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# Post-Digitalism and Contemporary Spanish Fiction

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> The language you are breathing becomes the language you think.
> -Loss Pequeño Glazier. *Digital Poetics* (57)

The purpose of this essay is to contextualize the work of several contemporary Spanish fiction writers who have faced the challenge of the mediatization and digitalization of culture by locating their creative and critical practice "at the edge of chaos." They have done so by creating new metaphors, possibilities for narrative innovation, interdisciplinary border crossings, hybrid networks and capacities for establishing new connections, absorbing and processing information from traditional and electronic media, market dynamics, science and technology, philosophy, metacreation, and the avangardist tradition of modernist, postmodernist and avant-pop literature.
My hypothesis here is that some of the common features of these writers derive from their active engagement in the socio-cultural, mediatic and artistic postdigital environment.

## The Emergence of Post-Digital Art

In his famous essay "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction," David Foster Wallace made a call for contemporary American writers to "rebel" against the limitations of television-inspired image-fiction, stating that, "Leyner's work, the best image-fiction yet, is both amazing and forgettable, wonderful and oddly hollow . . . Leyner's attempt to 'respond' to television via ironic genuflection is all too easily subsumed into the tired televisual

ritual of mock worship (192).

At the time Wallace published his article (1993), television was still the prevalent visual medium, mostly a one-way analogical flow of information—a traditional discourse "of realities and choices" (192) that would only allow the viewer to prove he's "consumer enough" (192). Coincidentally, and in parallel with several other American authors and critics such as Larry McCaffery, Curits White, and Mark Amerika, Wallace was becoming aware that pop culture, exemplified by television, had turned so banal, "commercial" and "mainstream," that any attempt to "dialogue" with the mass media in their own terms had lost all interest and artistic value.

However, the most interesting fiction that followed, including that by David Foster Wallace himself, was quite different from what he predicted. The expected "anti-rebels who dare to back away from ironic watching, who have the childish gall actually to endorse single-entendre values" soon realized that "single-entendre value" or "old untrendy human trouble and emotion" was actually being produced as a consumer good, among many others, by the same mass-media machine they were supposed to withdraw from (the phenomenon of human emotion and values being produced by the mass media is one of the main topics of Eloy Fernández Porta's work) (192–93). The new breed of writers found themselves embracing technologically-produced reality and media-shaped identities as the only way to try to deconstruct them and to make contemporary, yet significant, literary art. As Mark Amerika wrote about the most influential group of these American writers, "Avant-Pop artists themselves have acquired immunity from the Terminal Death dysfunctionalism of a Pop Culture gone awry and are now ready to offer their own weirdly concocted elixirs to cure us from this dreadful disease—'information sickness'—that infects the core of our collective life."

Shortly after Wallace's essay, the visual and textual media landscape started to change considerably fast. The World Wide Web boomed. Global communication became the norm. In the following years, the once one-way flow of information became widely distributed. The term "network," familiarly used to name television channels, shifted its meaning to represent a new reality of creative relationships through the Internet. Minority interest groups and radical thinkers that had remained "underground" for a long time multiplied their infuence through social electronic networking. The medium was no longer "the" message, but just one among many possible messages. Television was not the central flood "of realities and choices" anymore, and the new "anti-rebels" Wallace was longing for started to "play" with new post-human identities derived from the human/machine interface (Hayles, *How*). They began to experiment with "material methaphors" and all the novel possibilities provided by new media (Hayles, *Writing* 21–24). These "anti-rebels" were mainly characterised by their search for alternative uses

of technology. Thus, digital technology and hypertextual fiction defined the "risks" taken by the most innovative literary authors.[1]

Digital technology did not just change the way new narratives were being produced and received. It reshaped, at the same time, the technical representations of reality, thus modifying our perception of the world. It became evident that digital technology had "real" effects well beyond representation. As Mark Hansen explains, "technology affects our experience first and foremost through its infrastructural role, its impact occurs prior and independently of our production of representations: effectively, technologies structure our lifeworlds and influence our embodied lives at a level, as it were, below the 'threshold' of representation itself" (*Embodying* 4).

Digital tools, services and communities started to blend with analog ways of life, as mentioned by Rishad Tobaccowala, so readers were also ready and willing for the real and the virtual to co-mingle in a seamless way. While "text" was a central concept for postmodernist thinkers such as Roland Barthes or Mark Hansen, "code" became the central concept for digital fiction writers.[2] "Code" emerged as a new, universal, performative language, unifying written and audiovisual arts within its "textual nature" to the point that writers could become designers while painters and musicians started to "write" their works in code.

Digital literature shifted the paradigm from "text" to "code," but code is just a particularly privileged form of text. Postdigital literature is not centered in code, but instead is centered in addressing a reality shaped by a mixture of coded/uncoded reality.[3] In a postdigital paradigm, literature is used as a tool to discover "alternative" messages that emerge in the empirical manifestation of the mediatization processes. As Mark Hansen explains, "what remains unprecedent in the history of mixed reality (that is, of experience as such), and what is thus singular about our historicotechnical moment, is precisely the becoming-empirical, the empirical manifestation, of mixed reality as the trascendental-technical, the condition for the empirical as such" (*Bodies* 9).

Artistic writing means to challenge codification (one of the most pervasive contemporary mythologies—as in "genetic code," for instance). As Katherine Hayles writes, "literature was never only words, never merely immaterial verbal constructions. Literary texts, like us, have bodies, an actually necessitating that their materialities and meanings are deeply interwoven into each other" (*Writing* 107). One common method to resist codification has been the artistic appropriation of the undesired "side effects" of digital technology. Kim Cascone, in a very interesting article often reivindicated by Spanish author Agustín Fernández Mallo, explains that:

> while technological failure is often controlled and suppressed—its

> effects buried beneath the threshold of perception—most audio tools can zoom in on the errors, allowing composers to make them the focus of their work. Indeed, "failure" has become a prominent aesthetic in many of the arts in the late-twentieth century, reminding us that our control of technology is an illusion, and revealing digital tools to be only as perfect, precise, and efficient as the humans who build them. New techniques are often discovered by accident or by the failure of an intended technique or experiment. (13)

Experimenting with "code errors," "representational failures" or spam became prominent features of postdigital literary works, as it can be observed in the work of the British author Stewart Home or the neo-minimalist novels recently published by the young American writer Tao Lin.

In *Blood Rites of the Bourgeoisie*, Stewart Home uses prototypical sex spam to construct a satire about contemporary art (chapter titles are made by including names of modern celebrities and contemporary artists in the spam text—"Your Fantastic Device Will Make Andy Warhol Shake! Seventy Percent off Penis-Growth Pills!"). However, this would be just an anecdote if the "spam structure" was not used at the same time to creatively deconstruct the narration. This purpose relates Home's novels to American Avant-Pop in the sense that, explains Mark Amerika, "We prefer to lose ourselves in the exquisite realms of spacy sex and timeless narrative disaster, the thrill of breaking down syntax and deregulating the field of composition so that you no longer have to feel chained to the bed of commercial standardization" (Amerika).

## Database and Narrative

During the past two decades, it became increasingly evident that we were getting much information not in the form of narrative discourses, but in a non-narrative, database form. As Lev Manovich states:

> Many new media objects do not tell stories; they don't have a beginning or an end; in fact, they don't have any development, thematically, formally or otherwise, that would organize their elements into a sequence. Instead, they are collections of individual items, where every item has the same significance as any other (39). [ . . . ] As a cultural form, [explains Manovich] database represents the world as a list of items, and it refuses to order this list. In contrast, a narrative creates a cause-and-effect trajectory of seemingly unordered items (events). Therefore, database and narrative are natural enemies. Competing for the same territory of human culture, each claims an exclusive right to

make meaning out of the world. (44)

Based on these considerations, Manovich proposes the understanding of database as a new way of structuring the world in the computer age. By presenting database as "symbolic form," Manovich's essay allows us to shift from the traditional viewpoint that privileges narrative as the main form of cultural expression. However, database as symbolic form focuses excessively on how "raw data" are organized, without paying much attention to the origin and the processing of the data. Database-organized data are, in fact, as fictionally-organized as lineal, cause-and-effect narrations.

While centering on "code," digital literature was rapidly being absorbed by "database aesthetics" in detriment of "narrative aesthetics." But narrative and database are not actually "natural enemies," as Manovich takes for granted. In fact, they represent two compatible ways "to make meaning out of the world" (44). Postdigital creators believe that both ways are to be re-mixed in order to develop contemporary artworks (as it happens, for instance, in videogames). Postdigital artists understand database as an extra dimension, a new essential variable to define a trajectory in a space that has become uncoverable solely from the viewpoint of the narration. Some of the traditional narrative constraints of time and plot had no meaning in the new topologically-defined narrative space.[4] By integrating narration and database, postdigital writers "structure the possibilities which make up state space, and by extension, structure the possibilities open to the process modelled by a state space" (Delanda 16).[5]

The rise of a postdigital literature is exemplified in the recent works of N. Katherine Hayles and Mark Hansen. Hayles talks about "the mark of the digital" as "engaged in robust conversation with digital textuality," printed novels (*Writing* 29–33). This engagement, she explains, "is enacted in multiple senses: technologically in the production of textual surfaces, phenomenologically in new kinds of reading experiences possible in digital environments, conceptually in the strategies employed by print and electronic literature as they interact with each other's affordances and traditions, and thematically in the represented worlds that experimental literature in print and digital media perform" (*Electronic* 160). As Kenneth Goldsmith explains, this is a shift in the ways in which we use language: "while this new writing has an electronic gleam in its eyes, its results are distinctly analog, taking inspiration from radical modernist ideas and juicing them with twenty-first century technology." Hansen highlights the long line of antimimetic novels running from Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* to Danielewski's *House of Leaves*. The latter, he explains, "stems from an incompatibility between the 'topo-logic' of digital processing and the phenomenal dimension of human experience" (*Bodies* 229). Hansen's approach is of extraordinary interest for his efforts in integrating contemporary theories about the human body (for instance, neuroscientific

theories on cognition) with a deep critique of technological media, insisting on "the irreductible bodily or analog basis of experience which has always been conditioned by a technical dimension and has always occurred as a cofunctioning of embodyment with technics" (*Bodies* 9).

Both Hayles and Hansen highlight several novels of the last decade among the examples of "digitally engaged" literature going beyond the use of electronic media. Mark Danielewski's novels *House of Leaves* and *Only Revolutions* are among the best examples of what I would call postdigital fiction.[6] *Only Revolutions* is perhaps the most interesting literary attempt to make a "parallel running" of both narration and database up to date. Other notable examples of a postdigital literary approach in recent American fiction are *Re-La-Vir* by Jan Ramjerdi, written in "fake code" including many loops, subroutines and repetitions to represent the horror and brutality of rape, and *Tree of Codes* by Jonathan Safran Foer, where he uses analogic dye-cutting techniques to re-code Bruno Schulz's *The Street of Crocodiles*. Furthermore, many other literary works might be included in a postdigital context, such as the majority of Lance Olsen and Ron Sukenick fictions, Leslie Scalapino's novels *Floats Horse-Floats* or *Horse-Flows*, and Dahlia's *Iris*, Harmony Korine's *A Crackup at the Race Riots*, Steve Tomasula's *The Book of Portraiture*, Debra di Blasi's *The Jiri Chronicles and Other Fictions*, Blake Butler's *There is no Year*, and many others.

These fictions are highly valuable because they are not just *reacting* to the digital context or to the cultural recognition of a mixed reality, but *inscribing* themselves in what Steven Moore has called "the other great tradition" of the novel. In fact, narratives and databases have been co-existing in the world—and in literature—long before the arrival of the digital. Postdigital fiction is evolving from a long tradition of experimental or innovative fiction which has included many non-narrative elements as artistic resources. The inclusion of unordered lists, combinatorial elements or randomized lexical units is much older than the use of computers, and scientifical and philosophical approaches to complexity have been around for more than a century, influencing the work of innovative writers such as James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, Maurice Blanchot, Raymond Quenau, Arno Schmidt, Thomas Pynchon, Julián Ríos or Jorge Luis Borges.[7]

## Contemporary Spanish Fiction

In 2004 I had the opportunity to organize an encounter of "new Spanish fiction writers" in Santiago de Compostela, Spain. One of the topics I propossed for discussion was: "is there life after post-modernism?" The main objective of the meeting was to shed some light on the new directions of contemporary and emergent Spanish literature. During preceding years,

writers such as Juan Francisco Ferré, Eloy Fernández Porta, Javier Calvo, Vicente Luis Mora, Robert Juan-Cantavella, Javier Moreno and others had been publising (mostly in small, independent publishing houses) what I believed was the most interesting contemporary Spanish fiction. During this meeting, and others that followed in the following years (thanks to the initiative of Eloy Fernández Porta, Juan Francisco Ferré, Manuel Vilas and Javier Moreno), it became evident that something was changing in the quite conservative Spanish literary scene. This change was reflected in several anthologies, such as *Mutantes: narrativa española de última generación,* compiled by Julio Ortega and Juan Francisco Ferré, out of which the group of anthologized authors (and others who share similar aesthetic values) is usually named. The writers often included in this "Mutant movement" have some evident common features that have been explained elsewhere, yet they are stylistically diverse.[8] The Mutant scene may be better understood as the result of a spontaneously-networked artistic movement, instead of a "group" or "generation," as usually portraited in the press.[9]

## Pangea

Digital culture is a global culture by its own nature. It is originally de-territorialized, not related to geographic locations, languages or cultural boundaries. It uses universal codes, it is constructed on objective scientific and engineering data, and has adopted English as the universal lingua franca. This means that the transition from the analogic to the digital/analogic continuum in which we live today had to be different in Spain compared to English-speaking countries. Although I think that considering national literatures makes no sense anymore (even the notion of "hispanic" literatures seems outdated), it is true that, in order to get here, we had to walk a different path. Thus, one of the main features of postdigital literature written in languages other than English is that they reflect the transition from local (national) to global thinking, and from global languages (English) back to local ones.[10]

Some time ago, I received a re-tweet by Vicente Luis Mora with the joke: "¡Mesero! ¡Hay español en mi inglés!" (Waiter! There is some Spanish in my English!). It has been signaled that some "Spanish Mutant Fictioneers," to use Henseler's term, are heavily influenced by contemporary American literature. Indeed, there is some English in our Spanish. But this English does not come exclusively from the reading of American fiction. And it is not only English. It is code. It is Science and Engineering. It is global social networking. It is *Pangea*, as Mora called it in his book *La luz nueva*. For young Spanish authors writing today, Spanish has become a kind of native "second" language, as a great deal of communication is performed

in "global English"—the "non-native second language" of contemporary arts, science and technology—and a great deal of work is done, explicitly or implicitly, in universal technological codes—everybody's "non-native second language." This is a specific feature of the postdigital condition.

Agustín Fernandez Mallo often explains that we used to write from knowledge, but now we write from information (Calles).[11] However, this information is not "raw data." It is being continuously processed into evanescent narratives by the public, and the most pervasive ones become mass media mythologies that are then adopted as "identities" by individuals and societies. The effect of this process is a distributed, somehow indetermined knowledge, on which we rely to select the new relevant information. As Friedrich Hayek put it more than half a century ago, "it is a problem of the utilization of knowledge which is not given to anyone in its totality" (519). This does not mean that Mutant writers have purposely decided to ignore the Spanish (or any other) literary tradition. It means that referential Spanish literature has already found a space in the global culture, and it is now circulating around as information.[12]

Spanish literature has been stripped of "traditionality"—a particular tradition that is somehow linked to a language and/or to a geographical location—processed into data, and re-processed, along with many other things acting at the same level, as part of the "new reality." A good example of how Spanish culture is used as a source by contemporary writers might be found in the two last Manuel Vilas's novels, *España* and *Aire nuestro*. In both novels, folk and pop Spanish topics are fictionalized as a portion of global information, developing a very personal and unique vision of Spanish stereotypes. Also, many examples of this "sourcing" strategies might be found in Agustín Fernández Mallo's *Nocilla Trilogy*.[13] Furthermore, Mutant writers such as Eloy Fernández Porta, Juan Francisco Ferré, Robert Juan-Cantavella, Agustín Fernández Mallo and myself have explicitly acknowledged the influence of innovative Spanish authors, such as Julián Ríos, Juan Goytisolo or Juan Benet, and Latin American authors such as Julio Cortázar, Jorge Luis Borges, Fernando del Paso, Ricardo Piglia, Octavio Paz and many others.

## Science and Fiction

Spanish postdigitalism could not be completely understood without taking into account the fact that many contemporary Spanish narrators are "contaminated" by disciplines that have been much more digitalized than fiction, such as science, engineering or poetry—while not much electronic fiction has been written in Spain (although there are some remarkable counter-examples such as Doménico Chiappe's digital works), digital poetry

has gained some acceptance in the past decade.

Trained in and practicing different scientific and technical disciplines, Mutant authors have been able to find "opportunistic associations" to be used as experimentation tools: "Seeking opportunistic associations between economy, ecology, politics, and information, coupling is not simply a combinatory exercise so much as a typological investigation into new spatial formats for the twenty-first century" (Bathia et al. 7). Science and technology, for instance, are very influential in the work of several Mutant authors: Agustín Fernández Mallo is a physicist, Javier Moreno is a mathematician, Óscal Gual is a computer programmer, Javier Fernández is an engineer, I am a neuroscientist. Other non-scientifically trained authors are deeply interested in science and technology. One common feature of all these sciences is the strong influence of non-deterministic theories such as complexity and chaos theories, relational dynamics, topology, evolution theories, etc. As physicist Mark Buchanan has explained, "some of the deepest truths of our world may turn out to be truths about organization, rather than about what kinds of things make up the world and how those things behave as individuals" (19). Instead of working with science fiction, Mutant writers have decided to work in the science/fiction interface, carefully recording the interferences produced when they interact with each other. This allows for the investigation into new forms for existing functions and into new functions for existing forms.

## Playing the Database

Robert Juan-Cantavella's *Otro*, undoubtely one of the most outstanding experimental Spanish novels of the last decade, matches the description Mark Hansen has given of Danielewski's *House of Leaves*: "More than signs of the text's capacity to subsume the function of other media, the deformations in the body of the novel are symptoms of the impossibility of representing the digital, of its resistance to orthographic capture" (*Bodies* 237). Insisting on this resistance of the digital to orthothesis, one of the characters in *Proust Fiction*—the poet Giacomo Marinetti, creates his performance-works by computer-translating other authors' fragments.

In my last novel, *Intente usar otras palabras* (2009), I play with a modified version of Marinetti's system: after searching the name of one of the characters in the whimsical search engine "Googlism," I used Google translator to translate the results from English into Spanish, obtaining a kind of surreal and random description list. A decade ago, I tried to "infect" narration with a database in *La felicidad no da el dinero* (1999), where both real and fake links to webpages are included in the text—probably more than ten years later, some of the real links are not active anymore, so, instead of

obsolete, they have been "faked" by the action of time.

Although the press usually describes Mutant writers as users of electronic media, this is more a sign of the times than a distinctive feature. Mutant authors certainly use electronic media, including blogs, webpages, social networks, video, etc, as any other person in their age range. I used to joke about this media cliché saying that, as anybody knows, Mutant writers use the Internet while non-mutant writers use the telegraph. The disctintive feature is not to be users of digital media, but sampling digitally mediated reallity to construct novel fictional structures. As stated by Eloy Fernández Porta:

> si el sampleador menciona otras voces . . . no es porque se apropie sino porque vive en su momento, sale de casa, es sensible a los signos y formas del paisaje mediático—y se cuida de señalar la procedencia de sus ideas. . . . Lo que el sampleador hace suyo no es un fragmento ajeno, sino un instante que le había sido robado. (*Homo Sampler* 161)
>
> (If the sampler mentions other voices . . . it's not because he takes them as his own, but because he lives in his time, he gets out of home, he's sensitive to the signs and forms of the mediatic landscape—and he takes good care of signaling the origin of his ideas. . . . What the sampler makes his own is not a fragment by other, but an instant that had been stolen from him.)

Many Mutant novels have been created from a point of view of the digital/analogic continuum. *Alba Cromm,* by Vicente Luis Mora, is "continued" in the "real" blogs of some of its characters. Jorge Carrión creates a textual/visual artifact in his album/book *Crónica de Viaje*, constructed from both real and fake Google search engines (Google-destiny) by rendering the computer screens that display the search results.

Another form of the digital/analogic continuum is the videogame/biogame play. A videogame model is useful for representing recombinations in predictable narrative structures. However, the biogame model is more suitable for representing the unpredictability of complex systems. Biogames have neither explicit rules nor limited spaces, and work on the assumption that there are "causal holes in the fabric of space/time" (Kauffman ix). In Juan Francisco Ferré's *Providence*, videogame and biogame intermingle to produce a cyborg-type landscape inspired by H.P. Lovecraft. Jorge Carrión's novel *Los Muertos* (2010) creates a postdigital world in which dead fictional characters return to life with "encoding problems," to a point where none of the characters, nor the reader, are able to differentiate in which level of reality the code is performing. Characters in *Los muertos* have lost their memories and go to a psychic to get a reading of their past, yet they keep some "propensities," exactly that which "impart[s]

adequate coherence to a system to keep [it] from immediately disintegrating when impacted by most arbitrary singular events" (Ulanowicz 55).

## Noise and The City

Machine-cities are a common environment for Mutant's novels. The city (no matter if it is a big city or a small village) is often represented as a spam-loaded environment, the product of the failure of structural and social planning. Cities often have a problematic history of wrong and/or corrupted planification—Ferre's *Providence*, Calvo's Barcelona in *Corona de flores*, Óscar Gual's Sierpe in *Fabulosos monos marinos*, the vacation-city Marina D'Or in Robert Juan-Cantavella's *El Dorado*, or an unnamed city in my *Efectos secundarios*—are all full of noise and continuously being rebuilt. In my novel *La felicidad no da el dinero*, I use the different steps of the construction of a tower to mark the progression of time. Machine-cities produce the equivalent of the "glitches, bugs, application errors, system crashes, clipping, aliasing, distortion, quantization noise, and the noise floor of computer sound cards" cited by Cascone as the source of postdigital music, reminding us that "our control of technology is an illusion," and showing the radical impact of the unexpected on planned, inadequate realities, and the power of unique random events to shape the history and the stories (12).

## Image-Fiction and The Public Image of Fiction

If the fundamental event of the modern age was the conquest of the world as picture, as Martin Heidegger described, the fundamental challenge of the postmodern age is the conquest of the image as a world. This is an essential task because our more powerful machines (from everyday computers to brain scans or digital telescopes) process data to transform it into novel images that require further interpretation. Usually, for the "correct reading" of these images, some specialized knowledge is required. However, most of these images flow freely through electronic media and are often interpreted as faithful copies of reality. "The digital always circuits into the analog. The digital, a form of inactuality, must be actualized" (Massumi 138). A critical reading of the image-world and its narrative metaphors is also a common feature of postdigital literature, and it may be observed in Afterpop fiction and essays. In Javier Calvo's *El dios reflectante* and Juan Francisco Ferré's *Providence*, avant-garde filmmaking is used as a methaphor of the image-world. Eloy Fernández Porta's foundational works *Afterpop*, *Homo Sampler*, and *€®O$*, approach image-world and image-fiction problems at different

levels.[14]

Televisual fiction itself has changed a lot since the 1990s. As happened with all pop culture manifestations, and is well described in Fernández Porta's *Afterpop* book, television evolved by reacting to increasingly sophisticated audiences, growing open to more complex narrative structures and topics. Thus, contemporary image-fiction, as it may be observed in Jorge Carrión's *Los muertos* or Manuel Vilas's *Aire Nuestro*, "responds" to a completely different television mindstyle compared with the one Foster Wallace was writing about.

But Afterpop writers do not just write from or around image. They are also working on "imaging" literary fiction. Some of them use video to complement or to promote their written work (The *Proyecto Nocilla* movie by Fernández Mallo, for instance). And since 2008, live "lit-gigs" performed by some of the Mutant authors have become increasingly popular. Mutant writers have a crush on live performance. Agustín Fernández Mallo and Eloy Fernández Porta have been "on tour" for almost two years with their "Fernández and Fernández" spoken word/audiovisual show, in which they use both texts from their own fiction and non-fiction books as well as other authors' texts. Javier Calvo has been doing Black Metal-inspired performances for the presentations of his last novel *Suommelina*, and Eloy Fernández Porta has developed a new stage show for the presentations of his essay *€®O$*. Jaime Rodríguez and Gabriela Wiener are doing a "relational criticism" performance consisting on the public reading of each other's emails (Wiener). On-stage performances are helping to change the public perception of contemporary Spanish literature, especially for the younger audiences less inclined to attend conventional lectures or readings.

## Conclusion: The Network

Rolf Hughes has written about the need to reconceive the role of authorship across cultures and disciplines. In an attempt to overcome the dual conception of author as creator/absence, Hughes proposes a pragmatic account of authorship to investigate a collaborative mode of cultural production, inspired by the one currently being used in scientific production (research networks, peer review, etc.). Whithin this model, "the specific creative, expressive and artistic input of various agencies working together on a project (and their individual contributions to the project's 'style') can thereby be analysed, alongside the socio-cultural practices of contemporary media culture that help shape the reception of the work" (Hughes 11).

Although many scientific and artistic projects are originally designed as collective works, it is not unusual that collective cultural productions may emerge from the non-designed complex of spontaneous relationships among

diverse individual projects and their interaction with the cultural environment. Thus, a multi-agency approach would be also useful to investigate and describe the "expanded" cultural effects of the networks resulting from these spontaneous interactions.

As explained before, Mutant writers have repeatedly insisted on keeping each one's individuality and idiosyncracy. However, their nomadic wandering produced, in a non-planned manner, a networked scene that has become much larger than the sum of their books. By introducing a vibrant aesthetic debate, re-conquering a place for literature among the hippest contemporary arts, and expanding the battlefield beyond the literary scene, the Mutants have managed to make "the space of the possible much larger than the space of the actual" (Kauffman xii). Maybe, with the greatest respect for their individual rejection to be understood as a group or as a generation, it would be legitimate to describe their emergence and increasing cultural influence as a "collective" phenomenon that keeps evolving. As Leslie Scalapino wrote, "unknown words create a future" (5).

## Notes

* I wish to thank Christine Henseler for a critical reading of this essay.

1. See the work of Nelson and Glazier.
2. See the work of Hayles in *Writing Machines*, Hansen in *Bodies in Code*; and Glazier and Massumi.
3. This has been discussed in the work of Hansen and Massumi, and in my own essay "Bienvenidos a la era postdigital."
4. I am using "topological space" as a metaphor. It means a narrative space in which some properties are conserved through particular transformations: For instance, a text in which syntax is more defining than meaning, so some words could be substituted by others without changing its aesthetic value.
5. A "state space" is a set of specifications that captures a process, not the static properties of something: not how things are, but how things change.
6. For a detailed description of the most remarkable postdigital aspects in *House of Leaves*, see the work of Hayles in *Writing Machines*, especially pages 109–131, and Hansen's *Bodies in Cod*e, especially pages 221–252.
7. For more information see Hess and my own essay on "Ciencia y ficciones."
8. See Fernández Porta's *Afterpop*, Mora's *La luz,* Ferré and Ortega's *Mutantes*, Ferré's *Mímesis*, and Henseler's "*Spanish Mutant Fictioneers*."
9. See Azancot.
10. This is somehow difficult to grasp for Spanish speakers, since Spanish is already a quite globalized language for non-tecnical communication, but is evident for anyone involved in a technical discipline.
11. Without entering into a long epistemological discussion, the difference between "knowledge" and "information" refers not to the nature of content but to how content is accessed. "Knowledge" defines hierarchically organized, strongly socialized content, which is supposed to affect individual self-consciousness.

"Information" would mean non-hierarchically organized data that can be "mined" from "reality" for a specific purpose, not necessarily reflecting/affecting the "personality" of the individuals who are "using" the "information."

12. It could be argued that Spanish literature—and any type of knowledge—has always circulated as information, only not digitally, but through books and oral tradition. What is new is that that knowledge was not previously understood as "information." The main difference now is that we receive and process all data at the same level, so its origin does not matter. A writer might be more influenced by a video on a film about a Japanese interpretation of Don Juan than by Tirso de Molina's book. In fact, he might be using this "information" without any "knowledge" about its genealogy.
13. See Henseler's work in *Spanish Fiction in the Digital Age* for a more detailed analysis.
14. David Foster Wallace used image-fiction to define the effect of television on literary fiction (see pages 171–74). Nowadays, however his ideas should be expanded to the influence of other image narratives and transmedia storytelling on writing. Image-world is the mass-media representation of the world—including ourselves.

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