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BREAKING GRAPHIC CONVENTIONS: CAPTURING STORIES THROUGH TEXT AND IMAGE

ABSTRACT: This article proposes a new taxonomy for the ways contemporary authors are using graphic devices, such as photos, experimental typography, drawings, tables, maps and symbols, to subvert the conventions of illustrated fiction. The rise of digital technology and online publishing has led to an increase in novels and short story collections that experiment with the visual look of the book and that interweave graphic devices with written narrative. Analysing how these texts break with graphic conventions reveals how authors are using the visual aspect of print novels to question ideas around the reading experience and the object of the book itself.

INTRODUCTION

With the proliferation of desktop publishing and online publication, many authors have started using visual elements—photos, sketches, diagrams, flipbooks, colour and inventive typography—to tell stories that would traditionally be told only with text. The study of such graphic devices in literary texts is particularly important in today’s changing media economy, where more authors are self-publishing online and making decisions about typographic elements such as page layout, typeface and colour. Hartmut Stöckl observes that,

we have all become our own typographers as we handle our documents from start to finish... In doing so we develop our own tastes, designs and rules, thus shaping a new domain of un- or semiprofessional lay-typography, but more often than not we simply lack sound knowledge and much-needed skills. Systematic thinking about the semiotic nature of typography can [provide] a tool for the enablement of the typographically semi-literate (213).

The study of word-image hybrids is clearly “an increasingly valuable framework” in an age when computers are once again changing the nature of the book (Schiff 26).

This article will suggest a new taxonomy for the ways in which graphic devices subvert the traditional conventions of illustrated fiction. Focusing on this particular aspect of these devices reveals how they challenge traditional reading habits, making the reader consider the familiar object of the book in a new light.

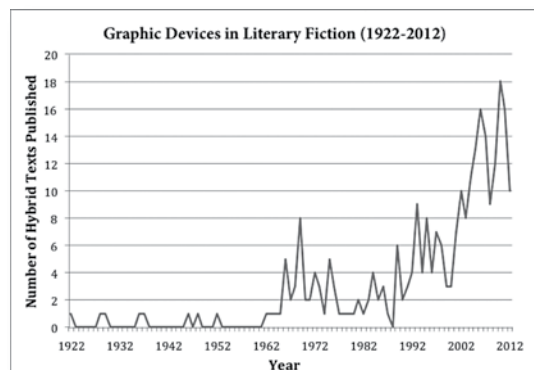
THE RISE OF HYBRID TEXTS

Combining words and images to tell a story is not a new phenomenon. Jeanne Ewert observes that comics have existed at least since the printing press was invented (72), while experiments with typography and concrete poetry are “recorded throughout literary history” (van Peer 52). Illustrated fiction also has a strong tradition in the West: “by the mid-1860s, the illustration was firmly established as a part of the narrative structure of the novel” (Sillars, *Visualisation in Popular Fiction* 30). Famous early examples of text-image experiments include Laurence Sterne’s elliptical *Tristram Shandy* (1767) and William Blake’s self-illustrated poems in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1794).

This predominance of illustration in the nineteenth century led Darragh McManus to reflect, in an article called “What Became of Illustrations in Fiction?”, on the relative lack of ‘graphic elements’ in contemporary literature (1). McManus (*ibid*) encourages authors to take advantage of visual devices’ potential: “the world is your pictorial oyster”.

These graphic devices are limited by the restrictions of printing technology, so they seem to become more popular in periods where communication media change dramatically, such as the invention of the printing press in the sixteenth century, and the rapid increase in literacy at the end of the nineteenth century (van Peer 59). In 1993, van Peer (*ibid*) accurately suggested that, because “new media require new forms for dealing with language and literature... one should expect in the near future, related to the growth in the use of personal computers for word processing... a new boom in typographic foregrounding”.

It has only been in the last decade, since the publication of Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* (2000)—which uses footnotes, diagrams, a page from a comic book, photos, fragments of sheet music, and experimental typography to tell the story of a haunted house that is bigger on the inside than it is on the outside—that more books have begun to incorporate visual elements as an inherent part of the narrative (Polk 1-2). The inclusion of graphic elements in fiction is becoming increasingly common, aided by developments in digital technology and the increasing popularity and acceptance of hypertexts and eBooks (Sadokierski 217).



While studying how graphic devices subvert the conventions of illustrated fiction, I have found approximately 270 adult, literary novels and short story collections that use these devices (for the full list see Luke 181). I discovered some of these books in previous critics’

Fig. 1: Hybrid texts from 1922 to 2012

discussions, particularly Sadokierski, White and Federman (“Surfiction”). Others I found by searching through libraries, bookstores and the Internet (Pitts). This is by no means a complete list but it is comprehensive and representative enough to give an idea of the range of hybrid texts. These examples are taken from all over the world, although most of them are English-language texts or translations. Figure 1 shows the number of hybrid texts published annually for the last 90 years, since what is arguably the first hybrid text of the twentieth century, James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922).

This graph reveals a surge in graphic devices as part of the 1960s and 70s avant-garde, with authors such as Christine Brooke-Rose, B.S. Johnson and Ronald Sukenick. It also demonstrates a considerable increase in hybrid texts over time, particularly since the year 2000; approximately half of the hybrid texts I have found were published in the new millennium.

In 2010 Zoë Sadokierski employed the term ‘hybrid novel’ to describe novels that combine linguistic text with images and typographic devices, creating a hybrid discourse. This article uses the broader term ‘hybrid texts’ because it discusses short stories as well as novels.

Peter de Voogd’s description of *Tristram Shandy* holds true for all hybrid texts: “the text’s verbal and visual elements are so intimately interwoven that they form an aesthetic whole. Text and picture cannot be divorced from one another without serious loss” (qtd. in Schiff 110). Sadokierski points out that hybrid novels are still sold on the same shelves as more traditional novels because they “are not a new type of literature, or a new fictional sub-genre. Rather, they demonstrate a shift in the conventions of the novel” (3). Graphic devices—like any other literary device—can be employed in any genre, from literary to speculative fiction (Kusche 396).

I will use Willie van Peer’s definition of typography as consisting of “the graphical representation of language on paper (or any other information carrier) and its concrete arrangement (type face, paragraph arrangement, type size, etc)” (50). I use the term ‘graphic device’ or ‘visual device’ to refer to any use of typography or images that breaks with the conventions of standard print novels. My definition of visual images is based on W.J.T Mitchell’s (qtd. in Fjellestad 12): “any recognizable figures and likenesses, pictograms, geometrical shapes, drawings, photographs, musical notations, or doodles”.

Hybrid texts can first and foremost be described as novels or short story collections that contain all of the traditional elements of literary narrative, such as plot, character, theme, setting and voice. However, their narratives are constructed not only out of written text, but typographic devices and/or visual images as well, and the relationship between these modes is such that if the graphic elements were removed one or more of the elements of narrative would be significantly altered or defaced. The graphic devices must also have been created either by the author, or by a collaboration between the author and an illustrator or designer. The former is the case for most hybrid texts, but there are a few examples of the latter, such as

Iain Sinclair and David McKean's *Slow Chocolate Autopsy* (1997) and Nick Bantock and Edoardo Ponti's *Windflower: A Novel* (2006). It is important that the author creates or has some kind of control over the graphic elements, because the distinguishing feature of hybrid texts is the way in which both the verbal and visual modes are developed together to create a unified narrative.

I discuss the distinctions between hybrid texts and similar forms such as graphic novels, illustrated fiction and artists' books elsewhere (Luke 16). Hybrid texts are less well-known than most of these forms, particularly graphic novels and picture books, which have already established a popular niche within the publishing world, whereas hybrid texts are still a relatively rare and ill-defined medium, and many of them have not received much critical attention (Lefèvre 35). Many critics have pointed out that typography's potential for meaning-making is often overlooked: "it is remarkable... how little attention is given to such typographical devices in stylistics" (van Peer 51). Nina Nørgaard argues "there is a general tendency in literary criticism to disregard the semiotic potential of typography in literature by focusing monomodally on word-meaning only" (141), and that this disregard is reflected by the choices made in the production of literary works. Sillars makes a similar observation about the illustrations that appeared in many canonical works of Victorian literature: "mainstream literary study has resolutely refused to accept the visual dimension of such texts" (*Visualisations in Popular Fiction 2*). However, graphic devices are beginning to receive more attention now that some hybrid texts, such as Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005) and Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010), have become mainstream, prize-winning bestsellers.

READING WORDS AND IMAGES

Works like *House of Leaves* and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* reveal that the physical appearance of a fictional narrative can substantially inflect and even contribute to its content. They raise questions about the relationship between text and image and how it affects the reading experience. What do images and typography *do* in literary fiction? Peter Sillars starts from a similar point in his discussion of Victorian illustrated short stories:

How does [an image] modify the response of the reader to the written word? Does it enable him or her to enter more fully into the created fictive world, or does it present that world as more of an artifice? Does it amplify the concepts and structures of the words, or does it offer separate ones of its own, as a sort of visual commentary? If the two work together to provide a new discourse, how is it assimilated and how best analysed? (*Visualisations in Popular Fiction 2*).

A number of critics have discussed the kinds of meaning graphic devices contribute to literary fiction. Some critics argue that the tension between these devices and the written word creates a "third text" (Gutjahr 21). This is similar to W.J.T. Mitchell's concept of the "third space". Mitchell argues "the space between words and images is a kind of void into

which (and from which) ideas, passions, narratives, representations emerge. It is the ‘third space’, the in-between where contingency rules” (qtd. in McNamara 1996, 10). For example, Teri Reynolds suggests that hybrid texts—as opposed to standard, typographically ‘transparent’ print novels—are “opaque, or thick with meaning” (169-170).

Hybrid texts are also inherently self-reflective, because they foreground the techniques that brought them into being. Jerome McGann studies how concrete poems (and, I would argue, hybrid texts) highlight their own “physicality and constructedness” and “turn back upon themselves, urging the reader... toward a correspondent reflexive posture toward the scene of writing” (106). Graphic devices call attention to the conventions (both verbal and visual) that facilitate the reader’s absorption in the narrative.

Other critics have suggested every book is hybrid, or multimodal, because all written text contains a spatial or visual element (Hocks 630-631). Gutjahr and Benton argue that “once given visual form, any text is implicitly coded by that form in ways that signal, however subtly, its nature and purpose and how its creators wish it to be approached and valued” (6).

Similarly, Karen Schiff argues that words and images are interpreted differently by the brain: a line of print must be read from beginning to end in order to be understood, whereas images “have no sequential path for the eye to follow in time” (5). As a result, hybrid texts “play with the reader’s perception of time in the narrative” (ibid). Graphic devices can interrupt one’s reading rhythm because, when deciphering images, the brain uses “wholeness, simultaneity, and synthesis”, whereas words require “sequence, analysis and abstraction” (Shlain qtd. in Sadokierski 6).

These observations indicate the complexity of meaning-making in hybrid texts, and give some idea of the challenges and rewards involved in writing and reading them. The literature has demonstrated that, although graphic devices in literary fiction have traditionally been overlooked, a large corpus of hybrid texts already exists, and they are entering the mainstream. Critics such as Sadokierski and Schiff have already asserted the value of these kinds of narratives, while others such as White have demonstrated that visual devices do not merely defamiliarise or foreground the nature of reading: they also contribute to meaning in complex ways. Critics such as Levenston, White and Sadokierski have attempted to classify graphic devices and the connections between them and the linguistic text, indicating patterns of typical usage.

However, because hybrid texts incorporate a variety of modes, previous approaches to the form have come from a range of disciplines such as visual design, semiotics and narratology. Many of these approaches are tentative, or limited by the boundaries of their field of study. There often seems to be a lack of cross-pollination between these disciplines. As Wolfgang Hallet states, the verbal-visual interaction within hybrid texts

cannot be grasped through traditional narratological and literary studies alone. The multimodality of narratives confronts narratology with phenomena that have not so far been the objects of its research. Therefore narratology must resort to and integrate the expertise that has been developed in other disciplines in order to describe and decode non-novelistic, non-narrative and non-verbal modes and media and their interplay with verbal narration (151).

According to Hallet, researchers analysing hybrid texts need to incorporate knowledge from fields outside the traditional boundaries of literary theory. Similarly, scholars within the field of literary studies have identified a need for a more comprehensive and systematic study of hybrid texts. For example, Glyn White argues,

there is much close reading still to be done of texts which present a distinctive graphic surface... Overall, there are many critical gaps and new opportunities and much more work to do. An awareness of the graphic surface may offer methods by which to tackle and include elements of texts that might otherwise seem to fall outside the remit of the literary critic... The point is that criticism must keep up and be as flexible and adaptable as novelists and readers (207).

This is a longstanding issue; in 1980 the typographer Robert H. W. Waller stated that “although the difficulties involved in analysing and describing the relationship of discourse to its graphic array are challenging, they are not insurmountable, and the more skilful use of textual communication that might follow from such an effort would lead to considerable social and educational benefits” (282).

Some authors of hybrid texts have also described this gap in knowledge. As Polk observes, Mark Z. Danielewski, author of hybrid novels such as *House of Leaves* (2000), stated in an interview that

he didn't think the critical vocabulary existed yet to talk about his book, for the models of critical analysis traditionally used to critique fiction didn't contain the tools to examine the layout of his story... If Danielewski is correct, then there exists a vacuum in critical literature for analyzing such works that seem to be becoming more mainstream and garnering more and more acclaim (1).

Like the critics mentioned above, Danielewski has identified a gap around the criticism of hybrid texts.

ANALYSING THE VISUAL PLAYFULNESS IN HYBRID TEXTS

A number of critics have effectively described and classified the different kinds of graphic devices in literary fiction, but there is still a need for a more explicit analysis of what Guo refers to as “the systems and functions that underlie the use of visual images” (196). For reasons of scope this article will provide a taxonomy of one particular aspect of graphic devices: the ways in which they emphasise the visual nature of books by breaking the conventions of illustrated novels. Analysing how hybrid texts experiment with earlier models of word-image interaction reveals how they foreground their graphic devices and encourage the reader to reconsider the familiar object of the book.

Renée Riese Hubert describes the ‘basic pattern’ of illustrated fiction in the nineteenth century: “the verbal and the visual retained their assigned space and function, confront[ed] each other on opposite pages or in horizontal juxtaposition... The illustrations sought to give the visual equivalent of the words to which they were subservient” (qtd. in Schiff 5). Illustrated fiction includes both early novels by writers such as Charles Dickens and William Makepeace Thackeray, and illustrated editions, in which illustrations are added to existing works. Illustrated editions have the capacity to be produced after the original publication of the book, or even after the author’s death.

The verbal and visual modes tend to be more closely linked in hybrid texts; in illustrated fiction words and images ‘stand side by side,’ usually on separate pages, although occasionally they feature more complex arrangements of words and images on the same page (Schiff *ibid*). According to Schiff (*ibid*), much illustrated fiction does not “substantially challenge a novelistic reading practice”. Illustrations are not always an integral part of the narrative because, as Sadokierski argues, they “can be added or removed in different editions without significantly affecting comprehension of the story. The illustrations are *supplementary* additions to the primary text” (25). Similarly, Schiff states that “illustrations are commonly defined as incidental additions to the words which re-present or repeat aspects of the written material. While [illustrations] create a different affect for the work, and aid the reader’s imagination, they do not significantly add to the work’s interpretation, but mostly reify the author’s words in image form” (113).

How are contemporary writers subverting conventions in order to weave images and typography into the core of the story? To answer this question, we have to consider how visual elements that break with convention are emphasised or foregrounded. As Sadokierski states, “when an author breaks the conventions they have established for their novel, we assume it is for a particular purpose” (111). Deviance, an aspect of foregrounding, is a core concept in stylistics, describing how “deviances from the ‘norm’ warrant attention” (Gibbons 4). Graphic devices that subvert traditional conventions are foregrounded because they break reader expectation; this draws the reader’s attention to them and highlights their significance. More specifically, Fei uses the term ‘markedness’ to describe verbal or visual elements that stand out as an atypical choice (233). She argues that, in a specific form such as hybrid texts, a particular “selection of appropriate typography is expected. In addition, because of the association of

certain typography with particular genres, any departure from the convention or mismatch between typography and genre would render those typographical choices as ‘marked’” (ibid).

Some critics have discussed the differences between conventional book design and the graphic devices in hybrid texts. For example, White explores the sense of defamiliarisation created by these devices (10). Similarly, van Peer examines ‘typographic foregrounding’ in poetry, and compares it to linguistic foregrounding: “central to the notion of [typographic] foregrounding is the characteristic, typically encountered in literary texts, of deviating from rules and habits, while at the same time displaying unusual regularity through partial repetition” (50). However, there is a need to categorise the specific ways in which graphic devices challenge the reader’s expectations.

Levenston suggests punctuation in literary texts can “deviate from the norm” in a number of ways: “iconically, symbolically, through patterning, by omission, and in relation to closure” (7). Iconically, the style of punctuation can match the events described. For example, in *Everything is Illuminated* (2005), Jonathan Safran Foer uses punctuation to visually represent a frozen moment in time that occurs when a small Jewish village is bombed. Pages 270 and 271 consist almost entirely of full-stops, with a few fragments of description scattered throughout. These pages are suggestive of the halt in time because they are primarily spatial, as opposed to linear or temporal. Thus Foer extends the familiar symbol of the ellipsis (...) to an almost absurd length in order to represent the fracturing of time in the narrative, and his own reluctance to describe the events that follow.

A more extreme example of typography mirroring the narrative occurs in Irvine Welsh’s *Filth* (1998). Most of the novel is written from the point-of-view of a misanthropic police officer named Bruce, but small sections are also narrated by a tapeworm living inside him. The tapeworm’s point of view intrudes into the policeman’s; as the novel progresses the tapeworm gradually begins to overlap and take over. The tapeworm’s thoughts—which are framed by squiggly lines indicating the walls of Bruce’s intestines—start to block out Bruce’s narration. The squiggly lines also resemble parentheses, which is a clever visual pun because, much like a pair of parentheses, their function is to separate the two texts. The tapeworm’s narrative is written in bold, centred, san-serif text, which, combined with its very small line-lengths, gives it an appropriately claustrophobic feel. Welsh writes this section in bold to suggest that the tapeworm is taking over the police officer and disrupting his thoughts. As the main character’s mental and physical health declines throughout the novel, the tapeworm’s sections grow wider and longer until they fill the entire page. Again, the spatial arrangement of the voices is iconic: the tapeworm’s story overlaps Bruce’s, but is also surrounded and framed by it, mirroring the tapeworm’s position within the policeman’s body. The typography therefore reflects how, by the end of the novel, the tapeworm has become dominant over Bruce.

Omission refers to instances where expected punctuation marks are left out, such as in the final chapter of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922), which includes only two full stops and therefore represented, at the time of writing, the longest sentence in English literature (4,391 words).

Patterning occurs when a particular punctuation mark is repeated throughout a story or poem. For example, John Barth's short story "Menelaïad", from the collection *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968), includes a number of speakers telling stories within stories, gradually accruing each other's quotation marks, until at one point there are seven quotation marks around the text.

Closure relates to the absence of capital letters or full stops at the start or end of sentences. William Golding uses this technique in the final scene of *The Paper Men* (1984), where the main character glimpses a man pointing a gun at him and then cuts off mid-sentence, suggesting he has been shot. This technique is often used at the end of a narrative to leave the reader hanging, searching for the missing convention. Levenston only discusses these foregrounding techniques in relation to punctuation (7), but I argue a similar categorisation can be applied to all graphic devices.

I have identified six main ways in which the visual elements in hybrid texts subvert conventions: exaggeration, alteration, repetition, deletion, combination and the adoption of conventions from other forms. This taxonomy allows for a more systematic method of identifying graphic devices and understanding why they are foregrounded against convention.

Exaggeration occurs when the size or complexity of traditional graphic devices is embellished. For example, Jeff VanderMeer's short story collection *City of Saints and Madmen* (2002) exaggerates conventional decorations by including extremely dense and intricate pseudo-Victorian borders and decorations on almost every page. In Salvador Plascencia's *The People of Paper* (2005), the length of a column of text is exaggerated when it literally runs off the bottom of the page; this emphasises the fictional nature of the character by suggesting that without paper and ink he would not exist. Finally, in Alasdair Gray's novel *Poor Things* (1992), instead of ending her letters with a single asterisk, one of the characters inserts a huge triangle of asterisks, revealing her exuberance and immaturity. This technique is often used to create a striking or impressive visual effect. It is sometimes taken to extremes, as in the hundreds of pages of appendices in Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000), which disorient the reader by presenting them with large amounts of complex verbal and visual information.

Following on from this is alteration: the re-arranging or reshaping of conventional visual devices. An example is the typographic manipulations in Raymond Federman's *Double or Nothing* (1971); the standard rectangular blocks of text in printed fiction are re-arranged into hundreds of different shapes throughout the novel. The line direction is altered so that it moves up and down, or right to left; paragraphs are shaped into stars, triangles and other forms. In one of the short stories from his collection *The Acid House* (1994), Irvine Welsh describes a man and woman who live in the same apartment building and fantasise about each other without ever expressing their desires. Welsh alters the convention of a single column of text by dividing the page into two vertical columns, with the man's thoughts on the left side and the woman's on the right. This layout reflects the irony of their spatial proximity

and shared feelings, contrasted with their lack of social connection. This technique is taken to an extreme in Salvador Plascencia's *The People of Paper*. Each chapter has one, two, or three columns per two-page spread, and each column is narrated by a different character. At the end of the novel the main characters, who are sick of the author spying on them, decide to wage war on him by arranging their columns into strategic formations that force him out of the book by using up all the white space. As a result, the two-page spreads near the end of the novel have up to nine columns of varying lengths and widths. The final pages are very crowded and require some effort to read, but they also give the narrative a sense of momentum.

Alteration is often used in quite a radical way, because it involves fundamentally altering particular conventions to suit the author's needs. The new shapes, colours or arrangements that result are often symbolic, echoing themes or images from the written text. For example, the type size in Mark Z. Danielewski's *Only Revolutions* (2006) is designed in tandem with the physical structure of the book. The same story is told from the point of view of two different characters. The two versions of the story start at opposite ends of the book and are presented one above the other on the page; one is upside-down, and the other is the right way up. The publisher suggests the reader should read eight pages of the first character's narration, then turn the book upside-down and read eight pages of the second character's narration, and so on. The type size of each story starts off very large—the first page of each story consists solely of the narrator's initial—but gradually shrinks over the course of the novel. Because each story starts at a different end of the book, the second story's type size expands as the first story's type size shrinks, and vice-versa. The result is a very complicated reading process; however, the arrangement of the text and the resulting reading mechanics are clearly suggestive of the powerful bond between the main characters. As Danielewski points out, the novel moves "from mechanism to motion to mood" (*Only Revolutions* 1).

In some hybrid texts familiar devices are simply repeated numerous times. For example, towards the end of *The People of Paper* the title and dedication pages are repeated because the narrator decides the story needs to start all over again. This calls attention, along with many other metafictional devices, to the constructedness of the text. Similarly, on the final page of Shane Jones's *Lightboxes* (2010), the words "The End" are repeated several times. This is often done for humorous effect, or to slow the pace of the narrative.

The opposite technique, based on Levenston's 'omission' and 'closure', is the deletion or erasure of an expected graphic convention. In Roberto Bolaño's novella *By Night in Chile* (2000) and Will Self's novel *Umbrella* (2012), paragraph breaks are omitted—the entire narrative is presented as a single paragraph. Mathias Énard takes this a step further in his novel *Zone* (2010), which is presented as one sentence, with a single full stop at the end of the novel. As Levenston points out, this technique is often iconic, and can also generate anticipation by denying a sense of closure.

Finally, graphic devices may combine two or more visual conventions, or use one convention to fulfil the function of another. The cover of Dave Eggers's *You Shall Know our Velocity*

(2002) performs the function usually assigned to the first page of a novel: instead of a cover image and title, it contains the beginning of the protagonist's narration. This recalls the cover of Richard Brautigan's *Trout Fishing in America* (1967), which features a black and white photo of the author and his 'muse' Michaela Blake-Grand. This photo is referred to throughout Brautigan's novel, and all subsequent editions have been printed with it on the cover (although later editions of Eggers's novel shift the beginning of the story from the cover to the first page). In Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* (1989), images of different fruits are used to identify the multiple narrators. In this case visual images perform a function traditionally performed by a title, heading or the written text itself. This technique can reveal new potentials for words and images by using them to perform functions usually assigned to the other.

Although hybrid texts often experiment with the traditional appearance of printed literary fiction, some also subvert the conventions of other forms, such as non-fiction, comics and scripts. Kress and van Leeuwen propose that creators of texts constantly import signs from different contexts—other eras or cultures—to signify ideas or values associated with these contexts (10). For example, Richard Kostelanetz discusses how many of the avant-garde, hybrid texts produced in the 1970s turn “the forms and trappings of literary scholarship into ironic fiction” or “depend upon either material or structures taken from outside literature” (85-100).

Levenston argues that writers experiment with these other forms in three ways (113). The first is switching—typographically presenting the narrative as some other literary form such as drama or verse. The second technique is “importing norms from other, non-literary, typographical genres: newspapers, advertisements, learned articles, sacred texts. The usual purpose of such deviations into other norms is to add verisimilitude” (ibid). For example, Leanne Shapton's *Important Artifacts and Personal Property from the Collection of Lenore Doolan and Harold Morris, Including Books, Street Fashion, and Jewelry* (2009) is presented as an auction catalogue, with photographs of 325 personal effects that Lenore and Harold have decided to sell after breaking up. The story of their relationship gradually emerges from the captions underneath each item. This intriguing format brings to mind Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962), in which the narrative is woven out of the biographical notes accompanying a poem. Finally, writers may transform conventions: “Only by discarding all the normal typographical conventions of literary text, prose or verse, and starting from scratch with a totally new concept of the potential of print, can any truly innovative use of layout for semantic purposes begin to take place” (Levenston 114).

It is unclear what Levenston means by ‘discarding’ all typographic conventions; this seems like an almost impossible task, since the visual presentation of literary works and their associated reading practices are deeply ingrained within society. It is hard to imagine what such a text would look like, let alone how the reader would approach it. I therefore use the third category—transforming—to refer to devices that import conventions, but also subvert some of these conventions using one or more of the five techniques described above. For example, the text in Graham Rawle's *Woman's World* (2005) is a collage of words and phrases

cut out of thousands of vintage women's magazines. Rawle's novel *imports* the typographical conventions—such as type size, typeface and type colour—from this other form, but it also *alters* these conventions by arranging the text into unusual layouts.

There is some overlap between these categories. For example, in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005) and Madeline Gins's *Word Rain* (1969), line spacing is decreased until words run over the top of each other and become illegible. In the case of *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, the narrator is attempting to write down his experience of the Dresden bombings, and the decrease in line spacing represents his inability to describe his traumatic past (he is also mute). This could be described as either exaggerating the amount of words on the page, or erasing the convention of line spacing. However, these categories allow the reader to pinpoint more accurately how a device disrupts familiar reading practices, and what effect the author intends to achieve.

CONCLUSION

Hartmut Stöckl observes that linguistic reflection on typography would have been useless to creative writers twenty years ago, when typography was “firmly in the hands of a trained elite” (213). Graphic design has traditionally been seen as something that happens after a book is written. However, in today's society, the majority of creative writers use desktop publishing, and many are publishing their work in eBooks or on the Internet. The study of hybrid texts has become increasingly significant as these tools allow writers to make their own choices about the visual presentation of their work. Paul C. Gutjahr and Megan L. Benton argue that “as modern technology increasingly empowers writers to create their own typography, it becomes more important than ever to understand how authorial involvement further reveals the dynamic power of type to inflect literary content” (14).

This article has discussed just one aspect of how hybrid texts challenge traditional reading practices and encourage readers to re-evaluate the process of reading and the object of the book itself. Readers engage with hybrid texts in complex ways, interpreting and analysing typography and visual images as well as the written word. Images and typography can reinforce, alter or even disrupt the reader's understanding of the narrative. The visual design of the written text can perform many functions, such as morphing to reflect or contrast with the action, suggesting connections between disparate elements, or highlighting aspects of the characters' inner lives. Readers need to draw on visual literacy skills that are usually associated with more design-oriented forms, such as non-fiction or hypertexts. Readers of hybrid texts need to be able to identify and decipher a myriad of visual clues together with linguistic ones. Many authors have already employed photographs, sketches, diagrams, flipbooks, typographic elements, white space, codes, symbols, found documents and other ephemera to reinforce and invigorate their fiction, and, now that changes within the publishing industry are placing the tools for creating visual texts in authors' hands, the coming years could see many more examples of this. As developments in digital technology enable writers to create and publish hybrid texts more quickly and easily, there is much potential for the already rich scholarship on this form to flourish.

For example, in 2013 Kendall, Portela and White edited a special edition of the *European Journal of English Studies*, with papers analysing graphic devices in a variety of contexts, such as poetry, contemporary literary novels and medieval texts. The editors argue that if text is no longer approached as the transparent medium that we are accustomed to, then our accepted and conventional conceptions of reading, writing, publishing, and, indeed, educating are destabilised. Engaging with text as a visual phenomenon allows us to see how it has been used, how it is being used and how current usage may be changing us (6).

The growing awareness of and openness to design-conscious literature has already begun to change the way writers and readers think about the novel, and there are still many avenues of experimentation to be explored.



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