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## The New Art of Making Books Revisited: Postdigital Recycling of the Literary

**Abstract:** This chapter revisits Ulises Carrión's pioneering manifesto "The New Art of Making Books" (1975) with the purpose of providing a critical framework that will be used to shed some light on contemporary artistic practices in the field of postdigital publishing. Attention will be paid to the work of artists that use canonical literature as raw material for their pieces, such as Jesse England's *E-Book Back Up* (2009), Jason Huff's *AutoSummarize* (2010), or Mimi Cabell and Jason Huff's *American Psycho* (2011), exploring the different strategies involved in the process of cultural and literary recycling. In an age when print competes with digital technology, its physical format appears to be more alive than ever, with artists using print affordances as subversive and performative gestures that open a dialogue about contemporary notions of authorship, originality and the evolving nature of contemporary reading habits and media consumption.

**Keywords:** postdigital publishing, recycling strategies, algorithm, appropriation, authorship.

### 1. Introduction

In 1975, Mexican conceptual artist Ulises Carrión published his literary and artistic manifesto "The New Art of Making Books", which proved highly prophetic and anticipated with great accuracy the artistic practices of future generations of creators who have reflected on publishing formats and literary culture during the first two decades of the 21st Century. Revisiting his seminal text from the perspective of a postdigital sensitivity can help us illuminate the practices of contemporary artists who have experimented with literary writing, reading and editing conventions, often using canonical works of literature as raw material for their new pieces.

Postdigital recycling carries with it the sign of the times, the overwhelming feeling that everything has already been said or done; therefore, it is impossible to generate original content *ex nihilo*, since every act of creation constitutes a particular type of recycling, of recontextualisation and processing of materials, which makes them useful again and integrates them into a new cycle.

Contemporary artists depend on our knowledge of our literary heritage to subvert and parody the act of literary creation through a myriad of strategies that combine digital technology with analogue craftsmanship in conceptual books that challenge our notion of reading: using search engines, word processing programmes and email as automatic writing agents, subjecting illustrious novels and plays to different procedural transformations, challenging in the process the traditional concept of the book as the right container for the literary text and also posing questions regarding the state of creativity in digital culture.

Through the analysis of artistic proposals in the field of postdigital publishing, such as Jesse England's *E-Book Back Up* (2009), Jason Huff's *AutoSummarize* (2010), Mimi Cabell and Jason Huff's *American Psycho* (2011), Stephanie Syjuco's *Re-Editioned Texts: Heart of Darkness* (2011), Tom Scott's *Shakespeare.txt.jpg* (2013), or Almudena Lobera's *Superficial Reading* (2013) and *Technical Images* (2020), this chapter explores the different strategies involved in the process of cultural and literary recycling. In an age when print competes with digital technology, its physical format seems to be more alive than ever, with artists using print affordances as subversive and performative gestures that open a dialogue about contemporary notions of authorship, originality, analogue and digital constraints and potentialities, and the evolving nature of contemporary reading habits and media consumption.

## 2. The new art of making books revisited

Ulises Carrión (1941, San Andrés Tuxtla, Mexico – 1989, Amsterdam, Holland) studied philosophy and literature at the National University of Mexico. After publishing two anthologies of short stories and having established himself as a promising young writer, he decides to travel to Europe with a grant to study French at the Sorbonne and German at the Goethe Institute in Achenmühle. He finally completed his master's degree in English Literature at the University of Leeds with a thesis entitled "Judas' Kiss and Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*" (Reijnders 2017). At some point in his life, however, he discarded literature in favour of freer art forms (artists' books, performances, installations), even though literature and particularly the book were essential categories in his artistic production.

"The New Art of Making Books" summarises the paradigmatic change he envisions with respect to the future of the book as a technology that transcends its content, be it literary or otherwise, and which can be playfully altered to question traditional notions regarding the production, dissemination and reception of knowledge. Carrión conceives the book as an "autonomous space-time sequence" (1975, p. 1), as if he had anticipated the emancipation of the

book as a container from its text, a tension between the text and its material support that has been made more conspicuous with the arrival of electronic textuality and the liquid nature of the digital text. In Carrión's words, "Books existed originally as containers of (literary) texts. But books, seen as autonomous realities, can contain any (written) language, not only literary language, or even any other system of signs." (1975, p. 1). So, the medium – the book – emerges as an artistic form to which the text is subsidiary, and language itself has become a source of investigation:

New art's language is radically different from daily language. It neglects intentions and utility, and it returns to itself, it investigates itself, looking for forms, for series of forms that give birth to, couple with, unfold into, space-time sequences.

[...]

The words in a new book might be the author's own words or someone else's words. (1975, p. 4).

Moreover, in "The New Art of Making Books" the author becomes responsible for the whole process, making sure that the design of the book is in accord with its content and that both establish a symbiotic relationship. Liberating books from becoming the container of traditional literature, and the words from their meaning and intentionality, has given way to experimentation with other sign systems, which in recent years has meant opening the door to hybrid compositions that are half-human/half-machinic.<sup>1</sup>

As the book as an artifact gains relevance, the text recedes in importance, to the point that one can be the creator of a book yet write very little or nothing at all. Furthermore, since it is the book in its totality that is significant and words have been divested of intentionality, the book's content is not meant to be read in the traditional way but understood as part of a structure. Thus, with these new books come new reading habits; or should we say non-reading habits? Recently Goldsmith tweeted, "No need to read. A sample of the work suffices to authenticate its existence" (Soulellis 2019, p. 230). Ulises Carrión anticipated this change in reading, but contrary to his famous aphorism, "Dear reader. Don't read" (1973), reading has remained, of course, a crucial activity, though the conditions for it have changed: in the new art every book requires a

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1 Along these lines, we find Flarf poets, like Nada Gordon, K. Silem Mohammad and Gary Sullivan, who often use Google search engine results as a primary text to create poems, mining the Internet with odd search terms and then filtering the results, a technique closely connected to 'found poetry' but introducing the machinic protocols and their incongruous juxtapositions.

different reading, being able to “read” it is already a sign that one has understood it. Reading, however, does not need to be completed since the reader can stop whenever he or she feels that the structure, the idea of the book, has been fully grasped. Reading, consequently, has incremented its speed (as we will see, his clairvoyance with respect to reading acquires a new degree of precision in light of electronic literature and postdigital publishing artifacts).

This line of thought has also led to one of the most frequently quoted aphorisms of this manifesto, “Plagiarism is the starting point of the creative activity in the new art” (Carrión 1975, p. 5), since texts have become surplus material. Following the path unlocked by Carrión’s exhortations, we can find many exponents of conceptual poetry, including the “uncreative writing” movement championed by Kenneth Goldsmith, according to whom, “[w]ith the rise of the Web, writing has met its photography” (2010, p. xvii), alluding to the way in which a superabundance of text made available by the Internet will inevitably cause disturbances in the literary system. Conceptual poetry, in fact, has applied the same rationale to poetry that Sol Lewitt applied to conceptual art, “When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art” (1967).

Copying-and-pasting, transcribing, transcoding, and republishing large amounts of text is the common *modus operandi* of postdigital artists who have found in the analogical publishing of artists’ books a new way to react to the Web’s incommensurable and intangible nature. As is often the case in conceptual poetry, reading the text is not necessary to appreciate the work, since it is the idea of the text that is the essence of the whole project, whose outcome does not need to be pleasing either to the eye or to the soul; the text can be quite meaningless or emotionless. Confronted with such an overwhelming abundance of texts, the writer faces the dilemma of the impossibility of ascertaining the originality of his or her contribution. Carrión and Goldsmith’s responses, at different times in history, are one and the same: “Dear writer. Don’t write”. The writer only needs to “borrow” the text to make it his or her own through a series of recycling procedures that have become the new aesthetic principles of our postdigital age. Postdigital creativity lies in the processes of de/recontextualisation, postproduction, republishing and the recirculation<sup>2</sup> of texts. By introducing

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2 Recirculation is a term coined by Miriam Llamas Ubieta (2022) and borrowed from the glossary of the archive Rec-Lit. “It is a specific form of postdigital circulation in which something with mass circulation in other periods alongside other media through multiple spaces, borders and points is incorporated into a new life or cycle of

well-known texts into new contexts, a series of features that had been taken for granted or had passed unnoticed come to the foreground and allow us to see them afresh.

However, these recycling practices pose a challenge for critics as there are implications not only regarding notions of authorship and originality, but also with respect to the categorisation of the works according to their genre and artistic discipline. In *Against Expression*, Craig Dworkin discusses how assembling texts for an anthology on conceptual writing from the spheres of literature, music and the visual arts provided him with an argument to advocate a “theoretically-based art that is independent of genre”, as he became aware that critics and readers need to open up to other disciplines and their traditions to be able to identify the family resemblances among pieces belonging to different artistic categories but stemming from similar conceptual fields (2010, p. xxiii). It can become quite impossible, for instance, to differentiate a poem from a work of conceptual art that uses text. To bring these works together under one category, Dworkin coined the portmanteau term “conceptual writing” (2010, p. xxiii), which assimilates both traditions.

Meanwhile, Carrión’s point-by-point aphoristic description of artists’ books circulated for years in several languages, but in the last decade it has seen its popularity increase exponentially thanks to the ways it resonates with contemporary artistic practices and to its dissemination on the Internet. The article was first published in Spanish in 1974 in the Mexican journal *Plural*, edited by Octavio Paz, and in 1975 in English in the prestigious art magazine *Kontexts*, and it has since acquired the status of a manifesto. And as with all manifestoes, the interest resides in knowing to whom the manifesto was addressed: did its intended audience already exist at the time of publication, or did it develop thanks simply to the existence and circulation of the manifesto?

Carrión’s passion for these heralded new books was manifested in his life-long dedication to his pioneering bookstore and gallery, which he ran in Amsterdam from 1975 to 1979, creating, selling, and collecting artists’ books that fit in with his conceptualisation. Eventually, he turned his artists’ books shop – Other Books and So – into an archive, Other Books and So Archive (OBASA), creating a centre of artistic experimentation and publication around

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mass, but postdigital, circulation over time. It is not just about taking it back from our heritage, as in the case of recovery, but rather what is stressed is the fact that it becomes a dynamic phenomenon that moves it again through new circuits.” (My translation). <http://repositorios.fdi.ucm.es/REC-LIT/view/generico.php?id=40&idpadre=40>.

it, and thus transforming the conventional associations elicited by the concept of the archive into a more relational and lively institution. He closely identified with the archive, to the extent that he could not imagine it would continue to exist without him, and so he decided that after his death the archive's contents should be dispersed, and he gave the complete contents of the archive to his friend Juan J. Agius – an antiquarian specialising in avant-garde publications (Agius 2016).

The physicality of printed books and their collection in physical/virtual archives has been revived in the postdigital era: Silvio Lorusso and Juliette Pépin's Post-Digital Publishing Archive (P-DPA), Paul Soulellis' Library of the Printed Web, LEETHI's Rec-Lit: Estrategias de Reciclaje Cultural y Literario en la Era Postdigital, even Carrión and Co.'s own early initiative at an independent artists' centre in Amsterdam in 1972 – the In-Out center – has been resurrected in the form of a digital archive.

As Juan J. Agius, Carrión's trustee, and Heriberto Yépez begin to reprint the complete works of Ulises Carrión in Mexico, a generation of new authors of artists' books flourishes in the wake of a postdigital nostalgia for the material. For Paul Soulellis, postdigital publishing refers to "web culture articulated as printed artifact" (2019). His Library of the Printed Web is an archive of archives where the return to an analogue object after gathering, harvesting and compiling on the Web, is the prerequisite for occupying its shelves. Some of its pieces bear a certain connection to the Internet-based art of the 90s and early 2000s, while others find their roots in uncreative writing and appropriationism.

The artists united under the label "postdigital" show an enthusiasm for self-publishing and its accessibility, but publishing becomes a performative act full of subversion rather than an attempt to reach a wider audience. Just like Ulises Carrión did, they too turn to books and printing as forms of artistic practice. The collection of pieces that I would like to discuss here emerges from a very specific moment in time, providing a frozen image of the technological possibilities available through the advent of the Web 2.0 and a particular, irreverent attention to our literary heritage.

Carrión's seminal text finishes with an appeal for a democratising new book art, not addressed to a particular group of intellectuals ("In order to be able to read the new art, and to understand it, you don't need to spend five years in a Faculty of English" (1975, p. 7)), but to humans' common ability to create and interpret signs. He also announces the impossibility of creating new literature, since, according to his conception, literature as a form of communication belongs to the past:

There is not and will not be new literature any more.

There will be, perhaps, new ways to communicate that will include language or will use language as a basis.

As a medium of communication, literature will always be old literature. (1975, p. 4).

Literature of the past, on the other hand, has become the raw material for the postdigital books we present in this chapter, manifesting a resilience to dying out or disappearing that testifies to some extent to its ongoing communicative properties. In 2008, Sarah Schmelling, for example, transposed Shakespeare's famous play in her *Hamlet (Facebook News Feed Edition)*. One year later, Alexander Aciman and Emmett Rensin, both students at the University of Chicago, did the same with Twitter and Penguin published their results in their collection *Twitterature: The World's Greatest Books Retold Through Twitter*. In their histrionic introduction, they compare themselves to Martin Luther and his translation of the Bible into vernacular German, since their Twitter versions of the classics aim to bring solace to those who find the great works of literature hard to understand:

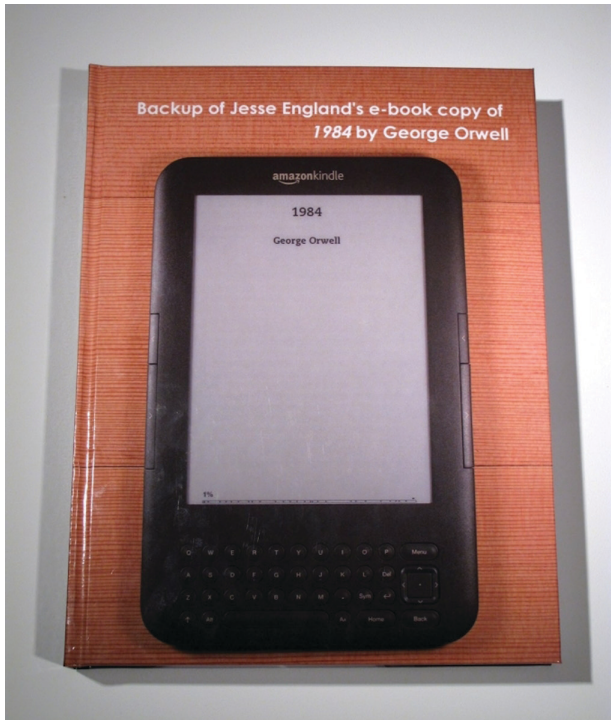
so many modern people find the great works of literature inaccessible, overwhelming, and even, perhaps, dull. It is not a defect of their character, nor any special ineptitude that has disposed them in this manner; rather, these great texts – timeless as they may be – are, in their present form, outdated. (Aciman / Rensin 2009, p. 1).

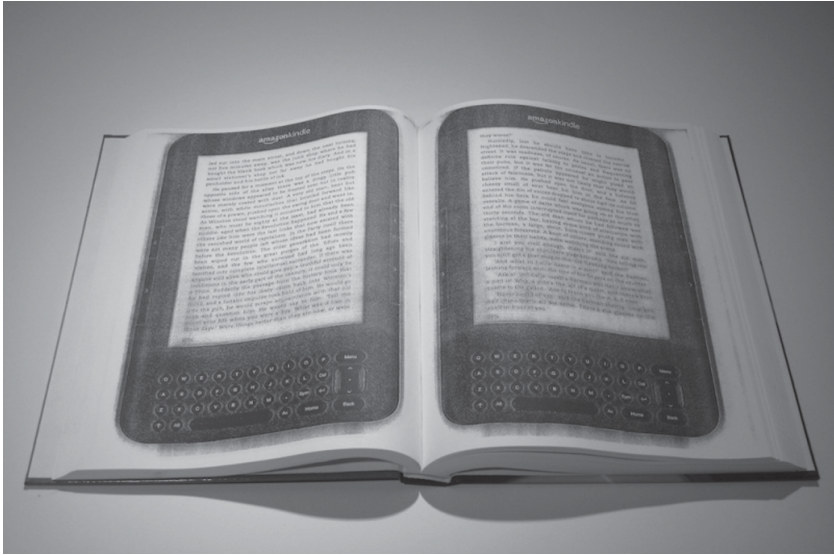
Notwithstanding their generous dedication, it is difficult to conceive of a fully engaged readership for these abridged versions that is able to find them funny or merely entertaining without knowing first-hand the original literary works they parody. The significance of their proposal lies in the details. We can read fast, but our attention does not need to stop once the structure and the technique underlying the work has been discovered – be it a compression algorithm, an email transcription or a processed text subjected to a sequence of procedures – the interesting part lies in the details. The examples of postdigital publishing we will discuss, as conceptual writing, are less theoretical than one would expect and highly intuitive, but the point being made here is that through a playful and irreverent manipulation of the literary they have inadvertently arrived at the same reading mechanics that machine reading does so well, distant reading techniques that identify the keywords in a corpus, their underlying structures and connections, in ways they had not been perceived before.

### 3. Postdigital recycling of the literary

Jesse England, an artist and educator based in Portland, Oregon, provides the context and most probably also the inspiration for his piece *E-Book Back Up*

(2009) on his webpage, where photographs of his work appear next to a link to *The New York Times*' article "Amazon Erases Orwell Books From Kindle," published in July 17, 2009. In it, customers who had both digital copies of *Animal Farm* and *1984* complained about a sudden disappearance of these titles from their digital libraries. The company alleged that the sellers of those copies did not hold the copyright over those works (actually, copyright for *1984* had expired in other countries, including Canada, but not in the United States). Students lost their notes together with their digital copy, and one customer noticed that his digital version of *1984* appeared to be a scan of a paper edition, "If this Kindle breaks, I won't buy a new one, that's for sure", he said. A very ironic twist of fate for Orwell's creatures, the idea of returning to print as a back-up copy of the e-book version is Jesse England's postdigital stratagem to denounce the authoritarian power harnessed by companies such as Amazon and the volatile nature of digital assets. Moreover, a second hardcover backup was made with the help of an online self-publishing house. England warns users, though, that the back-up is best viewed (not read!) on paper format (Fig. 1).





**Fig. 1.** Cover and inside of Jesse England's *E-Book Back Up* (2009).

The recycling strategy in this piece involves a particular type of retrograde remediation (Bolter / Grusin 1999, p. 147): it does not incorporate elements of the new media in the older medium to help the old medium appear more attractive to contemporary consumers, but to appraise the affordances of the old over the new. For its interpretation, it also requires the audience's memory of 1984 and its message regarding authoritarian regimes and their surveillance and censorship methods, including the memory hole – the incineration chute fed with news articles that did not conform to Big Brother's interests. This work is also in line with uncreative writing, since it appropriates Orwell's novel in full, but its publication is a gesture, a performative act that does not require any amount of devoted reading from the spectator. "Dear reader", Carrión would say, "don't read".

In this trend, we also find other examples of postdigital publishing. To some extent, they all depend on the reader's previous knowledge of the original literary works for their effect.

Spanish artist Almudena Lobera's *Superficial Reading* (2013) gives another twist to McLuhan's aphorism that the content of one medium is in itself another medium (1994, p. 8) by using another type of remediation: in this piece, Lobera transforms the concept of the book by eliminating its pages. Her pieces are

wooden frames with just three “readable” spaces: the front and back cover, and the spine. The front cover contains a selected quote from the original work, not printed but hand-drawn imitating print type face and using a variety of techniques; the back cover offers a translation of the quote in either Spanish or English, and the spine is reserved for the book’s original title and author, these last two spaces using pyrography with a laser cutter. Her work is an instantiation of Carrión’s statement, “To make a book is to actualise its ideal space-time sequence” (1975, p. 1). By abbreviating the original work’s content to a single quote, Lobera thus feeds us with the concentrated wisdom the book has to offer for our hurried time, this way allowing us to absorb the telegraphic messages of a life’s readings in just a few moments. However, upon a closer inspection, those quotes are hand-drawn recreations of print, bringing to the foreground that writing is like drawing, the visual representation of a language, and that the visible and legible dimensions of perception are interconnected in both literature and the visual arts. Among the titles chosen, three classics of literature in English stand out: James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, and William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* (Fig. 2).



**Fig. 2.** Almodena Lobera, *Superficial Reading*, 2013. Installation. Drawing on paper and laser engraved frames. Variable dimensions between 20 and 43 cm.

Whereas Jesse England's work acquires its eccentricity through undertaking the seemingly inane activity of photographing Orwell's novel page-by-page, Almudena's approach painstakingly reverts the speed of print through a return to the craftsmanship of the pencil and the virtuosity of the artist, although her result resonates with Carrión's perception that "[t]he new art makes it possible to read faster than the fast-reading methods" (1975, p. 6).

Also in line with this compression, we find Jason Huff's *AutoSummarize* (2010). Huff's selection of literary works for his piece does not entail any actual recollection of past readings, but follows a more procedural mode, "the top 100 most downloaded copyright free books" comprise his own book of arch-summarised novels, including *Dracula*, *The Count of Montecristo*, and *Emma*, which he has compressed into a few lines using Microsoft Word 2008's AutoSummarize 10-sentence function. He then organised the titles alphabetically to form the book's chapters. The result is quite hilarious, yet again one must have a good knowledge of the original novels' content to find the outcome significant. In this work, the classics are not being remediated but fully transformed by a mechanical writer (Fig. 3).

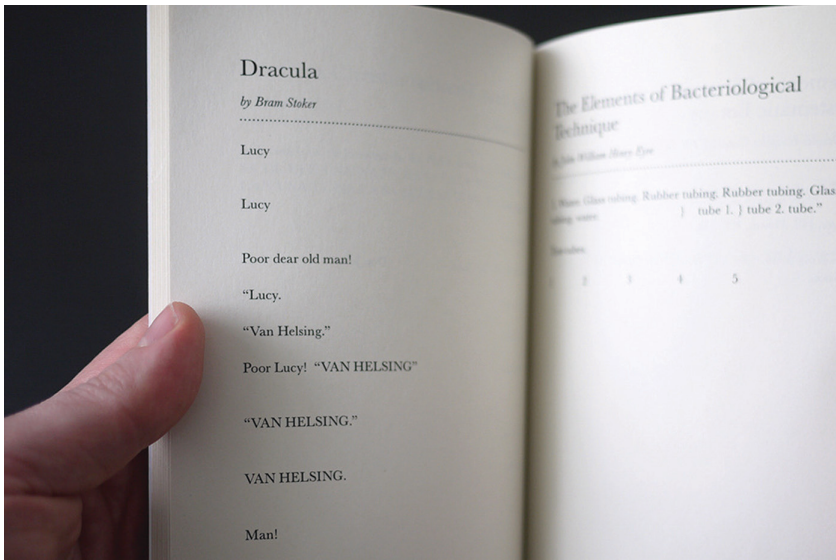


Fig. 3. *AutoSummarize* (2010) by Jason Huff. Photo by Paul Soulellis.

Stephanie Syjuco's *Re-Edited Texts: Heart of Darkness* (2011) and Tom Scott's *Shakespeare.txt.jpg* (2013) represent further experiments with literary transformation through algorithmic processing. In Syjuco's "novel", Conrad's original text is reprinted on demand in 12 different iterations, altered by the different service chosen for online publishing, which gives each version its title, for example <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/Literature/Conrad/HeartOfDarkness/03.html>. Each copy retains the errors and transformations of the digitisation of the novel: different fonts, the amount of content per page, and the inclusion of Google ads and mistakes, all communicating a feeling of progressive corruption and demystification of the original. It also highlights issues regarding authorship and appropriation, emphasising the loss that takes place in the translations from analogue to digital to analogue, as if a sort of mechanical rewriting of the text takes place in every transition. The titles inform the reader of the digital nature of the books, however something in these printed artifacts is unsettling. We cannot help but feel that the distance between the original text and what we have in our hands continues to stretch *ad infinitum*. As Paul Soulellis (2014) points out, "[t]he fish is out of the water", meaning that these works seem to inhabit an "in-between-state" that he relates to Duchamp's concept of the infrathin, which is described as "the immeasurable gap between two things as they transition or pass into one another" (Tucker 2009, p. 77). Regardless of their materiality, these works are not fully functional in their printed state – they seem like zombies, both dead and alive.

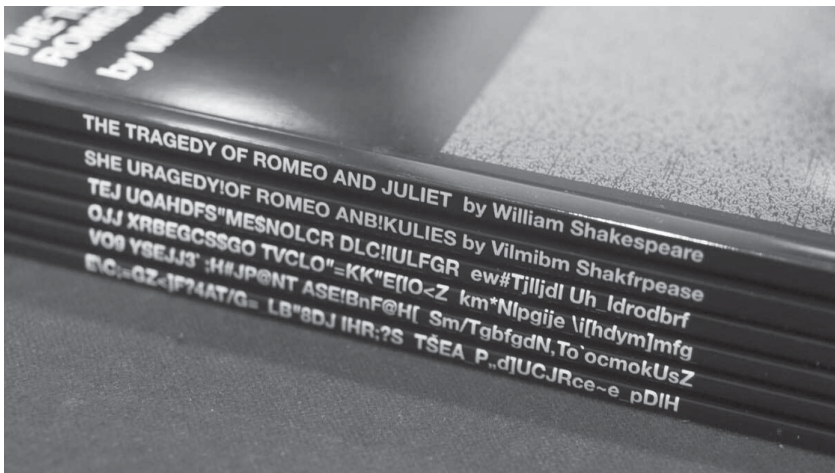


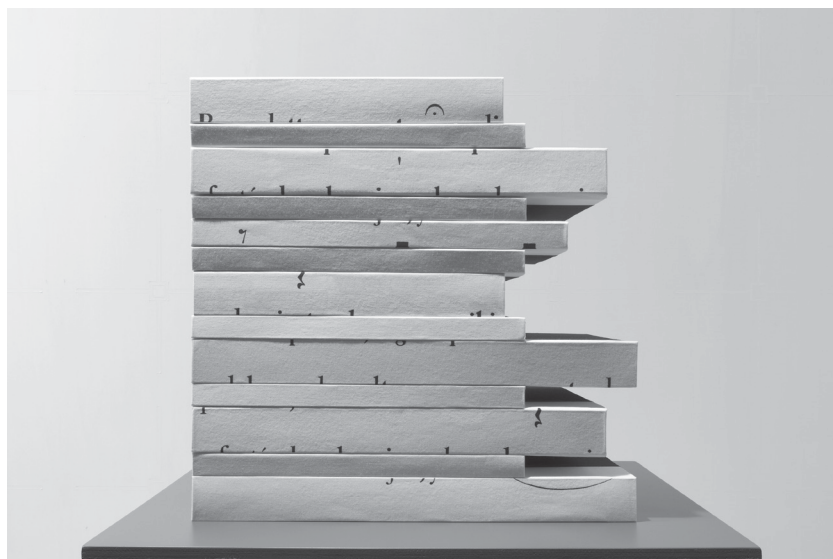
Fig. 4. Tom Scott's *Shakespeare.txt.jpg* (2013).

In Scott's *Shakespeare.txt.jpg*, a similar process is undertaken, in this case an experiment in applying a JPG compression algorithm at varying levels of quality to a literary text, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, where the result is also the progressive corruption of the original text until it has been rendered completely unreadable. As Scott himself explains in his web presentation of the piece, "JPEG image compression is lossy. Every time you edit and save a picture, some of the original content is lost. But it's difficult to see that with the naked eye, so I compressed Shakespeare instead". What is recycled here is not only Shakespeare's play, but the compression algorithm itself, which is meant for compressing images without a significant alteration (a minute change in colour that would be nearly undetectable to the naked eye), whereas, even at 'maximum' quality, when it is applied to text, it leads to almost all characters being replaced by their neighbour in the alphabet. In this manner, Shakespeare's tragedy becomes the object of an experiment in "confused" transcodification: applying an algorithm aimed at a specific type of encoded data to another kind. Moreover, the action of transferring these experiments to print has been referred to as "transduction" – normally defined as the transfer of genetic material from one microorganism to another by a viral agent; in this case, it is used to describe the technique of mixing, blending and embedding digital processes into traditional print, the two forming a hybrid character (Soulellis 2014).

This procedure is also put to the test by Almudena Lobera in her series *Technical Images* (2020), where she uses Photoshop to smoothly translate the colour code palette of a painting into ASCII code; or records computer codes being ritually reproduced in traditional Japanese ink calligraphy; shifts from a music score played on a computer keyboard to typing text on a piano. For many years now, Almudena Lobera has been committed to exploring "the capacity of human perception and its relationship with the construction of biological, economic and socio-cultural structures" (Ramos-Izquierdo 2020, p. 1). In *Technical Images*, she experiments with disrupting two of the coordinates of classical communication: firstly, the use of the same language, which in this case she splits into three: English, Japanese and computer code, and, secondly, transmission through different media carrying out a two-way transfer between traditional and analogue actions, between mechanical and digital ones. As Oulipo members could see for themselves, she devises a procedural set of operations as a mode to trigger (as well as constrain) her creativity, and she later twists the results in search of an aesthetically pleasing composition, devoid of intentionality in the conventional sense but deeply evocative.

From the myriad of texts that comprise the *Technical Images* exhibit, the book is a ritualised medium to which she grants a privileged status, placing it as a

singular group of objects in the eclectically updated Japanese domestic altar or *tokonoma* that opens the exhibit. Normally comprised of three objects that are placed in a harmonious relationship alongside each other to provide a space for meditation and contemplation, in Lobera's intervention on the traditional *tokonoma* she has introduced an element of distortion that references to the digital transformations and the strange symbols and recodification of digital life. The spines of the stacked books are decorated with illegible musical and typographic symbols, disconcerting the spectator rather than inducing in him or her a state of profound meditation (Fig. 5). As in *Superficial Reading*, in this installation the book is not used as a container but as an external surface, an object of decoration that merely demands a quick glance at its cover or spine, but which is still mired in mysticism and ritual.



**Fig. 5.** Almudena Lobera, *Line Spacing*, 2019. Books with painted cloth binding. 37 x 40 x 30 cm.

Mimi Cabell and Jason Huff's *American Psycho* (2011) also involves the intervention of algorithms for its composition. For this piece, Cabell and Huff

rewrote Bret Easton Ellis's novel by sending emails to each other, page-by-page, and collecting the Google ads that appeared next to their emails. The final product retains the cover of the novel<sup>3</sup> but replaces its original pages with blank lines with a few scattered footnote numbers next to the empty spaces where the words that triggered the ads should be located and a list of footnotes at the bottom with the Google ads (Fig. 6). The result exposes two different types of intervention, firstly it brings the role of Google's web crawlers to the foreground, the way they peruse private correspondence to suggest ads related to its content and, secondly, it presents another type of appropriation of the original literary work, which becomes conspicuous by its absence and by the eerie and disturbing associations the advertisements create with the violent content of this piece's raw material. The empty signifiers of Bret Easton Ellis' novel, combined with the incongruous narrative that the list of advertisements fabricates, nevertheless portrays a poignant image of American culture in the first decade of the 21st Century: brutally insensitive towards violence, racism, and sexism, obsessed with physical appearance and material goods, and on the quest for a quick fix to obtain happiness. The original novel, published in 1991, becomes the processed medium that has been recuperated, recycled and placed in circulation again with an updated portrayal of its protagonist – Patrick Bateman – through contextual advertisements of the 21st Century, presenting a frozen picture of a unique intersection in space and time.

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3 They retained the design of the cover letters of the series version of *Vintage Contemporaries Book*, albeit eliminating the background photograph.



**Fig. 6.** A page from Mimi Cabell and Jason Huff's *American Psycho* (2011).

#### 4. Conclusions

The collection of pieces discussed in this chapter are also fruits of a very specific moment in the history of literature and the history of print, a moment of transition between a fully digitalised process and the coexistence of analogue and digital products, an “in-between-space” in which a traditional reading is not always required but knowledge regarding the specificity of this postdigital era is essential to understand these printed artifacts – the “hybrid” creatures that Ulises Carrión anticipated and that digital technology has helped to conceptualise and embody.

What connects all these artists is that they use, as raw material for their transformations, literary texts found on the Internet, which acquire the status of pure data, disconnected from the time of their composition and reception, with the irreverence of one who uses Shakespeare's complete plays to light a fire. It could have been any other text gathered from the vast stacks of the Internet, but the fact that they use canonical works of literature testifies to the ongoing communicative value of these texts. The artists' playful provocations resonate far longer than they themselves had anticipated, which proves that they have hit a nerve. The literary and art critics that review these works, such as me, normally

a generation older than the creators, cannot help but fear that they themselves are a species in danger of extinction, born in an analogical world and trained for a digital one, we might be the last ones to be able to share the appraisal of the canonical works of literature (we have actually read them) and to wonder at the transformative potential of digital media.

What remains constant is the phenomenon of change, which applies to everything in life including literary texts, since everything is in a constant state of transformation and every end anticipates a new beginning, from creation, development, maturity, decadence, dissolution and eventually recreation.

As Ulises Carrión anticipated with his *Other Books and So Archive (OBASA)* and Paul Soulellis, an archivist of archives, corroborates, contemporary artists have also developed the sensitivity of archivists:

These are artists who ask questions of the web. They interpret the web by driving through it as a found landscape, as a shared culture, so we could say that these are artists who work as archivists, or artists who work with new kinds of archives. Or perhaps these are artists who simply work with an archivist's sensibility – an approach that uses the dynamic, temporal database as a platform for gleaning narrative. (Soulellis 2019, p. 229).

The countercultural effects of these proposals reside in their potential to continue recycling and therefore keep the conversation surrounding the great works of literature alive in a movement that diverges from the image-dominated culture that the web represents, or using Craig Dworkin's words, these works are set "to challenge the retinal imperative of art with a deskilled anti-aesthetic" (2010, p. xxxv) that borrows canonical literature and inflicts all sorts of transformations upon these well-known texts, inserting them in new cycles of life and dissemination. These movements of decontextualisation and recontextualisation refresh our view of these familiar works, making them significant again in their new context.

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