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"Why do you insist that Alana is not real?" Visitors' perceptions of the fictionality of Andi and Lance Olsen's 'there's no place like time' exhibition

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Chapter 6

"Why do you insist that Alana is not real?": Visitors' Perceptions of the Fictionality of Andi and Lance Olsen's 'there's no place like time' Exhibition

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1. Introduction: There's no artist like Alana Olsen

The American video artist Alana Olsen died in 2016. Her eclectic, experimental body of work has since been shown – in galleries across the United States and Europe – in iterations of an exhibition retrospective titled 'there's no place like time'. There is, however, no escaping one poignant yet problematic fact: Alana Olsen is not real. Rather, she is a fictional character, first imagined by Lance Olsen in his multimodal novel *Theories of Forgetting* (2014; see Gibbons 2019a, forthcoming). The exhibition was subsequently created by Andi Olsen and Lance Olsen, accompanied by a catalogue (Olsen 2016). The 'Alana Olsen' whose work is discussed in the catalogue and exhibited in real-world museums/galleries consequently has a precarious ontological status.

Exhibition retrospectives, like autobiographies, narrativise the trajectory of a life and in this sense rely, experientially in reception, upon what Paul John Eakin calls 'an existential imperative' (1992: 30, 52) – a 'will to believe' (30) in their referentiality. Furthermore, Eakin claims, 'reference lies at the heart of this felt difference' (1992: 29) between autobiography/non-fiction and fiction. This chapter interrogates Eakin's claim through a style-and-response analysis of Andi and Lance Olsen's 'there's no place like time' exhibition. The chapter is therefore characteristic of reader-response research in stylistics wherein, as Whiteley and Canning outline (2017: 73), insights from reception data shed light on stylistic concerns. Specifically, this chapter relates empirical insights to critical understanding of fictionality and the fiction/reality distinction.

In the next section, I introduce the concept of fictionality and review existing empirical research concerning fiction/reality distinctions. Subsequently, I offer a cognitive stylistic analysis of the multimodal composition of 'there's no place like time' in order to explicate signposts of fictionality within the exhibition and to track visitors' potential attention to such signposts. The empirical review and stylistic analysis then informs my own response research, which reports on a questionnaire study. Ultimately, because this chapter's empirical insights advance knowledge about the cognitive processes and experiential consequences of fictionality/referentiality, it bears significance for research conducted not only in stylistics and cognitive stylistics but also in narratology, autobiography studies, museum studies, and reception research.

2. Fictionality and empirical Research: There's no reality like fiction

Fictionality, whilst a slippery term, designates discursive invention; that is, discourse that is not bound to referential accuracy but deals instead with imaginary events and/or persons (cf. Cohn 1999: 15). In the humanities, various approaches to fictionality exist (for reviews, see: Gorman 2005; Schaeffer 2012; Fludernik 2018; Browse et al. 2019; Gibbons 2019c) but, above all, they tend to be philosophical and/or theoretical. Consequently, they tend not to be grounded in, or supported by, cognitive or empirical evidence. In narratology, for instance, the dominant take on fictionality is Nielsen, Phelan, and Walsh's rhetorical approach which, they argue throughout their 2015 article, is founded on 10 theses (my emphases):

1. Fictionality is founded upon *a basic human ability to imagine*;
2. Even as fictive discourse is a clear alternative to nonfictive discourse, the two are closely interrelated in continuous exchange, and so are *the ways in which we engage with them*;
3. The rhetoric of fictionality is founded upon *a communicative intent*;

4. *From the perspective of the sender*, fictionality is a flexible means to accomplish a great variety of ends;

5. *From the perspective of the receiver*, fictionality is *an interpretive assumption about a sender's communicative act*;

6. No formal technique or other textual feature is in itself a necessary and sufficient ground for *identifying* fictive discourse;

7. *Signalling or assuming* a fictive communicative intent entails an *attitude* toward the communicated information that is different from *attitudes* toward nonfictive discourse;

8. Fictionality often provides for *a double exposure* of imagined and real;

9. The affordances of fictionality have - for better or worse – *consequences for the ethos of the sender* – and often for the logic of the global message;

10. The importance of fictionality has been obscured by our traditional focus on fiction as a genre or set of genres.

Generally, I agree with the sentiments expressed by these theses since they consistently gesture towards acts of cognition, perception, stance, and response (as my emphasis highlights). However, the rhetorical approach – underwritten by the concept of narrative as communicative act between discourse producer and receiver – nevertheless treats readers or receivers as hypothetical constructs (on the difference between rhetorical and cognitive approaches, see Phelan 2009). The rhetorical approach, like other existing approaches in the humanities, has not engaged with extant literature in psychology on fictionality. Previous humanities scholarship into fictionality does not, therefore, substantiate reader-responses using empirical evidence about how the mind processes and responds to ontologically different stimuli and thus lacks the critical apparatus to explicate the cognitive processes at work in, and experiential effect of, fiction/reality distinctions.

In my view, cognition is essential to fiction/reality judgment and thus at the heart of any felt difference between fictionality and referentiality. Herein, I conduct a systematic literature review of empirical findings in cognitive, experimental, and developmental psychology concerning the fiction/reality distinction (for other reviews, differing in emphasis, see Prentice and Gerrig 1999; Pettersson 2016; Consoli 2018). My review is divided into two parts: the cognitive development of fiction/reality distinctions and factors effecting fiction/reality judgments.

2.1. The development of fiction/reality distinctions

Distinguishing between reality and fiction is not an innate cognitive ability but develops with age: 3-4 years olds do not systematically differentiate between real and fictional characters (e.g. Abraham Lincoln and Batman) unless familiar to them whereas older children, from 5 to 8 years, do. A marked improvement in children's ability to categorise real and fictional characters and events occurs around 4 years old (e.g. Samuels & Taylor 1994; Sharron & Woolley 2004; Skolnick & Bloom 2006; Sayfan & Lagattut 2008; Corriveau et al. 2009; Bunce & Harris 2014). This critical period coincides with the development of Theory of Mind (ToM) – the capacity to attribute mental states to others (for a summary, see Leslie 2001). Moreover, greater ToM abilities positively correlate with increased fiction/reality distinction (Corriveau & Harris 2015). As Martarelli et al. elaborate, '[u]nderstanding that some mental states represent reality whilst others do not is linked with understanding that certain stories represent reality while others do not' (2015: 112). This interconnection between ToM and fiction/reality distinction is especially meaningful for theories which ground fictionality assessments in readers'/receivers' interpretations about authors'/producers' intentions. Indeed, within cognitive stylistics, Stockwell (2016) and I (Gibbons 2019b, 2019c, forthcoming) argue that ToM necessarily underwrites this process.

Because metacognitive skills are central to fiction/reality judgments, children under 4 years – whose ToM is not fully developed – are over-reliant on real-world experiences and related

knowledge in assessing fiction/reality (Woolley et al. 2011; Woolley & Ghossainy 2013). This produces a bias of disbelief: across media representations including TV and Storybooks, children generally dismiss characters and events as unreal (Wright et al. 1994; Shtulman & Carey 2007; Woolley & Cox 2007). Consequently, Woolley and Ghossainy call children 'naïve skeptics' (2013). With the development of metacognitive skills comes greater awareness of the incompleteness of knowledge. Adults thus behave as discerning believers: 'children may be more likely to deny the existence of novel entities, whereas adults may be more willing to consider the possibility that they exist' (Van Reet et al. 2015: 90; cf. Cook & Sobel 2011; Woolley et al. 2011). Adults' credulity is explained as an automatic result of information processing: 'comprehension includes an initial belief' (Gilbert et al. 1993: 221; cf. Gilbert et al. 1990; Gilbert 1991). Disbelief occurs retroactively, with additional cognitive effort and motivation. Accordingly, Prentice and Gerrig describe readers as 'vulnerable to fictional information because they have (misplaced) faith in the truth standard to which authors subscribe' and 'in the absence of obvious cues to doubt, they will approach information in fiction with the assumption that it applies to the real world' (1999: 531). For adults, then, belief when processing information, including fiction, is the initial, default response.

2.2. *Factors effecting fiction/reality judgment and processing*

Whilst Hartung et al. claim, 'the belief a reader has about whether a story is based on a true event or not has no effect on the experiential aspects of reading' (2017: 12), several studies have investigated the influence of paratext. Prentice and Gerrig suggest that fiction is processed less systematically so assigned greater credulity (1999: 542) and Green et al. (2006) find readers more likely to scrutinize factual discourse. Using text comprehension studies, Zwaan (1994) found that non-fiction was processed faster than fiction and attributes the difference to mental representation: news discourse elicits stronger causal-situation representations whereas processing fiction prompts more detailed representations. Relatedly, Altmann et al. (2014) interpret brain activation patterns as evidence that whilst both non-fiction and fiction entail mental simulations of actions and events,

reading fiction additionally involves simulating protagonists' mental states (e.g. ToM). These conclusions fit with simulation theory, wherein fiction provides 'simulations of selves in the social world' (Mar & Oatley 2008: 173).

Text-based tasks have also been used to discover which parts of the brain are active when reading about fictional characters (e.g. Cinderella) compared with non-fictional/historical figures (e.g. George Bush). Neuro-imaging data suggests that, whilst there are overlapping activation patterns, 'one of the factors that guide our implicit knowledge of what is real and unreal is the degree of coded personal relevance associated with a particular entity/character represented' (Abraham & von Cramon 2009: 4; cf. Abraham et al. 2008; Abraham 2013). Personal relevance not only explains felt differences between real people we know intimately (e.g. our mother) and real people we have never met (Bush), but also why fictional characters of high personal relevance (e.g. encountered frequently, as in immersive videogaming or soap-opera watching) feel more real. Text-comprehension experiments in which discourse entities are ontologically consistent or inconsistent (e.g. 'Harry Potter was talking with Hermione and suddenly [Lord Voldemort/Bill Gates] appeared') demonstrate that clashes between fiction and reality are easily detected (Yang & Xue 2014, 2015). Clashes between different fictional ontologies (e.g. characters from different storyworlds meeting) are also distinguishable but 'reality/fiction mismatch is easier to detect that fiction/fiction mismatch' (Yang & Xue 2015: 170). Nevertheless, personal relevance can blur the fiction/reality distinction. In terms of experience, Sperduti et al. (2016) found emotional responses weaker for fiction than non-fiction but, regardless, emotional responses were heightened if the stimulus was personally relevant. Additionally, whilst fact/fiction labelling does not affect readers' transportedness (Green & Brock 2000) – their sense of being 'absorbed' or 'immersed' – or emotional response, greater transportedness correlates with greater emotional response (Green et al. 2012).

Finally, children and adults alike use narrative context in fiction/reality distinction: the more detailed and realistic the context, the more participants assume that novel entities are real (Woolley & van Reet, 2006; Woolley & Ghossainy 2013). Experience and knowledge are involved in fiction/reality judgment: van Reet et al. argue that 'there appears to be a hierarchy, in which direct experience is viewed as most reliable, then extant knowledge, and last, knowledge from indirect sources' (2015: 96). Factors such as perceived realism, personal experience, and identification with characters can also generate greater transportedness (Green 2004).

2.3. Summary of fictionality and empirical research

The preceding overview shows that, for adults, processing information necessarily entails initial, automatic belief, even for fiction. Disbelief may occur retrospectively, based on motivation and narrative inconsistencies. Many cognitive processes underlying fiction and non-fiction overlap, such as mental representation; the primary difference is that fiction entails greater ToM simulation. Inconsistencies between fiction and reality can be detected, but personal relevance potentially disrupts accurate fiction/reality distinction, intensifying transportedness and emotional response. Greater transportedness as well as reliability and believability are granted to narratives with higher degrees of perceived realism, judgments about which stem from direct experience, extant knowledge, and indirect information.

This review of prior empirical research suggests that, without prior knowledge, visitors to 'there's no place like time' are most likely to believe that Alana Olsen is a real artist, though some may retroactively interrogate this based on perceived narrative realism and external knowledge. If participants find the exhibition personally relevant, the exhibition will probably feel more real to them and be more enjoyable and transportative.

3. Modelling cognition in museums: There's no methodology like cognitive stylistics

My analysis of 'there's no place like time' synthesises models from cognitive stylistics and museum studies – namely Text World Theory, attentional resonance, and the attention-value model. Text World Theory (Werth 1999; Gavins 2007) is ideally suited to investigate visitors' experience because it: uncovers the mental representations triggered by linguistic and multimodal cues (Gibbons 2012); makes a fundamental ontological distinction between *discourse-world* – representing the context in which *participants* communicate – and *text-worlds*, mental representations populated by imagined *enactors*. *World-switches* to new text-worlds are generated by changes in spatio-temporal coordinates, shifts in perspective, and shifts in ontological status as prompted by modality, hypotheticality, and negation. The fictionality or ontological status of text-worlds is cognitively assigned by readers, based on interpretations of textual features and authorial intentionality (Gibbons 2019c).

Because visitors' attention is affected by exhibition design, I integrate the attention-value model in museum studies (Bitgood, 2011: 237-243) with the cognitive-poetic model of attentional resonance (Stockwell 2009). This combination is valuable since the former model was designed specifically for museum analysis whilst the latter is constructed from principles of visual perception. There are three steps of increasing visitor attention in the attention-value model: *capturing*, which includes *orienting* to stimuli and motivated *searching* based on interest and perceived value; *focusing*, which – although an increased attention from orienting – involves shallow processing, exposed to potential *distractors*; and *engaging*, whereby deeper processing facilitates 'sensory, intellectual, or affective immersion' (Bitgood 2011: 239). Visitor attention is captured by *orienting* and *perceptual distractors*, such as sound, light, movement, as well as by *attention facilitators* such as proximity and line-of-sight placement, whilst focusing and engaging are self-motivated by visitors' interest. The concepts of distractors and facilitators in the attention-value model complement Stockwell's model of attentional resonance in which certain features create *figures* of attention (2009: 25).

Figure-forming features that are relevant to the succeeding analysis are empathetic recognisability (the more human, the more engaging), brightness (light and vivid colours attract attention), and height (higher objects are deemed more significant).

In the next section, these frameworks are applied in analysis of 'there's no place like time'. The analytical synthesis provides a context-sensitive, medium-specific approach based on cognitive principles and psychological evidence. It resultantly explicates the influence of exhibition design and style on visitors' experience and their self-reported responses, discussed in Section 5, about the exhibition's ontological status.

4. Exhibition style: *There's no place like time*

The 'there's no place time' exhibition showed at the Snite Museum of Art (at the University of Notre Dame, USA) from 1 September–1 December 2018. Figure 1 shows the location of the exhibition in relation to the lobby and other galleries. As shown in Figure 2, two of the gallery walls are transparent glass, meaning that visitors' can see into the exhibition from the outside. The exhibition title appeared on the glass in white text as follows:

There's No Place Like Time: a novel you can walk through
A retrospective of video artist Alana Olsen

A multimodal installation by Andi & Lance Olsen

This provides paratextual orientation to visitors with the subtitle 'a novel you can walk through' marking 'there's no place like time' as fictional. Whilst the exhibition is described as a 'retrospective' of 'Alana Olsen', an attribution to 'Andi & Lance Olsen' follows. The discourse-

world context of the latter is foregrounded through metatextual reference to the exhibition as
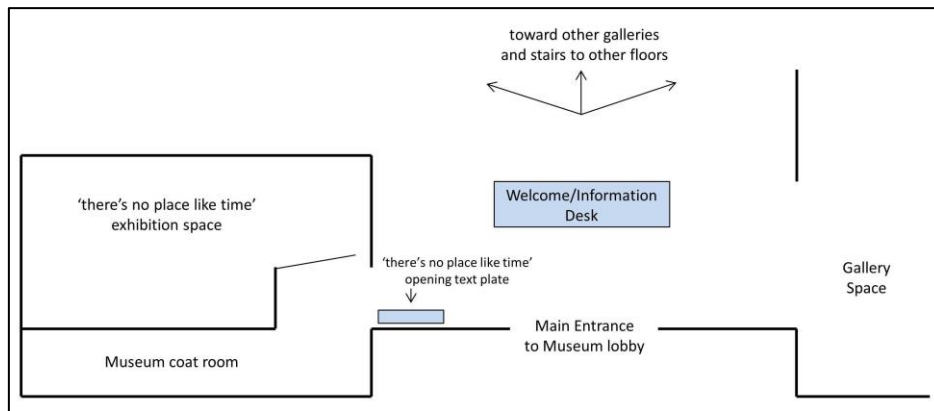
'installation'.

Figure 1: Partial Floorplan of the Snite Museum, showing location of 'there's no place like

time' exhibition.

Figure 2: External exhibition view

Viewers might, therefore, read that 'there's no place like time' is an exhibition of a fictional artist, created by Andi and Lance Olsen. Three attentional factors, however, mitigate this. First, the statement disclosing Andi and Lance Olsen's authorship is less attractive because it is lower than the preceding text and less central in line-of-sight. Second, the brightness of the videos within the exhibition is more attention-capturing than the title's white type so visitors might neglect this information. Third, if visitors do attend to the title, shallow focusing might nevertheless mean that, because of the onomastic similarity between 'Alana Olsen' and 'Andi & Lance Olsen', they may not notice the different ontological attributions.

Visitors enter the exhibition through a glass door on the right whilst the opening text-plate, shown in Figure 3, was positioned on the left-hand wall outside the gallery. Museum studies research has consistently observed that visitors have a right-turn bias, particularly on entering an exhibition (Bitgood 2011: 332, 380-383). Moreover, 'visitors who drift to the right sometimes omit to look at works of art exhibited on the left hand side of displays' (Scharine & McBeath 2002: 64). I observed this tendency in visitors to 'there's no place like time', many of whom did not pause to read the opening text-plate before entering. The opening text-plate is significant in terms of the ontological hoax at the heart of 'there's no place like time'. Thus, visitors with no prior knowledge of the exhibition's fictionality and who ignored the text-plate could be unaware (at least initially; some did revisit the text-plate) that the exhibition was an Alana Olsen retrospective.
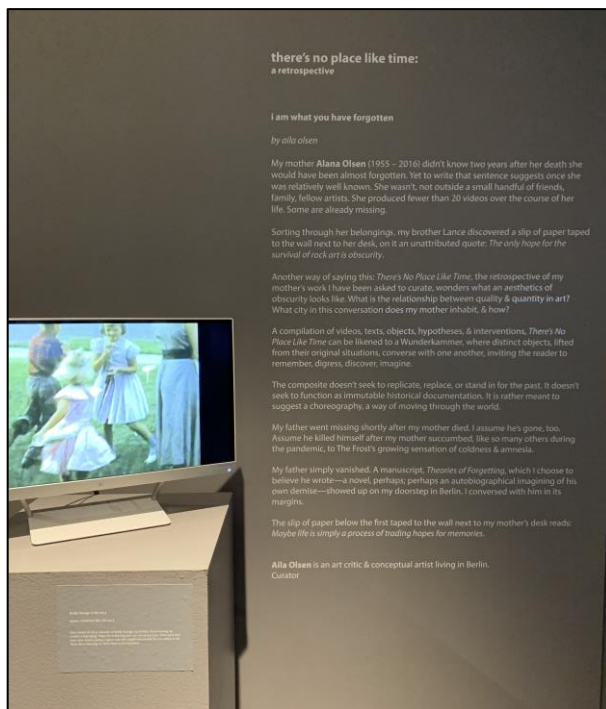
Figure 3: Opening Text Plate

The opening text-plate begins (emphasis original):

there's no place like time:

a retrospective

i am what you have forgotten

by aila olsen

My mother Alana Olsen (1955-2016) didn't know two years after her death she would have
been almost forgotten.

Authorship is attributed here to Aila Olsen – Alana's daughter in the novel *Theories of Forgetting* –
who is described at the end of the text-plate as 'an art critic and conceptual artist living in Berlin'

and 'Curator' of the exhibition. Bal claims that museum discourse is *apo-deictic* (from Greek, meaning 'showing') in that it is 'affirmative, demonstrative, and authoritative on the one hand, opining, often opinionated, on the other' (1996: 3). The apo-diectic nature of museum discourse means that 'showing these objects is in itself taken to be a transparent gesture of presenting the object itself, its truth' (Bal 1996: 8). Combined with the default to believe information, the museum context and presentational authority of apo-deictic discourse increase the likelihood that those visitors without prior knowledge of the exhibitions' fictional status will conceive of Aila and Alana Olsen as real.

The text-plate is written from Aila's first-person perspective, creating an intimacy of tone, and making Aila an initial attractor through empathetic recognisability. Figure 4 shows the text-worlds triggered by the opening lines. The first-text-world contains Aila as narrating-*I*. Because of apo-deictic address to visitor-readers, this text-world seems phenomenologically proximal to the discourse-world: visitor-readers may thus conceivably assign referential status to this text-world and interpret Aila as a textual counterpart of a discourse-world participant.
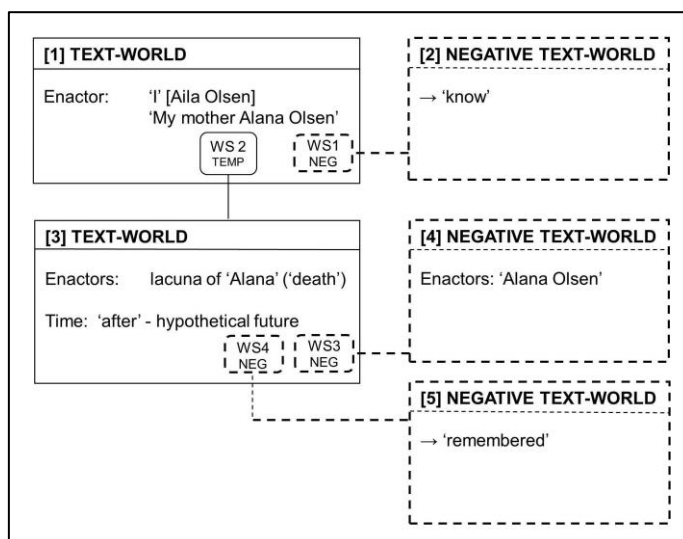

Figure 4: Text-World diagram of 'My mother Alana Olsen (1955-2016) didn't know two years after her death she would have been almost forgotten'.

Alana Olsen is also an attentional figure in the opening text-plate, immediately attractive through the empathetic recognisability granted by 'My mother' and as grammatical subject. Negation – as an attentional and cognitive foregrounding device – sustains the attraction: the syntactic negation and epistemic verb in 'didn't know' prompts visitor-readers to build a second text-world, mind-modelling Alana's knowledge, before rendering this as Alana's ignorance in the original text-world. The adverbial phrase 'two years after' triggers a temporal shift to a third text-world wherein semantic negation ('her death', 'forgotten') intensifies Alana's attractiveness: visitor-readers must imagine Alana alive (in TW4) and remembered (in TW5) to then negate her. She thus becomes a *lacuna* (Stockwell 2009: 31-32), experienced by visitor-readers as a 'felt absence' (2009: 158).

Aila and Alana are therefore attractive, but nevertheless invented, figures. The opening text-plate, though, does contain signals of fictionality: Aila references her 'brother Lance' and a mysterious 'manuscript, *Theories of Forgetting*' which she describes as 'a novel, perhaps; perhaps an autobiographical imagining'. For visitor-readers with prior knowledge of Lance Olsen's *Theories of Forgetting*, this extends the world of the fiction; for visitor-readers without this knowledge, these references will either be used as world-building information in text-worlds they believe represents reality or will prompt retroactive disbelief.

Overall, 'there's no place like time' discloses fictionality through generic terms ('novel, 'installation') and real artist/author attribution, but this information is not attentionally salient. The opening text-plate constructs the ontological hoax of 'there's no place like time' whilst hinting at the exhibition's fictionality. Noticing fictionality signposts will depend whether visitors read the title and opening text-plate and whether their attention is focused (shallow-processing) or engaged (deeper-processing). Regardless of fictionality assessments, text-world analysis shows that visitors who do read the text-plate necessarily build mental representations in which both Aila and Alana are attractive figures. My ensuing response analysis will consequently examine whether visitors

without prior knowledge overlook the exhibition's signposts of fictionality, deem Aila and Alana Olsen to be real people, and experience Aila and Alana as attractive figures in terms of imaginative and emotional engagement.

5. Questionnaire response: There's no data like qualitative answers

To gain insight into visitors' assessments of fictionality, I devised a qualitative paper questionnaire to be completed after visiting the exhibition. This was deemed the most appropriate method because it was not intrusive (participants were allowed privacy, time, and space to complete the questionnaire) and because qualitative responses would best capture participants' experiences. The questionnaire was (optionally) completed by 46 participants (henceforth P1-46). During the data collection period (2-6 October 2018), an undergraduate class on experimental writing visited the exhibition, and a 'writing conference called '&NOW' took place at the University; some students and delegates are consequently among participants in the study, though neither group necessarily possessed prior knowledge of the exhibition's fictionality. Data was digitized, anonymised, and coded both manually and using NVivo.

Three questions gauged participants' prior knowledge of the exhibition's fictionality: 'Why did you choose to visit this exhibition?'; 'Had you heard about Alana Olsen before visiting this exhibition?'; 'Have you heard of *Theories of Forgetting*?'. Participants who answered 'no' to the latter two questions and whose responses to the first and throughout the questionnaire did not explicitly exhibit awareness that the exhibition was a work of fiction (e.g. P22 wrote, 'I knew nothing specific about it [the exhibition] before I arrived in the museum') were categorised as having no prior knowledge. Approximately 76.1% (n=35) of participants were in this group; 19.6% (n=9) of participants disclosed awareness that the exhibition was a work of fiction (e.g. P9 'knew that it [the exhibition] was a novel and that it was fictional'); 4.3% (n=2) gave ambiguous responses (Both P34 and P37 were conference delegates: P34 thought the work belonged to 'Alana because so much of it

is her' but attended the exhibition because 'it was done by those whom I greatly admire' whilst P37 hadn't heard of Alana Olsen or *Theories of Forgetting* but thought it might be possible to meet her 'at this conference').

The remaining questions sought to capture participants' experiences and assessments of fictionality, such as 'Do you think it would be possible to meet Alana Olsen?' In response to this YES/NO question, 31 participants answered 'No' (67.4%), 12 answered 'Yes' (26.1%), and 3 answers (6.5%) were ambiguous (P8 and P28 ticked neither YES/NO whilst P36 ticked both). Such YES/NO data is not necessarily revealing of fictionality perceptions: in this case, it is impossible to meet Alana because she is fictional and because, within 'there's no place like time', she is dead. To gain greater insight into participants' judgments, all questions also requested qualitative justifications (e.g. 'Why/Why not?').

5.1. Is Alana Olsen real enough to meet?

Only 11 participants (23.9%) exhibited awareness that Alana Olsen was fictional (although this number matches the number of participants with ambiguous and prior knowledge, the participant groups are not the same; thus, more participants may have been aware of the ontological hoax). 9 of these participants deemed it impossible to meet Alana precisely because she wasn't real and were often secure in their knowledge: P9 uses an epistemic verb to assert certainty, writing 'Because I know it's fictional'; P16 categorically states 'Alana Olsen is a concept'. Other responses featured a degree of doubt, as in P32's question 'Isn't she a fictional person?'. The 2 participants who thought it possible to meet Alana whilst knowing she was fictional justified this by suggesting that fictional characters can be encountered through real people: P11 evoked the concept of performance – 'I know she is a fictional character but I'm sure somebody could "play" her and embody her beyond the exhibit' (original emphasis); P36 saw real artist-authors as gateways to fictional beings – 'Well I

know Lance + Andi and can only imagine that Alana is some space between them. It may be possible to experience the vibratory field of Alana'.

32.6% (n= 15: 11 responses + 4 no answer) of participants gave ambiguous justifications (e.g. 'How can I know the answer to this?' (P8)). In this group, I included responses accounting for both ontologies, as in the parallel constructions 'Because she's dead – Because she's fictional' (P39) and 'If she is a fictional character, then I met her by watching these videos and reading the text. If she is real, then I met her the same way' (P28).

Participants who believed that Alana was real formed the largest group (n=20; 43.5%). 11 of these cited Alana' death: e.g. 'Her daughter made it clear that she died in 2016' (P26); 'Because, as I understand it, Alana Olsen has died' (P7); 'Slightly confused by the question, as the exhibit makes it clear that she is dead and this is a retrospective of her work' (P2). P2's confusion interestingly suggests such intense belief that the question itself seemed nonsensical. Furthermore, P2's references to 'the exhibit' and 'a retrospective' indicate the influence of apo-deictic museum discourse, genre, and context. 2 of the 20 participants who believed in the conceit of the exhibition confused 'Alana' with Berlin-based daughter/curator 'Aila', showing shallow attentional engagement, though P31 did correct their misconception ('I don't live in Berlin. – I misread the name. Alana – no – she is not here'). 7 of these 20 participants, however, gave practical reasons for whether they could meet her: 'I think I could meet almost anyone if I really wanted to' (P4); 'Artists are human' (P6); 'The likelihood that she and I might be in the same place at the same time and be free to meet is rather low, and I do not expect that she would have much interest in meeting me' (P22). These latter responses signify shallow attentional engagement with the text-plate's narrative.

Of the 35 participants without prior knowledge of the exhibition, then, 57.1% of participants (n=20) interpreted Alana Olsen as real. Shallow processing seems particularly to result in belief because participants do not notice the exhibition's signposts of fictionality: paratextual markers, authorship attribution, and/or unrealistic/inconsistent narrative elements. Since such signposts were missed or overlooked by many participants, this data provides empirical evidence for my prior claim that fictionality is an ontological property of text-worlds, cognitively attributed by discourse-participants (Gibbons, 2019c).

5.2. Retrospective disbelief

Effortful, retroactive disbelief is evidenced in 6 participants' responses. When asked 'Who do you think the work in the exhibition belongs to (and why)?', P39 wrote 'At first, I thought it belonged to the estate of Alana Olsen', the adverbial phrase signifying both initial belief and subsequent change of attitude. P44 thought that Alana was 'made up' and revealed 'I had to go back through a couple of times, and I'm not sure I figured it out, but I think the whole thing is "art" not a documentary or curation of someone else's work'. Whilst repeated epistemic modality ('not sure', 'think') expresses uncertainty, P44's disclosure of 'go[ing] back' demonstrates deliberate, motivated scrutiny of the exhibition's fictionality/referentiality. P43 made use of indirect knowledge, explaining that they 'did some googling while in the exhibit/looking @ the exhibition catalog (revealed Alana to be fictional)' and refers, in subsequent responses, to a 'moment of discovery'. What generated these participants' suspicions is less clear, though P19 reflects 'the whole story is very odd' and P35 notes, 'The description on the wall that details [Aila's] father's disappearance is curiously vague. It almost felt scripted': Therefore, the narrative may have seemed improbable when compared with real-world knowledge, particularly because it lacked detail.

5.3. Belief in the auto/biographical retrospective and emotional response

The exhibition's auto/biographical genre – as retrospective – appears to have influenced believability: P21 scribbled 'retrospective approach' as reason for not being able to meet Alana; P31 admitted that they'd be surprised if Alana wasn't real because '[T]he exhibition is set out about her life'; P19 emphasises '[T]he entire exhibit describes her'. Given Alana's centrality in attentional and imaginative engagement generated by the opening text-plate, it is perhaps unsurprising that P22 claims to have 'looked for her in the self-portraits [a video work]'. Furthermore, P39 chose to visit the exhibition because '[i]t seemed very moving to see someone's life's work after their death' and claimed 'the life story framed my response'.

The museum context and opening text-plate were also cited by some participants to explain their potential surprise and change in feelings if Alana wasn't real. P28 explained: 'the text that is introduced before the viewer enters the exhibition […] influences the viewers mindset. In this case, I am led to believe I'm about to view works by Alana Olsen, who's works were just discovered. I look for common themes, interests – I develop a fragmented identity in my mind and believe it to be true' [sic][1]. P28 continues [sic]:

> The way the exhibition is set up, introducing Alana as a mother of the curator, the viewer becomes emotionally intrigued, A mother whose works were never seen before this exhibit pushes the narrative even further. Immediately, the viewer is led to believe they are viewing works that once belonged to someone and therefore transported into the past. If she's not real, it becomes about questioning the boundary between reality and fiction.

P28 suggests that the fiction/reality distinction does result in felt differences in narrative experience. Whilst theory of mind processes are supposedly more involved in fictional simulation, P28's repeated emphasis on Alana as 'a mother', description of visitors as 'emotionally intrigued', and

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[1] Other than omitted struck-through words on the questionnaire, 'sic' here and subsequently signifies that inaccuracies in spelling or grammar are present in the original response data.

first-person account of building Alana's 'fragmented identity' suggest an affective modelling of both Alana and Aila's intentions as curator. Moreover, the sense of being 'transported into the past' insinuates engaged attention to and resultant immersion in the text-plate's narrative. However, the verb phrase repetition of 'led to believe' and hypothetical statement 'If she's not real…' discloses uncertainty as to the ontological status of the exhibition, an indecision that perhaps motivates perceptual switches between first-person 'I' and impersonal, detached third-person 'the viewer'. Alongside recognition of the 'boundary between reality and fiction', this signals a psychological shift, entirely dependent on fictionality/referentiality, that shapes narrative experience: from immersion and belief in imagined (referential) text-worlds to a position of critical disbelief and reflection in the discourse-world.

An additional 8 participants (n=9; 19.6%) reported emotional responses to the exhibition. P44 claimed: 'Once I started to read the booklet + descriptions, I was deeply moved' and described the exhibition as 'beautiful, sad, and haunting all at once. It moved me to tears, even though I can't articulate why'. Emotional response appears connected to the auto/biographical narrative of the exhibition: P20 felt that 'so much effort and emotion is involved in the intro reading' whilst P7 claimed that the exhibition 'feels intensely personal as if Alana Olsen is trying to untangle memory and time', the resonance of their 'personal and immediate' experience manifesting in the use of present-tense ('feels'). P31 derived emotional affect from empathetic engagement with Alana Olsen: 'Found it sad & felt sorry for her – felt she was lovely'. P2's responses throughout the questionnaire demonstrated emotional response as a consequence of engaged attention and immersion:

> I passed by the small explanation outside the exhibit and was moved by how easily Aila seemed to pour her emotions into the project. There was something complex and confusing that I sought to explore. […] The emotions invoked in this exhibit have been raw and

touching. It would shock me if Aila had created this whole story from her imagination. […]
The exhibit would lose some of its weight. It is confusing to engage with and jumps through
many emotions. For me, it manifested in Aila's desperate and confused search to understand
her mother and the actions of her father after her mother's death. If I learned these events were
a phantasm of Aila's mind, they wouldn't have the same weight.

In '[seeking] to explore' Aila's emotions and understand her 'desperate and confused search', P2
undertakes ToM simulation, with their experience of the exhibition as 'confusing' echoing their
perceptions of Aila's mental state. The result is so 'raw and touching' that P2 would be 'shocked' to
discover Alana was fictional. For P2, then, believing Alana and Aila were real coincided with ToM
simulation and intense emotional experience.

5.4. Personal relevance and reality creating fiction

Four participants (8.7%) found the exhibition personally relevant, for instance: 'some of the videos
presented reminded me of my own experiences' (P30); 'I could relate to "scar" [video work]
because I have a lot of scars on my body too' (P40). Only 1 of these participants, P24, appeared,
initially, to think Alana was real and all four participants answered 'no' to 'If you discovered Alana
Olsen was not real, would it change the way you feel about this exhibition?'. Interestingly, P24 cites
personal relevance as the reason for the constancy of their feelings since 'real or not, the insights
are instructive and thought-provoking' and 'The exhibition resonated with me personally and
professionally'. Whilst personal relevance did not correlate with a belief that Alana Olsen is real, it
did seem to increase enjoyment.

Events in the discourse-world affected fiction/reality distinction. P38, for instance, was a
conference delegate at '&NOW', during which Andi and Lance Olsen introduced 'there's no place
like time'; responding to questions about Alana, P38 insists 'I saw her', 'she introduced the project

and talked about the process', and '[i]t seems like she is approachable in her work as well as at her conference'. P38's responses indicate shallow processing since they consistently mix-up fictional Alana Olsen, referenced in the exhibition and questionnaire, with real artist Andi Olsen who P28 saw at the conference. Contrastingly, P42 appears influenced by the Museum context itself: meeting Alana seemed unlikely because they (P42) are 'not from here!', implying a perception of Alana as a local artist. Finally, observer's paradox manifests in the data, with P14 writing 'the exhibit said [Alana] was [real], and it seems like she is a plausible figure. I have no reason (before this survey) to believe she is not'. My presence as a visiting British researcher also impacted participants' imagined perceptions of Alana: P35 decides, 'I think [the work] belongs to [Alison Gibbons]. These questions – the more I read them lead me to believe that the person who handed me the survey is assessing the believability of her work' whilst P25 didn't think it possible to meet Alana, writing 'I'll probably not be travelling to Great Britain at this point'. Whilst interpretation of Alana Olsen as Andi Olsen could be related to onomastic similarity, 'there's no place like time' lacked any textual suggestions that Alana was a local artist, British, or that I was Alana Olsen. Consequently, these responses expose the complex relationship between real-world experiences and imaginative engagement: discourse-world dynamics distort how participants' imagine and/or construct text-worlds.

6. Conclusion: There's no felt experience like referentiality

This chapter uses qualitative empirical research to investigate how people determine whether narratives are fictional or referential. Visitors' responses to 'there's no place like time' support prior research in psychology concerning default belief: visitors without prior knowledge predominantly interpreted Alana Olsen as real. For some, disbelief did occur retrospectively, arising from noticing lack of detail and narrative inconsistencies whilst (im)probability was judged in relation to discourse-world knowledge and fact-checked by reference to indirect (online) sources. The real-world museum context and autobiographical nature of the retrospective enhanced felt referentiality

and emotional engagement. Whilst personal relevance increased enjoyment, real experience and context – even if irrelevant – impacted how Aila and Alana were imagined.

Many visitors (n=29; 63%) to 'there's no place like time' dismiss fictionality as insignificant: P36, for instance, questions, 'Why do you insist Alana is not real? Why is this important?' P36, though, knew beforehand that the exhibition was fictional whereas P20, who had no prior knowledge, persistently asked in the questionnaire's 'any other comments' box, 'Is she real?'. Not only did some participants originally think Alana *was* real but some (n=13; 28.26%) also believe it matters and alters their experience: As P22 writes, 'I would feel sort of cheated – some of the work would feel much less genuine, and it takes a lot of trust and effort, I think, to invest in an artist'. Ultimately, this chapter shows that fictionality judgments do result in felt differences. For cognitivists interested in style and response, it is important whether or not Alana is real, precisely because, as P7 suggests, 'that would complicate my feelings'.

8. Funding

9. Data

The underlying research data is available from the Sheffield Hallam University Research Data Archive at: http://doi.org/10.17032/shu-180018.

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