

Listurbia: Lists as Narrative

Western Sydney University: Master of Research 2018

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LISTURBIA: Lists as Narrative

A creative and critical project

(by Carly Marie Cappielli 99053680)

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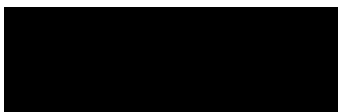
CONTENTS

- 1. CREATIVE PIECE (Listurbia: A Memoir)**
- 2. CRITICAL EXEGESIS (The Narrativity of Literary Lists)**

Printing instructions: to maintain the integrity of the intended design and layout please print pages 1-46 in landscape orientation and pages 47-81 in portrait orientation.

The work presented in this project is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

Signed,

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Carly Marie Cappielli.

Carly Marie Cappielli

16/09/2018

LISTURBIA: A Memoir

A creative piece

FOR KAPPA

Because every Santiago needs her Peralta

PART ONE

My Existential Hurdy-Gurdy

(The part where we get to know each other and you start to wonder where all of this is going)

Common cognitive biases

Pareidolia: a psychological phenomenon in which the mind responds to a stimulus – usually an image or a sound – by perceiving a familiar pattern where none exists.

The von Restorff effect: when multiple homogeneous stimuli are presented, the stimulus that differs from the rest is more likely to be remembered.

The Semmelweis reflex: a metaphor for the reflex-like tendency to reject new evidence or new knowledge because it contradicts established norms, beliefs or paradigms.

The Peltzman effect: the tendency to take greater risks when perceived safety increases.

Parkinson's law of triviality: also known as “bikeshedding,” the argument that members of an organisation give disproportionate weight to trivial issues over more important and more difficult and complex tasks.

Travis Syndrome: overestimating the significance of the present in relation to the past.

The Zeigarnik effect: a psychological phenomenon whereby the unconscious mind continuously reminds the conscious mind about incomplete or interrupted tasks. The effect often results in anxiety and distraction and leads to the endless creation of lists in a futile attempt to convince the unconscious mind that order has been restored.

Ok, so it's 3.45pm on Friday 27th October, and before we get started there are a few things you're going to need to know about me

I've always hated my name. That's probably not a sign of overwhelming emotional stability, I know. But it's the truth. I don't think it's the sort of name that everyone else hates, or if they do they never show it. But it's bad enough that I hate it. And now I can't even tell you what it is. Obviously. But maybe I'll give you a hint later. Maybe.

I write lists. Not just like this – for my job, I mean. Professionally, if that's a thing. I'm a professional list maker. Try not to be too impressed.

I write other things too. Stories, songs, poems. Darker things sometimes. Things I wouldn't want anyone else to read. Or maybe I would.

I'm female. I don't know how else to say that. I don't know any other word for it that doesn't mean something else as well.

I'm female, but whenever I start to write a story, the voice I hear in my head is a guy's. And I don't mean it's just a manly voice either. It's as if there's a man narrating my story but that narrator is still me. Weird, hey?

I'm a westie, if that means anything. I love telling people that, like it gives me some kind of tough-guy street cred or something. Especially when I meet people from the city, or the inner west, or one of the beach suburbs. God, even people from the Hills look a little shakey when I tell them I grew up in the west, like I might suddenly light up a crack pipe or grab their bag or something. Sometimes they just give me that pitying confused smile, the one that says, "I don't understand – you seem like such a nice girl."

Technically I'm an orphan, but I don't know if it counts if your parents died when you were already in your twenties. Probably not.

Technically I'm in my thirties, but I'm pretty sure I don't act my age. I don't know why.

Technically I guess I'm in a relationship. But I live with a guy who mostly doesn't seem to know I exist. Not really. A while ago I was watching this documentary about herd animals and I asked him if he thought we were like a pair of horses or goats or something, just huddling together for protection against predators, but he didn't get it and he asked me if I was high. I don't know if he ever really gets it. But I don't mind, most of the time I like it better this way.

I can recite the alphabet backwards. Honestly. My grandad learned that in the war and he taught my dad and my dad taught me. (You don't need to know that, I just don't get many chances to drop that little nugget into the conversation – it turns out it's not the sort of subject that comes up organically very often!)

I don't look like I should. Not that I'm deformed or disfigured or anything, I just mean my body doesn't suit my mind. It's like my mind is full of all these wild and crazy ideas and thoughts and desires and my body is just so... average. Ordinary. Unremarkable.

Sometimes I hurt people on purpose. Not physically or anything, I just kind of mess with their feelings. I never set out to hurt anyone but that doesn't stop me from hurting them anyway. Even if they're really nice to me. Especially if they're really nice to me. Sometimes I think there is nothing more repulsive than someone who cares too much about you.

Sometimes I feel like I don't make sense. Like there are all these different parts of me and they don't fit together like they should. Like it should be easy to tell someone who you are, to sum yourself up in three words or less, but if anyone was to ask me I wouldn't be able to do it. (Luckily for me, no-one ever asks.)

Sometimes I get so bored I think I'll lose my mind. Sometimes I get so bored I want to.

Oh yeah, and I really tell more lies than I should. Sometimes I just make things up and I don't even really know why. Or maybe I do.

The Top 10 Scariest and Spookiest Places in Western Sydney (as compiled by me for the Halloween edition of Western Sydney Council's Bulletin this week)

10. Studley Park House, Narellan: Two children who died at the property in the 1900s now allegedly haunt this old building, appearing as strange silhouettes.
9. Redbank Range Tunnel, Picton: The site where Emily Bollard lost her life in 1916 after being hit and killed by an oncoming locomotive. She now reportedly haunts the eerie tunnels.
8. Busby High School, Green Valley: According to reports, a girl was killed in one of the classrooms over 20 years ago and can still be heard crying late at night.
7. The Oven Cleaner's House, Minto: The owner of this house worked as a cleaner until he was found dead on the street in front of his property, run over by a heavy vehicle. He now often appears at night, staring out at the street from his kitchen.
6. Liverpool TAFE, Liverpool: Once the site of a state hospital, a morgue and a mental asylum, the ghost of a young girl is often spotted on the campus' K Block.
5. St Bartholomew's Church, Prospect: This old church and cemetery opened in 1841 and were destroyed by fire in 1989, and are now the site of much paranormal activity, including sightings of the ghost of a three-year-old-girl.
4. The Mafia House, Orchard Hills: According to urban legend, this creepy building is haunted by the ghosts of the people executed here by local crime syndicates.
3. Macquarie Fields Railway Station, Macquarie Fields: Late at night, the faint crying of a teenage girl can reportedly be heard at the lonely station.
2. Magic Kingdom Park, Lansvale: Having inherited Luna Park's ill-fated ghost train, the souls of those who died on the ride now haunt the abandoned park.
1. Female Orphan School, Parramatta: A tragic site, the spirits of children who died in the old orphanage now reportedly linger in the hallways and dark corners of the building, accompanied by strange black figures circling outside.

Things that actually scare me (*I ain't afraid of no ghost*) that I think about while sitting on the grass in front of the old sandstone church in Parramatta Mall at midday on Friday, eating warm sushi from a plastic tub and sipping cold cider straight from the bottle

Darkness so dark that I can't tell if my eyes are open or closed

How quiet the house is after I turn off the TV at night

Waking up in the middle of the night and for too many seconds not knowing where I am

Thinking too much about being happy

Thinking too much about being sad

Long-haired babies

Veins

People who don't think about things enough

People who do

Being scared of being scared and wishing there was something better to be scared of

Fluoxetine dreams

Angry black people

When I think about breathing and suddenly feel like I can't

When I look at my hands sometimes and it feels like I'm seeing them from really far away

That some days I can't shake the feeling that I only exist in my mind

To be or not to be: existentialist thoughts about existence (as found and pondered by me on my way home on the 5.47pm train to Blacktown today, Friday 27th October, as we edge closer to the start of the story)

I took a deep breath and listened to the old brag of my heart. I am, I am, I am.

— Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar*

I exist, that is all, and I find it nauseating.

— Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*

It is good to be a cynic — it is better to be a contented cat — and it is best not to exist at all.

— H.P. Lovecraft, *Collected Essays 5: Philosophy, Autobiography and Miscellany*

It's enough for me to be sure that you and I exist at this moment.

— Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

Of course I'll hurt you. Of course you'll hurt me. Of course we will hurt each other. But this is the very condition of existence. To become spring, means accepting the risk of winter. To become presence, means accepting the risk of absence.

— Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Manon, Ballerina*

Indeed, the only truly serious questions are ones that even a child can formulate. Only the most naive of questions are truly serious. They are the questions with no answers. A question with no answer is a barrier that cannot be breached. In other words, it is questions with no answers that set the limit of human possibilities, describe the boundaries of human existence.

— Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*

You can exist without your soul, you know, as long as your brain and heart are still working. But you'll have no sense of self anymore, no memory, no . . . anything. There's no chance at all of recovery. You'll just — exist. As an empty shell. And your soul is gone forever . . . lost.

— J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*

In the wild struggle for existence, we want to have something that endures, and so we fill our minds with rubbish and facts, in the silly hope of keeping our place.

— Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

It was a source of both terror and comfort to me then that I often seemed invisible — incompletely and minimally existent, in fact. It seemed to me that I made no impact on the world, and that in exchange I was privileged to watch it unawares.

— Marilynne Robinson, *Housekeeping*

There will come a time when all of us are dead. All of us. There will come a time when there are no human beings remaining to remember that anyone ever existed or that our species ever did anything. There will be no one left to remember Aristotle or Cleopatra, let alone you. Everything that we did and built and wrote and thought and discovered will be forgotten and all of this will have been for naught. Maybe that time is coming soon and maybe it is millions of years away, but even if we survive the collapse of our sun, we will not survive forever. There was time before organisms experienced consciousness, and there will be time after. And if the inevitability of human oblivion worries you, I encourage you to ignore it. God knows that's what everyone else does.

— John Green, *The Fault in Our Stars*

Human existence basically is—a never to be completed imperfect tense.

— Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*

Back to the start of my existence, things I remember from growing up in the Western Suburbs of Sydney in the 1980s (that I think about on the walk home from Blacktown Station along Kildare Road today, past overgrown lawns and abandoned shopping trolleys and fibro houses that look like loneliness)

I remember walking to the milk bar at the local shops and buying racing cars and milk bottles and red frog lollies for one cent each (back when there were milk bars and local shops and one cent lollies and one cent coins)

I remember wading through the floodwater at lunchtime on a weekday when the Toongabbie Creek broke its banks and flooded our school again (back before they widened the creek bed and cemented the walls and destroyed forever that strange watery magic)

I remember picking lemons from the tree in our backyard and selling them to our neighbours from a washing basket my brothers and sister and I dragged from house to house and feeling like we were walking all day and never making any money (we lived in a tiny cul-de-sac and there weren't very many houses/customers)

I remember the weight of lemons

I remember picnicking with my family in Central Gardens and playing "Spot the Aussie"

I remember Blue Tongue Lizards and homicidal Magpies and heatwave summers

I remember sunburn

I remember school bonfire nights and firecrackers and chasing tiny parachutes and the smell of smoke and sparklers

I remember finding cicada shells

I remember collecting paddle pop sticks

I remember no-one liking a weirdo

I remember bare feet and hot roads and bindiis

I remember a Chinese family buying the takeaway shop on the corner and my dad telling me that Asians can't make hamburgers like the wogs (he was right)

I remember sitting on the family hill at Parramatta Stadium and chanting for the Eels, "Parra! Ch, ch, ch! Parra!"

I remember getting up in the dark every Australia Day morning and going to Parramatta Park to watch the hot air balloons and to eat sausage sandwiches and to listen to songs about convicts and kangaroos and "The Outback"

I remember *Down Under* and *Great Southern Land* and Lionel Long's *Songs of a Sunburnt Country*

I remember believing that Aussie kids were Weet-Bix kids (until I went to New Zealand when I was eight and found out that Kiwi kids were Weet-Bix kids too)

I remember seeing funnel-web spiders in Auntie Heather and Uncle Ron's swimming pool and never wanting to go swimming after that

I remember Uncle Ron dying from AIDS a few years later (but we didn't know that at the time, our parents told us it was lung cancer)

I remember playing outside until the streetlights came on

I remember catching the train into "town" and the smell of doctors' waiting rooms

I remember falling asleep with the sounds of my parents still watching TV in the lounge room

I remember Anita Cobby being raped and murdered in a lonely paddock down the road from my grandparents' house and not being able to stop thinking about what it must have been like to have been so completely alone

That was then, this is now. Things I think of tonight while Scott stares at his phone and I chew my food and we both sit here at the dinner table in silence

Family holidays as a teenager

Every Christmas after you turn ten

Cutting your hair short to look like Audrey Tautou

Microwave dinners (like this one)

Showbags, especially from the Easter Show

Magnetic Mountain on Bowen Mountain Road

The first time you have sex

Drugs

The first time you have sex on drugs

Love

Happiness

Death

Seeing your school friends again as an adult

Sequels, especially those that you've been waiting a long time to read or see

Reunions

Best friends forever

Jumping off the Gap and thinking it will be the rocks or the water that will kill you

(Things that are never what you think they are)

More things I think of while Scott stares at his phone and I chew my food and we both sit here at the dinner table in silence. (Sometimes I think being in a relationship is mostly just eating in silence and waiting for the other person to die)

Things [that] you never see coming:

1. Door to door salespeople
2. Ninjas (allegedly)
3. The bottom of the bottle
4. The death of your first pet
5. The death of your next pet
6. The death of a celebrity you've seen recently in a movie
7. Any death, especially those that follow long illnesses
8. Herpes
9. The kind of sadness that keeps you awake at night
10. The kind of happiness that keeps you awake at night
11. Homesickness on a holiday
12. Holidaysickness when you get home
13. A list ending on an uneven number

Things I used to think about the world (that I think about over the weekend, the last days before our story truly begins)

I used to think that if you lived in a brick house you were rich

I used to think that if you dug really deep you would get to China

I used to think that if you stood on the beach and stared really hard out to sea you could see the back of your head (thanks dad)

I used to think I was psychic (I still do sometimes)

I used to think it was pronounced “supposedly”

I used to think if two people prayed really hard for opposite things to happen, the one God loved most would win

I used to think I would always believe in God

I used to think very tall girls must be sad

I used to think girls called Leslie must be even sadder

I used to think it would be terrible to have sex because you had to take your clothes off (I didn't know what else was involved but I was pretty sure that was the worst of it)

I used to think my parents were the greatest people who ever lived and that they knew everything

I used to think that if you were a good person, things would always just work out ok in the end

I used to think there was such a thing as a good person

I used to think there was such a thing as an ending (in life)

I used to think it would be terrible to live overseas and for everyone on TV to speak in a funny accent

Things I do sometimes that I sometimes wonder if other people do too (that I wonder about over the weekend, the last days before our story truly begins)

Sometimes I like to change my handwriting, like maybe I'll decide to start using dots in between the numbers in dates instead of slashes or something, and then I'll look at it and I'll feel like someone else wrote it.

Sometimes I try to lie really straight in bed – I try but I can never do it, I always feel like my body is twisted one way or the other, I even have to sit up and look down at my legs to check if they're straight and they look ok but they never feel like they are.

Sometimes if someone has a cold I try to catch a cold too, so I can remember that heavy sleepy feeling.

Sometimes I wee in the shower. But everybody does.

Sometimes I try to imagine being someone else. I don't mean emotionally, but what it would be like to see through their physical eye balls, sitting there at their desk or driving their car or something – but if I think about it too long it starts to freak me out so I have to stop.

Sometimes if someone has a cold I try to catch a cold too, so I can take cold and flu tablets and not feel bad about it.

Sometimes I get really happy all of a sudden doing something totally mundane or annoying, like scrubbing the shower or putting petrol in my car or picking up dog poo, and it makes me laugh.

And sometimes I can be in the most amazing place doing the most amazing awesome thing and I still feel sad. Or I feel nothing. Most of the time, feeling nothing is worse.

Falling asleep on Sunday night, my fantasy Nobel Prize for Literature acceptance speech list of inspirations and thank yous (because you should always be prepared for these things)

Jeffrey Eugenides and Sofia Coppola: for *The Virgin Suicides* and the scene where Trip leaves Lux in the park

Melina Marchetta: for making me fall in love with Jacob Coote along with Josie, and letting me live the exquisite heartbreak when it was all over

Bret Easton Ellis: for *Less Than Zero* and being afraid to merge and images that stayed with me for a long time after

S.E. Hinton: for *Ponyboy* and *Sodapop* and staying gold and only having two things on your mind, Paul Newman and a ride home

Joan Lindsay and Peter Weir: for *Miranda St Clair* and dreamy afternoon picnics and the spookiness of stopping clocks

Stephen King and Rob Reiner: for *The Body* and *Stand By Me* and just wanting to go somewhere where nobody knows who you are

Nick Hornby: for *High Fidelity* and life in lists and summing it up that as far as your senses are concerned, some people just feel like home

Chuck Palahniuk: for existential crises and things that can't be named and dangerous writing and questioning everything you think you know

William Goldman and Jorge Luis Borges: for *S. Morgenstern* and *Pierre Menard* and writing about writing about writing

Raymond Queneau: for *Roland Travy* and *Exercises in Style* and the beauty of numbers and the unlimited potentiality of words

And Georges Perec: of course, for games and riddles and puzzles and lists, and for somehow making it all matter

PART TWO

NERAK and Mirrors and Remembering

The Watcher in the Woods

(The part where things start to get weird – if they weren't already)

Strange facts about mirrors

Mirrors do not only reflect images, they can reflect sound as well. Mirrors that reflect sound waves are known as “acoustic mirrors,” and were used in Britain during World War II before the development of radar, to detect certain sound waves coming from enemy aircraft.

Along with conventional and acoustic mirrors, there are also “atomic mirrors” that can reflect matter. An atomic mirror reflects atoms of matter in the same way that a conventional mirror reflects light. They generally use electromagnetic fields to reflect neutral atoms, although some just use silicon water.

It's a misconception that a mirror reverses your image—your reflection is not flipped. What you see is the left-hand side of your face on the left of the mirror, and the right-hand side on the right, giving the illusion that your reflection is reversed. However, a non-reversing mirror, or “true mirror,” has been developed. It allows the user to see their reflection as others actually see them.

Mirrors were once believed to reflect, and even be capable of capturing, souls. This is one reason vampires reportedly cannot see their reflection in mirrors – the other reason being that mirrors were originally made by laying a sheet of glass over silver, the purity of which was naturally abhorrent to the undead.

Mirrors can cause hallucinations. According to reports, it's an old Halloween trick that modern science is starting to investigate. If you sit in a darkened room, about a metre away from a mirror, and gaze at the reflection of your face for about 10 minutes a strange illusion will be conjured up. At first, you will find that there are small distortions in your face in the mirror. Then, gradually, after several minutes, your face will begin to change more dramatically, and look more like a waxwork, like the face doesn't belong to you. Some people see a series of other faces, or even fantastical monsters or beings staring back, and others see animal faces. It is a dissociative state that scientists are studying to try to understand our sense of self and identity. Psychologists believe it could even help patients with schizophrenia, when they are encouraged to confront their “other selves.”

Things I notice through the window of the 7.54am train from Blacktown to Parramatta on Monday 30th October, the morning our story really begins (some of which I notice every morning, some of which I don't)

Miles of empty netball courts surrounded by wire fences and overgrown grass

An abandoned half-built house with broken windows and holes in its walls

Two men in high-vis shirts hiding out the back of some huge factory, sharing a smoke

A new block of units where there used to be a paddock with two grey ponies that I liked to pretend I owned

An Indian supermarket on the corner where our favourite milk bar used to be

A little barber shop with a sign in the window that reads, "Mens Hairdresser! Specialising in lady haircuts!"

A guy sitting in the gutter outside the Pendle Inn and I can't tell if he's sick or sad, but he looks like he's waiting to go in

A freshly painted brick railway wall that reminds me of years spent reading, "Cops killed Tsakos"

An angry looking woman in her dressing gown standing on her back patio and yelling something but I can't make out what

A cubby house built out of left over house bricks and wooden pallets with a drooping blue tarpaulin for a roof

A small brown-skinned boy standing alone next to the tracks near Westmead Hospital and covering his face with his hands as if he's crying but when I look back at him a second later he's gone

Facts about Westmead Children's Hospital (that I find as soon as I get to work, while searching for – but not finding – a way to access a list of current patients, wondering who the little boy was that I caught a glimpse of this morning and whether he has somehow wandered off the hospital grounds, but already starting to feel like something is wrong)

It is "the largest paediatric centre in NSW" and apparently provides excellent care for children from NSW, Australia and across the Pacific Rim.

Established in 1880 with the name The Sydney Hospital for Sick Children, its name was changed to the Royal Alexandra Hospital for Children on 4 January 1904 when King Edward VII granted use of the appellation 'Royal' and his consort, Queen Alexandra, agreed to the use of her name.

Originally based at Glebe Point, it quickly outgrew its small building and relocated in 1906 to Camperdown, where it remained for 89 years until its move to Westmead in 1995 to "better serve the growing region of Western Sydney."

Children with problems such as severe burns, major heart conditions and liver and kidney diseases are referred to The Children's Hospital at Westmead because "it houses leading speciality units within the hospital grounds."

"To aid mindfulness and meditation, the hospital grounds feature a labyrinth that is an exact size replica of the famous 13th century medieval labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral in France."

The hospital grounds include a multi-sensory garden that can only be visited by appointment as it caters for immune-suppressed patients who cannot mix with the general population.

Some of the jacarandas planted in the gardens were grown from seed from an old tree in a well-used courtyard at the hospital's long time Camperdown site and provide a significant historical connection for families and staff. "Some of the trees are family memorials to children who have died during the hospital's history."

Words of wisdom about how to treat mental illness from throughout history (that I remember reading about some time before, while I grip the edge of the basin in the ladies' toilets for support, taking deep breaths and willing the feeling to pass; closing my eyes, desperate to avoid my reflection in the mirror)

6500 BCE: Now hold still. We just need to let those evil spirits out through these teensy tiny holes in your skull...

500s: Now hold still. We just need to fix that brain of yours with these teensy tiny holes in your skull...

1600s: You've clearly got a problem with your humours – if this bloodletting doesn't work we'll try some purging and vomiting.

1700s: Ok, now relax in this lovely ice water bath and then we'll get you some comfy physical restraints and pop you into isolation for a few days.

1917: Let me just give you a shot of malaria...

1930: Schizophrenic? All you need is a good few hours in an insulin-induced coma.

1934: If you don't mind the risk of a fractured spine, perhaps metrazol-induced convulsions will be more your thing...

1937: How do you feel about a smidge of electroconvulsive shock therapy?

1940s: Alrighty then, we're just going to give you this nice soothing lobotomy...

1947: Just try this new medication from Sandoz Laboratories, it's called Delysid, or lysergic acid diethylamide.

1950s: Have you tried Thorazine? It will fix you right up.

1967: All you need is love, love is all you need. But did someone mention LSD?

2000s: Keep calm and carry on.

Later 2000s - present: Keep calm and [insert witty cultural reference here].

12 New Australian Writers You Need To Know (that my boss Judy doesn't need to know I give up on researching myself and borrow from *The Guardian Online* – with a few judicious alterations – and dump in her in-tray at 5.29pm on Monday, desperate to escape the office and get some fresh-ish air, and hoping she doesn't bother reading it too carefully)

1. Peter Polites, for *Down the Hume* and *Public Spaces: Mind Street Virus*
2. Ellen van Neerven, for *Heat and Light*, *Comfort Food* and *Expert*
3. Stefan Stevenson, for *Making Up Stories*
4. Eddie Paterson, for *We Will Not Pay*, *Sheep Poems* and *led zeppelin*
5. Luke Carman, for *An Elegant Young Man*
6. Jane Cook, for *Jimmy's Story*
7. Claire G Coleman, for *Terra Nullius*
8. Claire B Coleman, for *Shadows of Doubts*
9. Shastra Deo, for *The Agonist* and *शुभ्र; or, Lexical Gaps*
10. Edwina Mordake, for *Imaginary Faces*
11. Fury, for *Extracting queerness from a narrative of suffering*, *Fury against the plebiscite* and *Love and Anger: How popular culture sells aggression as romance*
12. Caitlin Maling, for *Conversations I've Never Had*, *Border Crossing* and *Diego's Head*

Comments exchanged between Scott and I at the dinner table on Monday night while I push my overcooked steak around with my fork and wash down mouthfuls of lumpy mashed potato with healthy doses of red wine

What's wrong with you?

Me? Nothing.

.....

Why?

...You seem weird. Wired or something.

I'm fine. Just had a weird day, I guess.

....

I tried to call you.

Huh?

At lunchtime. I tried to call but you didn't answer.

Yeah, I was busy. Sorry.

....

....

.... Oh.

Fucking hell, so you're gonna' be like that then?

Like what, Scott?

Making a thing out of it like always.

....

You know you always do this. Jesus.

....

Fine. Whatever.

God Scott, I didn't even say anything. You were busy, ok. Fine.

....

....

Well what did you want to talk about?

What?

When you called, what did you want to talk about? You never call me during the day.

Oh, nothing. I just... Nothing.

....

....

....

Shit.

What?

It's the 30th today. I just remembered tomorrow is Halloween.

Items that spill out of my upturned handbag and that I pick up off the kitchen floor at 7.41am on Tuesday 31st October, causing me to swear profusely, realising there is no way I'll make it to the station in time to catch the 7.54am train and I'll have to wait for the 8.07am all-stops (a thought that makes me much more uncomfortable than it should and I try not to think about why)

My large black purse with the zipper partly open

A pair of tortoiseshell sunglasses with one arm hanging loose

A white pen with "Stolen from the Albion Hotel" printed along the side

Two black pen lids, chewed on the ends

One almost completely used Scarlett Siren lipstick

Three crumpled ATM receipts

One Libra Ultrathins sanitary pad with the wrapping coming open at the edge

An old shopping list torn down the middle, listing ilk, ggs, occoli, cky tape and ms

\$2.45 in silver coins

Two and a half spearmint Mentos

A tiny gold key to unlock something I can't remember

A small plastic bottle with the last three tablets rolling around inside

And scribbled on the back of one of *Dr Raj Subramanian, Psychiatrist's* business cards, in my own handwriting, a note that reads, "Remember not to forget"

Remember not to forget: Images that bounce past my eyes as I run for the train, my hurried feet slapping an angry beat against the footpath, my mind playing over and over, remember not to forget to remember not to forget to remember...

I see kangaroo fur on the barbed wire at Aunty Carol's property in Marulan at Easter and my sister cutting her finger trying to pull it free

I see my brothers catching flies and rubbing dirty fly germs in their eyes to catch conjunctivitis and get a day off school

I see half-eaten pieces of fairy bread hanging from the clothes line after someone's birthday party (I can't remember whose)

I see Spitfire caterpillars on a gum tree in the playground and the green slime that oozed out when Jonathon Myers stabbed one with a stick

I see hands and faces stained red and purple, eating Mulberries straight from the bush

I see my dad with blood running down his arm after he punched out the broken windscreen of our car (he drove us all the way home from the Gold Coast with no windscreen and wind burning his face and his hand wrapped in a bloody t-shirt)

I see my sister with a bleeding head

I see my brother with a black eye

I see my other brother with a broken arm

I see a bloated orange tabby cat floating in our swimming pool the morning after a storm

And I see a small brown-skinned boy standing alone next to the tracks near Westmead Hospital and covering his face with his hands as if he's crying but when I look back at him a second later he's gone

10 of Sydney's worst train accidents (that I read about on the 8.07am train to Parramatta in an attempt to keep my eyes away from the windows)

1858: Homebush. Two passengers were killed when the open third-class carriages left the rails near Homebush and toppled down an embankment.

1878: Emu Plains. The drivers and firemen on two goods trains were killed, along with a train guard, when the two trains collided head-on.

1920: Hurstville. Five people were killed when a train shunted into the back of a locomotive at Hurstville station.

1947: Sefton. A man was struck and killed by a train near Sefton Station on Christmas Eve, probably crossing the tracks to visit his daughter's home nearby.

1952: Berala. In heavy fog, a passenger train from Bankstown ran into the rear of a crowded suburban train from Liverpool, killing 10 people and injuring 140.

1953: Sydenham. A passenger train travelling to Bankstown ran into the rear of another train travelling to East Hills, killing five and injuring 748.

1965: Liverpool. One person was killed and four injured when a goods train crashed into a passenger train near Liverpool station.

1970: Heathcote. Three people were killed when a driver ran through signals resulting in a rear-end collision at outer suburban Heathcote.

1977: Granville. 83 people were killed in Australia's worst ever rail disaster, when the train from Mt Victoria struck a pylon of Bold Street Bridge, causing a 300 tonne section of the bridge to collapse onto the train.

1989: Wentworthville. In Sydney's first major Tangara train crash, three of a train's eight carriages derailed just before the station. A 41-year-old man had to be cut from the wreckage and died later that day in Westmead Hospital. (A man, I know, not a little boy. But that doesn't stop me staring at my phone until I get off the train at Parramatta and am swallowed up into the safety of the crowd.)

So it's lunchtime on Halloween Tuesday and I'm sitting in a dark corner inside the Commercial Hotel, drinking cheap chardonnay, ignoring a middle aged bartender wearing vampire fangs trying to catch my eye across the room, and googling unsolved cases of children missing in New South Wales

Amanda Robinson: Aged 14. Last seen April 21, 1979 walking along Lake Road, Swansea NSW after attending a school dance the night before and catching a bus to Swansea. She has never been seen again.

Kay Docherty and Toni Cavanagh: Aged 15 and 16. Last seen July 27 1979. The girls left the Cavanagh residence in Martin Street, Warilla at about 7pm. It is believed they intended to make their way to a disco in the Wollongong CBD but have not been seen since.

Bradford Pholi: Aged 10. Last seen December 26, 1982 leaving his home at Dundas to catch a train to Newtown to visit a relative, however he never arrived.

Renee Aiken: Aged 5. Last seen February 16, 1984, she was taken from the family home in Narooma as her brother Brad, aged eight, slept in the same room.

Debbie Marie Ashby: Aged 16. Last seen October 9, 1987 at Campbelltown two days after her 16th birthday. She left her home at 1pm and stated that she was going to a friend's house but has not been seen since.

Helen Karipidis: Aged 10. Last seen December 22, 1988 playing in the playground attached to the unit complex of 454 Illawarra Road, Marrickville.

Quanne Diec. Aged 12. Last seen July 27, 1998, she left her Granville home to catch a train from Clyde to Strathfield to go to school but never arrived. A man has now been charged and will stand trial for her murder.

Rista Chathavixay: Aged 16. Last seen March 24, 2009 by her boyfriend at his home in Mount Pritchard. It is hoped she simply ran away following an argument with her parents, but there are grave fears for her safety.

What I do for the rest of Tuesday 31st October (with the faces of missing children running through my mind and wondering where they are and how and why and if those kids found cicada shells or collected paddle pop sticks or thought that they were Weet-Bix Kids too)

I stumble back to the office, realising I probably drank more at lunch than I should have and pretending to myself that this comes as some kind of surprise.

I stare at my computer screen for a few hours and type random letters onto a page to look like I'm inoafjsopfjpaofhofhapoc.

I tell Judy I'll definitely see her at the Halloween drinks thing tonight, but I know I definitely won't.

I sneak out through the fire exit and half-fall down the stairs while the rest of the office are busy getting excited and dressing up and popping any-excuse-will-do champagne.

I arrive home to an empty house, walking up behind three small zombies waiting expectantly at my door (I don't have any treats so I give them a ten dollar note and a \$30 movie voucher that I'm pretty sure has expired).

I pour a glass of wine and slump onto the lounge.

I try to call Scott but his phone rings out.

I pour some more wine.

I start to type a message to Scott but I realise I have nothing to say.

Before I go to bed I stand in half-darkness in the bathroom and stare at my reflection in the mirror. I stare so long my face starts to melt in front of me and I'm about to look away when something shifts in the darkness behind me and it makes me jump so hard that my bare feet slip on the smooth tiles and my hand sends the toothbrush holder flying so that it hits the wall with a bang and smashes into tiny ceramic pieces all over the floor.

PART THREE

Hoggle and Labyrinth and Life Inside the Oubliette

(The part where everything falls apart – if it hasn't already)

Strange facts about memory

Doorways destroy memory: In one common but mysterious short-term memory failure, people find themselves in a room, without remembering why they ended up there. Researchers say the very act of walking through a doorway may hint to the brain that a new scene has started and it should store prior memories away, thereby causing strange memory lapses.

Mind-erasing activities: Although rare, certain activities can result in a temporary memory loss and brain fog, called transient global amnesia. People with transient global amnesia suffer no serious side effects, and the memory problems usually disappear in a few hours. But it's not clear how this happens, and brain scans of patients who have had this type of amnesia show no signs of damage to the brain, or signs of stroke.

Memories can live on, even if we can't access them: In 2013, researchers described a woman who had musical hallucinations of a song that she didn't recognize, but that others did. The scientists said the woman had likely known the song at some point but had forgotten it. The case raises the question of what happens to forgotten memories and suggests that memories can be stored in some form in the brain that renders them accessible, and yet unrecognizable.

Brains may be programmed to forget infancy: Most people don't recall any memories from their earliest years of life, usually before about age 3. Scientists previously thought that early memories were there, but children didn't have the language skills to verbalize them. However, recent research shows that children do make memories during their early years, but the developing brain – growing exponentially and generating cells – deliberately wipes out stored memories.

Memories are selective and changeable: Traumatic events, for instance, may be forgotten as a survival method for dealing with stress – either the stress at the time of the event or the stress involved in remembering the event afterwards – but these memories often return later, either through deliberate recall or involuntary remembering of part or all of the traumatic event.

Emerging from blackness with a violent dry-mouthed gasp, things I do and think and feel and remember as I wake up on Wednesday morning 1st November

I open my eyes and for a few moments I don't remember where I am.

I feel the cushion under my cheek and realise I must have fallen asleep on the lounge.

I sit up and stretch my legs and try to remember what happened after I fell in the bathroom the night before.

I rub my eyes and my forehead and think about throwing up.

I rise slowly from the couch and hit an empty vodka bottle with my foot.

I remember the vodka.

I drop back down and seriously think about vomiting.

I stand again and stagger to the bathroom.

I see the scattered remains of what used to be the toothbrush holder and it makes me shudder.

Shaking violently, I grab hold of the toilet bowl and vomit into it.

I wash my face and take three Panadols and wonder if I might have something stronger.

I stand in front of the mirror and try to look at my face but it makes me nervous and jumpy and I have to look away.

I find my phone on the floor in the hall and see the time and sigh.

When I go to the bedroom to look, Scott is not there, but his side of the bed is still dented in and feels warm and I wonder how he didn't wake me up and what time he got home last night and where he was and how long ago he left.

Text messages I send and receive on the 8.38am train as I lean my face against the wall of the carriage and take deep breaths through my nose, trying to stop my head from spinning and fighting against the increasingly likely need to vomit yet again

To *Judy Work*: So sorry Judy! Alarm didn't go off, on my way now. Be there in 15.

To *Scott*: Hello?

From *Judy Work*: Again?

From *Scott*:

To *Judy Work*: Sorry. It won't happen again.

From *Judy Work*: Ok, again. You will just need to stay back to make up the time.

To *Scott*: Seriously? WTF?

To *Judy Work*: Of course. Thanks Judy.

From *Scott*:

To *Scott*: Scott, I don't know what you think I've done or why you're so pissed off, but you can't just ignore me.

From *Scott*:

To *Scott*: Fine. Fuck you!

To *Priya*: Hey Priya, what are you up to tonight? Need to talk. Xx

From *Priya*: Hey hun, you ok?

To *Priya*: Yeah, I'm ok. Just need to catch up. Albion?

From *Priya*: Of course, babe. Meet you there after work. XOXO

The list I compile for Judy today, Wednesday 1st November (that I think about while sitting on the floor of the ladies' room with my back against the cubicle door, my head pounding, and my knees dirty and shaking): Words You Can Make Rhyme With Vomiting (if you really try)

rocketing

...

...

pocketing

compositing

...

hobbling

...

toppling

tobogganing

...

...

...

videoconferencing

...

vodka

The list I actually submit to Judy today (that I sneak onto her desk while she's busy terrorising the work-experience kid at the photocopier), keen to get to the pub to meet Priya, and hoping to avoid any questions but figuring the chances are pretty slim that Judy will even read what's on the list: 20 Movies That Were Shot in the Greater Western Suburbs

1. On Our Selection (1920): Baulkham Hills
2. Smiley (1956): Camden
3. They're a Weird Mob (1966): Greenacre, Punchbowl
4. The FJ Holden (1977): Bankstown, Greenacre, Punchbowl
5. Puberty Blues (1981): Bankstown
6. Muriel's Wedding (1994): Eastwood, Parramatta
7. Paradise Road (1997): Marrickville
8. Imaginings (1999): Blacktown, Lalor Park, Auburn
9. Red Planet (2000): Homebush Bay, Prospect
10. Le Faux (2002): Merrylands
11. Oyster Farmer (2004): Hawkesbury River
12. Little Fish (2005): Bankstown, Bexley North, Cabramatta, Fairfield
13. Clubland (2007): Bankstown, Marrickville
14. The Black Balloon (2008): Holsworthy, Epping, Granville, Richmond
15. Cedar Boys (2009): Bankstown, Punchbowl, St Marys, Wentworthville
16. The Combination (2009): Bankstown, Granville, Guildford, Parramatta
17. X-Men Origins: Wolverine (2009): Camden
18. The Invention (2011): Doonside, Rosehill, Parramatta
19. Penultimate (2012): Prospect, Silverdale, Wetherill Park
20. The Wolverine (2013): Picton

Things my friend Priya says to me amongst the noise of the beer garden at the Albion Hotel on Wednesday night, leaning forward in anticipation and grabbing my arm with excitement the way she always does (and making me wish, the way she always does, that I was somehow more like her)

Wow, that is totally freaky, you poor thing. I'd be scared too. Remember that time I saw some kind of spirit or ghost or something in the carpark at Westfields after I saw *The Sixth Sense*? I was shitting myself!

Yeah, true. But you know, they say they won't hurt you or anything. Maybe this kid just wants you to do something for him, you know? Like pass on some message or something.

And what, you think Scott doesn't get it?

Well maybe you should try talking to him about it. Maybe he'll surprise you or something, I don't know.

Yeah, I'll have another one too. I'll get them.

Oh my god, the new bartender is so friggin' hot. Did you see him? I wish Indian guys looked like him. Anyway, you know what you need to do? Go see a psychic. They'll be able to help for sure. My cousin went to this really awesome one in Bankstown when she thought her husband was cheating on her, and the woman was amazing, knew everything. Fully legit. It's like a hundred and fifty bucks or something, but my cousin said it was totally worth it.

Yeah, the one who just got divorced.

Awesome. I'll find out her name and text it to you. It was just above one of the shops on Chapel Road, you know, on the Viet side, not the Leb side.

Yeah, it sounds like he's being a bit of a dick. Has he still not texted you back?

I guess it's really up to you, I mean I don't even know the guy. How long have you two been together now? And you know, I've still never met him.

Thoughts that keep me awake on Wednesday night, staring at a familiar smudge on the ceiling, listening to distant sirens and barking dogs and every now and then the low rumble of a passing car

That Priya must be wrong, I'm sure she and Scott have met. But for some reason I can't seem to remember a time.

That Scott is sleeping in the spare room and evidently still not talking to me. But since he hardly talks to me even when he is talking to me, I suppose it shouldn't matter.

That maybe it doesn't matter, maybe nothing does.

That I really need to dust the ceiling fan.

That "dust" is a weird word to describe *removing* dust. You don't say, "I need to dirt the house"...

That maybe I should call Dr Subramanian.

That I'll call him tomorrow.

That it's been a long time and I know what he's going to say (that he can't help me if I won't help myself).

That maybe I won't call him tomorrow.

That maybe I should take a sleeping pill or a few more shots of vodka.

Or both.

That I need to just relax.

Relax, damn it!

That there's something I was about to remember, some name on the tip of my tongue.

**Things I do between 6.35am and 5.13pm on Thursday 2nd November
(determined to get to the bottom of things and desperate to feel better and
deciding not to think about what will happen if I can't)**

I wake up to the radio announcing that today is the birthday of Marie Antoinette, white supremacist David Eden Lane, and cricketer Mitchell Johnson (in that order).

I catch the early all-stops train to Parramatta and stare out the window, this time hoping (and not hoping) to catch a glimpse of the little boy I saw near the tracks, but if he's there I don't see him.

I find Dr Subramanian's card in my handbag and think about calling him, then I turn the card over and read my writing on the back again and I chuck the card back in my bag.

I read the text from Priya with the number for her cousin's psychic and think about not calling her, then I think about all the things I can't explain lately and the feeling that something is wrong and that something makes me think I've felt this feeling before, and I make the call.

I take a deep breath and immediately wonder if I've made a mistake.

I work on a list for the Council's webpage, titled *The Top 10 Signs You're Doing Life Wrong and How We Can Help You Fix Things* (thanks Judy).

I finally hear from Scott who says we need to talk and I tell him ok.

I leave work early and catch the train to Bankstown and walk along Chapel Road until I find the green door between the Vietnamese butcher and the two-dollar shop, with the wooden sign above it that reads, "Mona-Rose: Psychic, Mystic and Medium. By Appointment Only."

I go in.

People I read about in a big leather album with *Testimonials* embossed on the cover, while breathing incense and pretending to sip a cup of pungent herbal tea, sitting alone on a low purple couch inside the dimly lit waiting room of "Mona-Rose: Psychic, Mystic and Medium. By Appointment Only" (wondering what I'm doing here and whether I even believe in psychics and if maybe this is all just a bad idea)

A woman calling herself "Your Little Lizzie" who wrote a tear-stained letter thanking Mona-Rose for checking in on her grandfather and for confirming that yes, she indeed had been his favourite, and what's more, she always would be (a nice touch, I thought. Nice work, Mona-Rose)

A man named Dave M who had been feeling pretty guilty about having cheated on his now-dead wife until Mona-Rose managed to get in touch with the duped deceased and report back that, as luck would have it, all had now been forgiven (another winner)

Five pages of excited thank you notes crediting Mona-Rose for her life-changing predictions, with one particularly gushing report describing Mona-Rose's uncanny knack for predicting exactly how this particular woman's relationship with her abusive drug dealer boyfriend would turn out (not well, as it happens)

A child's pencil drawing depicting a man and three small children standing outside a church, while a woman with angel wings floats above them and appears to be dropping pieces of glitter down from the sky, with the words, "Thank you Mona-R" scribbled across the top of the page

Pages and pages of families in various stages of grief and bereavement, all "eternally grateful" for the chance to speak to their loved ones one last time through Mona-Rose

And a family from Liverpool whose youngest daughter was killed in an accident when she was just seven years old that suddenly feels so familiar to me that I gasp out loud, spill my tea, drop the book and run out trembling into the darkness

Words that suddenly fill my head, bursting through the door from some dark room, somewhere in the back of my mind (as I rush back down Chapel Road towards the station, pushing past Thursday night shoppers and whinging children and teenage couples still in school uniforms holding hands)

Looking up there's always sky. Rest your head, I'll take you high.

We won't fade into darkness, won't let you fade into darkness.

Why worry now, you'll be safe, hold my hand just in case.

And we won't fade into darkness, fade into darkness.

No, we won't fade into darkness, fade into darkness.

This world can seem cold and grey.

But you and I are here today.

Nothing to fear but fear itself.

We'll be OK, just keep the faith.

And we won't fade into darkness, fade into darkness.

No, we won't fade into darkness, fade into darkness.

Whoa, whoa.

Whoa.

Whoa.

And we won't fade into darkness, whoa.

Fade into darkness, whoa.

No, we won't fade into darkness.

– *Tim Bergling aka Avicii (RIP)*

Desperate to get home and feeling myself starting to dissolve, questions that demand answers (that I know I don't want to ask, on my way home on the train, standing in the middle of the chatting crowd, clutching the rail for support, shaking and sweating and feeling like I'm watching myself from somewhere far away)

Why?

Why did that family's story hit me like a slap across the face?

I've never even met those people, why should I care so much?

Was it just the loss of a child? So suddenly? So tragically?

Or was there something else? Something deeper, darker, closer to home?

Why did it feel so familiar?

Why does it still?

I need to stop thinking about it, what else can I think about?

Scott, he should be home by now, I wonder what he wants to say?

I wonder where he went the other night?

I wonder where he ever goes?

Shit, I can't stop shaking and why do I feel like this feeling has something to do with the little boy near the train tracks?

And why do I feel like he has something to do with me?

What could have happened to him and who is he and how can I find out?

And why do I get the feeling that I somehow already know?

Finding my front door unlocked and hearing unexpected familiar voices, things my sister and niece say to me when I finally reach home on Thursday night and wonder why the hell they are there and wish they weren't and then wish I was the sort of person who wished they were, and then decide to try really hard to be that sort of person but then start to try and realise it's just too hard and go back to being myself and really needing some time to think (as Scott walks past me down the hall and disappears into the bedroom, shooting me a meaningful look as he closes the door, in case I'd forgotten he wanted to talk)

My sister Allie (confused): You said tonight, didn't you?

My niece Tamara (laughing): Mum, she forgot again!

Allie (reproachful – to Tamara): Tamara Marie!

Allie (apologetic – to me): Sorry, she's at that age. Of course you remembered we were coming... (less certain) You did remember?

Allie (to me): I get it, my boss used to make me stay back all the time too. It's different once you have children though, then everything is about them of course.

Allie (to me): Plus, it must be hard having to catch public transport everywhere?

Allie (to me): A few more months? That's not so bad. Once you can drive again things should be a lot easier. Maybe we'll see more of you?

Allie (to me): Oh, don't worry.

Tamara (to Allie): I told you she wouldn't cook anything, Mum. She doesn't know how.

Tamara (to me): I can teach you if you want? I'm really good.

Allie (to me): Don't listen to your niece, we already ate dinner. Honestly.

Allie: *clearing her throat*

Tamara: *humming a song I haven't heard before*

Tamara (to Allie): I'm bored. Mum, where's your bag? Mum. Mum!

Allie (to me): How's – oh sorry, what was that?

Allie (cheerfully – to me): Yeah, work's good, thanks. Same old, you know...

Allie (to me): Oh, I saw Sarah Patterson at school last week, her daughter Alexis is a year above Tamara you know, and oh my god, she looks so old now...

Allie (to me): ...Patricia and Lisa were saying...

Allie (to me): ...but then I saw it on special at Myer...

Allie (to anyone): ...so...

Allie (sincerely – to me): So, have you been seeing your... your specialist? Dr Raj, or what was his name again?

Tamara (not looking up from her ipad): Who's Dr Submarine?

Allie (apologetic – to me): I know, it's nothing to be ashamed of, I just didn't...

Allie (annoyed – to me): Fine, I'm sorry.

Allie (sighing, frustrated): Why do you always do that?

Allie (to me): Push me away like that. Shut me out.

Allie (to Tamara): Let's go, sweetheart.

Allie (angry, getting up to leave – to me): People want to love you, you know. Even if you don't know or don't care. But sometimes it's just too hard.

Tamara (walking past me out the door, still staring at her ipad): Bye.

Allie (turning to look at me in the doorway): We want to love you, you know? All of us, we do. But sometimes you just make it too painful.

Painful things (that I think about after they leave, standing at the kitchen sink drinking wine from the bottle and staring past my vague reflection in the window and out into the blackness beyond, since Scott is already asleep)

When you have to walk too far in new shoes

When you accidentally scratch your sunburn

When you've been swimming at the pools or the beach and the wind blows in your wet ears and makes them ache

When you find out that Santa Claus isn't real

Or the Easter Bunny or the Tooth Fairy

Or Heaven or Hell

When you hear your own voice on your voicemail recording

When you're in some training session for work and you have to introduce yourself to the group with your name and three fun facts about yourself

When you're in high school and you see your parents' dry-cleaning business fail

When your dad gets drunk and forgets to pick you up from drama class

When your mum threatens to leave

When she stays

When you hurt someone you care about the first time (it hurts less the next time)

When someone you care about hurts you the first time (it hurts less the next time)

When you realise the people you love most in the world will never be the people you thought or hoped they were

When you realise they feel the same way about you

At 12.47am on Friday 3rd November, knowing I need to go to bed but opening my second bottle of chardonnay instead and starting to feel like things are going to be ok, bits of words and phrases and the voices that spoke them so long before, that suddenly flood my mind (as I sit curled up on the couch with the bottle in my hand, closing my eyes and listening to the voices drift past)

My brother Josh whispering to me: Glen saw Angela Anderson's undies at little lunch and now they have to get married.

My brother Glen telling me: He's lying, I hate Angela Anderson!

My best friend in primary school, Ashley Davidson, telling me: You know, if you look at the sun you will go blind, but if you eat lots of carrots you can see in the dark.

My sister Allie yelling: I hate you! I hate you! I hate you!

Me yelling back: I hate you more! I hate you more! I hate you more!

My grandfather singing to me: *Oh my darling, oh my darling...*

My uncle Dan laughing at me: There was a little girl, who had a little curl, right in the middle of her forehead. When she was good, she was very, very good, but when she was bad she was horrid!

My mum calling: Come inside for dinner (a hundred different times).

My dad saying: I don't care who started it, I'll finish it (a thousand different times).

My parents together telling me: We love you, sweetheart, but we just don't know what to do with you.

And my own voice speaking a name that zaps me like an electric shock through my mind and snaps the face of the boy near the train tracks into view: Samuel Arthur Latu.

Things I suddenly remember about Samuel Latu

I remember that Samuel Latu and his family lived two doors down from us, in a noisy crowded fibro house with cars parked across the lawn, lounges on the front patio, and a smiling stream of massive terrifying Islanders constantly coming and going.

...

...

I remember meeting Samuel when he must have been four years old and I was five, throwing rocks at birds in his front yard.

I remember that Samuel was the youngest of six kids, four boys and two girls, and that he was small and skinny and serious and weird.

Almost as weird as me.

...

I remember when everyone used to ignore him and we'd run away together and play near the creek, catching lizards until it was almost dark

I remember that sometimes we squashed the lizards.

I remember that sometimes Samuel scared me.

...

I remember Samuel wanted to be just like his big brother, Junior.

..

I remember that for one whole summer Samuel was my best friend and we did everything together.

I remember that it only lasted one summer.

PART FOUR

Atreyu and Bastian and Remembering

the Fight Against the Nothing

(The part where things start to get darker – if they weren't already)

Facts about Schizotypy

The concept of Schizotypy suggests personality traits exist on a spectrum which ranges from healthy to schizophrenic, and which it proposes as the continuum which links OCD to schizophrenia. This idea is opposed to a categorical view of psychosis, wherein psychosis is considered a particular (usually pathological) state of mind, which the person either has or does not have.

Individuals with schizotypal personality traits demonstrate a tendency for cognitive disorganisation, that is, a tendency for thoughts to become derailed, disorganised or tangential.

Schizotypal personality traits are also often associated with impulsive nonconformity, that is, the disposition to unstable mood and behaviour particularly with regard to rules and social conventions.

People with schizotypal personality traits exhibit a disposition to have unusual perceptual and other cognitive experiences, such as hallucinations, and magical or superstitious beliefs and interpretations of events.

Those with schizotypal personality traits also exhibit a tendency to introverted, emotionally flat and asocial behaviour, associated with a deficiency in the ability to feel pleasure from social and physical stimulation.

There is now evidence to suggest that parenting styles, early separation, trauma or maltreatment (especially early childhood neglect) can lead to the development of schizotypal traits. Neglect or abuse, family dysfunction, or trauma during childhood may increase the risk of developing schizotypal personality disorder. Over time, children normally learn to interpret social cues and respond appropriately but for unknown reasons this process does not work well for people with this disorder.

Ok, so it's 4.56am on Friday 3rd November and before we go any further there are probably a few more things you're going to need to know about me

I'm not ok. Not really. Not right now. I need you to know I know that. And it's not like I don't care or don't want to fix it. God, I spend most of my day just trying not to fall apart. Just focusing on breathing, or being, or putting one pathetic foot in front of the other and moving around from place to place. And hoping no one else can tell.

I'm a terrible citizen. I forget to vote, lie on surveys, stand in the middle of the escalator, and throw those non-recyclable coffee cups into the recycling bin (although, in my defence, for a long time I thought those things were recyclable). If video cassette tapes were still a thing, I wouldn't rewind them.

I told everyone I lost my driver's licence for speeding, but I didn't. I've never lost my licence for anything, I've hardly ever even been booked. It's just that I started having these moments where I would be driving along somewhere really familiar, somewhere I've driven a hundred times before, and I'd suddenly have no idea where I was. I'd feel so weird and spaced-out and it scared me so much I decided to stop driving for a while. Plus, I hated people asking for lifts.

I keep secrets. Ones that belong to me, ones that don't. I've been keeping some secrets so long I don't even remember what they are.

For a long time, I didn't dream. I know they say you always dream, every night, and that sometimes you just don't remember it, but I don't believe that. Not me. For a long time, every night was filled with pure empty blackness. Silent, still. Sometimes I miss that. Sometimes I don't.

I write lists because I have to. I mean constantly, obsessively, compulsively. I can't not write them. I make lists like some people breathe. Sometimes I feel like the lists make me.

I want to be a writer. Still. One day. Once this whole list thing is over.

I don't feel the way I should. Emotionally, I mean. Like someone will say or do something that I know should really upset me, but it won't. And then something really insignificant will happen, like I'll be watching TV and one of those desperately sad clips of a kid with their face pressed up against a rainy window and an acoustic remix of some '80s rock ballad playing in the background will come on and I'll get really emotional, but just when I'm really getting into it, the logo will appear and I'll realise it's just an ad for NRMA or National Australia Bank or something and I'll get so mad I want to scream.

I never cry. Not really, not anymore. Apparently, I used to cry a lot when I was little but one day I just stopped and I haven't cried properly since. But sometimes I wish I could. Sometimes I feel like my body must miss it.

I used to keep things. Personal things, private things – lists, stories, drawings. I kept them in a big wooden chest and I would take them out sometimes and touch them and read them and remember.

Sometimes I forget things. Insignificant important things. Things other people get really pissed if you forget. I don't mean birthdays or anniversaries or anything like that (although I forget those too) but tiny existential things. Like which brother likes Mars Bars and which one likes Snickers, or how my sister likes her tea, or who I watched that episode of *Game of Thrones* with and what part made them squirm the most. The things that make them them. The things that make them matter.

Sometimes, lately, I remember things. Sometimes. Some things. Or some parts of things. Like things about Samuel Latu, things I haven't thought about for years. Like the day we found a stray kitten and hid it in a box in my dad's shed and I don't remember what happened, but I remember the sound of it crying and the strange expression on Samuel's face when it was dead.

Sometimes I don't think anyone really knows who I am.

Sometimes that's the only thing that's ok.

Things Scott says to me at 5.28am, after appearing silently in the doorway behind me and watching me for I don't know how long, while I scour the internet for references to Samuel Latu without finding anything (running out of time before I have to get ready for work and desperate to find what I'm looking for and thinking that I really don't have time for Scott's bullshit right now)

I know you think you don't have time for my bullshit right now, but too bad. We need to talk.

...

What the fuck are you doing anyway? Do you know what time it is?

...

(Seeing the empty bottles and glasses strewn across the desk) Jesus. You've been up all night?

...

(Sighing) We were supposed to talk.

...

(Sitting on the floor next to my bookcase and leaning his head back against the wall) You're doing it again, you know.

...

What you always do. Making problems in your head, pretending I'm the fucking bad guy.

...

You're acting crazy, you know that, yeah?

...

I bet you're not taking your meds either, are you?

...

(Sighing again, softer) I know, it's fucked. It's not fair. And you know I hate being hard on you, but who else is gonna do it? Someone has to say something. Do something.

...

You know we can't help you if you won't help yourself.

...

Of course I sound like him. It's all I heard you talk about for years. Dr Subramanian this, Dr S that.

...

That's bullshit and you know it. You were doing fine before, don't you remember?

...

What do you mean? You do remember. You remember everything, same as me.

...

Yeah, about that kid too. You remember what happened to him, I know you do.

...

What are you talking about?

...

Just give it up. Why do you think you keep seeing him? I know all about Samuel, and so do you.

With daylight creeping in through the bathroom window, things I know that I know and things I know that I don't, that I think about with Scott's words still ringing in my ears and my tongue still stale from wine and lack of sleep (sitting on the floor of the shower, closing my eyes and hugging my legs and letting steaming hot water pour onto my head and through my hair and down over my shoulders and onto my feet)

I know that I know what eigengrau is and also how to pronounce it

I know that I don't know why it scares me

I know that I know how to touch my nose with my tongue

I know that I don't know if it's really genetic

I know that I know all the words to the second verse of the national anthem

I know that I don't know if anybody cares

I know that I know how to do an inside-out braid

I know that I don't know how to ice skate

I know that I know *how* to do the splits, but I still can't make my body do them

I know that I don't know much

I know that (most of the time) I know enough

I know that I don't know what the hell Scott is on about

I know that I know he's an arsehole

I know that I don't know what happened to Samuel Latu or why Scott thinks that I do

I know that I know that I'm almost certain that that's true

Waking abruptly to the sound of my phone ringing and a torrent of icy water, messages I find on my phone at 8.57am on Friday morning, after I shut off the shower, grab a towel and drag my shivering body off the floor (wondering how long I've been asleep and how long I've been cold and thankful – and not thankful – that I didn't just fall onto the floor and drown)

From Judy (voicemail): It's almost half past, I guess you must be on your way. I thought you might get here early today to prepare... Never mind. I will see you when you get here.

From Judy (text): On your way? ETA?

From Priya (text): FML! Early shift today, so bored. Did you get my text? How did it go??? I'm dying to find out! Dying, get it?! XOXO

From Allie (voicemail): I just wanted to say sorry about last night. Really, I didn't want things to go like that, I just... I miss you. Call me when you get a chance. If you want to. Ok, bye.

From Scott (text): Remember?

From Optus (text): Your latest bill for account number is 87763662152 is now 5 days overdue. Please make payment online at www.optus.com.au/myaccount or call 1300309309.

From Judy (voicemail): So it appears you won't be joining us for our team meeting this morning. Or bringing croissants as you so generously promised to do! This is not acceptable. Call me. As soon as possible. Call me.

From Scott (voicemail): I know this shit makes you uncomfortable, but you've just gotta deal with it. You know you do. We agreed last time – you promised you'd remember not to forget.

Uncomfortable things that occur to me as I sit on my front porch waiting for my Uber ride to work, trying (and failing) to shake Scott's words out of my ears and trying (and failing) not to gag as I force down a couple of Sudafed tablets without any water, as my drunken buzz starts to fade, and I try to think of what bottle shops we'll pass on the way and if any of them will be open

Polyester underwear in summer

Pap smears (and saying "pap smears")

Thinking you might be pregnant and being *pretty* sure who to tell

When someone calls you by the wrong name but you don't bother correcting them and then someone else comes along and calls you by your actual name and then the first person just looks at you as if you betrayed them and there's nothing you can say

When the only things you need to buy are condoms and bananas

Running into a co-worker outside of work

Saying goodbye to someone you bumped into at the shops and then both walking off the same way and you have to make that weird post-farewell small talk

When your boyfriend tells you that something you've done is "demasculating" him and you have to resist the urge to correct him

When you stay at someone's house and they don't use a top sheet, only a doona, and it's too hot to keep the doona on you but too cold to keep it off

When you're singing along to the radio and then someone you're with starts singing along too and you're stuck in an awkward duet

When you're waiting for your Uber but it's taking ages and you're busting to wee but you're too scared to go back inside in case it arrives and when the Uber driver eventually pulls up he sees you with your pants around your ankles, squatting in the bushes in your front yard

Noteworthy things that happen on my Uber ride to work on Friday morning while I try to think of what to tell Judy when I get there and whether there is any way she'll believe me and what will happen if she doesn't and if I even care

My Uber driver introduces himself as Mahesh and tells me not to worry about him seeing me weeing, but something about the way he smiles when he says it makes me worry more.

Starting to feel sick, I swallow two nausea tablets and almost throw up and get the taste of bile in my mouth and wash it down with some of Mahesh's water.

I close my eyes for a moment and don't feel like I fall asleep but when I open my eyes again we've left the backstreets and are travelling along the highway.

Seeing the doors are open at Dan Murphy's and ignoring the way Mahesh looks at me when I tell him to make a u-turn at the lights, I lie that I need to grab some drinks for a work function, run inside, grab two bottles of chardonnay and a six pack of premixed vodka, and open one of the vodkas and gulp it down.

Driving past a primary school I spot a small dark-skinned boy sitting alone on a low wall and I gasp and hold my breath until his mum appears next to him and he looks up at her and smiles.

I get a text message from Scott telling me he's had enough and if I won't deal with what happened to Samuel, he's just gonna deal with it himself, and I'm not sure what he means but I know it can't be good.

A dog runs out in front of the car and Mahesh has to slam on his brakes and even though I'm sure we don't hit him, he yelps and runs off limping.

Feeling my stomach churn and rummaging for some coins to use in the vending machine at work, my fingers find something small and hard and uneven and I look in my hand at the tiny gold key from the bottom of my bag and I suddenly remember what it unlocks and how I can find out about Samuel and I yell at Mahesh to turn the car around.

Sitting on the floor with a bottle of chardonnay and my last three Valium pills for support, and dragging the old wooden chest out from under my bed and unlocking the little gold padlock and coughing from the dust, some of the souvenirs, mementos and keepsakes that I find inside, and that I put aside in my search for the thing that will tell me what I've forgotten I know about Samuel: the list I wrote for Dr S after our first meeting all those years ago, the list that started it all

A panoramic photo of a group of smiling twenty-somethings dressed up and standing at the lookout above Barcelona, with the city spread out below and *Contiki, Europe 2006* printed across the top

The paper program from my university graduation in 2005 with circles around the names *Brown, Mr Eric, Khatri, Miss Priya, and Turner, Miss Rachael*

A list dated 1st January 2005: New Year's Resolutions

A white plastic hospital band with my surname and my first initial

A list dated 1st January 2003: New Year's Resolutions

A list dated 12th November 2002: Things Dr Subramanian Says I Must Do (Again)

An oversized 21st birthday card signed all over with names of people I mostly don't remember

A list dated 9th April 2001: To Do Today (with only one of the items ticked off)

A list dated 3rd December 2000: Thoughts on the End of the World

An entry ticket to the baseball at Blacktown Olympic Centre on 20th September 2000

An unfilled prescription for Risperidone

A list dated 28th October 1999: 10 Things I Hate About You, Ben Jenkins

A bent cardboard Guinness coaster with *Happy 18th Love U (and you suck!) Love A & L xxx* written on the back

A Great Barrier Reef postcard from my grandparents written in my grandmother's tiny cursive lettering, telling us about the beautiful weather and amazing tropical fish and the lovely little Aboriginal girl they met on the boat with her white parents (she was adopted of course), who had the most wonderful manners

A list dated 2nd August 1997: People to Kill (hahaha... ???)

A list dated 15th December 1996: Worst Lies I've Ever Been Told

A list dated 14th December 1996: Forgotten Things (with no items listed)

A list dated 13th December 1996: Things to do For Dr S in the Holidays

A list dated 11th December 1996: Dr S's Holiday Survival List, woo hoo...

My 1996 school photo with me looking bored on the end of the front row and a moustache and glasses drawn on Mr Roberts and Louise and Leanna Cooper who used to play violin and sing and tap dance and do ballet and always starred in our high school musicals

A crumpled and water-stained ticket from the Bon Jovi concert at Eastern Creek dated 18th November 1995

A list dated 1st January 1995: To Do This Year

A paper program for The Toongabbie & Seven Hills Drama Club's 1994 production of *Fiddler on the Roof* with my name listed as the understudy to the actor playing Shprintze as well as stagehand number 3

A song written in purple pen titled *Secrets*, that begins, "If I told you, could I hold you, would I fold you, into pieces in my hands..."

A little plastic duck that my friends and I found at school and named Phoenix the Memorial River Duck

A list dated 3rd April 1993: My Favourite Lists

A list dated 8th March 1993: Things No-one Understands

A partly-ripped ticket to *Strictly Ballroom* at the Roxy Movie Theatre in Parramatta, dated 3rd September 1992

A list dated 4th January 1991: Why I Should Not Be Scared of the War

A (bad) pencil drawing of Johnny Depp as Edward Scissorhands

A typed report dated 29th April 1990 titled *IQ Test Results for Juvenile*

A polaroid photograph of me and my sister dressed in matching pink coats, holding Cabbage Patch Dolls and scowling at the camera, with *Winter 1989* written across the bottom

A list dated 7th November 1989: Fun Things I do at Lunch Time with Ashley and Claire and Rebecca S if She is Nice

A plastic flag on a broken stick from World Expo '88

A list dated 19th February 1988: Things I Can Do When I'm Sad

A list dated 27th January 1988: Things I Can Do When I'm Angry

A crayon drawing on the thick white paper Dr S used to use, of a child sitting alone under a tree, while two taller people who look like parents and three other children sit smiling inside a house

A folded piece of yellowed paper and on it a pencil drawing of a brown boy with glasses holding a flower with "Goodbye Samuel" written across the bottom

And as my head starts to swim and my eyes start to close, an old Sony Walkman with a cracked cover on the front and a dirty label on the back declaring it *Property of Junior Latu*

The list of lists I realise I don't find inside the chest when I wake up on my bedroom floor in the dark, hours later, and wonder how long I've been out and slowly remember what I was doing and why I'm on the floor in the dust, looking at things I haven't thought about for years

Things I Can Tell Dr S That He Promises He Won't Tell Anyone Else (and when I don't find this list inside the chest I know right away that Scott has taken it and I'm shot through with fear, knowing immediately why he has taken it and what he wants to do with it and where he's going to go)

Knowing I have to find Scott and stop him before it's too late, and shaking so violently I can hardly turn the key to start the engine of my car and slowly crawl through the back streets towards my old house, things I watch myself do

I watch myself put the car into gear and lurch unsteadily away from the curb

I watch myself lean forward in my seat, my sweaty palms pressed hard against the wheel

I watch myself stop suddenly at the sight of a man about to cross the road, but I look again and it's only a crooked tree

I watch myself close my eyes for a moment and tell myself to breathe, just breathe

I watch myself turn carefully into my old street and start shaking even more

I watch myself stop for a moment outside my old house and notice how different it looks now with the pretty gardens out the front and the new veranda and a stranger's shiny cars in the driveway

I watch myself drive a few metres more and pull up quietly in front of Samuel's family's home

I watch myself take a swig from the bottle in my lap

I watch myself climb out of the little car, close the door, and look up at the darkened house

I watch myself stand for a moment next to the car and just stare at the familiar house

Suddenly aware of being alone (and not alone), I watch myself pick up an empty beer bottle from the gutter and strike it against the road

Hearing Scott's voice break through the blackness, I watch my fingers close tighter around the broken bottle as I step silently across the lawn

Following Scott's voice through the darkness and creeping slowly through the side gate of Samuel Latu's house (like I've done so many times before) items Scott reads from the list that started it all: Things I can tell Dr S That He Promises He Won't Tell Anyone Else

"Sometimes I hate my mum. I know I am not supposed to hate her but I do anyway sometimes. She's mean and she hates me too anyway."

"Sometimes I pretend to eat my peas but I really just throw them under the table near my brothers so it looks like Josh or Glen chucked them on the floor."

"I cut Allie's hair once when she was sleeping but when my mum asked if I did it I pretended to cry and said Allie must have done it in her sleep and why does everyone always blame me, and I got so upset that everyone believed me."

"I can read people's minds, but only sometimes."

"Sometimes I pretend that I don't have any brothers or sisters and I tell people they all died. I don't know why."

"My mum said I have to see a doctor because I don't know why I'm sad, but I do."

"Sometimes I have bad dreams and I tell mum they are about monsters but they are really about Samuel."

"Nobody knows Samuel liked to steal things. Or that he hurt me sometimes. Or that he scared me."

"Nobody knows sometimes I hurt him too. Sometimes I had to."

"Nobody knows I made Samuel chase me over the train tracks even though I knew I shouldn't and I thought it was funny and I didn't stop even when he started crying, even when he fell."

"Nobody knows he asked me to help him get up but I didn't."

"Sometimes I think he fell down on purpose anyway just to get me into trouble but it didn't work."

"Nobody knows what happened."

"Nobody knows that I'm a murderer and I killed Samuel Arthur Latu."

Things that are happening while Scott reads the list that started it all: Things I Can Tell Dr S That He Promises He Won't Tell Anyone Else

As soon as Scott reads the first words I'm remembering being a child and writing it all and how the list will end.

And I'm remembering other things – things I don't want to remember, things I do. Me and Samuel playing in his front yard, finding bird eggs in the park, whispering secrets behind the back shed, sneaking through the fence to the train tracks.

And I'm seeing the day it happened – Samuel's face, his anger, his desperation, Samuel running and falling, his terror, his tears.

And I'm living it again – excited and running and screaming and crying, and the horror, the adrenaline, the anger, the fear.

And Scott is reading on and on, louder and louder, and I keep looking at Samuel's house, terrified his family are going to hear him and finally know what I did.

And now I'm lunging at Scott, grabbing at his hands, desperate to take the list from him, desperate to make him stop.

And he just keeps on reading and I can't stand to hear it and I grab his hand and try to pull the list from his grip but my eyes are blurry and my feet are wobbly and I just can't seem to get it and I grab his arm instead and slice the broken bottle across his arm.

And I'm seeing Samuel crying as he runs and tripping and falling and now the train hitting him hard and his tiny body flying and I'm closing my eyes and I'm cutting and cutting and cutting.

And then the back door is opening and flooding the yard with light and a voice I've never heard before is yelling at me to stop and I look around and I'm alone and it's my own hand holding the tattered list and my wrist is torn and blood is pouring out and I'm dropping the broken bottle and watching the world fade to black and am out before I hit the ground.

PART FIVE

Endings and Awakenings and a Tribute to Oliver Sacks

(The part where some things end and some things begin again)

Common causes of hallucinations

Sleep-wake Transitions: Hypnagogic hallucinations are those that occur just before falling asleep, usually with no emotional involvement, while hypnopompic hallucinations occur while waking up and usually demand an emotional response, primarily that of fear.

Bereavement: Losing a loved one such as a long-term partner can trigger hallucinations of the deceased, ranging from brief visual or auditory encounters to fully-fledged conversations and interactions. These hallucinations can function as an adaptive technique during the grieving period.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): Auditory hallucinations can be a result of past traumatic experiences. These are often seen in combat veterans and children who have been sexually abused, as well as others who have experienced significant trauma at some stage.

Delirium: A confused, excited state commonly brought on by high fever, infections, alcohol withdrawal (delirium tremens), and stimulant intoxication (cocaine, methamphetamine), delirious individuals often experience visual hallucinations. In children with high fever, these are often associated with sleep.

Psychoactive substance intoxication: Psychoactive substances like mescaline, psilocybin, dimethyltryptamine (DMT), lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), cocaine, and amphetamine can cause hallucinations. Alcohol-induced hallucinations can also occur while or after consuming excessive alcohol and are often accompanied by mood swings and delusions.

Psychosis: Hallucinations are a primary criterion in the diagnosis of various psychotic disorders – mental disorders that disconnect you from reality. Most psychotic hallucinations are auditory but they can also be visual or involve any of the other senses, and can also be polymodal, affecting several senses at once. Psychotic disorders that cause hallucinations include schizophrenia, psychotic depression, borderline personality disorder, and (less commonly) severe anxiety.

The first things I notice before I open my eyes again (a while before, as it turns out)

...

...

I notice there are people around me, talking in low voices like at the cinema when you're watching the previews and waiting for the movie to start

...

...

...

I notice a dull ache in my head and a strange pressure in my wrist

...

...

...

I notice the air moving softly past my arms, like from an open window or a low fan

...

...

...

I notice how dry my mouth is and I try to think about the last time I had something to drink

...

...

...

I notice gentle light on my eyelids and know it must be daytime, but I'm so tired

...

...

...

I notice how strange my pillow feels under my head

...

...

...

I notice a wave of heat spread through my body and into my face and out through my feet

...

...

...

And as my mind drifts off again, I imagine noticing the distinct sweet smell of Miss Dior, my mum's all-time favourite perfume

Alright, so I've gotta admit, not much happens for the next few weeks and months while I'm recovering in hospital (first at Westmead and then later at Bungarribee "Mental" House for obvious reasons), not for me anyway, only this

I open my eyes properly for the first time again at 5.18am on Tuesday 7th November and the first thing I see is my mum curled up uncomfortably on the vinyl armchair next to my bed and I don't know if it's the drugs or the pain or whatever (or just guilt at the fact that I've been telling everyone my parents have been dead for years, I don't really know why) but for the first time in as long as I can remember I start to truly cry.

About that, I cry a lot. Heaps, an embarrassing amount. It's like I start and then I just can't stop. Like when you don't wee for ages and you don't even need to, but as soon as you break the seal it's all over, and you just can't stop peeing. It's just like that, but with tears (not wee).

Although, while we're on the subject, I pee a lot too. Apparently, it's one of the charming side effects of the cocktail of medications they've got me on. But it's not so bad, I kind of like weeing.

The first thing my mum says to me is that she's sorry and that she knew I was unwell and that she kept telling my dad it wasn't good for me to be all alone like that, all that time. And she looks so sad I want to tell her I wasn't alone, not really, that Scott was with me and even though I know now he wasn't real, he was always real to me. I want to tell her that, but I don't.

But I think about that a lot. Reality. What it is, what it means. Sometimes I think about it too much and I just have to shrug the thought out of my head and think about something peaceful like puppies or waterfalls or butterflies instead.

I freak out a lot too, despite the drugs, maybe because of them. Sometimes I'm ok and then suddenly I'm not. But they tell me that it's normal, that it's ok. Yeah, I guess it's ok for them.

I find out the Latu family moved to Queensland ages ago, and Mr Yang who found me has lived in that house for years. He doesn't know why they moved, but I do.

A few times my whole family come to visit at the same time and even though it's weird and awkward and strained, there's something about being in a room full of faces you know, lying there in a hospital gown, that feels real and honest and ok.

Dr S comes to visit a lot too and asks me how I'm feeling and laughs when I roll my eyes and tells me it's good to see me anyway, despite the circumstances, and that sometimes we have to hit rock-bottom and survive before we can learn to heal, and I try not to roll my eyes again.

Priya visits me most days and bursts into tears the first time she sees the bandage on my wrist and again when she finds out about Scott, but I tell her it's ok and soon she is back to her usual self, chattering on about people I know and people I don't, and I don't know why (maybe it's the drugs or the pain or whatever) but it suddenly makes me grateful to have a friend like her, who never makes me talk when I don't want to, or make more sense than I can, and never demands anything from me and never needs me to be anything more than myself.

I know it's crazy but at Dr Subramanian's suggestion, I write a letter to Samuel's parents, telling them how I stole Junior's Walkman and that I knew how scared Samuel would be that I'd break it and how I made him chase me across the train tracks and how I watched him fall and when the train came and hit him, how I ran home alone and hid the Walkman and never told anyone, but I knew it was my fault. And how desperately sorry I was and am and always will be. I'm too scared to ask them if they think they can ever forgive me. I keep the letter in my diary, but I tell myself that one day I might even send it.

Oh yeah, and I finally say goodbye to Scott. I'm half asleep one afternoon and I see his face outside my window, looking in at me, making sure I'm ok. And even though I know he's not really there, there's something nice about seeing his face, and he smiles and waves and fades away and I know I'm not going to see him again.

And all the while, all around me, nurses go on nursing, and doctors go on treating, and people go on loving and hurting, and all around me life and lives just go on.

Ok, so it's my last day here at Bungarabee House on Monday 12th February and Dr Subramanian asked me to write this list: Advice I would give my past or future self (and even though I'm pretty sure I'm not in any position to give anyone advice – even me – I'm sitting here in the morning sunshine with the wind brushing lightly past my face and the familiar sounds of suburbia in my ears and the scent of the last days of summer in my nose, and it makes me think that even though most days are still going to be hard or painful or frightening, there will be moments on those days when, maybe just for a few seconds, things are going to be ok, I'm going to be ok, and all I can really do is hang onto those moments when they come, and when they go again just know that there are going to be more, that there have to be, and so I write this list)

Just know that life is shit sometimes. Really, truly shit. And hard and sad and painful. Just accept that and move on. And know that that's ok.

And know that some days will be worse than others. Much worse. Some days will feel like they're going to kill you. Like they're going to rip you apart from within. But they won't. Trust me on this, they won't.

Some days, on the bad days, don't try to fight it. Just lay on your bed and listen to *Fade into You* (the Bjorn and Tom Bailey version) on repeat and sing along and cry if you can and wallow in the beauty of the words and the exquisite agony of looking at yourself and seeing nothing, of looking at yourself and seeing the truth.

Remember your sunglasses – when you live in the west you just know you're going to be driving into the sun. Accept *that* and move on.

About that, never wear sunglasses indoors or at night. No-one's future is that bright.

At least once a year, climb the Rooty Hill and roll down it. Just for fun, just because you can. (I dare you to do this and not smile.)

Never buy the extended warranty – it doesn't exist.

Use your indicators. Please. Be the change you want to see in the world.

Remember the only thing you have to fear is fear itself (alright, so I stole that one but it's just such good advice and truer for most people than they realise).

Make time to drive up to Moonrise and to remember going parking there as a teenager and to look out across the rooftops towards the city, sparkling in the east, and breathe.

Drink less wine.

Drink less vodka.

Just drink less.

If you can't see the ocean from where you're sitting, don't order the seafood platter.

Remember that there are no endings, not in life, not really. Only lists and stories have endings, but even those are only make-believe, changing, temporary.

And just know that maybe you'll never really be able to explain exactly who you are, or how, or why. Maybe you'll never really know for sure what made you who you are or if you could have been different. Or if you would want to be. Maybe you'll never really come to terms with the crisis or the magic of your own existence. But maybe that's the point. Maybe it's not about solving the mystery or curing the disorder or putting the pieces back together again, but about the tiny bits of life we find in the midst of it all. Bits we might never have noticed otherwise. Bits most people never get to see. And maybe that's enough. Or maybe one day it can be. Yeah, maybe.

Floss.

Question your teaspoons.

Remember nothing good ever happens at a hotel-motel.

And write your story, even if you think you don't have one. You do. If you don't know where to begin, you can start by making a list.

EPILOGUE

20. *The Mezzanine* by Nicholas Baker
19. *Death with Interruptions* by José Saramago
18. *Cathedral* by Raymond Carver
17. *Notable American Women* by Ben Marcus
16. *Naïve. Super* by Erlend Loe
15. *Ask the Dust* by John Fante
14. *Norwegian Wood* by Haruki Murakami
13. *Wittgenstein's Mistress* by David Markson
12. *Love Is a Mix Tape* by Rob Sheffield
11. *Hopscotch* by Julio Cortázar
10. *Tuesdays with Morrie* by Mitch Albom
9. *Gadsby* by Ernest Vincent Wright
8. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon
7. *C* by Tom McCarthy
6. *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* by Eimear McBride
5. *Scorch Atlas* by Blake Butler
4. *The Unfortunates* by B.S. Johnson
3. *So Long, See You Tomorrow* by William Maxwell
2. *Turtles All the Way Down* by John Green
1. *Listurbia: A Memoir* by C.C. Kadigan

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For Page 3: Top 10 Spookiest Places in Western Sydney

“Friday the 13th: Sydney’s most haunted places” by staff writers, The Daily Telegraph Online (13 Nov 2015)

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For Page 22: Words that suddenly fill my head

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For Page 26: Facts about Schizotypy

“Schizotypal Personality Disorder” by Roxanne Dryden-Edwards MD www.medicinenet.com

For Page 35: Common causes of hallucinations

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For Page 38: Advice I would give my past or future self

Words taken from *Fade Into You* (feat. Tom Bailey) written by David Roback and Hope Sandoval and performed by Bjonr (originally performed by Mazzy Star)

“Floss” is a reference to the song *Everybody's Free (To Wear Sunscreen)* released by Baz Luhrmann and written by Mary Schmich, Nigel Swanston, and Tim Cox based on "Advice, like youth, probably just wasted on the young" (commonly called “Wear Sunscreen”) written by Mary Schmich, an article published in the Chicago Tribune in 1997

“Question your teaspoons” is a reference to Georges Perec’s “Approaches to What?” from *L’Infra-ordinaire* (1989) in *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* (2008) edited and translated by John Sturrock, Penguin Classics: London and New York

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The Narrativity of Literary Lists

A critical exegesis

Introduction

In the ongoing struggle to define and delineate narrative, the literary list presents a problem. The theoretical scholarship on literary lists has focused predominantly on lists *in* literature and has largely accepted the perspective of classical narratology, positioning these lists in opposition to narrative in general, and to the narratives within which they are embedded, in particular. However, lists *as* literature have remained largely unexamined, and it is in relation to these literary lists that the problem of definition arises. If the opposition of lists to narrative is to be accepted, what is to be made of texts such as Joe Brainard's *I Remember*, where the text itself is "merely" one long list? Does such an opposition relegate Brainard's text – and others like it – to the realm of the strictly non-narrative? And what implications does this idea have for real-world readers of the text, in their interpretation and interaction with the work? This exegesis will analyse the content and structure of Brainard's text in respect to the work's operation along the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes, and its presentation and negotiation of temporal, informative and textual gaps. Drawing predominantly on contributions from narratology and literary theory, it will consider Brainard's literary list in light of traditional and recent concepts of narrative. Rather than confirming the distinction between the literary list and narrative, analysis of Brainard's work reveals distinctive narrative elements emerging from its purportedly non-narrative form, raising the question of how concrete and useful a distinction between lists and narrative really is, and opening up possibilities for future explorations of literary lists in both theory and creative practice.

A word on narrative and narratology

It is necessary here to clarify exactly what is meant by the term, *narrative*, or more correctly, which specific definition or definitions of narrative will be adopted in this exegesis. This is no simple task. Narratologists have been defining and redefining this concept – in agreement and contestation – for decades. As Marie-Laure Ryan declares, "few words have enjoyed so much use and suffered so much

abuse as *narrative* and its partial synonym, *story*" (22). Emerging from the structuralist work of Roland Barthes and Tzvetan Todorov, through A.J. Greimas, Claude Bremond, Gérard Genette, Mieke Bal, Seymour Chatman, Gerald Prince and others, classical narratology has offered many variations on what counts as narrative and what does not.¹ All of these definitions have centred on narrative as the representation of a sequence of related events, but with significant disagreement over the way in which each constituent part of this concept should be understood, as well as what – if any – additional criteria are required. In *Boundaries of Narrative*, Genette – whom Prince refers to in *Classical and/or Postclassical Narratology* as “probably the most influential of all narratologists” (115) – together with Ann LeVonnas defines narrative as simply “the representation of a real or fictitious event or series of events by language, and more specifically by written language” (1). Prince himself extends Genette’s definition, describing narrative as “the representation of at least two real or fictive events in a time sequence, neither of which presupposes or entails the other” (*Narratology* 4). Building on these definitions even further, Bal insists that narratives are not only sequential in nature but must also include a causal relationship between their represented events, as well as an element of change and an experiencing subject. Bal argues that narrative is defined by “the transition from one state to another state, caused or experienced by actors” (189). Problematising matters further, a range of theories have emerged in response to the narrow structuralism of the classical tradition. Designated *post classical narratology* or *narratologies*, these theories offer criteria for defining narrative that are much more dependent on context, historicity and reader response. Meanwhile, further recent developments in the field of narratology – the work of Monika Fludernik, for instance, on *experientiality* as a defining aspect of narrative, which will be discussed later in this exegesis, and the debates over *natural* versus *unnatural* narratology – suggest that the goal of arriving at a single, satisfactory definition of narrative is still no closer to being realised.²

Given the range of meanings associated with the term narrative, rather than selecting one conceptual definition over others, this exegesis will approach narrative as a contested term, and will consider the question of the narrativity of literary lists in relation to some of the major traditional

and recent theories. However, despite the extensive range of attempts at defining narrative, none of these high-level definitions solves the complication that lies at the heart of defining narrative in actual usage, which is the variety of ways in which the term may be utilized. Narrative, as a term, is both specific and general, common-sense and technical. Narrative refers to both the story being told and the way in which it is told. Narrative is both the end goal and the means of getting there. (In its broader cognitive sense, narrative also refers to the notion that perception and therefore “reality” depend on the interaction and interpretation of narratives of various kinds: as Peter Brooks explains, “narrative is one of the large categories or systems of understanding that we use in our negotiations with reality” (xi) and Barthes states, “narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself” (79).) To complicate matters further, the term narrative refers also to particular elements within a text; for example, when the narrative elements of a novel are contrasted to its dialogue. Thankfully, narratology is not blind to this ambiguity, and in order to cope with the depth and breadth of meanings, provides some useful tools for distinguishing between these closely related concepts. Following the Russian Formalists and their distinction between *fabula* (what is being told) and *sjuzhet* (how it is being told), both classical and postclassical narratologists have formulated specific terms to address this conceptual divide. For simplicity, this exegesis will utilise the terms *story (fabula)* to refer to the underlying fictional world being represented, and *discourse (sjuzhet)* to refer to the way in which words and other linguistic devices are employed in order to create this representation. The term *narrative* itself will continue to be applied in its everyday usage, in reference to texts considered as *story-telling texts*, and when commenting on scholarship that has employed narrative in this way. It is worth noting, however, that while these terms prove useful resources for discussing narrative, they by no means settle the debate around the meaning or boundaries of narrative as a concept. The definition of narrative is not fixed, but rather exists as part of an ongoing conversation, and it is to this ongoing conversation around the limits of narrative – and the implications this has for literary lists – that I will now add.

Existing scholarship on literary lists

Like the concept of narrative, the humble list has generated a greater level of scholarly interest than the simplicity of its form would suggest. According to Robert E. Belknap, “our fascination with lists is old and continuing” (xii). However, the major scholarship on literary lists has focused on lists *in* literature, examining – and extending – the distinction between such lists and the narratives (in the non-technical sense) within which these lists are found. Since lists often appear to be incongruous elements within otherwise narrative texts, it would seem justified to draw a distinction between a literary list and the surrounding narrative. Taking Georges Perec’s *Life A User’s Manual* as an example, there is an obvious and common-sense difference between the list of items on top of the bookcase in Hutting’s studio, for instance – twenty-two lines of items ranging from “large vases” to “three fine alabaster pyramids” to “a terrifyingly complicated monkey wrench no doubt intended to be merely the ultimate in corkscrews” (38) – and the relatively straightforward telling of Remi Rorschach’s life story, that follows shortly afterwards (42). This difference can be identified in both the visual form of the text and the reader’s experience of what is written. There is a discernible shift in the momentum of the text; a shift felt distinctly in the act of reading. Brian Richardson recognises this shift, arguing that “lists generally produce a much more pronounced break than, say, descriptive passages, and nearly always force a break in the transmission of the narrative proper” (“Modern Fiction” 328). The break in narrative that Richardson describes, and the issue of momentum to which this break relates, will be discussed in greater detail later in this exegesis in relation to the two axes of language. For now, it will suffice to say that in relation to lists within literature, the more distinctive the list employed, the more apparently obvious and common-sense the distinction between literary lists and narrative would appear.

This distinction between lists and narrative is taken up by Francis Spufford in his exploration of lists in literature throughout history, from the work of Homer up until the book’s publication in 1989. Spufford accepts the opposition of lists to narrative and identifies the central difference of the two

forms as one related to cohesion and unity. Spufford argues that lists are essentially opposed to the sequentiality and connectedness of narrative, stating that, “lists refuse the connecting powers of language, in favour of a sequence of disconnected elements. In a list, almost everything that makes writing interesting to read seems inevitably to be excluded” (1). Spufford’s argument is that writing – or, presumably, *good* writing – is enjoyable and interesting to read specifically due to its ability to unite and create meaning through linguistic connections, but the exact method by which this unity and cohesion are achieved is not fully articulated or – importantly – questioned. He focuses instead on the nature of lists themselves, arguing that, “lists, however, divide, or leave divided, the things they include. They offer only the relationship of accumulation” (1). Contrasting what he sees as the non-progressive, fragmented movement of lists to the forward momentum of narrative, Spufford likens the momentum of literary lists to that of dancing, claiming that lists are “merely dances-on-the-spot, when the reader may expect the interesting forward movement of a narrative or a line of reflection” (1). For Spufford, while lists within literature may be revealing and worthy of examination, they are fundamentally non-narrative; incapable of generating the cohesion or sense of momentum necessary for carrying a narrative forward.

Following Spufford, Belknap builds on the idea of the list as analogous to a dance-on-the-spot, agreeing with Richardson in his positioning of the list as a break in narrative momentum. Belknap argues that, “literary lists afford us particular attractions and pleasures. The rhythm of the repetition interrupts the forward drive of the text, and for a moment we are invited to dance” (xiii). It is interesting (and indicative of the prevalence of spatial and physical metaphors in narrative analysis) that both Spufford and Belknap resort to metaphors of physical movement in conceptualising the differences between literary lists and narrative.³ Like Spufford before him, Belknap envisages literary lists as a form of play – both with words and with the reader – that is distinct from the direct, forward-moving work of a text’s narrative. And as is the case with Spufford’s work, it is beyond the scope of Belknap’s text to attempt any serious challenge to received notions of what constitutes narrative progression, or to pose any meaningful questions around the limits or limitations of

narrative. Celebrating the diversity and verbal richness of the lists of the American Renaissance, Belknap does offer a playful theoretical understanding of narrative in general “as an elaborate listing of a series of events” (3), but does not consider the reverse concept; the idea that the list in literature may be conceived of as a – perhaps less elaborate, but no less sophisticated – itemised sequence of narrative elements. If narratives can be broken down into lists, cannot lists be aggregated into sequential narratives?

Within the existing scholarship on literary lists, there do exist theorists who come closer to answering this question in the affirmative, although their interest remains focused on lists within literature – as opposed to lists *as* literature. Richardson, for example, accepts the distinction between lists and what he calls “narrative proper”, but concedes that “this separation, though often stark, is not always maintained” (“Modern Fiction” 328) and that “we find a continuous dialectic between the list and narrative proper, as narrative seems to produce a kind of center of gravity that regularly promises to turn non-narrative elements into narratives themselves” (339). Patti White offers a similar reading in her work on systems theory as it relates to literary texts. In reference to the lists in Don DeLillo’s *White Noise*, White states that:

It seems to me, however, more likely that the lists in fact serve simultaneous functions: as noise, disrupting the narrative and problematizing the narrative situation, and as information, capable of being read within the context of the surrounding episode and at the same time modelling for the reader a metasystemic recycling program that turns noise into narrative. (15)

White’s argument posits a dual nature for lists within narrative texts; simultaneously outside of the narrative and contributing to and commenting on the text’s story. Eva von Contzen’s recent work on literary lists contributes to this conception of lists in literature. Arguing on the one hand that lists “provide a means of pushing the boundaries of narration” (“Limits of Narration” 241) and on the other that “the list as a form is not at all or only very loosely ‘narrative’” (“Experience” 315), von Contzen captures the uncertainty of the status of literary lists, particularly as this relates to evolving

concepts of narrative. But perhaps the argument that comes closest to the one I intend to present here can be found in the work of Stephen A. Barney, who identifies lists as non-narrative, but concedes that the distinction may, in fact, prove to be less than straightforward. Barney describes literary lists as “intruders” that “potentially can react with the narrative that encloses [them]” (190) but finds a case for the connection between lists and narrative in the form of the itinerary. Barney argues that the itinerary provides an intimate link with narrative; explaining that lists of actions and of places to be visited “form a borderline between the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic – they are half story, half list” (202). If the itinerary – as a specific subclass of list – contains syntagmatic potential, perhaps this notion can be extended to lists of other forms, and particularly to literary lists where they operate *as* literature. It is to this distinction between the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic, to the differentiation of description and narration, that I shall now turn.

The paradigmatic becoming syntagmatic

The apparent difference between literary lists and narrative can be conceptualised in terms of the two axes of language: the vertical, paradigmatic axis and the horizontal, syntagmatic axis. The vertical axis is the axis of selection, where a word (or other linguistic unit) is chosen from all other possible words that could fulfil the same grammatical function. The horizontal axis is the axis of combination in which sequences of words are created through syntactically meaningful ordering. Roman Jakobson introduced the concept of these two linguistic axes, labelling these the metaphoric (paradigmatic) and metonymic (syntagmatic) poles (90), and arguing that “for poetry, metaphor, and for prose, metonymy is the line of least resistance” (96). Jakobson’s schematic division can be applied to the distinction between lists and narrative, with the former occupying the same position as poetry and the latter the same position as prose. Clarifying the distinction between prose – of which narrative is an example – and lists in these terms, Chris Baldick explains that, “prose has as its minimum requirement some degree of continuous coherence beyond that of a mere list” (294).

Narratology has traditionally accepted this division and – for the most part – positioned lists as paradigmatic. Literary lists are likened to description, with a defining logic of metaphor or similarity rather than of sequence or causality. Barney identifies the similarity between lists and what he sees as other non-narrative elements, such as extensive description and digressions, arguing that “lists resemble other intruders in stories” that “break the narrative thread” (190). Taking a similar position yet recognising the ways in which this division is now being – and should be – challenged, von Contzen argues that “in narratological debates, lists are frequently mentioned in the context of description” (“Limits of Narration” 245), and that lists and narrative “are then regarded as two poles on a continuum”, however these two poles, “may verge on one another to a greater or lesser degree” (246). Ross Chambers likewise contrasts lists and description to narrative, invoking Jakobson’s terms to oppose paradigmatic lists to syntagmatic narrative, but argues for the tendency of the syntagmatic to move towards the paradigmatic, noting “syntagmatic narrative structure’s inevitable embrace of the much looser form of cohesion that is the paradigmatic” (2). Joe Brainard’s *I Remember* demonstrates the convergence of these two axes – albeit in the opposite direction to that identified by Chambers – as the paradigmatic evolves into the syntagmatic. This literary list reveals an underlying sequentiality emerging through three categories of connection considered alien to the paradigmatic form: temporality, causality and experientiality. Following a brief introduction to the text in question, each of these three aspects shall be discussed in turn.

Upon initial inspection, Brainard’s *I Remember* presents itself as unproblematically paradigmatic. The book is a list: a work consisting entirely of a series of personal recollections, each introduced with the phrase, “I remember”. Some entries are short (“I remember canasta” (13), “I remember picnics” (138)), some are much longer (“I remember riding in a bus downtown one day, in Tulsa...” continuing for 26 lines (16-17)) but the connection between each item initially presents itself as simply the randomness of recollection and mental association. The form of the text suggests an absence of any sequence connecting the items on the list, whether in the temporal or the causal sense. Reinforcing this idea is the fact that the 1975 book now known as *I Remember* is the result of combining three

earlier works published individually as *I Remember* (1970), *More I Remember* (1972) and *More I Remember More* (1973). Rather than joining the three works end-to-end, Brainard produced the complete work by splicing and reshuffling his previous texts, fitting items together to form a new list with a new order and new associations and juxtapositions. A complete work consisting of entire previous texts, reshuffled and pasted together, would appear to resist the coherent sequentiality demanded of the syntagmatic axis (although many postmodern and experimental writers, particularly those working in such media as collage and pastiche, may vehemently disagree, and perhaps rightly so). Its creation intimates an undermining of the basic sense of meaningful ordering – what Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan refers to as “the two main principles of combination” of events in narrative, “temporal succession and causality” (17) – that forms a fundamental requirement of narrative. However, under analysis, this literary list reveals a level of connectedness that defies its relegation to the paradigmatic, as temporal, causal and experiential sequencing project the vertical stack of words out along the horizontal axis.

Unlike a true linguistic paradigm, in which items exist simultaneously as alternative options suspended in time and connected only by similarity, in *I Remember*, a temporal sequence emerges that challenges its definition as paradigmatic and suggests a distinct level of narrativity. As Andrew Fitch argues of *I Remember* and other works like it, these texts “do not simply shore up fragments, but [...] artfully construct incremental narratives” (“Serial Realism” 131). One way in which the incremental narrative develops in *I Remember* is through its temporality. The temporal relationship in Brainard’s work reveals itself on several levels, the first and perhaps most obvious of which is the progression of the narrator from childhood to adulthood. The first item on the list reads, “I remember the first time I got a letter that said ‘After Five Days Return To’ on the envelope, and I thought that after I had kept the letter for five days I was supposed to return it to the sender” (7). Clearly a memory from childhood, this item is followed by the entries, “I remember the kick I used to get going through my parents’ drawers looking for rubbers. (Peacock)” and “I remember when polio was the worst thing in the world” (7), continuing this childhood perspective. Later in the text, items

such as, “I remember leaning up against the walls in queer bars” (84), and “I remember, eating out alone in restaurants, trying to look like I have a lot on my mind. (Primarily a matter of subtle mouth and eyebrow contortions)” (151) are unambiguously memories of adulthood, illustrating the passage of time between the items of the list. Adding to this sense of temporality, a more definite personal-temporal context is provided within select items found throughout the text, for example, “I remember how much, in high school, I wanted to be handsome and popular” (9) and “I remember that for my fifth birthday all I wanted was an off-one-shoulder black satin evening gown. I got it. And I wore it to my birthday party” (9). Providing events with a specific location along the narrator’s personal timeline allows a connection beyond similarity to emerge between the entries on the list. Of course, the sequence that emerges is not straightforwardly chronological, but this is not a requirement of either temporality or sequentiality. As Rimmon-Kenan explains, “strict linear chronology, then, is neither natural nor an actual characteristic of most stories. It is a conventional ‘norm’ which has become so widespread as to replace the actual multilinear temporality of the story and acquire a pseudo-natural status” (17). Indicating temporal relationships between items on the list suffices to confirm that the entries exist within a defined time sequence. Rather than a collection of unconnected – or only thematically connected – memories, the text develops a recognisably temporal sequence; moving back and forward through frequent analepsis and prolepsis, yet ultimately drawing pieces together into a fragmentary but sequential whole.

The next level of temporality that can be identified in *I Remember* relates to the relationships between characters, both as they are described within individual entries and as they appear in subsequent entries, revealing progression over time. For example, “I remember the first time I got really drunk. I painted my hands and face green with Easter egg dye and spent the night in Pat Padgett’s bath tub. She was Pat Mitchell then” (10). Not only does this entry reveal temporal progression within itself – with the changing of Pat Mitchell to Pat Padgett being an obvious reflection of the passage of time, among other things – this item also immediately recalls the entry from a few pages earlier, “I remember my first cigarette. It was a Kent. Up on a hill. In Tulsa,

Oklahoma. With Ron Padgett” (7-8). Several levels of connection become apparent in the process of reading through these items (an outline of Pat’s relationship to Ron begins to appear, for example, along with the narrator’s connection to Ron and Pat). These levels of connection relate to character development and relationships, both of which are essentially connected to the progression of time. Rather than existing in isolation, the items on the list and the actors within these items are shown to exist in a temporal relationship with each other. Indeed, in entries such as these, the temporality of the items is foregrounded. When, later in the text, Brainard writes, “I remember giant discussions with Pat and Ron Padgett, and Ted Berrigan, after seeing *La Dolce Vita* about what all the symbolism meant” (78) the passage of time is again emphasized. The temporality of the list deepens further when items are provided with a specific historical location. For example, “I remember the day John Kennedy was shot” (9), “I remember the day Frank O’Hara died. I tried to do a painting somehow especially for him. (Especially good). And it turned out awful” (13) and “I remember Christine Keeler and the ‘Profumo Affair’”(164). These entries, and others like them, locate the items of the list in relationship not only to each other, but also to the real-world timeline of famous events (and, by extension, to the personal timeline of the reader). While items in *I Remember* are frequently presented out of their chronological order (a feature common to narrative fiction) and it would not be possible to reposition *all* the items in chronological order with any certitude, *many* items are temporally located either in relation to other items, or in relation to historical events. This temporality ensures the sequentiality of the text and pushes the work onto the syntagmatic axis.

The final level of temporality to be discussed is located within the structure and grammar of the items themselves, with their recurrent “I remember” and employment of contrasting tenses. The phrase, “I remember” is significant on a grammatical level, as it foregrounds the present act of remembering and signals the temporal distance between the event being narrated and the event of narration, sometimes – in recounting very early childhood memories, for example – extending this over many years. In grammatical terms, the action of the text is in the present. The tenses employed in reference to the events being remembered, though, are a complicated combination of past tense

("I remember when I went to a 'come as your favorite person party' as Marilyn Monroe" (8)), present tense ("I remember how difficult it is to let a 'public grin' fall gracefully" (132)), and often no tense other than that of the "I remember" ("I remember alligator purses" (112)). To complicate the grammar even further, Brainard also inserts present tense into entries, such as "I remember over-tipping. And I still do" (151) and "I remember driving in cars and doing landscape paintings in my head. (I still do that)" (29). This structure highlights the dual temporality of the text and relates to one element of narrative not yet discussed explicitly in this exegesis: the importance of the act of narration and the related requirement of a narrator.

As Bal explains, "a narrative text is a text in which a narrative agent tells a story" (15). The existence of a narrator – however vague or implicit – is a necessary condition of narrative, and this very existence posits a temporal distance – however close or distant – between events and their narration. It must be acknowledged, of course, that foregrounding the act of remembering could be perceived as having the effect of suspending items in time; the action of the text becoming not what happens within the items, but rather purely the act of remembering itself. However, this would be a strictly formalist approach – focusing only on discourse to the detriment of story – which is not the approach of this exegesis. In fact, it is widely acknowledged that this dual time is a feature of all narratives, made explicit to a greater or lesser degree. Chatman explains this duality, drawing a distinction between "discourse-time – the time it takes to peruse the discourse" and "story-time, the duration of the purported events of the narrative" (62). Fitch argues that, "Chatman's conception of 'discourse-time' suggests why Brainard's perpetual interruption of story need not rob *I Remember* of narrative status" ("Serial Realism" 131). For Chatman – and Fitch – all narratives feature a discourse time that is distinct from the time of the story. Relating this argument back to the distinction between the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic, Chambers states that, "in description, the time of the described and the time of the describing *coincide*, which amounts to saying that there is *only* the time of the describing" (9). By contrast, in *I Remember*, there is both the time of the remembered and the time of the remembering, which is also the time of the continuous present (as expressed

through “I still do”). This characteristic sets the text apart from description, the paradigmatic, and lends it a temporality that insists it be recognised as syntagmatic.

Along with temporality, *I Remember* stretches out onto the syntagmatic axis through its causality. It is not insignificant that causality should be discussed alongside temporality, as the two concepts overlap and contaminate each other, and in any given text, a distinction between these notions is not always easy to determine. Barthes explains that, “structurally narrative institutes a confusion between consecution and consequence, between temporality and logic” (98). Despite this, for many narratologists, causality is a central requirement of narrative and is recognised as the predominant form of narrative’s sequentiality. Acknowledging its complications and links to temporality, Richardson (for one) nonetheless sees cause as “one of the most significant and fundamental aspects of narrative” and also “an extremely protean relation [that] can operate at different levels within a fictional world as well as in the arrangement of the text” (*Unlikely Stories* 13-14). Philip J. M. Sturges takes up this second concept of causality, arguing that textual causality – what he calls the text’s “logic of narrativity” – is “the only causative process at work” (766). For Sturges, causality need not be represented *within* the work, instead it is the underlying logic *of* the work. While it is outside the scope of this exegesis to address the complications of causality, it is clear that the items in *I Remember* exhibit a distinct causal relationship, both within the world of memories evoked and by virtue of the textual arrangement itself. For example, “I remember the washing machine and the vacuum cleaner going at the same time” followed by “I remember, when one stops before the other, a moment of ‘fake’ silence” (150). This is an example of causality at its most basic and straightforward – the two items are linked in a direct causal relationship. The washing machine and vacuum cleaner running at the same time create a noise level which is then disrupted by the stopping of one machine, and the effect is what Brainard describes as “a moment of ‘fake’ silence”. The second item makes sense only as a result of the previous item, and its outcome is the direct result of the situation established in the first item. Causality is evident in a similar way in the relationship between the entries, “I remember hearing once about a boy who found a dead fly in his

Coke and so the Coca-Cola company gave him a free case of Cokes” and “I remember thinking how easy it would be to get a free case of Cokes by putting a dead fly in your Coke and I remember wondering why more people didn’t do that” (155). In this case, the cause is the narrator hearing about a boy finding a dead fly in his Coke and then receiving the free case of Cokes, the effect is the narrator reaching the conclusion that it would be easy enough to put a dead fly into your own Coke and wondering why more people didn’t do this. While there is a certain element of ambiguity as to whether the narrator believes the boy found the dead fly, or whether he himself put the fly there – which is nonetheless diminished by use of the word “more” – the narrator’s resultant thoughts are in direct relationship to the preceding item of the list. These are examples of direct causality from one item to the next, where the logic connecting consecutive items is one of cause and effect.

Causality also occurs less directly, where earlier fragments of the narrative shape and are shaped by items that follow later in the text. These links may be less direct, but this does not rule out their causal relationship. Rimmon-Kenan explains how indirect causality can be read into a text, arguing that, “causality can either be implied by chronology or gain an explicit status in its own right. But the very notion of causality is by no means unproblematic” (17-18). In *I Remember*, in many cases, the items involved relate on both the temporal and causal level, for example, “I remember (early New York City days) seeing a man close off one side of his nostrils with a finger, while blowing snot out of the other nostril onto the street. (Shocking)” followed by “I remember seeing an old lady pee in a subway car recently and it wasn’t shocking at all, I’m sorry to say. One *does* learn to draw blanks: a compliment to nothing” (148). In this case, both the passing of time and the experience of living in New York City combine to cause a change in the feelings and expectations of the narrator. He moves from being shocked by the behaviour of those around him, to not reacting at all; he learns to “draw blanks”. In this case, the first item operates as an example and indication of the kind of interaction the narrator experiences in the time that passes between the two items. The contingency of these items within the text belies the temporal distance between them, yet in retrospect the narrator

identifies the fundamental relationship between the two experiences and draws conclusions about how one experience – and others like it – effects a noteworthy change in his life.

Also related to the narrator's resultant emotional state are examples of insecurities present throughout the text, such as the recurrent references to stuttering. For example, "I remember how much I used to stutter" (8), then later "I remember what a hard time I had memorizing Shakespeare and how nervous I got when it was my turn to recite" (86), and "I remember trying to memorize Shakespeare so that words that began with sounds I stuttered on (*s*, *b*, etc.) would not begin with a new breath. (Do you know what I mean?)" (86). These references to the protagonist's stuttering – itself a reflection of underlying anxiety and lack of confidence – are recalled at other points in the text, where the narrator describes his lack of confidence. For example, "I remember when, in high school, I used to stuff a sock in my underwear" (9) and "I remember many first days of school. And that empty feeling" (17). While the causal link between these items is less explicit, the effects (of personal insecurities, expressed in various ways) are described in enough detail and with sufficient persistence for the reader to make the cognitive connection between these effects and their causes – even if these causes are more probable than proven. As with temporality and causality, the distinction between causality and the next type of connection to be discussed, experientiality, is not always clearly defined. Not only are the items above examples of the effects of a conjectured common cause (insecurity), but that cause must also be understood as a feature of an experiencing subject. Or to put it differently, in examining these examples of causality, the text's expression of an experiencing subject – its underlying experientiality – becomes clear.

Experientiality is the third type of connection fundamental to the sequentiality of *I Remember* and is the underlying logic linking the items together. Throughout the text, the temporal and causal sequencing is connected at a deeper level, through the presence of a continuous, experiencing subject (using *subject* in the sense of *character* or *person*, rather than the more philosophical concept of an essential sense of self or identity⁴). Fludernik introduced the concept of

experientiality into narrative, defining experientiality as, “the quasi-mimetic evocation of ‘real-life experience’” (12) and arguing that it is experientiality, more than any other element, that lies at the heart of narrative. Fludernik explains:

Experientiality in narrative as reflected in narrativity can therefore be said to combine a number of cognitively relevant factors, most importantly those of the presence of a human protagonist and her experience of events as they impinge on her situation or activities. The most crucial factor is that of the protagonist’s emotional and physical reaction to this constellation, which introduces a basic dynamic feature into the structure. (30)

Fludernik’s definition of experientiality as it relates to narrative applies easily to Brainard’s text. The entire text can be read as the narrator’s reflection on his “experience of events as they impinge on [his] situation or activities” and his “emotional and physical reaction to this constellation”. The events recalled are all personally relevant to the narrator, they are all events about which he can declare, “I remember”. Many of the items either explicitly involve the narrator’s emotional and mental reactions, for example, “I remember not liking myself for not picking up boys I probably could pick up because of the possibility of being rejected” (84), or else they include reference to his emotional reaction to the event portrayed, for example, “I remember (*too* recently) writing something I especially liked in a letter and ‘using’ it again in another letter, and feeling a bit cheap about it” (146). The fact that the “I” of each “I remember” represents the one repeated, continuous subject – an assumption that may be conventional, but would nonetheless require more disproving than proving – is confirmed through the connection between the items. For example, immediately following the entry above is the entry, “I remember (to be more accurate) feeling cheap about it because I *didn’t* feel cheap about it” (146). It would take a very non-conventional reader – or one very suspicious of the basic assumptions of fiction and willing to make some incredibly abstract cognitive leaps – to conclude that these declarations are spoken by different speakers. (This is not to discount the fact that while the typical or conventional reading is what interests me here, writers can and do choose to play with conventions and reader expectations in various ways, and that the

conventional or expected reading of any text – including *I Remember* – must not be assumed to be the only way of reading that text.) Fitch accurately summarises the experientiality of *I Remember*, describing the text as, “Brainard’s poetic construction of serial time” (“Serial Realism” 126) and explaining that, “however discontinuous Brainard’s individual entries, each ‘I remember’ phrase confirms the continuous present (continuous pleasures) of retrospection” (132). Fitch provides a useful link between the three types of sequential connection that emerge through the text, insisting on both the continuity of *I Remember*’s experiencing subject, and the development of this experiencing subject as a result of time and experience. Noting the problematic nature of subjectivity as a concept, Fitch argues that, “narrative, especially Pop narrative, demands the frequent recurrence of a familiar subject, yet narrative’s reliance on a diachronic realism necessitates that this so-called ‘repeated subject’ change continually to fit the shifting circumstances in which it finds itself” (“Serial Realism” 132). In this way, experientiality, along with temporality and causality, connects items into a sequence, and moves the text onto the syntagmatic axis. However, as with all sequential texts – and, in fact, because of sequentiality itself – the text retains an element of discontinuity and fragmentation. It is largely through this discontinuity and fragmentation, or more specifically, the temporal, informative and textual gaps that result, that *I Remember* expresses its narrativity, as an examination of what is notably absent from the text will demonstrate.

The presentation and negotiation of gaps

It is widely acknowledged that *some* narratives include gaps, that narratives *sometimes* involve omissions, ellipses or implicitness. What is perhaps less widely acknowledged is the fact that *all* narratives necessarily include gaps of various kinds, that, in the structural sense, gaps are the necessary by-product of sequence. Sequence – as the composite of a set of related events – is by its very nature fragmentary. Regardless of how cohesive the bonds between events, evidence of the juncture remains. Only a solitary event could be truly unitary in the structural sense (and even then,

only in *reality*, not as a product of narration with its limited perspective and necessary omissions and ellipses). Moving beyond the discourse level and onto the level of story, gaps remain a central characteristic; as Wolfgang Iser explains, “no tale can ever be told in its entirety” (284). In a similar way, Rimmon-Kenan argues that, “holes or gaps are so central in narrative fiction because the materials the text provides for the reconstruction of a world (or a story) are insufficient for saturation. No matter how detailed the presentation is, further questions can always be asked; gaps always remain open” (128). For Iser and Rimmon-Kenan, gaps are (among other things) a practical matter, the result of the time and space restrictions of material texts. Genette offers a similar understanding of narrative, explaining that, “narrative ‘representation’, or, more exactly, narrative information, has its degrees: the narrative can furnish the readers with more or fewer details, and in a more or less direct way” (*Narrative Discourse* 162). This variation in the amount of information provided, and how directly this information is delivered, plays a role in readers’ interaction with texts, and demonstrates how texts work together with their readers to convey meaning. Applying these concepts to the analysis of Brainard’s text, I will argue that not only does the presence of gaps – temporal, informative and textual (the latter sometimes referred to as *lacunae*⁵) – not diminish the narrativity of *I Remember*, but it is through the utilisation and negotiation of these gaps that the text communicates crucial elements of its story.

In the previous section I identified the presence of a temporal sequence within *I Remember* and argued that this sequence is one area in which it becomes evident that the paradigmatic merges with the syntagmatic. Analysing this concept further, it can be argued that, paradoxically, temporal sequentiality is simultaneously responsible for the temporal gaps that emerge throughout the text. While it is possible to connect items into a temporal sequence, it is impossible to reconstruct an entirely comprehensive timeline. Consider, for example, “I remember daydreams of having a pet monkey that would wear human clothes and we would go around everywhere together” (68), followed by, “I remember daydreams of inheriting lots of money from some relative I didn’t even know I had” (68), then, “I remember daydreams of being a big success in New York City. (Penthouse

and all!)” (68), and finally, “I remember living on the lower East Side” (69). In this sequence, temporality is present but incomplete. What occurs on the level of story between daydreaming of a pet monkey, then daydreaming of money, then daydreaming of being successful, and then finally returning to the reality of living in New York City, remains unclear and unsaid.⁶ Of course, on the level of discourse, the connection between these items within the text may be verbal and associative – “monkey” to “money” – and certainly on the discourse level there appear to be thematic and verbal connections throughout the text. Indeed, often a single item may be related to more than two others through association, that is, it may be a node in a network, not only a point in a linear sequence. As Howard Becker explains, “Brainard’s paragraphs connect to one another. One reminiscence of a schoolteacher is likely to be followed by several others” (67). In relation to the sequence above, it is possible to mentally insert other items from the text between these items as the reader progresses through the text, but it would take a genius – or someone with a huge amount of time on their hands and a large notepad – to rearrange all the items on the list into an accurate timeline.

Even then, complete absorption into a timeline is resisted through items that lack a clear temporal location, for example, “I remember painting, ‘I HATE TED BERRIGAN’ in big black letters all over my white wall” (12). This item’s material location within the text – immediately following, “I remember playing ‘doctor’ in the closet” (12) – leaves its temporal location ambiguous. Is this the behaviour of an angry child, or the emotional outburst of a frustrated adolescent or adult? The following item, “I remember throwing my eyeglasses into the ocean off the Staten Island Ferry one black night in a fit of drama and desperation” (12) contains a hint of a temporal location within its physical location, yet it is not clear whether these two items relate to the same crisis, or whether they are linked only thematically, with both events falling into the possible category: times I remember being desperately upset. When Ted Berrigan is mentioned later in the text – “I remember having a long serious discussion with Ted Berrigan once about if a homosexual painter could paint the female nude as well as a ‘straight’ painter could” (140) – it remains unclear in what order these events occurred. Without

recourse to external events (Ted Berrigan being, of course, an *actual* person and acquaintance of author Joe Brainard) and relying only on the text itself, it would be equally plausible to assume the two characters are friends – or perhaps lovers – first, and that a rift of some kind prompts the narrator’s outburst on page 12, as it would be to assume the narrator later becomes friends – or lovers – with someone he initially “hates”. The existence of at least one other possible reading – that the outburst on page 12 is provoked by Berrigan insisting on the superiority of the heterosexual painter’s mastery of the female nude – obscures the temporal (and causal) sequence of items even further. Rather than detracting from the text’s story, though, the uncertainty created through these temporal gaps opens up possibilities for reader interaction and interpretation and provokes the reader to participate in the reconstruction of the text’s fictional world. Rimmon-Kenan argues that, “whatever category the gap belongs to, it always enhances interest and curiosity, prolongs the reading process, and contributes to the reader’s dynamic participation in making the text signify” (130). While there are, no doubt, texts that challenge Rimmon-Kenan’s claim – texts in which gaps have the opposite effect of leaving the reader uninterested, confused, and unengaged – this argument provides an accurate description of the way temporal gaps function in *I Remember*, and the important role they play in inviting reader interaction.

As well as allowing for reader interaction, the temporal gaps in *I Remember* work together with information gaps as an end in themselves, to enable the narrator – and perhaps Brainard himself – to keep chosen elements hidden. As mentioned above, the extensive utilisation of analepsis and prolepsis reads as a deliberate strategy to resist the comprehensive recreation of a timeline, and to facilitate the obscuring of unwanted details. The form of the text does not promise a complete story, and the discourse is not required to provide one; a narrative emerges, but it is nonetheless a narrative distinguished by temporal-informative gaps of various sizes. (I am using the term *narrative* here to refer to the combination of discourse and story, although perhaps a more apt term would be Peter Brooks’ “plot”, which he explains, “seems to cut across the *fabula/sjužet* distinction in that to speak of plot is to consider both story elements and their ordering” (13).) In discussing these

temporal-informative gaps I will borrow Helen Davis' term *implied narrative*, to refer to the story that lies beneath the overt narrative (although with a text such as Brainard's it could be argued that all levels of narrative are implied, that none are overt or explicit in the conventional sense, as all temporal and causal connections require a degree of speculative reconstruction by the reader).

Davis argues that, "implied narratives can be reconstructed from fragmented information presented by a narrator who does not want parts of her own or others' stories to be directly narrated. Implied narrative is necessarily the result of narrative omission of some kind" (195). Identifying omission, though, is challenging. Gaps in information can be difficult to identify, and some information gaps may never be recognised as such, as they cannot be distinguished without a hint of what should be there but is not. A certain amount of readerly licence is required to recreate what has been omitted. Richard J. Gerrig believes this is to be expected, explaining that, "authors count on readers to use inference processes to bridge narrative gaps of various sizes" (20), while Lubomír Doležel argues that, "the fictional text is a complex of explicit and implicit texture; consequently, fictional facts are constructed not only explicitly but also implicitly" (203). Combining the concepts of inference and implied narrative, it is possible to identify some of the omissions of information in Brainard's text, and to draw conclusions about the implications these gaps present for the reader.

Perhaps the most striking omission in *I Remember* – and therefore the gap that lends itself most readily to be identified and discussed – is the "coming-out" experience of the narrator. Notable due to the emotional impact this experience can be assumed to have had on the protagonist, this gap exists at the level of discourse, but the story of the narrator's coming-out can be reconstructed through the implied narrative beneath the surface of the text. The narrator discusses his sexual orientation and experiences throughout the text, the first explicit mention of his homosexuality occurring as follows:

I remember when I got drafted and had to go way downtown to take my physical. It was early in the morning. I had an egg for breakfast and I could feel it sitting there in my stomach. After roll call a man looked at me and ordered me to a different line than most of the boys were lined up at. (I had very

long hair which was more unusual then than it is now.) The line I was sent to turned out to be the line to see the head doctor. (I was going to ask to see him anyway.) The doctor asked me if I was queer and I said yes. Then he asked me what homosexual experiences I had had and I said none. (It was the truth.) And he believed me. I didn't even have to take my clothes off. (20)

From this item it can be concluded that by the time this event occurred – when the narrator was at the age to be drafted into the military, between 19 and 25 years old – he was willing to verbalise his sexual orientation, at least to himself. However, whether or not he had already revealed this to his family and friends is not mentioned. In fact, nowhere in the text is the narrator's family's reaction to his sexuality discussed.

On the surface – and reading from a current perspective in which equality and acceptance of a wide range of sexual orientations is valued (at least in theory) – the impression is that the narrator's sexuality did not cause a problem, that the process of coming-out was not even worthy of mention. Bringing a historical-cultural reading to the text though (for which the post-classical narratologists would be thankful, and at which the classical narratologists would no doubt cringe) this is clearly an omission of great significance. Not only does the protagonist come of age in a southern American city – Tulsa, Oklahoma – in the 1940s and 1950s, with all the assumed conservative family values this suggests, but he does so within the context of a strictly religious family. Early on, the narrator states, “I remember when I got a five-year pin for not missing a single morning of Sunday School for five years. (Methodist.)” (8), and shortly after, “I remember when I decided to be a minister. I don't remember when I decided not to be” (9). This item itself illustrates one of the central temporal-informative gaps of the text: that which takes place between deciding to be a minister and deciding not to be. Or, to consider it differently, what happens between the protagonist fitting into the society into which he was born, and realising he no longer does, or wants to. In a text defined and shaped by the mantra, “I remember”, the definitive negation, “I don't remember” marks the gap strongly, even if the not remembering is sincere. Bal offers a possible explanation for the omission of this information, claiming “that which has been omitted – the contents of the ellipsis – need not be

unimportant; on the contrary, the event about which nothing is said may have been so painful that it is being elided for precisely that reason ... Or the event is so difficult to put into words that it is preferable to maintain complete silence about it" (101). However, regardless of whether or not the narrator (and perhaps Brainard himself) wishes for this information to remain hidden, or whether this is an acknowledgment that some things simply cannot be said, the gaps suggest an implied narrative that can be – or perhaps, *cannot but be* – reconstructed by the reader.⁷

The informative gaps that relate to this implied coming-out narrative extend beyond where and when the coming-out occurred, though, as hints of the significance of this event emerge throughout the text, largely in connection with the word "queer". Near the opening of the text, Brainard writes, "I remember when, in high school, if you wore green and yellow on a Thursday it meant you were queer" (9). Later he continues, "I remember Moley, the local freak and notorious queer. He had a very little head that grew out of his body like a mole. No one knew him, but everyone knew who he was. He was always 'around' (16). And later still, "I remember a teacher who used to use the word 'queer' a lot (meaning 'unusual') and a lot of snickering" (141), along with, "I remember when the word 'fairy' began to evoke snickering and not knowing why. Then later, I do remember knowing why. What I don't remember is *how* I learned what it meant. Just a gradual process of putting two and two together, I guess. Plus a bit of speculation" (141). The negative connotations of the word 'queer' are clear and form a recurrent theme in the narrator's memories of both childhood and adulthood. Again though, the experience of moving from the perspective of a child who is told that to be queer entails notoriety, that to be queer is to be different and excluded, to the perspective of an adult who acknowledges his sexuality and appropriates the term 'queer' to define himself, remains unspoken; the experience of working out what it meant to be a "fairy" is again *not remembered*. The implied crisis of identity that the reader can assume the protagonist must have experienced is evident in the entry, "I remember a boy I once made love with and after it was all over he asked me if I believed in God" (20), and many others like it, in all of which the narrator

refuses to be drawn on the emotional toll this surely would have taken. The implied narrative is suggested again in the following extended item:

I remember a boy who worked for an undertaker after school. He was a very good tap dancer. He invited me to spend the night with him one day. His mother was divorced and somewhat of a cheap blond in appearance. I remember that his mother caught us innocently wrestling out in the yard and she got *very* mad. She told him never to do that again. I realized that something was going on that I knew nothing about. We were ten or eleven years old. I was never invited back. Years later, in high school, he caused a big scandal when a love letter he had written to another boy was found. He then quit school and worked full time for the undertaker. One day I ran into him on the street and he started telling me about a big room with lots of beds where all the undertaker employees slept. He said that each bed had a little white tent in the morning. I excused myself and said goodbye. Several hours later I figured out what he had meant. Early morning erections. (22)

Unable or unwilling to remember his own experience of revealing his sexuality, the narrator hints at his own story by representing the experience of another character; an experience that illustrates the dangers of being found to be gay in an item that becomes an allegory for the generic coming-out story of the time. Whatever Brainard's reasons for refusing to comment on the protagonist's own coming-out, this implied narrative persists, determined not only by the text itself, but equally by the experience and background of the work's readers. As Gerrig explains, "readers fill narrative gaps, in an automatic fashion, based on their own life experiences" (24). Or as Davis puts it, "the fabula is constructed by the reader, who constantly revises and rearranges the events in the process of reading and gaining more information. This same impulse for reconstructing the chronological order in order to fully understand a story also compels readers to reconstruct the narrative of characters or events that are indirectly narrated" (194). Regardless of Brainard's silence on the matter, or perhaps because of it, the impact of being queer in a time when being so would certainly have had a marginalising effect cannot but form part of the work's underlying implied narrative, and it is through information gaps such as this that the text truly speaks.

As well as exhibiting temporal and informative gaps, *I Remember* is marked by gaps on the textual level, where Brainard's move from one item to the next varies from similarity to juxtaposition. It is in relation to textual gaps that consideration of the role of the reader must take prominence. Some connections are obvious ("I remember 'sick' jokes" to "I remember Mary Anne jokes" (61)), some are oblique ("I remember (in colour) *very pink skin and very orange skin*" to "I remember trying not to look lonely in restaurants alone" (150)). The oblique connections are where textual gaps reside, and it can be argued that it is these ambiguous or difficult connections that engage the reader most actively. Belknap argues that this disjunction lies at the heart of lists in literature, where "items can be arranged to separate and distinguish, rather than join and unite" (53). What Fitch identifies as, "*I Remember's* precious (some might say pathological) affections for the oft-overlooked non-sequitur" ("Blowing Up" 79) shape the reader's experience of reading from one item to the next, where assumptions and inference determine how the textual gap will be interpreted. In sequences like these, where the text does not provide a clear or comfortable connection between items, the reader cannot help but wonder what possible connection can exist between "*very pink skin and very orange skin*" and "trying not to look lonely in restaurants alone"? Each reader's answer – if indeed, one is found – must surely vary and depend on their individual knowledge and their unique constellation of circumstances and experiences; and the wider the textual gap, the less consensus could be expected among readers on how the gap should be filled. Referring to the lists he finds in Emerson's work, Belknap argues that it is in these kinds of textual gaps that the true excitement of reading resides, arguing that, "the skips and leaps we make in reading from one item to the next are compelling, occasionally disorienting. In their unpredictable courses, Emerson's lists force us to make unforeseen connections or even bridges of thought where we think no connection is possible. They simply and ingeniously fire and excite our minds" (72). The same can be said of Brainard's work, where his "decisive cut from one topic (one perspective, one discourse) to the next" ("Blowing Up", Fitch 79) jolts the reader and challenges them to find the connection between apparently unconnected items. Robert Champigny provides an apt summary for the operation of gaps and implicitness in fiction,

one that resonates with the temporal, informative and textual gaps in *I Remember*, arguing that, “[fiction] is not limited by the conditions of human knowledge. It can choose its discontinuities, what to say and what not to say, how to say it and how not to say it” (989). Indeed, it is the choice of discontinuities – what to say and what not to say, how to say it and how not to say it – that informs the structure of Brainard’s text, that invites the reader to complete the story, that questions how a work like *I Remember* should be received, and that challenges ideas about the very nature of narrative itself.

Limitations, relevance and counterarguments

I have attempted to argue that the opposition between lists and narrative – while possibly justified in relation to lists *within* literature – does not effectively reflect the nature of lists *as* literature, of which Joe Brainard’s *I Remember* is a definitive example. However, taking a purely formalist approach, it could be argued that in terms of form (focusing only on the discourse level of the text) there is an undeniable difference between lists and narrative, and since discourse is all we (as readers, theorists or critics – or indeed writers) have direct access to, this is the level that deserves primacy. But this is true of all texts, story is always – and only – a construction. As Richardson explains, “in the terminology of narrative poetics, the *fabula* (histoire) is unknowable in principle, and we can never go beyond or behind the *sjuzhet* (récit) that is presented” (“Causality” 72). But without the *fabula*, what is to be made of the *sjuzhet*? Without the story, what is the point of the discourse? This situation approaches the truism Genette identifies when he claims, “the truth is that mimesis in words can only be mimesis of words” (*Narrative Discourse* 164). Genette’s analysis recognises that what words truly imitate is nothing more than words themselves, and yet, the story continues to fascinate, the *fabula* continues to emerge. At the same time, story must be understood not only as a construction, but always as a construction dependent upon readers, upon their own experiences and assumptions, and their idiosyncratic interactions with texts. It is important to

acknowledge Gerrig's argument that, "the important implication is that each reader's understanding of a text will be inflected by his or her own life experiences: theorists can specify the processes that give rise to inferences, but they cannot specify, for a text of any complexity, a particular representation at which readers will generally arrive" (24). Despite the impossibility of arriving at any absolutes, discussion of the narrativity of lists would not be complete without some consideration of the role and response of the reader, and it is for that reason that I have attempted to address this aspect of literary lists. To ignore the part that the reader must play in identifying and reconstructing narrative from lists would seem the greater of two evils, and it is with that in mind that I have deliberately chosen this approach.

This exegesis is, of course, related to my own creative practice and forms the theoretical background to my own literary list, *Listurbia: A Memoir*. What began as a theoretical question – can a narrative be written through lists alone? – became a creative piece in which lists are utilised and manipulated in the service of narrative, and this critical exegesis examining the theoretical opposition between these two forms. Throughout my research and writing, Brainard's text, in particular, provided inspiration, both for the creative piece and for the questions at the heart of this critical exegesis. While my own creative piece approaches the problem from a different perspective – both in terms of my personal socio-cultural and historical location, and my formal decisions (such as to exploit the titles of lists in order to communicate story, and to present items in a more linear chronological order) – I hope the underlying passion and affection for literary lists can be identified as common to both. Beyond a shared affection for listing, there are parallels that can be drawn between the structural concerns shaping *I Remember* and those informing the production of my own creative work, particularly in the incorporation and manipulation of what I have been referring to as gaps. While gaps are an essential feature of all texts, perhaps it is in lists as literature that they find their greatest expression; lists as narrative not only allow for omission, they demand it. And it is through these gaps in my own creative work – these omissions, disjunctions and discontinuities – that I have attempted to pose questions for the reader to answer and to introduce a game of uncertainty for

the reader to play. Rimmon-Kenan argues that the uncertainty created by gaps is vital to the excitement and interest of reading, that “in the process of reading, the reader cannot know whether a gap is temporary or permanent; indeed this uncertainty is at the basis of the dynamics of reading” (129). Finally, having argued that all sequences – and therefore all texts – include gaps of various kinds, it is only fitting that I recognise that gaps in this exegesis are an inevitable and exciting reality. Between the items of this exegetical sequence there exist spaces for further investigation and gaps for ongoing discussion. What these gaps represent are opportunities for reader participation in the construction, not of a fictional world, but of a deeper theoretical understanding of the narrativity of literary lists, an understanding which I hope may be developed by identifying gaps as promising areas of potential for future research.

Conclusions

Narratology, like any field of enquiry, seeks to find definitive answers to its questions and to define the limits of its relevance. It is to this end that classical and recent approaches have drawn a distinction between literary lists and narrative. Literary theory, likewise, has largely supported the essential differentiation of these forms, celebrating lists for their otherness, their uniqueness and the challenge they pose to the narratives within which they exist. However, stretching the edges of any idea runs the risk of finding the limits of its usefulness, and in relation to the apparent non-narrativity of literary lists, this indeed proves to be the case. While lists *within* literature provide abundant evidence of the ways in which lists and narrative differ, Brainard’s list *as* literature provides equally abundant evidence of these two modes functioning in ways that are fundamentally the same. Under analysis, the boundaries of the list merge with those of the narrative, as the paradigmatic structure of *I Remember* expands meaningfully into the syntagmatic, and its temporal, informative and textual gaps prove to be, in fact, more narrative than not. Fitch argues that, “Brainard expands our conception of first-person realism” (“Serial Realism” 135). It could be argued

that, through the narrativity of *I Remember*, Brainard likewise expands our conception of what counts as narrative and challenges the validity of positioning narrative in opposition to literary lists. Brooks argues that, “we live immersed in narrative, recounting and reassessing the meaning of our past actions, anticipating the outcome of our future projects, situating ourselves at the intersection of several stories not yet completed” (3). Perhaps the story of lists as literature is one such tale, just beginning to be recognised, not yet completed, and with much to tell us still about what narrative is and indeed can be.

¹ For a detailed discussion of the development of narratology beginning with the Russian Formalists see David Herman's "Histories of Narrative Theory (I): A Genealogy of Early Developments" pp. 19-35 and Monika Fludernik's "Histories of Narrative Theory (II): From Structuralism to the Present" pp. 36-59 in *A Companion to Narrative Theory* edited by James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz.

² For a conversation around "natural" versus "unnatural" narratology in response to Fludernik see Jan Alber, Stefan Iversen, Henrik Skov Nielsen and Brian Richardson, as well as Finland's Tampere School of Narratology, especially *Narrative Interrupted: The Plotless, the Disturbing and the Trivial in Literature*.

³ Interestingly, both theorists choose a metaphor that Paul Valéry used to oppose poetry to prose, arguing that poetry is to prose as dancing is to walking. See "Poetry and Abstract Thought."

⁴ For a discussion of the theoretical history of subjectivity and how this relates to literary and cultural criticism see Donald Hall, who argues that, "as literary and cultural critics have aggressively expanded what they mean by the term text, the textuality of the self as a system of representations has, itself, become a singularly important arena of investigation and speculation." (*Subjectivity* 5)

⁵ *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines lacunae as "any gap or missing element in a text, usually a manuscript" (195), although the term can be applied metaphorically to gaps and omissions of other kinds.

⁶ Daydreams are examples of what Marie-Laure Ryan refers to as "embedded narratives", which she describes as "any story-like representation produced in the mind of a character and reproduced in the mind of the reader" (320) in "Embedded Narratives and Tellability." See also Gerald Prince's "The Disnarrated", in which he argues that "the disnarrated provides one of the important means for emphasizing tellability: this narrative is worth narrating because it could have been otherwise, because it usually is otherwise, because it was not otherwise" (5).

⁷ For a summary of *tellability* and the *nonnarrated* see again "The Disnarrated," in which Prince argues that, "we know that, in certain genres and/or in certain periods, the representation of certain experiences, the recounting of certain actions (pertaining to, say, money, eating, excretion, sexuality) is simply taboo; and we are (often) aware of the (unspoken) agenda by which the tellability of a series of events, the narrativity of this or that mode of representation, is assessed in certain contexts" (1).

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