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**Making it old and new: Intermedial print-digital approaches to the novel as response to media competition**

Abstract:

The novel has been consistently threatened by competition from new mediums. From modernism to postmodernism and beyond, many writers have responded to this competition by innovating and incorporating new styles, forms and techniques for the novel. In the digital age, despite the threat to print from online sources, linear print novels remain the dominant fictional mode – even though most of us communicate and consume through a discontinuous array of digital media that bears little resemblance to them. Adam Hammond has declared ours a ‘hybrid moment ... [in which we have] one foot in the print world and the other in the digital’ (2016). Recently authors have published augmented books – print novels enhanced with additional digital components – which belong to a wider category of intermedial narratives (Ryan 2016). This paper analyses the hybrid print-digital forms of Steven Hall’s *The Raw Shark Texts* and Jennifer Egan’s *A Visit from the Goon Squad*; positions the combination of print and digital narrative as a modern innovation in response to media competition; and argues that such approaches remediate the novel in ways that allow authors to reflect our hyper-attentive digital with fidelity.

Biographical Note:

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## Introduction

The Western novel has constantly shapeshifted. The shapes it has taken have reflected changes in technology, reading habits and society. In the last century, the threat of its demise due to competition from other media has been constant. But there has never been such a range of media available for the public to consume, nor a medium available that is increasingly capable of swallowing them all. In an age where nonfiction is freely available online, complex stories are played in video games, more books than we could read fit in our hands, and YouTube tutorials are easier to follow than instruction manuals, it is worth asking whether print retains the cultural value it once had. And yet novels defy their cultural peers – like music, film and journalism – and continue to be widely produced and consumed in their analogue form.

This paper suggests that innovation and remediation of the form and style of the novel has always occurred because of increased media competition. As Pressman argues, ‘the genre of the novel remains novel only by constantly innovating in relation to its contemporary environment of popular culture and media’ (2009: 466). This paper argues that innovative responses in fiction to the challenges of the digital age require writers to embrace the digital medium. It discusses an emerging approach – that of the hybrid intermedial print and digital novel – and suggests that such approaches may help keep the form relevant in a digital age, while not requiring the abandoning of its print heritage. I analyse two works – *A Visit from the Goon Squad* and *The Raw Shark Texts* – that employ both print and digital mediums to enhance and extend their texts, despite their themes of cultural demise in the wake of digital culture. I focus on works that are: a) text-based; b) novels; and c) have a printed form with distinct digital features composed by the same author/s for the same single work. I am not, for example, discussing adaptations, fan fiction, multimodal books, ebooks, or other extracompositional intermedial works. I position these hybrid fiction approaches within intermedial theory as possible solutions to the cultural upheavals of the digital age. New media has always threatened the novel’s demise, but historically and now, this has driven writers to seek new forms, techniques and methods in ways that ensure that the novel remains vibrant in our culture.

## What's wrong with print?

Print remains an outstanding technology. In the centuries since Gutenberg’s press, words have changed, languages have died, and publishing techniques have been modernised, yet today’s books function identically to those that came before. In fiction, despite regular hints of revolution – of the modernist and postmodernist need for new forms to match new ways of thinking and to respond to the advent of the digital age in which text is produced, recycled and deleted on a Borgesian-like scale – the print novel remains vital. Anxieties persist: local libraries teeter on the verge of closing (Haigh 2017), and media such as film, television, ebooks, online news and video games continually threaten to push the printed word out of the collective consciousness and into the realm of the niche. Bolter and Grusin suggest that ‘our culture wants to both multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation’ (2000: 5). Yet physical books

remain popular, while other culturally significant technologies such as CDs and DVDs have increasingly fallen in favour of streaming internet services (Sweeney 2017).

Why should print fiction remain culturally significant when, for many, online text is easier to access? Adriaan van der Weel suggests an ‘Order of the Book’ might be responsible – the idea that the physical book has become a ‘major social organising principle’ of Western knowledge which, while challenged by the fragmentary nature of digital text, remains vital to our ways of seeing the world and thus intrinsically difficult to shake (van der Weel 2011: 2). Similarly, Jessica Pressman refers to an ‘aesthetic of bookishness’ (Pressman 2009: 465) and the recent trend of producing hardcopy books that celebrate the printed word by doing things only the printed word can, evidenced in books such as Jonathon Safran Foer’s cut up novel of Bruno Schulz’s *Street of Crocodiles*, *Tree of Codes* (2010). For Pressman, this trend is prolonging the life of print books in popular culture.

But perhaps the book is its own saviour. The printed novel is a tangible object that is complete and static. It cannot be more than one book, or become a music player, or a shopping cart. The reader may go to any point in the text quickly and with little thought. Pages turn and can be marked with folds or pencils. The pages to be read become the pages that have been read. The weight of the book and the size of the book directly influence the time it takes to read. More importantly, perhaps, a book is its own ecosystem. It needs no electricity, no record player, or DVD player, or games console to operate. And yet there is a sense that what it holds – mostly traditionally linear, sequential narratives – might lack relevance in the hyperconnected digital age. van der Weel suggests, for instance, that the ‘Order of the Book’ is disintegrating, to be replaced not by a digital order, but digital disorder, one that evades the ‘familiar one-way hierarchical order fostered by the print paradigm’ (2011: 2).

We increasingly work, communicate and consume through a discontinuous array of digital media that bear little resemblance to novels. We stream and play and text and like and share and post and edit and re-post. We consume and create media in so many forms that the printed word might seem a barely adequate vehicle for modern stories. As Ciccoricco states,

[t]he way in which minds and media reciprocally shape one another – what anthropology describes as ‘technogenesis’ – has long been an explicit and, perhaps, inevitably an implicit concern of contemporary literary narrative. But whereas print literature registers the effects of the technologised world, digital literature is more overtly positioned as both a reflection of the transformative power of digital technology and, as one of those technologies itself, a direct cause of the transformation (2015: 72).

It has been argued that fiction is in a hybrid moment (Skains 2010: 98; Hammond 2016: 206), somewhere between the order and solidity of print and the disorder and dynamism of the digital. It may be difficult to evaluate the effects of the storm when we are in the middle of it, but it’s worth noting that ‘existing mediums are rarely made redundant by new mediums ... neither film, nor the radio, nor the television, was able to cause the demise of the printed book’ (van der Weel 2011: 102). Rather than being abandoned as a form, the print novel will likely be remediated by and within other media, and ‘digital

media will ... function as a constant dialectic with earlier media, precisely as each earlier medium functioned when it was introduced' (Bolter and Grusin 2000: 50). In this dialogue between media, new shapes for the novel may again emerge.

### **Pre-digital innovation in the novel**

Literary innovation has a history perhaps as long as language itself. But, as Hammond puts it, 'Whenever any new medium presents itself, we tend to connect the older medium with rationality and stable subjectivity and to see the new one as threatening to both' (2016: 25). As historical examples, he cites Plato's concerns that writing would dismantle oral storytelling traditions, and the fears of the 'obsolescence of monastic copying clerks' in the wake of the Gutenberg printing (25). Bolter and Grusin have argued that new media spark medial competition, with new media incorporating – or remediating – rather than rejecting old media. But they add that this is not a one-way street, and that 'older media refashion themselves to answer the challenges of new media' (2000: 15).

As has been well-documented, modernist novelists experimented with fictional form and style to better express human responses to the social and technological change that was going on around them. The new medium of film was increasingly popular and able to tell stories in ways that novels could not. The threat it posed inspired new paths for the novel, and 'reframed for the novel the importance of the image, of simultaneity, while at the same time showing the possibilities offered by fragmentation' (McCourt 2010). James Joyce was fascinated with film, and remediated the novel by incorporating cinematic narrative techniques in his work. Virginia Woolf made the claim that '...on or about December 1910 human character changed' (Woolf 2015). She argued that the 'Georgian' writer could no longer look to the 'Edwardian' writer for technique, stating that 'the Edwardian tools are the wrong ones for us to use'. She asked her audience to 'tolerate the spasmodic, the obscure, the fragmentary, the failure', seemingly pointing to cinematic narrative techniques. Her tone suggests that the threat of the new medium may not have initially sat comfortably with her, despite her subsequent narrative innovations.

As television arrived in people's living rooms and people saw themselves as 'belonging to a kind of electronically constituted society whenever they watch(ed)' (Bolter and Grusin 2000: 194), postmodern innovations began to shape different novels. Samuel Beckett, characterising change in negative terms, nevertheless hailed the need for literary innovation: '...there will be a new form, and ... this form will be of such a type that it admits the chaos ... To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now' (Driver 1961). Writers like Beckett, Ionesco and Camus employed absurdism to illustrate the human condition in increasingly abstract ways. Experimental (or avant-garde) writers like Marc Saporta, Julio Cortázar, B.S. Johnson, Vladimir Nabokov, Georges Perec and Raymond Queneau attempted to re-invent what the novel could be. Some, referred to as 'material experimentalists' by Burgess (2015), focused on the physical form of literature itself. Queneau published *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* (1961), a poetry book with each page cut up into several lines, allowing the reader to combine lines from many different pages to form many possible poems.

Saporta's *Composition No. 1* (2011) was a series of looseleaf pages collected in a box that could be read by the reader in any order. Johnson, despairing that 'the novelist cannot legitimately or successfully embody present day reality in exhausted forms' (Johnson 1999), wrote *The Unfortunates* (1999). Like Saporta's *Composition No. 1*, *The Unfortunates* was a book in a box, although Johnson's work has a defined start and end page. Johnson was a relentless innovator who was dismissive of television narrative, stating, '...serials like *Coronation Street* and so on do very little more than answer the question "What happens next?"' (Johnson 1999).

A feature of much modernist and postmodernist fiction was its inventiveness with style and form, which can be understood in part as a response to shifting media landscapes. Writers transformed the novel, assimilating (and being assimilated by) new mediums. Despite their influence, not all these innovations were commercially successful, and the physical nature of the book stayed largely unchanged. But the emergence of the internet in the 1990s changed more than just how text could be displayed and received – it offered an entirely new, dynamic medium for text to converge with other modes. It has so fundamentally altered the way people communicate that we have perhaps entered an entirely new literary age – which Pressman terms 'digital modernism' (2014). In this age, it is not only the novel that is under threat, but the very medium in which it is printed and consumed.

### Post-digital innovation in the novel

Early forms of digital narratives can be found in interactive fiction. The first interactive fiction was a text adventure called *Adventure*, first released in 1976 and adapted by multiple authors to work on a multitude of home computers by 1980 (Montfort 2004: 12; Aarseth 1997: 12-13). For many years, experiments in digital text were the domain of video games, and required programming expertise. Rather than as a response to medial threat, these works were generally created by enthusiasts optimistic about the possibilities of the new medium, not just for text, but for play. During this time, the *Choose Your Own Adventure* series of interactive children's books became an enormously popular example of interactive fiction (and may have been a natural progression from the work of Cortázar, Johnson, and the Oulipo). The advent of hypertext and authoring software made writing interactive text simpler, and more novel-like digital narratives followed. In the late 1980s and early 90s, explorations of the literary possibilities of digital fiction – such as Michael Joyce's *Afternoon* or Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* – made use of hypertext concepts in proprietary systems such as Storyspace. Enslinn and others have referred to this as the first generation of digital literature (2014: 73).

The possibilities of hypertext and global communication networks caused a great deal of excitement in some literary quarters. Robert Coover, an established novelist and early adopter of hypertext, stated in *The New York Times* that hypertext would change the way humans thought and thus change the shape of the book (1992). Despite criticism – see Miller (1998) and Coover (1999) – Coover's article is prescient. He elegantly expresses that the then-uncertain future shape of the internet and the subsequent social impacts would change the way we read. He hints at technogenesis – the idea that

humans evolve alongside and as a function of the technology they develop, rather than simply the other way around – further elucidated in research on attention and digital reading conducted by Hayles (2012). As Hayles, Carr (2010) and others have since argued, the digital ecosystem has changed the way we read. Whether it has degraded our ability to read, enhanced, or merely changed it remains debatable. Ciccoricco, for example, argues that ‘digital narratives can challenge commonplace ideas about the degradation of attention in light of digital textuality and its supporting screen media by innovating and disrupting traditional reading practices’ (2015: 72). However, it is clear the internet has brought about enormous changes in the way we read, listen, watch, talk, and even the way we conduct our relationships and politics.

Since Coover’s ‘golden age of hypertext’ of the 1990s, several generations of digital-born fiction have followed, as outlined by Enslinn (2014: 73). In addition to simple hypertext, digital fiction has been produced using a wide variety of software and methods, from Adobe Flash, to HTML and Javascript, to parser-based interactive fiction using proprietary tools like Inform, to heavier programming environments like Java. A glance at the collections of the Electronic Literature Organisation demonstrates the wide variety of languages and tools being used to create digital literature. Increasingly interactive fiction can be found and purchased on well-established video game distribution sites like Steam, or mobile app stores like iTunes and Google Play. Digital serialisation of fictional works occurs on sites such as Wattpad, with the form attracting established authors like Margaret Atwood (2012). Intermedial novels – what Ryan refers to as augmented books (2016) – have also emerged, allowing a paper book to be enhanced or extended with an app or a website.

But despite innovators like Coover and Atwood, there are few established novelists who have been prepared to experiment with the digital medium in their work. Books may now be available electronically as ebooks, but the threat of the new medium appears so great that many writers have surrendered the novel to a future of anachronism. The novelist Will Self has said: ‘I believe the serious novel will continue to be written and read, but it will be an art form on a par with easel painting or classical music’ (2014). The change to print-based culture wrought by the internet is profound. However, Pressman argues that embracing technophobia by retreating into a defensive, binary view of books versus digital technologies is self-defeating (2009: 477). The complexity of the digital medium is undoubtedly an enormous barrier for many writers. Its multimodal nature often necessitates multi-skilled creators, challenging traditional notions of individual authorship, which have become fundamental to book culture since Romanticism. Nevertheless, Hammond encourages writers to engage with the digital, showing how processes of remediation preserve even as they transform books. Discussing the works of several writers of digital literature, including Emily Short and Young-Hae Chung, he shows how ‘working in digital forms does not entail an abandonment of print traditions, for the born digital works they produce are hybrids of print and digital traditions, deployed to better understand and grapple with the world we are living in today’ (2016: 206).

In the wake of media competition, some of the greatest, most inventive novels of the twentieth century were written. The novel will change shape again, be remediated, and itself remediate. The internet is unlikely to spell the ‘death’ of the novel. As Bolter and

Grusin point out, ‘What is new about new media comes from the particular ways in which they refashion older media’ (2000: 15). Likewise, older media refashion themselves in response to new media. Just as the modernist writers responded to the threat of film by employing cinematic styles, and postmodernists decrying television employed forms with effects not dissimilar to that of changing channels, I argue that contemporary novels employing both the print and digital mediums are important experimental responses to the digital.

### **A combined approach: Intermedial/plurimedial fiction**

The mixing of mediums in storytelling is not new. Opera combines music and speech; film adapts novels; novels expand films. The *Star Wars* universe – a single storyworld – continues to produce ‘canon’ films, novels, video games and comic books, as well as innumerable fan fictions (Ryan 2016). Academically, concepts such as remediation, intertextuality, transmediality, hybridity, intermediality, intramediality, and plurimediality have variously been employed to make critical sense of these works. Scholarly work in the intermedial/transmedial field is extensive – see Bolter and Grusin (2000), Wolf (2005), Ryan (2016), and Rajewsky (2005) – and is beyond the scope of this paper to cover in detail. Nonetheless, some definitions are needed to analyse a new form of storytelling, which brings together the print and the digital, and which is the focus of this paper.

Wolf’s identification of different forms of intermediality is useful. Wolf defines intermedial works broadly as ‘[dealing] with media as conventionally distinct means of communicating’, and defines several categories for the works that may appear within this category (Wolf 2005: 252). Extracompositional works, Wolf asserts, ‘result from relations or comparisons between medially different semiotic entities’ (253). These types of intermedial works would generally be composed by its author/s at separate times. Both transmedial works (such as *Game of Thrones*, with its novels, television series, and video games) and intermedial transpositions (such as a film adaptation of a novel) fit into this category. In contrast, intracompositional works incorporate different media within the same semiotic entity – all the mediums the work employs would generally be created in unison, at the time of composition. Intracompositional works include multimedial or plurimedial works – which occur ‘whenever two or more media are overtly present in a given semiotic entity at least in one instance’ (254) – and intermedial reference works, in which ‘the other medium enters as a conceptual rather than a physical presence, and the base medium retains the character of a homomedial semiotic complex’, something similar to intertextuality (254).

I intend to look at works that combine print and digital fiction (two distinct mediums), composed by the author as a single work (thus not a remediation, or an adaptation), and using a predominantly textual mode (rather than, say, a combination of text and images, and thus not multimodal, as defined by Hallet [2014]). These works are what Wolf would refer to as plurimedial – or multimedial – intermedial works. I prefer the term plurimedial, given the term multimedia has perhaps been overextended. I also refer to them as ‘augmented books’, as defined by Ryan (2016), or ‘intermedial print-digital’ works.

Although the form is hardly ubiquitous, many established authors have experimented with intermediality. Geoff Ryman's *253* began life as an online hypertext and was 'remixed' into a printed book (1998). Jennifer Egan produced a Pulitzer Prize winning novel, *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, featuring a chapter in the form of a PowerPoint slideshow (2010). The PowerPoint, with additional effects, was made available on Egan's website. Recently, with the increasing ubiquity of mobile devices, authors have experimented with enhancing their books through apps, such as Iain Pears' *Arcadia*, or websites, such as Annabel Smith's *The Ark*. I concentrate on literary fiction in this paper, but it is worth noting that many authors and publishers in children's and young adult literature have pioneered intermedial approaches. This suggests a commercial awareness of the fact that those who have grown up in the digital age may be more prepared to accept (or even *expect*) digital-print hybridity in the future. J.K. Rowling, for example, expanded her Harry Potter series by creating the site *Pottermore*, in which she continued to add life to the universe she had created. To varying degrees, these works utilise features of both mediums to construct their storyworlds – the longevity, accessibility and linearity of print, and the changeable, networked and dynamic nature of the digital.

In the following sections I analyse two commercially and critically successful novels augmented by digital content, discuss why these intermedial works may offer an ideal approach to bridging the gap between print and digital fiction, and why they may help point the way to a future literature.

### **In hidden corners of the internet: *The Raw Shark Texts***

*The Raw Shark Texts* (2005) by Steven Hall is a print novel that contains many typographic images, the most memorable a fifty-page flip-book of a shark, made from fragmented sentences, slowly approaching the reader before finally opening its mouth. The plot centres around an amnesiac being chased by a conceptual shark, in a world where concepts become fish. Although the book is complete and has a conclusion, many questions are left unanswered – for example, what the main character did before his amnesia. In support of the print novel, a forum on the author's website hints at a network of elusive fictional websites that further the text for interested readers.

The novel has been lauded by some scholars, with Jessica Pressman declaring it a rallying cry for the book over the digital: 'no contemporary novel has responded with such vigour to the fears of the dark, fathomless depths of digital culture by presenting the book as a defense against it than British author Steven Hall's *The Raw Shark Texts*' (Pressman 2009: 468). This is most evident in the nature of the antagonists – the Ludovician shark, a fish that 'lives in streams of information and feeds on human memories' (Panko 2011: 268), and a hostile artificial intelligence, Mycroft Ward – that threaten to destroy the memories of Eric, the protagonist. In trying to reclaim his memories while outrunning the shark, Eric repeatedly encounters clues in print, and is warned that the internet is not a safe place for information. The theme of information and memory loss runs through the book. Julia Panko suggests it is a metaphor for 'how a storage medium preserves its subject' (2011: 265), claiming that *The Raw Shark Texts* 'posits textual inscription as its preferred form of storage. Print itself, in other words,



remains of primary importance' (265). She positions the novel as both a celebration of printed text and a repudiation of digital memory, but also as a demonstration that print will continue to remediate the digital, not just the other way around:

The materiality of the book is important not in the vein of glib arguments about readers being unable to take their Kindles into the bath, but because it can be the means of another kind of record-making, created from the physical traces a reader's body leaves in the process of handling a book, rather than from the reduction of a human being to a data set or literary description (32).

The novel is a bold, at times obtuse, experiment in intermedial fiction that harkens back to modernist responses to media competition. It is, however, more overtly hostile to the new medium – a major theme of *The Raw Shark Texts* is the threat of the digital. The Ludovician shark feeds on memory and information but cannot attack printed text; Mycroft Ward is an electronic intelligence that subsumes the personalities of others. Nevertheless, despite this negative message, when the book was published, its author offered a forum on his web site in which readers could discuss the book (Hall 2011). Skains notes that digital communities curated by the author, can 'activat(e) ... the text of the story as a bridge rather than a barrier' (2010: 104) between the print book and the digital realm, and change the author-reader dynamic to increase reader engagement. However, this does not seem to have been the intention. Rather, it seems that Hall wanted to further his point about the unreliability of the digital.

On the website Hall hinted that additional fragments of the text, not included in the printed version, were hiding in corners of the internet. The forum members shared clues and pages, and the author occasionally teased with hints, effectively making the work a low-interactivity Alternate Reality Game (ARG). Whether anyone found all the clues or whether they were important to the story or not is difficult to say from several years' distance: the forum remains, but its activity has long ceased, and many of the URLs mentioned lie abandoned, or point to sites that have nothing to do with the book. When viewed alongside the book's theme of the problems with digital memory, it seems plausible that this was the author's intention all along: to extend the thematic concern of the novel with the unreliability of the internet as a preserve for human memory.

*The Raw Shark Texts* both critiques and illustrates a key flaw of digital text – what van der Weel refers to as textual instability, and the difficulty in preserving text in a medium that is so unstable (van der Weel 2011). A book is durable – and can always be reprinted when it decays. Digital works, by contrast, need regular maintenance. Thus, while there is little difficulty in reading a hundred-year-old book, there will likely be many difficulties in reading a hundred-year-old computer program. A digital work lasts while the software that runs it is supported, or the operating system, or the hardware. The memory loss Hall critiques in *The Raw Shark Texts* is already evident in many first-generation digital works, which often require outdated proprietary software that cannot be run by modern systems, and are unlikely to have the resources spent on them to make them accessible (Rettberg 2015: 29). Organisations such as the Electronic Literature Organisation continue to save key works, but their resources are limited. Using standardised, non-proprietary languages might help make works last longer, but as can be seen in the seemingly abandoned digital ephemera of *The Raw Shark Texts* this is

not always the case. *The Raw Shark Texts* makes an important point in placing its emphasis on print – it recognises that its digital components will likely not stay around forever – even as it paradoxically allows the digital to enhance the work's point.

*The Raw Shark Texts* is an innovative fictional response to media competition that celebrates print even as it experiments with a foray into the digital. *The Raw Shark Texts* serves as an exemplar of print-digital intermedial fictional form, and a key example of contemporary literary novels responding to media threat by invention and remediation rather than retreat.

### **The author website and the PowerPoint: *A Visit from the Goon Squad***

Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad* responds to the digital medium less polemically than *The Raw Shark Texts*, but nevertheless provokes reflection – initially through its representation of people involved in the music industry – on the changes brought about by the digital. Many of its characters exhibit a nostalgia for the analogue – Bennie, an ageing music producer, reflects that digitisation 'sucked the life out of everything that got smeared through its microscopic mesh' (Egan 2010: 22-23). Sasha's daughter Ally records her thoughts in a PowerPoint slideshow, and recoils when her mother asks why paper isn't good enough (253). But Egan herself seems neutral, as her literary innovations also incorporate digital forms.

The novel is a complete work and needs no digital enhancement to be understood and read, yet the novel engages in formal experiments that remediate digital media. To begin with, the novel has the form of what might be called a social media novel, as its discrete chapters revolve around the friendship networks of two key characters. Moreover, the PowerPoint slideshow forms a key chapter. The slideshow details Ally's observations about her family and her brother's obsession with 'great rock 'n' roll pauses'. To Lincoln, the pauses are significant because they give the impression the song has ended when it hasn't, speaking to the novel's overall themes of ageing, time, and fleeting happiness. The PowerPoint is also presented on the author's website, where it includes audio excerpts of the songs and their pauses. Some years later Egan also published an extension of the book in the form of a story released first on Twitter, then in *The New Yorker* in a story called *Black Box* (2012), which extends the story of a character from *A Visit from the Goon Squad*.

The intermedial component (the PowerPoint chapter) is affecting. It bears much of the book's emotional weight, due largely to the fact that Sasha, Ally's mother, is a recurring character, and her daughter is clearly aware that her marriage is under stress, possibly partly due to her son's disability. The PowerPoint bears resemblance to an old print form, the diary entry – but featuring diagrams and (on the website) sound.

Cowart states that Egan 'finds inspiration in the work of literary parents and grandparents alike' – such as Proust, Eliot and Woolf, as well as postmodernists like Don DeLillo – suggesting that she is fully aware of where her work sits within the pantheon of modern literature, and that the remediation done in the novel is done with significant literary purpose (Cowart 2016: 252). Egan is not simply pining for an analogue past – rather, she 'consciously and effectively opens new possibilities for

literary discourse, not only in her subject matter and style, but by trying out several distributional channels and formats that do not seem to appear in any way nostalgic toward any idea of non-mediated presence' (Bruhn 2016: 112).

Egan seems aware of negative sentiments about the digital medium – as the plot of her narrative, and its drifting and nostalgic characters, makes clear – but her engagement with digital artefacts and culture shows that she recognises that 'no medium today ... seems to do its cultural work in isolation from other media' (Bolter and Grusin 2000: 15). Certainly, there are several notable differences between the way in which Egan chooses to use the digital medium compared to Hall. Egan's digital work (the online PowerPoint chapter and the Twitter story) is simple, requires little maintenance, and could easily be represented in other ways if needed. Following the publication of *Black Box* on Twitter, for example, Egan published the story in full in *The New Yorker*. Similarly, it is likely that the PowerPoint chapter could quite easily be adapted using a different program if required. Egan thus ensures that her digital experiments are less likely to be subjected to the digital forgetting that Hall's work pre-empts, and perhaps also underlines that her novel is not intended as a negative interpretation of the medium.

However, in doing this, Egan also notably precludes a key feature of the digital medium – interactivity. While readers can view her works online, they can't interact beyond playing a few sounds. In Hall's novel, readers could chase down clues online, find websites, click links, and find out more information. This can be in part attributed to the different nature of the narratives. Ryan makes the point that dramatic work without clear goals for its characters, such as Egan's novel, are 'the most difficult' to translate into interactive fiction 'because of its emphasis on the evolution of interpersonal relations' (Ryan 2008: 10). Hall's work, by contrast, is epistemic, requiring the reader to piece knowledge together, and thus better suited to the digital interactive medium (9). It is worth noting that increasingly mature dramatic interactive narratives have begun to appear in contemporary video games, and that these often tend to be driven by epistemic goals. Whether interactivity in dramatic fiction like *A Visit from the Goon Squad* is desirable is another topic, but there is no doubting that Egan's novel offers a subtle but powerful response to the threat of medial competition. She includes digital components sparingly, simply, and effectively. Ryan asserts that stories in multiple mediums allow the extension or enhancement of the storyworld (2016), and Egan's digital enhancements do so here in ways that feel organic and inseparable from the text. Egan demonstrates that a dramatic text can be successfully integrated into a digital experience in ways less antagonistic (as in the case of Hall) than embracing.

## Conclusions

Like modernists and postmodernists, contemporary novelists are being challenged by the new medium of the digital to produce works that continue to inspire engagement with their art form. Coming to terms with the new medium and what it can offer to the old is increasingly important. Digital is dynamic, but temporary and easily forgotten. Print is immovable, but can last centuries. Digital can allow us to hold thousands of books, but only if we have electricity and the right devices. Print requires only sight and literacy, but books take up luggage space. It is not simply a case of transitioning

from one medium to the other. We are in a hybrid print-digital moment, according to Hammond (2016: 206), and for the foreseeable future, print and digital must co-exist.

Intermedial print-digital works of fiction that bridge this divide are rare. They may not end up being an answer to the question: what will become of the novel? Following an initial flurry of interest in mobile applications in the early 2010s, for example, publisher interest seems to have slowed. The cost to produce software is, perhaps, more expensive than the cost of producing a print-based work of fiction (or simply more noticeable), and until authors either become confident with code or a standard, easy-to-use platform becomes ubiquitous, these works are likely to continue to be a niche form. Nor does born-digital fiction seem to be the answer to the narrative problems of our age. While many thought hypertext fiction was going to unseat print, print-born fiction remains the standard. Print continues to offer works of fiction a legitimacy in the eyes of publishers and perhaps the public. The intermedial works analysed in this paper still have a complete print-based fiction as the end goal.

Nevertheless, print novels alone may not be able to represent the mediums and stories of our times. Our communications are multimodal and scattered throughout complicated digital networks. Our lives, daily journeys, intimate thoughts and communications are recorded on server farms in faraway countries and sold to companies for unclear purposes. There is no going back. Mediums like photography, film and television could not be stopped. They became parts of us, remediated and incorporated into human expression and routine. Intermedial print-digital fiction is a positive, inventive and inclusive response to the changes wrought by the digital age. It offers a bridge between the two mediums, acknowledging the attributes of the new while not relinquishing the power of the old. Perhaps novels that combine the best of print and the best of digital can help make sense of our hybrid, media-rich era. The novel will be reshaped, again.

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