

The Book an Adaptation from the Film: Technology, Narrative, Business & How the Book Industry Might Adapt the Film

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Abstract: This paper proposes that the book, both its form and the book publishing industry that support it can make reference to how the film industry have reacted to technological change since the 1980's. This can be done in such a way to transform how a book is marketed, published and perhaps read. Epstein (2010) describes how the film industry profited despite its best efforts, from technological advances. The book industry has an opportunity to learn both from the film and record industries using both industries as case studies to support the book's transition to a supporting digital format. There is an opportunity to make the debate not about Kindle versus Ipad, open-source ePub format versus locked down Kindle but about how to use non-linearity, choice vs control, structure and storytelling in a creative fashion. What is the book? It is more than its physical form. It is an experience. Current industry marketing practices, for instance the book review, the audio book, speaking tours all lend themselves to a multimedia approach that can reinforce the position of the book and the reading of the book in today's creative cultural environment.

Keywords: Film Industry, Non-linear, Hypertext, Marketing, ePub, Multimedia, Technology

Introduction

THIS PAPER WILL start with a few recent apocalyptic statements about the future of the book and the book publishing industry. This selective, non-representative series of quotes seek to provide a *narrative* background to the issues the paper will then seek to examine.

“If we fail to grasp the enormity of what is happening the first step to irrelevance will have been taken for us.”

Sharon Murray. President of the Booksellers Association (2010)

“Here comes the Apple iPad, and it's making straight for the publishing industry.

Stephen Page, Chief Executive, Faber and Faber (2010)

“It doesn't matter how good or bad the product is, the fact is that people don't read anymore”

Steve Jobs, Apple CEO (2008)

It is commonly accepted that the music publishing and recording industry mismanaged recent technological change. The articles and discussions about this reaction to technological change are extensive. Knopper's book *Appetite for Self-Destruction* (2009) is one such example. It chronicles this reaction as a tale of 'corporate rivalries, technological hubris, myopic greed

and lamentable customer relations' (Faber 2009). This paper seeks to focus on perhaps a less well-examined similarly traditional creative industry and to use this industry, the Hollywood film industry as a useful comparative model. The Hollywood film industry, as identified here will largely be represented by the six major film studios, those studios being Warner Bros' Studios, 20th Century Fox, Paramount Studios, Columbia Pictures, Walt Disney Pictures/Touchstone Pictures and Universal Studios.¹ Examination of how the Hollywood film industry reacted to significant technological change over the preceding three decades provides an opportunity to develop a useful case study model for the book publishing industry.

This paper seeks to create a narrative around the implementation and adoption of new technologies. It uses the case study of the film industry's historic adoption and implementation of new technologies to describe how new technologies might affect the creation, production, distribution and consumption of the book. Conklin (Conklin et al. 2007) describe the idea of Wicked Problems. Wicked Problems are problems described as complex and contradictory by nature. They are problems where large-scale perspective change is required rather than a problem that aims for a *solution*. Conklin (Conklin et al. 2007) stress that the recognition of *complexity* is the key issue to engage with when addressing the Wicked Problem.

This paper is neither a warning to man the barricades against the ever advancing digital hordes in a valiant battle to the death to avoid the impact of new technology, neither is it exhorting the book publishing industry to adopt the cutting-edge, all singing, all dancing e-book. Rather it is an attempt for open, clear recognition of both the dangers and the opportunities that new technology provides. The language of adoption of new media techniques and new technology shouldn't be categorised as defensive or offensive techniques. The nature of hypertext, interactive culture, contemporary digital hardware and software-based technologies support the adoption of non-linear, random access formation of narrative, just as the codex book has done for thousands of years. How the book industry, meaning authors, agents, publishing companies and retailers react to technological change might provide an opportunity to reinforce the importance of the book and might provide an opportunity to reinforce the importance of reading in shaping the narrativisation of our lives. The medium though has also shifted. The point of sale for the book has shifted dramatically and in a way that has affected the medium, so both medium and point of sale have shifted, this is the Wicked Problem.

Background

The Book: I'll see your Nook and Raise you a Kindle

Blogging, Tweeting, Posting and Followers in social networking spaces, these are all terms that speak to the gamut of contemporary publishing options available. The fact that in this paper publishing has to be categorized in this way outlines how publishing has become an option for those of us with smartphones.² Mass consumer retailers have over the past three years produced a number of hardware devices designed to respond to the digital production and consumption of the book. The consumer market has seen electronic readers (eReaders)

¹ MGM studios is currently undergoing a financial reorganisation following a managed bankruptcy and has not been included as a major studio for the purposes of this paper.

² In 2010 Gartner reported a 49% increase in worldwide sales of approx 54.3 million units. <http://www.gartner.com/it/page.jsp?id=1372013>

introduced by companies such as Amazon (Kindle), Barnes and Noble (Nook), Apple (iPad), Sony (eReader), amongst others. At the time of writing there are at least seventeen competing eReaders on the market³.

By the very nature of the free market most of these products can be seen to broadly be in competition with each other. The merits of Adobe Flash⁴ compatibility versus the open document ePub file, the battery life, storage memory or usb port structure are largely subsidiary concerns. The danger is that the book publishing industry will allow the marketing of the mainly hardware products produced by these manufacturers, to determine what the book is and what the book can be. This marketing might be formal traditional paid for marketing, product placement, or informal through things like television news reports, technology reviews shows and fan sites and the like. This marketing is almost entirely driven by the manufactures. The hardware, the device and not the content, the book becomes the lingua franca, the story. This runs the risk of duplicating the *format wars*⁵ of the early 1970, repeated in the early 1990's that occurred in the film industry. The *product* became the hardware and not the content. The conversation became not what 'films do you have' but 'what films do you have that can play on my device'?

The Apple technology company's success with its iTunes application/iPod design, revenue and integration model have led to high expectations, as outlined by one of the earlier *apocalyptic* quotes for its new hardware tablet computer the iPad.

This hubbub and renewed press and consumer interest focused around the iBook application seems an apt moment for comparison with the recent history of the film industry adoption and integration of new technology. This comparative approach can then be used to paint a model for how the book industry might be transformed where rather than coming to consume, to cannibalise, to kill, new technology can be seen as the gift that keeps on giving.

Technology: What the Film Studios Learnt Despite Themselves

There is an old joke retold in the UK, a disoriented traveller spying someone who looks like a local stops and asks for directions. The local responds with "oh I wouldn't start from here." This problematising of the position seems to me to be one of the defining narrative drumbeats propagated by *Book People*, where book people is defined as cultural commentators, authors, agents and publishers.

The position problematised in this model is technology, but the technology genie cannot be put back in the bottle as there is no bottle and there never was. We are here. The wall became the scroll became the codex became the printing press.

If the publishing industry, authors, editors, agents, retailers, readers create a narrative around the book that is one of apps, one of Technology A versus Technology B or become concerned with *my* market share rather than *our* market share then they run the risk of failing to reap the long-term benefits that accrued to the film industry *despite* the best efforts of film industry executives.

³ <http://www.the-ebook-reader.com/ebook-reader-comparison.html>

⁴ Adobe Flash is multimedia platform that is popular for adding animation and interactivity to web pages. One estimate is that 95% of computers have it installed

⁵ Competing tape systems Betamax versus VHS and DVD formats BluRay vs HD DVD led to fragmentation of the film rental and purchase market

In what Epstein calls *the samurai embrace* (2010, p189) The reinvention of the film business began in 1970s with the engineering by the Sony and Matsushita companies of an affordable, mass-market videocassette recorder. Epstein (2010 p190) goes on to describe how the Hollywood major studios led by Universal fought for seven years in the courts to prevent the videotape machine from reaching the market. If the studios had prevailed the home entertainment market may have never developed. Over the next decade or so this rental market became a major source of revenue for the studios as distributors pre-ordered large number of video copies of studio films. This became known as the sell-through market. The revenue from these video presales then alleviated some of the financial risk of the specific film in production as Studios sought to have covered the production costs of the film whilst it in its development phase. Epstein (2010, p212) estimates that by 2007 this home entertainment market accounted for 80% of total film industry revenues.⁶

The introduction of the DVD format in the mid 1990's was similarly resisted as it was now feared that this might "kill the video rental market that had become their golden goose". (Epstein. 2010 p191)

The technology of the DVD format with its random access and easy navigation also had the advantage of opening up a new markets, The DVD extra idea with talent commentaries, behind the scenes documentary featurettes, scenes that didn't make the final version of the film are now commonplace. Products such as boxed sets releases of films and television shows provide an additional revenue stream.

"The hand of Tokyo might not always be visible but it has allowed Hollywood to reinvent itself. It is not that the Japanese set out to change the way the world see movies, it is that Hollywood failed to see its own digital destiny."

(Epstein. 2010 p194)

It is possible to go back even further than the late 1970's, to technology being introduced in the 1950's, television and see how the movies reacted. Demographic and societal changes led to a fall in cinema audience. Although commercially available since the 1920's the impact of television was increasingly being felt at this time. Epic *bigger than television* filmmaking was the reaction. What the studios initially failed to realise was that television needed content. The film libraries of studios, films that previously had been occasionally re-issued or melted down for the silver the film stock contained, now became important revenue sources. Selling films to TV, using TV to advertise and market upcoming cinema releases and the use of television to market both nationally and internationally were strategies that opened up additional revenue streams.

The Narrative of Technology: Worlds Entered for What can be Accomplished There

"Technology isn't in itself liberating, is it, but the range of tools available to us to disseminate works and the opportunities to augment our experience of a text is increasing steadily. I think we'll all expect more from writers, too, and this may create new pressures for poets to see themselves as working in a range of media to create a kind of

⁶ In 2007 \$17.9 billion dollars of film's income came from the DVD market

multimedia experience of their work, to capture the visual and aural experience of a poem.”

Poet and publisher Chris Hamilton Emery (2010)

Arthur (2009, p25) in his discussion about the evolution of technology sees technology as something whose main character is that it can be combined and configured endlessly for fresh purposes. Castells (2010, p5) describes technology as embodying society.

Discussion about reconfiguration and theories on technology as an evolutionary process lead Arthur to provides three definitions, (Arthur, p28) technology as a means to fulfill a purpose, technology as an assemblage of practices and components and finally technology as a collection of devices and engineering practices available to a culture. The final useful idea of Arthur’s I wish to introduce here is that of technology as a set of phenomena captured and put to use. This idea can be seen to link to *Technoromanticism* as defined by Coyne (2001) that being The Romantics idea of multiplicity and commitment to individualism. Coyne (2001, p7) examines the idea that the narrative of technology is one of transcendental progress away from ‘the constraints of the embodied world towards unity through the power of information technology’, a new world order sought through unity of information. Google Inc’s stated mission is to ‘organize the world’s information and make it universally accessible and useful’ (Google, 2010).

This idea of data transitioning to become useful information speaks to how in order to understand a narrative, one needs to construct an understanding from each of constituent parts, but the parts do not make sense until seen in context of the whole. This again reintroduces Conklin’s (Conklin et al 2007) *wicked problem*. The paradox is that we cannot see the whole whilst in the midst of the narrative. We cannot *not* start from *here*. The ability of one device such as the iPad to integrate multiple messages or sources in this instance does what Castells (2010, p402) refers to as an “integration of all messages in a common cognitive pattern”. An interactive eBook shouldn’t then be seen as combination of its differing multimedia, it is simply an eBook.

Punt (1990, p 350) in his study of digital media and postclassical cinema states that a ‘shared culture of consumption’ suggested that multimedia technology helped foster an economic determinism and that resulted in derivative films released in the 1980’s. He states that companies used the box office release of a film almost as a ‘spectacular advertisement’ for the other multimedia products and tie-ins associated with the film.

The DVD format allowed the user to create an antidote to this kind of reductive determinism by facilitating individual user experience. Extras might typically include, deleted scenes, ‘making of’ documentary featurettes and various versions of the film’s trailer. The main film itself might be a longer version than the theatrical release. More sophisticated DVD extra options include alternative endings and entirely different edits⁷. The White Rabbit interactive feature on *The Matrix* (1999) film allows the user to click on the screen when a small logo of a white rabbit appeared. This click then launched additional elements, character biographies, extra scenes etc, which became available to the user to watch while the main film was on pause. This participatory interactive engagement is something that the book as a format replicates.

⁷ Memento (2000). One story line moves forward in time while the other tells the story backwards revealing more each time. A DVD extra feature allows the storyline to be played in chronological order.

“It occurs to me that the art form I hold most dear, the novel, was participatory from the beginning. A good book needs a good reader. What could be more participatory than a kit made of nothing but 26 letters of the alphabet?”

Meek (2010)

eBooks with this type of extra features are increasingly common. Most large-scale publishing houses have an interactive division. Many stand-alone companies have been formed to serve the market for interactive versions of current and upcoming releases. Enhanced Editions⁸ version of *The Death of Bunny Munro* (2009) was voted one of the thirty best apps in 2009 by Apple. The iTunes version of the book, available on the iPhone, iPod, and iPad included the full eBook, text to audiobook synchronization, an original soundtrack and eleven videos of the author reading from the novel. Is this a symptom of the pressure that Hamilton-Emery (2010) describes?

Business: It's not an App, it's an Approach

Recording, podcasts, video download, hypertext formatting, linking to publishers' websites these are all techniques that are technically relatively easy to do. Atomic Antelope⁹ developed an innovative application (app) for the recent iPad release of *Alice In Wonderland*. The challenge for authors and publishers is how do they reconceive not just their content to provide an interactive, visual experience but how do they reconceive the intrinsic way that they work?

Thematically linked digital boxsets of books can be easily imagined; the digitally annotated *Student Guide Edition* of a book is an easy sell but what about the rest of us, the reading public? How might this networked future affect the book?

I think the somewhat controversial deleting of George Orwell's 1984 from Amazon Kindle devices¹⁰ which received a rather ironic tone of negative publicity might actually be an insight into a more positive future. Is this remote access the way that digital books can be shared? Is remote download and deletion the way to rent books? How will the library respond in an iPad, Nook, Kindle world? What will happen to the book club? How might publishers facilitate this? Again the film industry offers useful parallels.

In what I am calling 'Authors... Practise your signature -The Comic Con approach' the film industry's more recent approach to the marketing of its products and the upheaval to its business model that occurred in the early 1950's resulted in a significantly different way of working with talent. These strategic changes provide a possible model for adoption.

Current marketing practices have prevailed in the book industry for a long time. The book review, the audio book, and speaking tours for instance, all lend themselves to a multimedia approach that might act if adopted to reinforce the position of the book and the reading of

⁸ Enhanced Editions tailor make multimedia versions of books

⁹ <http://www.atomicantelope.com>

¹⁰ When the publisher decided they wanted to withdraw the electronic edition of Orwell's 1984 the book was deleted remotely by Amazon without the knowledge or permission of the Kindle owner. The opportunity for ironic reflection of how this tallied with themes of the book proved too much to resist for journalists worldwide.

books in today's creative cultural environment. These should be adopted. These relatively simple acts of *capture* using Smartphones, Flip Digital Video Camera and the like allow for the easy capture and sharing of material.

Companies like Atomic Antelope might act in a similar way to apps developers for the mobile Smartphone market¹¹ in that the developers spend the investment in time and money in creating products that utilize the main product, that being the mobile phone or in this instance the book. Commonly adopted technical standards allow for low entry to market costs thus encouraging developers to look for the upside in the knowledge that the Smartphone apps market is substantial. The publisher that invests some money in perhaps incubating eBook companies might get out ahead of its competition.

Multimedia adoption of marketing techniques is something that can be incredibly cost effective and wouldn't require significantly different changes to current practices with the training curve being very flat. Authors might easily and readily be seen to be the people controlling their marketing. Technology manufacturers have also provided examples of how subsidiary markets can evolve from the major product. The mobile phone market has resulted in a subsidiary market of bumper covers, chargers, carry cases to name just a few products that support the main phone product. This subsidiary market can act as a potentially useful revenue source. Creating and developing these types of vested interests from subsidiary partners can help sustain and support the book industry.

The larger conceptual change proposed is the relationship between the publishers and authors. This culture change is happening and has already seen as review of eBook royalty rates for some high-profile authors¹².

This change in the relationship between authors and publishers' has some parallels with the 1950's end of seven-year contracts between Actors and Film Studios. Anti-trust court cases, the rise of television and the decline of cinema attendance led to the demise of the 'studio system'. Television offered alternate opportunities, Actors' agents new to the business such as Lew Wasserman¹³, insisted on different relationships between their client and the studio. As actors went freelance, no longer compelled to sign onerous seven-year contracts signing onto individual film by individual film the Hollywood studios were by necessity forced to reevaluate their business models. The relationship between Talent and Agents also changed significantly. A more proactive Author might result in a more proactive Agent or might result in a role change where agent becomes publicist. The film studios became funding, distribution and marketing operations.

This area is traditionally what the book publishing industry has been good at. Crucially new technology requires quicker, more coordinated responses. The traditional hardback, paperback, interviews and reviews on publication product process chain is likely to become a major stress point as the eBook market develops. New marketing methods are possible and desirable in order for the industry to get ahead of the technology and technologists, ahead of the manufacturer who looks to impose their favored file format on publishers to

¹¹ One recent study estimates the value of this market to grow to \$50bn by 2014. <http://www.atelier.net/articles/juniper-mobile-application-market-worth-25b-2014>

¹² Agent Andrew Wylie announced in 2010 that his clients were to sell directly to Amazon. After a short legal tussle eBook terms and conditions were adjusted for the authors his agency represent. <http://www.suite101.com/content/odyssey-editions-of-ebooks-are-no-longer-amazon-kindle-exclusives-a278385>

¹³ Wasserman headed MCA talent agency eventually merging it with Universal Studios and Decca Records

the peer-to-peer pirate looking to illegally distribute books. The annual Comic-Con¹⁴ convention seeks to create associations and identification with products under development through direct aggressive marketing and previewing of upcoming material. Films are announced, with Actors, Directors and Film Executives present to discuss the film up to three years in advance of the film's release. To this end book publishers' marketing strategies need to be more responsive and the production of marketing material that may end up as extra features of the eBook need to be integrated into the entire marketing approach of the title from its inception. The idea that the writing of a novel is so unique as to mitigate against such marketing isn't one that is likely to be substantiated when examining the production of most texts, fictional or otherwise.

The popular contention is that the market abhors a vacuum so if the publisher, author, agent doesn't do it Amazon, Apple, Sony, etc will. Being present on multiple distribution and marketing platforms should be a given.

This marketing and distribution focus will produce challenges for the author as much as the publisher. Apple's iTunes software demonstrated to the music industry that there was a market for digital material that up until then had been seen as niche or stuff consumers just weren't prepared to pay for. The technology design was coupled with an extremely low price point. Surely the pricing of eBooks has to be looked at in this context? When customers undertake a campaign against pricing of eBook¹⁵ this should be seen as a symbolic shift. Useful parallels with similar consumer campaigns when the audio mp3 file was being introduced might also act as a warning. Knopper (2007) talks about this in detail.

Epstein (2010 pp 213-219) characterizes the film industries move to downloading of movies at prices significantly less than theatre box office prices as 'giving up analogue dollars for digital pennies'. The business model is that as the digital pennies are so competitively priced profit is perfectly possible and at vastly reduced distribution costs.

Why can't the hardback book become like the special edition DVD? The hardback can be re-packaged as a product full of extra value, an artefact in itself and released alongside digital and paperback copies of the title. In 2007 the band Radiohead released an album through their website. *In Rainbows* was available to download in a digital format with the user paying as much or as little as they chose. Alongside this digital release was a boxset that included a CD and vinyl release of the album, additional songs, artwork and lyrics. This package was retailing at £40.00.

Conclusions: Back to Work

The film industry profited from new technologies despite an initial adversarial approach to the companies manufacturing these technologies. It utilized the change in consumption of its products to revitalize its industry, innovate and continue to stay relevant. What was the core business and what had been its core business since its initial inception, that of getting people into the cinema, became an important revenue stream but one of many revenue streams. The introduction and exploitation of technology created these additional opportunities. The book publishing industry should be pushing for open standards that are adopted

¹⁴ Comic Con originated as a convention for the comic book. In recent years Hollywood studios have used this as a platform to market upcoming film releases. Not all the film announced are comic book adaptations

¹⁵ http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/nov/03/ebook-prices-kindle-amazon-protests?CMP=tw_t_fd

by all. It should seek to establish an industry regulatory body that has real weight. What regulatory lessons might be learned from examining the genesis and history of the Motion Pictures Association of America (MPAA)? Can the International Publishers' Association operate in such a manner wherein it acts as the lobby body for the industry currently not, to use a boxing metaphor, punching its weight? Publishers small and large should seek to gain membership of Interactive Media Associations, it should seek to use metadata to allow search, customer profiling and intuition. This kind of data can help produce better, faster, more effective marketing, production and distribution. Almost certainly more importantly than any of these steps, important though they are is that the book publishing industry should strive to convince authors that this type of change should be embraced. It is the content, the idea of the book that has kept it relevant since its inception, not merely the form.

The book publishing industry has changed permanently as it did during transformation from scroll to codex, as it did with the printing press, mass distribution and the computer. A radical shift in approach, methodology and practice led by the book publishing industry can simply consolidate the position of the book in today's multi-literate society and get writers and readers thinking about their next book.

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