The Residual Concepts of Production v. the Emergent Cultures of Distribution in Publishing

David Blakesley
Who wins in the world of publishing? The base or the superstructure? I’m not a Marxist per se, but I’ve lived this struggle for some time as a writer and publisher. In this presentation, I describe my efforts to change or adapt the democratized tools of production to produce new forms of writing, which ultimately led to an ongoing battle with the dominant cultures of production in the world of publishing.
I’ll narrate two case studies. One focuses on the writing and production of an innovative, if not disruptive, textbook in the ultra-conservative textbook industry. The second tells the ongoing story of an interloping publishing company (Parlor Press) that reveals the central challenge of distribution for both writers and publishers, from typesetting (print) to transformation (digital).
“‘The base’ is the real social existence of man. ‘The base’ is the real relations of production corresponding to a stage of the development of material productive forces. ‘The base’ is a mode of production at a particular stage of its development.”

The Base in Publishing
The Superstructure

The superstructure consists of the cultural and economic forces that both reflect and maintain the material base, the mode of production. The superstructure is of a secondary order and symbolic.
Hegemony

Hegemony is the expression of power, an ideological force that dominates social, cultural, and economic life and thus stabilizes the base, the modes of production.
Example

“The Lingering Hegemony of Print”
“The modes of incorporation are of great social significance, and incidentally in our kind of society have considerable economic significance. The educational institutions are usually the main agencies of the transmission of an effective dominant culture, and this is now a major economic as well as cultural activity; indeed it is both in the same moment.”

Residual Culture

“The meanings and values which cannot be verified or cannot be expressed in the terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practised on the basis of the residue—cultural as well as social—of some previous social formation.”

“New meanings and values, new practices, new significances and experiences, are continually being created. But there is then a much earlier attempt to incorporate them, just because they are part—and yet not part—of effective contemporary practice.”

Example
Residual and Emergent Cultures
Case Study 1

Writing in the Digital Age
The Second Edition

The First Edition
The Innovative Design

Exercise 1-2  Meaning Depends on Context

What a word, phrase, or sentence means will vary depending on context.

Context refers to all the situational elements that might shape a writer's intentions or purpose, whether they are conscious or not. A purpose is a motive—some situation that "incites" you to write (hence the word motive, which is related to motion and even emotion). When you have or discover purpose, you act on the world in a deliberate way—through writing, art, the spoken word. You feel compelled to "step up" a situation and respond to it. You can also intentionally shape contexts so that, for example, you have some say in the circumstances and media in which your writing is read.

As a writer yourself, you already know that one of the greatest challenges is to use the right word at the right time in the right place. How do you make these difficult decisions? How do you know what to write? Where do you find purpose? Every writing situation is different to some degree, so learning to draw on elements of the context in order to shape your purposes and your subject is a strategy you'll need in every situation that calls for you to communicate your ideas to others.

1. How would you describe each of these contexts?
2. Imagine that "Are we having fun yet?" is a caption for each image. How might the meaning of "Are we having fun yet?" change if it were read or heard in these contexts?
3. How does context—even when it's only imagined—shape interpretation?
Composing in the Design Space
Disassembly into Word
The Art of Looking: Writing about Film as a Visual Medium

1. Working Thesis

Study a film or films and come to a provisional interpretation of their meaning and significance. Sample Thesis: Many films portray the acts of watching and being watched to expose the power and danger of the gaze. Why is this an important subject now? Are there also more innocent acts of watching? How can a person being watched wield power? How does this thesis explain the pleasure of film viewing?

2. Approach to Gathering Evidence

To focus on film as a visual medium, you can draw from studies on visual rhetoric and the relationships among seeing, knowing, and power. Evidence can be gathered by using screen capture software (such as HyperSnap™) to take screenshots, carefully taking notes, and reading the script, if it’s available.

3. Integration of Evidence

Build the argument by citing evidence from the film or films that illustrates the act of viewing and its function.

Guy Pearce as Leonard Shelby in Memento, dir. Christopher Nolan

4. Analysis, Inference, Extension

Break a film into its components and show how it “adds up.” Does the film make a point about our “society”? Does it suggest that our ways of seeing are also ways of not seeing? Does it teach us how to read other films? Why is the thesis relevant to studies of visual culture?

Writing about Film Adaptations of Novels and Short Stories

In adapting a piece of fiction for the screen, directors, writers, and cinematographers face significant challenges, because film is primarily a visual medium while a novel or short story is purely verbal. Here are three approaches to film adaptation:

1. Fidelity: The film re-creates the plot as closely as possible, avoiding stylistic interpretation and divergence from the source text.

2. Interpretation: The film interprets the source text by stressing some aspects over others, exaggerating themes, or changing the plot and characters to make the film more dramatic or interesting for viewers.

3. Inspiration: The film draws thematic inspiration from its source but extends the themes to new contexts. A film may have fidelity to the source’s themes while acting them out in completely new situations.


...This novel’s progression from print to screen is one of the boster documented and most bitterly contested adaptations in film history. After producer Herb Jeff’s option to film Dick’s novel ran out in 1978 (Dick thought the draft screenplay was “a bad joke”), the project was optioned to Hampton Fancher and Brian Kelly, then picked up by Universal. Fancher wrote increasingly variant screenplays of “Fidelity to the source” for the novel, but when Ridley Scott, fresh off his success with Alien, was hired as the director, he began to convert the story into what Dick later called an “outland, robot epic,” with Deckard as a “chicken-ridden Chandleresque figure” (Rickman)....Dick went public with his dissatisfaction, creating a network for the film’s publicists. ...Dick and the collaborators had a distinct conception of what Blade Runner should be: Dick wanted the auditors to be the catalysts for Deckard’s and Lisette’s moral and spiritual growth in facing evil. Fancher saw it as a love story about a man who discovers his conscience. Scott’s futuristic film noir set in a densely packed, gritty cityscape (he wanted the final title to be Gotham City). Peoples, an exploration of the distinguishing qualities of humans and their replicants (Koht). All four perspectives ultimately found their way into the film. ...Dick and the director believed that Peoples’s revisions of the script made it a “beautifully symmetrical reinforcement” of his novel’s main theme. Ironically, Dick died suddenly of a stroke just a few months before the film’s release. ...From David M. Baxandall, Encyclopedia of Novel into Film, 2nd ed., ed. John C. Tillett and James M. Welsh (New York: Facts on File, 2005).
Case Study 2

Publishing in the Digital Age
Publishing Cultures
Residual, Dominant, Emergent
Allen Ginsberg's
Howl & eBook Formatting Nonsense (or, HTML is Hard)

Callie Miller


I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked,
dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix,
angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night,
“I tweeted my frustration. Others did too. What does this say for eBooks if we can't get basic things like formatting right? Why create such hullabaloo around this digital release if you hadn't properly checked formatting on every device? Why is it that publishing sits so far outside the norms of what is required to launch something digital?”

Callie Miller, The Lit Life, 7 Oct 2010,
Jim Welke says:
October 6, 2010 at 2:14 pm

What a drag. Such laziness. The problem could easily be addressed by adding line breaks and tabs. Somebody just didn’t bother.

(I’ve written lots of code, in lots of languages, and formatting text is one of those hassles you must deal with to please the humans who end up reading it...and paying for it!)

(And if the above indents don’t appear, then this comment form stripped out my line breaks and spaces, same as the Kindle!)

Cheers,
Jim

I.A.M. says:  
October 6, 2010 at 5:17 pm

Enforcing indentations, tabs, hanging indents, and the like is nigh-on impossible to accomplish in anything other than an Adobe PDF (which is best considered a photocopy of a book, because the text doesn’t ‘re-flow’ to fit the screen dimensions). As has Natasha October, I’ve tried to protect typographic fidelity to original layouts and been skunked every time. Maintaining ‘centred text’ sometimes is a challenge.

Oulipo and Poetry rely heavily on a word being in a particular spot in relation to another line or word when read, and e-readers are incapable of maintaining that due to the text size control the user has, as well as the fact that various units’ typefaces will take up a different line space than another’s.

As much as I continue to make books available in electronic formats, the printed editions continue to be made available along side of them due to a variety of reasons that guarantee that printed books will continue to be created for decades to come. Electronic books are an alternate binding, not a replacement for all printed books.

Craig Morgan Teicher says:  
October 6, 2010 at 4:56 pm

Troy: Line breaks in poetry aren’t “formatting,” they’re an essential part of how the text communicates. That said, I know that may not mean much to casual readers, but I wish it did.

Natasha, as you say, this is exactly the issue that has most poetry publishers nervous about e-books. I wish we could devote some tech time to it and find a solution.
Parlor Press Poetry

Free Verse Editions

Series Editor: Jon Thompson

Free Verse Editions represent a joint venture between Free Verse: A Journal of Contemporary Poetry & Poetry and Parlor Press. The series will publish three to five books of poetry per year. All submissions are reviewed as part of our New Measure Poetry Prize competition. Read more about Free Verse Editions and the New Measure Prize here. Photo by Teague. • Unsplash.
Generating ePub from LaTeX (2021)

Ivan Savov

Minireference Blog: Starting a Revolution in the Textbook Industry

https://minireference.com/blog/generating-epub-from-latex/
The Softcover Book: Frictionless Self-Publishing
Michael Hartl
https://manual.softcover.io/
The real challenge is producing EPUB and MOBI output. The trick is to (1) create a self-contained HTML page with embedded math, (2) include the amazing MathJax JavaScript library, configured to render math as SVG images, (3) hit the page with the headless PhantomJS browser to force MathJax to render the math (including any equation numbers) as SVGs, (4) extract self-contained SVGs from the rendered pages, and (5) use Inkscape to convert the SVGs to PNGs for inclusion in EPUB and MOBI books. Easy, right? In fact, no—it was excruciating and required excessive amounts of profanity to achieve. But it’s done, so ha. — Michael Hartl
Publisher’s Goal

Single Source Production for Distribution

Print, PDF, EPUB
Publishing Cultures
Residual, Dominant, Emergent
The hegemony of spaces, tabs, and hard returns preserves the status quo of production as governed by residual and dominant cultures and embedded not just in software but in the socialized practices of the people. The nonbreaking space and soft return are elements of the emergent culture.
Word processors and even keyboards encourage people to use spaces, tabs, and returns for line and paragraph spacing, regardless of the target format. 😞
Additional Considerations for Poets

Authors of books of poetry should follow these guidelines where applicable. Line breaks, stanza breaks, and poem boundaries merit special care because they affect the appearance of layout across formats, from print to ebook. All Parlor Press books are published simultaneously in multiple formats; following these guidelines will ensure that poems display in all of them as expected.

So that you can see all formatting marks (like hard and soft returns, spaces and nonbreaking spaces), we recommend using Word’s Show/Hide button to reveal all formatting marks. The button is normally on the home toolbar and looks like the paragraph symbol shown here.

- **Single space** throughout.
- Do not use Tabs for anything, anywhere.
- **Line breaks**: use a hard Return (Enter key) at the end of the line. The line length in the final printed book will normally allow for about 63 characters (with spaces). Kerning can be applied for slightly longer lines. For lines with more than 70 characters, we will have to use an indented second line.
- **Stanza breaks**: use a soft return to create additional space between stanzas or sections. In Word, you can create a soft return with the Shift+Enter keystroke (Mac or Windows).
- **Poem boundaries**: because poems may sometimes run over multiple pages, it is helpful for you to include a manual page break at the end of the poem. In Word, insert a page break with the Ctrl+Enter key combination (Windows) or Command+Return (Mac) or choose Insert > Break > Page Break (Mac or Windows).
- **Layout of the line**: if you need to indent the start of a line or create extra space between words, use “nonbreaking spaces” (not spaces or tabs) to indent. Using nonbreaking spaces is critical because all books will be converted to ePUB format for publication as ebooks. All multiple spaces, returns, or (any) tabs are ignored in that format. **To make a nonbreaking space, use CTRL-Shift-space** (Mac or Windows).
Distribution ← Invention

- PUBLISHER
- AUTHOR

- Tabs
- Spaces
- Multiple Hard Returns
There was RETAIL
-&-
OFFICE
&
SPACE
&
the sky hadn’t ordered yet

If it were possible to read the books being gathered in a shoebox on the desk—

but those were shells in the shoebox The books are stacked on the desk

In a hurry, the wind has a hole in it

NEW
VIEW
REALTY

NEW
VIEW
REALTY
There was RETAIL
&
OFFICE
SPACE

the sky hadn't ordered yet

If it were possible to read the books
being gathered in a shoebox on the desk—

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The books are stacked on the desk

In a hurry, the wind has a hole in it

NEW
VIEW
REALTY
280 hours

Conversion from print to EPUB Format
(70 books) x (4 hours)

10 minutes at the moment of production
The work required to convert a backlist designed for print is substantial, particularly for a publisher like Parlor Press, which runs on a shoestring budget with no full time employees. The democratization of production and digital printing technologies that made desktop publishing possible have led to new challenges at new stages of the publishing cycle. For the near future of publishing, the residual and dominant cultures of production must be reimagined in light of the emergent culture of distribution. Once that happens, the process of single-source development for multiple formats will be free and easy. 😊


An end . . . for now.

David Blakesley
Clemson University and Parlor Press
dblakes@clemson.edu
editor@parlorpress.com