

Notes on Black Box by Jennifer Egan:

Jennifer Egan (c) Pieter M. Van Hattem - green
"This is all artificial": An Interview with Jennifer Egan
Zara Dinnen / 05.20.16

I came late to Jennifer Egan's work. I started with *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010), Egan's fourth novel, and winner of the Pulitzer. Then I read the rest: *The Keep* (2006), *Look At Me* (2001), *The Invisible Circus* (1995), the story collection *Emerald City* (1993), articles, essays, and, when it was out in the world, the Twitter story, "Black Box" (2012). Egan's writing always feels prescient, which is to say contemporary. In her work we encounter a "poignancy of that struggle between the private self and mediated self" that so marks a particular kind of being in the world now. It is surprising that there is very little scholarly work on Egan currently in circulation—a situation that perennially disappoints my students desperate to think with her. But all this will change. As organizer of a symposium on Egan's work I have been in the privileged position of hearing about what is forthcoming: new books, new PhDs, all engaging with Egan's expanding archive.

This interview took place around a symposium on Jennifer Egan's work held in London in 2014. "Invisible Circus: An International Conference on the Work of Jennifer Egan" was part of series of events exploring academic scholarship around a single author, where the author was present as respondent. Egan came to London for the event and in between various talks, screenings, and a whole day of academics digging into her work, we recorded this interview.

So it begins with a symposium.

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ZD: Given tomorrow's event, I was wondering how you were feeling about the idea of an academic conference and perhaps more generally how you feel that your work does or doesn't connect with the academy?

JE: My first experience of passionate writing really was academic writing. I loved being a student of literature and I loved exploring it like a detective and trying to ferret out all of the connections and greater resonances. Not just the things that the author presumably meant to be there. I came of age academically at a moment when there was a great interest in using text as sociological, anthropological and cultural documents. For example, I wrote a paper about William Faulkner's novel *Sanctuary* using it as a kind of window into changing notions of femininity in the American South. That approach to literature felt incredibly exciting to me. When I worked on papers like that I felt every bit as much excitement and joy in the endeavor as I do now when I write fiction. To me the two have always felt like one thing; one kind of exploration and enquiry. So when I write fiction, it is often with a cerebral query in mind that may almost seem more suited to academic exploration than fiction writing. I guess what I am saying is that those kind of questions really excite me in a visceral way and I don't think I could write fiction without a question like that in mind. Being here, in a way, feels like 'Wow,' I am home... this is where I started.

ZD: As one of the speakers tomorrow is going to discuss, you often have academic characters in your novels; is this character some kind of stand-in then, for you as an academic thinker? 1

JE: I often have ideas that I think would fuel interesting academic explorations but they're actually pretty ridiculous. I think I really have found my perfect academic role at this conference; my ideas end up being more comic than serious, and better suited to fiction than serious exploration. For example, in one part in *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, where Ted Hollander (an art critic character in the novel) has this idea about Cézanne using sound in his paintings. I started out thinking that was a really good idea! [Laughs]

ZD: But it's a wholly believable academic paper! That's what makes it so great.

JE: I think my only remotely viable academic idea was in *Look at Me*: the whole Irene Matlock question about genre self-consciousness and its impact on various kinds of work, like private detective, or police officer, or mobster. I think that's actually interesting and maybe people are doing work on that. My fictional ideas always seem to have a theoretical component, and I would go as far to say that if a fictional idea can't be pushed that far—to withstand rigorous exploration of its theoretical underpinnings—then it is weak. To satisfy me, fiction should do many things at once and remain sound when pushed from many different angles. One of them is this theoretical, or academic one. Do I always meet that standard? I'm sure not. But I like to try.

ZD: I have many questions that may tap into the way you are engaging with academic enquiries in your writing. Before we leave this topic entirely I wanted to ask: from the UK it seems that a big thing happening in American fiction at the moment is an idea that the MFA program is somehow homogenizing contemporary American Literature, but it is needed, in part to prop up the salary of a writer.² You are someone who is not doing teaching, and I think didn't do an MFA, so I was wondering what your thoughts were on MFA program and writing careers?

JE: It is a present debate, but I feel so apart from it that I don't feel qualified to have an opinion. I didn't come through the system and I don't teach in the system, so I'm an outsider really. I don't have any judgements about it. The idea that writing can't be taught seems ridiculous. Nobody questions teaching of the visual arts, so why would it be different for writing? In my experience, you can learn a lot. Absolutely writing can be taught. In a way, whilst I didn't go through an MFA programme, I created an ad-hoc MFA by taking workshops people were teaching out of their living rooms in New York when I first got there. Every workshop I sat in gave me something really vital. All of that being said, I can't say that I feel that comfortable in that system... I can't quite say why either. I think for me personally it feels like an insular world and I seem to really need to be in the "bigger world," whatever that is... or at least tell myself that I am. What seems to work much better for me as an additional job is journalism which has almost the opposite feeling for me. It makes me feel that I am really thrust into a world where I am uncomfortable. As a journalist (for me anyway) you're always an idiot. You never truly know what you're talking about at the beginning and I like that. I like starting out incompetent and becoming, briefly, a sort of expert. I also feel insecure as a teacher... unsure that what I have to offer is really what students need. Is the MFA system on some level a kind of racket that keeps writers employed? No question about it! But you could say that about any academy so I don't say that as if it's a bad thing. It's just part of a system that is doing good things for a lot of people, including the students. To me whether or not these people are going to end up being writers is immaterial. If the system is promoting reading, if it's getting people reading and thinking and reading in a

vigorous way, if it is giving people a chance to read and write for two years before they go on to do something else, it is doing the entire culture a gigantic service.

ZD: Thinking about contexts for creative practice. I wanted to ask you about your relationship with other disciplines; particularly the visual arts. You have recently worked with the artist Sarah Sze?³

JE: Yes, Sarah is a young American sculptor who represented the USA at the Venice Biennale last fall, in 2013. She was interested in my story "Black Box" and wanted to include it in the catalogue for her Biennale piece, "Triple Point". Some of the catalogue text takes the form of a conversation between us about our work and process. We think very analogously about our work—it's sort of uncanny.

ZD: The catalogue does some really interesting things. The introductory essay by Holly Block and Carey Lovelace is titled "A Desire for Intimacy among Common Objects"; Block and Lovelace draw your work in Black Box into dialogue with Sze's staging of intimate objects. I thought that "intimacy among common objects" is a very suggestive phrase, particularly with something like Black Box where the voice seems to move between objects. In Black Box you move between this distant seeing of looking at her and with her, and this happens a lot in your writing; there are many instances of making a self an object, of self-objectifying. And from this there is a kind of intimacy between objects—technological devices, books, records—and people.

JE: I don't think I've thought of it in that way. But sometimes I don't recognise what people are describing because I don't use the same language they use to think about it. One book that was important for me in College was John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*; his idea exploration of self-objectification, what it is and what it means.⁴ This is something that has interested me all along. Maybe this is a point of connection between what you're saying the way I think of it. The way that it feeds into most of my work, almost an obsession, is as a question of how mass media invites a particular sort of self-consciousness, or self-objectification. Just when I think I've exhausted that topic, the technology changes yet again and I realise that it really is inexhaustible right now. My son is thirteen, he doesn't have a smartphone but he uses my phone for Instagram. Instagram could just as well be titled 'Self objectification'. Obviously when you use social media to display your experience for the benefit of others, you're pretty close to thinking of yourself in a natural state, in terms of 'here I am': as an object to be perceived. The imagined viewer is always there, in other words. That's pretty horrifying! Luckily as a fiction writer I don't have to waste time being horrified, I can just be curious. It is one of the great gifts of this job. It gives me a way out of fear of the future. I think it would really consume me otherwise. Mass-media as an ever evolving means of self-objectification and an invitation to self-objectify, is something that has been an overt interest of mine right from the beginning.

ZD: The way you describe it really reminds about a book by Sherry Turkle. [*Life on the Screen* 1995.]

JE: She's totally recanted that!

ZD: But in it she had this phrase of "cycling through windows" and the way in which people moved through different forms of self-objectification and self-presentation. The place she went to there, that she has stepped back from since, was that real life becomes another window that people draw back and forth from.

JE: It makes sense more from an academic standpoint that an application to everyday life though.

ZD: Do you think that it is also something that happens when you're writing that process? That you think about these different frames of self-presentation?

JE: Do you mean, is writing another iteration of that?

ZD: I mean the way you are writing the characters, not from you personally.

JE: I never have these ideas in my head when I am writing characters. It would make writing impossible. Maybe I should say something about my process. In this conversation, I'm making it sound like it is intellectually driven and cerebral, which it kind of is... but, in a deep underground way. In the execution, it's totally intuitive and visceral. The work would be dry as dust if I had these kinds of ideas in my head as I was doing it.

Basically I start with some questions. For example, in *Look at Me* I was specifically interested in whether mass media and image culture had qualitatively changed the experience of being human. Basically, the same phenomenon we've just been talking about: the impulse to create oneself from the outside in (but my impetus was pre-Internet; I hadn't been online when I invented the idea of "ordinary people" and all that). Looking back, the idea of trying to answer those questions in 1996, when I began working on that book, seems almost premature. I was jumping the gun a little. But that's what I wanted to know: has image culture and its corollaries, self-consciousness and self-objectification, changed who we are to ourselves? Asking that question suggested that I thought that the answer must be yes.

Then I wrote the book fairly blind. I really work more with a sense of time and place. The characters come out of that. I always write fiction by hand as I am trying to give my intuition and unconscious free rein. Fiction has to be about people we care about doing things that interest us; otherwise you should be writing academic papers.... and being more rigorous! Interestingly, having those big questions in mind ahead of time seems to inform what happens to the people very much, even though I am not thinking about the questions anymore as I write. I kind of notice and feel glad about the fact that big ideas are at play in the action, but I cannot make it happen. It just has to happen by itself.

I write the first draft by hand—in the case of *Look At Me*, about 800 pages—type it up and read it and then start to think more intellectually again about what the book is trying to be, how I can make it better. I write endless drafts, over years, to get there. The blood moving through it, the human blood and human experience, is what really matters. That's what is going to make it work or not work. These big questions are important but finally they have to take back seat to the human stuff—be latent and deep, the way ideas are in culture, rather than manifest. Nothing kills a piece of fiction faster than didacticism. So I'll sort of notice and maybe even try to foreground things a little bit when I can but on some level I just have to count on my unconscious to do that synthesis of the ideas with the people. Somehow it feels like if I try to do it consciously then it is almost heavy handed. Ideally, there are things that I don't know are in the writing and I am glad to notice them but it won't work if I jam them in there intentionally.

ZD: I wanted to ask you a bit about how see yourself in relation to media history. I was thinking about the relationship between groups of writers as generational. There is a moment in the late

1970s early 80s in California where you get this coming together of counterculture and the work on computing at Stanford, and I was thinking about how certain writers, you, Jonathan Lethem and Dave Eggers (a little later); how you were all growing up, or coming into writing, in the proximity of where all this change is happening. And in recent work (although you have been writing about this stuff for so much longer) you are all preoccupied with change wrought by digital media. I was wondering if your influence had come from being there, in that moment, somehow.

JE: I didn't know that I was there! Growing up in the 70's, we thought nothing was happening. The 60's were over and it was just a big yawn, we thought, but in fact huge things were happening—very nearby, in my case, having grown up in San Francisco. Silicon Valley was exploding, but we just didn't know. The entire time I was growing up, I didn't come into contact with anyone working in the computing industry. I didn't even know there was a computing industry. I remember the first Apple Computer coming out as I was babysitting for a family and the dad had one. I thought 'Is that a television?' It was all there and I share your interest in that but in terms of my own interest in that but I am not sure that proximity is the reason for my own interest. I think the reason is that it's the story of my lifetime. I didn't even live through the counterculture, except as a young child who occasionally saw a "hippie" through the window of her parent's car. I was born in 1962, when I went to college in 1981, and in that time there was no significant development in telecommunications that I was aware of. The answering machine came along around the time I went to college and that was huge! It was the difference between there being some record of a telephone call having happened, and there not being one. And call waiting, which came along around the same time, was also revolutionary. Finally you didn't hear a busy signal when you called someone's phone! That was one of the biggest arguments I had with my parents as a teenager. "Get off the phone"... they said. You had to stay off the phone if someone was expecting a phone call! It sounds strange now but that's how it was. So to go 18 years without any development on that front and to think about what 18 years can bring now? In fact, though, I missed one huge development—it had already happened by the time I was paying attention. Not television, which obviously became pervasive before I was born, but the televising of the Vietnam War is truly fascinating as a cultural milestone. I started thinking about that all the way back in *The Invisible Circus*. The relationship between mass media and sixties counter culture has been a preoccupation of mine ever since reading Todd Gitlin's groundbreaking *The Whole World is Watching* in college. The story of media saturation in our lives, beginning with the television of the Vietnam War, feels like the big thing I have to write about, here, the cultural cataclysm that has occurred within my lifetime. I haven't arrived at that conclusion intellectually. It just feels alive and rich and I can't quite seem to stay away from it. I don't think being in California had much to do with it. I was totally ignorant to what was going on. But being in California absolutely led to my interest in the 1960s. And the roads all connect, as you point out. In fact, these two things, the counterculture and the tech explosion, were always very close together and I continue to be interested in that.⁵ One of the disappointments I have as a reader is that there has never been a good novel on the 1960s counterculture. Especially given that Ken Kesey, one of the best American authors of his generation, was right in the middle of it. But I guess he took too much acid and he ruined his ability to write. His later books are terrible, I mean they are so terrible that you cannot connect them with the same man who wrote *Sometimes a Great Notion*. He would have been great. Robert Stone was a great novelist, but he didn't write a 1960s novel. He wrote an interesting memoir⁶ but all we have is non-fiction... very creative... but no novel. And I feel that there is a way in which non-fiction just can't do it. A great novel of a particular moment can really reveal and expose it—say the way Robert Stone's *Dog Soldiers* exposed the ennui and sickness of the post 1960s counterculture.

ZD: That chimes with *Invisible Circus* really well – there it is all about “the missing.” It's a novel about nostalgia, but for something never experienced?

JE: It is a novel about nostalgia, but specifically about how nostalgia is a feeling you can have for times and places you never experienced. In that sense it intersects with self-objectification and mass media, because all of those phenomena—and hallucinogenic drug experience for that matter—have an out-of-body quality. Self-objectification is, quite literally, an out-of-body experience. I never use this phrase, self-objectification. But now we've been talking about it I can't let it go. It's quickly becoming a tick!

ZD: I was reading a few interviews you've done previously where you describe *Invisible Circus* as a classic coming of age novel; what with the big acid trip that happens in the middle. The out-of-body thing connects slightly to the Gothicism and haunting aspects of *The Keep*. Maybe these aspects are medial?

JE: In *The Keep* I was thinking about supernatural experience in the form of disembodied communication, which is a staple of the gothic genre from *The Mysteries of Udolpho* through *The Turn of The Screw* and into Stephen King. My interest was the way disembodied communication is now an omnipresent feature of modern connectedness. I was writing *The Keep* in the early 2000s, before smart phones, so this is even more true now: modern communications fill our lives with that same sense of awaiting signals from an invisible world that permeates the gothic. I was still interested in the interaction of private experience with mediated experience, but not so much its impact on the self. I don't think that solipsistic aspect is something I could get interested in again. It started with *Invisible Circus* and ran through *Emerald City*, but I exhausted it with *Look at Me*.

ZD: The way you describe Charlotte in *Look at Me* reminds me a lot of Lulu in “Black Box.” Both characters question the veracity of an essential self, but also how one might hold onto the self, through a mediated body.

JE: I didn't consciously think about it, but yes, a source of poignancy is in that struggle between the private self and mediated self, which in some sense is communal property. With Lulu in “Black Box” her thoughts are not even her own: they are, in some sense, owned by the state, the record of her work for them, and equally valuable whether she is alive or dead. All they need is her body. She is literally a media outlet. I guess that's one of the things that interested me about it.

ZD: The embodied media outlet... is another moment in your work that seems quite prescient, given the porousness of the boundary between privacy and surveillance today. Your work often contains images of people watching; I was wondering about questions of voyeurism in your work?

JE: Well first of all, my job is to be a voyeur, and I love it. I never write about my own life. Writing, for me, is like peeking into windows and going inside houses and finding out what the people there are like, what they think. I invade privacy imaginatively, but more and more, that kind of invasion is becoming technologically possible to actually achieve, which is pretty scary. I came by “Black Box” less cerebrally than is usual for me. It started with a desire to use Twitter to create a serialised work of fiction. I was struggling to find a voice that might require small structural units for its expression. The challenge of using a radical structural approach is not

"Hmmm... how can I create work that can somehow be squeezed into this unconventional structure?" but the opposite: how can I create work that requires such a structure, and can't be written any other way? That necessity is critical—otherwise you're barely making it work, and it would work better written conventionally. So I asked myself what sort of story would need to be told in short dispatches, and that question intersected with my own tendency to keep lists, one of which is a list of all the lessons I've learned from all the things that have happened. That list is an indirect narrative of failure, in the form of things I would do differently next time round.

I can't remember exactly when I realised that I should write a story in the form of the lessons someone learns, but that discovery was everything, and it was driven by the structure. I became fascinated by writing a narrative in which the action is never stated directly, and can only be inferred from the lessons the speaker has learned each step of the way.

ZD: It has the lessons, but it has this dynamism of the pulse of the transmissions. Like every minute she is transmitting this bit of knowledge and that tallies with the description of the body as transmission data to whoever is watching.

JE: A lot of that I didn't come up with ahead of time. Some of it was just practical. The whole idea of her body having machinery in it, I came up with in the moment, because I couldn't think of how she would realistically be able to carry recording equipment with her. It came to me whilst I was writing that the equipment would have to be inside her, and the fact that the piece must be taking place in the 2030s, given Lulu's age, seemed to invite that sort of technological leap. Recently I heard Jane Smiley use the phrase "the energy of logic". I love that. The energy of logic makes a lot of my discoveries for me. The dialectic between solutions and problems can lead the work in some interesting directions.

ZD: The policing of the female body in this: do you feel that this is something you are conscious of when you are writing women? About pushing back on certain representations of a female body?

JE: It wasn't something I was thinking about whilst writing at first, but once I saw that it was there, I paid close attention to it. I began to sense that a completely different reading of the story was possible: as a list of directives for a woman whose sole purpose is to please and satisfy a man, and who exists solely in order to do so. It's pretty polemical, I suppose, but it came about naturally. I was really just trying to follow my conceit and see where it would lead me.

The other element that I was so happy to find in there, although I didn't "put it there" consciously, was the mythological aspect. The sense of this powerful creature who is not even fully human in the Mediterranean, that great locus of mythology, doing heroic things... was really fun to play with. Looking back, I think that a lot of it grew out of one of the failures of *Goon Squad*: I had really wanted to write a chapter in the form of epic poetry. Undeniably, it would have been cool. I mean epic poetry and PowerPoint in one book would have been amazing, but I'm a lousy poet, unfortunately, and I couldn't begin to pull it off. What I wanted was that sense of reaching back to our very beginnings, the collective unconscious, call it what you will... not to mention the beginnings of storytelling as an oral tradition. I couldn't quite do it but somehow that wish stayed with me and revealed itself a bit in "Black Box."

ZD: I wanted to ask about different media and genre within your novels, and how you integrate multiple forms. I've just been teaching Zadie Smith's *On Beauty*; in that book Smith uses her husband's poetry. Do you use others' writing in that way?

JE: I'm interested in that, but I've only managed to do it a little bit so far. In *Look at Me*, the character Moose has a correspondence with an Art History professor called Barbara Mundy. She exists; actually she is one of my oldest and closest friends and a celebrated art historian. I wrote letters to Barbara in the character of Moose and she responded as she would have responded had someone actually written her those letters. There was a more extensive back and forth in earlier drafts. The book was baggy and I had to be merciless about cutting. But I like the idea of the text reaching out into the real world and incorporating a real character. Anything that is not gratuitous, then I'm there. Anything that is fun to do that I can get away with!

ZD: How did it work with the PowerPoint in *Good Squad*? Did you write PowerPoints when you were putting it together?

JE: Yes, there was no other way. Even though I generally write by hand, with PowerPoint there was no way to do it by hand. I mean the programme itself was integral to the whole conception of that chapter in the same way Twitter was the catalyst for "Black Box". I made an attempt to do it by hand but it just went nowhere. I didn't know how to use PowerPoint at first, and on top of that, there are things one expects from fiction that can't be done in PowerPoint, the major two being transition and action. Nothing moves in PowerPoint; it is a totally static form. It is also a pixelated/pointillist form. It consists of discrete units with no real continuity between them. So I ended up thinking about the chapter in those terms: as moments. With each new slide, I'd ask myself: What is the moment I am describing here? I'd start by creating a series of bullet points on the slide that seemed like the essential elements of the moment in question. Then I would ask: what is the relationship among these elements? PowerPoint is about diagramming the essential structure of a moment. Is it cycle? Cause and effect? A huge mess? A process? Is it going from A-B in a series of steps? Back and forth? There are slides to manifest any of those, so at the beginning I would look for a template that seemed to manifest the relationship I saw among the bullet points. But gradually I started feeling like Microsoft's templates weren't specific enough for me, and I need to begin inventing my own. There were relationships that were subtler than the templates offered, elements that just coexisted, unrelated but together. PowerPoint doesn't have a template for that—I don't think that's supposed to happen in a corporate presentation! In the end I created slides, then read them through, edited and added and changed and cut just as I would with any other text.

ZD: I am interested in how you reached the limit of the presets...

JE: My sister is a consultant for Bane, a large management consultancy firm. She once told me that she thinks in PowerPoint. She sent me a bunch of her PowerPoints and I must confess I stole one of the slides she created.

ZD: The PowerPoint chapter is ostensibly about pauses. Listening to you describe your experience of writing with PowerPoint—and the challenges you encounter, the difficulty of representing co-existence, say—I wonder how interlinked the thing you were writing about and the challenge of the writing were; what came first, the pauses or the PowerPoint moments?

JE: I had been interested in pauses for a while, and tried various ways of incorporating that interest into *Goon Squad*. I had a failed chapter with an academic, writing about the pauses in music but it was incredibly boring! I was fascinated by the idea of the pause, what it means and how it can function in music, but it was only when I was able to finally use PowerPoint that I

could bring in the pauses. I wasn't sure what sort of character would be interested in them to the same degree that I was. I already had a son with Aspergers-esque issues and he embodied my fixation beautifully, much better than in the academic I had. It all came together in the last minute really, like two months before my final revisions were due. I think the pauses must have been driving my curiosity about PowerPoint without even my knowing it.

This was only pointed out to me by readers but the PowerPoint chapter appears in the novel at exactly the same point where pauses often appear in songs: just before the last refrain. In other words, the PowerPoint chapter itself functions as a pause. I can't take credit for that awareness, as it was not conscious. If you have intellectual points you want to make, it is much easier to do it in a PowerPoint format than to subtly try to ease them into conventional fiction! It served me very well that one time, and I have no immediate interest in returning to it! Or I should say that I haven't come up with another story that requires it yet.

Fast-forward two years[!]

ZD: Looking back over this interview I am struck by how you are drawing a line under some of the pre-occupations in your fiction; especially its medial attachments. I read recently a conversation published by The New York Times between you and George Saunders. You say there that your new writing is less interested in "trickiness", and more in "verisimilitude." I'd forgotten that in our conversation you brought up John Berger and it has made me think about how for him verisimilitude is a vantage, a particular aspect of the condition of capital in a given historical moment. I was hoping you could talk a little more about your new work, and about what verisimilitude means to you, for your work?

JE: Well, as usual, I came to many of my decisions for this new book through the back door of trial and error, rather than a strong pre-existing stylistic plan. To the extent that I had a plan, it involved plenty of trickiness; I imagined myself playing wildly with the fact that the book is set in the 1930s and 40s by letting the present intervene whenever it felt right. Well, turns out that it never felt right! It felt lame and overbearing, and the only approach that seemed to work at all, and be compelling, was a straightforward approach that looks a lot like verisimilitude. I see verisimilitude exactly the way you suggest: as one of many possible approaches, rather than as some basic truth I've deviated from and am now finally returning to. I mean let's face it, this is all artificial. We're creating a simulacrum of the mind-blowing complexity of human experience filtered through perception. In some ways, verisimilitude is the most artificial of all: to try to contain all of that randomness and chaos and sensation in a thin skin of forward-moving narrative. Of course what we call "conventional" now is much more conventional than anything novelists were doing in the 19th century—that stuff was pretty weird! And the modernists busted through that thin skin and began mapping consciousness overtly. But for me, this time, just telling the story "straight," whatever that means, was the only artifice that seemed to open things up rather than closing them down. And in retrospect (as I head toward the finish), I could probably have predicted it. One of the things that drew me to the 1930s and 1940s, I think, is that all of my media and image culture concerns are irrelevant. None of it had happened yet. America wasn't a superpower yet. It's proved to be a clean way of leaving behind just about everything I've cared about as a writer, and looking at other things instead. There are no screens. Thank God! And of course, leaving behind those preoccupations also meant leaving behind the techniques that felt necessary to embody them.

Zara Dinnen is Lecturer in Modern and Contemporary Literature at University of Birmingham, UK. Her research on new media and contemporary American culture has been published in journals including *Journal of American Studies*, *Journal of Narrative Theory*, *Media-N*, and *Studies in Comics*.

Martin Eve's paper "'Structural Dissatisfaction': Academics on Safari in the Novels of Jennifer Egan" has recently been published as a full article. Martin Paul Eve, "'Structural Dissatisfaction': Academics on Safari in the Novels of Jennifer Egan" (2015) 1(1): e5 *Open Library of Humanities*, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.16995/olh.29> [↔]

Discussion has galvanized around the polemical collection *MFA vs NYC: The Two Cultures of American Fiction*, ed. Chad Harbach (New York: Faber/N+1, 2014). [↔]

Sarah Sze exhibited a large scale sculpture "Triple Point" for the US Pavilion at the 2013 Venice Biennale. The story *Black Box* featured in the accompanying catalogue along with essays by Holly Block and Carey Lovelace. [↔]

In the first section of *Ways of Seeing* Berger writes "To touch something is to situate oneself in relation to it [...] we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves". pp. 8-9.

John Berger *Ways of Seeing* (London: BBC/Penguin, 1972, 1988). [↔]

For the cultural history of this connection read Fred Turner's excellent *From Counterculture to Cyberculture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) [↔]

Prime Green: Remembering the Sixties 2007 [↔]