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Unthrifty Loveliness: Shakespeare Sonnets Encoded in DNA at $12,400 per Megabyte

by Michael E. Cohen ✉

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Ewan Birney and Nick Goldman, two scientists from the European Bioinformatics Institute, have worked out a system to encode text, audio, and other data in DNA. Teaming up with Aligent Technologies, the two encoded all of Shakespeare's sonnets, an audio clip of Martin Luther King Jr. speaking, and a photograph into a synthesized DNA sample. Though Aligent did the DNA synthesizing work for free, the cost of the DNA synthesis is estimated to have been roughly $12,400 per megabyte. On the other hand, prices for DNA synthesis are dropping, and it is estimated that 50 billion megabytes of text, roughly equivalent to everything ever written by humans, could be encoded into a sample that would weigh less than "a granola bar." This takes the idea of cloning your data to an entirely new level.

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