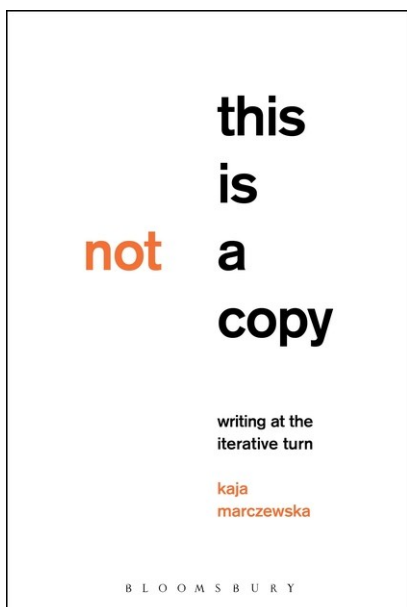# This is not a copy of
This is not a copy

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Marczewska, Kaja. 2018. *This Is Not a Copy: Writing at the Iterative Turn*. London: Bloomsbury Academic. 303 pp. ISBN: 978-1-5013-3783-3.

Sometimes coinciding, sometimes intersecting, overlapping on occasion, and even contradicting each other, there are so many of them, emerging in so many different fields of knowledge and so close together in time, that the twentieth century may well be considered the century of the turns. Juggling with the Linguistic Turn, the Pictorial Turn, the Cultural Turn and the Archival Turn, *This Is Not a Copy: Writing at the Iterative Turn* invites the contemporary reader to consider a new "turn". The trend spreads well into the twenty-first century and is a continuation, at the present days, of the "dizzying array of «turns»" (13) that the author herself parodies. Kaja Marczewska's proposal is radical: the author places the copy at the center of contemporary culture and, with this premise in mind, demon-

strates how the concepts of originality, creativity and authorship have undergone profound changes under the influence of the technical means of writing, reading and circulation of poetic and literary forms.

The book provides an overview of contemporary conceptual writing that activates the knowledge produced in recent years on the subject and thus, Marczweska reaches an operative framework that leaves a mark in the field of studies. The author groups and relates, in a cohesive reflection, contributions from various fields of knowledge. It is through this complex texture that the argument gains the real density that allows it to approach a global interpretation project of the culture of writing and reading of the contemporaneity. The number of works analyzed is quite extensive. The author could have convened other literary works and, with this gesture, diversify the poets and writers who appear in the book associated with this type of manifestation. The fact that the monograph focuses almost exclusively on English-speaking authors is not a problem, however, since this seems to be part of the selection criteria of the study *corpus* – by choice or necessity – this feature would deserve an explanatory note. On the other hand, the visual, sound and performative works that the author, over and over again, relates with the literary works that she analyzes in depth are, in the great majority, the achievements of artists that are already explicitly mentioned by the analyzed conceptual poets. The discussion could integrate other artists and works, something which would greatly benefit the reflection on the theme.

Marczewska does not ground the revision of the concept of authorship, a matter to which she aims to contribute, on a refusal of the relevance of the figure of the author. Also, originality is not eliminated, but reconsidered. The perspective that Marczewska casts on recent texts, and others more distant in time, owes much to the socio-technological moment of the present. Marczewska reveals a complex network of affinities between works which owe their material and conceptual existence to the technical means of inscription. Despite this, the author's analysis escapes certain hegemonic forms of techno-determinism. In this sense, one should note that a continuous attempt to reveal the human behind the machine (author and reader) crosses the book, an objective that Marczewska is able to achieve consistently through her in-depth analysis and theoretical problematization.

The key concept of the book is that of appropriation, used as an umbrella term and explored, in particular, through the analysis of material and conceptual practices of erasure (chapter 2), transcription (ch.3) and coding (ch.4). The notion of appropriation, understood as "[a] model for cultural production and a mode of artistic exploration so prominent since the inception of postmodernism" (49), remains, in the author's perspective, "too far

removed from the legal assumptions and copyright's understanding of no-
tions of authorship, authenticity, and originality to be regarded a legitimate
practice, with art and normative reality conflicting on the ideological level."
(49). As we also know from other studies, this discrepancy between artistic
practice and its general perception rests largely on a Romantic (and roman-
ticized) image of the author and of the literary or artistic object: the former
is usually regarded as a genius (Marczweska extends the critical reading of
the *unoriginal genius* of Marjorie Perloff) and the latter is sacralized as a to-
tem of that same creative gesture (the author expands, in the same way, the
idea of *uncreative writing* coined by Kenneth Goldsmith). Echoing the thought
of Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari, the author constructs a strong argument
based on the idea that repetition in conceptual writing extrapolates mere
reproduction: "Instead of perpetuating the set of values advocated in the
sources (...) [by appropriating them] these contemporary writers simultane-
ously preserve and deconstruct it, to find those moments in the reappropri-
ated discourse that enable them to transgress the system of values exempli-
fied by it, to transpose and translate them into the value of their own and
their own time" (85). That time is one of paradigm shift, expressed through
the Iterative Turn concept as "transitional cultural stage" (6), which the au-
thor characterizes as the "propensity to copy as an expression of a creative
and critical practice" (7). Although the author presents this change as an
innovation, in the sense that it breaks up with the traditional literary mod-
els and attunes itself to the present social time, the work of Marczweska is
historically informed and the contextualization that it implements, escap-
ing a linear chronology, results in a thick description. With her proposed
conceptualization of the Iterative Turn, the author follows the overcoming
of the terminology of postmodernism, relying on Nicolas Bourriaud's theory
of postproduction, which considers, in Marczewska's words, that "contem-
porary culture of surplus derives from and manifests itself through an ex-
cessive information production, dissemination, and manipulation charac-
teristic for the contemporary digital culture and not the excessive
consumerism of postmodern hypercapitalism that triggered appropriation
as it developed in the 1980s." (25). For the author, "[t]oday, it is the notion
of collecting rather than creating content, and the related ability to manage
and manipulate the information available, that emerges as a paradigm of
postproduction authorship" (166).

    The book displays a solid balance between the description and analysis
of works and a firmly sustained theorization in a broad scope of references
in the fields of literary studies, media studies, philosophy and art theory,
not forgetting legal studies, but keeping it short and simple. Herein lies one

of the hallmarks of this work when we place it in the context of recent production on appropriation, remix, and quotation practices: legal issues – which must undergo a critical review for topics such as copyright infringement, plagiarism and intellectual property – cannot be set aside in a book of this nature, but end up not taking a central place in the reflection. It seems to be a conscious and, in my opinion, very wise decision. The discussion of the legality of this type of artistic practice (literary, visual, or musical) repeatedly obscures the reflection on the aesthetic and political character of the works, stealing space and density from an investigation that, when trying to discuss legal matters, ends up being held up by the discourses from which the literary and artistic works themselves are often demarcated. The last chapter, which is shorter and more differentiated with regard to the typology of works covered, also serves as a conclusion, since a textual section of this nature is absent from Marczewska's volume. Not that we miss it, given the fact that the author's argument is woven into the fabric of the entire book, with constant references and links among chapters and other sections. However, given the different thematic character of this final chapter, focusing mainly on issues of copy in electronic literature and, to a lesser extent, on performance art and Fluxus' event scores, it might have been important to close the book with some conclusive notes at the high level of the whole book. It seems obvious to say that there are no conclusions, *stricto sensu*, to draw from a chapter of a history that is still in the making. Nevertheless, on the one hand, the fourth chapter lacks something to be a full chapter, and on the other, it seems to be more than a conclusion. Moreover, *Sea and Spar Between*, the literary work of Nick Montfort and Stephanie Strickland that the author subjects to an in-depth analysis, could be replaced by any other work of a similar type. Perhaps, for example, *Taroko Gorge*, an automatic text generator by Montfort that originated an extensive stream of appropriated iterations by several authors, was of more interest here (see note 61, page 265, a good example of the robustness of the endnotes from the book). In any case, rather than opting for one or another work for an in-depth analysis, I believe that offering more examples of works of electronic literature would bring some diversity to the reflection, and with it, a new strength to the chapter.

In recent years, conceptual writing has been a hot issue in literary studies. From my point of view, this is due to the urgency of understanding the reading and writing practices that result from the transformation of contemporary technological society. As a result of this and other factors, which are not unrelated to issues of symbolic capital and mobilization of institutional powers, conceptual poetry is one of the many contemporary experimental writings about which academia has written the most. As an example,

much has been written by the university and the media about Kenneth Gold-
smith's writing experiments. Still, Marczewska's lengthy analysis of several
of the author's works are not redundant. That is to say, her reading of the
works of Goldsmith gains new interpretative potentials mainly due to the
theoretical apparatus in which the author inserts them. To put it another
way, the much that has been written and continues to be written about the
works of Goldsmith has, in *This Is Not a Copy*, one of its strongest expressions,
not so much for what is being said about each of the works, but especially
for its integration in a robust critical approach that frames, supports and
promotes the interpretation and theorization of conceptual writing. For all
this, *This Is Not a Copy* is a must-read book on contemporary writing, con-
temporary reading and the contemporaneity of writing and reading. To read
iteratively.