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The Posthuman Body in Jennifer Egan's "Black Box"

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Abstract

This paper participates in the discussion about the configuration of what is commonly being referred to as 'the posthuman condition' by addressing the technological transformation of the human body and the cultural and political inflections of this transformation through the exploration of Jennifer Egan's "Black Box." The paper interrogates the implication of the fusion of flesh and technology and the re-conceptualization of the body as information, thus enabling insights into how these changes affect subjectivity, individuality, and the stereotyped understanding of gender hierarchies.

Keywords: Jennifer Egan, "Black Box," the posthuman body, the body as information, technology, gender

Recent scientific and technological advancements (biotechnology, nanotechnology, robotics, information and communication technologies, neuroscience, physics etc.) have spurred important discussions and debates about how the progress in these fields will change the definition of what it means to be human and how it will shape the future(s) of humanity. From radical forecasts regarding the evolution of technology that would fight human finitude and from the seductive promises of transgressing the natural biological limitations and augmenting the abilities of the human body, to warnings about social and political instability, to the disturbing discussions about the loss of individual agency and the dystopian triumph of surveillance technology, and to precautionary approaches or even prophecies of technological doom, all these discussions fuel insightful debates. The interest in the evolution of our technological and scientific behavior, which brought together the

fields of science and humanities, informs the dialectics between euphoric technophilia and the “nostalgic longing for an allegedly better past” (Braidotti). Within this intricate network of perspectives and theoretical standpoints, this paper addresses the narrower area of discussion about the technological transformation of the human body and the cultural and political inflections of this transformation, as treated in Jennifer Egan’s “Black Box.” More specifically, this analysis tackles the implication of the fusion of flesh and technology and the re-conceptualization of the body as information, and enables insights into how these structural changes affect subjectivity, individuality, and the stereotyped understanding of gender hierarchies.

Jennifer Egan’s “Black Box” strengthens the ranks of Twitterature. It was tweeted by *The New Yorker* and subsequently published in print, in the pages of the magazine, immediately after the Twitter serialization had ended.ⁱ The series of tweets began on May 25, 2012 and continued for ten days in a row, with chunks of text being released in hourly installments each evening. Egan’s confessed intention behind the serialization of the story on Twitter resides in “the intimacy of reaching people through their phones” and in “the odd poetry that can happen in a hundred and forty characters” (Egan in “Coming Soon”). Some reviewers noted the poetic inflections that tweeting imprinted onto the text,ⁱⁱ others greeted the experiment as an attempt to reanimate serialized fiction,ⁱⁱⁱ while others expressed their doubt about whether tweeting actually contributed to improving the reading experience and to enhancing the quality of the text.^{iv} Although the context of the text’s initial publication is neither an innovative, nor the most complex way of commenting on the impact of digital technology and social media on literature (these aspects are, most likely, beyond the scope of the text’s publication), it does, however shape the rhythmic flow of the text and impregnates it with aphoristic overtones. Nevertheless, the advancement of new systems of technology, communication, information and their impact on both public and private lives constitute the main thematic concern of the text.

“Black Box” is a spy-thriller parody set in a near future, telling the story of a female citizen agent, a spy without professional training, relying solely on the implants in her body and on her sexual appeal for the

completion of her patriotic mission that involves gathering information from an “enemy subject,” her Designated Mate. The story can be read as an extension of Egan’s Pulitzer Prize winner novel *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, since the unnamed main character of “Black Box” fits the profile of Lulu from the novel. When describing the writing process of “Black Box,” Egan confessed that she intended “to take a character from a naturalistic story and travel with her into a different genre” (Egan in “Coming Soon”). The narrative strategy Egan adopted resulted in a transmutation of the character that goes beyond the generic transformation she had announced: once Lulu became the unnamed female character of “Black Box,” she entered an ontological realm that calls for the revaluation of the nature of her being. The world to which the character travelled had already been hinted at, in the novel, as “the new world” that only Lulu and her generation could make sense of.^v Thus, “Black Box” opens a generous leeway for inquiring into the transition to what is nowadays being theorized as “our posthuman condition.”

Designed as “a series of terse mental dispatches” (Egan in “Coming Soon”), “Black Box” reads like a mix between an instructions manual and a mission log, recited and recorded by the protagonist and meant to provide information on how to use one’s body in order to complete a spy mission. The architecture of the text is based on effectively concise and well-balanced sentences, consisting mostly of a mix of conditionals laying down procedural steps, directives and prescriptive statements, strings of corrective recommendations that acknowledge the fallibility of procedures and their impossibility to forecast all possible outcomes, guidelines for manipulation, dissimulation, and seduction techniques, patriotic motivational slogans, and terse observations with aphoristic inflections. The mix is often interrupted by similarly concise, but amusingly astute insights into the insecurities of human nature, which undermine the gravity of the entire affair and betray the parodic intentions of the text. The plot evolves and reasserts itself by forcing the update of the prescriptive statements and directives through homeostatic loops meant to reconcile desired outcomes with the actual course of events.

The body is central to the narrative; it is the tool for which the instructions for use have been designed. The body is explored in three

main hypostases: the technologically enhanced body, 'programmed' to complete a mission while ceaselessly fighting human emotions and impulses, the disposable body used as a black box, instrumental to storing and transferring information, and the female body reduced to the status of a sexual object, raped, displayed as ornament and discarded when deemed useless. All these hypostases enable insights into versions of the near future by raising questions about the redefinition of subjectivity by the fusion of flesh and technology, the implications of cybernetic technologies in defining individuality, the integration of human consciousness into a circuit of information, and the dominance of biologically defined social categories through the survival of the hegemonic social matrix beyond the technoscientific evolution.

The body has acquired crucial relevance for the emerging transhumanist and posthumanist discourses, as the technological alteration of the body and the questions of dis-/embodiment became the locus of the debate on the impact of technology on human beings. The body is seen either in terms of its functional enhancement through literally incorporating technology, or as dispensable bio-matter. Both technophobic and technophilic approaches dwell on issues, ideas, and questions about the relationship between technology and (dis-) embodiment, with a view to updating the understanding of subjectivity and individuality through the reconfiguration of the structural markers of identity. As Kiran and Verbeek point out, "[t]echnologies do not extend human beings, but rather help to constitute them" (419).

The kernel of the identity reconfiguration process is that "the practical distinction between machine and organism is receding" (Pepperell 7). The symbiosis of organic matter and technological artifacts epitomized in the figure of the cyborg "makes it possible to explore imaginatively important issues about the nature of life, freedom, self-determination, the relationship of humanity to technology, and the transgression of fixed boundaries that previously had been regarded as vital to civilization" (Bendle 58). Of course, this exploration can be approached from a number of theoretical perspectives, but the most complex and useful for the purpose of this analysis is that which views the cyborgized body as an enhanced version of the human and elaborates on

the existence of a common code that facilitates the link between flesh and technological components, eventually perceiving the body as information. This perspective draws on the assumptions N. Katherine Hayles uses to define “the posthuman view”:

First, the posthuman view privileges informational pattern over material instantiation, so that embodiment in a biological substrate is seen as an accident of history rather than an inevitability of life. Second, the posthuman view considers consciousness ... as an epiphenomenon, as an evolutionary upstart trying to claim that it is the whole show when in actuality it is only a minor sideshow. Third, the posthuman view thinks of the body as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate, so that extending or replacing the body with other prostheses becomes a continuation of a process that began before we were born. Fourth, and most important, by these and other means, the posthuman view configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines. (2-3)

One of the questions Hayles explores in *How We Became Posthuman* refers to “how *information lost its body*, that is, how it came to be conceptualized as an entity separate from the material forms in which it is thought to be embedded” (5); she claims that “it makes sense to think about information as an entity apart from the medium that embodies it” (244).^{vi} Drawing on Hayles’ insights, Mervyn F. Bendle claims that “these notions facilitate the re-conception of human beings as essentially information that is only *contingently* embodied and therefore capable of being ‘uploaded’ into ‘super-intelligent’ communication and information systems that know no limitations of time or space” (47). This view is akin to the forecasts made by Hans Moravec, Marvin Minsky, or Ray Kurzweil, who advocate disembodiment by envisaging a future that would facilitate the fusion of bio-matter and technological artifacts culminating with the complete transfer of human consciousness into an artificial shell.^{vii} While these forecasts about the evolution of (post)humanity might seem radical and uncanny, their scientific plausibility and the potentiality they reveal incite revaluations of human ontology and trigger a series of reformulations of the categories of ‘individual self’ and ‘personal identity.’

By exploring the human body through the metaphor of the black box, Egan’s story invites reflections on questions that have become

central to the discussion about ‘the posthuman condition’. The main character in the story had her body technologically enhanced and transformed into a highly efficient tool for the purpose of gathering, storing, and transferring information. The microphone placed in her right ear canal, the Subcutaneous Pulse System activated by a button behind the ligament of her right knee, allowing her to signal either distress or safety, the chip grafted beneath her hairline, storing the Field Instructions and serving as a mission log, the camera implanted in the left eye, the Data Plug and the Universal Port located between her toes redefine her human limitations and, implicitly, her social and political roles. However, the implanted technological devices do not immediately transform the main character into a super-human. On the contrary, the importance of this transformation is downplayed either by pointing out the imperfections of the devices (such as the continuous whine of the microphone when recording, the Data Surge whose effectiveness is only guaranteed once and which leaves a ringing tone in the ear) or by observing and elaborating on the clumsiness of their user, as in the case of the temporary blinding scene:

The camera implanted in your left eye is operated by pressing your left tear duct.

In poor light, a flash may be activated by pressing the outside tip of your left eyebrow.

When using the flash, always cover your non-camera eye to shield it from temporary blindness occasioned by the flash. (Section 25)

...

Move close to the sketches you wish to photograph, allowing them to fill your field of vision.

Hold very still.

A flash is far more dramatic in total darkness.

An epithet in another language, followed by “What the fuck was that?,” means you overestimated your Designated Mate’s handset absorption.

A bright, throbbing total blindness means that you neglected to cover your non-camera eye.

Distance yourself from agency in the flash by crying out, truthfully, “I can’t see!”

It is hard to safely navigate a cliff-top promontory at high speed while blind.

It is hard to defer said navigation when your Designated Mate is forcefully yanking your hand.

A distant buzz presages an approaching speedboat.

Cooler air and a downward slope indicate that you are now below the cliff's edge.

Trying to negotiate a crumbling wooded path in a state of blindness (and heels) will soon lead to tripping and collapsing. (Section 27)

The serious, flat tone of the discourse connotes multiple ironies as it clashes with the ludicrous and clumsy way of controlling the technologically enhanced body, resulting in a farcical rendering of 'cyborgization'. The mechanical tone of the lapidary sentences updating the prescriptive statements with observations meant to align them with the actual course of events is used as a comic device to potentiate the humorous effect of the entire event. The recording device, the camera, and the signal transmitter do augment the body's capabilities, but the dynamics between the imperfection of the devices and the human predisposition to erroneous use replicates the hesitant behavior typical of the timid accommodation of humans with technology. Nevertheless, the Data Surge redesigns the relationship between human beings and technology by using the biological organism as an information storing device, regardless of the consequences on the pre-existing body of information that used to define the individual:

Sit on the floor, away from sharp surfaces, and brace your back against a wall.

A red ribbon has been tucked inside your Universal Port; enclose this in one of your palms.

Spread apart your toes and gently reinsert the plug, now fused to your subject's handset, into your Universal Port.

You will feel the surge as the data flood your body.

The surge may contain feeling, memory, heat, cold, longing, pain, even joy.

Although the data are alien, the memories dislodged will be your own:

...

The impact of a Data Surge may prompt unconsciousness or short-term memory loss.

The purpose of the red ribbon is to orient you; if you awaken to find yourself clutching one, look to your foot. (Section 35)

The ideational sublayer of the Data Surge episode invites the reconsideration of the constitution of the human self and reframes the notion of Cartesian dualism. The scission between body and mind is made

clear in the text: it begins with the Dissociation Technique, which helps leave the body through meditation, without the help of cybernetic grafts, and peaks with the technological transformation of the body into an expendable storage device: “Your physical body is our Black Box” (Section 38). Moreover, personal history, feelings, desires, sentience are understood as codified information, stored in the body, transferable and even dispensable. Although accepting the dislodgement of personal memories caused by the data flow is not a gesture of surrendering to technology, but rather a necessary sacrifice for the completion of the patriotic mission, it still prompts questions about the understanding of the body as the repository of information that can be downloaded, transferred, or uploaded, and takes its toll on the individualistic centre of the traditional Western discourse, by undermining its essentialist nature and projecting it into perspectival uncertainty. This comes as a consequence of the epistemic rupture caused by

[t]he discursive exchanges between representations of the body as biological organisms and as mechanical assemblages [that] blur the boundaries between human and machinic agency and destabilize concepts of personhood and individuality by turning cognition into a distributed state shared by analogue embodied consciousness and digital, cybernetic operations. (Borbély and Popa Petrar 239)

The mechanical mode of delivering the narrative, as if recited by a putative external entity, is consistent with the figuration of a systemic integration of the informational flux. That which generated and dictated the process, actually became a constituent part of the process and has the ability to continuously rectify the imbalances caused by the impossibility of foreseeing and prescribing procedural actions for all possible turns of events. The discourse is constructed by continuous updates and actualizations through feedback loops, specific for homeostatic, self-regulating systems. Homeostasis is a state common to “both humans and cybernetic machines,” as they are “goal-seeking mechanisms that learn, through corrective feedback, to reach a stable state” (Hayles 65). Thus, on a meta level, the narrative itself informs the understanding of the human being, including sentience, consciousness, and the biological body, as data and code, integrated into a system of information.

Technological achievement is overtly extolled in the story, with indoctrinating fervor. The discourse of the technological transformation of the body is replete with optimism. It uses the vocabulary of superiority and is engrafted onto mythical exceptionalism. Egan writes:

Recall that the mythical feats you loved to read about as a child are puny beside the accomplishments of human beings on earth. (Section 28)
For millennia, engineers have empowered human beings to accomplish mythical feats. (Section 40)

Technology thus assists in the democratization of heroic exceptionalism. Being a hero is no longer an exclusivist prerogative. The technological enhancements of the main character are available to anyone; they transform ordinary citizens into heroes. Egan writes: “Technology has afforded ordinary people a chance to glow in the cosmos of human achievement” (Section 21). With the help of technology, any ordinary citizen can serve his or her country in whatever way necessary; they just have to make their bodies available and be willing to sacrifice them(selves) for the benefit of the collective, to become embodiments of the collective. Technology has, indeed, a liberating effect through its power of transforming ordinary human beings into ‘enhanced-humans’, no longer confined to their biological limitations. It also assists in the democratization of exceptionalism, in the standardization of the features of outstanding individuals, previously cherished for their uniqueness. The modified body thus becomes the political body and invites questions about self-determination, autonomy, and control. These questions are explored, in the text, by elaborating on the new notion of heroism:

In the new heroism, the goal is to merge with something larger than yourself.
In the new heroism, the goal is to throw off generations of self-involvement.
In the new heroism, the goal is to renounce the American fixation with being seen and recognized.
In the new heroism, the goal is to dig beneath your shiny persona. (Section 21)

This mantric series of redefinitions and reformulations peaks, later in the text, with a dramatic gesture towards the ideological mutation involving

the shift of emphasis away from individuation and towards the collective, towards the hegemony of the network: “In the new heroism, the goal is to transcend individual life, with its petty pains and loves, in favor of the dazzling collective” (Section 45). This new understanding of heroism undermines traditional notions of individual agency and individual will and gestures towards what Hayles defines as the new models of subjectivity shaped by the “the posthuman's collective heterogeneous quality [which] implies a distributed cognition located in disparate parts that may be in only tenuous communication with one another” (3-4). The individual self is integrated into a larger circuit of information, which consequently outmodes the idea of fixed, autonomous, unified identity. Thus, the question of transcending biological limits and extending human capabilities comes with a threat to individuation and extends its political implications by fueling an ideological shift away from individualism and towards the ethos of the collective and its attendant ethical and moral system. It implicitly generates a vast array of possible instantiations of the individual, in response to the needs of the collective.

Technology is not meant to compete with humanity, but to potentiate and enhance its capabilities. Actually, given the implied fallibility of technology and the erring tendencies embedded in human nature, the stake of the bio-technological merge is a compensatory effect: technology erases biological limitations, but whenever technology fails to provide a solution, human instincts and the human potential to improvise save the situation. A good example in this sense is the Primal Roar episode:

When you find yourself cornered and outnumbered, you may unleash, as a last resort, your Primal Roar.

The Primal Roar is the human equivalent of an explosion, a sound that combines screaming, shrieking, and howling.

The Roar must be accompanied by facial contortions and frenetic body movement, suggesting a feral, unhinged state.

The Primal Roar must transform you from a beauty into a monster.

The goal is to horrify your opponent, the way trusted figures, turned evil, are horrifying in movies and in nightmares.

Deploy your camera flash repeatedly while Roaring.

When approached by a howling, spasmodic, flashing monster, most women holding newborns will step aside. (Section 38)

The acknowledgement of the extraordinariness of inherently human capabilities culminates with the statement: “Human beings are superhuman” (Section 42). The farcical inflections of the Primal Roar episode disrupt the eulogy of technology but, at the same time, point to the crevasse between humans and primal human drives as the Field Instructions manual needs an update with the procedural steps for the primeval technique of roaring in order to intimidate opponents. Of course, technology is able to offer some assistance by transforming the roaring monster into a roaring monster with scintillating eyes.

Human values are continuously reasserted throughout the text. Despite the technological devices implanted in her flesh and connected to her neural network, the main character of “Black Box” is still very conventionally feminine and very human, both in her aspect and in her aspirations. She finds the power to overcome the hardships of her mission in typically human dreams of having children, raising a family, and defending the way of life she and her husband believe in. The text presents technology as instrumental; it does not enthrall humanity, but has a complementary role. Moreover, technological augmentation is available and subject to individual choice. Although the prospect of reducing the individual to bits and bytes prompts thoughts about the predetermination and the ‘pre-encoding’ of individual will and agency, “Black Box” clings to ‘analogue’ modes of behavioral manipulation. The sacrificial task undertaken by the main character has not been technologically pre-programmed, but predetermined through the very human traditional indoctrination of political discourse, rooted into the mentality of a society driven by the ideology of heroism and a strong sense of national exceptionalism. However, some of the indoctrinating statements flattering American patriotism and righteousness embed ironies meant to undermine the same notions they seem to promote and to expose the potential hypocrisy behind political propaganda. Egan writes:

There will be moments in your mission, perhaps very few, when you’ll
sense the imminence of critical information.
It may come in the form of a rush of joy.
...

It may arise from your knowledge that you have accomplished every goal you've set for yourself since childhood.

It may arise from the knowledge that at long last you've found a goal worthy of your considerable energies.

It may arise from the knowledge that, by accomplishing this goal, you'll have helped to perpetuate American life as you know it. (Section 25)

As Americans, we value human rights above all else and cannot sanction their violation.

When someone threatens *our* human rights, however, a wider leeway becomes necessary. (Section 37)

If it helps, imagine that the contents of the Data Surge will help thwart an attack in which thousands of American lives would have been lost. (Section 42)

The uncanny of this future projection of a world in which human beings are seen as bodies of information and are given the ability to download other people's data into their own body and then upload it into devices that would share the information with the collective is continuously undercut by the rendering of spying episodes in the penumbra of farce, by ironical insights and amusing remarks about human foibles, by descriptions meant to reproduce a recognizable Mediterranean atmosphere, and by a strict insistence on familiar clichés and stereotypes, at work in contemporary culture. The most pervasive stereotyping tendency in the text refers to gender discrimination, particularly with the preconceptions referring to 'beauties.'

In order to complete her mission, the main character has to embody the socio-cultural stereotype of 'the beauty,' the beautiful, attractive, brainless woman, whose entire *raison d'être* builds around pleasing men. The 'beauty' is viewed as a human subspecies, with clearly established behavioral patterns, prescribed by the Field Instructions manual with ethological accuracy, as if drawing on long term observation and monitoring. The instructions cover social and private behavioral patterns, ranging from eating habits, dressing, dislike for reading and the impossibility to process complex information, to hierarchical domination and leadership among beauties and to their strategies of adapting to the determining environmental factor, the male. As a 'beauty,' the main character becomes an object of power play and fulfills sexual and ornamental roles. She experiences extreme gender discrimination; she has

to accept male domination and offensive behavior and to find coping mechanisms for sexual intercourse against her will.

By inserting gender discrimination in its extreme form in the text, Egan invites reflections about whether technological advancement can assist in the evacuation or, at least, the attenuation of sexist, racist, ethnocentric, classist tendencies embedded in the hegemonic social matrix. Although the technoscientific discourse has indeed given rise to some fairly unsettling alternatives to humanism, the bio-technological developments of the last decades also embed the promise of a solution to rectify the biological drawbacks characteristic of human nature. From cyborgization to the technology-assisted transcendence of corporeality, the relationship between technology and “the production of new kinds of bodies or embodied capacities” extends its nurtural potential to discussions about the likeliness of rectifying the shortcomings embedded in the hegemonic bias of human thinking (Munster 122). The revaluation of the biological and cultural valences of the human body under the impact of new technologies leads to questions about transcending the hierarchical mode and announcing a crucial shift in the cultural mediation of biological differences. A couple of decades ago, Tiziana Terranova considered the optimistic potential of the impact of technology on biocultural distinctions by referring to

the strategically useful myth that if technologies (and especially CMC technologies) would be left on their own, they would naturally and spontaneously extend harmoniously to the entire population, making the experience of ‘technologically enabled, postmulticultural’ identities ‘disengaged from gender, ethnicity and other problematic construction’, universally achievable. (176)

The modified body, resulting from the merge of technology and bio-matter, seems to embed the promise of annihilating dualist discriminatory thinking. Donna Harraway views the cyborg as “a creature in a post-gender world” (150) offering “a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves” (181). Krstić and Prodanović contend that “[w]hat underlies the notion of the cyborg is the idea that science can provide some kind of ‘clean slate’ or cleared space for a radical change of humans and their future” (4). On the other

hand, a study performed by Francesca Ferrado shows that the contemporary mindset is still fairly biased when it comes to thinking about cyborgs and robots in gendered terms. She concluded that “the seeds of the futures are gendered, in the ways they are currently being conceived and actualized” (15), thus reinforcing and adding to Judy Wajcman’s thesis that “the symbolic representation of technology is sharply gendered,” not because “the identification of technology and manliness” is “inherent in biological sex difference,” but because of “the historical and cultural construction of gender” (137).

In its approach to the question of gender categories, “Black Box” goes against the grain of the hopes that a technological future, with its paradigm shift in defining individual subjectivity, might erase the patriarchal categories of identity. The projection of the future it envisages is a far cry from the “post-gender world” Harraway theorized. Instead of being attenuated, the biological and cultural indicators of femininity are emphasized and their inferior nature is continuously reasserted through the insistence on the status of the ‘beauty’. The only major change in this respect is that the female body is the generator and transmitter of biological and non-biological information alike. Of course, taking advantage of men’s preconceptions about ‘beauties’ becomes part of the manipulation strategy that ultimately ensures the success of the spy mission, but the biocultural gender discrimination retains its paradigmatic role and dominates the society of the future Egan envisaged.

Oscillating between scientific optimism and the impulse to reconfirm inherently human capabilities, vacillating between the competing notions of self-negation and affirmation, and problematizing the perpetuation of the socio-cultural circumscription of the individual’s position, Egan’s “Black Box” participates in the process of shaping the twenty-first century posthuman imaginary. By tackling the three hypostases of the body discussed above – the technologically-enhanced body ‘programmed’ to complete a mission, the body used as a black box, and the female body as sexual object – the text invites comments on the evolutionary prospects of humanity. It engages the complex interplay between the idea of the technologically-assisted transcendence of human limitations and the transformation of the traditional Western notion of

individual self and reasserts the perpetuation of the boundaries that separate social categories in a posthuman future. Drawing on the complex imbrications of these notions, “Black Box” simultaneously secures and challenges the faith in the technological augmentation of the human body, thus inviting the interrogation of its social, political, and individual implications. Technology does incite the reconsideration of the notion of autonomous identity, but its effects do not fulfill any of the prophecies of technological doom, because of the sound moral and ethical framework circumscribing the fictional world of the text. Technology is still viewed as instrumental and giving up the body is presented as a sacrificial gesture on behalf of the collective, and not as surrendering to technology.

Notes:

ⁱ The story, tweet by tweet, is available on the website of *Paste* magazine, with a short introductory note by Darren Orf:

<http://www.pastemagazine.com/articles/2012/06/black-box-by-jennifer-egan-tweet-by-tweet.html>

ⁱⁱ Lisa Gee talks about the text’s “haiku-esque pithiness” and Darren Orf claims that “the story reads more like a prose poem than a short story.”

ⁱⁱⁱ See “Let’s Hope Jennifer Egan’s Twitter Story Heralds the Return of Serial Fiction” by David Barr Kirtley, published by *Wired* the day before tweeting began: <http://www.wired.com/2012/05/jennifer-egan-black-box-twitter/>.

^{iv} See Sarah’s Crown review for *The Guardian* or Lisa Gee’s comments in the review published by *The Independent*.

^v In *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, Jennifer Egan writes: “Now and then, Dolly [Lulu’s mother] found herself wondering what sort of event or convergence would define *the new world in which she found herself*, as Capote’s party had, or Woodstock, or Malcolm Forbes’s seventieth birthday, or the party for Talk magazine. She had no idea. She had lost her power to judge; *it would be up to Lulu and her generation to decide*” (Kindle Locations 1971-1973, italics added).

^{vi} Accepting and working with this theory does not mean that she belittles the importance of embodiment. On the contrary, she repeatedly warns that “The computational universe becomes dangerous when it goes from being a useful heuristic to an ideology that privileges information over everything else” (244).

^{vii} See Michio Kaku, 123-125, including the notes to the subchapter.

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