

Institution: University of Brighton		
Unit of Assessment: D34 - Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management		
Title of case study: Transforming readership and publishing spaces through innovations in experimental narrative design		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000 — 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (eg job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Graham Rawle	Lecturer (2006 — 2013), Senior Lecturer (2013 — to date)	2006 — to date
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2013 — 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Experimental multimodal literature and design at University of Brighton (UoB) has revolutionised literary practices, informing diverse creative industry sectors internationally (fiction, comic illustration, graphic novels, music and film) to produce a new way of storytelling. Consequently, this has helped to disrupt the UK and US publishing industry by making editors and publishing houses reconsider their strategies around popular forms of fiction. Challenging the role of readership, materials, form and content, this work has become embedded within higher education creative writing programmes (UK, Europe, USA, Canada and Singapore) benefitting teaching practitioners and students. Rawle's research and practice has had a longstanding effect on the public, as readers are challenged to rethink how they read, absorb and learn from novels.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Rawle's practice-based research through experimentation with multi-modal methods has spanned a career of over thirty years. Rawle's research has developed innovative techniques in multimodality involving the interplay between text and image (or text as image) as a way to carry an additional narrative dimension that is neither written nor illustrated, but which emerges through the combined reading of both. This has resulted in the production of numerous experimental novels, including <i>Woman's World</i> (2005), <i>The Card</i> (2012) and <i>Overland</i> (2018). Though the designs and layouts differ from book to book according to the characteristics of the story, each work challenges literary traditions by using visual elements to create sub-textual indicators within the narrative. These engender more intense reader experiences, enhancing their capacity for visualisation, in particular the narrative 'voice', the dramatic mood or the geographical space. The originality of the approach and the success of these novels in both academic and public spheres situates Rawle as an artist rooted firmly within the tradition of experimental novelists.</p> <p><i>Woman's World</i> is a 437-page novel collaged entirely from fragments of text clipped from the pages of vintage women's magazines; these clippings are reassembled to tell the 1962 story of Roy and 'sister' Norma's struggle to live up to the prescribed ideals of feminine perfection. The method of assembly illustrates Norma's constructed persona and her dependence on the magazines to find her female voice. The metafictional use of real magazines allows characters to be realised and immerses the reader within an original contextual backdrop, magnifying the novel's questions about sexism, stereotypes, sexuality and social standards as the appropriated material tells its own social, historical and cultural story [Reference 3.1]. Rawle has won wide critical acclaim through reviews in over 70 international press publications, with <i>Woman's World</i> being described by Neel Mukherjee in <i>The Times</i> as: 'a work of genius [...] the most wildly original novel produced in this country in the past decade.'</p> <p><i>The Card</i>, one of three novels shortlisted for the 2013 Writers' Guild Best Book Award, required a different visual approach to reflect the protagonist's thought patterns. Here, the page design</p>		

makes use of typographic anomalies, and a series of coded graphic symbols that sit in the margins alongside the text. These act as a narrative visual shorthand that highlights the protagonist's mental condition, apophenia (or 'patternicity'), which manifests itself in a tendency to perceive, mistakenly, meaningful connections between unrelated things [3.2].

In *Overland*, Rawle's research into visual innovation reflects the overall shape of the narrative, rather than the personality of the character, as the central themes of heaven and hell are conveyed through the book's innovative layout. Designed to be read with its spine aligned horizontally, its parallel alternating narratives unravel simultaneously above and below the book's spine, orienting the reader spatially within a narrative in which characters and their stories migrate between the bright utopian world of 'Overland' and the dark underworld of industry and war. As in Rawle's previous books, the unexpected format and narrative delivery challenges expectations of how literary fiction should be read. *Overland* readers must physically rotate the book 90 degrees, adapting to the new structure, which subverts centuries of conventional fiction formatting. This new layout that uniquely highlights spatial, physical and emotional relationships within the narrative [3.3] and its effect on the reading experience, has been widely discussed in national press reviews and features (*Times Literary Supplement*, *The Guardian*, *Daily Express*, *Sunday Times*, *Bookseller*).

These works of fiction collectively demonstrate Rawle's theory that the visuality of the text, when tailored to the aims of specific story, can create a significant added narrative complexity [3.5]. Rawle is now bringing these insights and strategies to moving image. The making of the *Woman's World* film, currently in production, recycles audiovisual clips to create a narratively fluent film collage. The same methodology is used and clips are sourced, catalogued and archived to allow a version of the original story to be assembled. Unlike other leading contemporary 'found footage' filmmakers, Rawle uses a unique process whereby live action film is digitally cut and pasted both sequentially and spatially, so that each single frame might be composed from as many as 15 cut-out and layered film clips. The outcome can thus be viewed as somewhere between a traditional film and a moving collage. No film has ever been created in this way before. This ground-breaking methodology furthers Rawle's ongoing research into the practice and theory of narrative, continuity, montage and sequence [3.5]. Through the meticulous re-composition of existing film footage his process tests the boundaries of narrative coherence revealing new insights into the perceived importance of established conventions in editing and audience comprehension. It examines the participatory role of the audience, playing on their natural propensity to 'find' a narrative thread. Rawle's film demonstrates that discontinuity in spatial geography, costume, setting etc (once considered prohibitively obstructive to narrative flow) can be made acceptable to an audience so long as the narrative drive is strong, the dramatic intent of the scene remains stable, and a character's emotional state is changed only by a tangible catalyst [3.4].

3. References to the research

[3.1] Rawle, G. (2005). *Woman's World*. Atlantic Books. London. ISBN 1843543672 [Quality validation: received extensive coverage in the media and has become a critical reference point for studies of experimental literature worldwide].

[3.2] Rawle, G., (2012). *The Card*. Atlantic Books, London. 336pp ISBN 0857891243 [Quality validation: shortlisted for 2013 Writers Guild Best Book Award].

[3.3] Rawle, G., (2018). *Overland* Chatto & Windus, Penguin Random House, London. 384pp. ISBN 1784741485 [Quality validation: received extensive review in the media and within the field of study].

[3.4] Rawle, G. (2018). The Trouble With Norma. In G. Solomons (Ed.), *Beneficial Shock!: The Fully Illustrated Movie Magazine* (pp. 74-77). (Beneficial Shock!; Vol. 3). Beneficial Shock Ltd.

[3.5] Rawle, G. (2019). "Who cares if it takes twenty years?" In J-P. Kilpiö (Ed.), *Tuli & Savu.*, (95 ed., pp. 25-36). [95]. Helsinki, Finland: Runoyhdistys Nihil Interit ry, p. 25-36 12 p. 95. [Quality validation: published in Finland's leading poetry magazine].

4. Details of the impact

Rawle's experimental artistic practices have delivered sustained impacts affecting different layers of culture, education, publishing and creative industries across different countries and

settings. Creative artists from a wide range of disciplines (writers, artists, poets, publishers, graphic designers, photographers, typographers, songwriters, filmmakers, producers, directors, illustrators, graphic novelists and literary critics) have cited Rawle's works and methods as a key influence on their practice, enabling them to test new methods in their own experimental work. Notably, these include UK creative arts educators Tamar MacLellan and Philippa Wood's collaborative (found text) artist book project, *The Blue Book* (2018); Israeli-born New York artist Stavit Allweis's photo-graphic novel, *Isness*; Academy Award nominated American actor, director, screenwriter, film & TV producer and artist James Franco's *New Film Stills* exhibition at the Pace Gallery NY (2014) and the two-time Emmy-award winning UK animators, Peepshow Collective [Source 5.1].

4.1 Disrupting the publishing and film industries

The development of experimental techniques across Rawle's body of work has also affected industry professionals that work to deliver new, diverse, experimental works that challenge readers. *Woman's World* (2005) was included in a landmark international exhibition, *Graphic Design Now in Production*, organised in the USA by the Walker Art Center and Cooper-Hewitt Smithsonian National Design Museum (2012, touring throughout the US in 2014). In the exhibition the novel was presented as an original example of a piece of work that utilises collage within the 'production processes of the commercial graphic arts'. The Senior Curator of Contemporary Design at Cooper Hewitt has acknowledged that while graphic novels have become a global phenomenon, Rawle's approach, methodology and outcomes are '*entirely his own*'. The curator goes on to describe this novel as '*contributing to a renaissance in the world of independent publishing*' [5.2].

Rawle's experimental works have an effect outside of the independent press, being published and sold by mainstream publishers and outlets. The production of these works, and the response received by the public, has led the publishing director at Chatto & Windus (the world's biggest trade publisher), who worked with Rawle on both *Woman's World* and *Overland*, to testify that these works have helped shape practices on an individual editorial level as well as across the organisation as '*there, quite simply, has been nothing like it, before or since [...] it was a case of a story finding its ideal form*' and it remains '*the gold standard for how to bring art into storytelling*' [5.3]. These works have '*prompted an editorial process that sharpened my work as an editor and publisher [...] the skills I have learned working on Graham's books continue to be put to use when I edit more conventional narratives*' as it has '*stretched what they are capable of*'. This has informed practices within Chatto & Windus, by bringing together the editorial and production functions in the business, which is rare for the publishing industry. This has enabled different aspects of individual projects to be worked on creatively *between* departments, cementing important new internal working relationships [5.3].

This influence has spread to the USA through the publication of *Woman's World* via its American publisher, Counterpoint Press. Speaking on behalf of US publisher Cursor, as well as his experience of the US publishing industry as former President of Soft Skull Press and Executive Editor, Counterpoint Press, the CEO of Cursor has stated that Rawle's '*body of work has expanded the set of possibilities for contemporary fiction*' [5.4]. Rawle has been able to build upon and amplify the moves made in *Woman's World*, via his subsequent works *The Card* and *Overland*, but he has also shown the way for others. Leanne Shapton's *Important Artifacts and Personal Property*, Zach Dodson's *Bats of the Republic* and Austin Kleon's *Newspaper Blackout*, are all books that have exploited the possibilities enabled by Rawle's body of work. The CEO of Cursor goes on to show that:

'the significance resides not solely in the effect on other artists but the concomitant effects on publishing as a creative industry. While artists may strive for originality, publishing does not. The entire publishing infrastructure depends on what are called comparison, or competitive titles; in other words, this book is like that book. Books like Rawle's do not merely inspire artists and writers; they make it possible for publishers to publish forms that had not been hitherto published [...] it took a certain bravery on my part to publish something without antecedent, and to have had success in doing so certainly gave me some additional measure of authority in the subsequent years...it is astonishingly rare for an art form that has been around for over three hundred years, that have been iterated upon in so

many ways, by some many great artists, within so many distinct cultures, to have a new and distinct variant arise. It is a testament to the astonishing creativity of Graham Rawle that he has devised exactly that' [5.4].

The innovative narrative practices have also affected the development of methodologies from text-based narrative to film. Rawle's innovative process has influenced the practices of those directly involved in the making of the *Woman's World* film project who have subsequently come to re-evaluate commonly held beliefs regarding narrative structure and sequential design in film projects. The BAFTA winning producer of the *Woman's World* film and co-founder of Trademark Films, has highlighted how Rawle's approach '*simultaneously exploits and subverts cinematic language*' with the '*unorthodox methodology*' prompting a '*collective shift in thinking about film editing, production and distribution*' for the planning of this project with an effect on audiences and '*ways of reading film*' [5.5]. Screenings of test footage have generated audience feedback about the project's experiential value and its power to influence and inspire new approaches to copyright, collage, sequence and narrative continuity [5.6].

4.2 Underpinning new creative experiences for teachers and learners across disciplines

Rawle's innovative methods have had a significant cross-disciplinary impact on the teaching of both design and creative writing. Over 40 educational textbooks draw on this work to teach methods across disparate themes and disciplines eg language and gender, children's learning, design and awareness, multimodality, print and linguistics. *Woman's World* is a set text on post-graduate literature and creative writing courses across the UK, Europe, USA, Brazil, Canada, India and Singapore, where it is studied for its literary content and its unconventional method of construction. Lecturers at these institutions regularly conduct narrative workshops employing Rawle's cut and paste approach to stimulate unexpected, imaginative texts and to develop a deeper student experience (University of Chester, York St John University, San Diego State University). These encourage students to take a more holistic approach by considering the story and the book design as integral. A Professor of Creative writing at York St John's University who has led both MA and undergraduate courses on the works testified that: '*the work has had a strong impact on the design of these courses, as an exemplar of the breaking of genre and formal boundaries, the relationships that can be formed between the textual and the visual, and the ways in which writers and artists can challenge voice*' leading to '*new and high quality student work*'. She also confirmed that at York St John the impacts are far-reaching and '*have been at the fundamental level of course and module design - without this book (and other work by Rawle) curriculum design would indeed have been different*' [5.7]. *Woman's World* features in a further study from Poland, published by Routledge, which reflects the substance of the approach and continuing power to guide deserving '*to be treated as a unique artistic experiment*' that is an '*unprecedented feat*' that affects readers through '*a complex verbovisual narrative mosaic*' [5.8]. In addition, Rawle's lectures on method and storytelling have inspired students to think differently; this is confirmed by a student at an international school in Singapore: '*Rawle...gave us the key to free ourselves from familiar styles, patterns, and cliches; to find our own voices and tell our own stories*' [5.9].

4.3 Changing public readership practices

The recontextualizing of existing material in *Woman's World* (2005) highlights the main themes of the narrative: gender stereotyping and the prescribed paradigm of femininity as portrayed onscreen in the 1950s and '60s. This has a significant impact on audiences as confirmed by the editor of the novel who describes how the book's engagement with identity politics through the original depiction of the character still plays a key role in that public debate [5.3]. By playing with perceptions of gender, consumerism and society through its creative methodologies the novel considers constraints of both stereotyping and the novel form. Raising important questions about gender construction '*the text both seems to reinforce and yet transform reading practices*' and '*reinigorates an understanding of what it means to study experimental texts*' [5.10].

Public attention is drawn to Rawle's novels as they have been widely reviewed in the media; this in turn has led to prolific online public discussions, book groups and blogs. Public reviews of the novels include typical positive commentary including: '*a work of genius*', '*extraordinary*', '*distinctive*' and '*praiseworthy*'. But reader reviews from the general public confirm a deeper

connection to the novel's form as readers admit to feeling '*unsettled*' and '*moved*' [5.11]. The diversity of this readership includes those who are fans of experimental novels and those who are new to the genre, but most admit to experiencing something new. Some readers feel apprehension around the limitations of these techniques, but then go on to express a changed view due to the holistic way in which form and content are intrinsically linked to express new meanings, generating entirely '*novel*' or even '*crazy*' experiences [5.11]. One blog explores novels in a book group setting, evaluating responses online. It states that: '*Rawle's treatment goes beyond that of a simple gimmick, to truly expanding the boundaries of literature as a form*' [5.11]. A review in the *Found Poetry Review* also states that Rawle: '*engages with kinds of traditions [...] takes the method of cut up to new extremes [...] and creates a reading experience in which the reader buys in*' [5.11]. A recognised blog site has covered *Overland* and has recorded more than 23,000 page views. This describes the originality of the reading experience due to the landscape format, the blank pages and how the storyline subverts itself between the over and under stories. It goes on to describe the reading experience transforming readers into 'observers' and where the 'cinematic splitscreen' also affects readership. Through this: '*Rawle asks us to reconsider how we read and absorb information. He asks for a high level of participation from his readers and rewards the studious*' [5.12].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[5.1] A report containing evidence from multiple sources relating to individual artists and the influence on their work. PDF available.

[5.2] Statement from Senior Curator of Contemporary Design, Cooper Hewitt, National Design Museum (New York). This testifies to how Rawle's work was incorporated into the exhibition due to its position as a unique example in the industry.

[5.3] Testimonial, Publishing Director Chatto & Windus, Penguin Random House. This testifies to impact across editorial processes within the organisation and the effect on readers.

[5.4] Testimonial from the CEO of Cursor that testifies to the significance of Rawle's works and their impact across the industry.

[5.5] Testimonial from the BAFTA winning producer and Co-founder of Trademark Films that confirms how Rawle's film project has effected a shift in thinking about film editing and production.

[5.6] A report containing evidence from multiple sources relating to the positive feedback on screenings of the *Woman's World* film project.

[5.7] Testimonial from a Professor of Creative Writing at York St John University that confirms the impact of the work on teaching, student engagement and curriculum design.

[5.8] Drag W (2019). *I'm every wo/man, guaranteed one hundred per cent genuine!: Graham Rawle's Woman's World*. In *Art of Crisis: Collage in Twenty-First-Century Literature in English*, Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003005414> Supported by a statement and other articles on the role of these works and the effect on creative practice and learning. Supplementary sources available as a PDF.

[5.9] Writers' Fortnight 2019: Cutting Outside the Box | Perspectives | UWCSEA | International school in Singapore. This contains feedback on workshops led by Rawle.

[5.10] Parker, E., (2015). Re-envisioning feminist fiction, in James, D., (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to British Fiction since 1945*, (Cambridge University Press). pp 79-94. ISBN 9781107562714. This essay includes a discussion of how the work transforms reading practices.

[5.11] A report of all supplementary evidence pertaining to extensive reviews in the media and online public discussion forums. These support the impact relating to changed experiences of reading amongst the public. Report available as a PDF.

[5.12] Randall, L., @RandallWrites (2018). A History of my Life in 100 Objects [Book review]. <https://randallwrites.wordpress.com/2018/03/05/book-review-overland/> [Accessed on 12th January 2021]. This review describes in detail the changes to readership experience.