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## **Entropology and the End of Nature in Lance Olsen's *Theories of Forgetting***

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## Entropology and the End of Nature in Lance Olsen's *Theories of Forgetting*

In *Tristes Tropiques*, Lévi-Strauss coins the term 'entropology', a lexical blend of 'entropy' and 'anthropology' signifying that the study of humankind is always, necessarily, the study of humankind's transformative (disruptive, corrosive) impact. This article traces entropology as an aesthetic practice through Robert Smithson's Earthwork, particularly the *Spiral Jetty*, and into twenty-first century ecoliterature. At the heart of the article is an analysis of Lance Olsen's contemporary fiction *Theories of Forgetting*, focusing on the interconnected portrayals of human fragility and the environment. *Theories of Forgetting* embodies entropology both in its material poetics and as a thematic trope. By representing the entropological inseparability of the fates of humankind and the natural world, the novel casts contemporary human life paradoxically as both destructive and vulnerable. These affects subsequently require the characteristically metamodern renewal of historical thinking by bringing into focus the impact of humanity's past and present actions on the future.

Keywords: contemporary fiction; entropology; ecoliterature; Lance Olsen; metamodernism; post-postmodernism; Robert Smithson; *Spiral Jetty*; twenty-first century literature.

In his travel memoir *Tristes Tropiques* (originally published in English as *World on the Wane*), Lévi-Strauss documents his encounters with tribes in Brazil. Writing in the midst of the twentieth century, Lévi-Strauss also contemplates the role of the anthropologist, regretful of how contact between cultures is inevitably erosive and mindful of humanity's existence in the universe:

The world began without man and will end without him. [...] From the time when he first began to breathe and eat, up to the invention of atomic and thermonuclear devices, by way of the discovery of fire – and except when he has been engaged in self-reproduction – what else has man done except blithely break down billions of structures and reduce them to a state in which they are no longer capable of

integration? No doubt he has built towns and cultivated the land; yet, on reflection, urbanization and agriculture are themselves instruments intended to create inertia, at a rate and in a proportion infinitely higher than the amount of organization they involve. As for creations of the human mind, their significance only exists in relation to it, and they will merge into the general chaos, as soon as the human mind has disappeared. Thus it is that civilization, taken as a whole, can be described as an extraordinarily complex mechanism, which we might be tempted to see as offering an opportunity of survival for the human world, if its function were not to produce what physicists call entropy, that is inertia. Every verbal exchange, every line printed, established communication between people, thus creating an evenness of level, where before there was an information gap and consequently a greater degree of organization. Anthropology could with advantage be changed into 'entropology', as the name of the discipline concerned with the study of the highest manifestations of this process of disintegration.<sup>1</sup>

Entropy refers in physics – specifically, the second law of thermodynamics – to a directional spread of energy whereby concentrated or localized, and therefore potentially powerful, energy is dispersed or diffused, for instance when ice melts to water or when a hot object (like a saucepan) cools down. Drawing on the language of entropy, Stanley Diamond glosses Lévi-Strauss' comments as the 'prediction of the ultimate thermodynamic leveling of all culture'<sup>2</sup> whilst James Clifford similarly speaks of 'the prophetic disintegration of all real cultural differences'.<sup>3</sup> Still, Lévi-Strauss intends not to extend 'entropy' through the addition of the suffix '-ology' (meaning: the disciplinary study of entropy), but for his coinage, 'entropology', to be understood as a lexical blend of 'entropy' and 'anthropology'. In this way, Lévi-Strauss suggests that the study of humankind is always, necessarily, the study of humankind's transformative (disruptive, corrosive) impact. Thus, the fate of 'the human mind' is intimately intertwined with the fate of local cultures, human civilization as a whole, and the greater cosmos.

Cultural contact and the development of civilizations are certainly Lévi-Strauss's foci, yet his mention of humankind's acts of breathing and eating and of 'urbanization and agriculture' suggests humanity's draining of the Earth's natural resources whilst 'the invention of atomic and thermonuclear devices' alludes to the fallout from nuclear testing happening concurrent to his writing. This human impact on the Earth may not have been Lévi-Strauss's primary concern, but his remarks nevertheless prefigure growing anxiety in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries about the planetary cost of humanity's development.

Take 1989, often seen as a watershed moment – a transition from a dominant postmodern culture to its emergent aftermath<sup>4</sup>: As the Berlin Wall fell, the Cold War ended, and Communism in Eastern Europe collapsed, cultural commentators – led most prominently by Francis Fukuyama – declared 'the end of History'.<sup>5</sup> Yet at the same time, environmentalists and climatologists were warning that humanity had also reached 'the end of nature'.<sup>6</sup> Just as Fukuyama's declaration did not simply mean that chronological time had expired or that the event was a thing of the past, when Bill McKibben lamented nature's end, he was not suggesting that natural forces would cease or that the Earth's cycles would come to a standstill. Like Fukuyama's, McKibben's argument entailed a fundamental conceptual shift:

[...] we are at the end of nature.

By the end of nature I do not mean the end of the world. The rain will still fall and the sun shine, though differently than before. When I say "nature," I mean a certain set of human ideas about the concrete changes in the reality around us—changes that scientists can measure and enumerate. More and more frequently, these changes will clash with our perceptions, until, finally, our sense of nature as eternal and separate is washed away, and we will see all too clearly what we have done.<sup>7</sup>

Nature, McKibben argued, could no longer be understood as an autonomous, perpetual force. It could no longer be considered independent of humankind but as having suffered as a consequence of human evolution.

These pronouncements of ‘endings’ now seem symptomatic of a certain postmodern form of critical thinking: postmodernism entailed the end of history, the end of nature, the end – in Lyotard’s conceptualization – of all metanarratives.<sup>8</sup> Yet, whilst the end of history has since been subject to a rethink,<sup>9</sup> in contrast the end of nature has gathered steam with climate scientists arguing that we have entered a new moment in planetary time. Precisely because of human damage to the earth and its atmosphere, Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer claim that it is ‘more appropriate to emphasize the central role of mankind in geology and ecology by proposing to use the term “anthropocene” for the current geological epoch’.<sup>10</sup> As climate change demonstrates, humankind’s ‘central role’ has thus far borne out Lévi-Strauss’s theory: it has been entropological. The validity of the ‘anthropocene’ has been widely accepted by climate scientists and humanities scholars alike. Consequently, as a conceptual frame it has become loaded with significance; particularly in cultural studies and the arts, it has come to stand not only for a geological age, but a social age too – a conceptual move facilitated by interconnections between climate change, late capitalism, and global politics.<sup>11</sup> In this respect, the idea of the anthropocene is a vital facet of any conceptualization of the aftermath of postmodernism.

I interpret the anthropocene, however, not as the *de facto* zeitgeist but as a contributing component within a more complex configuration of contemporary crises – of environment, of financial instability, of social inequality, of political conflict, of terrorism, of technology, and others – that together, relatedly, engender a new cultural sensibility. As such, my thinking develops alongside van den Akker and Vermeulen’s

paradigm of the metamodern in which climate change plays its part within a socio-political context, brought about by global neoliberalism, where ‘wealth is concentrated at the top 1 per cent of the pyramid, while rising sea levels and super storms crumble its base, where the rest of us reside in highly precarious conditions’.<sup>12</sup> Even so, this is not to deny the important role of the environmental crisis: perhaps more than these other afore-mentioned crises, the sense of the end of nature – the fundamental, entropological inseparability of the fates of humankind and the natural world – produce an experience of contemporary human life paradoxically as both destructive and vulnerable. These affects subsequently require the renewal of historical thinking by bringing into focus the impact of humanity’s past and present actions on the future.

This article uses entropology as a lens with which to read Lance Olsen’s contemporary fiction *Theories of Forgetting*.<sup>13</sup> The analysis concentrates on the interconnected portrayals of human fragility and the environment, demonstrating that *Theories of Forgetting* embodies entropology in both its material poetics and as a thematic trope. Reflecting on the analysis, the article suggests that the novel expresses a metamodern (or post-postmodern) sensibility, largely because the entropological aesthetic of *Theories of Forgetting* regenerates historicity. First, though, the article discusses entropology (including entropy) as aesthetic, starting with its appearance in Robert Smithson’s Earthwork and subsequently emerging as a mode of twenty-first century literary ecopoetics.

### **Entropology as a Contemporary Aesthetic**

Lévi-Strauss’s concept of entropology was first taken up as aesthetic theme and practice by twentieth century artist Robert Smithson, who felt that Lévi-Strauss offered ‘a good insight’.<sup>14</sup> Entropology became the *raison d’être* of Smithson’s work and writings

before his untimely death in a plane crash in 1973.<sup>15</sup> Smithson originally discusses the scientific notion of entropy in a 1966 essay – ‘Entropy and the New Monuments’ – about the minimalist sculpture of Donald Judd, Robert Morris, Sol LeWitt, and Dan Flavin, amongst others. Smithson views their works as a celebration ‘of entropy by telling us energy is more easily lost than obtained, and that in the ultimate future the whole universe will burn out and be transformed into an all-encompassing sameness’.<sup>16</sup>

He continues:

Instead of causing us to remember the past like the old monuments, the new monuments seem to cause us to forget the future. Instead of being made of natural materials, such as marble, granite, or other kinds of rock, the new monuments are made of artificial materials, plastic, chrome, and electric light. They are not built for the ages, but rather against the ages.<sup>17</sup>

As a radical reaction against modernism, minimalist art marked – in Hal Foster’s words – ‘a paradigm shift toward postmodernist practices’.<sup>18</sup> This seems apparent in Smithson’s description of sculpture that sits out of time, blacking out the future, and which – in its use of artificial materials – is cold, depthless, and antianthropomorphic. Thus, these works – and Smithson’s interpretation of them – fit neatly within Fredric Jameson’s typology of the postmodern as the loss of historicity, the lack of depth, and the waning of affect.<sup>19</sup>

In parallel in the literary sphere, the concept of entropy was an ‘all-important’ aesthetic strategy of postmodernist fiction between the 1960s-1980s, as Hoffman evidences<sup>20</sup> with reference to the work of Thomas Pynchon,<sup>21</sup> Kurt Vonnegut,<sup>22</sup> and John Barth.<sup>23</sup> To these names can be added William Gaddis who, in 1981, considered entropy ‘as the central preoccupation of our time’.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, Hoffman argues that in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, Pynchon presents an ‘entropic, beyond-history view of time, a destructive mode of presentism’.<sup>25</sup> Hoffman’s analysis of the aesthetics of



postmodernist fiction resonates with Smithson's view of minimalist sculpture. Taken together, they demonstrate the prevalence of entropy as a dominant postmodernist sentiment that expresses flatness, fragmentation, and artificiality as well as a lack of futuricity.

Although often categorized as an off-shoot of the minimalist tradition, Earthworks (also known as Land Art or Earth Art) – being made, precisely, *of* natural materials – embody a different aesthetic. Smithson increasingly practiced Earthwork and his most famous piece, the *Spiral Jetty*, tends to be viewed as the 'poster' work of the movement. Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* was built in April 1970 at the Great Salt Lake in Utah. Constructed from mud, salt crystals, water, and black basalt rocks from the shore, the Jetty (originally fifteen-hundred-feet-long and fifteen-feet-wide) moves out from the shoreline before spiraling in an anti-clockwise direction. Its ecological materiality produces a powerful anthropomorphic impact, foregrounding man's place in the physical world by locating the human subject in the center of its spiral.

Not only does the *Spiral Jetty* emphasize the relationship between man and the environment, the anti-clockwise direction of the spiral places the viewer in an important relationship with time:

Walking from the shore to the centre, following the spiral of the artwork, the viewer travels in an anti-clockwise direction. This suggests a movement backwards in time. Thus Smithson invites the viewer to ponder geological time as he or she stands on the rocks and earth of the spiral and look out at the lake and the surrounding landscape. The viewer is also invited to think about cosmological time as the shape recalls the spirals of galaxies. In 1970, a year after the first moon landing, outer space and our place within it was at the forefront of consciousness.<sup>26</sup>

Smithson saw the Great Salt Lake as a landscape encapsulating 'prehistory' and the *Spiral Jetty* as creating an 'entropic situation': it 'is physical enough to withstand all

these climate changes, yet it's intimately involved with those climate changes and natural disturbances. That's why I'm not really interested in conceptual art because that seems to avoid physical mass' (moments later in this interview, Smithson recalls Lévi-Strauss' coinage).<sup>27</sup> The climate changes to which Smithson refers are the natural rising and falling of water levels at the Great Salt Lake: the Jetty thus develops salt crystals over time and the processes of submergence and re-emergence ultimately produce an erosive effect on its structure. Moreover, despite being built at a remote site (at one time it was only viewable from the air, but it is now possible to drive there, albeit off-road), human visitors who reach and walk across the jetty (kicking up rocks in the process) will inevitably disrupt its shape. The *Spiral Jetty*'s environmental make-up is thus subject to the disintegrating logics of geological time and human time: through the Jetty's materiality and metaphysicality as an endangered artifact, its dual logics simultaneously evoke the past as well as drawing the future into sharper focus.

Earthwork and the aesthetic of entropology seem out of kilter with the dominant culture from which they originate. Rather than sitting neatly within a postmodernist paradigm, they hold contemporary resonance, particularly with regards to historicity and affect. Not only has Levi-Strauss's concept continued to bear critical weight in studies of cultural anthropology in the twenty-first century,<sup>28</sup> but both Earthworks and the aesthetic of entropology have strong on-going artistic and literary traditions. Contemporary Earthwork and environmentally conscious twenty-first century art includes Chris Drury's numerous works outside (for instance, *Heart of Reeds*), Daniel McCormick's *The Watershed: An Ecological Installation*, David Maisel's aerial photographs (particularly the *American Mine* and *The Lake Project*), and James Turrell's *Roden Crater* (although the land was purchased in 1979, the project only came to completion in the twenty-first century).<sup>29</sup>

In literary studies, eco-criticism, eco-literature, and eco-poetics have flourished since the 1980s<sup>30</sup> and, unsurprisingly, it is in this realm that ‘entropology’ resurfaces. Dissatisfied with ‘eco-poetics’ as too broad a term, Jonathan Skinner proposes four subcategories, each defined by their relationship to the natural world and by their stylistic traits. Skinner’s third category is ‘*entropological* poetics’ (original emphasis) which, acknowledging Robert Smithson as the stimulus, Skinner describes as:

[A] practice engaged at the level of materials and processes, where entropy, transformation and decay are part of the creative work. Any “concrete” writing focused primarily on procedures of the letter might fall into this category [...] but also other kinds of “writing” that involve marking the land or natural processes and that might more properly be considered under the rubric of visual arts.<sup>31</sup>

These concrete or land-based literary works would, obviously, still need to be thematically interested in the environment. Skinner’s category of entropological poetics appears to uphold, relatively faithfully, the sentiment behind Smithson’s aesthetic employment of Levi-Strauss’s concept in that form and content, style and substance, are allied in their engagement with ecological concerns. Although *Theories of Forgetting* is a novel (rather than a work of poetry), it most certainly possesses an entropological aesthetic. This is perhaps unavoidable, since Alana, one of the central characters, is making a film about Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty*: his Earthwork is therefore an explicit stimulus for Olsen’s novel too and the term ‘entropology’ is presented in Alana’s documentation of Smithson’s praise for Levi-Strauss’s concept.<sup>32</sup>

Olsen’s *Theories of Forgetting* is not alone as a contemporary novel inspired by Earthwork, Land Artists, and/or the environment. Rachel Kushner’s *The Flamethrowers* (2014), for instance, features a young art school graduate in the 1970s who, impressed by Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty*, wants to create her own Earthwork.<sup>33</sup> The Salton Sea—a lake formed accidentally in 1905 from the overflow of water from the Colorado River,

which was initially idyllic but now (resulting from rising salt, selenium, and pesticides) seems more like a shrinking toxic soup where sea life and water birds are dying—and the nearby Salvation Mountain appear in novels such as Gayle Brandeis’s *The Book of Dead Birds* (2003), Marisa Silver’s *The God of War* (2008), and William T. Vollmann’s *The Royal Family* (2000) and his non-fiction *Imperial* (2009).<sup>34</sup> Like *Theories of Forgetting*, such works engage with the theme of entropology and, in doing so, can be read as anthropocene fictions<sup>35</sup> – an archetypal metamodern genre (or, at least, a twenty-first century literary trend that resonates beyond the postmodern) – presenting ‘challenges to twentieth-century modes of narrative’ because they ‘successfully reconfigure the historical relationship between fiction and truth-telling; alter assumptions of how humans relate to place; reimagine social and political organization; or rearticulate the global, mechanized, consumer economies of the twenty-first century’.<sup>36</sup>

In *Theories of Forgetting*, Lance Olsen utilizes both form and content to engage with the environment and human existence. The importance of form for Olsen is evidenced in his decision to take an additional six months to complete *Theories of Forgetting* in order to learn to use the computer program InDesign so that he could lay out the pages.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, Olsen views the materiality of the literary text, what he calls its ‘architectonics’, as politically expressive:

So-called experimental fiction teaches us a fundamental political lesson over and over again, as much through its structural complications as through its thematics: that the text of the text, the text of our lives, and the text of the world can and should be other than they are.<sup>38</sup>

Both the innovative form of *Theories of Forgetting* as well as its narrative content are crucial to its entropological poetics, as the ensuing analysis demonstrates.

## **Entropological Poetics in *Theories of Forgetting***

The innovative formal design of *Theories of Forgetting* is immediately obvious to readers: you pick up *Theories of Forgetting* and realize that you are looking at the back cover (featuring synopsis, endorsement, author bio, cover credits, and barcode) so you turn it over, only to find on the other side the same identical back cover flipped 180 degrees. Looking at the inside pages offers little clarity: both sides include title, copyright pages, and dedication, leading to the start of the narrative(s) proper. The covers are, ultimately, designed to create confusion and disorientation (manifesting the forgetfulness of the novel's title): it's simply not clear which is the front and which is the back, and therefore at which side of the book you should start reading.

The novel itself is composed of three narratives. There is the first-person diary (presented in Adobe Garamond Pro typeface) of Alana, a middle-aged filmmaker who is making a documentary about Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, and who is suffering from an epidemic disease; starting at the other side of the book is a third-person narrative (presented in American Typewriter font) of a character referred to as 'the man' but who – through his memories of scenes that also appear in Alana's diary – readers are likely to interpret as Hugh, Alana's husband, who journeys from their home in Utah across Europe and then into the Middle East following his wife's death, as he seems simultaneously to try to remember and to forget. Each narrative starts where the other ends and crosses in the middle, and each page features both (at 180 degree angles to each other).<sup>39</sup> Finally, the third narrative takes the form of blue marginalia throughout the book (realized in Georges typeface, designed to look like handwriting), penned by Alana and Hugh's daughter Aila, an art critic working in Berlin, seemingly addressed to her brother.

Olsen has acknowledged Robert Smithson's 'astounding' Earthwork, *Spiral Jetty*, as the 'formal influence' and 'shape that most influenced the writing of *Theories* both in terms of structure and content'; the placement of the narratives on the pages and the relationships between them therefore 'take the contours of a kind of spiral spinning in on itself'.<sup>40</sup> The book's design, therefore, not only offers readers – as Joe Sacksteder puts it – 'the literary equivalent of walking the Jetty',<sup>41</sup> it is central to the novel's entropological poetics, capturing the integrative and disintegrative nature of human relationships and human life within the book as a metaphorical instantiation of an Earthwork landscape. The three narratives come together in *Theories of Forgetting* to produce a whole, and that whole can be read as a kind of complex system – in this case, a family – but through the course of the novel that system becomes more dispersed, disintegrating: Alana's narrative leads ultimately to her death; Hugh's to his reactionary, mysterious disappearance in Jordan; whilst Aila's marginal comments appear to echo into a silent void as she addresses questions to a brother – about her mother's condition and father's disappearance – who never seems to reply (at least, not in writing within the novel).

Moreover, the concrete realization of the novel, its material type, also disintegrates: in Alana's narrative, the text and images (such as photos of the *Spiral Jetty*) turn from black to grey at the end; in Hugh's, the type pale from the start perhaps as a result of his grief, fewer and fewer words appear until the final page shows only an incomplete 3-word fragment. Yuriy Taranawsky consequently describes the relationship between Alana and Hugh's narratives as:

[...] strong and clear contrasting with weak and fuzzy at the beginning and the other way around at the end, alluding to the inevitable process in nature for everything that is born—you start out strong and fade out to nothing in the end.<sup>42</sup>

Another way to put this, of course, is that the book design and narrative structure work together entropologically. Whilst they represent the environment, taking the form of Smithson's Earthwork, they also demonstrate that human life – emotional and physical – is entropic, always in the process of disintegration from birth to inevitable death.

The next two subsections of this article analyze Olsen's portrayal of human fragility and the environment in *Theories of Forgetting*. Whilst treating each theme in turn, the analysis ultimately shows them to be intimately, entropologically, connected.

***Human Fragility in the World: 'it's just the way it is living inside a human body'***

From Alana's first diary entry, *Theories of Forgetting*'s preoccupation with the fragility of the human body and mind is evident:

21 June

Something is happening to me.

I wasn't sure at first. Now I am. A glary gray migraine aura. A sheet of plastic lowering between me & me.

The same sort of feeling when you suspect flu has begun scattering through your bloodstream: the peculiar ache behind your eyes, the poisonous ghost at the back of your throat ::: and then again, you say to yourself, maybe you've just worn yourself down lately. It happens. Maybe all you need is a glass of orange juice, some extra sleep, a handful of echinacea.<sup>43</sup>

Lexis relating illness to the body is rife in this opening: 'migraine', 'flu', and 'ache' are complemented by 'bloodstream', 'eyes', and 'back of your throat'. Alana's uncertainty about how to interpret these physical symptoms is communicated by the abstract noun '[s]omething' and by the epistemic modality of the verb phrases 'wasn't sure' and 'suspect' and the repeated adverb 'maybe'. Her uncertainty is, moreover, emphasized

by vocabulary that possesses more mystic connotations – such as ‘aura’ and ‘poisonous ghost’ as well as the self-estranging metaphor ‘A sheet of plastic lowering between me & me’ – and these insinuate that Alana may be suffering from a somewhat more ominous illness than ‘migraine’ or ‘flu’. Even so, Alana dismisses such an interpretation, self-reflexively prescribing herself common-place treatments (‘orange juice’, ‘sleep’, ‘echinacea’). In this opening passage, then, Olsen emphasizes that the human body is an imperfect system, continually struggling to ward off disintegration in the form of disease and sickness, and that experience is fragmented between body and mind.

Also present in Alana’s opening diary entry is a strange cluster of four semicolons ‘;:;:’. Olsen won a fellowship at the American Academy in Berlin to write *Theories of Forgetting*. At the same time and also published concurrently, Olsen produced a small book, described in its cover synopsis as ‘part critical meditation and part trash diary’, called *[[ there. ]]*. In it, Olsen questions ‘why we should stop at 14 punctuation marks in English’ and goes on to suggest the addition of two new punctuation marks, one of which – ‘;:;:’ – represents ‘what cannot be articulated accurately’.<sup>44</sup> The punctuation mark in Alana’s opening diary thus adds to Olsen’s representation of psychosomatic fragmentation: the mind is unable to necessarily comprehend or articulate the symptoms experienced by the body.

Over the course of the novel, Alana’s health deteriorates. From this strange foreboding of indecipherable illness, Alana’s fingertips repeatedly prickle, the tingling sensation spreading to her hands. Trying to make sense of it, she lists various conditions in her diary – Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, Dupuytren’s Contracture, Focal Dystonia or Writer’s Cramp, Ganglion Cysts, Nerve Injuries, Neuropathy, Tendonitis – eventually telling her husband Hugh and consulting doctors. Alana’s preoccupation with her ailing



hands extends to the images she includes: x-rays of hands (perhaps her own during the medical testing process), drawings of hands, and sign language instructions. It is, of course, significant that Olsen chose hands as the starting point for Alana's mysterious disease, as another diary entry insinuates:

13 July

The hand is the primary organ for manipulating the human environment.

29 major and minor bones, 29 major joints, 123 named ligaments, 34 muscles responsible for moving the fingers, 48 named nerves, 30 arteries.

Our fingernails are in reality modified hairs.

Our sense of ~~touch~~ touch is intimately associated with our ~~houn~~ hands, which can form fists, point, prod, emphasize, draw, hold, make, brandish, type, play, pat, signal, stroke, sign, salute, caress, warn, high five, wave hello and goodbye.<sup>45</sup>

This entry similarly links body and mind: it features biomedical information and the list of action verbs, which characterise what hands can physically do, implies a range of human intentions. The final verb in the list – 'wave hello and goodbye' – is perhaps most meaningful since it suggests the role of hands in creating human relationships. Moreover, since the hand is 'the primary organ for manipulating the human environment', Alana's illness can thus be perceived as entropological in that it symbolizes a breakdown not only in human interaction but also in human engagement with the world.

Alana's condition also affects the clarity of her mind, with misspellings and text placed under erasure becoming representative of her state of cognitive disintegration. Initially, these mistakes are few-and-far between, and might appear (as those in the above diary entry) as errors or amendments made during the writing process. However, these slippages increase across the novel with Alana's mortal decline. As such, Olsen's

material, concrete-poetic realization of Alana's deteriorating mental health inscribes a form of neurological realism into the text.<sup>46</sup> At times, Olsen's wordplay also places Alana's condition in relation to the environment, for instance when Alana's diary quotes Hugh's statement 'Wait and see' in error, initially, as '~~Wait and see~~'.<sup>47</sup> Alana's disease, both in its physical symptoms and cognitive consequences, is, therefore, a metaphor for the entropological relationship between humankind and the Earth.

Alana is not, in fact, suffering alone. Newspaper clippings extracted in Alana's diary contextualize her illness first as an epidemic and eventually as a pandemic – according to the World Health Organization (WHO) – with the widespread contagion of the pandemic made clear from the rising death counts, categorized according to world geography (starting in Canada and moving across the world), also provided by Alana.<sup>48</sup> In her diary, Alana reveals the name for this disease: 'The Frost, they're referring to it as'.<sup>49</sup> Just as the symptoms of the disease stand as an entropological metaphor so, too, does its name. Frost is a process in nature referring to the formation of ice crystals when the temperature drops below freezing (often at night). As the name of the pandemic, 'The Frost' therefore links the health of the human body and mind to natural processes and by extension temperature changes in the environment. Ultimately, then, *Theories of Forgetting* can be read as an example of what Heather Houser calls ecosickness fiction, since it 'deploy[s] affect in narratives of sick bodies to bring readers to environmental consciousness'.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, ecosickness is a recurrent theme within fiction of the anthropocene.

In her marginalia, Aila – Hugh and Alana's daughter – writes that she received an email from her mother 'shortly after she was diagnosed', saying "'Please don't worry too much about my medical news, sweetheart. It's just the way it is living inside a human body.'"<sup>51</sup> In these lines, Olsen reminds readers that whilst the novel's pandemic

‘The Frost’ is a dystopic creation<sup>52</sup>, human bodies are – by their very nature – entropic. Doing so appears to be a conscious raising scheme: human bodies are fragile and evanescent. The end of nature, the anthropocene, and humankind’s entropological relationship with the Earth mean that the planet, too, needs thinking of as fragile and, perhaps, also ephemeral.

***The Environment around Humanity: “the consummate embrace of the countless quiet catastrophes taking place around us”***

One of the central ways in which entropology and the environment surface in *Theories of Forgetting* is through the novel’s explicit engagement with Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty*. Alana’s current film project is described as:

[...] a short documentary exploring her accruing awareness that Smithson’s signature work didn’t only change from year to year, season to season, day to day, hour to hour, second to second, an Impressionist’s perfection, depending on the texture of the light, how it veils, what it stresses, the level and tincture of the water, the quality of the clouds, the consistency of the atmosphere, the person you were when you observed it then and the person you were when you observed it then, which was, needless to say,

Smithson’s specific point: that all experience of his sculpture is by nature ~~brazen~~ brazenly haptic, brazenly full-body sensory involvement with space and place; that you can’t so much look at the Spiral Jetty as be in and among it, which is to be in and among landscape.<sup>53</sup>

This description emphasizes both the ecological properties of the Earthwork – changing with the natural world – and the human experience of it. Such an experience is physical – ‘brazenly haptic, brazenly body sensory involvement’ – but also situational, bringing the human subject into a relationship with the Earth, with ‘space and place’, located ‘in and among landscape’.

The syntactic repetition and Alana's underlining of the word 'then' in 'the person you were when you observed it then and the person you were when you observed it then' suggest not only is temporality embedded in the materiality of the Jetty and the dialogue it has with its own site and geological time; the Jetty also produces reflection on the viewer's own changes, changes of self-identity but perhaps also biological cell regeneration, whereby the various cells in the human body move through processes of division, regeneration, and decay. This interpretation is reinforced by Alana's typo, 'accuring', at the start of the passage. Given Alana's illness, Olsen's neologism appears to privilege the word 'cure', that is relief from symptoms of disease. Moreover, because 'accuring' seems to replace 'accruing' (based on its context in the sentence), the typo, similarly to Smithson's Jetty, evokes both material decay (in its neologistic reference to biological wellbeing) as well as a temporal process (of accumulation). In interview, Olsen has said of *Theories of Forgetting*:

The formalistics of entropy reiterate the thematics of entropy, not only at the level of the biological individual, but at that of the increasingly impoverished planet. Like *Spiral Jetty*, our environment is not-so-slowly sinking into sand, wasting itself away, becoming, in a sense, illegible.<sup>54</sup>

Olsen makes explicit that *Theories of Forgetting* echoes the entropological aesthetics of Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, in that humanity and the planet are subject to equivalent processes of disintegration, and their fates entwined.

Alana's research for the documentary is manifest in her diary, wherein she includes biological information about Robert Smithson, often quoting him directly or summarizing his views. Resultantly, Smithson's voice – his opinions on the relationship between art and environment – is a strong presence in *Theories of Forgetting*'s textuality. For instance, Alana describes a lecture Smithson delivered in 1972, 'advocating a mediation between ecology and industry by means of recycling such

culturally dismissed sites as open-pit mines into earthworks.<sup>55</sup> Additionally, when outlining the debate over the erosion of the *Spiral Jetty* and whether it should be restored and protected – particularly in the face of an application from the Pearl Montana oil company to drill into the site around the Jetty – Alana writes that, for Smithson, it ‘would have meant the apotheosis of his aesthetics of entropy, the consummate embrace of the countless quiet catastrophes taking place around us, always and all ways, if only we could be awake enough, brake enough, to pay attention.’<sup>56</sup> Smithson did speak, unambiguously, of entropy relative to the environment:

One might even say that the whole energy crisis is in a form of entropy. The earth is a closed system, there’s only a certain amount of resources and of course there’s an attempt to reverse entropy through the recycling of garbage.<sup>57</sup>

His reference to ‘recycling’ implicates humankind’s role in the process of geological entropy – both disintegration and potential reintegration. Likewise, Olsen’s wordplay in Alana’s writing expresses entropology. Olsen’s homophonic repetition in ‘always and allways’ (as with ‘accuring’) inscribes both temporality and physicality<sup>58</sup>. Moreover, Alana’s misspelling of ‘brave’ as ‘brake’ not only injects assonantal sound-patterning into the text (rhyming with [ei] in ‘awake’ and ‘pay’); in the context of ‘be awake enough, brake enough, to pay attention’, it also highlights the end of nature. To have any positive impact on climate change, humanity must ‘awake’ from apathy and ‘pay attention’, must act to put the ‘brake[s]’, so to speak, on entropology.

Humankind’s response to climate change also arises thematically in Hugh’s narrative. After Alana’s death, Hugh – in a state of avoidant grief – travels, first across Europe (London, Athens) then, whilst becoming increasingly disorientated and cognitively impaired, to the Middle East where he is recruited, somewhat unwittingly, into a cult: the Sleeping Beauties, so named because their principal action is the taking

of powerful barbiturates in order to ignore the destructive nature of humankind's existence on the planet. Essentially, the Sleeping Beauties practice inertia – the very thing Levi-Strauss saw as a consequence of civilization. Furthermore, in the cult's attempt to indoctrinate Hugh, its spokesperson lists – over the course of fourteen pages – the numerous sins humankind has committed against the planet (including oil consumption, deforestation, the water crisis, factory farming, ocean acidification, amongst others) before highlighting the political, legislative inaction of governments in protecting the environment. The Sleeping Beauties ultimately believe that humanity's characteristic act is 'ecophagy', the destructive consumption of the Earth's ecosystem.<sup>59</sup> Finally, the end of nature is located in history:

That history's real lesson is how the world is today will absolutely, positively not be how it is tomorrow?

And/or that future humans will therefore someday look back on us, here, now, with a mixture of dumbfounded awe, deep-structure exasperation, and unadulterated loathing in the face of what we allowed to happen?<sup>60</sup>

As Olsen's prose demonstrates, the end of nature forces humans to think historically – to place ourselves within a larger narrative of geological time and of human evolution. For the Sleeping Beauties, the conceptual confrontation with humankind's role in the decline of the planet results in feelings of shame and powerlessness so they treat these 'symptoms' with drugs that obliterate their conscious awareness. In *Theories of Forgetting*, it seems important that Olsen presents such entropological facts as questions: although the Sleeping Beauties hide from the harsh realities of the anthropocene, the questions place the addressee – Hugh, but also the reader – in a position of potential agency: how humanity responds needs to be seen as a choice, both individual and collective.

Hugh, in fact, does not succumb to the Sleeping Beauties' inertia, managing to escape from the confines of the cult. As he flees, he travels into the middle of the desert of the Wadi Rum where his narrative ends. In fact, both Hugh's and Alana's narratives end in entropic landscapes: Hugh in the desert and Alana at Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (though Alana's presence at the Jetty is probably a memory or hallucination). The desert in Hugh's narrative is a supreme symbol of 'geological exhaustion'.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, describing North America's Great Basin, Alana appears to preempt Hugh's closing experiences, once again interweaving environment with human experience: 'The high desert's combination of severity, immensity, and shock make you conscious of your own breathing, how you negotiate this breath, then this one, then the one after that.'<sup>62</sup>

Olsen's writing implies that the direction of Hugh's escape, from the cult to the desert, is deliberate; that – unable to cope with his grief over his wife's death – Hugh is seeking to obliterate himself. In the final pages, Hugh's narrative is flooded with memories of Alana's illness, of his and Alana's life together. In wandering the desert, Hugh seeks his own inertia – not dissimilar from the practice of the Sleeping Beauties – just as the third-person style of this narrative enacts a psychological distancing from the painful reality of Alana's death. Significantly, in the closing moments, Hugh faces indecision about his own fate and as he does so, the narrative toys with first-person 'I' ('I can manage it'<sup>63</sup>). He realizes, though, that 'in the end everything is about oxygen'<sup>64</sup> – for the body, for the planet.

Alana's death is symbolized in the faded closing lines of her narrative as both the endurance of love but the failure of the human body: "the heart is allways the least to go away'. Hugh's death, in parallel, situates the body in the larger cosmos: 'The stars are the first to go away. And then the—'<sup>65</sup>. As such, the endings of both central narratives of *Theories of Forgetting*, set in entropic landscapes, place humankind at the

heart of the decaying natural world, their fates – the possible death or end of humans and nature – entwined. Using ellipsis at the end of Hugh's narrative, moreover, Olsen presents those joint destinies as an unfinished story. Whilst humans today might be in the epoch of the anthropocene, the future is – as yet – unwritten.

### ***Theories of Forgetting, the Aesthetics of Entropology, and the Metamodern***

*Theories of Forgetting* presents the relationship between human life and the environment as entropological – a concept that has travelled from Lévi-Strauss's anthropological reflections through Robert Smithson's Earthwork aesthetic and into contemporary literature as a form of ecopoetics. Expressing the possible 'end of nature', Olsen manifests entropology both in the material substance of the book, its codex form and language, as well as through its narrative themes. *Theories of Forgetting* is, in Olsen's words, 'obsessed with entropology all the way down—from its architectonics to poor Alana and Hugh (which is to say poor you and me) to various linguistic undoings, from failing sentences to crossed-out words and deliberate misspellings.'<sup>66</sup> Just as 'Landmarks create accounts, chronologies'<sup>67</sup>, so too does discourse – scientific, philosophical, literary. By emphasizing the veracity and urgency of humankind's entropological impact on the environment, Olsen's *Theories of Forgetting* is representative not just of ecoliterature in the epoch of the anthropocene, but also of a metamodern (or post-postmodern) sensibility. This is because novels like *Theories of Forgetting* ask readers to think beyond climate change.

Considering the current dominant culture (as manifest in shopping malls and city design) and the potentialities of science-fiction writing, Fredric Jameson writes:



I think it would be better to characterize all this in terms of History, a History that we cannot imagine except as ending, and whose future seems to be nothing but a monotonous repetition of what is already here. The problem is how to locate radical difference, how to jumpstart the sense of history so that it begins again to transmit feeble signals of time, of otherness, of change, of Utopia. The problem to be solved is that of breaking out of the windless present of the postmodern back into real historical time, and a history made by human beings.<sup>68</sup>

*Theories of Forgetting* imagines a near dystopic future in which a pandemic threatens life and the planet's decline has given rise to (cultish) apathy. Its aesthetic of entropology is an assertion of the end of nature and a plea for humanity to reboot (rather than inertly accept the end of) history. Imagining a possible future enables us to retrospectively look back on ourselves in the historical present, to feel the affective force of our predicament, and contemplate how next to act – how, in other words, to complete Olsen's words: 'And then the—'.

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<sup>1</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman. (London: Penguin, 1973 [1955]), p. 413-414.

<sup>2</sup> Stanley Diamond, *In Search of the Primitive: A Critique of Civilization* (New York; London: Routledge, 2009 [1974]), p. 95.

<sup>3</sup> James Clifford, 'On Collecting Art and Culture', in Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Cornel West (eds.), *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art; Cambridge, MA; London: The MIT Press, 1990), pp.141–169 (p. 159).

<sup>4</sup> For instance, see Christian Moraru, *Cosmodernism: American Narrative, Late Globalization, and the New Cultural Imaginary* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2011). The importance of 1989 is also discussed from a planetary perspective by Amy J. Elias and Christian Moraru, 'Introduction: The Planetary Condition', in Amy J. Elias and Christian

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Moraru (eds.) *The Planetary Turn: Relationality and Geoaesthetics in the Twenty-First Century* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2015), pp. xi–xxxvii.

<sup>5</sup> Fukuyama's first thesis on 'the end of history' appeared in his article 'The End of History?', *The National Interest* 16 (Summer 1989), pp.3–18. It was further developed three years later in his book *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin, 2012 [1992]).

<sup>6</sup> Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (New York: Random House, 2006 [1989]).

<sup>7</sup> Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature*, p. 41.

<sup>8</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

<sup>9</sup> Francis Fukuyama, 'The Future of History: Can Liberal Democracy survive the Decline of the Middle Class?', *Foreign Affairs* 91.1 (Jan/Feb 2012), pp. 53–61.

<sup>10</sup> Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, 'The "Anthropocene"', *IGBP [International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme] Newsletter* 41 (May 2000), pp. 17–18 (p.17). Crutzen is generally accredited with having coined the term 'anthropocene', though his article in nature succeeds the aforementioned co-authored piece: see Paul J. Crutzen, 'Geology of Mankind', *Nature* 415 (3 January 2002), p. 23.

<sup>11</sup> Timothy Clark traces some of the most forceful accounts of the anthropocene as a cultural age in the humanities in *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept* (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2015). In particular, he points to work by: Tom Cohen, Claire Colebrook, and J. Hillis Miller in *Theory and the Disappearing Future* (London: Routledge, 2012); Timothy Morton in *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013); Tobias Menely and Margaret Ronda in 'Red', in Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (ed.) *Prismatic Ecology: Ecotheory Beyond Green* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), pp. 22–41; and Slavoj Žižek in *Living in the End Times* (London: Verso, 2010). See also Theo Savvas's article in this issue.

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- <sup>12</sup> Robin van den Akker and Timotheus Vermeulen, ‘Periodising the 2000s, or, the Emergence of Metamodernism’, in Robin van den Akker, Alison Gibbons, and Timotheus Vermeulen (eds) *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth after Postmodernism* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), pp. 1–19 (p. 17).
- <sup>13</sup> Lance Olsen, *Theories of Forgetting* (Tuscaloosa, AL: FC2, 2014).
- <sup>14</sup> Robert Smithson, ‘ “...The Earth, Subject to Cataclysms, is a Cruel Master” (1971): Interview with Gregoire Müller’, in Jack Flam (ed.), *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 253–261 (p. 257).
- <sup>15</sup> Whilst Smithson spoke often of entropy, he explicitly praises Lévi-Strauss’s conception of entropology in the above interview (footnote 14) as well as in Paul Cummings, ‘Interview with Robert Smithson for the Archives of American Art/Smithsonian Institution (1972): Interview conducted by Paul Cummings July 14 and 19, 1972’, in Jack Flam (ed.), *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 270–300 (p. 299).
- <sup>16</sup> Robert Smithson, ‘Entropy and the New Monuments’, in Jack Flam (ed.), *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 10–23 (p. 11).
- <sup>17</sup> Robert Smithson, ‘Entropy and the New Monuments’, p. 11.
- <sup>18</sup> Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001 [1996]), p. 38.
- <sup>19</sup> Fredric Jameson, ‘The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism’, in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London; New York: Verso, 1991 [1984]), pp. 1–54. Jameson’s three axes of postmodern culture are also considered – as postmodern characteristics as well as contemporary rethinks – in Robin van den Akker, Alison Gibbons, and Timotheus Vermeulen (eds.), *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth after Postmodernism*.

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- <sup>20</sup> Gerhard Hoffman, *From Modernism to Postmodernism: Concepts and Strategies of Postmodern American Fiction* (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2005), p. 171.
- <sup>21</sup> Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (New York: Viking, 1973) and 'Entropy', in *Slow Learner* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012 [1984]).
- <sup>22</sup> Kurt Vonnegut, *Cat's Cradle: A Novel* (New York: Dial Press, 2010 [1963]).
- <sup>23</sup> John Barth, 'Posttape' in *Giles Goat-Boy* (New York: Anchor Books, 2012 [1966]), pp. 697–708, and *LETTERS: A Novel* (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1994 [1979]).
- <sup>24</sup> William Gaddis, 'The Rush for Second Place: Missed victories in America', *Harper's* 252.1571 (April 1981), p. 35. Gaddis's novel *JR* has been explicitly discussed in relation to entropy, with a focus on the character of Jack Gibbs by Thomas M. Sawyer, 'JR: The narrative of entropy', *International Fiction Review* 10, pp. 117–22, and by David Buehrer, 'Personal Entropy and Satiric "Incorporation" of Characters in William Gaddis's *JR*', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 53.4 (2012), pp. 366–380.
- <sup>25</sup> Gerhard Hoffman, *From Modernism to Postmodernism*, p. 301.
- <sup>26</sup> Robert Shane, 'Rozel Point: Robert Smithson', in Amanda Renshaw (ed.) *Art & Place: Site-Specific Art of the Americas* (London; New York: Phaidon, 2013), pp. 56–57 (p. 56).
- <sup>27</sup> Robert Smithson, ' "...The Earth, Subject to Cataclysms, is a Cruel Master" (1971): Interview with Gregoire Müller', p. 298.
- <sup>28</sup> For instance, Roberts employs 'entropology' as representative of a 'conscientious' critical approach to the meeting of Western and other cultures (and the inevitable disintegration of each through contact) in Modernist narratives: Kathleen Glenister Roberts, *Alterity and Narrative: Stories and the Negotiation of Western Identities* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007), pp. 143–170 (p. 159). Similarly, Michaelsen evokes Levi-Strauss's concept in his consideration of what affective sentiments – particularly empathy, loss, and sorrow – can contribute to anthropological study: Scott J. Michaelsen, 'Our Sentiments', in Scott J. Michaelsen and David E. Johnson, *Anthropology's Wake: Attending*

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to the End of Culture (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2008), pp. 58–80

(‘entropylogy’ is specifically discussed, pp. 78–9).

- <sup>29</sup> Direct links are drawn between Land Art/Earthwork from the twentieth century and from contemporary art by Oliver Lowenstein, ‘Twenty First Century Land Art’, *Fourthdoor: Unstructured* 4 (Online: [http://www.fourthdoor.co.uk/unstructured/unstructured\\_04/article4\\_4.php](http://www.fourthdoor.co.uk/unstructured/unstructured_04/article4_4.php), 2009). David Maisel’s aesthetic is directly compared to Robert Smithson’s through entropylogy by Micah Messenheimer, ‘On Entropylogy’, in Thomas Brent Smith (ed.) *Elevating Western American Art: Developing an Institute in the Cultural Capital of the Rockies* (Denver: Petrie Institute of Western American Art, 2012), pp. 174–179. Peter Selz discusses both twentieth and some twenty-first century earthwork artists in ‘Toward a Sustainable Earth’, in *Art of Engagement: Visual Politics in California and Beyond* (Berkeley; Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 223–246.
- <sup>30</sup> For a brief overview, see Cheryll Glotfelty, ‘Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis’, in Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (eds.) *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (Athens; London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. xv–xxxvii.
- <sup>31</sup> Jonathan Skinner, ‘Statement for the “New Nature Writing” Panel at 2005 AWP (Vancouver)’, *Ecopoetics* 4/5 (2004–2005), pp. 128–129 (p. 128).
- <sup>32</sup> Lance Olsen, *Theories of Forgetting*, p. A241–242. *Theories of Forgetting* has two narratives starting from opposing sides of the book. Both sides have page numbers, so for clarity I use ‘A’ for Alana’s narrative or ‘H’ for Hugh’s in my references.
- <sup>33</sup> Rachel Kushner, *The Flamethrowers* (London: Vintage, 2014).
- <sup>34</sup> Gayle Brandeis, *The Book of Dead Birds* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003); Marisa Silver, *The God of War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008); William T. Vollmann *The Royal Family* (New York: Penguin, 2000) and *Imperial* (New York: Penguin, 2009).

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- <sup>35</sup> Adam Trexler, *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change* (Charlottesville; London: University of Virginia Press).
- <sup>36</sup> Adam Trexler, *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change*, p. 14 & p. 16.
- <sup>37</sup> Christian Schultz, 'Be More Extreme: Interview with Author Lance Olsen', *Slug Magazine*, (Online: <https://www.slugmag.com/book-reviews/be-more-extreme-lance-olsen/>, 8 April 2017).
- <sup>38</sup> Olsen speaking in interview with John Domini, 'Lance Olsen with John Domini: *Theories of Forgetting*', *The Brooklyn Rail: Critical Perspectives on Art, Politics, and Culture* (Online: <http://brooklynrail.org/2014/05/books/lance-olsen>, 6 May 2014).
- <sup>39</sup> A parallel can be drawn between the graphological layout of Alana's and Hugh's narratives on the page and the layout of Mark Z. Danielewski's *Only Revolutions* (London: Doubleday, 2006), which similarly places the narratives of its two central characters – Sam and Hailey – at 180 degree angles.
- <sup>40</sup> John Domini, 'Lance Olsen with John Domini: *Theories of Forgetting*', online. Interestingly, as well as being used by Olsen in *Theories of Forgetting*, the spiral shape is also a recurrent figure in Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (London: Doubleday, 2000). Olsen's awareness of the latter is evidenced in his critical work *[[ there. ]]* (Fort Wayne, IN: Anti-Oedipus Press, 2014), in which he writes about 'that enormous spiral staircase in Danielewski's *House of Leaves*' (p. 52).
- <sup>41</sup> Joe Sacksteder, 'Theories of Forgetting by Lance Olsen' [Review], *Heavy Feather Review* (Online: <https://heavyfeatherreview.com/2014/06/18/theories-of-forgetting-by-lance-olsen/>, no date).
- <sup>42</sup> Yuriy Taranawsky, 'Forgetting Things Present' [Review], *American Book Review* 35.2 (2014), pp. 17 & 29 (p. 17).
- <sup>43</sup> Lance Olsen, *Theories of Forgetting*, p. A13–14.
- <sup>44</sup> Lance Olsen, *[[ there. ]]*, p. 26, p. 28.

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<sup>45</sup> Lance Olsen, *Theories of Forgetting*, p. A85.

<sup>46</sup> The term ‘neurological realism’ comes from Charles B. Harris, ‘The Story of the Self: *The Echo Maker* and Neurological Realism’, in Stephen J. Burn and Peter Dempsey (eds), *Intersections: Essays on Richard Powers* (Champaign; London: Dalkey Archive Press, 2008), pp. 230–259. Two similar genre terms exist. The first is the ‘neuronarrative’ from Gary Johnson, ‘Consciousness as Content: Neuronarratives and the Redemption of Fiction’, *Mosaic* 41.1 (March 2008), pp. 169–184. The second is ‘Neuronovel’ from Marco Roth, ‘The Rise of the Neuronovel’, *n+1* 8 (online: <https://nplusonemag.com/issue-8/essays/the-rise-of-the-neuronovel/>, Fall 2009). All three critics identify the genre using exemplary works of contemporary literature and/or they interpret it as a distinctly contemporary phenomenon.

<sup>47</sup> Lance Olsen, *Theories of Forgetting*, p. A168.

<sup>48</sup> Lance Olsen, *Theories of Forgetting*. See p. A185 and p. A243 for the two-referenced newspaper clippings; the death counts are given on pages A228, A241, A265, and A299.

<sup>49</sup> Lance Olsen, *Theories of Forgetting*, p. A198.

<sup>50</sup> Heather Houser, *Ecosickness In Contemporary U.S. Fiction: Environment and Affect* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), p. 2.

<sup>51</sup> Lance Olsen, *Theories of Forgetting*, p. H47.

<sup>52</sup> In this sense, *Theories of Forgetting* is also an instance of ‘cli-fi’ (sci-fi about climate change), a term that is generally attributed to journalist Dan Bloom; for instance, by Adam Trexler, *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change*, p. 8.

<sup>53</sup> Lance Olsen, *Theories of Forgetting*, p. A156-158; all emphasis original.

<sup>54</sup> John Domini, ‘Lance Olsen with John Domini: *Theories of Forgetting*’, online.

<sup>55</sup> Lance Olsen, *Theories of Forgetting*, p. A143.

<sup>56</sup> Lance Olsen, *Theories of Forgetting*, p. A176.

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- <sup>57</sup> Smithson in interview with Alison Sky, 'Entropy Made Visible (1973): Interview with Alison Sky', in Jack Flam (ed.), *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 301–309 (p. 302).
- <sup>58</sup> The homophonic play of 'always' and 'all ways' resonates with Danielewski's word play – 'allways' – in *Only Revolutions*. Not insignificantly, both novels are interested in temporality whilst their formal design mean that the books must be rotated for both narratives to be read.
- <sup>59</sup> Lance Olsen, *Theories of Forgetting*, p. H218–232 (p. H223).
- <sup>60</sup> Lance Olsen, *Theories of Forgetting*, p. H231.
- <sup>61</sup> Lance Olsen, *Theories of Forgetting*, p. H338.
- <sup>62</sup> Lance Olsen, *Theories of Forgetting*, p. A26.
- <sup>63</sup> Lance Olsen, *Theories of Forgetting*, p. H363.
- <sup>64</sup> Lance Olsen, *Theories of Forgetting*, p. H354.
- <sup>65</sup> Lance Olsen, *Theories of Forgetting*, p. A357 & p. H365-7.
- <sup>66</sup> Christian Schultz, 'Be More Extreme: Interview with Author Lance Olsen', online.
- <sup>67</sup> Lance Olsen, *Theories of Forgetting*, p. A189.
- <sup>68</sup> Fredric Jameson, 'Future City', *New Left Review* 21 (May-June 2003) pp. 65–79 (p. 76).