Don't Trust the List: The Politics of Enumeration and Capitalist Discourse in the Novel

Eva von Contzen

In Chapter XIV of Laurence Sterne's first volume of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, published in 1759, Tristram muses about the pitfalls of writing historiography. If history writing were as straightforward as a direct journey between two places—a direct route from Rome to Loretto—it could be accomplished in a very short period of time. But, alas, as Tristram points out, this is “morally impossible”:

For, if he [the historiographer] is a man of the least spirit, he will have fifty deviations from a straight line to make with this or that party as he goes

This article was written as part of the research conducted in the project *Lists in Literature and Culture* (LISTLIT), funded by the European Research Council Starting Grant no. 715021.

E. von Contzen (✉)
University of Freiburg, Freiburg, Germany
e-mail: eva.voncontzen@anglistik.uni-freiburg.de

along, which he can no ways avoid. He will have views and prospects to himself perpetually soliciting his eye, which he can no more help standing still to look at than he can fly; he will moreover have various

Accounts to reconcile:

Anecdotes to pick up:

Inscriptions to make out:

Stories to weave in:

Traditions to sift:

Personages to call upon:

Panegyrics to paste up at this door;

Pasquinades at that:—All which both the man and his mule are quite exempt from. To sum up all; there are archives at every stage to be look'd into, and rolls, records, documents, and endless genealogies, which justice ever and anon calls him back to stay the reading of:—In short there is no end of it. (34–35)

The point Tristram makes here about historiography in general and his autobiography in particular is that it is arduous because it involves including many diverse sources and following sheer endless new paths. Typographically, the many possibilities for being led astray are presented in list form. The items of this list in turn point to further distinctions and ramifications and thus imply further lists. At the same time, the entries are linked to writing practices and literary artifacts: “archives [...] and rolls, records, documents, and endless genealogies.” Formally as well as epistemologically, we are concerned with practices of listing.

Tristram foresees that his task will keep him busy for a lifetime: “I shall continue to do as long as I live” (35). It is not a coincidence that Sterne makes this point about Tristram’s literary endeavor by using a list and that he refers to material that involves further lists. Not only are lists a key form of historical records, the argument also works the other way around: our lives can be abstracted in the form of lists; who we are, where we come from, to which groups we belong, which alliances we enter, which choices of place, faith, or possession we make, there will be traces of them in the form of lists—from our CVs and various kinds of statistics of which we form a part to genealogies, databases, social network sites, and so on. On yet another level, the passage also highlights the close interdependence of lists as containers of abstract, reductive knowledge on the one hand, and their inherent potential to offer material for constructing, or

reconstructing, larger contexts, even narratives out of the individual items on the other.

The passage from Sterne's novel can be read as a concise overview of the versatility of lists: it reaches from practical contexts of ordering and archiving the world to providing the cues for narrating one's own life. Readers of the present volume will also have encountered a wide range of lists that span several centuries: from lists in the context of *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* and the *Arma Christi* tradition to the character sketch, Humboldt's tableau physique, experimental poetry, and children's literature. The range of media under discussion likewise reflects the versatility of the list form: lists can be written on bronze tablets, parchment, paper; they come in and as manuscript illuminations, images and photos, but also occur in periodicals, notebooks, and as hybrids between text and image. Their functions are manifold: to teach, to delight, to satirize, to create unrest, to gather or produce knowledge, to provide order, to commemorate, and so on.

One aspect that is implicit also in all of the essays assembled in this volume is that of the politics of the list—that is, the structures of power that underlie the list-making process in the first place (De Goede et al. 2016).¹ To various degrees, all essays grapple with the question of power relations and the list's capacity to undermine knowledge—sometimes even the very same knowledge a list establishes. Humboldt's "weaving flaws," that is, the deliberate incorporation of mistakes within the list, are a prime example of this strategy.² When Augustus and Gregory of Tours inscribe themselves into their lists,³ they draw attention to the list-maker and offer insight into the power structures that made both the list and that which is listed possible. In poetry, lists are often indicative of the poet's life and times, verging into the testimonial, as the recipe poems and "Howl" illustrate.⁴ A self-reflexive dimension is particularly striking also in many poetological lists, as the examples by Barthes and Calvino demonstrate.⁵ In pragmatic contexts, by contrast, this meta-level tends to be absent. The lists in medieval rabbinic literature, the *Arma Christi* images, or table of contents do not invite a critical reflection on the how and why (or who) of their assembly.⁶ Yet investigating the agenda behind these lists becomes all the more critical because we, as readers and potential users of the lists, may too quickly take for granted the principles and categories they offer. Against this backdrop, I am going to approach the list as a form that begs a suspicious reading. I first outline the premises and consequences of such a suspicious reading before I turn to selected examples of lists in the context of capitalism to illustrate my argument.

THE LIST AS FORM: AFFORDANCE AND SUSPICION

In a number of the essays in this volume, as well as in the introduction, the authors draw on Robert Belknap's definition of lists:

At their most simple, lists are frameworks that hold separate and disparate items together. Lists are plastic, flexible structures in which an array of constituent units coheres through specific relations generated by specific forces of attraction. (2004, 2)

This definition is useful in several respects. Belknap directs our attention to the fact that every list has two dimensions: the immediately recognizable form of the list as a whole, and the individual items that make up the list. The one could not exist without the other. As a fixed form (or framework, as Belknap calls it), the list is static; a container of its items. These items, however, are not random; there is coherence between them. This coherence can be very loose, hence Belknap's careful phrasing "specific forces of attraction" that hold the items together. What a list is "about" can thus be approached from two different perspectives, one from within, the other from the outside. The frame "shopping list" already defines the items of said list; the individual items cohere because they fall under this heading. On the other hand, it is also possible to find a list that reads "eggs, cheese, 2 bottles of wine, tissues, 1 cucumber" and deduce from that list that it must be a shopping list. In the latter case, the items themselves create coherence by their shared context of what a supermarket has on offer. Importantly, lists do not create coherence in and of themselves—they require a reader, an interpreter, a user to connect the individual items and make sense of them. List-making and dealing with lists are fundamentally cognitive acts. In literary texts, authors can actively factor in their readership's practical knowledge of lists in the real world and invite them to reflect on the practice of list-making itself, in other words, the experience of making lists (von Contzen 2018).

While Belknap's definition is certainly helpful in highlighting the double nature of lists, it does not take into account the processual and dynamic thrust of the list as form. Caroline Levine goes one step further: she argues that form itself is dynamic, contradictory, and hybrid. Crucially, Levine also points to the inherent political entanglements of form in order to make sense of the complexity therein. Form is not an end in itself, but it conveys additional meaning, it has (overt or latent) purposes and

functions. These purposes and functions may not be obvious, they may not even be necessary to be disclosed in order to make sense of a particular form. They can be understood as affordances: those aspects a particular form implies, may engender, may be “*capable of doing*” (2015, 6; emphasis in the original). Different forms, Levine argues, lay claim to different affordances. These affordances are dependent on the context; they are not isolated but set in dialogue with other organizing principles:

[A] form does its work only in contexts where other political and aesthetic forms also are operating. A variety of forms are in motion around us, constraining materials in a range of ways and imposing their order in situated contexts where they constantly overlap other forms. Form emerges from this perspective as transhistorical, portable, and abstract, on the one hand, and material, situated, and political, on the other. (Levine 2015, 11)

Levine discusses wholes, rhythms, hierarchies, and networks as examples of forms. I would like to add the list to this list. The list is highly versatile: it is a simple form that can be used—exploited—to various purposes and thus attains transhistorical status. It is portable, crossing centuries, contexts, genres, and functions. It is also abstract—irrespective of how a list is used, it remains a list.⁷ Levine’s approach becomes particularly useful if one considers list-making as a cultural technique in its interdependence on changes in media, such as the changes from manuscript culture to book culture; from print culture to the internet age; from computer-based media to portable devices. These changes are not teleological; rather, the different media lead to new contexts in which lists can be used. The form of the list itself has remained stable throughout technological advancements, perhaps because it is so “simple,” formally, and can be adapted easily (hence the list as “transhistorical”).⁸

For Levine, the affordance-based approach to form necessarily entails a political dimension, in her words “*a generalizable understanding of political power*” (2015, 7; emphasis in the original). From a sociological perspective, Urs Stäheli tackles lists in very similar terms. He does not use the term “affordance,” but what he describes is essentially a plea for including the affordances of lists in our theoretical discussions about this form and its political dimension:

My argument is that the politics of lists has to account for the specific epistemic practices which go along with list-making – and it is only possible to

understand these practices if we account for the particular operations which the format of the list enables. From such a perspective, list-making is not only a problem of selection, but it is necessarily a transformative and performative practice: it produces the items which the list will comprise. It is the epistemic power of these practices which I call the invisible politics of lists. (Stäheli 2016, 14)

Stäheli analyzes how data, that is, individual items of information, are turned into lists; he is interested in the “transformative work” that *precedes* the making of lists (2016, 15). His approach is indebted to practice theory. Practice theory underlines the embeddedness of cultural productions and actions not only in a network of people acting and interacting with things and other people, but also in implicit knowledge systems and scripts of procedures.⁹ What all kinds of lists share, no matter where or when they are used, is that they represent and reflect a certain order. Lists are tools for structuring and ordering the world. As such, they also imply power relations. Lists convey hierarchies: even in a list that seems random, there is no doubt that the first item takes precedence, simply because we read it first. In addition, the mere fact that something is included in a list means that other items are excluded. Lists are the result of selection and choice. Who or what has “made it” onto a list is itself already a matter of power (Stäheli 2016, 26).

On the surface, the list form signals objectivity and transparency. Lists invite a reading that focuses on their surface structure. It is tempting, then, to approach lists from the perspective of what has been termed “surface reading” by Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus. Best and Marcus’s approach attunes to the surface of texts, that is, to “what is evident, perceptible, apprehensible in texts; what is neither hidden nor hiding; what, in the geometrical sense, has length and breadth but no thickness, and therefore covers no depth” (2009, 9). Surface reading is essentially descriptive reading; a way of approaching texts that reads, in Heather Love’s phrase, closely but not deeply (2010). Lists are surface forms par excellence: they are immediately recognizable as lists, and often a superficial glance will (seemingly) reveal what they are about. Lists don’t tell, they show; they require looking, not reading (Mainberger 2003, 267).¹⁰

Yet, when it comes to lists, surface reading (which the form very much invites), can be dangerous. The list form, in fact, calls for a symptomatic and suspicious reading. In their introduction to the special issue in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* on “The Politics of the

List,” Marieke de Goede et al. draw attention to the politics of “the assumed prosaic nature of lists” (2016, 5) in contexts of law, regulation, and governance. The essays in their issue focus on “lists that *disguise themselves* as practical and coherent” (2016, 5; emphasis in the original). The special political force of lists, they argue, lies “(partly) in producing contingent referentialities that come to appear as obvious, and in drawing together disparate items that come to appear as commensurate” (ibid). One cannot stress enough that any list could also have been drawn up in a different way. Any system of order (or disorder) that appears in list form is preceded by the positing of this system, by the decision to set up the list in this way and not another. Analyzing lists, whether in everyday practical usage or in literary, aesthetic contexts, thus calls for a general distrust of the list as form. Only by reading symptomatically, by questioning the reasons for the list, by asking for the author(s) and authority behind it (its *cui bono?*), by deconstructing the systematization it offers, by discussing the effects in light of the performative function of the list can one do justice to this seemingly straightforward form. Despite their ostensible simplicity, lists are structures of power.

In what follows, I provide a case study of the close interdependence of everyday practices of list-making and power relations in literary texts that thematize, in the broadest sense, capitalism and its effects on the individual and on personal relationships. One could even argue that the list is the ultimate tool of exerting capitalist power: lists help us to manage the things we own, to count and measure them, to express our desire for possession and consumption, to tempt our desires in the first place.

LISTS AND CAPITALIST DISCOURSE IN THE NOVEL

The New Economic Criticism has emphasized the multifarious links and overlaps between economic conditions and systems and literary texts.¹¹ We can add a further dimension to the existing approaches by focusing on the interrelationships between the specific formal arrangements of the list and how it is used in capitalist discourses. In doing so, I consider list-making as a practice that transgresses any implicit or assumed boundaries between the realms of aesthetic works on the one hand and “the real world” and its economic conditions on the other. I stress this point because one frequently comes across a distinction between “poetic” and “pragmatic” lists, originally made by Umberto Eco in *The Infinity of Lists*, which is both misleading and problematic. According to Eco, pragmatic lists, such as the

shopping list, a guest list, or a library catalogue, “have a purely referential function, in other words they refer to objects in the outside world and have the purely practical purpose of naming and listing them” (2009, 113). Poetic lists, by contrast, he argues, comply with “any artistic end for which the list was proposed” (ibid.). Pragmatic lists, for Eco, are finite because they serve a practical purpose that limits these lists; the prime purpose of poetic ones, however, is to transcend finiteness and reach toward infinity, explore the margins, the ever-more, the whole world. Lists that occur in literary texts (which thus qualify as “poetic” lists) and that negotiate capitalist values, though, complicate Eco’s distinction. Here the list form, in its poetic, aesthetic usage, deliberately aligns itself with the pragmatic implications of the kind of lists we make in everyday life for practical purposes. Such poetic lists that negotiate economic concerns do not make sense without the pragmatic backdrop of lists in everyday life.

The Life and Strange Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner by Daniel Defoe is a case in point. The book, often hailed as the first English novel, was published in 1719. Even though—or rather, because—Robinson Crusoe, stranded on the island, is outside of any social structures and contact with other human beings, he takes careful measures to record everything he does. The form of the list is ubiquitous in this enterprise. Robinson keeps a journal in which he notes his observations and actions from right after his shipwreck until he has run out of ink (see 2012, 66–68); he provides a list of the changing seasons on the island (103); there are accounts of which items of food and clothing he stores, of the things he retrieves from the shipwreck (51–53); and a list of positive and negative (“good” and “evil”) aspects of his present situation (63). Robinson frames this list of the pros and cons of the shipwreck in financial-administrative terms:

I now began to consider seriously my condition, and the circumstance I was reduc’d to [...] I began to comfort my self as well as I could, and to set the good against the evil, that I might have something to distinguish my case from worse, and I stated it very impartially, like debtor and creditor, the comforts I enjoy’d, against the miseries I suffer’d. (Defoe 2012, 63)

Paradoxically, Robinson is a proto-capitalist in a society of one. He cannot help but construe his situation in terms that are oriented toward a system which is based on the exchange of goods and in which commodities define

the self. For instance, we are given the following list of items he recovers from the shipwreck:

I brought away several things very useful to me; as first, in the carpenter's stores I found two or three bags full of nails and spikes, a great skrew-jack, a dozen or two of hatchets, and above all, that most useful thing call'd a grind-stone; all these I secur'd together, with several things belonging to the gunner, particularly two or three iron crows, and two barrels of musquet-bullets, seven musquets, and another fowling-piece, with some small quantity of powder more; a large bag full of small shot, and a great roll of sheet lead. But this last was so heavy, I could not hoist it up to get it over the ship's side. (Defoe 2012, 51)

Robinson survives because he upholds capitalist ideas and ideals, even though his whole situation could not be further removed from them: there is no market, no production, no demand, no consumption that could influence a potential market. Critics have of course noted the novel's richness of material details and their proto-capitalist contexts, in particular its indebtedness to early eighteenth-century social and political discourses.¹² I want to put emphasis on the link between this preoccupation with economic discourses and the form of the list. On the one hand, the list is the form most evidently linked to administration and management; it reduces complexity, it provides order, and it signals clarity and stability. These functions hold true for household management just as much as they do for contexts of trading and globalization. At the same time, the list also fulfills the function of keeping Robinson sane. Dorothee Birke has situated the lists in the novel within the context of the protagonist's mental processes. She argues that the lists are indicative of Robinson's struggles with despair and isolation and function as "exercises in rational self-control" (2016, 304). Robinson masters the island by transforming his experiences into lists, in the form of a calendar, a journal, and inventories of goods. In *Robinson Crusoe*, then, the list brings together struggles of identity and proto-capitalist thinking. The two go hand in hand: Robinson's identity is defined by and ultimately stabilized by his activity as a member of a (absent but imagined) market society. His list-making is thus driven by the desire for a return to a society whose rules and values he has internalized. The list is the prime medium of translating these desires and possessions into words and thus into the narrative: Ultimately,

the message is that even in complete isolation, human beings are *homines economici*.

My second example is taken from Charles Dickens's novel *Little Dorrit* (1855–1857). In the following extract, Daniel Doyce and Arthur Clennam visit the Meagles, who are friends of Clennam's. In the Meagles's house, they encounter Mr. Meagles's curious collection of souvenirs:

Of articles collected on his various expeditions, there was such a vast miscellany that it was like the dwelling of an amiable Corsair. There were antiquities from Central Italy, made by the best modern houses in that department of industry; bits of mummy from Egypt (and perhaps Birmingham); model gondolas from Venice; model villages from Switzerland; morsels of tessellated pavement from Herculaneum and Pompeii, like petrified minced veal; ashes out of tombs, and lava out of Vesuvius; Spanish fans, Spezzian straw hats, Moorish slippers, Tuscan hairpins, Carrara sculpture, Trastaverini scarves, Genoese velvets and filigree, Neapolitan coral, Roman cameos, Geneva jewellery, Arab lanterns, rosaries blest all round by the Pope himself, and an infinite variety of lumber. There were views, like and unlike, of a multitude of places; and there was one little picture-room devoted to a few of the regular sticky old Saints, with sinews like whipcord, hair like Neptune's, wrinkles like tattooing, and such coats of varnish that every holy personage served for a fly-trap, and became what is now called in the vulgar tongue a Catch-em-alive O. Of these pictorial acquisitions Mr Meagles spoke in the usual manner. He was no judge, he said, except of what pleased himself; he had picked them up, dirt-cheap, and people *had* considered them rather fine. (Dickens 2008, 192–193)

The primary function of this (descriptive) list is clearly to poke fun at Mr. Meagles.¹³ Given how eclectic and fraudulent the collection is, Mr. Meagles, who is a former banker, comes across as someone who wants to make the impression of being well-traveled and a connoisseur of art when in truth he is neither. His relationship to these possessions is complex: he claims they were “dirt-cheap” but that other people, too, considered them “rather fine.” The items bear witness to an itinerary that ranges from various places in Italy, Switzerland, and Spain all the way to Egypt. His desire to collect is also an attempt to control the world, to bring it into his home. Mr. Meagles's “market” is a global one (even though most of the places turn out to be relatively close by) and linked to travel. We can situate this type of souvenir or kitsch list in the wider context of Victorian commodities and the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London.¹⁴ As in *Robinson Crusoe*,

and also similar to the character sketch,¹⁵ goods here are a means of characterization—Mr. Meagles aims at being perceived in a certain way (a man of the world) while at the same time he is disclosed as being something else (artsy, ignorant). The form of the list encapsulates Mr. Meagles's self-understanding as a man of possession; he is what he owns, or rather, he wishes to be judged by that which he owns. The list thus functions as a means of indirect communication between the narrator and reader that allows us to share a certain opinion about Mr. Meagles's character behind his back.

In both *Crusoe* and *Dickens*, the form of the list—lists of objects and material belongings in particular—is used to impart information about a character's relationship to society and to consumption. We have seen that there is a strong element of self-definition, as in *Robinson Crusoe's* case, who upholds capitalist ideals even in isolation. Mr. Meagles, too, defines himself by what he has acquired, though the result is not quite what he may have envisaged. In his case, the fraudulent nature of the souvenirs renders any genuine effort to be a respected traveler vain to the point of absurdity.

In contemporary literature, literary texts continue to capitalize on lists in order to express their protagonists' sense of self, their material desires, and often also their personal relationships in the form of wish lists, gift lists, and shopping lists. These lists often establish a direct connection to the real world—online retailers, for instance, take advantage of the power of lists and provide the opportunity to create one's own wish list and saving items for later purchases. Against the backdrop of an ever-growing marketing machine that exploits the form of the list in order to speak to our material desires, it is small wonder that literary texts, too, complicate the relationship between possessing, purchasing, and desiring. The metaphor of love as a commodity, and the overlaps, gray areas, and conscious slips between love-making and prostitution are by no means new discoveries. What is new is that authors set love explicitly in these materialist contexts by using the form of the list.¹⁶

A good example of the use of lists and their economic, capitalist affordance is Nick Hornby's 1995 novel *High Fidelity*. The protagonist, Rob, seems to be a lost cause when it comes to finding—and keeping—a lover. Rob is a passionate lover of music; he works in a record store and occasionally DJs, too. He orders his world according to the music he likes and associates with events and people. In doing so, he relies on the form of the hit list. Hit lists, like wish lists, are expressions of material desire. Whereas

wish lists are prospective (they contain wishes that have not yet been fulfilled), hit lists are retrospective (they are based on the information of how many albums or singles were sold). Rob's lists are retrospective and highly subjective. In fact, the whole plot of *High Fidelity* is based on such a hit list: Rob's five worst split-ups. The very beginning of the novel is as follows:

My desert-island, all-time, top five most memorable split-ups, in chronological order:

1. Alison Ashworth
2. Penny Hardwick
3. Jackie Allen
4. Charlie Nicholson
5. Sarah Kendrew (Hornby 2014, 1)

Rob, who is in a confused emotional state after his separation from his girlfriend Laura (with whom he is still in love), decides to visit the five former girlfriends from his list in order to find out why they broke up with him in each case. Rob's behavior toward women is highly questionable—in the words of Barry Faulk, the novel “proffers the voyeuristic charm of getting to know male psychology at its most asocial” (2007, 154), yet it does so “by disarming a romantically dysfunctional, but well-intentioned and maturing white male” (154). One symptom of Rob's “dysfunctional” handling of his personal relationship is his obsessive list-making that also informs his attitude toward women. Rob turns his former girlfriends into objects which can be ordered and ranked just like his favorite songs. Since the narrative is told from Rob's perspective, we only gradually learn why Laura left—he cheated on her while she was pregnant. In the course of the novel, Rob comes to recognize that much of the blame lies with him. By the time he gets back together with Laura (though she does not accept his marriage proposal), his process of learning has reached its peak. It may not be a coincidence that the density of lists decreases toward the end of the novel. The fact that Rob does not need the list as a form of managing his life as much as he did at the beginning of the novel may suggest that his attitude toward women, and his understanding of love and relationships, too, has changed for the better. Instead of objectifying his personal relations, and thereby distancing himself from any actual confrontation with reasons and causes, he has learned to pay attention to others' feelings.

Behind each item of his “hit list” of the worst breakups, there is, after all, a whole story not just about Rob’s hurt feelings, but the women’s feelings, too.

Another protagonist who in a similar vein struggles to manage her life is Bridget Jones in Helen Fielding’s 1996 novel *Bridget Jones’s Diary*. As a diary, the entries already form a list of items, ordered chronologically. The novel begins with a list of New Year’s Resolutions, and within the entries of the diary, there are lists of food and drinks consumed, but also other types of lists, such as guest lists, schedules, and shopping lists.¹⁷ The main function of the lists in *Bridget Jones’s Diary* is to characterize the eponymous heroine as someone who fails in getting her life together. Her inspiration for using lists is taken from self-help books, which recommend excessive self-monitoring. Both Rob’s and Bridget Jones’s lists can be read in the trajectory of what Eva Illouz has termed “emotional capitalism.” According to Illouz, “emotional capitalism” describes

a culture in which emotional and economical discourses and practices mutually shape each other, thus producing [...] a broad, sweeping movement in which affect is made an essential aspect of economic behaviour and in which emotional life – especially that of the middle classes – follows the logic of economic relations and exchange. (2007, 5)

High Fidelity is a good example of these processes. Rob, as a passionate lover of rock music, has internalized the principles of hit lists and charts to the extent that the economic logic of the music market has come to shape his perspective on his personal life, in particular his ex-girlfriends. What classic rock is to Bob is what self-help literature is to Bridget Jones. According to Illouz, the trend of a rationalization and intellectualization of personality that emerged in the 1980s was closely associated with advice literature for women, especially on the theme of intimacy (2007, 30–32). By writing down emotions—and this was explicitly advised—one could detach one’s emotions from the self and thus control them. Bridget’s excessive list-making thus becomes a symptom of capitalist society in which Bridget attempts to write not her own autobiography but oughta-biography, the way she wants to appear based on societal norms and expectations.¹⁸ Not only are Bridget’s love life and identity intertwined in the form of the list, they are also converted into capital that she tries to manage and invest wisely. The effect—Bridget’s constant failure to live up

to her expectations—is of course comic and ultimately lays bare how problematic the perspective on relationships as economic capital is.

While Bridget Jones uses the list as an exercise in self-control and performing adulthood, the heroine of Julian Barnes's 1998 novel *England, England* (Martha Cochrane) uses the list as a way of coping with her love life and distancing herself from her own experiences. Here the management of her capital "love" is reified in the form of the list. At one point, Martha reflects upon her love life so far. The list is entitled "A brief history of sexuality in the case of Martha Cochrane" and begins with the stages of Martha's sexual experiences, from "1. Innocent Discovery" to "7. The Pursuit of Separateness" and "8. The Current Situation" (Barnes 1999, 82–88). Number 6 of that list ("Pursuit of the Ideal") contains yet another enumeration: that of four men with whom Martha has been together (numbered a to d—Thomas, Matthew, Ted, Russell), none of whom really seemed to have loved her or could truly satisfy her.

(a) Thomas, who took her to Venice where she found his eyes glowed before a Giorgione more than they did when she stood before him in her specially-bought night-blue bra and knickers while the back canal went slap-slap outside their window; (b) Matthew, who really liked to shop, who could tell what clothes would suit her when they were still on the rail, who brought his risotto to a perfect pitch of sticky dampness but couldn't do the same for her; (c) Ted, who showed her the advantages of money and the softening hypocrisies it encouraged, who said he loved her and wanted to marry her and have kids with her, but never told her that between leaving her flat every morning and reaching his office he always spent an intimate hour with his psychiatrist; (d) Russell, with whom she ran away light-headedly in order to fuck and love halfway up a Welsh mountain with hand-pumped cold water and udder-warm goat's milk, who was idealistic, organized, community-minded and self-sacrificing. (87)

The whole list appears to be almost scientific (hence the title "a brief history"): an objective classification of Martha's failed relationships. The list, then, is an attempt at distancing herself from what is ultimately a rather depressing overview. In itemizing her former love interests, Martha turns her love life into objects that can be ordered, classified, and dissected from an analytical stance. The list is a strategy of identity management, an expression of her coping mechanism. Ultimately, of course, Martha's list is highly ironic: the itemization of her love experience as a way of managing her emotional capital demonstrates that her identity work has been

successful; she is able to distance herself from these experiences by turning them into a pseudo-objective history.

The management of emotional capital is also at the center of my final example, Leanne Shapton's work *Important Artifacts and Personal Property from the Collection of Lenore Doolan and Harold Morris, Including Books, Street Fashion, and Jewelry* (2009). The subtitle is: *Strachan & Quinn Auctioneers, February 14, 2009. 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. EST*. The book presents itself as an auction catalogue; indeed, perhaps one could mistake it for one if one would not pay attention to the literary epigraphs that precede the catalogue, and only superficially glance at the images. Here the list form occurs on two levels: one is the auction catalogue itself, which is essentially a list of entries: each entry is one "item," marked by a photograph (or the absence of one). The second level occurs within these items, in the explanatory notes that accompany each "item." There are further enumerations, for instance actual lists that are included in or attached to individual items (a shopping list, a dedication, a list in a letter, etc.), or an enumeration of the things presented in an image, such as the list of the things contained in Lenore and Harold's cosmetic cases (LOT 1079 and 1080; 30–31).

Two of the essays in the present volume also discuss "visual" lists (the documentary photobook and the *Arma Christi* tradition in the Middle Ages).¹⁹ Whether "visual" lists exist, is debatable. The term is Eco's, who has a broad understanding of lists and forms of enumerations in the first place. In their introduction, the editors of this volume make a compelling case for the existence of "visual lists" and argue that the concept of the list can provide a more nuanced understanding of different kinds of series in contexts of visual art. They single out patterns of repetition and variation as well as part-whole relationships as prominent features of visual lists. Admitting that these features are by no means hard criteria for identifying potential visual lists, they suggest following an inductive approach: "A visual list would then be whatever is perceived as a visual list".²⁰ The appeal of such an "inductive" (perhaps also, or rather, "intuitive") approach is that it empowers the viewer to think critically about the arrangement patterns of a work of art. At the same time, this approach begs a cognitive perspective: if one perceives of the list as a cognitive form—as a tool of and for thinking—then it can also be applied to visual representations. Shapton's book is clearly based on principles of order and itemization that reverberate with list structures and may therefore be described, in terms of its affordances, similar to a list—a visual list.

The very form of the auction catalogue already anticipates the outcome of the love story: it ended badly; Lenore and Harold have separated. The catalogue represents the sell-out of their relationship. Although a note by Harold Morris that precedes the catalogue may hint at the possibility of a happy ending, the catalogue clearly suggests otherwise. A love story is reduced to, broken down into, the items that the two former lovers owned.²¹

In the metaphor of the auction catalogue, love itself is on display. Inherent in the items, especially when they are “read” from beginning to end, is a narrative. The items tell the love story of Lenore and Harold through the objects they owned, got, and gave each other. A relationship leaves material traces, and the choice of the auction catalogue problematizes that we are what we own. What remains of this, or indeed, any love story, are things, material objects. These remains, “ruins” almost, are the afterthought of love. With the desire for the other gone, all that remains are things, the things that tell the story of their past love. Importantly, however, the story does not stop here: these things, being things, could potentially be turned into money again. The metaphor is obvious: just as the objects are on the market again, so are the former lovers. Love can be found anew, (metaphorically) “sold” anew, and thus begins new circle of goods being purchased by a potential new couple.²²

Ultimately, Shapton’s auction catalogue suggests the objectification of desire. The emotionally cool, removed, reasonable thing to do—rather than throwing the former lover’s possessions out of the window—is to sell them. In a way, this decision makes obvious what the things have always been, implicitly: the material capital of a love relationship, that capital on which, at least partly, the emotional capital hinges. If the capital of love has gone, the objects that remain lose their affective power, they can be seen as purely material again. The list form both conceals this logic and draws attention to it: only if we interpret the auction catalogue in terms of Lenore and Harold’s (failed) love story, we can unearth the various layers and complications of selling out one’s former relationship.

CONCLUSION

I have suggested that the form of the list and capitalism are closely, inextricably intertwined when it comes to the depiction of love as material desire. Lists are commonly used to depict sales figures and profits in capitalist societies, and in our examples, the list form becomes the medium

that transmits the message of a society in which love, personal relationships, and identity are bound up in capitalist discourses. The list seemingly itemizes and orders that which in truth defies order and neatly separated units, and yet the idea of one's self (self-worth even) and personal relationships as capital can be traced from Defoe to Shapton.

Clearly the form of the list has the affordance of being a capitalist instrument. It allows the depiction of identity, love, and lovers as material objects, itemizing the self and others. Apart from *Robinson Crusoe* perhaps, the lists in the examples discussed above have comic effects: we are invited to laugh about Mr. Meagle's pretence, to see through Rob's attempt to present himself as the good guy, to feel pity for both the hyperbolic failures of Bridget Jones and Martha's love history, and to recognize the ironies in Shapton's faux auction catalogue. In each case, the form of the list appears harmless; on the surface, it is a funny rhetorical move that shuns digging deeper. If we approach these lists suspiciously, however, we see their deeply political implications. If anything, we can take from the essays in the present volume a very similar message: lists are never simply containers or transmitters of knowledge and order. Under their surface of clarity and objectivity, there is potentially an abyss of contradiction and manipulation. Readers, don't trust the list.

NOTES

1. See also the discussion of this issue in the "Introduction" to this volume, 9–10.
2. See the chapter by Ottmar Ette in this volume.
3. See the chapter by Martin Stöckinger in this volume.
4. See the chapters by Juri Joensuu and Alyson Brickey in this volume.
5. See the chapter by Ulrike Vedder in this volume.
6. On rabbinic literature, see Lennart Lehmhaus's chapter in this volume; on the *Arma Christi*, Daniela Wagner; on table of contents, Stefanie Lethbridge.
7. See in more detail von Contzen (2017a).
8. On the list as "simple form," see von Contzen (2017b).
9. See in more detail Reckwitz (2003).
10. Surface reading thus seems to be the natural way of reading lists because they defy the depth and concealment that has been the dominant form of critique in the hermeneutics of suspicion school. The philosopher Paul Ricoeur coined the phrase "hermeneutics of suspicion." He evoked the image of the critic as someone who, in Rita Felski's words, has to "reverse

the falsifications of everyday thought, to ‘unconceal’ what has been concealed, to bring into daylight what has languished in deep shadow” (2015, 31). This practice of “symptomatic reading” gained currency from the 1970s onward. Influenced by psychoanalytic and Marxist approaches to literature, it posits that the actual meaning of a literary text is suppressed, hidden, latent, not immediately visible and accessible, and thus requires the literary critic to search for this hidden meaning by “digging deep,” that is, by “reading suspiciously.” In recent years, the tide has appeared to be turning against symptomatic reading, as the calls for “surface” or “descriptive” reading (see Marcus et al. 2016 for the latter) demonstrate.

11. For an introduction, see Woodmansee and Osteen (1999).
12. See Schmidgen (2001) on mercantilism; Rogers (1974) on Robinson’s home-building; and McMillen (2013) on the importance of food and Robinson as a global citizen. See also Watt (1957) on Robinson as *homo economicus*.
13. See also Fludernik (2016, 319–320) for an analysis of this passage.
14. See in more detail Richards (1990).
15. See Theresa Schön’s chapter in this volume.
16. I can only briefly mention at this point the wider discourses of the reification of the laborer and labor in capitalist societies as Georg Lukacs (1971) has argued. Said succinctly summarizes Lukacs’s arguments, drawing attention to the form of the list: “If capitalism is the embodiment in economic terms of reification, then everything, including human beings, ought to be quantified and given a market value. This of course is what Lukacs means when he speaks of articulation under capitalism, *which he sometimes characterizes as if it were a gigantic itemized list*” (1983, 232, my emphasis). Modern working conditions, in their poetic form, become a list.
17. See von Contzen (2018) on Bridget Jones’s diary and the experiential dimension of lists in literary texts.
18. The term was coined by Chon Noriega and has found its way into the theory of autobiography; see Smith and Watson (2010, 258).
19. See the chapters by Anja Schürmann and Daniela Wagner in this volume.
20. See Barton et al., “Introduction”, in this volume, 16.
21. See the chapter by Agnes Blümer in this volume.
22. Vedder (2012a, b) analyzes the narrative dimensions of Shapton’s work (its elliptical, fragmentary nature) and its links to memory work. See also Jakubowski (2013).

REFERENCES

- Barnes, Julian. 1998. *England, England*. London: Picador, 1999.
- Belknap, Robert E. 2004. *The List: The Uses and Pleasures of Cataloguing*. New Haven/London: Yale University Press.

- Best, Stephen, and Sharon Marcus. 2009. Surface Reading: An Introduction. *Representations* 108 (1): 1–21.
- Birke, Dorothee. 2016. The World Is Not Enough: Lists as Encounters with the 'Real' in the Eighteenth-Century Novel. *Style* 50 (3): 296–308.
- De Goede, Marieke, Anna Leander, and Gavin Sullivan. 2016. Introduction: The Politics of the List. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34 (1): 3–13.
- Defoe, Daniel. 2012. *Robinson Crusoe*, ed. John Richetti. London: Penguin Classics.
- Dickens, Charles. 2008. *Little Dorrit*. London: Vintage.
- Faulk, Barry. 2007. Love, Lists, and Class in Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity*. *Cultural Critique* 66: 153–176.
- Felski, Rita. 2015. *The Limits of Critique*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Fludernik, Monika. 2016. Descriptive Lists and List Descriptions. *Style* 50 (3): 309–326.
- Hornby, Nick. 2014 [1995]. *High Fidelity*. London: Penguin.
- Illouz, Eva. 2007. *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Jakubowski, Zuzanna. 2013. Exhibiting Lost Love: The Relational Realism of Things in Orhan Pamuk's *The Museum of Innocence* and Shapton's *Important Artifacts*. In *Realisms in Contemporary Culture: Theories, Politics, and Medial Configurations*, ed. Dorothee Birke and Stella Butter, 124–145. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Levine, Caroline. 2015. *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*. Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Love, Heather. 2010. Close but not Deep: Literary Ethics and the Descriptive Turn. *New Literary History* 41 (2): 371–391.
- Lukacs, Georg. 1971. *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*. Trans. Rodney Livingstone. London: Merlin.
- Mainberger, Sabine. 2003. *Die Kunst des Aufzählens: Elemente zu einer Poetik des Enumerativen*. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Marcus, Sharon, Heather Love, and Stephen Best. 2016. Building a Better Description. *Representations* 135: 1–21.
- McMillen, Krystal. 2013. Eating Turtle, Eating the World: Comestible Things in the Eighteenth Century. In *Eighteenth-Century Thing Theory in a Global Context: From Consumerism to Celebrity Culture*, ed. Ileana Baird and Christina Ionescu, 191–207. Farnham & Burlington: Ashgate.
- Reckwitz, Andreas. 2003. Grundelemente einer Theorie sozialer Praktiken: Eine sozialtheoretische Perspektive. *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 32 (4): 282–301.
- Richards, Thomas. 1990. *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851–1914*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Rogers, Pat. 1974. Crusoe's Home. *Essays in Criticism* 24 (4): 375–390.

- Said, Edward. 1983. *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Schmidgen, Wolfram. 2001. *Robinson Crusoe*, Enumeration, and the Mercantile Fetish. *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35 (1): 19–39.
- Shapton, Leanne. 2009. *Important Artifacts and Personal Property from the Collection of Lenore Doolan and Harold Morris, Including Books, Street Fashion, and Jewelry*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson. 2010. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Stäheli, Urs. 2016. Indexing – The Politics of Invisibility. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34 (1): 14–29.
- Sterne, Laurence. 1984. *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. The Florida Edition, ed. Melvyn New, Richard A. Davies, and W.G. Day. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Vedder, Ulrike. 2012a. Weitergeben, verlorengelassen: Dinge als Gedächtnismedien. In *Gendered Objects: Wissens- und Geschlechterordnungen der Dinge*, ed. Gabriele Jähnert, 17–28. Berlin: Zentrum für transdisziplinäre Geschlechterstudien der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.
- . 2012b. Auktionskatalog, Fotoroman, Liebesinventar: Vom Wert der Dinge in Leanne Shaptons *Bedeutende Objekte und persönliche Besitzstücke aus der Sammlung von Lenore Doolan und Harold Morris, darunter Bücher, Mode und Schmuck*. In *‘High’ und ‘Low’: Zur Interferenz von Hoch- und Populärkultur in der Gegenwartsliteratur*, ed. Thomas Wegmann and Norbert Christian Wolf, 199–216. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- von Contzen, Eva. 2017a. Die Affordanzen der Liste. *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik* 3: 317–326.
- . 2017b. Grenzfälle des Erzählens: Die Liste als einfache Form. In *Komplexität und Einfachheit*, ed. Albrecht Koschorke, 221–239. Stuttgart: Metzler.
- Watt, Ian. 1957. *The Rise of the Novel. Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 2018. Experience, Affect, and Literary Lists. *Partial Answers* 16 (2): 315–327.
- Woodmansee, Martha, and Mark Osteen, eds. 1999. *The New Economic Criticism: Studies at the Intersection of Literature and Economics*. London/New York: Routledge.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.