

# MATERIALITIES OF TEXT: BETWEEN THE CODEX AND THE NET

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The cultural authority of the codex form of the book appears to be in a process of displacement ensuing from the rise of on-line digital media. The traditional material structures of the book - its physical forms and its institutional forms of production, circulation, and preservation - are often seen as being subject to dematerialisation; evaporating in the transitory appearances of the digital screen and in the proliferation of new systems of production. However, this issue of *New Formations* makes the case that the present historical juncture should be understood as a mixed media milieu, in which traditional and digital forms of writing and publishing coalesce and conflict in a complex array of textual materialities.

Such materialities of text are at once sites of political and aesthetic experimentation, and of intense capitalization, intersecting features which are approached in the articles collected here through a broad range of theoretical and empirical themes: diagrammatic writing; the material reading formations of a best-seller novel; grey literature in the institutions of cultural studies; Black Twitter; the politics of Open Access and the artists' book; digital humanities and its political problematics; the bibliopolitics of the passport; and the political and aesthetic forms of independent publishing.

*New Formations* has faced its own dilemmas in recent years around the politics of publishing and its materiality. Even during the relatively brief tenure of the current editorship, the nature of academic publishing has changed radically. Five years ago, the journal was still primarily a paper product; today only a tiny proportion of its readership will ever hold a bound and printed copy of the journal in their hands. This is in part because digitisation has made possible a very significant increase in readership, especially outside the UK, but it also because the key mode of distribution for scholarly journals has decisively changed: the vast majority of our readers now access the journal digitally, primarily through the vast bundles of electronic journal subscriptions that university libraries purchase from aggregators such as ebsco. Although this vastly increases the reach of the journal, it also massively decreases the effective income-per-subscription earned by the publisher.

*New Formations* is in an almost unique position for a British scholarly journal, in that it is neither wholly self-published, like the much-admired *Radical Philosophy*, nor the property of one of the large international publishing conglomerates. Our publisher, Lawrence & Wishart is one of the last remaining, and possibly now the oldest, independent progressive publisher in the UK, responsible for the dissemination of large parts of the work of

writers such as Marx and Gramsci, among others; and university library subscriptions to the journal remain an important income-stream for them. As such, our obvious desire continually to expand the availability of the journal must always be balanced with the need to try to protect this important source of revenue for a great radical institution.

As such, the temptation to switch over to an open-access, free-content model is not one that we could succumb to without doing significant damage, although the political and conceptual commitments of many of the editorial board would tend to make full open-access an appealing option for us. By the same token, the intensive, largely unpaid labour of producing the journal requires the kind of support that only an experienced publisher can offer, and it would not be easy to replace this support with still more free labour if all income disappeared.

On the other hand, however, the mission of *New Formations* can ultimately never be a commercial one: it is to explore the interface between culture, theory and politics in new and often experimental ways, while maintaining the highest standards of rigorous scholarship. Any failure to take advantage of new technologies and distribution systems in order to improve and widen access to our content would be an abdication from the responsibility to pursue this project as vigorously and imaginatively as possible.

The strategies that we have recently adopted are all intended to meet, as far as possible, these competing demands on the journal. On the one hand we continue to make ourselves available through commercial digital aggregators and conventional paper subscriptions, and we would encourage all supporters to request any university libraries to which they have access to subscribe through one means or another. On the other hand, as well as having recently been accepted for inclusion by the main digital aggregator of non-commercial content in the Anglophone humanities and social sciences - Project Muse - *New Formations* has also launched its own independent online archive at <http://www.newformations.co.uk> with a fully searchable database of our entire back-catalogue. A large amount of that content has been made freely available on an open-access basis, while the remainder is available to all institutional or individual subscribers without further cost; we have also launched a new, highly-affordable digital-only subscription rate offering full access to the archive and all current issues at a rate which should be affordable by any interested reader without the privilege of access via a university library account, or simply to researchers who want the convenience of full access to the online archive.

We hope that by adopting these innovations, *New Formations* will continue to make its best possible contribution to international intellectual culture, while remaining open and sensitive to the possibilities and dangers inherent in new materialities of text. And we note with some satisfaction that our traditional format and lay-out, transferred without further amendment to PDF - already looks fantastic on the iPad ...