

**‘A Storm of Connectives’: Narrative, Self and Process in
Contemporary Poetry**

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Gareth Damian Martin, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the works of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: Gareth Damian Martin

Date: 17 April 2019

Abstract

This study is a practice-based exploration of radical narrative strategies within contemporary poetry and poetics. In it I trace a lineage of radical narrative that emerges in the 1970s in the Language writing moment in the East and West coasts of the US and continues to this day. Refusing the frame of 'non-narrative' which has often been applied to Language writing, I question the historical positioning of Language writing as non-referential as well as its supposedly adversarial relationship with New Narrative. Using the often-overlooked critical work of Nick Piombino, I then develop a model of radical narrative—the 'storm of connectives'—which builds on Piombino's own readings and analysis of Language era experimentation. I then go on use this model to identify radical narrative strategies in the work of Carla Harryman and Leslie Scalapino, with reference to their own critical framing of their work. In this study's final chapter, I introduce my own experimental text *Radical Transparency* as a realisation of the narrative strategies of the storm of connectives. This piece uses modes of procedural generation to produce a shifting work of self-disclosure, engaging with both the concept of transparency as championed within social media as a potentially revolutionary approach to selfhood, and its ultimate failure, manifested through the opacity and dehumanising force of the systems that now process and distribute users' personal data. Contextualising *Radical Transparency* by drawing connections with Ben Lerner's *Lichtenburg Figures* and *Mean Free Path*, I conclude by exploring how the storm of connectives might allow for

radical narrative strategies that speak directly to a contemporary condition of contiguity and subjective experience.

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Preface

Before commencing this study I wish to clarify the framework for my thesis, with a particular focus on poetics as a context for my critical investigations, as well as the definitions of both 'self' and 'narrative' I am working within.

In his essay 'The Necessity of Poetics' Robert Sheppard offers an interlocking catalogue of definitions for poetics, which he calls 'a theory of practice, a practice of theory' (1999). For Sheppard poetics emerges from 'the process of reflection upon writings, and upon the act of writing, gathering from the past and from others, speculatively casting into the future' (1999). In his essay Sheppard presents this formulation of poetics in aphoristic terms, through 'snapshots' and 'thumbnails' of text, creating 'a structured disequilibrium' of a practice that is 'provisional', 'nomadic' and 'its positions temporary and strategic' (1999). For this reason, Sheppard's essay is not so much a description of poetics as it is an evocation, intended to bring poetics into the light as a 'a speculative discourse, not a descriptive one' structured around the 'act of making' (1999). For Sheppard, poetics is not a lens to be brought to bear on poetry and writing, but instead a 'generative schema' in which 'the making can change the poetics; the poetics can change the making' (1999).

Sheppard's definitions are playful, even placed in occasional conflict with each other, but in their volume, they suggest a connective conception of form and content, theory and practice, that refuses those borders in favour of hybridity, changeability and a distinctly speculative focus. For this study, Sheppard's idea of poetics, built on

a loose history that extends from Aristotle to contemporary innovative poetry, provides an important frame. In particular, this study takes on Sheppard's idea of poetics as a speculative mode, orienting its critical investigations towards the generation of new practices. From a basis in the critical analysis of past writings, this study 'casts' into the future in pursuit of new ways of understanding and writing narrative. In Sheppard's words it is 'a prospectus of work to be done, that might involve a summary of work already done' (1999).

Sheppard's 'speculative impetus' (1999) is the impetus that drives this study in its approach of narrative, self and contemporary poetry.

Throughout his essay Sheppard also quotes Charles Bernstein's *A Poetics*, in particular his essay 'Optimism and Critical Excess (Process)':

Poetics becomes an activity that is ongoing, that moves in different directions at the same time, and that tries to disrupt or problematize any formulation that seems too final or preemptively restrictive. (Bernstein 1992: 150)

Bernstein's definition highlights the qualities and opportunities poetics presents as a frame for this study. Poetics, in the form prosed by Sheppard and Bernstein, allows this study to operate both through theory and practice without favouring one or the other. It also provides a context that supports the unfixed nature of the study, which proposes a territory of associated practices of contemporary poetry, not a fixed lineage of canonical progression. Sheppard's quoting of Bernstein, himself a Language writer, also evidences the importance of poetics to this study's chosen subject. Poetics is not

only important to my own practice, but it is vital to the practices of those at the centre of this study. Ron Silliman, Carla Harryman, Leslie Scalapino, Nick Piombino and the wider group of writers encompassed by the dual movements of Language Writing and New Narrative are marked indelibly by poetics as a discipline and practice. To study their work from the vantage point of poetics represents an attempt to meet these writers on their own terms, to engage with the context in which their practice was shaped.

When approaching the idea of 'self' or the 'individual' within poetics, it is the work of Nick Piombino who provides this study with its definition. Though Piombino is an often overlooked figure in Language Writing, his work on the self within contemporary poetry is explored in Mark Wallace's essay 'The Individual as Social Process: Writer and Self in the Work of Nick Piombino'. In Wallace's words Piombino's body of work as a critic and poet is unique for the way it:

links psychoanalytic and social materialist notions of the individual in a way that engages both discourses. We can't understand people without regard to social situation; we equally can't understand them without recognizing individual development and change.

(2003)

This consideration of the self as a negotiation between individual agency and social structures marks Piombino's work throughout his career. Within Piombino's work, Wallace claims, 'the individual becomes a process of interrelations' (2003). This definition of the self

or individual as a process is one that marks the discussions of self, within this study. For Piombino, the presence of this self emerges in both the content and form of a text through a process of self-disclosure¹. With this in mind, throughout this study I am not evoking a coherent, fixed self, but a self-in-process. I am interested not in what the self *is*, but how it occurs. Wallace proposes that Piombino provides an important critical perspective for those, like me, who are interested in reading Language writing as relating to the self. He observes that 'the concept of the self never gets theorized directly in the poetics of either Hejinian or Silliman, even though it's crucial to their work' while for Piombino 'the individual remains a problem that's never avoidable' (2003). For this study, the idea of the individual as unavoidable is vital to its readings of Language writing. In my critical analysis of these texts I refuse to avoid, obscure or ignore the self. As Wallace suggests, 'far from being repressed, the writer, in process, becomes essential to the production of the text' (2003). This study sees the self as an outcome of the writer in process. This definition of the self as processual, to paraphrase Bernstein's description of poetics, envisions it as an ongoing activity, moving in multiple directions simultaneously.

¹ This term is used specifically by Piombino as a way of describing the process by which a poet's experimentation with formal devices emerges from, and discloses, their own interest and obsessions: 'The contemporary poet discovers his formal matrices through a process of self-disclosure that is contiguous with his creations' (1978b: 17). As with much of his work, it is clear that while Piombino is drawing from his background in psychoanalysis here, this term should be understood as an expansion or extension of its use within that field. Self-disclosure is of particular interest to this study among Piombino's terms, because of the processual nature of disclosure, an act which emerges at the point of its occurrence, and which bleeds into surrounding experience, colouring both readings and meanings that are already present. Self-disclosure, by definition, is an act which makes the self present.

The idea of being in-process also extends to this study's definition of narrative. Like ideas of self and individual, I am interested in how and when narrative occurs within the work of Language writers, not in identifying the narratological hallmarks of plot, character and genre within these works. This approach reflects the concerns and approaches of Language writers themselves. In the fifth issue of *Poetics Journal*, the 'Non/narrative' issue (an important publication that I will return to in greater detail in the body of this study) various Language writers describe narrative as occurring in their work due to 'associations [which] are neither transparent and direct nor arbitrary' (Armantrout 1985: 94), 'procedural decisions' (Ward 1985: 95) and 'nomadic attentions' (cheek 1985: 73). Narrative is described as 'not immanent, but social' (Perelman 1985: 169). There is an echo here of Wallace's discussion of Piombino's 'individual', of a concept which is defined by the conditions of its occurrence. This distinction is one Bob Perelman also highlights in his discussions of Ron Silliman's *Ketjak* in his essay 'Parataxis and Narrative'. For Perelman Silliman's disjunctive work is 'not a fully formed narrative; but it is, in an adjectival sense, *narrative*.' (1996: 68).

In this study, these narrative occurrences identified within poetic texts are tied directly to the occurrence of an identifiable self. Narrative emerges from Piombino's self as a 'process of interrelations' (2003) and is activated by the interplay of patterns and intervals of meaning that result from the process of reading a text. While Piombino is not explicit about narrative as a term, this study proposes that his identification of the self within procedural and processual writing

equates to a 'narrative' reading of those texts. This approach is one where narrative is considered as an aspect of poetics, not of narratology, and so it is fluid, multi-directional and nomadic. I believe this concept of narrative is fitting for the subject and overall approach of this study, and it is reflected in the material that I consider.

It is this definition of narrative, as a descriptive frame, momentary occurrence and nomadic quality, that this study focuses on, and it should be read with this in mind.

Introduction

In his 1978 essay 'Writing as Reverie', appearing in the journal *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, Nick Piombino writes:

The interruption of 'the argument runs like this...' is a simple dimensional loosening of the referential register this particular moment of writing needed. Anywhere I look (for example, the child on the beach at sunset) I pass through a storm of connectives intensifying one another. (1978c: 26)

This evocative description refers to Piombino's immediate context, the historical moment now known as Language writing. A bicoastal gathering of experimental language-centred and practices active in the 1970s and 80s, Language writing is the 'particular moment' Piombino is evoking, his term also alluding to Language writing's self-stated desire to be seen as 'a moment not a movement' (Silliman 1997)². In the sentence which follows, the above extract also gives this study its central image. This image of a 'storm of connectives intensifying one another' suggests a particular territory, one which in passing through, we accrue meaning, association, experience, and affect. The 'storm of connectives' describes a process of unfixed shape and duration, one where connectivity and intensity are the twin modes of engagement. While in Piombino's essay the 'storm of

² The identity of Language writing as either a moment or a movement is often a point of contention. In this study I approach the wider group of writers that have actively positioned their work as Language writing (or been retrospectively placed within Language writing) as a moment, due to the diversity of approach, style and intention within this group. However I do also refer to Language writing as a movement in the cases where it has been described as such by its critics, or where its orthodoxy, driven by the core members of its group, betrays an intention to formalise and advocate a set of political and aesthetic concerns that supersede those of the individual writers.

connectives' is an image of engagement with the world, for this study it becomes an image of an engagement with text. This engagement is not split between the processes of writing and reading, but encompasses both, guiding a compositional practice which suspends intentionality in service of shaping the territory in which such a storm might gather.

In order to shape this territory, which at once contains a mode of reading and a mode of practice, I will return to the context which birthed it. Language writing, described by Marjorie Perloff as 'presenting itself as a decisive rupture with the poetic status quo, a distinctive way of Making It New' (2005: 129), represents a fulcrum between narrative and radical poetic practice. The notion of narrative—the mode of engagement described by the 'storm of connectives'—is essential to my study. This narrative, however, is not the familiar and formalised territory of plot, character and genre, but one of radical self-disclosure, associative meaning, and the interaction of pattern and interval. What I propose is that Language writing, and language-related practices from the same moment, represent a radical development of narrative, rather than a denial of it. If we turn to the various histories of Language writing, we can see how this might be a novel position.

Many of these histories are marked by the Frederic Jameson's critique of Language Writing in his essay 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism' (1984). In it, Jameson accuses the Language writers as having 'adopted schizophrenic fragmentation as their fundamental aesthetic' (1984: 28) of producing 'heaps of

fragments' (1984: 25) where 'the materials of the text, including its words and sentences, tend to fall apart into random and inert passivity, into a set of elements which entertain separations from one another' (1984: 31). As will become evident, Jameson's position is inherently critical of the concept I will term the 'storm of connectives', finding Language writing passive, not intense; separated, not connective. His critique not only finds Language writing without narrative, but also without meaning. Because of both the polemical nature of this critique and the wider importance of Jameson's essay in defining postmodernism, his description of Language writing is one which has formed a major reference point for those championing or critiquing Language writing.³

Jameson's critique was foreshadowed by the May 1979 issue of *Poetry Flash* which, in an issue 'dedicated' to early Language writing, Alan Soldofsky's 'Language and Narcissism' equated Language writing with a 'deterioration of language in every aspect of public life' (1979). Soldofsky accused Language writers Bob Perelman, Steve Benson, Ron Silliman, Kit Robinson, Bruce Andrews, and Barrett Watten of producing 'baffling and tiresome' work, and 'participating in the retreat of thought from feeling' (1979). In the same issue, Steve

³ Jameson's critique of Language writing, especially its discussion of Bob Perelman's *China*, is anatomized by Rob Halpern in his 2009 essay 'Restoring "China"'. Halpern points out that 'Jameson can only make "China" a privileged test case by subtracting it from the poem's living ecology, flattening its cultural landscape, eliding its social relations, and erasing its print history. By doing so, he performs the very features of "schizophrenic" signification at the level of his own analysis'. Halpern also manages to identify some of Jameson's direct relationships with New Narrative and Language writers which may have shaped his reading of 'China' and Language writing generally, undermining the sense of distance with which he presents 'China' in his critique.

Abbott's 'Language Poets: An Introduction' sought to remind the group that 'obscurity is not a virtue in itself' (1979).

After Jameson's now famous essay was published in 1984, critics continued to frame Language writing as disjunctive, non-narrative, and emotionless. In his 1987 essay 'A Note on *Montemora*, America & the World', Eliot Weinberger called Language writing 'a product of a generation raised in front of a television' (1987: 195), describing its poetry as 'an endless succession of depthless images and empty sounds, each cancelling the previous one' (1987: 195). In the same year, an exchange between Jerome McGann and Charles Altieri discussed the aesthetics and politics of Language while reinforcing Jameson, Weinberger et al.'s characterisation of Language writing as unreadable, non-referential, and absent of voice or self. McGann initially refers to Language as a body of work where 'antinarrative and nonnarrative forms abound' (1987: 262), dismissing Tina Darragh's procedural work as 'literally unreadable, as is much other L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry' (1987: 264), but goes on to make claims for the work of Language writers Ron Silliman, Alan Davies, Lyn Hejinian and Susan Howe as 'distinct and distinguished' (1987: 276). Altieri's response questioned Language writing's alignment with Left-wing politics, suggesting that the 'audience freedom' (1987: 306) afforded by Language's collapsing of the centrality and authority of the writer is more aligned with 'neoconservative economics' (1987: 306) than with the New Left, leaving the work with a 'minuscule claim on either feelings or intellect' (1987: 306). Both, whether arguing for or against Language writing as a worthwhile movement, seem to

assign it the same set of qualities, the sole point of contention being whether it is a symptom or a diagnosis of neoconservative and postmodern society.

In 1989, in what is perhaps the most distinct connection of Language writing to disjunctive, meaningless postmodern fragmentation, Rod Mengham compared Bernstein's poem 'Fear of Flipping' to 'a game of Space Invaders' (1989: 107), with 'no object but to play the game, no alternative but to keep going' (1989: 107). Mengham places it alongside Clark Coolidge's 'A False M', which is, he writes, 'not as showy as in the Bernstein text but more insidious and ultimately more disturbing' (1989: 108). Mengham concludes that Language displays 'syntactic anarchy, semantic incompleteness and a certain brusqueness of resolve in setting out to disappoint the reader' (1989: 108).

These critiques, taken as a whole, present a consistent perception of Language writing in its first two decades of existence as being marked by disjunction and an absence of meaningful content. It is a history I seek to undermine, through an exploration of the radical narrative practices within Language writing, and the development and expansion of the concept of 'the storm of connectives'. However, I am not alone in challenging this inaccurate framing of Language writing; in recent decades, a number of critics have sought to reposition Language writing within literary history.

Marjorie Perloff, despite her 1984 claim that 'the immediate impression likely to be produced by a Bernstein or Silliman poem is that Swinburne or Crane have somehow been put through the

Cuisinart' (1984: 17), has become a notable supporter of more nuanced readings of the moment's work, especially in her books *21st-Century Modernism; The 'New' Poetics* and *Unoriginal Genius: Poetry by Other Means in the New Century*. Most notably, in 'The Portrait of the Language Poet as Autobiographer: The Case of Ron Silliman', Perloff proposed, in a reading of Silliman's 'Albany', that Language writing might not have been as defined by disjunction and absence of self as previously claimed:

Early commentators on Language poetry, myself included, thus took for granted that the poetic community represented by *The American Tree* was united by its antagonism to lyric voice, coherent self, individual consciousness, or transcendental ego. (1998: 167)

In her discussion of 'Albany' she points out that its 'voice' is 'matter-of-fact, street-wise, the voice of a largely self-educated working-class man' (1998: 168) and clearly belongs to Silliman himself⁴. She extends this brief reading of voice in Language writing to Leslie Scalapino's 'hmmmm', Michael Palmer's 'Autobiography' and Barrett Watten's 'City Fields', identifying a distinctive textual and personal identity in each, so that 'to label these texts "Language poems" and let it go at that tells us very little' (1998: 169).

Other historians of Language writing come to similar conclusions, such as George Hartley, who, in his introduction to *Textual politics*

⁴ The personal nature of 'Albany' was later confirmed by Silliman himself, through his work *Under Albany* (2004), which details the autobiographical events behind each sentence in the original poem.

and the Language Poets, asks: 'how do these poets see their work as the creation of a democratic reader-writer relationship rather than an obliteration of any possibility whatsoever to read such work?' (1989: xiv). Yet despite this, Hartley is unable to develop an conception of narrative which is supportive of this reader-writer relationship. This is especially clear in reference to the work of Carla Harryman, which, in Hartley's words, 'goes through the motions of narrative, but one would be hard put to summarize what story has been told' (1989: xii). Here the limits of applying traditional narrative identifiers to this body of work are made apparent, and Hartley takes his analysis no further.

It is Bob Perelman who, in *The Marginalization of Poetry: Language Writing and Literary History*, puts forward a more original explanation of the denial of narrative within Language writing. In a chapter entitled 'Narrative and Parataxis', Perelman identifies a point of connection between that influential Jameson critique and the manner in which Language, particularly through the theorisation of its leading member Ron Silliman, described itself. Perelman brings attention to:

the overall frame Silliman shares with Jameson: the Marxist-master narrative that sees commodification as a necessary stage that history must pass through. [...] Where Jameson reads the signifying chains snapping, Silliman reads the technicolor epics of false consciousness being swept away. (1996: 66-68)

This is a powerful point, and one that begins to explain the absence of narrative as a concept in discussions and histories of Language

poetry, and therefore the background of this study. For both Jameson and Silliman, the abandonment of narrative related directly to materialist politics; they simply differed on how this abandonment was being enacted within Language poetry. Perelman proposes that, like McGann and Altieri, for Silliman and Jameson the debate was between whether Language was an effective critique or mirror-image of neoconservatism. Later in this study, I will go into greater detail on how Silliman sought to disconnect Language writing from any concept of narrative in order to align it instead with materialist concepts—but it is already clear that Perelman is, in connecting the strongest critiques of Language to its strongest advocate, beginning to describe the loop which excluded narrative from the theorisation of Language writing.

However, Perelman, like Hartley, fails to deliver a compelling discussion of how, if we are to consider narrative an aspect of Language writing, that narrative might be theorised. Perelman focuses on the ‘possibilities of re-narrativization’ (1996: 68), a process which he attributes to the reader, and which occurs after the process of ‘de-narrativization’ (1996: 68) performed by the text. While Perelman is right to point to Silliman’s ‘new sentence’ as a ‘combined reading and writing practice’ (1996: 68), his simplified identification of the processes in action is unsatisfactory. His positioning of the text as a de-narrativizing structure and the reader as re-narrativizing agent allows the writer to maintain the disassociated position so regularly associated with Language writing—one which with this study I am eager to question.

In grouping these histories and critiques of Language writing, I hope to give a sense of the context within which I propose to establish the new territory of 'the storm of connectives'. The 'absence' of narrative, self, and identity in Language writing is an orthodoxy both externally and internally defined, and yet I will show how that this framing acts as a mask for diverse, radical narrative practices which exist and continue to exist in the work of Language and Language-related writers. Building on this, I will foreground those within the movement who not only worked with radical ideas of narrative, but actively theorised, developed, and discussed these ideas. Nick Piombino is chief amongst these writers, and so forms a central figure in this study. Piombino's work is crucial to this thesis because it represents a previously untapped resource of discussions of self, affect, and narrative in the Language moment.

Piombino's essays for *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, the journal that gave the moment its name, blurred critical and creative modes, while displaying an intensity of focus towards the development and discussion of a new poetics. Indeed, Ron Silliman described Piombino as 'one of that journal's most important attributes' (1986: xxiii). Despite this, Piombino's work, though preserved and republished, has been subject to only occasional critical discussion. This thesis goes some way towards correcting this oversight, identifying 'the storm of connectives' as a description of a nuanced discourse of self and self-disclosure which exists throughout Piombino's body of critical work. Building upon this, I propose that this rich vein provides a vital, internal point for establishing the

identification and reading of acts of radical narrative within the work of key Language writers.

As the narrative acts I seek to describe are connected to an inherently radical, experimental and progressive tradition, as well as the development of contemporary poetics, I am relying on Piombino's theorisation to form the core of my argument. While discussions of narrative in literature are multifarious and widespread, few are focused on the kind of experimental poetic work which is the focus of this study. Additionally, while hermeneutic philosophers such as Paul Ricœur and Alasdair MacIntyre have theorised the relationship between self and narrative, their work is less pertinent to the specific concerns of Language writing, and its origins within Russian formalism and poststructuralism. Additionally, while Piombino himself draws from a background in Freudian psychoanalysis, his work is an expansion, transformation, and development of these ideas, rather than a direct application of them to Language poetics.

Beyond this, this thesis also rejects the relevance of the wider discipline of narratology to the study. The core of narratology consists in typologies of story, plot, character, and genre, which are used to process narrative as an object of study, as typified by Mike Bal's *Narratology* (1985) or Franz Karl Stanzel's *A Theory of Narrative* (1982). Some critics have developed the discipline beyond this classical formulation: Monika Fludernik's work on 'natural narratology' attempts to extend the discipline to include postmodern texts (1996), and Alan Richardson and Francis F. Steen have proposed 'cognitive narratology' as a way of studying narrative as an

experiential phenomena (2002). However, as mentioned in the preface, narratology remains incompatible with the poetics of Language and its associated practices, due to its focus on defining narrative by its conventional systems and structures.

For these reasons, the model of radical narrative I develop in this study is structured around the concepts Piombino proposed as modes of reading and engagement, suggested by Language writing itself. I do not wish to redefine Language writing in external terms, but instead explore those radical narrative practices already evident within its body of work.

Methodology

In his 1983 essay 'Writing and Method', Language poet and critic Charles Bernstein suggests, in opposition to the idea of writing as 'mapping consciousness', that

the text is [...] seen as a map, but in the sense of a model, or outline, or legend and not trace. Rather than work which is the product of the 'author's' projection/memory/associative process, it is work for the reader's (viewer's) projection/construction'. (1983: 186)

This study draws a connection with this identification of the text as a map, a model or an outline, but not with Bernstein's separation of author and reader. In fact, I propose that the idea of a text as a map or model is contingent on the acceptance of the existence of *both* the writer's and reader's meaning-making processes. Any textual map or model must be a collaborative structure, one which is formed at the

meeting point of writerly and readerly composition. Following from this assertion, the development of the model of practice and reading that is ‘the storm of connectives’—and even the selection of ‘the storm of connectives’ as a descriptive title—is indicative of my framing of description as a process of mapping, and the text as a map.

Vital to my study is an experimental practice consisting of explorations of how the central model, the ‘storm of connectives’, might be realised as a project. The descriptive nature of the storm of connectives, as both a phrase and a model, and its formation through a focus on additional descriptive elements drawn from the work of Piombino and others, is a core part of the interaction of theory and practice within this study. As it is intended as both a catalyst for experimental practice and a model for critical readings, the storm of connectives cannot, by its very nature, be a checklist of formal elements to be applied as a yardstick of a text’s adherence or divergence from radical narrative forms. Instead, as a descriptive model, it must provide a map of a territory through which the reader/writer may pass, within which the radical narrative practices examined in this study may be fostered, shaped, and understood.

In keeping with Sheppard and Bernstein’s conception of poetics, this territory is described by both the critical part of the study *and* the practice which sits alongside it. Neither can be considered a complete map of the storm of connectives. Instead, theory and practice each provide a series of points, plotted within the bounds of the territory I seek to explicate. They are not a total description of the

territory, and do not represent a series of fixed borders or edges that cannot be breached. Rather, the model of the storm of connectives should be thought of as self-same in content and form. That is to say: as a model, it describes a practice which is inherently connective, focused on intensity and accumulation of meanings; and so the method through which this model is formed is equally interested in connectivity, intensity, and the accumulation of multiple meanings.

Because of this, this critical study is shaped around finding points of connection within the body of work described by Language writing, which indicate a shared engagement with radical narrative forms. It focuses as much on the images, narratives, and descriptions which lie within this territory as it does on theorisations of narrative, self, and poetic form. Using Piombino's highly evocative critical writing as a medium through which these points might be connected, the study provides a potential way of reading the diverse practices of radical narrative within Language writing, as well as a potential model for developing those practices in a contemporary context.

In the first chapter, I focus on the argument for reading Language works as narrative, and on the nature of those narrative practices displayed by some of the writers associated with Language writing. Focusing on both the contrasting and contradictory descriptions of the moment by key members, I want to outline an image of a moment that was defined not by orthodoxy, but by diversity of approach. I also discuss the importance of the division between Language writing and New Narrative, as well as the political divisions between

the groups which led to the denial of narrative within the internal theorisation of Language writing.

After having established the viability of a narrative reading of Language writing, as well as outlining the social and historical context of the movement, in the second chapter of this study I introduce the work of Nick Piombino and develop the 'storm of connectives' model. Through a reading of Piombino's critical work, drawing connections between his accounts of self, self-disclosure, and meaning-making, I establish the model and its attributes. Then, through critical readings of the work of Carla Harryman and Leslie Scalapino, I explore how this model can be used to read Language works, uncovering the radical narrative practices which define these two writers.

In the third and final chapter, having presented a working model of the storm of connectives, and with additional insight into the radical narrative practices of Language writing, I turn to the practice element of this study, outlining my process of composition, as well as the central work *Radical Transparency*. This procedural text represents a realisation of many of the concepts described within this thesis, as well as an exploration of ideas of transparency, autobiography, and self-disclosure. In closing, I discuss two works by Ben Lerner, *Lichtenberg Figures* and *Mean Free Path*, and outline their connection to *Radical Transparency*. Drawing on Lerner's own discussions of his process of composition and the origin of his work, I will present connections between these texts and the radical

narrative strategies I have come to place within the storm of connectives, framing it as a distinctly contemporary practice.

Chapter 1 – The Unfolding of Meaning in Time: Narrative in Language Writing

Of all the critical texts that emerged from Language writing, it is Ron Silliman's *The New Sentence* that represents one of the more lasting influences. Language writing itself, emerging on both the West and East coast of America in the early 1970s, and split between the Los Angeles and the Bay Areas of Southern California and New York, has a disparate quality, as much due to its resistance to being named and framed as a movement as due to the shifting practices of its central writers. Those writers were united by an interest in the radical politics of the New Left (identified as a split with the existing communist parties of the US and UK and their apathetic relationship to social issues such as race and gender) as much as an aesthetic unity, and this was reflected in the discursive characteristics of their work. For that reason, theoretical texts like *The New Sentence*, which seek to propose a unified aesthetic within this collection of disparate work, often receive more attention in critical discussions of the period. While the central anthology of Language writing, the Silliman-edited *In the American Tree* (1986), seems to take great pains to reflect 'a lack of consensus' (1986: xix), *The New Sentence* gives a name to a poetic form supposedly shared by writers, shaping them into a shared critical position. For example, in his introduction to *In the American Tree*, Silliman critiques the process of framing a shared practice as a movement, observing that 'extended from the form of prose to the collective existence of these poets, this impulse to name confuses a moment with a movement' (1986: xix). Yet in

The New Sentence, the core of which was delivered as a talk in 1977 (almost a decade before *In The American Tree*), he does exactly this, beginning his discussion by proposing that ‘there is such a thing as a new sentence and that it occurs thus far more or less exclusively in the prose of the Bay Area’ (1987: 63). I believe that this confident, clear framing, which comes at the expense of accurately representing the diverse practices of prose work taking place in the area at the time, is a key reason why *The New Sentence* has maintained its lasting influence—it gives a name, a structure, even a numbered and bulleted list to a practice that is otherwise nascent, experimental, and often difficult to comprehend.

Because of this, *The New Sentence* is perhaps a necessary frame for prose within the Language writing movement. And yet it is also an unsatisfactory one. More than that, if one wishes to propose a narrative reading of the work it frames, as I seek to do in this study, it is deeply restrictive. If we look to Silliman’s oft-quoted 8 points which define *The New Sentence*, we find no mention of narrative:

- 1) The paragraph organizes the sentences;
- 2) The paragraph is a unity of quantity, not logic or argument;
- 3) Sentence length is a unit of measure;
- 4) Sentence structure is altered for torque, or increased polysemy/ambiguity;
- 5) Syllogistic movement is: (a) limited; (b) controlled;

6) Primary syllogistic movement is between the preceding and following sentences;

7) Secondary syllogistic movement is toward the paragraph as a whole, or the total work;

8) The limiting of syllogistic movement keeps the reader's attention at or very close to the level of language, that is, most often at the sentence level or below. (1987: 91)

We do, however, find something of a clue regarding the motives behind narrative's absence. Syllogism, a term Silliman borrows from the Italian linguist Ferruccio Landi-Rossi, stands out as a strange choice of term to describe a 'higher order of meaning' (Silliman 1987: 86). Silliman uses syllogism as both a stand-in *for* and a denial *of* narrative. In his analysis of 3 lines from David Bromige's *One Spring* in the preceding paragraph he demonstrates this, referring to the 'syllogistic movement' within the lines as 'figurative', 'literal', and even 'narrative' (1987: 90). If syllogistic movement, as Silliman terms it, is inclusive of these qualities, then it is surely a narrative form in itself. So then why use the word 'syllogism'? The explanation for this choice lies in Ferruccio Landi-Rossi's own framing of the term. In his 1974 study *Articulations in Verbal and Objectual Sign Systems*, Landi-Rossi describes the syllogism as follows:

The syllogism starts from two sentences (from the enunciation of two propositions) which are put to work together. The conclusion is the dialectical sum of the two premises. The content of the conclusion was present in the premises, but it

emerges from them on their condition of entering into reciprocal action. We cannot have less than three pieces if we want to talk about a syllogism. The elementary form of the syllogism, indeed of the various possible syllogisms, is homologous to the elementary form of the various possible mechanisms in the field of material production. (1974: 23)

Landi-Rossi's syllogism is a staunchly materialist concept, an idea of linguistic structures attuned to concepts of labour and production. It is mechanistic, programmatic, and, for Silliman, politically convenient. By using the term syllogism in *The New Sentence*, Silliman aligns the aesthetic and political poles of his work. A political organiser and one-time executive editor of the *Socialist Review*, Silliman is seeking, in his fashioning of the New Sentence, a definition that not only summarises an aesthetic but frames it within his own politics. Fellow Language writer Bob Perelman even referred to the new sentence as an example of 'literary-political proselytizing' (1996: 61) linked to Silliman's own 'commitment to the emergence of a transformed, materialist society' (1996: 66). *The New Sentence*, then, as Silliman presents it, is in step with the New Left. Narrative, meanwhile, was not to be touched; it was politically compromised. As Steve McCaffery wrote in *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, narrative was 'the paradigm art form of the capitalist system' (1978: 189).

It is exactly this denial of narrative, this reframing of its effects, which makes a study of the narrative processes and elements present in Language writing a challenging but worthwhile endeavour. *The New Sentence* is not alone in its denial of narrative through the

maintenance of a political position. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, Silliman's refusal of narrative in *The New Sentence* is emblematic of an orthodoxy that has led to a critical exclusion of narrative as an aspect of Language writing practice. For this reason, in undertaking this study, I must begin with the critical framing ahead of the poetic work. I am, after all, not seeking to identify the conventional markers of narrative prose within Language writing. Instead, I seek to read these works as narrative, in an attempt to see them as progressions of narrative form, radical developments of how narrative is typically seen to operate. In this chapter, I aim to show that the typical critical framing of Language writing obscures and confuses the diverse practices of self-disclosure and narrative that exist in the work of these writers during this period. It is not a case of performing narrative readings of works which are non-narrative in nature, but instead uncovering the narrative, subjective, and affective processes that Language writers enmeshed with their conceptual and language-centric practices to create new forms of radical narrative.

Escaping the 'Prison House': Language Writing and the Denial of Narrative

In his 2016 'reassessment' of Language writing, *Questions of Poetics*, Barrett Watten reminisces about his ten-volume collective autobiography, *The Grand Piano* (2007). Watten contrasts the ways in which the writers involved (Rae Armantrout, Steve Benson, Alan Bernheimer, Carla Harryman, Lyn Hejinian, Tom Mandel, Ted Pearson, Bob Perelman, Kit Robinson, Ron Silliman, and Watten

himself) described, understood, and created their work during the two distinct periods of the project. The first period, as Watten describes it, is 1975-1980—the time of the original Grand Piano reading series in San Francisco, and some of the core years of the Language writing moment. The second period, 1999-2010, is the period during which the 10 writers worked on Watten's ten-volume series, reflecting on the first period. As Watten puts it:

Within this shift from one period to the next, a change in the nature of the literary occurred (for writers in the project, but also in the broader historical sense). In the first period, the work of a group of writers (or [*sic*] avant-garde tendency) individually or collectively shared a range of formal features: a foregrounding of language as opposed to reference; an emphasis on the material text as iterative or noncommunicating; an avoidance of the speaking subject, persona or identity claims; and experiments in non-narrative. In the later period, the same writers, to greater or lesser degrees, contextualised that work in referential, communicative and personal terms, within the form of experimental autobiography that permitted active interrogation of a genre as a feature of the writing itself. (2016: 139)

Watten's identification of the prevalent features of the Language writing moment, his 'first period', represent the typical descriptors that have come to define the work of that specific context. His 'foregrounding of language' is perhaps the most common of these, drawn from the work of linguist Roman Jakobson, whom Watten had

previously referenced in various publications, including his essay 'The Politics of Style' (1981). But I would like to call into question Watten's other claims, in particular his framing of Language writing as 'noncommunicative', absent of 'identity claims', and 'non-narrative'. What is especially interesting in Watten's periodisation is that he doesn't identify narrative or communicative practices in the works discussed in the volumes of *The Grand Piano*, but instead recognises them as *retrospective* schema used to frame the work. Namely he refers to the 'referential, communicative and personal terms' in which the ten writers now, outside of the historical context, define their work. This is an important dissonance: why is work with supposedly no autobiographical or narrative content being described and recounted through autobiographical and personal means?

Some of the contributions to *The Grand Piano* reflect on this tension between applying a retrospective, external autobiographical schema to existing work, and uncovering an internal narrative, autobiographical origin for their work that may have been disguised or ignored at the time of their publication. In the fourth volume Steve Benson describes his participation in the Language writing as a 'revenge against the self' (2007: 138), explaining that 'in Language writing 'self' became a tool, a weapon, a cipher, an open question, all sorts of things' (2007: 138). Most notably, he adds that the self 'didn't vanish, it just wasn't willing to be taken for granted anymore' (2007: 138). This contrasts with Watten's description of Language writing as defined by 'an avoidance of the speaking subject, persona or identity claims' (2016: 139). Benson isn't the only contributor to *The Grand*

Piano reflect on this. Ron Silliman, for example, when tracing the lineage of the line ‘Instead of ant wort I saw brat guts’ (2007: 33)—which was created during an elaborate reading and typing practice devised by Kit Robinson, Steve Benson and Bob Perelman—seems to elevate the identity of the writer above the form of the text, stating:

I can imagine every poet associated with the Grand Piano, plus quite a few others having written *Instead of ant wort I saw brat guts* [...] In every instance, however, it would mean something quite different. Those words in a poem by Ron Padgett would carry a different weight than they would in a work by Linh Dinh, Elizabeth Willis, or Bruce Andrews. What those differing meanings might be is what concerns me most. (2007: 33)

There is an important distinction between these two examples. Benson is pointing to a centrality of self that existed within his creative practice at the time, and that shaped his work. Silliman, meanwhile, is reframing work defined as non-narrative as contingent on the presence of a recognisable self or author—but doing so *retrospectively*. Silliman’s approach seems to support Watten’s periodisation, contextualising the first period of Language writing in ‘referential, communicative and personal terms’ (2016: 139). Benson’s approach, however, disagrees with Watten, suggesting instead that those personal terms are not a retrospective approach to the work, but a catalysing force in its original inception. Both approaches share a concern with the central dissonance of framing

or reframing previously 'non-narrative' works around narrative constructions of the self.

Elsewhere in *The Grand Piano*, it is Bob Perelman who most directly approaches this dissonance. 'We're all writing discursive sentences here, and isn't that odd?' (2007: 72) he asks in the third volume of the series, before going on to add:

To say the obvious: all of this, these attempts at presenting our pasts, go against an early *don't* that some of us promulgated: critiques of narrative by Ron and others (Bruce Andrews, Steve McCaffery). That *don't* has reverberated for decades, especially in the reception of Language writing: don't try to construct novelizing, technicolored picture windows, which only open onto ideologically fixed theme parks. I promulgated this don't myself in an MLA talk, but I wasn't terrifically enthusiastic about what I was saying. (2007: 72)

Perelman not only directs our attention directly to the dissonant nature of much of the writing in *The Grand Piano*; he also displays a scepticism—both for how the work reframes Language writing, and for the non-narrative positioning of the time. For Perelman, the presentation of the past through narrative forms in *The Grand Piano* is not a betrayal of the original values of Language writing, but instead an acknowledgement of the limitations of those values, their negative influence. It's an influence Perelman begins to actively erode. In relating the story of Louis Zukofsky telling him how William Carlos Williams, visiting Zukofsky's home, 'peed right in the corner of the bathroom' like a 'slob' (2007: 74), Perelman locates an origin

story of sorts for a single line in Ron Silliman's *Ketjak*: 'The urinary habits of Dr. Williams' (1978: 8). In doing this, Perelman begins to unpick the notion of that iconic work of Language writing as being non-referential, and in particular, non-narrative.

Perelman returns to *Ketjak* later in *The Grand Piano*, when, in the fourth volume, he relates an encounter with Bruce Andrews at a conference in 2007. After Andrews reads 'what at first sounded like a version of language writing poetics circa 1975-80' (2007: 121), which Perelman describes as concerned with 'problems with constructing narrative, representation, and voice' (2007: 121), Andrews, in a 'surprise move' (2007: 121), reveals it to actually be 'paraphrases of U.S politicians circa 1948 as they considered what to do about the Soviet Union' (2007: 121). Puzzled by the statement Andrews is trying to make, Perelman recalls asking him, as a joke, 'if there was such a thing as Language writing?' (2007: 125) Perelman reports that Andrews replied: 'Language writing, if there was going to be such a thing would be defined by specific formal features: no narrative, no representational description' (2007: 125). This classification, which mirrors Watten's, is then parodied by Perelman:

I'd written that *Ketjak* could be read as a kind of novel and that *Oxota* in fact calls itself one, so does that make Ron and Lyn not be Language writers? Bruce nodded. And Rae and Carla would not be Language writers; I, of course, would not be one. Perhaps, I suggested, there is in fact only one example of a Language writer and that would be, precisely, you, Bruce. He smiled. (2007: 125)

Perelman's retort, though clearly humorous in tone, speaks to the tension that many of the contributors to *The Grand Piano* seem to feel when faced with the stringent formal descriptors of Language writing as a coherent movement. While Watten attempts to frame this tension as existing within a second period of Language writing ('a change in the nature of the literary' (2016: 139)), Perelman's anecdotes point to it being a more deep-seated tension, focused around narrative and the self, that manifests in the works themselves. In the third volume of *The Grand Piano*, Perelman admits: 'I feel like a nonbeliever, not wanting to look back' (2007: 74). It's a telling statement, one that points to the orthodoxy that hangs over the work of Language writers. It is this orthodoxy that seems to compel Watten to maintain his image of the two periods as separate, and his description of Language as 'an avoidance of the speaking subject, persona or identity claims; and experiments in non-narrative' (2016: 139). But a close reading of *The Grand Piano* suggests instead that narrative, self, and even voice were contingent elements of the work of many of the 'Pianists' and the wider group of Language writers.

This is not to say that Watten is in complete denial of the existence of narrative structures and forms within Language writing. But his insistence on his own periodisation leads him to try to define these traits within the umbrella term 'nonnarrative poetics', which in recent years he has used to describe the narrative practices of Language writing:

A nonnarrative poetics, then, is framed within experimental forms of narration, in the open horizon of the serial work, in a manner that reproduces how nonnarrative writing was undertaken as a form of the present within a historical period whose duration, beginning and end were indeterminate.

(2016: 139)

For Watten, it is closure and historical periodisation that define narrative as a formal device, and so a narrative that emerges from openness and from 'presentism' has to be defined as in conflict with narrative, namely as 'nonnarrative'. We can find this same use of nonnarrative (notable for its lack of hyphenation, something Watten is careful to maintain) in Watten's introduction to *A Guide to Poetics Journal: Writing in the Expanded Field*. It is present in his discussion of the fifth edition of that journal, titled 'Non/narrative'. As is perhaps obvious from its title, that 1985 issue is something of a landmark moment in the late development of Language writing, focusing itself on the issue of narrative. In fact, this journal would be the first of the Language writing-associated journals to theme an entire issue around narrative.

Poetics Journal marked a sea-change in the critical focus of the writers associated with Language. As Ron Silliman put it to me in a 2017 Poets & Critics symposium in Paris: 'they were going from communicating within the immediate literary community to trying to communicate with the world at large. So it changed the terms of the discussion once and for all' (2017). Silliman was referring to the symbolism of Watten and his co-editor Lyn Hejinian's decision to

publish *Poetics Journal* in a 'perfect-bound book version' (2017), rather than its original 'mimeographed and stapled version' (2017). For Silliman, this represented the journal's outward-facing intention, a claim he repeats in the fifth volume of *The Grand Piano* when he describes the Language moment as a 'specific literary tendency and history, bounded chronologically by the first publication of *This* in 1971 and the first issue of *Poetics Journal* in 1982' (2007: 29). But while Silliman grants the first issue of the journal this significance, for Watten, it is the fifth issue—'Non/narrative'—which had the most destabilising effect on Language writing. This comes across strongly in Watten's *A Guide to Poetics Journal: Writing in the Expanded Field* introduction:

In retrospect, it seems that Non/narrative marked a crisis in aesthetics among language-centred writers and a defining moment in the journal's project in its situating of nonnarrative in theory, practice, and comment. It was truly controversial. (2013: 23)

Watten's framing of these debates is polemical. He proposes that, at the time of the issue's publication, 'something snapped in terms of the immanent consensus shared by members of the writing community' (2013: 23), before reluctantly adding that 'perhaps this was a good thing' (2013: 23). From this commentary, one might expect the issue to be filled with heated debate, and sharp distinctions, and yet a reading reveals little of this. The issue's central 'Symposium', each essay of which specifically concerns narrative, portrays a set of writers eager to reshape narrative to their own

means, and to use it in innovative poetic strategies. While Watten uses his contemporary introduction to paint narrative as ‘the real prison house to which we have been confined by history’ (2013: 19), the texts of the original journal undermine this view.

We only need look at the essays contained within the issue’s Symposium to affirm this:

In the kind of poetry I want to write associations are neither transparent and direct nor arbitrary, but somewhere in between. One proceeds through the stanza clusters, of course, in their given order, but not without effort, wonder, and argument. Doubt and choice can coexist in the reader’s mind. For me this better corresponds to the character of daily experience. (Armantrout 1985: 94)

So concludes Rae Armantrout in her essay ‘Chains’, presenting a formation of narrative that allows for openness and surprise. Her reference to creating ‘associations’ that exist between the obvious and the opaque points to a nuanced view of narrative connectivity that marks it not as a symbol or fixed classification, but an active, readerly process. Her mention of the ‘character of daily experience’ (2013: 94) and the implication that her work emerges from lived experience, not a highly formalised conceptual position, is, as I will show, common amongst Language writers. This idea of narrative as relational and generative is also present in Diane Ward’s contribution, ‘The Narration’:

The narrative in my work exists in my efforts to relate the procedural decisions I make, the impossible or ideal situations that I would create, a sort of thirdness in a world of ones and twos. (1985: 95)

Here she identifies narrative as emerging from pattern as well as procedure and is eager to locate narrative as a presence in her work. Her 'thirdness' echoes Armantrout's 'somewhere in between' (1985: 94), pointing to a shared focus on connectivity within each writer's conception of narrative.

Elsewhere in the symposium, cris cheek, in what is perhaps the most strongly contradictory essay to Watten's framing, presents narrative as having a renewed primacy in writing. 'Narrative is writing order' (1985: 71), he states, before proposing a powerfully liberatory concept of narrative that frames it as a personal response to lived experience:

An immersion into what and how who Is and Are [sic] moving in the world gives us a narrative line of the development of nomadic attentions and also inferences or actual instances of specific narratives which such attentions bring to us. We're receiving mixes and combining mixes to create personal versions of the playful, sloppy, doubting, quoting, matter of fact, cliché, obscure, demanding, awkward, piqued and more. (1985: 73)

cheek's conception of narrative is combinatorial, empowering the writer as an active agent in the sampling of external influence.

Notably, he distinguishes between received, societal, or specific pre-existing narratives, and the writer's narrative process of combining, splitting, and inverting those narratives. Vital to this is his concept of 'nomadic attentions' (1985: 73) as granting the writer agency to actively resist or recompose narratives, rather than framing narrative as an inherently oppressive device, as McCaffery does (1978: 189). It is impossible to read cheek's essay and conceive of narrative as a 'prison house' (Watten 2013: 19). Indeed, one could suspect that the 'prison house' in question might be the stringent descriptors that Watten, McCaffery, Andrews et al. use to characterise Language writing. Like *The Grand Piano*, which through its proposed form of an 'experimental autobiography' (Watten 2016: 139) inadvertently allowed the 10 'Pianists' to re-engage with the narrative and self-centred aspects of their work, so the 'Non/narrative' issue of *Poetics* seems to have allowed this same space for writers to reassert narrative as an aspect of their work. The Symposium is clear evidence of this, with the writers demonstrating how eager they are to explore how they might remake narrative within their work. What is even more notable, is that, despite Watten's eagerness (in his contemporary introduction) to reframe this work within 'nonnarrative writing practices' (2013: 19), which he defines as work 'which deferred or suspended at least one of the several distinguishing features of narrative' (2013: 19), none of the Symposium writers use the term 'nonnarrative', choosing instead to remake, not deny, the concept of narrative itself.

There are of course, within the journal's symposium, counterarguments to the claims that narrative is a potentially redeemable method within radical poetics. Steve McCaffery builds on his previous claim of narrative as an inherently capitalist form with a Baudrillardian critique that proposes narrative form 'no longer offers a commodity world of bounded stories and events but hypersimulates its own form as the abstract form of reproduction' (1985: 66). And yet even this critique is framed as 'an issue not of narrative but narratives, of a plural narrativity that permeates and circulates our lives as telling,' thus leaving space for a redemption of narrative outside of the hegemony of societal master narratives. Bob Perelman, in his essay 'Exchangeable Frames', does not come out in support of narrative as such, but instead refuses the terms of the argument: 'There is no such thing as nonnarrative writing. Better, perhaps, to say that there is nothing a reader can't narrativize' (1985: 169). Perelman situates narrative practices with the reader, not the text, and in doing so collapses the argument:

Anything is a story if it's seen as one. Yet any narrative can be dissolved into a wider scheme. So there are no "such things" as narrative or nonnarrative. Narrative is not immanent, but social. (1985: 169)

Yet, in this collapsing, Perelman still ends up in a position that feels enmeshed with the idea of narrative as generative and experiential. Narrative, for Perelman, is generated by the reader's engagement with a text.

The collective result of reading the essays in the 'Non/narrative' symposium is a sense of narrative as an active and invigorated aspect of radical poetics, not a structure of closure and a limited horizon of meaning. Watten's late recontextualisation, in his introduction to *A Guide to Poetics Journal: Writing in the Expanded Field*, falls flat, seeming like an attempt to reinscribe his own theory of nonnarrative onto a set of diverse pieces that fail to support his claims. It is worth noting that his co-editor, Lyn Hejinian, describes the issue in completely different terms in her own introduction to the same collection, explaining simply that the Symposium at the centre of the journal 'gives some indication of how various are the sites through (or around) which narrative may pass' (2013: 6). There is no polemical description of narrative or aggressive reframing, which is perhaps to be expected, as Hejinian's own work is deeply enmeshed with issues of narrative and narration. In her essay in the fourth issue of *Poetics Journal*, 'The Rejection of Closure', Hejinian purposefully and powerfully separates closure from narrative as an inherent part of its form. Hejinian acknowledges, like Perelman, that it 'is impossible to discover any string or bundle of words that is entirely free of possible narrative or psychological content' (1984: 140) and in doing so she is able to conceive of narrative without closure:

Form cannot be equated with closure, nor can raw material be equated with the open. I want to say this at the outset and most emphatically, in order to prevent any misunderstanding. Indeed, the conjunction of form with radical openness may be

a version of the “paradise” for which the poem yearns—a
flowering focus on confined infinity. (1984: 134)

The paradise Hejinian alludes to is not the death of narrative, but its integration into poetry in a radically new, radically open form. As with the views expressed in the symposium on narrative in the issue that followed, there is a sense that, in this late stage of Language writing, the narrative ambitions of these writers are becoming visible, even primary, in their pursuit of radical new work.

This engagement with narrative, and its framing as a site of conflict, is not limited to the *Poetics Journal*. In the same year as ‘Non/narrative’, the journal *The Difficulties* published a special issue on the work of Ron Silliman. Consisting of a handful of essays and an extensive interview with Silliman himself, it demonstrates the conflict between narrative as a hegemonic logic, and narrative as a potential site for radical experiment—a conflict found even within Silliman’s own descriptions of his work. For example, when talking about his use of the Fibonacci sequence to structure *Ketjak*, a distinct formal device that has become strongly associated with his work, Silliman explains that ‘A successive increase in sheer mass, in writing as in music, is felt by a reader as a powerful index of narrative (i.e., meaningful) development’ (1985: 35). Seeing Silliman refer to narrative development as meaningful, and *Ketjak* itself as narrative, is surprising. In the late 70s and early 80s, he often refused to define his work narratively, and when discussing *Ketjak* in his 1977 essay and talk ‘The New Sentence’, he wrote:

Any attempt to explicate the work as a whole according to some "higher order" of meaning, such as narrative or character, is doomed to sophistry, if not overt incoherence. (1977: 92)

This is a denial of narrative in the strongest of terms. However, by 1985 Silliman seems to be recognising, or admitting to, the narrative aspects of both this work, and his wider body of work.

Returning to the *Difficulties* interview, Silliman goes on to describe narrative as being 'a function of the mind, not of the plot or storyboard' (1985: 38). Here we can begin to see a separation of narrative into two concepts: narrative as Silliman wishes to practice it, and narrative as symbolic power structure. Silliman's narrative of the mind is a readerly, experiential narrative, similar to those we have already seen proposed by Language writers within the 'Non/narrative' issue of *Poetics Journal*. Here, Silliman seems to align himself with Perelman. But we can also see Silliman's other conception of narrative: 'When writing is organized hierarchically, content is not only restricted, but much more easily subjected to a wide range of possible social conventions, internal as well as external censorship' (1985: 45). This is the second narrative, a social structure of hegemonic power, an ideology. Silliman suggests the department store Sears as being an example of this kind of narrative: 'retail layout is a hierarchical structure: it's a narrative with a conclusion you buy' (1985: 43). This duality marks a change from Silliman's previous discussions of narrative and—appearing in the

same year as 'Non/narrative', and the year after 'The Rejection of Closure'—reflects a similar interest in isolating narrative from what Language writing had typically classified as inherently negative power structures, characterised by total unity and closure.

Perhaps surprisingly, the interview also has Silliman opening the door to a narrative reading of *Ketjak* as, in Silliman's own words, 'meaningful' (1985: 35). This is reinforced by Charles Bernstein's essay, in the same issue, on Silliman's work. Focusing specifically on how narrative operates in Silliman's formal structures, Bernstein explains how Silliman's work 'accounts for narration by showing how the sequencing of sentences engenders meaning and how the world accomodates [*sic*]—is made particular by—the ingenuity of narrative shapes' (1985: 93). This precise observation by Bernstein points to a key aspect of Silliman's work—that its foregrounding of processes of meaning and narrative formation do not obscure the narrative of the text, but complicate it. We are not seeing a denial of narrative, but a self-reflexive development of it. As Bernstein puts it, Silliman's work is 'narrative process rather than narrative fiction'⁵ (1985: 95).

When I spoke with Silliman at the Poets and Critics symposium, he confirmed this aspect of his work. Explaining that narrative was 'implicit in a lot of the earlier work I was doing, which I didn't think about in exactly those terms', he added 'I think I've gotten clearer on that over time' (2017). In many ways this mirrors the return to

⁵ This development of narrative is in keeping with Bernstein's own conception of poetics I touched on in the preface to this study. This further reinforces the idea that within poetics, narrative takes on some of the aspects of its host, and becomes 'an activity that is ongoing, that moves in different directions at the same time'. (Bernstein 1992: 150)

narrative and the self we've already seen from Perelman, Benson and others in *The Grand Piano*. Watten's description of the two periods, with the 70s and early 80s as being defined by nonnarrative, and the turn of the millennium seeing that nonnarrative work being described in narrative, personal expressive ways, is thus revealed to be inaccurate. Instead, what we see above with Silliman, in the 'Non/narrative' issue of *Poetics*, and in *The Grand Piano* itself is the recognition of the narrative aspects of the original work, as each writer re-approaches it. In the case of Silliman, when I asked him if he would discuss narrative in his work, he gave me the following definition: 'Narrative is the unfolding of meaning in time' (2017). This is not a definition that is unique to Silliman. As I will show, narrative as an interaction of pattern or meaning, through an interval or time, was a shared conception of narrative form held by many writers associated with Language writing. And, importantly, many of these writers saw this approach as a development of narrative, not a denial, obstruction, or refusal of it. As James Sherry puts it in his piece on Silliman in *The Difficulties*:

Narrative is more than the literary story, rather a recounting that might be of temporal or prosodic events. These definitions do not attempt to purge the more common, literature uses, but to absorb them into a general case in order that the old can exist within the new. (1985: 74)

Sherry's statement is one I aim to take forward within this study. Destabilising the framing of Language writing as a non-narrative practice is not simply an attempt at revising literary history, but rather

a necessary act if space is to be made for a radical narrative poetics that refuses to adhere to an artificial form/content split. As Sherry observes, new definitions do not refuse lineages, but absorb and reshape them towards the creation of new work. In order to develop my own radical narrative practices, I wish to build upon the structures and practices I see within Language writing—but to do so productively, I have to challenge the persistent labelling of Language writing as being defined by nonnarrative poetics. However, I am by no means the first writer to attempt to articulate the potential of a radical narrative poetics. In fact, Language writing developed in simultaneity with a movement which was formed around exactly that intention: the New Narrative movement.

‘Fellow Travellers’: New Narrative and Language Writing

Founded by Bruce Boone and Robert Glück, New Narrative emerged both as a response to Language writing’s rejection of the practices of autobiography and narrative, and an attempt to articulate and develop those same practices, which these two writers saw as essential to their work. New Narrative writers shared the concerns of Language writers around enacting radical politics within their writing practices but diverged on what these practices would entail. For this reason, if I am to interrogate the denial of narrative practices within Language writing and its critical framing, it is necessary to examine New Narrative.

In his ‘Long Note on New Narrative’, Robert Glück’s loose history of the group, published in the 2004 anthology *Biting the Error: Writers Explore Narrative*, he states that ‘to talk about New Narrative, I also

have to talk about Language poetry' (2004: 25). It's a statement that betrays how New Narrative has often both externally and internally been defined in relation to Language writing. In that essay Glück goes on to offer some humorously backhanded compliments to Language writing's 'puritan rigour' (2004: 25) and 'professionalism' (2004: 25) before adding that 'if he could have become a Language poet he would have' (2004: 25). In this way, Glück frames Language writing as exclusionary by nature, if not by intention: 'Whole areas of my experience, especially gay experience, were not admitted to this utopia' (2004: 25). Glück explains this reasoning with clarity: 'we (eventually we were gay, lesbian and working-class writers) could not let narration go' (2004: 27). New Narrative, then, was founded on the need for representation within the formal experimentation of new writing, and the centrality of this representation to any work that might position itself as political. For Glück, Language's examination of meaning and reference 'by subtraction: of voice, of continuity' (2004: 26) removed the very aspects of the work that he saw as necessary to his writing.

While Glück's essay is retrospective, delivered from the vantage point of the early 2000s, it is supported by the critical framings of the movement that were written during its most active years. Steve Abbott's introduction to *Soup*, the closest publication there was to a New Narrative journal, states:

New Narrative is language conscious but arises out of specific social and political concerns of specific communities. It may be foregrounded as in the work of Luisah Tiesh, Shirely

Garzotto, Robert Glück, and Judy Grahn or more buried as in recent work by Leslie Scalapino and Aaron Shurin. It stresses the enabling role of content in determining form rather than stressing form as independent or separate from its social origins and goals. Writing which makes political and emotional (as well as linguistic) connections interests me more than writing which does not. (1981: 1)

Here we see the clearest framing of New Narrative's rejection of Language writing. In Abbott's statement, 'the enabling role of content in determining form rather than stressing form as independent or separate from its social origins and goals' (1981: 1) is (as Rob Halpern astutely points out in his essay 'Restoring "China"'(2009)) in conflict with of Ron Silliman's influential maxim of Language writing, which appears later in the same issue of *Soup*: 'New content occurs within already existing forms; new forms contain already-existing contents' (Silliman 1981b: 41). For New Narrative writers like Abbott and Glück, narrative content is the source of political efficacy and is contingent to formal experimentation, while for Silliman and the Language writers he seeks to represent, it is form, not content, which is a progressive force within poetics. This debate is made in relation to a third position, marked by Robert Creeley's claim that 'form is never more than an extension of content', made famous by Charles Olson in his manifesto 'Projective Verse' (1950). However, while Silliman is evidently resisting and refuting Creeley's claim, it would not be accurate to say that Abbott is supporting it. For Abbott, and New Narrative, content *enables* form but it does not *encompass* it—

the two are interlinked, not hierarchically arranged. This tension is stretched across the pages of this single issue of *Soup*, an issue which also contains Bruce Boone's essay 'Language Writing: The Pluses and Minuses of the New Formalism'. In that essay, Boone accuses Language writing of 'some serious defects' (1985: 2), pointing out that 'if the Language Writers want to be political, they should make their politics deal with the actual world' (1985: 2). If this seems like a stagey and opportunistic dig at a literary group, that is, perhaps, because that was a core tactic of the smaller, less recognised—and less critically validated—New Narrative writers. As Glück puts it:

We contended with the Language poets while seeking their attention in the forums they erected for themselves. We published articles in *Poetics Journal* and *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* and spoke in talk-series and forums—a mere trickle in the torrent of their political work. If I had thought Language Poetry to be a dead end, what a fertile dead end it turned out to be! (2004: 28-29)

This approach of defining New Narrative in relation to Language, and intervening in Language events and publications in order to develop new work and refute the assumptions of the 'new formalism' (Boone 1985: 2), has contributed to the popular framing of these two interlocking ideas (New Narrative and Language) as facing each other on either side of the 'battle lines' (Glück 2004: 26).

In his 2011 essay 'The Small Press Traffic school of dissimulation', Kaplan Harris refers to 'one of the great lost poetry conversations of

the 1970s' (2011)—the debates between New Narrative writers Bruce Boone, Steve Abbott and Robert Glück, Steve Benson and Ron Silliman (themselves key Language writers), and the editors Kathleen Fraser and Denise Kastan that took place as part of Small Press Traffic's Marxist study group. Harris refers to it as a 'catalytic moment' in which this group of writers sought to 'carry forward the activism of the New Left' (2011). However, the debates were combative not productive, with neither group willing to concede to the other's views on how the New Left might manifest itself in their poetic works. This disjunction between the two groups would go on to be hugely influential in the development of both New Narrative and Language writing. As Harris puts it:

Thirty years later, the writers are studied, if they are studied at all, in self-encapsulated schools or movements. The writers are understood by social and aesthetic contiguity within such groupings, but, at the cross community level, they are cleaved from one another and from the ground conditions in which each developed a distinctive practice. When critics today champion such schools or movements in isolation — either by idealizing the notion of collective authorship within a group or by defending the embattled writers from powerful outside interests — then histories of the Bay Area fall too easily into misleading and divisive scenarios, such as the Poetry Wars or "the violence of expulsion," as Perelman remarks in *The Grand Piano*. (2011)

As Harris points out, both New Narrative and Language are often considered to be isolated objects of study, represented as distinct, coherent practices guided by conflicting concerns. However as we have seen in this chapter, Language writing contained conceptions and practices of narrative that were highly divergent. From Steve McCaffery's total denial of narrative as an aesthetic with any progressive or radical potential to Bernstein and Perelman's embracing of narrative as a core aspect of radical poetics, Language writers represented a spectrum of practices and relationships with narrative. These practices, and how they relate to New Narrative call into question the common idea of New Narrative and Language writing as antagonistic groups. Why, then, were Boone, Abbott, and Glück so eager to emphasise divisions between the groups, both during and after their active periods?

The reason seems to be due to a series of confrontations like those that took place in the Small Traffic Press Marxist Study Group (Harris cites Silliman as having recalled that they had 'some TERRIFIC arguments. In every sense of that word' (2011)), and also those which occurred during the *Left/Write!* conference in 1981. Abbott, Boone, and Glück were all part of the steering committee for this event, making it a defining moment in the development of New Narrative. In fact, Rob Halpern has described the 1981 *Left/Write!* conference, along with the 1990 *OutWrite* conference, as the bookends of 'New Narrative's first decade of intense productivity' (2017: 12). It was at *Left/Write!*, during the panel 'How Can Writers Best join in a Unified Political Struggle?' (accessed via transcripts

produced by Steve Abbott) that Ron Silliman, the sole Language writer on the panel, triggered one of the most notable of these confrontations. After admitting that 'I'm learning from gay people, from women, from people of color of a whole series of kinds of oppression I need to know about' (1981a: 50), Silliman goes on to explain that 'particularly in the women's and gay movements, because they are a cross-class community, both have the potential for bourgeois cooption' (1981a: 50). This skepticism towards the political potential of women's and gay right movements, as might be expected, was not well-received, and Amber Hollibaugh, the editor of *The Socialist Review* who was also on the panel with Silliman responded:

I've heard these questions arise in various ways for 15 years and I'm sure it's gone on long before that. I wish we on the left could learn how to disagree with respect for the lack of knowledge people have, for the ignorance all of us carry, without assuming people don't support each other's struggles. Unless they say so. And at times, part of the Left has said they don't support gay rights. Maybe we can leave here today talking about how to differentiate between the valued opinions and support all of us share for each other's struggles. If we can't do it, we've got nothing in the future. (1981: 51)

This reprimand of Silliman encapsulates the way in which narrative, as a core element of representational writing, became a wider political battleground for these two movements. Though the discussion above concerns the potential for what we would now think

of as an intersectional movement within the Left, it also touches on those issues of content versus form that divide Language and New Narrative. For Silliman, identity is not at the core of his political struggle, and this is reflected in the framing of his poetic work, which seeks to emphasise formal and structural shifts over content, representation, and identity. For Silliman, it was economic and class-based oppression which was the political challenge of the era, and so it was a poetics borne out of formal experimentation, which refused established orders and hegemonic logic, that would define radical poetic form. Meanwhile, New Narrative placed identity, albeit as a shifting, collaborative and collective project, at the heart of its work. The marginalisation of women, gay and queer communities, and racial minorities were central issues for these writers, and their poetics was therefore fashioned around a need to shift the representational schema placed on these groups by wider society through subverting representational norms. For this reason, content became necessary as a leading force, as progressive form alone could not seek to represent the diverse and marginalised identities of New Narrative's writers. Looking at narrative through this lens, we can also begin to see that it was an aesthetic flash-point for the wider issue of intersectionality in the New Left. The split itself was not around narrative as an aesthetic and formal technique, but instead around the political implications of that aesthetic as framed within the core New Left debate of the period.

In his 'Long Note on New Narrative', Glück shows a distinct awareness of this fact, explaining that the previously mentioned New

Narrative and Language 'battle-lines' (2004: 26) were framed around the period's political dialogue between 'representation and non-representation' (2004: 26) rather than the aesthetic poles adhered to by the work. Glück goes on to say that the 'logic of history' (2004: 26) at that moment supported the idea of this division, along with 'the struggle to find a third position that would encompass the whole narrative' (2004: 26). Glück even goes so far as to describe, in retrospect, the division as being 'arbitrary' (2004: 26). In fact, much like the Language writers in *The Grand Piano*, who, at a distance from this logic of history, were able to identify the previously denied narrative and self-oriented aspects of their own work, so we find Glück ultimately conceding to the overall collectivity that existed between writers of both groups within that moment:

We were fellow travellers of Language Poetry and the innovative feminist poetry of the time, but our lives and reading led us towards a hybrid aesthetic, something impure. [...] One could untangle that know [sic] forever, or build an aesthetics on the ways language conveys silence, chaos and undifferentiated existence and erects countless horizons of meaning. (Glück 2004: 27)

Here we see Glück pushing towards the idea of a continuation of both 'schools'; a shared legacy. Returning to Harris' essay "The Small Press Traffic School of Dissimulation", we can see that he too seeks to rediscover the 'visible signs of mutual interest and productive exchange' (2011) between the two groups, rather than continue the 'misleading and divisive scenarios' (2001) he sees in

contemporary discourse. Halpern, too, makes a claim for the 'literary promiscuity that New Narrative has always stood for' (2017: 14) alongside 'New Narrative's permission to maintain the body and self as vulnerable and porous, resistant to newly re-sanctioned forms of fortification and borderization' (2017: 14).

Perhaps it is this porosity, this vulnerability, which has resulted in New Narrative's recent re-emergence as powerfully connected to a set of diverse voices emerging in contemporary poetics. A series of recent anthologies, including the already mentioned *From Our Hearts to Yours: New Narrative as Contemporary Practice* as well as *Biting The Error: Writers Explore Narrative* and Dodie Bellamy and Kevin Killian's *Writers Who Love Too Much: New Narrative Writing 1977-1997* position New Narrative as an ongoing, relevant and distinctly contemporary practice, identifying its traits in the work of Renee Gladman, Matias Viegner, Pamela Lu, Tisa Bryant, Chris Kraus, Eileen Myles, and Joey Yearous-Algozin among others.

Meanwhile, with Language writers like Silliman ceding to the presence of a distinct self and narrative form within their work, the failings of that moment's aggressive critical framing of the work produced within it as non-narrative and non-communicative is apparent. Simultaneously, the loosely defined unity of formal experimentation and representation present in New Narrative provides an attractive framework for contemporary practices. However, I am not eager to restate this division. To talk of New Narrative as a movement outside of, and separate to, Language writing remains a shaky position, unsupported by the views of the

writers of the era. Equally, to consider Language writing a singular moment of non-narrative, non-communicative writing, consisting of writers that rejected the representational approaches of New Narrative, is to remake a myth. Instead, as I proceed in this study, I will draw on writers from both 'sides' by objecting to the viability of those sides at all. Instead, I will seek to define how narrative operated within the works themselves—not how it was positioned, or even exploited, as a site of political conflict by both groups. There remains, as Glück indicates, a deep connection between the two groups. In his 'Long Note on New Narrative', he states:

I wanted to write with total continuity and total disjunction since I experienced the world (and myself) as continuous and infinitely divided. That was my ambition for writing. Why should a work of literature be organised by one pattern of engagement? Why should a 'position' be maintained regarding the size of the gaps between units of meaning? To describe how the world is organized may be the same as organizing the world. (2004: 29)

We see echoes of this sentiment in the collection of essays from the Symposium of the 'Non/narrative' issue of *Poetics* with which we began this chapter. The same sense of liberation, of self-definition, and of claiming narrative as a site for progressive development marks both. Glück, too, seeks an escape from the idea of a 'prison house' of narrative orthodoxy towards a poetics that might seek to represent its writers without compromise, while engaging with the contradiction of such an act—its inherent shift of discontinuity and

continuity. This is the 'unfolding of meaning in time' (2017) which Silliman so astutely presented as a definition of narrative. In the next chapter, I develop this definition through a sustained focus on the poetic works which orbited the positions of both New Narrative and Language writing, and which shared a concern with the reshaping of narrative as a radical practice of both formal experimentation and expressive autobiography.

Chapter 2 - Interval and Pattern: Towards a Model of Radical Narrative

To begin this chapter, I wish to return to the previously quoted definition of narrative offered by Ron Silliman at the Poets and Critics Symposium at Paris Diderot University. When I asked him to explain how he saw narrative within Language writing, he gave the answer: 'Narrative is the unfolding of meaning in time' (2017). Receiving this definition from Silliman, especially in the context of a direct conversation⁶, was an important moment for my study—not because it offered a paradigm I might use to read Language works as narrative, but because it reinforced the paradigm I was *already* using to perform narrative readings of Language works. Being given this definition by one of the most influential Language writers—one, as we have seen, initially resistant to considering the role of narrative in a radical poetics—served as an endorsement of the direction of this study. In this chapter I wish to discuss how I came to formulate the paradigm that Silliman's definition would mirror.

The origins of this study lie in a reading of Language writing that left me unsatisfied by the critical framing of the work as non-narrative. As I have shown in this study, this framing was driven as much (if not more) by the political positioning and orthodoxy required to shape the

⁶ Silliman, in his later work, has gained a reputation for revising his own poetics. In his work *Under Albany* (2004) he posits that 'far from being the apotheosis of exoskeletal determinism in poetry, as I have sometimes been portrayed, I find that I have spent 17 of the last 24 years actively undercutting expectations within form' (22). As mentioned, *Under Albany* is in itself a challenge to his previous ideas of self and narrative, which explains, in an autobiographical form, the origins of each of the 100 sentences in his poem *Albany* (1983). When I encountered Silliman in 2017, it was the Silliman of *Under Albany* that I met, and he was more eager to deliver autobiographical anecdotes and engage in self-disclosure than discuss the formal qualities of his poetics.

Language movement than it was by the aesthetic, formal and expressive qualities of the works discussed. As discussed in the first chapter, the major critical positions that came from within Language writing—and, later, the external critical positioning that affirmed Language's place in literary history—repeatedly reinforced this non-narrative reading of many Language works. It would be incorrect, however to say that all the criticism that would emerge from the context of Language writing explicitly used this non-narrative framing to discuss the moment's poetics. Just as the 'Non/narrative' issue of *Poetics Journal* exposed an underlying interest *in*, engagement *with*, and development *of* narrative strategies, so certain critical writers working within Language writing seem to point directly to a collective engagement with narrative. For my study, the most important of these is the poet and critic Nick Piombino.

Nick Piombino: Narratives and Self-Disclosure

Piombino, a psychotherapist who turned to both poetry and literary criticism, was an important figure in the New York wing of the early Language writing scene. His essays for *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, which are scattered through the 13 issues of the journal, form a series: 'Writing and Free Association'; 'Writing and Self-Disclosure'; 'Writing as Reverie'; 'Writing and Remembering'; 'Writing and Imaging'; 'Writing and Experiencing' and 'Writing and Conceiving'. Differentiating themselves from the works around them, which often concerned the politics of form or new processes of writing, Piombino's essays worked from his background in psychoanalysis to consider language and poetry through the self, and through

experiences of thinking, dreaming and memory. What makes Piombino especially notable, however, is his commitment to, as Wallace put it, the individual or self within poetry as 'a process of interrelations'.. Compare, for example, the statement: 'The self as the central and final term of creative practice is being challenged and exploded in our writing in a number of ways' (Benson et al. 1988: 263), from the key Language text 'Aesthetic Tendency and the Politics of Poetry: A Manifesto', with Piombino's statement in 'Writing and Self-Disclosure':

The contemporary poet discovers his formal matrices through a process of self-disclosure that is contiguous with his creations. This process reveals to him the form that is hinted at in his conscious and unconscious intentions at the outset of the poem, and what he knows intuitively about how this work fits into his more long range formal intentions. [...] He discovers 'by accident' the actual recurrent objects of his fantasy. (1978b: 17)

Here we can see Piombino considering the self as *the* organising principle of poetics, positioning formal experimentation, the central focus of the Language moment, as subordinate to the poet's process of self-disclosure. This view is evident throughout Piombino's essays for *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, pointing towards an idiosyncratic reading of Language poetics. In 'Writing and Free Association', for example, Piombino focuses on the experience of composition, saying of the contemporary poet: 'these signs he makes to re-read are hieroglyphic constructs by which he hopes to disclose the

experiential process simultaneous to its construction' (1978a: 6). For Piombino, the poet's process of composition is marked by this experiential process of writing, reading, and re-reading. This experiential process is, for Piombino, shared with the reader: 'the poet and the reader are equidistant from the meaning of the poem' (1980a: 45). This position privileges neither reader nor writer, and instead recognises the self as an inherent aspect of a text or narrative's realisation, invoked through reading and re-reading. Piombino refers to this fluidity of self throughout his work. In 'Writing and Imaging', he notes that the value of 'written images' (1979b: 1) changes 'depending on the lexical and aural associations chosen by the reader or writer to be, at any given moment, their signal source or 'key'' (1979b: 1). This 'key', crucially, is not a fixed aspect of the text, but one which shifts from moment to moment as the reader or writer proceeds through the text. In 'Writing and Remembering', Piombino continues this thought, describing poetry as 'a mimetic gesticulation towards the thought process' (1979a: 18), again arguing that the poet's experiential process of composition defines the presence of the self within the text, without enshrining their intentions as a singular 'correct' reading.

In doing so, Piombino becomes a key point of focus for understanding Language poetics and the presence of the self, distancing his work from the limited and isolated conceptions of the self that exist in other theorisations of Language writing. We find one such conception in the essay, 'Aesthetic Tendency and the Politics of Poetry: A Manifesto'. After asserting their refusal of the literary model

of self-as-subject, Benson et al. propose a possible reintegration of the self into their poetics through a set of examples from Carla Harryman, Bob Perelman and Steve Benson, of which they say:

There is a possibility, an openness to the implications of experience, associated with the / here that is more generative of insight than the transcendent elevation of carefully scripted incidents. (1988: 266)

They then draw on Coleridge's attempts to separate the 'I that thinks' (1988: 266) from the 'I that is the object of thought' (1988: 266) to argue that one might 'arrive, from this understanding of the self as a critically necessary project, at the possibility of a dissociated self as a critique' (1988: 266). This is perhaps the typical position explicated in the theorisation of Language writing: the use of a so-called dissociated self as a form of social and political critique. This reading posits that the self is to be used unemotionally, and has importance only in relation to the social construction within which it exists. Let's examine, using the example text given in the essay, how this position might guide a reading of Harryman's work:

I enjoy being slavish for in this way I conceal my deep suspicions. I enjoy all the roles I play. When the mayor hands me a dollop of praise I heckle. I turn on people when they compromise themselves in front of me. My reason is I am a hermaphrodite. That is, my reason acts hermaphroditically. I am normal physically. (1988: 265)

Using the lens of 'self as critique' (1988: 266) to understand this passage, we can see that the text's 'I' exists in an entirely relational space. Here, Harryman's selfhood is formed through its relations to authority ('the mayor'), social engagement ('I turn on people'), and imposed or constructed identities ('I am a hermaphrodite,' 'I am normal'). In each of these cases, Harryman's constructed self can be read as an engagement with social critique. In reading the text in this manner, the self is subordinated to the conditions of its construction, and so stripped of any narrative or affective power. This is often presented as the ideal way of reading the self in Language writing. However, Piombino provides us with a way of breaking this limited rubric. In the essay 'Writing and Conceiving', Piombino writes:

Poetic composition is an activity which subtly alters the rules that govern the relationship between the ordering of thought and allowing it swoon into reverie. Remembering is at its base a connective mode of cognition. From this is expropriated its power to order, to value, to record, to create, to historicize, to catalogue, describe, recreate, make safe, controllable and distant — to signify. (1980b: 32).

This transient relationship between the structural composition of the self and the self-defining, interior process of reverie defines how Piombino thinks of the relationship between writer and text. In the above statement, Piombino identifies the process of composition as being a double relationship between the emotional crux of 'reverie' and the systematic paradigm of 'ordering of thought'. In this mode, the writing self becomes a dynamic process, both externally defined

and internally active. In theorising of the self as a dynamic, active process, Piombino takes into account the socio-political context in which this self is formed; but by conceiving of the self as the cognitive, emotional and organisational centre of the work and its creation, Piombino's self possesses agency in its social and political relations.

When approached from the position of the reader, this understanding of formal experimentation as engaged in processes of 'self-disclosure' manifests as a form of radical narrative. As Piombino puts it, 'to read is to practice a mental resonance between language, thought and memory' (1980b: 33). This formulation, in 'Writing and Conceiving', directly follows an incomplete list which seems designed to act as an example through which the reader might experience this 'mental resonance':

18. Salvaged Debris.

23. Moisture, remainders, dew, condensation.

24. Reference points on a map, questions of materials,
accident. (1980b: 35)

This passage exists as an unresolved and unresolvable narrative, one which Piombino has fashioned to oscillate within the regions of thought, memory and language. In doing so, he effectively demonstrates the dynamic relationship between 'ordering of thought' and 'swooning into reverie'. Taken as a unit, the passage points both to the narrativising power of order (the non-consecutive numbering, the list format, the contiguous and associative word choice) and the

tendency of language towards experience, towards reverie, signalled by the evocative, signifying nexus points of 'Salvaged Debris', 'Reference points on a map', and 'accident'.

Piombino accepts that the self can be formulated in a work as a mode of critique, but he refuses to ignore its inherently affective and narrative aspects. In short, he does not deny the textual self the intensity of lived experience. With this in mind, if we return to the Harryman piece with Piombino's intense, cognitive, affective self as a model, our reading includes the social relations present in the text, but also allows for a secondary conception of this text as an expressive work. Our eye focuses on the unsteady repetition of 'enjoy' (1988: 265), the strength of 'heckle' (1988: 265), and the attack and retreat of first identifying as a 'hermaphrodite' (1988: 265) and then conceding to normality. We begin to form a shaky, inconsistent portrait; we read emotion and thought as well as socio-political relations. By envisioning the self as a tool that can be accessed through linguistic reference, but not inherent to a writing and reading process, the interpretation proposed by Benson et al. denies this work its inherent depth. Ultimately, it neuters both the reader's response and the potential critical understanding of the work. This is why, in contrast, Piombino's theorisation of Language writing is such a vital resource for this study.

What is particularly distinctive about his conception of the self within Language writing is that Piombino creates a connection between the self and formal methods of composition. This can be seen in 'Writing and Self-Disclosure', as quoted earlier, in which Piombino states: 'the

contemporary poet discovers his formal matrices through a process of self-disclosure that is contiguous with his creations' (1978b: 17). If we compare this to Abbott and Silliman's competing discussions from *Soup 2*, as discussed in the first chapter, we can see why Piombino is so important to expanding definitions of narrative within radical poetics. Silliman's maxim 'new content occurs within already existing forms; new forms contain already-existing contents' (1981b: 41) and Abbott's assertion that New Narrative 'stresses the enabling role of content in determining form rather than stressing form as independent, separate from its social origins and goals' (1981: 1) both link the discussion of narrative to a discussion of content. In Silliman's conception of Language writing, narrative represents the limited potential of content for enabling radical work, while in Abbott's description of New Narrative it represents content's potential to shape form. But Piombino refuses this separation. In his description of composition, the contemporary poet is discovering both content and form simultaneously. So, when Piombino speaks of 'the recurrent objects of [the poet's] fantasy', discovered 'by accident' (1978b: 17), we might interpret this as the poet discovering, through composition, the form of content, or the content of form.

Holding Environments: Narrative as a Transitional Object

This approach is not particular to 'Writing and Self-Disclosure' and 'Writing and Conceiving' but its presence can be detected throughout Piombino's work. It appears in its most developed form in his essay 'Aural Ellipsis and the Nature of Listening', in Charles Bernstein's 1998 edited collection *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed*

Word. Though the essay mostly concerns performed poetry, and the introduction of the term 'aural ellipsis' (1998: 55) to refer to 'certain effects of indeterminacy in writing, reading, and listening to contemporary poetry' (1998: 55), it also introduces the idea of considering works (such as those by Jackson Mac Low, Robert Creeley, Bernadette Mayer, John Ashbery, and Clark Coolidge) which use 'found and invented forms of language and innovative conceptions of the relationships among perception, language, and reality' (1998: 55) as 'holding environments'. Piombino explains the works described by this term as:

not so improvisatory as to lack significant content, unity, and structure. The relationship or balance between elements of recognizable content and structure and those of semantic and structural innovation create good conditions for the presence of the aural ellipsis. Uses of abstract-expressionist, surrealist, and other innovative techniques foregrounding the juxtaposition of words and images, paradox, ambiguity, and enigma, encourage readers or viewers to bring into awareness and project their own experiences, conscious and unconscious, onto the works, enhancing their usefulness as transitional objects. (1998: 55)

In many ways, the works Piombino is considering here are parallel to the work I aim to consider. These are experimental, radical works, but in Piombino's conception of them, they are seen to engage with both the self and lived experience, not just formal and conceptual rigour. He borrows the 'holding environments' (along with the term

'transitional object') from the British psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott. Piombino describes a 'holding environment' as a 'context that makes available to poets and other artists and to their readers, listeners or viewers freely juxtaposed modes of paying close attention to external and internal experience' (1998: 57). A holding environment in this case, is a text which displays semantic openness and a loose referential structure, two distinct aspects of Language writing. What is also notable here is the effect of a holding environment on the reader, which Piombino describes as 'organizing otherwise anomalous, disparate and incommunicable perceptions into patterns of meaning that can be further articulated, refined, and better understood, in an ongoing process' (1998: 57). Here, through Winnicott, Piombino is starting to shape a singular idea of conceptual, experimental and radical poetic works. Rather than refusing narrative, he is suggesting a process of cognition akin to narrative reading, but one forged by openness, ambiguity, and opacity. And, unlike traditional narrative markers of plot and character, this narrative reading process is not stymied by conceptual or radical forms but instead both catalysed and intensified by them.

This is evident from the works Piombino discusses in the latter half of his essay. Jackson Mac Low, known for his use of chance-based and procedural methods, is presented by Piombino not as coldly dissecting language but as dealing with identity and self through methodical means. In relation to Mac Low's *The Pronouns*, a chance-based set of dance scores published on index cards, Piombino states:

It is not only the concept of identity that is being displaced, in this and other works by Mac Low, but it is in [sic] the presumption (the sometimes necessary illusion) that identity is, in actuality, completely separate from anything else. (1998: 63)

Here again we find Piombino identifying these conceptual methods not as displacing the self completely, but instead integrating it into the wider formal experimentation of the piece. For Piombino, Mac Low's use of pronouns in *The Pronouns* does not atomise and eradicate the self, but instead:

provides a holding environment in which to immerse oneself and participate in the complex, transformative interrelationship between self and other: he = she = they = you = all = I = it = we = one = thou = ye = this = those = these = that = somebody = someone = anyone, and so on. (1998: 63)

While it is true that Piombino is primarily referring to the performance of these works, he is careful to include the process of reading, as well as the process of listening, within his formulation of these works as holding environments. What seems especially powerful in his theorisation is that he neither reinforces self as a singular, unshakeable position, nor does he deny its centrality to experiences of composition and cognition. The use of the word 'immerse' is also particularly illustrative of the experience Piombino is discussing here. It is not privileging the cold formulation of intellectualised relations, but is also inclusive of the affective, felt experience of entering an environment.

Piombino uses similar language when discussing Joan Retallack's *Errata Suite*, a text structured around the rewriting and correction of errors by philosophers including Aristotle, Spinoza and Wittgenstein on 5-line musical staves. Rather than focus on the collage-like nature of this procedural work, built from a web of citation, rewriting, appropriation, and formal constraint, Piombino focuses on the experience of encountering it, both in a written and spoken form:

Although the lines are drawn from various sources, this in no way limits either the ideas or the vibrant lyricism of the language. *Errata Suite*, by utilizing words as they appear to us in the inchoate flux of everyday experience, very much including the experience of silent and spoken reading, as well as associative thinking, creates a land of music that challenges us to listen to the entire complexity of experience in its full density. (1998: 66)

For Piombino, the experiential nature of *Errata Suite* deeply connects it to the associative experience of everyday life. He identifies, in its use of found material and structural restraint, a vibrancy, an immersive quality that is inherently affective. Piombino even goes on to say that *Errata Suite* when performed, transforms 'what might otherwise remain incommunicable internal experiences into concrete, albeit fluid forms of external expression' (1998: 66). Again, we see the foregrounding of experience in Piombino's discussion of a procedural text, and the same use of language—here the word 'fluid'—not typically associated with conceptual or procedural work. By focusing on the concept of the holding environment, and so

placing the process of creating and assigning meaning and reference under the dual ownership of writer and reader, Piombino is able to access the affective aspects of these texts. For Piombino, this is an essential part of these works, a proposition made possible by their radical forms:

These texts point the way to telling us how poems are created and how to listen closely to our responses in order to discover the experiential sites of the poem's constituent materials.

(1998: 68)

It is through his engagement with the self, and his identification of formal experimentation as a form of self-disclosure, that Piombino is able to discuss these works in this way. But for the purposes of this study, I must also build on Piombino's work to connect this idea of self-disclosure with the formal devices that might identify its narrative aspects.

Introducing the 'storm of connectives'

While this study is primarily concerned with narrative, not the self-as-subject, we can begin to see how, within the context of the radical narrative strategies of Language writing, the two are interlinked. For example, to look back at the first chapter of this study, and to the contributions to the symposium contained within the 'Non/narrative' issue of *Poetics Journal*, we find Armantrout referencing 'the character of daily experience' (1985: 94) and cheek referring to the process of 'combining mixes to create personal versions of the

playful' (1985: 73). Meanwhile in *The Grand Piano* we saw Steve Benson framing his work as 'revenge against the self' (2007: 138).

These discussions are reminiscent of Piombino's proposition that the self is the inescapable organising principle of the work. The implication of this proposition for the present study is that the radical narrative model we seek is one which exists in a contiguous relationship with the self—contesting it, representing it, but never escaping it. In the case of Piombino, his reading of Language writing proposes an alternative way to conceive how the self, and therefore narrative, operates within the moment's poetics, not in opposition to it. In his 1978 essay 'Writing as Reverie', which appeared in *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, he writes:

The interruption of 'the argument runs like this...' is a simple dimensional loosening of the referential register this particular moment of writing needed. Anywhere I look (for example, the child on the beach at sunset) I pass through a storm of connectives intensifying one another. (1978c: 26)

The 'particular moment of writing' Piombino is referencing here is Language writing itself, but while he refers to a 'loosening of the referential register', he offers a 'storm of connectives' as his model of the moment. But what is this 'storm of connectives' envisioned by Piombino? I propose that it is a model within which we might read Language-era works as both self-disclosure and, more importantly, narrative.

In the context of Piombino's essay, 'the storm of connectives' refers to both the experience of encountering texts from the 'simple dimensional loosening of the referential register' in this 'moment of writing' and to Piombino's own embodied experience, contained in the phrase 'I look.' Taken as a whole, 'Writing as Reverie' is an essay which seeks to complicate divisions between reading, remembering, thinking, and ultimately, as implied by the piece's title, writing. In the essay, Piombino describes a situation in which a reading child, lost in thought, recalls a particular memory of the sea, while simultaneously perceiving the shifting of the light in the world around him. Refusing to separate these states of cognition, Piombino instead seeks to understand this moment as a singular process operating within the self: 'an accumulation of fragments, passes through coherence into speculative fantasy' (1978c: 25). In order to visualise this singular process, Piombino creates the image of 'a storm of connectives intensifying one another.' This powerful image is notable for its precise articulation of what is an inherently fuzzy concept. Though it refers to the same formal structures as those decried by Fredric Jameson as 'heaps of fragments' (1984: 25), this image suggests instead, through collapsing reading, writing, and thinking, that these structures are connective, intense, and fluid. The image of the 'storm', something not typically associated with the precise formal articulation Language poetry was known for, suggests a looseness of control, a suspension of intentionality. 'Connectives', meanwhile, populate this storm, a form of shifting particles, with points that *may* connect but are not permanently connected. This eschews the image

of the network map, its nodes and paths fixed in eternal passages of meaning, and instead brings to mind the complex relations between multiple shifting points of meaning and reference. Finally, Piombino offers us a suggestion as to the nature of these potential, multifarious connections: intensity. This not only reinforces the image of the storm, but implies a strength of feeling, bringing an affective quality to the process of connection. In Piombino's image, we, as the reader-writer, are not processing data, piecing together a suggested whole from a broken series. Nor are we lost in Jameson's 'heap of fragments' (1984: 25), without reference or sense. We are instead in reverie, immersed in a waking dream, with cognition and thought co-occurring in a process of an intense, personal nature. This image provides a powerful model for both critical readings and experimental practices, and by providing an alternative way of considering Language writing it opens up new possibilities of narrative form. I want to suggest that the 'coherence' through which Piombino's fragments pass in the reader-writer's cognition of the text-storm can be considered as a narrative structure.

Returning to 'Writing and Conceiving' we can see exactly how Piombino's conceptions of reading, writing, and thinking support this idea of narrative as the core cohering force in operation within the self:

Writing is reading. I live in a world of signs which acausally direct my consciousness. Thought is writing, just as thinking is protolinguistic. Thought is reading, just as listening enforces a

transposition of an interval of related sounds into a specific inner focus of attention. (1980b: 36)

In each of these cases Piombino is typifying a single relationship: that of the self to context. This cognitive processing is, for him, the way to understand the self in relation to external-internal processes of writing-reading. Each of these processes mark an active navigation of potential meanings, transposed through the self. As Piombino puts it: 'At the root of all comprehension exists an indeterminate number of possible meanings which are coming into being, into consciousness' (1980b: 36). This process of 'coming into being' is the narrative process that connects the self to context. Internalising meaning, and therefore turning its potentiality into an active meaning-making process, requires the self to activate the storm's connectives, to assemble an associative frame of reference through which meaning might be formed. This is the same 'key' discussed earlier, the shifting referential register that both the reader and writer use, adapt, and develop as they encounter a text.

In this way the 'storm of connectives' is analogous with the 'holding environment' Piombino identified within his essay 'Aural Ellipsis and the Nature of Listening.' Just as the holding environment was a process of 'organizing otherwise anomalous, disparate and incommunicable perceptions into patterns of meaning that can be further articulated, refined, and better understood, in an ongoing process' (1998: 57), so the storm of connectives is a textual model that creates an open territory in which multiple referential registers and associations may operate to suggest connective, fluid patterns of

meaning. But unlike the idea of the text as a holding environment, the storm of connectives also suggests the intensity, and experiential nature of this meaning-making process. However, in order to develop the storm of connectives as a model we must also understand how this process of meaning-making occurs. For if this is an open territory, how can meaning be assembled within it?

Interval and Pattern

It is also within 'Writing and Conceiving' that Piombino identifies a 'fulcrum' at the 'acausal axis of interval (instance) and pattern (generalization)' (1980b: 35). Piombino associates this fulcrum with 'defamiliarization' (a key term for Language writers, derived from Russian formalism), a desirable quality of suspended meaning:

The sign constantly displays its maddening ability to out-wit its supposed 'associated' thought, and as its creator seizes on the reminiscence of its genesis, the acausal connecting process of association determines the actual signification. This eventually becomes the meaning of the experience. These meanings are ordinarily interpreted in intervallic measures or 'beats' of time. Meaning entropically moves towards 'familiarization,' which is static, rather than 'defamiliarization' which is nascent, and closer to the fulcrum of the acausal axis of interval (instance) and pattern (generalization). (1980b: 35)

The above passage extends the self-oriented, interpretive process of writer and reader, discussed earlier, towards a formal model that begins to unpick how meaning occurs within such an open structure.

Piombino's identification of interval and pattern as the two qualities or aspects that dictate the process of meaning-making, and ultimately the narrative aspects of these texts, provides us with a structure by which to identify these processes as they occur. Importantly Piombino identifies the tendency of meaning to move towards a static structure of reference where the repeated occurrence of a word or pattern might solidify its relationality into a fixed connection, while also providing an alternative, the nascent process of 'defamiliarization' which finds itself balanced between the structures of pattern and interval. This is exactly what he has identified within both the texts he offers as examples of 'holding environments' and the 'storm of connectives': a use of the interrelated structures of interval and pattern to produce an open form of suspended meaning and shifting referential registers.

By doing this, Piombino gives us the clearest image of the narrative model we are trying to identify. It is not defined by plot, character, or genre; instead, it operates within the paradigm of instance and generalisation. It is the acausal interaction of pattern and interval, the formation of each within the other. The model of narrative that transposes the self both into and out of these works is the occurrence of pattern within a given interval, or, simultaneously, the occurrence of an interval within a given pattern. It is on this basis that the 'storm of connectives' is realised in the reading-writing process.

This pattern/interval model recalls Silliman's definition of narrative as 'the unfolding of meaning in time' (2017), identifying the same elements as the defining aspects of narrative. But unlike Silliman's

linear arrangement of meaning as a single axis of accumulation, it accounts for the multiplicity of meanings accrued within a narrative reading process. In this conception of narrative, we are given a model which, because of its focus on how narrative *occurs* rather than how it might be quantified into a set of characteristics, is ideally suited to performing narrative readings of Language texts. It is inherently radical, rejecting (as we have seen) the narratologist's tool-box of plot, character, and fixed reference, and instead embracing contiguous meaning, accumulation, and polysemy. With it we no longer seek to *find* narrative by its traits, but instead acknowledge the processual narratives of reading and writing that transform the text into a set of relations between interval (time) and pattern (meaning).

As with his focus on the self and self-disclosure as an organising principle of poetic work, so Piombino's interest in pattern and interval can be traced through his critical work. In his poetic essay 'Event Clusters' (from the collection *Theoretical Objects*), he presents a series of evocative models that suggest the importance of a pattern/interval interrelation to his work:

Event Clusters-'gravitational' pull of time.

Chronological furrows across and into which events flow.

Poem as a 'reading'-card reading (tarot)

Turning pages-'measure' of this furrow cluster in time.

(1999: 67)

Here we see a similar paradigm emerging, especially with regards to the term 'event clusters'. This concept, suggestively described as being produced by the 'furrows across and into which events flow' points to the same interactions we might identify as occurring between the pattern and interval. Pattern, like event, is organised by the furrows, or intervals of time, but as is indicated by the second of these two couplets, so these furrows are organised by the 'measure' of pages, itself a pattern of textual form. Piombino's description of time as 'gravitational' and intervals as 'furrows' suggests how he sees interval not as a static set of fixed 'beats' but as a tendency of organisation that gathers events together in varying clusters. Again the 'storm of connectives' is reinforced as an image, its lack of fixity cohering with the description of event clusters we see here.

Elsewhere in *Theoretical Objects*, Piombino provides further descriptions of this interaction. The following passage, from '10 Forms of Distortion', could almost be taken whole as a description of the storm of connectives:

It was meant to illustrate a structure, or an outline, a form around which solidity gives events a physical locale. This event is a system, this system is a format, some momentum supplies a direction and soon after a discrete transformation erupts into an identifiable experience. Each word colors another. (1999: 80)

This passage provides us with another point of reference for what the storm of connectives might be realising. Once again experience becomes foregrounded as a mode of engagement with a space of indeterminacy. The use of 'event' and 'system' evoke the interplay of pattern and interval, complicating these terms. In a sense this passage also serves to describe the nature of Piombino's own classifications. They too exist as both outlines and structures, forms and events. There is, again, that overriding sense of a blurred territory, in which complex processes are instigated by the presence of an observer. It is this which provides the 'momentum' to transform the potentialities into 'identifiable experience'. The final sentence—'Each word colors another'—also points to the continual movement of this process, its refusal of fixity. There is a strong sense of Piombino sketching out a territory with each of these descriptions, a complex and fluid vision of a process that refuses to cohere into a singular paradigmatic argument.

Piombino returns to the interrelation of pattern and interval once more in his essay, 'The Indeterminate Interval: From History to Blur' (1981), co-written with Alan Davies. Dealing with free association, interpretation and language, the piece further develops ideas from in 'Writing and Conceiving':

Memory becomes the place, the locus, relative to which particulars get filed (both senses). Filing a thing whittles it, by putting it in that one place. Fitting in, placing things between, relates to the idea of interval. Fragmenting produces interval. The interval has a place, fits into a larger whole, a larger

continuum. But it is still a very specific moment, productive of an instance of pulse, a measure, like sonar, a metronome. Intervals pulse, inscribing the certain amount of distance that has been gone through. (1981: 31)

This passage offers additional insight into how Piombino sees the shaping of interval. As both a direct result of fragmentation and 'part of a larger whole', interval, for Piombino, is the pulse of the text, instated by memory. In Piombino's construction, we can see how the experience of reading a text can be broken again and again into intervals through the process of experiencing and remembering. Here, an interval is not a stoppage, not a process of fixing a period in time, but is instead a flow: 'Intervals are not confusing, they are allowable of confusion, in not distorting chaos' (1981: 31). For Piombino, a text can possess this quality of allowing confusion. He proposes that 'art that doesn't push to where it has to go, that is more [sic] intervallic, admits of indeterminacy' (1981: 31), meaning that a focus on the pattern/interval relation in composing a text produces a quality of indeterminacy. We might think of the Mac Low and Retallack texts, previously offered by Piombino as examples of 'holding environments', as intervallic in this sense—they do not push towards a fixing of reference and meaning.

In the same essay, Piombino details what he refers to as 'field reading', a concept that is clearly emerging in relation to Charles Olson's 'composition by field' from his influential manifesto 'Projective Verse' (1950). But, in a purposeful reversal, Piombino's focus here is not on composition but on reading as an active process. So when he

says that 'field reading involves thinking about place in relation to meaning' (1981: 35), he evokes the sense of interval as being positional as well as chronological within a text. Piombino continues:

In making an art that attempts to provide for a field reading experience, one opens up to direct apperception the experience of that part of the mind which screens experience. Field reading allows for the normal capacity of the mind to reshuffle experience, to see new connections than those which were thought when the mind originally formed the connections; field reading permits the mind to portray and perceive the actuality of reality as experienced. (1981: 35)

Piombino's 'field reading' is that which is encouraged by the storm of connectives. It is the sense of broad awareness, of potential connectivity, and unfixed meaning fostered by my model. What is important here is that Piombino connects this to the same sense of awareness that dictates our behaviour towards all phenomena, a sorting, shuffling, sense-making process. The implication is that field reading *is* experiential reading, it is the state of reverie suggested elsewhere in his work. In 'The Indeterminate Interval: From History to Blur', Piombino then goes on to provide an extensive description of the process of field reading in action:

The constellation that forms the original pattern of what the reader tries to retrace: any point in the text permits the other points. The splicing of two parts refocuses them in a different way; focusing a small detail which may seem a flaw or snag in the whole fabric, discovers the points of tension, the points of

most resistance. The mind, in its barest function, takes in the facts, sifts them, determining both its own daily need of facts and what it must do next; it finds those things which have the most gravity. The mind grows and links to other things when the unexpected things are linked; it scans elements, processes them and in doing so, reshuffles them for another something which the mind will invent. The mind evolves a blueprint out of what is already there, doesn't recognize where to go next, then explores and enumerates the possibilities, a part of the mind insisting on making the ludicrous connection. The odd connection permits a reexperience of what was originally recorded but not really experienced. The mind (language) reshuffles its fragments in order to attain the original hierarchy; reassembling it permits reprocessing from the new perspective. (1981: 37)

I quote this remarkable passage in full because of its detailed exploration of a complex phenomenon. Elsewhere in Piombino's work, this process—the experiential reading proposed by his 'holding environment or 'storm of connectives' —is gestured towards and explored, but only here does he describe it in detail. Here, Piombino identifies complex processes of recombination, cognition and response which totally refuse the idea of reading as a passive act. We are offered a direct view of reading as an active, fluid process and an affective, engaged relationship with the text. This is the reading of radical work with which I seek to engage: one which, while accounting for the conceptual and process-driven structures of

experimental work, refuses to expose the works to a purely formal or conceptual reading, instead seeking to identify the narrative inherent in an open field of meaning and a complex arrangement of pattern and interval. This is the reading which the storm of connectives requires.

‘Collisions are necessary’: Reading Carla Harryman’s *Erosion Columns*

With Piombino’s model of reading in mind, I want to turn again to the Language writer Carla Harryman; this time to the early prose work ‘Erosion Columns’, from her 1980 collection *Under the Bridge*. In approaching this text through Piombino’s model, I seek to demonstrate how the storm of connectives provides a way into understanding the complexity, radical narrative form, and affective nature of this text. As this text is only available in its original limited printing, and as the shifts over the course of the work are vital to understanding how it operates, I will reproduce it here in full:

Erosion Columns

At the top of each erosion column is a horizontal slab. These slabs resemble teetering heads caught in a balance. You might start to feel like you’re losing shape. One can go on and on. Collisions are necessary.

Geology of the body: request to take the garbage seriously.

Request to take the words out.

A man said, sometimes I meet a stranger on the street and I just melt. It may last for five minutes or a day. Thank God I keep these things to myself. That sort of pleasure could kill you.

It's like when you swim lap after lap and you don't notice coming up for air.

In the heat of an enormous summer night my head is yours.
Erosion of character: repeated punctuation of the eyebrows. A false grip in a game. Running right through the track onto the gravel passing out without knowing it on the street under a street light and discovered by a stranger.

The cranium of a flash flood. I did not drown. We both survive the conversation.

We clear our minds and then change the subject. Later the words in our tongues come out muddy. Pieces of our bodies stick to the city map. We locate ourselves at these points. Our

paths never cross where our bodies match up to their parts.

(1980: 16-17)

'Erosion Columns' is an ideal example of how the play of self and narrative exists within the work of Language poets, and how failing to discuss either is to obscure both the work and the reader's experience of it. Initially, in its third sentence, 'Erosion Columns' suggests that a disjunctive, paratactic organisation will be its defining formal feature. The shift from the description of the titular 'erosion columns', which is reinforced by the descriptive simile of 'teetering heads' in the second sentence, to what appears to be a statement directly addressing the reader ('You might start to feel like you're losing shape') is a familiar conceit. In Ron Silliman's 'New Sentence', these shifts, which Silliman suggests block 'readerly integration' (1987: 78) into a singular narrative, and often contain sudden moments of self-reflexivity and illusion-breaking, are presented as a hallmark of the form. Following directly on, we have two more shifts, in the sentences: 'One can go on and on' and its follow-on: 'Collisions are necessary'. Once again both of these feel like they are primarily references to the text itself ('going on and on' and 'collisions' of meaning) rather than additions to any kind of narrative form. From this first sequence, then, the work appears to follow the disjunctive, anti-narrative structuring associated with Language poetics. However, as we progress through the text, this begins to be called into doubt.

The shift towards the presence of the self begins first in the third paragraph, where a deferred self, 'a man', has a section of direct

speech. This emergence of a voice comes directly after the introduction of a 'body' in the second paragraph and marks a shifting relationship between the individual and context present in the poem. The man's speech, unsettled by the contiguous relationship between sentences established in the first two paragraphs, seems to shift as it progresses: 'That sort of pleasure could kill you' could be either a continuation of the previous statement, 'Thank God I keep these things to myself', or a response to it. The text gives no clear indication either way. This drift away from the 'man' as a subject is then completed by the single line paragraph that follows: 'It's like when you swim lap after lap and you don't notice coming up for air'. This powerful line, given additional impact by its isolation, suggests a total shift in voice, a sudden emergence of a distinct piece of narrative self-disclosure. Though framed through the indistinct pronoun of 'you', the turn of phrase suggests a self-reflexivity, a reveal of the writer's (or an undefined other's) presence in the text, and the disclosure of personal experience. Taken on its own, this line's evocation of the panic or tension of 'coming up for air' and the routine of 'lap after lap' alongside the listlessly melancholic 'don't notice' create an affective sentence, one which seems to crystallise the slowly-forming themes of the first half of the poem. The beginning of the sentence—'It's like'—invites connection to what has come before, encouraging the reader to find the connectives that might allow the navigation of the work's meaning. This literal fulcrum, the fourth of seven paragraphs which are, by approximate volume, mirrored around this central point, marks the moment by which we

can see, to use the paradigm established earlier, the distinct narrative interaction of pattern and interval.

The pattern, seen reflexively through the voice established by this line, begins to gather the ideas of erosion around those of the individual or self. Previously disjunctive lines find points of connection, such as 'teetering heads caught in a balance' with 'feel like you're losing shape,' and 'collisions' with 'geology of the body' and 'melt'. This pattern is meaningless, however, without the interval established by our initial sense of disjuncture, the accrual of 'body' and voice, and then the shift which occurs in the central hinging line. This shows the complexity of the pattern and interval model we have established: it accounts not just for textual structuring, but the cognition and comprehension of this structuring by a reader, as described by Piombino (in 'The Indeterminate Interval: From History to Blur'). In this way it locates the narrative of these works as not solely existing in the text, but in the interaction Piombino is indicating with his dynamic, ever-changing image of the 'storm of connectives intensifying one another'.

Once we establish this central pivot in the piece's fluid narrative, we can see how, rather than remain in this static state, the following paragraphs continue the sense of an ever-shifting selfhood. This is where the presence of a self in the text increasingly evident. The line 'my head is yours' seems to confirm the writer's voice that emerges from the 'you' in the previous line, now becoming 'my', condensing the two into a singular position. The following line continues: 'Erosion of character: repeated punctuation of the eyebrows'. A play on the

idea of the newly introduced voice belonging to a 'character' rather than a self, the association of 'punctuation' and 'eyebrows' also completes the earlier dual presence of the body and text suggested by the second paragraph's 'Geology of the body: [...] Request to take the words out'. Following this, we have another distinct piece of self-disclosure, this time not couched in the defensive 'you', but also not yet possessing a writerly 'I'. Instead this account of 'passing out without knowing it on the street under a street light' floats without a pronoun. Like the image of swimming 'lap after lap', it provides another point of intense affective energy, another point of narrative connection between erosion and the self, the individual falling 'without knowing' and finding at the end 'a stranger'.

There is one more shift in the narrative form that takes place in the final paragraphs: 'The cranium of a flash flood. I did not drown. We both survive the conversation'. Here the body once more comes under the pressure of eroding processes, but in a moment of resistance, the central voice of the self speaks out. This is the first time we encounter an unmediated 'I' in the text, and while it asserts its presence with the simplicity of its statement (making connections through 'drown' to the swimming 'lap after lap' and once more asserting the consistency of this voice), its claim is somewhat ironic. Though claiming not to 'drown', the 'I' is then amalgamated into 'we' in a near-repetition that shifts the survival of a 'flash flood' to the survival of a 'conversation'. I also can't help but see and hear the ghost word here, 'conversion', that haunts the process of 'I' moving to 'we'. Whether that is a viable reading or not, what is clear is the text's

play of scale and affect between internal turmoil (in 'I', 'cranium' and 'flash flood') and external calm (in 'we' and the underplayed 'conversation'). This suggests another pattern, a resonance between the text's preceding images of interiority and intimacy: 'heads caught in a balance', 'geology of the body', 'thank God I keep these things to myself', 'pleasure could kill you', 'you don't notice' and 'passing out without knowing it'. By asserting the voice's 'I' at this point, another cascade is triggered and the above connective meanings emerge from the text, alongside other connective structures established by the earlier shifts. What seemed initially like a linear, recursive, even insular argument is now more and more a storm of connectives reaching out in narrative pathways while still cohering around a central subject.

The final paragraph, with the conversion from 'I' to 'we' now firmly in place, presents a final shift. In contrast to the first paragraph, which unsettles our frames of reference with disjunction, this paragraph is a near linear section of prose, a narrative in five sentences. We are prepared for this by the first line, encouraged as readers to 'clear our mind' for a 'change of subject', a line which is hard not to read as a nod to the sudden shift to a collective pronoun. Yet any clarity is quickly undermined by the following line: 'Later the words in our tongues come out muddy.' What is most notable about this line is the obvious shift in interval, the use of 'later' moving the preceding sections of the poem into retrospective narration. This once again reconfigures the narrative frame and acausal system of reference the reader has built. Because of this, there is a distinct sense of outward

movement to this final section, a leaving-behind, a moving-away from the intensity of the rest of the piece. The final lines continue this movement, emerging into complete exteriority, in which any self present in the text is now spread across the 'city map', anatomised, fixed 'at these points'. In a concluding image, we are given a looping, almost unparsable set of relations: 'Our paths never cross where our bodies match up to their parts'. Here, the distance between self and others is absolute. The tone, which is absent and removed, leaves the reader in this same isolated position, grasping at a series of inter-relations between interior and exterior, self and other, body and erosion that retain their power though a failure to cohere into fixed meanings. From this point the reader can move back through the text, using the narrative patterns as a guide, but what is important is that the interval has changed. The final shift leaves the work forever in a past tense, a mode of recall, of memory. The text, and the dynamic self that animates it, is now changed through the act of cognition, but as Piombino points out, recall and remembrance are active processes that can trigger new connective structures. The text, by failing to adhere to a singular meaning in its concluding section, remains open to these processes, and in this openness we can see how this text (and other texts like it), with its disjunction, formal experimentation and focus on linguistic play, is ideally suited to expressing Piombino's conception of narrative and the self. It is not that 'Erosion Columns' contains narrative self-disclosure *in spite* of its formal experimentation. It contains narrative self-disclosure precisely *because* of its choice of form.

Ultimately, the series of shifts in 'Erosion Columns', and the dynamic, narrative self-disclosure we have located in the text, cannot be ignored. It is evident that, guided by Piombino's conceptions of how a self might manifest through formally conceptual texts, this mode of critique opens up new ways of considering works such as Harryman's 'Erosion Pillars'. The image of the 'storm of connectives intensifying one another' also helps us turn to the cognitive process of the reader in order to understand occurrences of narrative in these texts. That we might find these traits encapsulated in the work of Carla Harryman is no surprise, as her relationship to narrative exists not simply in her poetic work but also within her critical writing. After all, it was Harryman who in the 'Non/narrative' issue of *Poetics Journal* opened her essay 'Toy Boats' with the line: 'I prefer to distribute narrative rather than deny it' (1985:104). This manifesto-like statement echoes through her work, both in its refusal of the denial of narrative (indicative of the prevalence of this same denial in her immediate context) and the attractive ambiguity of the word 'distribute'. This word points to a conception of narrative that is not singular and linear, but multifarious and interlocked. A distributed narrative is one that occurs throughout a text but does not encompass that text. A distributed narrative is unfolding, to use Silliman's terms, and connective, to use Piombino's, but neither connected nor unfolded. In the case of 'Erosion Columns' its patterns, separated across contiguous intervals, feel deeply linked to the concept of a distributed narrative, one which exists in a state of

tension, gathering at certain points, and becoming stretched and shifting at others. Harryman describes this later in 'Toy Boats':

Extension is inside and outside the writer. But I could also say that the thing pulling the writing toward it is chaos: the words fall into place in anticipation of a jumble. (1985: 107)

This passage evokes Piombino's oscillation between order and reverie in both composition and cognition, rephrased here as falling 'into place in anticipation of a jumble.' Like Piombino, Harryman refuses to let narrative occupy a singular perspective: both order and chaos are in operation in the narrativising processes of writing and reading. A tendency towards chaos in writing, a tendency towards order in reading, and the reverse: writing as ordering, reading as chaotic. Both are recognisable as active processes, enacted through and in relation to the self. This is visible in 'Erosion Columns': a constant shift between a writerly order and a readerly interpretation, manifested in a process of self-disclosure. This is the core of how narrative functions in Language works. But, in 'Toy Boats', this process first requires a resistance to the denial of narrative. And, if Harryman's opening line was not strong enough, later in the essay she clarifies the territory in which her work operates beyond doubt:

The question of the status of narrative presupposes a hierarchy of literary values I do not entertain in my work. Narrative is neither an oppressor to be obliterated nor the validating force of all literary impulse. (1985: 107)

Harryman's position here accords with my own. The intention is not to validate these radical works via the accepted literary trope of narrative, nor is it the destruction of narrative through the explosion of the term into meaningless fragments. It operates outside of that delimited territory in which narrative must conform to its classical descriptors. It is, like Harryman's work, an unfolding of narrative over time, one that might continue to expand as it begins to encompass more of the structures found within Language writing and its adjacent practices. For this reason, the next step within this process is to propagate this expansion through the close reading of another work which might demonstrate both an interval/time relation and a shifting centrality of the self, but with extra complications not encountered in Harryman's work. In particular I wish to focus on the possibility of this form of reading, as suggested by Piombino, to consider work that makes use of programmatic or procedural methods of composition.

'Randomly-generated-as-mind-shape': reading Leslie

Scalapino's *That they were at the beach—aeolotropic series*

Leslie Scalapino's 'That they were at the beach—aeolotropic series', first published in the 1985 collection *that they were at the beach*, represents the work of a writer uniquely concerned with the interrelation of interval and pattern. Grouped with both the New Narrative and Language writers, and often presenting and publishing within both their contexts, Scalapino is both separate from, and an important part of, the Language writing moment. In her performance essay 'Disbelief', posthumously published in *Jacket* in 2010, and dedicated 'with deep and abiding respect and admiration for poets of

the San Francisco Language scene' (2010a), Scalapino explores aspects of her relationship with that group. Though she compliments many of the writers, including Carla Harryman, Barrett Watten, Lyn Hejinian, Bob Perelman and Ron Silliman, she also expresses many of the conflicts that emerged from her relationship with, and inclusion within, Language writing. Primary among those is a dismissal of her work as narrative: 'as was said to me a number of times in the '80s, "That's just narrative!"' (2010a) She goes on to relate:

My language, which I intended as study of individual's thought-shape and sensations [*sic*], Ron Silliman apparently saw as self-expression. Thus he criticized me in letters ('You refuse to question self.'). (2010a)

She also strongly critiques 'The Turn to Language and the 1960s', Barrett Watten's 2002 history of Language writing, as exclusionary of what he terms the 'expressivist' poetics of black, queer, feminist and other minority groups that operated simultaneously to Language:

Dictating the terms of other movements such as Black and feminist arts, as to bring these under rule of white, heterosexual avant garde males, contradicts the nature of the new as avant garde — their need (as Black and feminist arts, for example) to undo definition and re-definition. Watten contradicts the necessity, certainly, to bypass and offset that which describes one as inferior to white, heterosexual, 'avant garde' men. (2010a)

Here Scalapino points to Watten's external definition of minority poetics, which affords his work the freedom of defining its own terms while not extending that to the work of minority writers, who must be defined by their political status alone. This incisive argument leads into a further critique of Silliman, and in particular his mode of publishing poets within the *Socialist Review*, where he assigned them the pejorative descriptors of narrative and expressive to their work, as indicative of his views and the shared views of Language writing as a wider context:

Silliman, the chief editor, introduced his selection in relation to his assertion that while white, heterosexual men are free to experiment, to create new, avant garde work—minorities, gays, and women, owing to their conditions of oppression, have the need to 'tell their stories;' thus they supposedly tend to write 'conventional narrative.' The poets whose excerpts he published in *SR* were to be examples of the latter pejorative category. None of these poets write conventional narrative. My sequential poem had been excerpted to give in the few poem-segments chosen the impression of there being narrative with characters (a figure of an elderly woman) to illustrate Ron's argument. (2010a)

Again, we see here Scalapino reinforcing arguments made against Silliman in the first chapter of this study, particularly those from the *Left/Write* conference. In a final act of what seems like defiance Scalapino relates an anecdote in which she reminds Steve Benson that he invited her to be a co-director of the Grand Piano reading

series, and ‘thanks him’ (2010a) for the opportunity to learn about ‘the social world, and about sexism, the latter especially from my fellow-co-directors’ (2010a). She then goes on to frame ‘Disbelief’ as her own contribution to Watten’s *The Grand Piano: An Experiment in Collective Autobiography*, a series she was not invited to contribute to despite holding the co-director position. She ends by stating, simply, “Disbelief,’ though as an afterthought on my part, is a contribution as a part of memoir’ (2010a).

The resulting essay frames Scalapino’s work as being treated with suspicion, constantly called into question for its use of radical narrative strategies, first person pronoun, and relationship with memory. This framing further exposes some of the exclusionary aspects of Language writing as a movement, and how this orthodoxy is linked to discussions of narrative and self. For Scalapino, there is a sense of contained frustration around the positioning of her work as inclusive of ‘conventional narrative’ aspects. If we turn to the way in which Scalapino herself describes her work in ‘Disbelief’, however, we encounter a framing that seems to exceed the limits placed upon her work as ‘just narrative’. When describing ‘That they were at the beach—aeolotropic series’ she explains it was:

Intended as randomly-generated-as-mind-shape past or past-present events as such ‘punched out’ of space (of reality), so one is to be without certain individual memories — then without memory at all — as the means of one being only in future. My sense of it (the past, the writing) being on its own, it

was random arising, impermanence originating the writing of segments. (2010a)

Scalapino's engagement with impermanence and memory dominates much of her work but 'That they were at the beach' is also notable for its engagement with randomness. Though Scalapino doesn't go on to explain if any techniques associated with randomness, such as dice rolls or indexing, were used in the composition of the piece, it seems more likely that the randomness to which Scalapino is referring is more a process of suspended intentionality, akin to the automatic writing and free association-based practices Piombino references in his first essay for *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, 'Writing and Free Association'. In that essay Piombino states that free association is 'comparable to serious attempts to read, write, and understand poetry that directs attention to the totality of the thinking process' (1978a: 6). Clearly drawing ideas around free association from his background in Freudian psychoanalysis, Piombino divorces it from its use as a clinical tool and seeks instead to draw connections between it and the discussions of reading and composition which exist throughout his critical work. He claims that, through free association, memories and the present moment 'collapse in an experiential field composed of verbal presences which can be re-sounded for various interpretation and alternative directions' (1978a: 6). In this way, we can see Piombino's description of free association as an early indication of his ideas around 'holding environments' and the 'storm of connectives'. In order to understand how Scalapino's 'randomly-generated-as-mind-shape' (2010a) method for composing 'That they

were at the beach—aeolotropic series’ might relate to the free associative method described by Piombino, it is useful to turn to Scalapino’s later book *The Dihedrons Gazelle-dihedrals Zoom* (2010), which, as its introductory note explains, was composed by:

Leafing through Random House Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary choosing words at random by process of alexia, not as mental disorder but word-blindness: trance-like stream overriding meaning, choice, and inhibition. (2010b: 1)

Whether Scalapino composed ‘That they were at the beach’ in an identical fashion is unclear, but what is clear is that it engages with the same compositional approach as the ‘trance-like stream’ of *The Dihedrons Gazelle-dihedrals Zoom*. This is suggested not only by her model of ‘randomly-generated-as-mind-shape’ but by the subtitle ‘aeolotropic series’, which, while referring to aeolotropy (an esoteric term from physics that describes materials whose properties differ depending on the direction of measurement), seems also to have been chosen to evoke a more familiar word: aleatoric. This is a term Scalapino would have been acutely aware of, especially for its use in defining the chance-based work of John Cage and Jackson Mac Low. But Scalapino’s own engagement with chance seems to differ here, suggesting a similarity to Piombino’s free association, and particularly the discussion of random compositional methods described in ‘Aural Ellipsis and the Nature of Listening’ as transforming ‘incommunicable internal experiences into concrete, albeit fluid forms of external expression’ (Piombino 1998: 66). Scalapino’s aim in the composition of ‘That they were at the beach’ is

linked both to her interest in impermanence, and her sense of bringing language into focus within a suspended, cyclical present, a focus that results in a text balanced at Piombino's fulcrum between interval and pattern.

It's in the past—yet is repressed in terms of the situation itself, poor people who're working, the division is by color. We're not allowed to leave the airport on arriving—others not permitted to stop over—we're immature in age, so it's inverted.

(Therefore receded—we get on the bus going to the city and look around, seeing people dressed shabbily).

—

A man—I was immature in age—was a stowaway so not having been active, taken from the ship we're on in a row boat.

(A sailor had fallen out of the row boat then, was embarrassed. So it's like paradise—the embarrassment, therefore it's depressed—seen by his waving at us as the other sailors are coming to him). (1985: 18)

Scalapino's prose above focuses itself on an interrelation of interval and pattern, not just as a compositional tool, but as a self-reflexive

subject. The overall intervals of text, and its linear progression are complicated by this engagement with time and meaning. Events are placed 'in the past', 'repressed', 'inverted', 'receded' or split between shifting tenses. Meanwhile an accumulation of patterns, and cyclical rewrites of the same images and scenes undermines their initial autobiographical reading. For example, the bracketed anecdote about a sailor, embarrassed and depressed, initially appears to be a memory relayed in fragmented form, but it is later returned to as: 'A microcosm, but it's of sailors—though I'm given attention standing in pictures with one or two of the men' (1985: 21), then later, 'the man's deeply embarrassed—he's not old—at it turning out to be this way after having others take him to hospitals' (1985: 25) and on the same page 'not really being ill—corresponds to the man who mugged me, not the one I mistook for him—it's depressed' (1985: 25); and later still, '(We haven't seen him—as with the sailors it's contemporary in time)' (1985: 28). Each of these become aligned with other microcosms, docks, sailors, depressions, hospitals, illnesses, muggings, in a process of recall and re-evaluation. Towards the end of the sequence, these patterns become inseparable from the commentary on them:

It's hot weather—so it's reversed, is contemporary as with the
sailors

(beefcake is in the foreground)

Is naïve—corresponds to the floating world (1985: 34-35)

To read this as autobiographical would be to mischaracterise it, but it still emerges from a process of memory, a selfhood within which the writer is processing these patterns. It is unclear if it is phenomenon of hot weather which is reversed, or the phrase 'hot weather', for example, and little indication is given as to whether the foreground which 'beefcake' occupies is a perceptual, textual or metaphorical one. Are these memories or fictions? Images or wordplay? In Scalapino's words:

Some people disliked 'that they were at the beach — aeolotropic series' on the basis of its being 'nostalgia;' others admired it apparently for that very reason, being nostalgia and autobiography, neither of which were my intention: which was to eliminate memory as basis or vehicle, liquidationist, thus to eliminate the social constructions that had deformed 'our' present and that became part of us. The effort again is also to thereby actually change the fabric that is the past, literally.

(2010a)

Scalapino is recomposing memory as something else, into what she terms a 'mind-shape' of 'past-present events' (2010a)—not events in their initial occurrence relayed by narration, but a transcription of the shape of an active, present process of reshaping and recall. She is aided in this by the 'randomness' of ordering she uses, refusing a fixed, systematic structure in favour of an irresolvable reverie of associative patterns. Her attempts to destabilise the past in order to reflect what she sees as an unsteady, perhaps even non-existent

present, use many of the radical narrative devices we have already encountered in this study. Scalapino's work with patterns of memory resembles, but does not replicate, the pattern arrangements in Harryman's 'Erosion Columns', just as its structural intervals and textual, referential tense and timescapes seem to exist in tandem with 'Erosion Columns' and its carefully orchestrated shifts. With this in mind, I believe it is possible to extend the phrase 'a storm of connectives intensifying one another' to encapsulate the narrative processes we see in operation in 'That they were at the beach'. In fact, to go further, it is Scalapino's text, rather than Harryman's that seems to come closer to the radical promise of Piombino's image of narrative form.

The radical aspect of 'That they were at the beach' lies in its engagement with systems of chance, procedure and randomness. This suspension of authorial power—but not, crucially, a suspension of the presence of a central self organising the text—allows it to engage with the most radical aspect of the model I am developing: its openness, its state of unfolding without reaching some terminal end. This is something previously recognised by Piombino: that experimental works which used found language, random structuring and procedural forms were emblematic of the processes of reading and composing that might be described by the storm of connectives, and, in the context of this study, identified as narrative.

In this light, Scalapino's 'That they were at the beach' becomes an exemplar of the radical narrative structures I am seeking to unearth within and around Language writing. I have already established that

Scalapino's work exists in a complex relationship to its context, both denied by its orthodoxy and supported by its collectivity. But in addition to this positioning, which mirrors the oscillating position of narrative itself within Language practices, I have been able to identify a focused interest in using the model of interval and pattern to engage with a history that is at once oriented by the self while existing in a state of suspended authorial control. Through Piombino's distinct identification of these processes, and his refusal to deny the self and, ultimately, narrative, I have generated the critical tools to perform these readings.

In fact, Harryman and Scalapino's practices, as well as the 'storm of connectives', 'holding environments' and 'unfolding of meaning', form a series of points around which I might organise this new model of narrative. This model, like the work it describes, cannot by its very nature exist as a fixed set of descriptors to be applied to a text. Instead, it describes a fluid territory of practice which engages with a series of processes, occurring within the interrelation of pattern and interval, which shapes these texts from composition to cognition. As Piombino suggests in '10 Forms of Distortion': 'This event is a system, this system is a format, some momentum supplies a direction and soon after a discrete transformation erupts into an identifiable experience.' (1999: 80)

The storm of connectives, as a model for reading texts, is one that lies along a different axis of development from the non-narrative readings of Language writing and poetics. In this model, narrative is not a 'prison house' (Watten 2013: 19), but a process of cognition

and composition, oscillating between chaos and order. In this way, the model also becomes one that might generate a potential territory in which to produce, not just read, radical approaches to narrative poetics. Reading Language writing as narrative has allowed me to gather these descriptive images and formulate a model that refuses to exclude experimental work from the narrativising processes of composition and cognition. Having performed this reading within a historical moment allows us to move forward along the axis established here, towards both a contemporary practice that is consistent with the models and devices described, and an individual practice that draws directly from the lineage that has been outlined. So, following this line of thought, in the final chapter of this study I will turn to my own practice and its relationship to a set of contemporary practices that I consider it to be in communication with.

Chapter 3 – A Storm of Connectives: Composing Radical Narratives

At the same time as developing the critical model at the heart of this study, I have been developing a model of practice which both derives from, and informs, the model I have termed ‘the storm of connectives’. In many ways these are one and the same model, developed through a tandem process of critical analysis and practical experimentation. Just as Piombino’s description seemed to me to find a point of connection between those radical practices and conceptions of narrative that surrounded them, so too did it suggest a continuing practice, an image that radical narrative strategies might be oriented towards. For my own work, this sense of orientation presented an axis of experimentation, one I might follow in order to realise the kind of narrative that previous practices, like those of Harryman, Scalapino and even Silliman and Perelman, suggested, exploited, and expanded.

In order to explore how my own experimental practice was both guided by and helped to constitute the storm of connectives as a model, I will first focus on the early experiments that led me into using procedural methods to create narrative prose, then move on to *The Narrated City*, the work that led into the production of my thesis project *Radical Transparency*. Then I will explore how *Radical Transparency* represents the culmination of my work on the storm of connectives, and the manner in which it deploys the model developed in this study.

Narrative and procedural form

My work with procedural methods and narrative form began with my performance text, *At The Shattered Edge*. Performed at London's Rich Mix in 2017, it was the culmination of a series of experiments in using a Markov chain algorithm to reorder the text of an unpublished novel. As this novel was written in first person and present tense, any remixing of its content proved very effective, creating coherent but distinct prose segments. The algorithm used to reorder the text was a stochastic model, which functions by reordering words based on their frequency in the original source text. Such an algorithm takes an input which determines the order of word frequency to use, which I will refer to as n . Based on that input, it takes the first n words of the source text and searches the remaining text for that exact sequence of n words. Every time that word sequence appears, it stores the word immediately following each sequence. Once it has found all of these 'legal' words, it chooses a random one and adds it to the output, which now contains $n+1$ words. It then repeats this process over and over, each time taking the final n words of the result and randomly choosing a word that can legally follow them. Larger values of n result in outputs that are closer to the source text, while low values are more disjointed and agrammatical. I used the variation inherent in this algorithm to create feedback loops of repetition and recursion within the text of *At the Shattered Edge*, resulting in an ornate process of repeating phrases and words. The text below, for example, was reordered with a high frequency, a n value of 3 or 4:

I steady myself against the coming day. Lights appear in unknown patterns, the occupants of the city pulling aside their coverings, while the others quiz me on the pile. I stand alongside these objects, exiled unceremoniously from my dark hair. There is little of interest, half-formed droppings and crumpled pages stuck left and right with fractured lines. They uncurl, plans of an obscene architecture gaining their own uneasy life.

(2014)

After generating this reordered passage, I then fed it back into the algorithm, and generated a new output that could sit alongside it:

I steady myself against the others quiz me on the others quiz me on the others quiz me on the city pulling aside their coverings, while the others quiz me on the others quiz me on the occupants of an obscene architecture gaining their own uneasy life. the occupants of the city pulling aside their coverings, while the city pulling aside their coverings, while the city pulling aside their own uneasy life.

(2014)

This process of creating this looping, decaying text specifically for performance was intended to explore the narrative possibilities of such a structure. The performance itself was a one hour reading of 43 pages of textual material at various states of reordering and semantic destruction. This experimental work formed the seed for this study. It was in observing the narrative traits of this looping,

fractured text that I began to see the potential for radical narrative structures that might emerge from procedural methods. While the experiments produced during this study take a different formal approach to generating and reordering text, it was this work that provided the emergence of patterns and practices I wished to pursue. The first of my experiments intended to develop this work was *The Narrated City*.

The Narrated City is a self-generating text which runs inside a web browser. Using a random number generator which combines strings of text together to make sentences, each page of *The Narrated City* is generated as it is loaded. The result is not a fixed piece of prose, but a potential text which is enacted when it appears to the reader: the potential connections between phrases and strings of text are created the moment they are read. In order to discuss this work, I will first outline the formal structures within which *The Narrated City* generates passages such as the following:

What, will he construct such a prison?

On the cameras it appeared to be an
edgeless object.

Polygons and bollards towering on the skyline.

Prisms and struts placed side by side.

(2016)

To explain the way in which *The Narrated City* operates, I will begin by describing the process of composition for the above series of four

sentences or strings. Each of the formats that define these strings has automatically been chosen at random from a potential set of 20 formats. A random number of these strings have been chosen (in this case 4), and they have been randomly placed on the page. The content of each string, though selected randomly, is defined by a carefully limited and edited set of phrases which are assembled in a specific order. If we take the first sentence—‘What, will he construct such a prison?’—and look directly at the plain text code that defines its random selection, we can begin to see how this operates:

(either: “How could”, “When will”, “What, will”, “Can”, “Will”, “How can”, “Where will”, “Why can”, “Why can’t”,) (either: “I”, “he”, “she”, “they”, “it”) (either: “fill”, “inhabit”, “understand”, “encompass”, “conceive”, “construct”, “dissect”, “cross”, “understand”, “make a home of”, “unpick”, “control”) such (either: “a wide space”, “a vast expanse”, “a closed room”, “an empty hall”, “a space”, “an area”, “a district”, “a room”, “a basement”, “a prison”, “a courtyard”, “a street”, “an Empire”, “a kingdom”, “a ward”, “a state”)?

In this example the ‘(either:)’ function defines a range of values which will be chosen from at random. So in this case, any string generated by this process can begin only with ‘How could’, ‘When will’, ‘What, will’, ‘Can’, ‘Will’, ‘How can’, ‘Where will’, ‘Why can’ or ‘Why can’t’. After one of these has been selected, the next ‘(either:)’ function will trigger, and so on until the string is complete. You will also notice the presence of the word ‘such’ and a ‘?’ both placed outside any of the ‘(either:)’ functions. Any words, spaces or punctuation arranged like

this will be included in every string generated by the code. To make this clear, I might write this string out as: '(either:) (either:) (either:) such (either:)?' Each string is generated in the same way, though differing strings will be constructed from different sets of potential phrases.

What is important to note about this process is that it is a so-called 'dumb' process. The code which drives the random selection of the phrases is very simple, as can be seen, and the algorithm itself is simply selecting an option from a range as it calls each function until the string is complete. I could, for example, replicate this process without the use of any computing equipment at all: the phrases would simply need to be assigned a numerical value and dice could be rolled to determine which one of these phrases would be used. In this case the intermediate string would appear as follows: '(2) (2) (6) such (10)?', the translated string being 'What, will he construct such a prison?' I mention this is because it is important to the formal structure I am using here that it functions within a simple random system, not a complex algorithmically-driven Natural Language Processing system. While Natural Language Processing is a discipline which uses artificial intelligence to produce so-called natural speech using only algorithmic systems, my own algorithmic system is analogous to the random systems utilised by procedural and experimental literature of the past century. In *The Narrated City*, the sense of meaning, pattern and narrative comes not from an ornate piece of programming, but from the inherently connective, meaning-making processes of language itself.

In this way, *The Narrated City* is designed to take advantage of the polysemic and modular nature of language, as well as the reader's associative experience of reading the text itself. Its compositional process puts me, as Piombino suggests in his discussions of poetic composition, simultaneously in the position of both reader and writer. Building *The Narrated City* involves not just a process of writing the phrases and strings into the code, but of generating the results over and over to see the interactions between the phrases, before returning to the writing and editing process to erase certain associative meanings and strengthen others. The result is a text that, despite generating at the moment the reader encounters it, is united within a highly defined—but not fixed—narrative, associative and referential field. This fuzzy territory makes up the potential reach of *The Narrated City's* experimental prose.

This idea of a text which freely occupies a territory, rather than one which seeks to define a single path, is what drew me to create the system which drives *The Narrated City*. But in its development this system also became as much a compositional aid as it was a tool for generating text. With each rewrite and regeneration I was able to encounter the text anew, and make new connections that I could then feed back into the process. In this compositional process I regularly encountered unexpected combinations of my own phrases; unforeseeable implications and associations. Even in its finished form, the text still has the potential to surprise me. Composing *The Narrated City* was a linear process in the sense that the texts gained complexity and focus over time, but it was an accumulative linearity,

one which grew in all directions at once. From the point defined by a single phrase or word—in this case ‘city’—I began to build out the storm of connectives, all the time seeking to generate an interlocking set of meanings between strings that might feed each other’s potential set of meanings. The aim here was not the maximum amount of meanings or variations; instead I sought to control the text generated to maximise its density, polysemic play, and connectivity.

The patterning of pebbledashed telephone-poles suggest
sleeping positions of the dead.

(2016)

The single string above, one I had not encountered in this form until I generated it at the point of writing this chapter, points to the manner in which I worked with the text to create a narrative density much like that seen in the work of Carla Harryman, Leslie Scalapino, or even Ron Silliman. My intention was not to build a system to recreate these works or their style, but to develop the radical narrative strategies described by these works, along with Nick Piombino’s criticism. The focus of *The Narrated City* is the coherence and incoherence of the city as a symbol. My intention was to create a work able to explore the city as both a collection of disconnected objects, events and figures, and also the cities inverse nature as a single system, pattern or structure:

She goes between rails, corridors, walkways, always resting.

In the beating wind.

He goes along paths, lines, catacombs, never running.

Grids and spheres make up an unreadable
language of signs.

(2016)

The formal structure I developed for *The Narrated City* allows me to create work which engages with both the pattern/interval interrelation suggested by Piombino and the particular qualities of a 'holding environment' text that uses randomness and a suspended intentionality to transform, in Piombino's phrasing, 'what might otherwise remain incommunicable internal experiences into concrete, albeit fluid forms of external expression' (1998: 66). This description of Retallack's *Errata Suite* is integral to how I think about the structure established with *The Narrated City*.

However, this work was only the first step in my development of this form that might reflect the 'storm of connectives'. In many ways the limitations of *The Narrated City* come from its choice of subject, which results in it establishing a world that feels fictional, as opposed to directly reflective of experience. While formally it began my process of exploring how I might engage with randomness it did not fulfil it. Piombino's analysis of *Errata Suite* describes the text as:

utilizing words as they appear to us in the inchoate flux of everyday experience, very much including the experience of silent and spoken reading, as well as associative thinking, [creating] a land of music that challenges us to listen to the entire complexity of experience in its full density. (1998: 66)

I felt that *The Narrated City* lacked this link to the ‘flux of everyday experience’, aligning itself too closely with the territory of literary fiction. To engage with the narrative qualities I wished, without evoking those fixed traits of character and plot from which I intended to separate my work, I would need to develop my approach to the formal structure established here. By placing a nameless city at the centre of *The Narrated City*, I generated something that resembled a fictional world. This fictional world felt like a refusal, or concealment, of the self that Piombino saw as being central to contemporary poetics. Rather than deflecting the self, my intention was, like Scalapino and Harryman, to evoke, contest, and complicate its presence in the text. With this in mind, I moved away from *The Narrated City* towards a new work based on the same formal structure.

Composing *Radical Transparency*

Radical Transparency is built on the same random-selection structure as *The Narrated City*, but with an important difference: rather than generating live as the reader encounters it, each iteration is generated in advance to be encountered as a traditional printed text. Unlike *The Narrated City*, it also exists as a shifting work of self-disclosure, one which, through its generation processes, engages with autobiography as more than the recounting of personal events.

In approaching the creation of *Radical Transparency*, my aim was to extend the structure of *The Narrated City* to create a text that would more directly engage with questions of self-disclosure, as well as my own contemporary experience. Drawing from Piombino’s conception

of self-disclosure as essential to poetic form, I created a work that explicitly used self-disclosure as a narrative mode:

Pistol whip my interests. Find my face, punctuated by accidental marks, with dreams of you. I assemble all known things like a blanket. Pornography suspended in skyscraper glass. I will touch whatever I see. A truth that feels like it cannot be truly real. Once I hid in the unused fire exit, listening to music and inhaling dust and I learnt nothing.

A sign says: 'the nuclear family.' You exposed our illness to please your fans. A pattern of movements that is derived from my desires. May you judge me aptly, and retreat to anywhere but here. You detailed your daughter to comply with the disclosure agreement. A pattern of movements that is a reflection of my screen name. Bent cigarette ends arranged within misplaced reflections.

The two paragraphs above make up a single generated iteration within *Radical Transparency*. The full text takes the form of a sequence of 100 of these iterations, each iteration consisting of two paragraphs of 7 sentences each. This sonnet-like structure is intended to emphasise the connectivity between lines and iterations, while providing a serial work with a sense of accumulative meaning and progression. Having 100 variations within a single text also allows for the accumulation of multiple patterns and meanings, while providing an arbitrary volume of content often used colloquially as shorthand for a large volume, eg. 'hundreds of' or 'a hundred' objects. As in *The Narrated City*, each one of the 100 14-sentence iterations

of *Radical Transparency* is built from a series of sentence strings that are themselves built from a collection of potential phrases. However, unlike the individual narratives of urban space which made up *The Narrated City*, *Radical Transparency*'s strings combine both acts of self-disclosure and opaque statements on the nature of transparency. The reasoning for this draws from the focus of the text on contemporary experience, and in particular the online and offline acts of self-disclosure in and with which we engage on a daily basis.

The term from which the text takes its name, 'radical transparency', was coined by Allen L. Hammond (2001), in a speculative essay in the journal *Foreign Affairs*. In this essay, Hammond proposes 'radical transparency' (2001: 103) as a form of surveillance by civil society and NGOs that might pressure regimes and corporations to be held accountable to their actions. He describes it as 'the equivalent of CNN everywhere, all the time. No contentious action would go unnoticed and unpublicized' (2001: 104-105). Hammond's term gradually became mainstream, and by the time the non-profit body Wikileaks launched in 2006, with the aim of disseminating incriminating material on the involvement of the US and UK governments in the Middle East, radical transparency had become an umbrella term for these practices. The term also gained a wider usage, in particular catching the attention of a generation of successful entrepreneurs. Mark Zuckerberg, founder of social media network Facebook, has publicly made explicit this focus on transparency. In *The Facebook Effect*, David Kirkpatrick's 2011 profile of the company, Zuckerberg states:

The days of you having a different image for your work friends or co-workers and for the other people you know are probably coming to an end pretty quickly. [...] Having two identities for yourself is an example of a lack of integrity.' (2011: 199)

Later in *The Facebook Effect*, which remains the only profile of the company approved by Zuckerberg, Kirkpatrick explains that 'Facebook is founded on a radical social premise—that an inevitable enveloping transparency will overtake modern life' (2011: 200), also mentioning that the term 'radical transparency' is specifically used within Facebook's corporate structure. 'Radical transparency' is also a philosophy espoused in Ray Dalio's 2017 best-selling and critically-lauded business book *Principles*. Under the heading 'Be Radically Transparent', Dalio (founder of the hedge fund Bridgewater Associates), adjures: 'use transparency to help enforce justice. Share the things that are hardest to share' (2016: 281).

Both Zuckerberg and Dalio focus on radical transparency as a liberatory practice, an escape from concealment and complex social structures towards a flat plane of disclosure in both social and work contexts, where each individual would be judged by their peers—an 'idea meritocracy', as Dalio puts it (2016: 540). However, their utopian ideas have been troubled by a string of revelations about how the data disclosed by individuals is being sold, illegally distributed, and instrumentalised for the material gain of both corporations and powerful political actors. Most notable among these is the harvesting of 50 million Facebook accounts by the data analytics firm Cambridge Analytica, in order to build psychological

profiles that were used for targeted political advertising during the 2016 US election campaign.

This interplay between self-disclosure, power, social media and our online and offline contemporary lives is the topic I sought, in making *Radical Transparency*, to engage with. It seemed to me that to talk of self-disclosure in our contemporary moment without reference to these processes which relate directly to the small and large acts of self-disclosure we commit every day would be to obscure their huge influence. In order to engage with contemporary experience and consider how the self might be rendered in a contemporary, algorithmically driven text, it was necessary for me to engage with these social issues of self-surveillance and disclosure as well as broader ideas of transparency and opacity:

I will step out of the shadows. Strikethrough my search history.
May you leave me the fuck alone, and just go to work. The
scratch-resistant screens conceal something indeterminate. A
stutter that is a replacement for a sense of self. Criminally
prosecute my sexual preference. The Venn diagrams, printed
on acetate, catch the light.

Though the balance of strings in any single passage of *Radical Transparency* is dictated at random, through many iterations and regenerations, the pattern-making nature of using the same set of simple strings and structures to generate different sentences lends the text a certain formal play of consistency and disjunction that I tried to reflect in how I constructed the strings themselves. From the extract above, for example, the sentence ‘the Venn diagrams, printed

on acetate, catch the light' comes from a string that produces oblique references to transparency in a wider sense, whether in architecture, design, or just simple observations. 'Criminally prosecute my sexual preference', meanwhile, comes from a string that combines references to different kinds of personal data that are held or volunteered by web users, with references to actions, performed both online and offline, upon that data. The above passage contains two other sentences originating from this string: 'strikethrough my search history' and 'strip search my performance', creating an interlocking pattern that even in a small section of the work helps dictate the rhythm and meaning of the text. When 'criminally prosecute my sexual preference' and 'the Venn diagrams, printed on acetate, catch the light' are placed side by side at random, these two strings also produce a sense of a connective pattern that is suggestive without being referential, and which even over the course of two sentences, accumulates multiple implied meanings. The generation process of *Radical Transparency* was deliberately tuned in order to create these kinds of occurrences and, taking the passage as a whole, it is possible to see how multiple sentences produced by similar strings create a complex structure of noticeable pattern and variation which guides the reader's interpretative experience.

This relationship also carries through the text as a whole. Because of the mode of its construction, *Radical Transparency* is a self-same text at the level of its sentences: any line could be substituted with another line without breaking the rules of the code which generates it, as could every paragraph across the entire piece. Each of the 100

iterations, from the perspective of the code that generates them, is identical. This, when combined with the associative strings which encourage connections to arise without becoming fixed, results in a text which epitomises the pattern/interval interrelation explored in Piombino's writings. *Radical Transparency's* narrative nature relies entirely on the textural intervals provided by paragraphs and sentences, as well as the experiential intervals of the reading process. It is this which organises the reader's engagement with its interlocking patterns of meaning and association. But *Radical Transparency's* engagement with the storm of connectives model, and Piombino's theorisation more broadly, is not simply a formal one. The work also articulates the same relationship with the self that has been identified throughout this study.

Radical Transparency is built on the presence of shifting and yet somehow consistent pronouns that point to the act of impossible autobiography at the centre of the text. As should be clear by now, though I have limited control of each individual iteration of *Radical Transparency* as they are generated, I have complete control over the coding that generates them. In this sense the question of intention becomes spread across every generation of the text, as opposed to one individual iteration. This makes the distinct act of self-disclosure difficult to identify and yet an undeniable element of the narrative that operates within the text:

I am influenced by my thoughts as I imagine what it would be like to make something. Once I forgot your name. The reflections in your glass transform the space. A list of likes and

dislikes that is poorly imagined from this text's particular qualities.

In the passage above it is possible to see how the layering of personal pronouns, disclosure, as well as oblique and self-referential statements simultaneously alludes to and displaces the presence of a perceivable self within the text. In his discussion of Jackson Mac Low's *Pronouns*, Piombino notes how the work displaces the concept that 'that identity is, in actuality, completely separate from anything else' (1998: 63), allowing the reader to 'participate in the complex, transformative interrelationship between self and other' (1998: 63). In this same way, *Radical Transparency* provides a space which both asserts the inherent connectivity of the self, allowing for its presence in the text to absorb and displace the meaning of other, more oblique, statements, but also allows for a relationship between self and other that undermines the singularity of any group of pronouns. For example, in the above passage, the interplay between an 'I' which is present in the first sentence, and the 'you' which is introduced in the second and carried into the third creates a sense of consistency which is undermined by the isolated nature of the sentences. The fourth sentence, lacking a pronoun, then becomes placed in an equal relationship with both imagined figures: whose is the 'set of likes and dislikes'? When stretched across the entire body of the generated text, this interplay between 'I' and 'you' creates a web of potential situations which the reader is free to navigate. It is their conscious and subconscious choices that will dictate into which intervals, and in what patterns, these connective pronouns will be

sorted. As *Radical Transparency* has no singular, final form (only an endless series of possible iterations), these referential terms have no singular form either. But as Piombino claimed, this radical openness does not destroy the presence of the self in the text, but instead heightens the collaborative nature of that self, held between an equidistant reader and writer.

However, that is not to say that there is no 'factual basis' for *Radical Transparency*, as its disclosures all emerge from my own experiences, restructured by the code of the work into variations, affirmations, and reversals. The importance of this lies, for me, with the nature of the discourse *Radical Transparency* is attempting to engage with. Self-disclosure is integral to the wider concept of radical transparency as a social ideology, and as the work takes a critical position in relation to this concept, it is important to enact, complicate, and displace self-disclosure as a process. In *Radical Transparency* my self-disclosure is placed into a system of suspended control, which allows me to encounter it as it is generated, but not dictate the nature of its generation. But if we turn back to Piombino, we can accurately read that system, the coded process that dictates the arrangement of the text, as being as much an expression of the self as the 'content' of the disclosures. As we saw, Piombino describes this process as the poet discovering 'his formal matrices through a process of self-disclosure that is contiguous with his creations', and so 'by accident', discovering 'the actual recurrent objects of his fantasy' (1978b: 17). And so, in *Radical Transparency*, we ultimately see a close relationship

between the disclosures and the method of their delivery. Stressing the relationship between content and form would not bring us to this position, but the storm of connectives, with its focus on pattern, interval, and the presence of the composing and reading self, as well as the writing self, reveals the nature of this work.

Because of this, the reading of *Radical Transparency* I am performing in this chapter risks misrepresenting the work. In order to explicate the generation, composition, and writing/rewriting processes, it is necessary to isolate each one for discussion.

However, the movement of a work produced in the model of the storm of connectives is towards coherence, not fragmentation.

Ultimately, this is the focus of *Radical Transparency*: centred on the experiential process of reading, not a falsely formalised process of composition. For *Radical Transparency*, the processes of writing, reading and composing blend together, both in my process of creating the work and in the reader's ordering of that work as they experience it. Both shift between Piombino's 'acausal axis' (1980b: 35) of 'ordering of thought' (1980b: 32) and 'reverie' (1980b: 32) with neither taking a privileged position in relation to these qualities. The meaning of the work is as contingent on the reader's ordering as it is on my 'reverie', and the reverse is also true. The result is a work which, rather than expecting the reader to experience it with a conceptual coolness, appreciating the complexity of its composition, instead asks for an engagement with the experience of reading. As each of the 100 iterations is uniquely generated, there is no concrete or fixed version into which the work can be reified. Each iteration is

an inherently experiential text. *Radical Transparency* is the name for the 100 iterations collected and presented with this thesis, but this set of iterations cannot be said to be the ‘correct’ version of the text. They are instead representative of the potential territory the text is able, through the generation process, to occupy. The text, at its core, is the description of a territory—one which, no matter how fuzzy or blurred they are, possesses borders.

When trying to explain the above aspects of *Radical Transparency*, I developed a descriptive image that aided me in helping those unfamiliar with or intimidated by digital algorithms understand the form of the piece. This image, which I came to call the ‘Invisible Statue’ also began to take shape as a way of engaging with the poetics of the work. This image asks the reader to imagine a sculptural form, which cannot be seen—the invisible statue. Then I ask the reader to imagine a series of points being plotted on the surface of this statue, points which are visible. If we were to plot a hundred points on the surface of the statue, then we would have a new sculptural form, a cloud of visible points describing, in part, the hidden statue. This cloud of points would be shaped by the form of the invisible statue, but would not encompass its entire surface, and as they are only points, the connections between each one would be entirely for the viewer to create. We could also clear the points, and then plot another hundred, entirely new points, and the result would be an entirely new form. However both sets of points would emerge from the form of the same invisible statue. In fact this process could be repeated infinitely, each time producing another new form, but

each time this form would be emerging from, and limited by, the unseen statue which they are describing. In *Radical Transparency*, the code which generates new iterations is, in effect, the invisible statue. Never seen but creating and limiting the potential textual outputs. Each generated sentence or string of *Radical Transparency* is a point on the surface of the statue, connective, distinct, but also descriptive of the unseen form which generated it. While elaborate, this image helps to define the formal aspects of *Radical Transparency*, as well as its constituent parts, and is suggestive of both its algorithmic form and the outputs of that form. This image also helps indicate a vital point regarding the poetics of *Radical Transparency*, its content is inseparable from its form, as, like the statue, both meaning and structure are tied up in the central unseen object that drives its textual outputs.

This is why the storm of connectives model is so vital in realising this type of work. With its double refusal—of fixed patterns and meanings, and of total fragmentation and the abandonment of narrative and self—it shapes a distinct space for experimental and radical work to occupy. Freed from a need to champion form as the singular expression of experimental work, but also from a conception of content as simply a volume of meaning to be slotted into a formal container, space is opened for experimental texts whose narrative and affective nature is heightened, rather than limited, by open form and loose associative meaning. In addition, the model engages directly with the reader's implication in the process of meaning-making, and their experience of the text. Within this frame, narrative

becomes a mode of engagement as well as a textual property, occupying the space of the cognitive agent, and allowing, through patterns of interval and meaning, the formation of fluid systems of reference. *Radical Transparency* is my expression of these qualities, my attempt to occupy this fertile territory with a work that engages directly with my own lived experience within a wider social frame.

**‘Abandoning the figure won’t change the world’: Ben Lerner’s
*The Lichtenberg Figures***

While these techniques of interlocking strings and disclosures supported by an inconsistent and shifting set of pronouns are, in part, drawn from the work of the writers discussed earlier in this study, *Radical Transparency* also sits alongside the work of more contemporary writers whose work, I believe, shares some of my concerns and ambitions. Chief amongst these is the poet, critic, and novelist Ben Lerner, whose work combines a shifting, inconsistent, even fictional sense of self with an interest in the generative properties of procedure and rule sets. To conclude this chapter, I will explore this connection with reference to two specific works by Lerner. The first of these is his poetic series *The Lichtenberg Figures*.

Published in 2004, *The Lichtenberg Figures* is made up of 52 untitled, unnumbered, 14-line sonnets. Mixing poetic styles and carrying the traces of found language, disjunctive associations, and an almost narrator-like self, *The Lichtenberg Figures* have a distinct self-referential and self-aware quality. Lerner, speaking to the *Paris Review* in 2016, explains how he wrote the initial poems at a friend’s

house after receiving a collection of books: 'I read one of the books that was by Majorie Welish [...] and I just wrote in the margins of the book' (2016). He goes on to explain that:

the poems became sonnets pretty quickly because I felt like the trajectory of an individual poem was about 14 lines, and I wanted to stabilise some rules in the manuscript that I could wrestle with. (2016)

Lerner also mentions his interest in the presence of a volta in each of the poems as a 'thematic turn or formal turn' (2016), as well as his interest in a 'sense of seriality, or sequentiality, or the book as a larger architecture' (2016). The overriding impression given by the interview is of a writer concerned with formal constraint, with Lerner even talking about how he started to 'impose the form' (2016) that had occurred to him in those moments of first reading Marjorie Welish, and then simultaneously writing the first poems of his sequence alongside hers.

Already we can see, in this process of composition, the kind of discovery of form discussed by Piombino, with Lerner's formal devices emerging not from critical distance, but from the experiential process of composition. Lerner, though he uses an adaptation of the traditional form of the sonnet, comes to this form through reading, writing, and the association and meaning-making processes of both. In his interview with the *Paris Review* he also discusses the relationship his chosen sonnet form had with the themes which started to emerge from the work. Lerner mentions that he discovered intuitively, whilst writing the poems, 'an intimate relationship between

the detachment of language from reality and the use of language as an instrument of violence' (2016). This violence became the central focus of *The Lichtenberg Figures* (named after the strange branching patterns left in human skin when struck by lightning), and that violence cohered with, or even emerged from, Lerner's chosen form: 'the violence of the sonnet and the violence I did to the sonnet were supposed to be mimetic of the violence the poems were exploring and describing' (2016). In Lerner's account of his compositional process, it is difficult to find an origin point from a conceptual perspective, but easy to find one from an experiential perspective.

However, the most notable aspect of *The Lichtenberg Figures* is not its overarching structure but its combinatorial arrangements of disclosure, factual statements, adapted found-language, and fictional anecdote:

They can take your life, but not your life signs, my father
was fond of saying after apnea. But that was before articles
shifted during flight, before our graphs
grew indistinguishable from our appetites. In fine,
that was the greatest period of American prosperity

since my depression. Father's left hand was an extension
of liberal thinking. It could strike a man without assuming
a position on the good. His left hand was a complete

and austere institution. In fine, it could move through

my body's DMZs without detection. But that was before

articles copped pleas and feels from objects, objects

rendered fulgent by our theories, back before my mood

swung slowly open

to let this ether enter like a view. (2004: 27)

Above is the 21st poem in *The Lichtenberg Figures*, reproduced in full. What is instantly noticeable across its 14 lines is its use of word play and appropriated statements or expressions, interwoven with an unsteady narrative supposedly concerning the poet's father. Lerner uses line breaks to literally undercut both the authorial presence and narrative coherence of the poem, delivering punchlines or diversions in a predictable fashion. But between these failed jokes, the text also has layers of interleaved personal admission, political commentary, and seemingly isolated statements. The effect within a single poem is an effective accumulation of thematic associations and strange or almost metaphorical linkages, which, when spread across the entire sequence, begin to feed back into patterns of characters, events, phrases, and fictions. Finding a singular position within this shifting landscape is impossible; Lerner forces the reader to constantly move between positions and perspectives, often eager to undermine the

seriousness of any statement with a punchline, before quickly extinguishing that humour as he moves to the next line.

The series is also marked by an aggressive self-referentiality, with poems themselves being described within their own text, and compositional processes, poetic theory, and theory in general making noticeable appearances:

Then bullets tore through the soft tissue of our episteme.

We had thought that by arranging words at random

We could avoid ideology. We were right.

Then we were terribly wrong. Such is the nature of California.

(2004: 43)

This stanza opens the 37th poem, making direct reference to the techniques of Language and avant-garde writing while, simultaneously, drawing broad associations with the acts of violence that pepper his sonnets. Violence and language are placed in close proximity, creating a play between the two that draws connective but not conclusive associations. Elsewhere he uses this same blending of associative references:

In order to avoid saying 'I,' the author eats incessantly.

The author experiences pleasure from a great distance

Like the bombing of an embassy. In the business district,

Fire is exchanged. The media butcher the suspect's name.

(2004: 55)

Here, in the 49th sonnet, Lerner again draws collage-like connections between language and violence, while continuing to upset our sense of his presence in the text. Elsewhere in this poem—and in his wider work, such as his novel *10:04*—Lerner uses ‘author’ rather than ‘I’ to refer to both his characters and himself. In the passage of *The Lichtenberg Figures* above it is unclear if it is Lerner or a character, who is the ‘author’ of these lines, and before the reader can decide on one or the other interpretation, Lerner once again undercuts the line of argument, drifting back into the poem’s pattern of violent euphemisms.

I really don’t want to do this over the phone

But I also never want to see you again.

So I paid Ben Lerner to write this poem

In language that was easy to understand. (2004: 37)

Meanwhile, this appearance of Lerner’s name in the 32nd sonnet is the only such instance in the series. The joke is a simple one, the volta shifted to the final line of a sonnet written entirely with a personal pronoun, as well as the self-deprecating joke about the nature of the language used, but it is also an invitation for the reader to reframe the entire sequence once more. Throughout *The Lichtenberg Figures*, Lerner performs these destabilising nudges, throwing the reader out of any kind of fixed reference system or conventional narrative—and yet he does so in patterns that become a narrative structure of their own. This is where I see the connection between Lerner’s practice and my own approach to the storm of

connectives. Lerner's work exists in a carefully held space between coherence and incoherence, order and reverie. It is affective, as demonstrated by the final lines of the first poem I quoted in this section:

back before my mood

swung slowly open

to let this ether enter like a view' (2004: 27)

And yet it refuses to settle into this mode, constantly shifting the territory the reader occupies over the whole sequence.

This constant associative play, and Lerner's layered use of pronouns, sits alongside my own work in *Radical Transparency*. Lerner strikes a careful balance between characters and symbols, metaphors and disjunction, and gives a serious consideration to the pattern of reference and meaning he constructs over the course of the entire 52 sonnet sequence. There's an invigorating quality to his arrangements of factual statements and self-disclosure, which expands the potential field of the entire sequence with each reading. But perhaps most importantly, there is a strong sense of Lerner's interest in continuing something of the Language writing project, but stripped of its rejection of narrative and self, in this series and throughout his work.

In 'Beyond "Lyric Shame": Ben Lerner on Claudia Rankine and Maggie Nelson' (2017), Lerner writes that Language poetry was 'a

machine that ran on difficulty'. He cites work fashioned in the mode of Silliman's 'New Sentence' as being intended to 'teach us that meaning is actively produced', that 'language is manipulable material', and 'that the "speaker" is a unifying fiction more than a stable subject' (2017). However, despite identifying these processes as highly influential, Lerner questions their political basis:

When aggressive ungrammaticality and non sequitur are fundamental to mainstream capitalist media (and to the rhetoric of an ascendant radical right), the new sentence appears more mimetic than defamiliarizing. (2017)

It is a familiar point, one not dissimilar to Jameson's original critique of Language writing, and yet rather than use this point to discredit the form of the new sentence, Lerner only uses it to discredit the political framing. Lerner makes this critique not to attack Language, but to expose its qualities beyond the political. Tellingly, Lerner implies a strong Language writing influence on his work, explaining that 'many of us learned something from the Language poets' taking up of a constructivist vision of the self and its literature', and citing 'their insistence on language as material' and their 'compelling reading of experimental modernism' as key factors, before adding as an aside:

And many of us learned to appreciate certain texts associated with Language poetry in terms other than and often opposed to those provided by essays like Silliman's 'The New Sentence,' with its anti-expressive and anti-aesthetic bent. (2017)

Lerner, too, recognises the failure of 'The New Sentence' to account for the aesthetic and expressive qualities of the works it describes. His identification of it as 'anti-expressive' points to a reading of Language which, like the one proposed by this study, might attribute an expressive, affective, intense quality to Language writing. While Lerner uses this as a platform to discuss 'lyric', rather than narrative, in the work of Rankine and Nelson, and how they operate within a 'post-Language poetry environment of lyric shame' (2017), he necessarily touches on how Rankine and Nelson's work might represent a 'shift from the tactical deconstruction of ostensibly natural narrative or lyric unities to the effort to reconstruct them with a difference' (2017). While Lerner, tantalisingly, leaves his essay open to the arrival of new forms, for the purpose of this study no conclusion is needed. This essay provides a point of connection between Lerner's own work, and an affective, even narrative reading of Language writing.

'Affective adjustments | to the architecture': Ben Lerner's *Mean Free Path*

Lerner's relationship with the legacy of Language writing is reinforced in a conversation with Aaron Kunin for *Jacket*. Here, when asked about the non sequitur in his serial work *Mean Free Path*, Lerner responds by contrasting Silliman's 'new sentence' with the work of John Ashbery. Silliman, he proposes, presents a '(sometimes painful) lesson for the reader' (2010a) by limiting the reader's integration into a higher order of meaning. The reader may 'be tempted to eat at the tree of integration, but shall not' (2010a); and Lerner posits that

Silliman is suggesting they should be 'ashamed of integration because it is homologous to commodity fetishism' (2010a). Lerner then compares this position with John Ashbery's *Three Poems*, explaining that 'what's exhilarating is how everything seems to integrate seamlessly' (2010a), and how, despite the reader's sense that 'higher units of meaning' are 'coalescing', if they were to stop and attempt to 'define that higher unit ('narrative,' or 'argument'), its content vanishes' (2010a). In this argument, Silliman is negative reinforcement, blocking the reader from forming a coherent whole from the text, while Ashbery is positive reinforcement, indicating the possibility of a coherent whole which never arrives. Lerner, again, doesn't take this position in order to disparage the form of the new sentence; rather, he does so in order to explode the shared interest in the careful manipulation of 'integration' shared by both Silliman and Ashbery:

Ashbery and the new sentence aren't ultimately opposed—both make us aware that integration is produced by reading, not just discovered, and that the affect of integration can be experienced without arriving at a stable integrated whole.
(2010a)

If we turn to Lerner's *Mean Free Path*, we can see a precise example of this focus on a process of integration without closure or stability, much akin to Piombino's 'holding environment' which was so contingent to the formation of my storm of connectives model.

The petals are glass. That's all you need to know

Lines have been cut and replaced

With their opposites. Did I say that out loud (2010b: 10)

Mean Free Path is Lerner's most explicitly procedural sequence. In the extract above, taken from the third section, Lerner gives one of many indications of the processes he uses: 'lines have been cut and replaced | With their opposites'. These admissions of form are peppered throughout *Mean Free Path* as both descriptions of and comments on the structure of the sequence. Together, they enmesh the form of the work with its content in a way that makes it indistinguishable as form. Lerner writes of 'the language of disaster, the disaster in | Not finishing sentences' (2010b: 18), and 'Collective despair expressed in I-statements' (2010b: 18). He describes reference as 'a slow | Wave transporting energy through empty | Media' (2010b: 21), proposing that 'Only a master | Only a butcher can unmake sense' (2010b: 21). There is a self-consciousness here, expressed in lines such as 'It will develop recursively or not at all | The new closure' (2010b: 23), 'Do not flee into procedure' (2010b: 23), or 'Strong misreadings arise | On the surface' (2010b: 25). Lerner also addresses the reader directly: 'Nothing for you here but repetition' (2010b: 26), and 'What if I made you hear this as music' (2010b: 39). Lerner's *Mean Free Path* is described many times within itself: 'I want this to be | Composed entirely of edges, a little path | For Ari' (2010b: 42).

That last extract, marked by 'For Ari' points to the subject of the poem. *Mean Free Path* is, in many senses, a love poem. In Lerner's own words, it emerges from his interest in 'expressing an emotion

that goes beyond description, and as a central technique of the kind of love poem I was writing' (2011). Additionally, he describes its central struggle as 'concerned with finding the right form for the expression of love' (2011). Lerner is typically unwilling to give a precise formulation of the structures and patterns he uses to compose his work, indicating that procedures are used, but not what those procedures might be. This unwillingness to readily separate content and form is reflected in his discussions of his work. In *Mean Free Path*, he explains, he is 'interested in how the drama of negotiating an imposed form can be thematized, becomes part of the meaning of the poem' (2011). For Lerner, form is *for* expression and expression is embedded *within* form. His self-consciousness reflects this: the form/content division is collapsed through its reintegration into the poetics of the work. For Lerner, form becomes an image or example of an affective process, just as each image in *Mean Free Path* is open for recombination as both metaphor and abstraction. The title of the work, a scientific description of the average distance a particle travels before its course is altered by a collision, is perhaps the best example of this. Lerner describes his reasoning for selecting this title 'as an apt trope for the poems' formal procedures, for the line as a space between collisions, for the line as measure' (2011). Yet this idea of the title as measurement becomes enmeshed with meaning. Lerner explains that:

the title gets swept up into a connotative field in which 'mean' means all sorts of things' giving the examples of 'signification' or 'meanness' and drawing connections between 'free' and

what he describes as ‘the murderous cheapening of that word
by American capitalism and its permanent wars. (2011)

There are similar concerns to those of Language writing here,
particularly in the social and political context of meaning and
language, but Lerner engages with these while still structuring his
work around connectivity, intensity, and affect:

Even the most direct and emotionally charged statements in
the book are made out of language that appears elsewhere in
other configurations. This isn’t intended to ironize the
statements, but to show how expression is always also
construction, a working with materials that have a history (in
the book and beyond). And to make that struggle to express
expressive. (2011)

For Lerner, expression is a struggle which is expressive in itself, or
perhaps even *of* itself. The manufacturing of meaning, the formal
disclosure of it, and the constructed, borrowed nature of language is
expressive and affective by its very nature. In *Mean Free Path* Lerner
presents a love poem which is both an attempt to resolve the
emotion of love with its expression within poetry, *and* a speculative

attempt to propose a structure through which the expression of love could be renewed, reassembled, reconfigured by poetic form⁷.

There must be an easier way to do this

I mean without writing, without echoes

Arising from focusing surfaces, which should

Should have been broken by structures

Hung from the apex in the hope of deflecting

In the hope of hearing the deflection of music

As music. There must be a way to speak

At a canted angle of enabling failures

The little collisions, the path of decay (2010b: 40)

The above section of *Mean Free Path* describes this struggle, but, simultaneously, it also describes the text which portrays the struggle. There are multiple interlocking images here: the failure of the poet to express in writing and yet continuing to write; the technical practice of acoustic engineering through physical deflection; and the evocation of the mean free path as a scientific descriptor, a measurement of

⁷ Lerner writes in more detail on the interlocking subjects of love and failure within poetics in his book *The Hatred of Poetry* (2016). The book explores Lerner's own contempt for the poem, setting it within a history of hatred of the form. However, the result is not a denunciation of the poem but a recognition of the utopic 'poetic virtuality' (96) of poetry generated by the 'contempt' of Lerner and others which 'by creating a place for possibility and present absences (like unheard melodies), it might come to resemble love' (114). This is highly indicative of the attitude of Lerner's work, which relies on the connective possibilities of implied and elusive meanings, but also marks a point of connection with my interest in shaping the storm of connectives as a shifting, virtual territory in which narrative and meaning might occur.

collision and decay. These images are also each seen here without their context: in *Mean Free Path* each of the images listed are variations of images which have already occurred or have yet to occur within the text. This wider structure of interval and pattern which structures these individual sections, themselves focussed on connectivity and intensity, makes this text a powerful realisation of the storm of connectives.

Both this, and Lerner's acknowledgement of his own reading of Language writing outside of an 'anti-expressive and anti-aesthetic' (2017) frame makes him a distinct realisation of the legacies this study seeks to expand. For me, the deftness with which Lerner manipulates his referential registers, looping meanings back through themselves while integrating layers of found material and external reference, is marked by a concern for language as a material itself, but not limited by an ideology that precludes narrative and self. In this sense, Lerner is contemporary to *Radical Transparency* along the axis which extends from the experiments of Language writing. In fact, there is a startling sense of connection between Lerner's and Piombino's concerns with form, experience and expression. To take a passage from *Mean Free Path*:

I planned a work that could describe itself

Into existence, then back out again

Until description yielded to experience

Yielded an experience of structure

Collapsing under its own weight like

Citable in all moments: parting

Dusk. Look out the window. Those small

Rain. In a holding pattern over Denver

Collisions clear a path from ground to cloud (2010b: 49)

This stanza strongly evokes Piombino's descriptions of composition and cognition which I have used throughout this study to help me formulate the territory of the storm of connectives, as well as deploying the self-same method of describing practice and forming practice from description I have engaged in within this study. In attempts to realise the storm of connectives, just as in *Mean Free Path*, 'description yielded to experience' but that experience is 'an experience of structure'. This loop is the animating property of this body of work, marking the play of interval and pattern with an intense and affective connectivity. As we saw in Lerner's discussion of Ashbery and Silliman, there is no eventual resolution to this loop, no stable whole to be derived from the storm. It is always 'collapsing under its own weight' yet always 'citable in all moments'. Lerner, in an attempt to escape this loop, to make the 'struggle to express expressive', turns outside, to the 'dusk'. This is an image reminiscent of Piombino's conclusion to 'Writing and Conceiving':

We wait and try again. We measure and take note. We generalize and enumerate. We sift through. This sifting, this remeasurement of experiences, one combined with another, leads to connections which are imbued with the feeling of discovery, that are remarkable

Now, as I look out through the porthole of this ferry, even from this distance, I am thinking of the small rectangle of graduated color, yellow white to pink to black, to specks of, to pinpoints of, electric white light to blue, brings to light, to mind, the entire dawn. (1980b: 35)

Lerner's 'dusk' is shown to be analogous with Piombino's 'dawn'. Lerner's 'path from ground to cloud' strongly resembles Piombino's a path through color and image which suggests 'the entire dawn'. In this sense, both Lerner and Piombino seem to turn to the inexpressible, but also to the frame, the window, the porthole. This structural relation holds a power for both of them, as an image of their poetics enacted. Here is our storm of connectives, a fuzzy frame over an intense territory, a narrative emerging from the connectivity of the two. In *Mean Free Path* there is a concern with storms, with rain. We read of 'virga' (2010b: 50), the rain or ice which falls from clouds but evaporates before it reaches the ground. Elsewhere, 'lightning' sits beside 'particles' (2010b: 55), 'theory' is 'like swimming in a storm' (2010b: 12), there is 'a rain that can't be paused' (2010b: 12), and 'a path from ground to cloud' (2010b: 49). But perhaps the most distinct description of the storm of connectives offered by Lerner comes in a set of four lines that suggest the intentions of the model, and perhaps even my own intentions with this study. I can think of no better way to conclude:

I did not walk all the way here from prose

To make corrections in red pencil

I came here to open you up

To interference heard as music (2010b: 43)

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Radical Transparency

(100 iterations)

Gareth Damian Martin

A statement sliding under the door. An open window sitting quietly in the corner. An error arriving. Tiredness washing the room in radio static. I saw you and didn't say anything. A scrawled annotation that I fostered as a child and that has never left me. A truth that is well practised but poorly constructed.

I revealed your memory to impress them all. The polarized lenses mask uncertain landscapes. I will pretend to tell the truth. Neg my driving licence. A series of mannerisms that project confidence. I am aware of the wingbeats, between us. A diagram of the human nervous system on the wall.

Once I avoided you on the street. Once I avoided you
on the street but we forgot about it. Idle thoughts of
violence beyond the waves. A sequence of memories that
is not present despite how strongly you imagine it.
Unannounced aches behind the lightboxes. The car
windows catch the light. I will forget.

A phrase was repeated again and again for effect: "etc."
The architectural renderings expose our addictions. I
rejected you. Unpick my mind, before descending back
to where you came from. I can feel revolving signs, all
things quantified. A to do list that is made in China.
Once I didn't do any of these things.

Follow me, wrapped in blankets, in a poor imitation of desperation. The acetate splash guards stand between us. Bait and switch my publishing schedule. I notice a franchise forming, beside my head. A position under the bridge. If you like unsolicited advice, toughen up. I will start a petition.

The processes of juxtaposition created by switching tabs are a bug, yet to be fixed. Here I am, in the unstructured texts of a hundred search queries, with dreams of death. I imagined only the terrible things that might be inferred from my behaviour. I will arrange a time and place to meet and then not show up. If you just don't know anymore, tell me. I tried to express myself imprecisely, to show conflict, not authority. I will hide myself away.

The docudramas expose our addictions. Record me, through the cameras you installed, in the belief that it will help. I will defend strangers. I forgot to eat. I advertised our ethnic makeup to your followers. Small tensions on plastic sheeting. Hurt me, in waves of pain, as a way of modelling this page and others.

Once I had no regrets about anything that had occurred and that was where it began. Pressed shirts suspended in the glass partition walls. A recording of me, each day this year, long since made obsolete. I will carry this everywhere. Steal my blood alcohol level. Ignore all the deaths I imagined for you, and escape along the border. Hear this as if it was echoing through the wall from the next apartment over, where you never see the people enter, only leave on their way into some imagined future.

The glass faces of the watches close off the office. Once I failed and I didn't understand what it meant. A file that asserts my identity. Your friends in your hand. Inside the card it read: "have you forgotten?". On the back of the photograph, written in biro: "ignore this". Believe in nothing and retreat into a black fucking hole.

I detect the halting of your breath, flickering, still flickering. Once I erased all the characters from the foreground so I could exhibit the background and then forgot about it. I will sit here, quietly, if that is what needs to be done. Wasps beyond my fingers. A to do list that is made in China. My life placed on a series of questions. I am aware of the river's shift, flexing.

Know me, somehow, through this flickering cloud, and take that knowledge to the checkpoint. If you have a better idea, stop here. Once I decided to do the wrong thing. Captured, each day this year, imagining my addictions. Your déjà vu on your feed. Gather them around you as protection for the journey to somewhere else. Knife crime my favourite purchases.

Leave me the fuck alone, and just go to the checkpoint. I tried to be more calculated. Once I deleted what I wrote and I felt inauthentic. Step away without injury, and run back home. A scrawled annotation that is totally unlike the one imagined through extensive online contact. Copper wire held between a series of cages. Infect my life goals.

Panels of celluloid deny our collectivity. Ringfence my keystrokes. Let's begin with: "feature presentation". I will pretend to tell the truth. I deleted your messages. A scrawled annotation that is foreign to me. Find my limit, before you make a phone call along the beach.

If you are bored, tell someone. Observe me, self-diagnosing via online help sheets, waiting for the event to start. Panels of celluloid are all that remains. Textures trapped within frosted glass. Forget your name in place of mine, and stumble offline. The virtual and physical distances between webcams flicker. If you have regrets, give up.

If you like unsolicited advice, sell your story. We did not want to go home. I will stalk your profiles. A character that was downloaded from the internet. A series of bad habits exhibited on the display screens. I liked what I made. The augmented-reality inserts mark the passing of time.

A structure that I have never noticed. I will renegotiate my position. I feel the warmth of skin, beneath heavy cloud cover. A scrap of paper reading: "press release". Be moved by this to my birthday party. A phrase, learnt by heart, that is a reflection of my screen name. Plastic sculptures arranged within plastic sheeting.

I tried to learn to play the piano. A sketch that is a reflection of my avatar. A note was forgotten but I believe it said something like: "Schizophrenia". A shrill voice that can be improved upon. I will get a tattoo. I will clean the display. Leave me the fuck alone, and just go to bed.

Nothing good hung on the wall. I built you a temple, which you pulled apart, piece by piece. A gesture that serves me well in difficult situations. The plastic safety shields glow. I leaked my masturbation practices to seem honest. Distribute my dream diary. You explained your rent to make a point.

I was obsessed by the possessions of my father, and began to quietly hoard them. The tempered-glass screen protectors catch the light. Motes of dust revealed by the floors. There, floating face down, with dreams of choking. The polarized lenses favour visual distortion. A confession that I have forgotten. I can feel the automation of my wish fulfilment, in the warm screen glow.

Diseased birds displayed in the gallery walls. Observe me, punctuated by accidental marks, imagining something else. The film strips, overlaid, scream. Smart-glasses are hollow metaphors. Work, endless work on the screen. I spilt my glass of water just so I could clean it up rather than go back to my desk and work for another moment. Once I fell asleep while listening to a looping piano.

I detect the lessening recursion of stimulation, in the endless scrolling screen. A lyric: "I forgot". I woke up not knowing where I was. You distributed your time of death to anyone who would listen. Be moved by this offline. Once I tried to escape the paradigms of my upbringing but I didn't mean it. You were repeating: "quiet now".

A muttered complaint that cannot be mine. The processes of juxtaposition created by switching channels lit by sources of light that are definite but various. Captured, self-diagnosing via online help sheets, in a poor imitation of desperation. A recording of me, thinking, or attempting to find thoughts, with dreams of choking. Infect my job history. A note that simply says: "thanks for that". Two panes of glass passing one another favour visual distortion.

I will sell your information. Our addictions placed on layers of dust. Once I spoke for you and it couldn't have been so simple. Find my limit, before you make a phone call to the border. Strikethrough my rent. I am aware of the swaying of aials, breaking everything into fragments. I tripped on a paving slab.

Alt f4 my nickname. I can feel your quiet designs, in the warm screen glow. I will burn your country to the ground. If you don't like this part, try to be honest. Execute my depersonalisation. The windows, streaked with dust, create an inexhaustible series of organizational frames. I wanted to have a deeper voice, a more masculine air.

An announcement in the waiting room. Empty my
robots.txt. A diagnosis preserved by the windows.
Hospitalise my visa. Once I tried to build a personality
from a network of affectations and then forgot about it.
I notice light screeching over glass, across the soles of my
feet. Leave me the fuck alone, and just go to sleep.

I knew what I was doing but I did it anyway. You were
repeating: "let's return to this later". We explained your
masturbation practices to seem transparent. Find some
insight and take it to the checkpoint. The mirrored
windows reflect the profits of visibility. I will remember
that. I will scream in your face.

Find my limit, before you make a phone call to
anywhere but here. Tactically strike my Body Mass
Index. Once I forgot your name and I don't know why I
am telling you this. Hold me, gesturing wildly, with
dreams of death. I notice endless tiresome greetings,
before you wake me. I can feel layers flocking like
starlings, but as a form of weather. Once I met you and
I didn't understand what it meant.

If you are bored, remember you are all the same.
Abandon me, as I escape, seeping into the carpet. If you
have already read this part, try something new. Find my
limit, before you make a phone call across the border.
Kettle my recorded calls. A muttered complaint that I
have never noticed. Once I just didn't care anymore.

A scrap of paper reading: "digital content". You revealed my dirty talk to throw them off the scent. I will log off. Gratefully receive directions to the international press. I notice a pressure, in the morning rain. Watch me, in the unstructured texts of a hundred search queries, with tired eyes and sore skin. Inside the card it read: "a song".

The glass faces of the watches scream. I will sleep in the street. The actor tried to say: "limited edition". I will give in to nostalgia. Two overlapping figures trigger traumatic memories. Once you scratched my skin so hard I cried out but we forgot about it. The Venn diagrams, printed on acetate, form a canvas for the rain.

If you have left already, read a book. The architectural renderings show that we have nothing to hide. I decided this was too much. The mirrored windows capture small insects. I watched the video over and over to try to understand. A story or anecdote that is foreign to me. The panes of glass create a space of indeterminacy.

I feel the halting of your breath, in routine. I am aware of a franchise forming, in the warm screen glow. Once I was so angry I literally "saw red" and for the first time understood that expression as more than a cliché and that was all. My lost keys held in the air. You leaked my schedule to the jury. The epigraph: "again". Two overlapping figures feel powerfully real.

I uploaded your fear of the dark to look good. Nerf my race. Once I tried to manipulate the situation. I can feel the sensation of waking up far from anywhere, before it is light. Once I put up some shelves and I didn't understand what it meant. I will eat now. I notice the sensation of waking up far from anywhere, after you have fallen asleep.

A grammatically tenuous statement that was recommended to me as a way of dealing with social anxiety. I will look right at you. I will hammer the same note over and over. I rejected self-awareness. I explained your loss of appetite to the jury. Look for me, gesturing wildly, in the belief that it will help. If you are following your dreams, use it.

A story or anecdote that is not what I wanted. A
breaking glass hung on the wall. Forgive me for this, and
depart to the checkpoint. I imitated my own image of
myself. The album should have been titled: "all my
ghosts are with me". Our addictions held between the
windows. The coastline on your feed.

A rasping voice that is my own. Once I just stopped
thinking and I told you already. If you are waiting for a
diagnosis, turn the page. Judge me aptly, and retreat
through the mirror. I will record you. There, pacing
back and forth between rooms, with dreams of voices.
Shout it from the rooftops or your nearest elevated
point: "I forgot".

The leaders agreed on a statement: "imminent collapse".
Access my cries for help. A man meant to say: "to pay".
A conversation we had last night: "a song". If you can't
go on much longer, take our advice. A sign says: "often
vs once". If you are afraid, stop here.

My life preserved by these pages. I can feel the decaying
city, in my gums. Once I hid in the unused fire exit,
listening to music and inhaling dust. I notice some
desperate search for energy, between the window panes.
Cry at my half-truths, before retreating into the
landscape. I can feel I need it, in the morning rain. A
recording that is made strange by the infrequency of
talking.

End my pronation. The film strips, overlaid, are a form of narrative. I detect an elegant set of compulsions, piece by piece. I detailed your sexual preferences to the moderators. If you are surprised, try something new. If you need to forget, toughen up. There, flinching at nothing, with dreams of you.

Observe me, through the cameras you installed, quietly concealing something. Sunlight through the gaps in the buildings in my hair. Hold me, wrapped in blankets, unwilling to move, erasing myself. Lynch my profile. I decoded it to a single phrase, though I was sure I had made a mistake, it read: "all my ghosts are with me". Once I imagined I was free of religion and it kept repeating. I will refuse to believe them.

A woman at the counter told me: "you forgot". Once I tore up your note and you cried. We exposed your brand to anyone who would listen. See me, in the brief and heartless exchanges between strangers, my mind bristling as it accrues passing images. Hold me, in the unstructured texts of a hundred search queries, for no reason in particular. Two video feeds, accidentally put through the same output mix. See me, at my place of work, erasing myself.

An object revealing something. If you have a better idea, tell everyone. I revealed our fatigue to win an argument. If you have regrets, arrange an overdraft. Hold me, in my file or permanent record, with thoughts of fictional places. Follow me, via a third party service, fading into the furniture. Impeach my unsightly rashes.

Believe in nothing and retreat to post about it. A rasping voice that was made publicly available. In a tired voice she murmured: "optional". Speak prose, fully-formed, directly to somewhere else. Air pockets preserved by ambient light. Once I dreamt of you wandering the house, surrounded by the domestic dangers I failed to suppress and it was true. Stress suddenly apparent.

Feel pain that is bearable and worthwhile, each day on the way into a black fucking hole. Textures exhibited on the gallery walls. You will never know me, just rush through the plate glass. Learn to hate me, then head into a black fucking hole. Gather them around you as protection for the journey into a better narrative. Our addictions occluded by misplaced reflections. We laughed.

A sequence of memories that seems to be mine. The album was titled: "optional". If you on the edge, act like you feel it. A desire that was recommended to me as a way of dealing with social anxiety. Once I wanted to be more specific but I didn't know how and it kept repeating. A hum sounded like: "five palaces". I can feel the effects of this cocktail of medication, between my finger joints.

Memorise my biography, and take it onto the front pages. I notice endless tiresome greetings, among the morning songbirds. If you have approved our privacy policy, toughen up. If you have left already, just be quiet. Once I bought a broken tape player and I don't know why I mentioned it. I will step out of this bubble. Novelty in the street.

Once I fell in love with an image. The pristine facades expose our addictions. I will scream in your face. If you are afraid, stop here. The coastline suddenly apparent. A photograph of half-submerged architecture on the bridge. I found myself talking circuitous routes around shops and rooms just to preserve the sense of movement.

I saw you. Here I am, eyes fixed on the screen, crouching beside a minor distraction. A voice, which you cannot hear, that serves as my password for multiple accounts across multiple websites. Dox my carbon footprint. I will fear the truth. I thought I had the solution. Some confusion in communication lead to me only being able to parse a single phrase: "reverse evolution".

If you are surprised, post here. A stutter that is my own.
Run to my supposed childhood home. Nothing good
somewhere in the suburbs. A breaking glass on the wall.
You detailed your family history to gain followers. You
leaked my ethnic makeup to find friends.

A series of bad habits behind prisms. I explained my
money problems to satisfy your lawyers. You revealed
your family to look aware. You will never know me, just
rush to the border. We advertised our memory to the
lawyers. Once I lied about you and I forgot about it
until just now. We detailed our brand to the police.

I rejected you. Distraction just uploaded. Kick me out of my depression. I feel the reverb of headlines being printed, in my heart. Novelty marked on the map. The scratch-resistant screens indicate our management policies. Criminally prosecute my emails.

A man at the counter told me: "Rotate the quotation". The album should have been titled: "I don't know". Once I confused fiction of my own creation with memories I had borrowed from you. A vocal tic that is a core expression of identity. Nail clippings behind the display screens. I am aware of the limits of my reach, like a fingernail tearing. I watched you in the dark of a cinema.

A fear that subtly takes control. A notification chirps, saying only: "billing information". Once I failed and I just remembered it. The processes of juxtaposition created by switching channels expose our addictions. An image of me, as I cross the city, imagining my addictions. A random occurrence in your hand. The image-compositing processes of extracting an alpha channel create some private version of space.

If you are looking for something, get out more. I am aware of revolving signs, beside my head. Hold me, through my unsecured webcam, on which reality will be maintained. I found myself talking circuitous routes around shops and rooms just to preserve the sense of movement. Transparency in digital imaging was developed in 1984. Digital images are a form of narrative. Once I knew that I wasn't able to be better. A memory that feels like it cannot be truly real.

Some confusion in communication lead to me only being able to parse a single phrase: "returns and refunds". I will double check my facts. I will make myself relatable to my audience. A notification chirps, saying only: "game changer". I notice my need to express something, in sequence. I will pretend to tell the truth. I detailed our fear to look aware.

A sign says: "not not here". Log my movements, in the shadow of listless days, blanking out all thought. A handprint on the mirror hung on the wall. Once I did not understand what it was to be from somewhere else and that was it. The blacked out windows transform the space. I will disclose information freely. A sign said: "I am leaving".

Unfollow my patient health questionnaire. If you are waiting for a diagnosis, stop here. A product description that serves as my password for multiple accounts across multiple websites. If you are bored, try to be honest. The blacked out windows fail to show us anything new. Once I hid in the bathroom. Steal my tax return.

I tried to make this better for you. A performance, as I cross the city, on which reality will be maintained. Snipe my metabolism. I will tell the truth without fear. I wanted to be different. I will fall in and out of love with many different brands. I will forget what you just said.

I feel the torque of language, in my gums. See me,
calculating my monthly outgoings, with dreams of
death. I found myself talking circuitous routes around
shops and rooms just to preserve the sense of movement.
I used my illness as a crutch. I can feel the swaying of
aerials, before thinking. I will lie without guilt. A note
says: "I am leaving".

A series of bad habits shown behind my fingers. There,
at my place of work, resisting the temptation to stop
here, and never return. The mirror images of text on the
next page, seen through the preceding one reveal altered
states. Every set of misplaced keys revealed by the floors.
I feel the lessening recursion of stimulation, like a
stutter. Find me, in some right-hand margin, with
dreams of voices. I built you a temple, which you pulled
apart, piece by piece.

A desire that is built by immigrant workers. Write a deservedly bad review, and rush offline. I wanted to have a deeper voice, a more masculine air. I notice the dividends being paid, in my gums. I detect the contours of my skull making themselves apparent, before thinking. Escape to the theatre. If you think this has gone too far, tell me.

I fell asleep in the theatre. The street signs, read from the combinatorial perspective of a car at high speed blend. Thirst reflected in my eyes. Smash up my bucket list. The video diaries are all that remains. A recording that serves the greater good. I detect the touch of God, in the faint breeze.

I just kept going because I couldn't think of what else to do. I will never sleep. A fragment of code that projects confidence. Once I saw you but we forgot about it. Sleep beside me, never touching me, and wake in the morning before I do in order to make it to bed. An image of me, in some right-hand margin, imagining something else. Gratefully receive directions to my birthday party.

You scratched my skin so hard I cried out. If you need to forget, use it. I didn't know whether what I had done was the right or the wrong thing. A sketch that is poorly imagined from this text's particular qualities. Gather them around you as protection for the journey to somewhere else. Once I came back. Your memory beneath my feet.

I will use your personal data to build a psychological profile for advertising purposes. A photograph that was downloaded from the internet. A broken glass held in the air. Step away without injury, and run into a better narrative. I lied. Watch me, in the blankets of white noise, with dreams of death. A confession that is totally unlike the one imagined through extensive online contact.

Have a great time before it's all over and you have to go to post about it. Tell no more truths, and retreat into some imagined future. Nail clippings placed on layers of dust. Here I am, in some right-hand margin, seeping into the carpet. A truth that asserts an identity. Hide my comment history. Forget your name in place of mine, and stumble to some imagined fortress.

A truth that subtly takes control. The two figures feel powerfully real. Once I cried out for help. Feel pain that is bearable and worthwhile, each day on the way back home. I froze when I recognized you. A privacy policy arranged within layers of dust. Two panes of glass passing one another mix.

I decided this was the least productive thing I might do with my time. I forgot why. I will go now. Alt f4 my software licences. Once I fell asleep while listening to a looping piano and that was all. If you forgot why you are doing this, try to be honest. I notice the river's shift, between us.

The virtual and physical distances between webcams are transparent, unclear. If you are uncomfortable, try something new. Find my limit, before you make a phone call to the checkpoint. I will post this later. If you are waiting for a diagnosis, take our advice. Cry at my half-truths, before retreating to the checkpoint. End my trash.

Once I felt that visibility was not worth the exposure and I forgot about it until just now. I detect the lessening recursion of stimulation, across the soles of my feet. Step away without injury, and run to bed. I will forget. Phone hack my mineral content. I will tell the truth without fear. Have a great time before it's all over and you have to go along the border.

We distributed our fraudulent claims to regain a sense of self. There, in the unstructured texts of a hundred search queries, in the belief that it will help. I wanted to get a tattoo saying: "no, not here". Rick roll my WiFi router. A position in the waiting room. The refrain: "to pay". The docudramas expose our addictions.

I feel the decaying city, crying out. Frozen, punctuated by accidental marks, imagining my addictions. Here I am, calculating my monthly outgoings, seeping into the carpet. Wasps preserved by the water's surface. Find my face, floating face down, in the belief that it will help. We exposed my treatment plan to provoke an argument. I will falsify my diagnosis.

Thoughts held between clear lenses. Find me, speaking to myself, with dreams of death. My lost keys hung on the wall. Your friends just uploaded. I woke up every morning shouting at the radio. the slogan: "simulated environment". I watched the video over and over to try to understand.

Alt f4 my video chats. A sign says: "again and again". Screw up my voting history. We advertised your favourite to advertise the new release. A gesture that is crowd-sourced. A woman at the counter told me: "discharge". I will close your borders.

A signal transmitting: "digital discharge". The poorly thought through equivalences produce fictions. I explained our fear of failure to communicate with someone, anyone. I detect fictions stood around the bed like statues, settling on the grass. I can feel signifiers humming all around, fixed in place. Once I had a dream that was so real I had to check the events with someone who was there. The reflections in your glasses reflect the privileges of visibility.

A persona that time and again lets me down. If you are going through a tough time, don't worry. You explained my loss of appetite to the investigators. I noted it in shorthand: "to pay". I can feel a drift, in the faint breeze. A note says: "listen more closely this time". If you just don't know anymore, arrange an overdraft.

If you are in pain, act like you feel it. A need to sleep on the bedroom carpet. Blend my restless leg syndrome. I couldn't stand to hear that slogan once more: "a hill to die on". A whisper from nowhere: "I don't know". An object making itself known. I felt I was an observer in my own life.

If you just can't get relief, act like you feel it. A book concludes: "Rotate the quotation". A stutter that serves me well in difficult situations. I will fall down again. What he should have said was: "feature presentation". Impeach my cup size. I explained your imposter syndrome to my followers.

Once I started again and it really happened. Addiction
beneath my feet. A face just there, outside the window.
Once we were tired but happy. I will sleep in the street.
We exposed my poor planning to provoke an argument.
I detect an elegant set of compulsions, before it is light.

We leaked my treatment plan to impress them all.
Hunger in the waiting room. Once I found something
and it couldn't have been so simple. You leaked my
family to impress them all. If you are uncomfortable, ask
a friend. I will step out of the shadows. I notice fictions
in the air like dust, settling on the grass.

You mentioned, I think: "digital content". A confession that can be improved upon. The coastline on the wall. I just let go. A project that is noticeably unpractised around larger social groups. Run through the garden. Cry at my half-truths, before retreating to nowhere in particular.

A message: "mutual exclusion". I advertised our poorly chosen furniture to your parents. I forgot why. What he should have said was: "constraint". Follow me, framed naked in the windows of our flat, with dreams of choking. If you have regrets, give up. Captured, drifting to sleep, shoring up my status.

Nail clippings surrounded by the unwashed glasses.
Your slow gathering fear of death occluded by a series of
cages. Your déjà vu marked on the map. Find my limit,
before you make a phone call through the garden. I
noted it in shorthand: "landscape only". A random
occurrence under the bridge. I am aware of people of
power, shaking hands, flickering.

I found it. I notice layers flocking like starlings,
flickering. If you are on the edge, transfer your funds.
Once I thought I saw a long forgotten friend at a
performance, sitting expectantly in the crowd. I detect
how far away you are, flickering, still flickering. Copper
wire arranged within skyscraper glass. I will open you
up.

I will hide myself away. I will eat now. Two overlapping figures show that it is no longer necessary, or even preferable, to conceal information. Once I couldn't find a point of connection and I remember it, often and without context. I tried to let you in. Once I saw you. I notice the currency fluctuations, in the warm screen glow.

If you think this has gone too far, post here. A structure that is poorly imagined from this text's particular qualities. I leaked our masturbation practices to satisfy the police. I tried to distinguish routine from event. Once I couldn't recall anything, not a single thing and that was where it ended. I decoded it to a single phrase, though I was sure I had made a mistake, it read: "can we stop for a minute". Follow me, in some right-hand margin, crouching beside a minor distraction.

The processes of juxtaposition created by switching windows transform the space. Fatigue on the wall. I wanted to be more specific but I didn't know how. The reflections in your glasses offer the illusion of escape. A signal transmitting: "under restrictions". Tase my logic circuits. I detect people of power, shaking hands, across the soles of my feet.

Glide weightlessly through the door on your way along the beach. Illegal substances seen through prisms. If you are looking back, jump. I will cover your shift. Inject my childhood traumas. I detailed our imposter syndrome to look aware. The architectural renderings are all that remains.

Once I thought about what it would be like to be you.
Once I started again and I tried to understand why. I
wanted this to end. On the title page, in pencil:
"turbulent point". A pattern of movements that is not
ideally suited to my age. A public scandal masking the
sound. Official portraits held between shards of glass.

Voices held within the glass partition walls. A claim was
misheard: "digital discharge". I am aware of the
dividends being paid, beside my head. Memorise my
biography and take it to my supposed childhood home.
I feel the warmth of skin, before anything else. I am
aware of the halting of your breath, along my spine.
Unannounced aches seen through the floors.

A performance, drifting to sleep, quietly concealing something. I detailed our fear of the dark to the police. A title: "let's return to this later". I detect a quiet death, dictating energy prices. A sense of direction entering through the window. There, in the unstructured texts of a hundred search queries, in a poor imitation of desperation. I will hide myself away.

I will scream silently at myself to shut up. If you can't remember what it was like, here is some advice. Motes of dust exhibited behind the gallery walls. Your softness leaking noise. Once I hit you in my sleep and I tried to understand why. I arrived at work on time. Hold me, at my place of work, quietly concealing something.

Illegal substances arranged within the camera lenses. Two video feeds, accidentally put through the same output are transparent, unclear. The panes of the panelled facade produce fictions. A series of bad habits trapped between the camera lenses. End my voting history. You were repeating: "content unavailable". I can feel the demarcation of the city, but as a form of weather.

I will hammer the same note over and over. I will open you up. Kick me out of my porn searches. I knew I was ignoring you. The phrase had become some kind of calling card, it was something like: "bulkheads". I will eat now. A rasping voice that is available this holiday season.

A personal motto: "if not why not". If you have already read this part, think about something non-specific. A writer concludes: "early riser". If you are going through a tough time, try something new. Small stones shown behind the display screens. You advertised your ethnic makeup to retain control. Impeach my ad sense.

Once I built you a temple, which you pulled apart, piece by piece and that was where it ended. A flaw that I learnt from someone forgotten. I saw you. A belief that forms a method of social self defence. A unremarkable person says: "avoid at all costs". A photograph of half-submerged architecture somewhere in the suburbs. A voice, which you cannot hear, that does not belong in this sentence.

Fatigue in the waiting room. If you are on the edge, just make it up as you go. Distribute my pelvic rotation. Your softness underneath my fingernails. Nail clippings revealed by plate glass windows. Once I fell in love with an image and I didn't understand what it meant. I wanted to stay.

You advertised my schedule to fulfil the bargain. A message: "mutual exclusion". I detect a pressure, in my heart. If you are on the edge, toughen up. Once I found it and here we are now. A series of diagrams showing a man putting on his plastic safety goggles trigger traumatic memories. If you are waiting for a diagnosis, get out more.

I notice fictions on the floor like wrappers, settling on the grass. Interrogate my likes. A voice that was recommended to me as a way of dealing with social anxiety. Novelty in the waiting room. If you are sure, step forward. Sleep beside me, never touching me, and wake in the morning before I do in order to make it to somewhere else. Gaze upon my updates and feed them into your shadow.

If you can't go on much longer, use it. The album was titled: "of leaves". Upload my blood flow. Pages 10 and 11 of this report scream. If you are looking back, get over it. Look for me, in those long nights, erasing myself. Find my face, thinking, or attempting to find thoughts, in the hope that meaning might be gifted through some momentary crisis or event.

Find my face, punctuated by accidental marks, my mind
bristling as it accrues passing images. I am aware of
other, better places, between the window panes. Once I
tried to express myself imprecisely, to show conflict, not
authority but we forgot about it. You distributed your
treatment plan to my followers. Live stream my
memories. We revealed our underpaid tax to look good.
Once I was late to arrive at work and I remember it,
often and without context.

Ignore me, lying face down on the carpet, crouching
beside a minor distraction. I detect the river's shift, in
my gums. Share my internet of things. A truth that I
have never noticed. A photograph that I learnt from
someone forgotten. A strength that is a reflection of my
avatar. My desire beyond a series of questions.

A set of transparent things that is without a sense of self.
The street signs, read from the combinatorial perspective
of a car at high speed imply a broader spatial order.
Glide weightlessly through the door on your way to the
checkpoint. Small stones placed on clouded corneas. I
just didn't care anymore. I couldn't recall anything, not
a single thing. Steal my metabolism.

In a tired voice she murmured: "I've lost my voice". We
had sex in the bathroom. I fell asleep in the theatre. I
will fail. A memory that doesn't actually work the way it
is supposed to. Hold me, through the cameras you
installed, in the hope that meaning might be gifted
through some momentary crisis or event. If you can't go
on much longer, try again.

The video diaries produce fictions. Unannounced aches seen through prisms. Sucker punch my hobbies. I knew I was ignoring you. If you thought you had it, take a holiday. Once I erased all the characters from the foreground so I could exhibit the background. I just kept going because I couldn't think of what else to do.

Headshot my job history. You leaked my child to the embassy. A grammatically tenuous statement that functions through a four-step plan. A self that is well practised but poorly constructed. A gesture that functions through a four-step plan. A structure that time and again lets me down. Learn to hate me, then head through the plate glass.

Once I deleted something because I thought you wouldn't be interested but now I am unsure. A report that I fostered as a child and that has never left me. Abandon me, in the blankets of white noise, imagining something else. Once I walked across the city for no reason. The accidental double exposures trace the patterns of our scars. A shrill voice that projects, or so they tell me, a strength of character. I slept until evening.

A recording of me, getting slowly dressed, in the belief that it will help. I recognised you in another person. If you are hoping for a diagnosis, take out a loan. A sequence of data that is lost to me. Once I felt things more strongly than I do now and I don't know why I am telling you this. A file that is not ideally suited to this epoch. I will speak quietly.

Once I ran out into a sunlit field and believed I was more than human and I don't know why I mentioned it. Overload my visa. Tell no more truths, and retreat through the garden. I detect a list of lost contacts, like a stutter. The virtual and physical distances between webcams reveal altered states. A truth that feels like it cannot be truly real. Abandon me, opening and closing my eyes, in the hope that meaning might be gifted through some momentary crisis or event.

Record me, in the patterns of your routine, by counting the hours on my fingers and toes. Track me, speaking to myself, there amongst the outliers. Cry at my half-truths, before retreating to somewhere else. Look, here I am, flinching at nothing, my mind bristling as it accrues passing images. A sequence of memories that is totally unlike the one imagined through extensive online contact. I feel the automation of my wish fulfilment, beside my head. If you are looking back, snap out of it.

I revealed my list of nominations to our children. If you just can't get relief, act like you feel it. A list of rules shown behind the server racks. Remix my client. Hold, without trial, my parenting principles. If you have approved our privacy policy, try to be honest. I will bleach your coral reefs.

Addiction washing the room in radio static. Clouds seen through the waves. Once I imitated the work of other, better writers and I don't know why I am telling you this. Once I woke up every morning shouting at the radio. A breaking glass discovered. Empty my immigration status. I am aware of your distance, crying out.

Remind me later to remember: "to be carried at all times". I revealed your fear to the managers. Alt f4 my race. The systems that have erased the potential of accidental double exposures to trigger traumatic memories. Biological samples occluded by plastic sheeting. Self-harm under the bridge. Once I arrived at work on time but I didn't mean it.

I detect the torque of language, fixed in place. Escape to the party. You uploaded my daughter to satisfy the police. We leaked my pain to the jury. Phone hack my desktop. Memorise my biography, and take it to nowhere in particular. The street signs, read from the combinatorial perspective of a car at high speed reveal your skills and interests.

Alt f4 my pelvic rotation. A sense of self that I have forgotten. A statement held in the air. The newest wearables reflect the privileges of visibility. Sunlight through the gaps in the buildings appearing out of nowhere. Log my movements, speaking to myself, in the hope that meaning might be gifted through some momentary crisis or event. A personal motto: "hybrid warfare".

I will forget your name. We explained my underpaid tax to the customer assistant. Run to the city. I saw you. The need to leave just uploaded. I can feel an intake of breath before descending, breaking everything into fragments. We leaked my masturbation practices to the papers.

If you are hoping for a diagnosis, get out more. A
memory that was downloaded from the internet. I will
fall in and out of love with many different brands. Find
me, floating face down, eager to move on. Once I
thought I saw a long forgotten friend at a performance,
sitting expectantly in the crowd and it was true.
Criminally prosecute my secrets. I feel the dust
breeding, between my finger joints.

Spots of blood arranged within layers of laminate. If you
have a better idea, try this. Once I used my illness as a
crutch. I can feel a habit forming, piece by piece. I
notice fictions in the air like dust, fixed in place. I did
this weird thing where I sat and stamped on one of my
feet with the other one. Once I decided this was too
much.

I am aware of my need to express something, between my finger joints. A conflict that is a replacement for a core expression of identity. Rain held between warehouse walls. Once I started again and it was worse and it meant nothing. An object in the landscape. If you need something, jump. A note was forgotten but I believe it said something like: "I wish I hadn't".

Silence trapped between clouded corneas. Abandon me, in the uneven veering of your household circuits, imagining something else. An object reflected in my eyes. The video diaries glow. Once I was immature and wrong-headed. I saw you. The actor tried to say: "we were young".

We advertised my memory to impress them all. Your memory in front of you. A diagnosis shown behind skyscraper glass. I will falsify my diagnosis. Ignore me, lying face down on the carpet, in the belief that it will help. A man at the counter told me: "again and again". I notice the presence of the new, beneath heavy cloud cover.

A strength that is a replacement for a core expression of identity. The systems that have erased the potential of accidental double exposures reveal your skills and interests. I explained your illness to throw them off the scent. Calls to action surrounded by the waves. Your déjà vu softening the light. The shards of glass are hollow metaphors. A sign says: "landscape only".

If you don't know what I mean, sell your story. Look, here I am, thinking, or attempting to find thoughts, as a way of modelling this page and others. The phrase had become some kind of calling card, it was something like: "feature presentation". Streaks of saliva held within cloudless skies. If you are lost, speak up. A series of diagrams showing a man putting on his plastic safety goggles glow. A shrill voice that can be improved upon.

Look for me, pacing back and forth between rooms, with dreams of choking. Mental health questionnaires exhibited behind clear lenses. I am aware of my feet in the fire, making my fingers clench. Biological samples held within the unwashed glasses. Step away without injury, and run to where we met. Depreciate my blood alcohol level. Once I recognised you in another person.

I will employ illegal immigrants to save money. Once I
rejected art. Images trapped within ambient light. I
notice the dust breeding, in the faint breeze. An
underlying structure: "dysfunctional forecasting". A set
of reminders that is, at most, a faltering sense of self.
Forget your name in place of mine, and stumble to
sleep.

I feel the wingbeats, in the systems spread ahead of me.
If you don't know what I mean, post here. We
advertised our sexual preferences to your followers. A
memory that subtly takes control. The panes of glass
create an inexhaustible series of organizational frames.
The processes of juxtaposition created by switching
channels close off the office. Work, endless work held in
the air.

See me, floating face down, long since made obsolete.
Physical tics suspended in the partition walls of the data
centre. See me, at my place of work, resisting the
temptation to stop here, and never return. Know me,
somehow, through this flickering cloud, and take that
knowledge to the international press. A performance,
huddled by my computer, blanking out all thought. A
face arriving. I will go to sleep.

Whistleblow on my relationships. The need to leave on
the road. Ticket stubs trapped within the partition walls
of the data centre. Download my management
principles. I feel something pulling me back, in the
systems spread ahead of me. Once I tried to be less
obsessed by myself. Two panes of glass passing one
another create an inexhaustible series of organizational
frames.

I notice the currency fluctuations, before anything else.
Two or more overlaid images trigger traumatic
memories. Your memory appearing out of nowhere. A
shrill voice that is stolen from another. I am aware of the
sensation of waking up far from anywhere, but as a form
of weather. Track me, represented by a compilation of
data, in the belief that it will help. If you think this has
gone too far, don't ruin it for everyone.

Once I dreamt of you wandering the house, surrounded
by the domestic dangers I failed to suppress and it
couldn't have been so simple. Once I wrote a lie down.
You leaked your time of death to the investigators. Air
pockets trapped between the glass. Frozen, huddled by
my computer, reconstituted like cheap chicken or beef.
Once I slept until evening. Tell no more truths, and
retreat online.

The Venn diagrams, printed on acetate, lit by sources of light that are definite but various. Record me, with heat sensitive cameras, with dreams of you. The refrain: "content unavailable". A quiet breeze in front of you. Your softness in front of you. If you have a better idea, take out a loan. Your life held within skyscraper glass.

The architectural renderings reflect the space around them. The shards of glass stand between us. Once I rejected literature and that was all. If you are searching, share it with the group. I feel endless tiresome greetings, in the faint breeze. The processes of juxtaposition created by switching channels transform the space. I will touch whatever I see.

Look, here I am, sleeping in the daytime, with dreams of death. Once I felt things more strongly than I do now and then forgot about it. Write a deservedly bad review, and rush offline. Dissect my influencer score. A recording of me, sleeping in the daytime, motionless in the light. Drop my medication. Believe in nothing and retreat to the city.

We explained your rent to my parents. I felt that visibility was not worth the exposure. If you are struggling with your limitations, take a holiday. A position somewhere in the suburbs. I revealed your child to fulfil the bargain. Once I avoided you on the street and I wrote about it. If you are afraid, ask a friend.

An apology leaking noise. Once I imagined I was free of religion. If you hate your life, write about it. If you thought you had it, act like you feel it. In a tired voice she murmured: "is beautiful". Once I found you asleep and I didn't understand what it meant. Rabid dogs on a series of questions.

I will eat now. I will burn your country to the ground. We uploaded my imposter syndrome to the managers. See me, wrapped in blankets, unwilling to move, with dreams of you. I will forget. A photograph that can be improved upon. The album should have been titled: "limited edition".

If you just can't get relief, you are in the wrong place. I notice the dust breeding, fixed in place. I detect how far away you are, crying out. I will refuse to check my facts. Once I rejected art and I don't know why I am telling you this. A performance, flinching at nothing, there amongst the outliers. Abandon my filesharing client.

Once I was immature and wrong-headed. Confessions pasted to clouded corneas. See me, on Saturday nights, my mind bristling as it accrues passing images. A statement on the screen. The coastline on the screen. Broadcast my client. A status update that I fostered as a child and that has never left me.

Once I closed my eyes and could see you and language failed me. My déjà vu in the street. Once I found myself talking circuitous routes around shops and rooms just to preserve the sense of movement and that was it.

Biological samples displayed in a series of cages. Two overlapping figures blend. The phrase had become some kind of calling card, it was something like: "quiet now". I came out to my friends.

Once I wanted this to end and I don't know what that means anymore. A note was forgotten but I believe it said something like: "etc.". Once I tried to think of sincerity as a principle for organising information about myself and it really happened. I walked across the city for no reason. A sketch that is poorly imagined from this text's particular qualities. I can feel disaffection, beside my head. Have a great time before it's all over and you have to go beyond the horizon.

A transcription reads: "colourless void". An alphabetised list of likes and dislikes trapped between the partition walls of the data centre. The architectural renderings scream. A video that was made publicly available. Look, here I am, framed by the furniture, with dreams of voices. I can feel the river's shift, between my finger joints. Possess a healthy amount of scepticism towards this, and may that carry you to somewhere else.

We explained your schedule to seem transparent. The Venn diagrams, printed on acetate, feel powerfully real. Steal my unpublished drafts. Textures preserved by the floors. Record me, calculating my monthly outgoings, quietly concealing something. I forgot how to listen. A signal transmitting: "collectivity sucks".

I can feel the creak of your footsteps, before you wake me. Trauma behind the camera lenses. Perform open heart surgery on my pain index. Unannounced aches arranged within gilt frames. A piece of music that projects confidence. Cry at my half-truths, before retreating across the border. The songs from all the bars, mixing in the night air, create new worlds.

I detect the growl of ugly systems, but as a form of weather. I can feel some desperate search for energy, influencing the market rates. I used the word "we" when I should have said "I". An announcement under the bridge. A handprint on the mirror suddenly apparent. The scratch-resistant screens lit by sources of light that are definite but various. I dreamt of you wandering the house, surrounded by the domestic dangers I failed to suppress.

I will never forget you. If you thought you had it, post here. I feel a list of lost contacts, before anything else. The songs from all the bars, mixing in the night air, favour visual distortion. Hunger suspended. Nothing good leaking noise. A statement suddenly apparent.

Once I rejected self-awareness. I will make myself relatable to my audience. Follow me, via a third party service, eager to move on. A structure of meaning in your hand. If you can't go on much longer, take a holiday. My glasses show that it is no longer necessary, or even preferable, to conceal information. We leaked my love to look aware.

Gather them around you as protection for the journey back home. Have a great time before it's all over and you have to go to that bar we met at. A stutter that serves the greater good. I will post it tomorrow. A profile that is not what I wanted. If you thought you had it, ask a friend. Silence trapped within my fingers.

I refused to speak to anyone. A strength that is well practised but poorly constructed. Know me, somehow, through this flickering cloud, and take that knowledge back home. Addiction at the table opposite. Track me, idling in false worlds, in a poor imitation of desperation. Unpick my mind, before descending through the mirror. I will quietly slip away.

The leaders agreed on a statement: "dysfunctional forecasting". Transparency in digital imaging was developed in 1984. Digital images catch the light. I saw you. Once I thought fuck it and did it anyway and it meant nothing. A sequence of memories that was a waste of time. The two figures imply a life without structure. Hide my unique identity number.

A protest discovered. We uploaded my schedule to the police. I will steal your data. A structure that could be a misplaced affectation. A voice, which you cannot hear, that feels like it cannot be truly real. What? You reply: "a new release". I tried to pay more attention to my moods.

Bent cigarette ends placed on gilt frames. You leaked your schedule to feel something. We explained my sexual preferences to find friends. Once I thought fuck it and did it anyway and it really happened. The architectural renderings transform the space. Inherit one of my thoughts, and sell it onto the front pages. Stalk my campaigns.

A diagram of the human nervous system just uploaded. You explained your fatigue to feel better. Unfollow my stolen cards. If you are following your dreams, expose yourself to the truth. The blend modes available in the image-editing software indicate our management policies. A scrap of paper reading: "thanks for that". If you just don't know anymore, give up.

If you are trying to express something, turn the page.
Idle thoughts of violence occluded by shards of glass.
Impeach my chemical signature. Ruin my nutrition.
The film strips, overlaid, point towards opacity. Have a
great time before it's all over and you have to go to some
imagined fortress. A need to sleep appearing out of
nowhere.

A stutter that is a reflection of my screen name. Once I
started moving again and it was nice. I will cut my
finger. Your favourite line: "hammers fall on hammer
falls". The newest wearables are a bug, yet to be fixed.
Here I am, lying face down on the carpet, my eyes fixed
on the ceiling. I will eat you alive.

I can feel a pressure, all things quantified. I can feel a franchise forming, but as a form of weather. I decoded it to a single phrase, though I was sure I had made a mistake, it read: "avoid at all costs". The blend modes available in the image-editing software show that it is no longer necessary, or even preferable, to conceal information. A confession that is translated badly into text. I lied about you. Once I tried to express myself imprecisely, to show conflict, not authority and that was it.

I will stand just there and watch. The film should have been titled: "you go first". If you hate your life, read a book. I can feel light screeching over glass, in the morning rain. A shrill voice that I have never noticed. Panels of celluloid are a form of narrative. The mirror images of text on the next page, seen through the preceding one offer the illusion of escape.

If you are waiting for a diagnosis, jump. I liked what I made. A sense of direction masking the sound. Sell this privileged information through the storm. If you are looking, remember you are all the same. I notice a fresh addiction, in my gums. Extract my bank details from my skill tree.

See me, in those long nights, with tired eyes and sore skin. You weren't there. Find me, in the unstructured texts of a hundred search queries, reconstituted like cheap chicken or beef. A character that is, at most, a faltering sense of self. Chance meetings surrounded by the camera lenses. If you have regrets, try this. I wanted to get a tattoo saying: "I've lost my voice".

I fell asleep while listening to a looping piano. A tensing of the forehead in thought that was recommended to me as a way of dealing with social anxiety. Inherit one of my thoughts, and sell it into the tunnel. I feel the reverb of headlines being printed, before it is light. I notice the lessening recursion of stimulation, in routine. The various interfaces remain silent. A sketch that is noticeably unpractised around larger social groups.

A passing plane held in the air. A sequence of data that is translated badly into text. Hear this as if it was echoing through the wall from the next apartment over, where you never see the people enter, only leave on their way next door. Stress on the bedroom carpet. If you are looking for something, arrange an overdraft. We did not want to go home. Distraction marked on the map.

Hear this as if it was echoing through the wall from the next apartment over, where you never see the people enter, only leave on their way to bed. Burn my WiFi router. I will never fail. If you have left already, post here. I can feel the music of static skies, between the window panes. I feel a quiet death, in my heart. You leaked my loss of appetite to get the contract.

A diagram of the human nervous system beneath my feet. I leaked our sexual preferences to the managers. A sign says: "instructions for interface". I will close your borders. Ignore me, on quiet frozen mornings, erasing myself. Have a great time before it's all over and you have to go onto the front pages. I kept going.

I leaked my illness to the managers. Terrorise my nutritional information. If you are surprised, stop here. We explained our list of nominations to find friends. Once I felt that we should believe in an ability to synthesise anything, to create without limit and it kept repeating. I will impose sanctions. You distributed your imposter syndrome to look aware.

A storm under the bridge. You were there. I can feel sleep releasing its grip, like a stutter. If you want to confess something, get out more. We distributed our memory to our children. I was depressed. Here I am, opening and closing my eyes, resisting the temptation to stop here, and never return.

Once I came up with the perfect response 30 minutes later and I don't know why I mentioned it. Knife fight my medication history. Work, endless work in my hair. Nothing good washing the room in radio static. A phrase was repeated again and again for effect: "to do". You advertised our favourite to your parents. If you just can't get relief, remember you are all the same.

Once I avoided you on the street and it couldn't have been so simple. A shrill voice that is totally unlike the one imagined through extensive online contact. Gratefully receive directions to post about it. We uploaded my rent to demonstrate intelligence. We exposed our fear of failure to deliver on your promises. The album should have been titled: "have you forgotten?" Silence surrounded by clear lenses.

If you are surprised, open up about it. A sense of self that is not what I wanted. Your friends arriving. I will scream silently at myself to shut up. I wanted to get a tattoo saying: "press release". Once I confused fiction of my own creation with memories I had borrowed from you. Some confusion in communication lead to me only being able to parse a single phrase: "thermal imaging".

We exposed your family history of mental illness to please your fans. I can feel static pain, piece by piece. I will clean the display. I notice the contours of my skull making themselves apparent, in my gums. We uploaded our family history to feel better. The mirrored windows conceal something indeterminate. If you are hoping for a diagnosis, just make it up as you go.

There, in those long nights, imagining my addictions.
Forget all this and go offline. Abandon me, as I escape,
my eyes fixed on the ceiling. Leave me the fuck alone,
and just go to anywhere but here. Ringfence my genuine
distress. A passing feeling beyond the window. If you
don't know what I mean, just be quiet.

I met you. A list of rules pasted to the unwashed glasses.
Captured, each day this year, waiting for the event to
start. Keylog my ghost limbs. A note that simply says:
"no, not here". A claim was misheard: "a self portrait".
Pages 2 and 3 of the report imply a broader spatial
order.

If you forgot how you got here, arrange an overdraft.
Rain displayed in the partition walls of the data centre.
Two or more overlaid images imply a broader spatial
order. A piece of text that was a waste of time. A
breaking glass on the road. Learn to hate me, then head
through the garden. I notice the sensation of waking up
far from anywhere, flexing.

A note says: "I've lost my voice". An image of me, in the
uneven veering of your household circuits, with dreams
of you. Laser designate my administration fees. Once I
couldn't find a point of connection and I tried to
understand why. I froze when I recognized you. If you
are afraid, open up about it. The refrain: "divide and
conquer".

Here I am, framed naked in the windows of our flat, my mind bristling as it accrues passing images. An apology leaking noise. We exposed my underpaid tax to help negotiate a new contract. Once I kissed you and I told you already. An apology suspended. If you are struggling with your limitations, take a holiday. Terms of use trapped between my fingers.

The shards of glass capture small insects. Infect my data allowance. Small tensions arranged within the partition walls of the data centre. I failed. A gesture that is lost to me. Neg my anxiety. I will scream silently at myself to shut up.

The mirror images of text on the next page, seen through the preceding one remain silent. The video diaries form a canvas for the rain. A passing plane beneath my feet. You revealed my ethnic makeup to the moderators. I cried out for help. I am aware of typing sounds, before it is light. A notification chirps, saying only: "collectivity sucks".

I will clean the display. If you are looking for something, stop here. Once I tried to step out of this space and it was a lie. I tried to kill myself. A way of speaking that is stolen from another. Once I dreamt of you wandering the house, surrounded by the domestic dangers I failed to suppress and it was nice. Once I acted oddly and I think that it helped.

A self that is not my own. I feel the Atlantic drift, in sequence. The street signs, read from the combinatorial perspective of a car at high speed show that we have nothing to hide. You exposed my struggle to seem transparent. Once I started taking medication. Once I could no longer watch the news and I just remembered it. Strikethrough my lost weekends.

A random occurrence appearing. Rain surrounded by the server racks. A stutter that can be improved upon. Some confusion in communication lead to me only being able to parse a single phrase: "new world order". Unpick my mind, before descending through the plate glass. A pattern of movements that projects my principles. You leaked our fear of the dark to communicate with someone, anyone.

I will be entertained. Transparency in digital imaging was developed in 1984. Digital images reflect the privileges of visibility. I will remember that. I am aware of the dust breeding, in the systems spread ahead of me. I leaked our underpaid tax to seem honest. Your ability to make new memories underneath my fingernails. Alt f4 my hometown.

I explained your dirty talk to my parents. Be moved by this offline. I wanted to get a tattoo saying: "a hill to die on". I wanted to sleep. The blacked out windows offer the illusion of escape. I hope you never get what you fucking want and instead, just be reassigned to work. I had something explained to me.

Find me, online, imagining something else. I can feel an opening closing, flexing. Once I thought I saw a long forgotten friend at a performance, sitting expectantly in the crowd and it meant everything. I tried to be less obsessed by myself. If you are uncomfortable, just make it up as you go. Transparency in digital imaging was developed in 1984. Digital images remain silent. A structure of meaning underneath my fingernails.

DDos my email address. You detailed my carbon footprint to anyone who would listen. Once I was so angry I literally 'saw red' and for the first time understood that expression as more than a cliché and it couldn't have been so simple. A fragment of code that is crowd-sourced. I will arrange a time and place to meet and then not show up. A passing feeling under the bridge. I tried to forget but then I saw the scars.

Biological samples preserved by the windows. Physical
tics on the camera lenses. You uploaded my brand to
seem transparent. I can feel sleep releasing its grip,
before it is light. You will never know me, just rush
through the mirror. Biological samples surrounded by
the frames. Log me out of my administration fees.

The augmented-reality inserts deny our collectivity. A
man meant to say: "is beautiful". Know me, somehow,
through this flickering cloud, and take that knowledge
offline. Here I am, via a third party service, with dreams
of you. Once I tried to step out of this space and that
was where it ended. Flakes of gold beyond the skylights.
I distributed my family to advertise the new release.

A privacy policy preserved by clear lenses. If you think this has gone too far, stop here. Once I found solace in sound and that was where it ended. If you this is all you want, ask a friend. Watch me, in some right-hand margin, motionless in the light. I detect the halting of your breath, all things quantified. Dysfunctional systems behind the interfaces.

Once I left and I told you already. Rain arranged within the keys. Remind me later to remember: "etc.". Make a meme from my subroutines. Download my content. I will employ illegal immigrants to save money. Here I am, occluded by the smoke, resisting the temptation to stop here, and never return.

If you have forgotten, try something new. I will send you the link. We leaked my arguments to comply with the disclosure agreement. The refrain: "leave me alone". Images placed on the cubicles. I will give in to nostalgia. Break off my selfies.

I will pretend not to see you. The glass faces of the watches create new worlds. If you have a better idea, just ask. Particles displayed in the frames. A broken glass beneath my feet. I notice a visionary moment, in the systems spread ahead of me. You detailed your child to seem honest.

The plastic safety shields transparent, unclear. A performance, writing this sentence, resisting the temptation to stop here, and never return. I will touch whatever I see. Your ability to make new memories suddenly apparent. A sense of collectivity exhibited behind the server racks. Gravel beyond the screens. You explained my pain to please your fans.

We explained your illness to make a deal. I notice endless testimony, before it is light. A public scandal underneath my fingernails. See me, lying face down on the carpet, pressing one key after another. We explained my time of death to retain control. I detect fictions on the floor like wrappers, beneath heavy cloud cover. The table edge on your feed.

I can feel the growl of ugly systems, between my finger joints. Once I found solace in sound and it kept repeating. Once I put up some shelves and then forgot about it. Leave me the fuck alone, and just go to anywhere but here. Once I just let go and that was enough. If you don't like this part, give up. Once I lied about you and I forgot about it until just now.

If you are waiting for a diagnosis, get over it. Once I was sick in the bathroom of a restaurant and it was a lie. A sign said: "turbulent point". I am aware of your quiet designs, like a stutter. Record me, on quiet frozen mornings, with tired eyes and sore skin. A flickering screen in the landscape. Tactically strike my childhood traumas.

I will renegotiate my position. Once I tried to kill myself. Identity claims occluded by warehouse walls. We detailed your fear of small spaces to communicate with someone, anyone. If you are afraid, give up. Work, endless work at the table opposite. Make a meme from my desktop.

You were there. Believe in something, and take that belief to the party. I will never sleep. We explained our new identity to demonstrate intelligence. Once I fantasised about being injured and we were happy. I feel the lessening recursion of stimulation, making my fingers clench. I will expose myself to criticism.

Expose my travelcard. Share my administration fees.
Your friends appearing out of nowhere. I detailed our
family history to the moderators. Sunlight through the
gaps in the buildings in front of you. The refrain: "love
me". If you are struggling with your limitations, transfer
your funds.

A strength that is, at most, a faltering sense of self. Once
I ate and we were happy. Smart-glasses indicate our
management policies. If you are going through a tough
time, step forward. A lyric: "vandalism". I will make a
retaliatory strike. My lost keys in the waiting room.

I detect how far away you are, flickering. I revealed my treatment plan to your parents. I can feel static pain, dictating energy prices. I notice the need to escape, like a fingernail tearing. If you are afraid, take out a loan. The systems that have erased the potential of accidental double exposures scream. The processes of juxtaposition created by switching windows fail to show us anything new.

A phrase comes to mind: "we were young". A scrawled annotation that does not belong in this sentence. I detect an opening closing, in the faint breeze. A public scandal in the landscape. Edit my lies, and sell them beyond the horizon. Your ability to make new memories masking the sound. Dysfunctional systems surrounded by prisms.

I was careful not to interrupt you. Gratefully receive directions online. I thought about what it would be like to be you. If you have approved our privacy policy, get over it. I will overhear you. The songs from all the bars, mixing in the night air, confuse birds. The album was titled: "billing information".

If you hate your life, try again. See me, eyes fixed on the screen, crouching beside a minor distraction. A fragment of code that asserts my identity. Erase my nutrition. I will send you the link. If you are trying to express something, turn the page. Ignore me, as I escape, trying to concentrate on something, anything.

Afterword

The nature of this study has been both explorative and experimental. It was always my intention that, taken as a whole, the critical development of the storm of connectives and the realisation of its narrative aspects within my practice would describe a territory that, rather than foreclosing alternative approaches and developments of narrative, open up a potential space for revisions, alternations, developments and expansions of the narrative structures discussed within. Just as Robert Sheppard suggests, (and as I quoted in my preface) poetics is always 'provisional', 'nomadic' and 'its positions temporary and strategic', but these temporary positions are what allows for the 'speculative impulse' (1999) that makes poetics a generative practice for new forms and realisations of poetry and writing. In this study I have engaged with that generative possibility directly, using the work of Nick Piombino to seed a reading of narrative within Language writing specifically intentioned to shape new encounters between narrative and procedural or processual forms.

It has been necessary in this approach to consider certain terms and concepts as processual rather than fixed within systems of definition. In particular, self, which occurs through acts self-disclosure, and narrative, which occurs through the interrelation of interval and pattern, have been discussed on the terms of their occurrence, not as existing traits embedded in the text. It has been poetics, as a frame, which makes working in such a manner possible, but I would also add that it was also vital to develop such definitions in order to

observe the narrative aspects of this studies chosen texts. The very nature of the forms and texts discussed discounts the possibility of approaching them as narrative in a traditional narratological sense, and it is difficult to imagine a vocabulary of terms that emerges from the discourse on plot, character and genre that might apply to such radical structures. In addition to this, the study here is tethered to my own experimental practice, just as any exploration of poetics often is tethered to the practices of its writer. For that reason, the study was not simply an attempt to reconfigure a literary history, but to produce, in the storm of connectives, a generative structure that would not just imply new work, but enact it. *Radical Transparency*, and the experiments that proceeded it (*At the Shattered Edge*, *The Narrated City*) are the direct result of this generative structure, and the site of the study's outcomes.

However, *Radical Transparency* is not the ideal example of the storm of connectives, but simply an outcome generated by it. Like the individual points in the image of the invisible statue, which can be plotted on its surface to portray a near infinite set of forms, *Radical Transparency* represents only a single point within the storm of connectives. Its existence implies a wider body of work, an ongoing project, which could further describe and expand upon the work here. *Radical Transparency* not only engages with this project through its formal construction, but places it within a meaningful context by linking it to a distinctly contemporary condition, where self-disclosure is instrumentalised through the structures of social media. The storm of connectives is not meant to be an ahistorical form, which can be

applied or used as a repeatable technique within any context.

Instead it emerges from the particularity of its surroundings, engaging with a struggle for a meaningful textual self within the wider structures of society. I see this struggle enacted within the work of Silliman, Harryman and Scalapino, among others, with their interest in narrative by other means than those offered to them by conventional fiction. Articulating this struggle has been a core part of this study, and I hope that in my close reading of both these writers work, and the discussions that surround them, I have made a case for the existence of a distinct engagement with narrative.

In his introduction to *In the American Tree*, Ron Silliman proposes that:

Much, perhaps too much, has been made of the critique of reference and normative syntax inherent in the work of many of the writers here, without acknowledging the degree to which this critique is itself situated in the larger question of what, in the last part of the twentieth century, it means to be human.

(1986: xix)

While I take some issue with the attempt at universalising diverse practices under the heading of 'human' that Silliman undertakes here, I do see the value of framing Language writing as emerging from both its context and the lived experience of its writers. If we are to see Piombino's work as presenting, as Wallace states, the self as 'a process of interrelations' (2003), then the implication is that any act of self-disclosure is tied directly into the context of its emergence. So then, the work of Language writers, and the self-disclosure it

contains, represents a complex negotiation between self and context, textual forms and social structures. In my own work, beginning with *At the Shattered Edge*, and carrying through *Radical Transparency*, I find myself engaged with a similar struggle. There is something pleasingly mimetic about engaging with the issue of self-disclosure within the structures of social media by subjecting personal writing to algorithmic reorganisation. It was in my first work with *At the Shattered Edge*, reordering a very personal novel through a Markov chain, that I first encountered this process. I found those early regenerations of what was an abandoned and disused text, the results allowing me to reencounter my own disclosure in new and strange reconfigurations, very powerful. They pointed towards a type of narrative configuration that I had not previously encountered, or even considered possible. Later, when I saw traces of this same quality in the work of Ron Silliman, despite some of his claims to the contrary, I became aware of the possibility of a kind of lineage or territory that might be sketched out. In building out this territory through this study, I have anchored my work within what I see as a collective project.

I do not wish to imply, however, that this study was comprehensive. The focus of the study necessitated a selective outlook, particularly in regards to Language writing. As such a powerful and influential moment in the encounter between narrative and experimental poetic form, it felt like an essential focal point for a study of those aspects. My own practice's relationship to Language writers like Silliman and Scalapino, and the inspiration I derived from their work, was also a

factor in this choice of focus. The study demonstrates the value of this focus, and I believe the reading of procedural and experimental works as narrative is most effective in contexts where those terms have been excluded from the discussion. However, the focus of this study has also meant that some key practitioners of work which might be placed within the wider territory of the storm of connectives, were not included. In particular writers from my own local context, practitioners of experimental and linguistically innovative British writing, are absent from the study. Among these Allen Fisher is perhaps the most notable, due to his engagement with procedure and process within poetic work. But, like an American inspiration of his, Jackson Mac Low, Fisher worked outside of established structures such as those that supported Language writing, and so the nature of his conversation with, and relation to, the other works considered in this study is very complex. There is a separate study which could be structured around how we might read both Fisher and Mac Low's work as narrative, and while I believe there is crossover here, it would require a more focussed attention to both poets expansive and distinct bodies of work. Peter Manson is another British writer whose engagement with process and narrative could be beneficial to this study, and his book *Adjunct: An Undigest* (2004) is among those that inspired my own engagement with procedure. Manson's relationship to self-disclosure within that work in particular is worthy of some attention, as well as the intense paratactic structure which feels adjacent to but not mimetic of Silliman's 'New Sentence'. While it received an extensive commentary from Craig

Dworkin in his essay 'Poetry without Organs' in *Complicities: British Poetry 1945-2007* (2007) I believe some of the claims within that work could be effectively expanded and problematised in order to support a reading of *Adjunct: An Undigest* in a manner more in keeping with the storm of connectives.

Despite the obvious value of pursuing some of these omissions, the project that this study opens onto, for me, is one of practice. Looking forward from this point, I wish to pursue a practice which builds on the work produced here in meaningful ways. However, I do not wish to do so by senselessly continuing the form of *Radical Transparency*. For me that work's output is unified with the process of its creation, and simply building new content into the same structure would only weaken the project. Instead I wish to pursue both forms of presentation for my existing work, including considering performance version of *Radical Transparency* which would take advantage of the algorithm's ability to instantly generate new iterations, and also create new procedural structures for new work. I would like, in these new structures, to engage more directly with the existing structures of poetry and explore how this kind of procedural work can engage with, and intervene in, rhythm and cadence within poetic form. Additionally, I believe the feedback loops of *At the Shattered Edge* propose a potential balance between abstraction and description in radical narrative structures, which while unexplored in this thesis, presents a unique territory for further investigation.

Looking at this thesis as a whole, I also believe this study can serve, like the storm of connectives, as a map of a territory that might be

explored, inhabited and expanded. The practices I have described and undertaken in my study, in their engagement with connectivity, self and self-disclosure, and open fields of associative meaning, seem especially suited to the contemporary moment. Ideas of transparency, self-disclosure, and narrative are innately connected to the rise of social media, and our own role as both storytellers and advertisers of our own identity. A poetics of self, narrative, and association is a tool well suited to explicate the manifest ways we interact with language, the way it is manipulated, and the way it manipulates us, without losing sight of the affective, self-defined core of experience. To echo Lerner, I wish to open both readers and writers to 'interference heard as music' (2010b: 43), to encourage them to engage with difficult and conceptual texts on personal and affective terms, and to imagine what futures might be described by a storm of connective points, organised by the intensity of human experience.