere in the depths of YouTube is a video detailing the arrival of the printed copies in a garage, their being loaded onto a hired van, then driven by a member of the *Crack* team to various locations in and around Manchester, before the drive home in the wee small hours. For some business analysts (those who have not read enough Drucker) this effort would represent an opportunity cost–that is, the team member could have been undertaking

9 The world of creators and the creator economy should be a required research area for anyone working in or teaching about media. A good starting point is Doug Shapiro's *The Relentless, Inevitable March of the Creator Economy* (2024).

10 https://on.substack.com/p/switch-blog

other, more productive duties that would contribute to the main purpose of the business, creating content or raising advertising revenue. But to the Drucker-savvy observer, this mode of distribution has several advantages: it allows the creator to maintain direct communication with the nodes of distribution; it allows a direct inter-personal connection with the people who run those nodes; it allows a direct check of how the previous issue performed; it allows the exploration of potential new distribution nodes in the region.

(It is perhaps worth noting here that controlling distribution does not have to be small scale–the giant Frontline Distribution started with EMAP but eventually included Haymarket, BBC Worldwide, Dennis and others. But owning your distribution division, as Drucker notes, does not necessarily mean understanding what it does …)

Another example of Drucker-influenced distribution can be found in the print version of men's magazine *Shortlist* (2007-2018). This takes us back to Mike Soutar, who is currently best known for his role as an adviser to Alan Sugar on the British version of *The Apprentice* television programme. After his role as director of IPC's magazine division and an outlook-changing bout of typhoid, Soutar headed up the launch team for *Shortlist*, a men's magazine with two USPs–it was free and it was high quality ("no profanity, no nudity, and there is no gutter journalism") (Snoddy, 2010). Soutar acknowledged to me[11] that Drucker's views on the importance of understanding and "owning" the distribution chain influenced him when developing the business plan for *Shortlist*, and there still exists on YouTube a video of him demonstrating how members of the distribution team should approach "customers"[12] (the video gave rise to a number of snarky comments about Soutar's performance, but I think we know who had the last laugh). Handing out free products is not, of course, a new idea but by using it in a precise way, Soutar managed to harness what Drucker characterised as the "most powerful distribution model … by finding a pathway directly to the consumer".

Which brings us to the other end of the MAGA, the zine–the small-scale, self-published, non-commercial printwork. Zines have existed since at least the 1930s, certainly for as long as there have been readily-accessible and relatively (or absolutely) cheap duplicating machines like the mimeograph. In fact, as technology advanced zine producers had the opportunity to own not only the means of *distribution* (e.g. hawking the product in pubs or gig-goer queues) but also the means of *production*–a discarded Roneo or photocopier.

In fact, nowhere is it easier to encompass all the key principles mentioned earlier: a creative vision, focus on a very specific niche, controlling the means of production and controlling the means of distribution–and all unmediated by a third-party digital platform. By its very nature a zine can be the product of a solitary creator (although teams and collectives are not uncommon), and the intensely personal outlook is likely to result in a purity of editorial vision and equally likely to be political, in the sense of "having to do with power relationships, not the narrow sense of electorial politics", as Carol Hanisch, who is credited with coining the expression "The personal is political", has written (2006).

There have been and are zines covering every topic imaginable, from music and poetry to sexuality and health, and their collective importance in the culture of media is becoming recognised in academia and beyond. The university libraries

11 Personal communication

12 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZXrc3QqNmk

of Reed College,[13] Wisconsin-La Crosse[14] and Texas,[15] for example, have significant zine collections, while the Wellcome Trust is currently (as I write—it ends on 14 September 2025) hosting Zines Forever! DIY Publishing and Disability Justice, an exhibition that

"looks at how zines have been used to share experiences of disability and disabled identity …The display draws on our growing collection of over 1300 zines themed around health. It explores how the making and sharing of zines can further disability activism and political resistance and serve as a vehicle for community building and mutual support." (Wellcome Collection, 2025)[16]

The exhibition is co-curated by Dr Lea Cooper, who is closely associated with the Edinburgh Zine Library[17] and whose doctoral thesis (2024) on zines is available from the University of Kent.

Are zines the answer to the serious issues that face the magazine as an industrial, socio-cultural and journalistic entity? Not entirely, not on their own, and not unless there is some way for some creators, at least, to make a living from them. As Peter Houston of *The Magazine Diaries* (published on Substack—naturally) firmly states, "Making magazines that sell is not selling out. Being passionate about profits is what lets you make your next issue" (2025).

But between them, the MAGA and the zine offer important reminders of why people love magazines and what drives the very best of them forward. Other voices, like some of those referred to above, provide perspectives on the changing qualities and values of the mediascape and the creator economy. These are all lessons that publishers and teachers forget or overlook at their peril because unless we collectively take note of them, we will all be out of jobs, and not even Substack will save us.

References

Allen, G. (2020). Magazines as Alternative Sites of Artistic Practice. In M. Sternadori & T. Holmes (Eds.), *The Handbook of Magazine Studies* (1st ed., pp. 263–277). Wiley-Blackwell. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119168102.ch20

Bruns, A. (2005). *Gatewatching: Collaborative Online News Production*. Peter Lang Publishing.

Cairns, W. B. (1922). British criticisms of American writings, 1815-1833: A contribution to the study of Anglo-American relationships. *University of Wisconsin Studies in Language and Literature Number 14.* Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin. pp. 10, 15. https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/102830803

Cooper, L. J. (2024). *The zINe-Between: A Creative Practice Exploration of Health, Liminality, Lived Experience and the Zines in Wellcome Collection* [University of Kent]. https://kar.kent.ac.uk/106954/1/225The_zINe_Between.pdf

dos Reis, M. F. P. (2010). A Reading of "How to Write a Blackwood Article" as an Exercise in Irony, Authorial Self-Consciousness and Tuition for Creative Writers. *The Edgar Allan Poe Review, 11*(1), pp. 142–151.

13 https://library.reed.edu/zines/

14 https://www.uwlax.edu/murphylibrary/news/discover-diy-publishing/

15 https://guides.lib.utexas.edu/zines/zines

16 https://wellcomecollection.org/exhibitions/zines-forever-diy-publishing-and-disability-justice

17 https://www.edinburghzinelibrary.com/about-us

Drucker, P. F. (1962, April). The Economy's Dark Continent. First Publication in: *Fortune, Vol. LXV, No. 4*, pp. 265–270.

Eggers, D. (2000). *A heartbreaking work of staggering genius*. Vintage Books.

Garfield, S. (2007, December 30). From student rag to literary riches. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/dec/30/culture.features

Gioia, T. (2024, February 18). Why Creatives Will Win by Thinking Small. [Substack newsletter]. *The Honest Broker*. https://www.honest-broker.com/p/why-creatives-will-win-by-thinking

Hanisch, C. (2006). *The personal is political*. https://webhome.cs.uvic.ca/~mserra/AttachedFiles/PersonalPolitical.pdf

Hartley, J. (2000). Communicative democracy in a redactional society: The future of journalism studies. *Journalism, 1*(1), pp. 39–48. https://doi.org/10.1177/146488490000100107

Hoffman, F. J., Allen, C., and Ulrich, C. F. (1947). *The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography*. Princeton University Press.

Holmes, T. (2020). Magazines, Megazines, and Metazines: What Is a Magazine in the Twenty First Century? In M. Sternadori & T. Holmes (Eds.), *The Handbook of Magazine Studies* (1st ed., pp. 1–19). Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119168102.ch1

Holmes, T., & Nice, L. (2012). *Magazine journalism*. SAGE Publications

Houston, P. (2025, April 6). Selling magazines is not selling out [Substack newsletter]. *The Magazine Diaries*. https://magazinediaries.substack.com/p/selling-magazines-is-not-selling

Johnson, S. (1775). *A journey to the western islands of Scotland*.

Kanagasabai, N. (2020). Case Study: Language, Little Magazines, and Local Feminisms. In M. Sternadori & T. Holmes (Eds.), *The Handbook of Magazine Studies* (1st ed.,pp. 333–341). Wiley-Blackwell. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119168102.ch25

Lependorf, J. (2015). Introduction: A Decade or So of Little Magazines: One Reader's Perspective. In I. Morris & J. Diaz (Eds.), *The Little Magazine in Contemporary America* (pp. 1–16). University of Chicago Press. https://www.degruyterbrill.com/document/doi/10.7208/9780226240695-003/html

Lewin, K. (1943). Forces behind food habits and methods of change. In: *The Problem of Changing Food Habits: Report of the Committee on Food Habits 1941–1943*. National Academies Press (US). https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK224347/

Morris, I., & Diaz, J. (Eds.). (2015). *The Little Magazine in Contemporary America*. University of Chicago Press. https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/L/bo19804601.html

Robison, K. (2025, April 8). Most Americans don't trust AI — or the people in charge of it. *The Verge*. https://www.theverge.com/ai-artificial-intelligence/644853/pew-gallup-data-americans-dont-trust-ai

Shapiro, D. (2025, January 20). Quality is a Serious Problem [Substack newsletter]. *The Mediator*. https://dougshapiro.substack.com/p/quality-is-a-serious-problem

Shapiro, D. (2024, December 1). The Relentless, Inevitable March of the Creator Economy [Substack newsletter]. *The Mediator*. https://dougshapiro.substack.com/p/the-relentless-inevitable-march-of-creator-economy

Schechter, D. (2002). Mapping the Dark Continent. *Olam Capital*. https://olamcapital.com/logistics-and-the-modern-corporate-battlefield/

Snoddy, R. (2010, November 22). Mike Soutar—Interview. *In-Publishing*. https://www.inpublishing.co.uk/articles/mike-soutar-+interview-1509

Sternadori, M., & Holmes, T. (Eds.). (2020). *The handbook of magazine studies* (First edition). Wiley-Blackwell.

Strachan, J. (2016). Introduction. In: Strachan, J., Mason, N., Mole, T., & Snodgrass, C. (Eds.). (2016). *Blackwood's magazine, 1817-25: Selections from Maga's infancy. Volume 6, Selected criticism, 1820-25* (First edition). Routledge.

Thomas, K. J. (2018, July 3). Supply Chain—The Economy's Dark Continent. *Worldlocity*. https://www.worldlocity.com/post/2018/07/03/supply-chain-the-economys-dark-continent