Alison Gibbons
Sheffield Hallam University

Interpreting Fictionality and Ontological Blurrings in and Between Lance Olsen's *Theories of Forgetting* and *there's no place like time*

Introduction

In *there's no place like time*, the exhibition catalogue accompanying the retrospective of twentieth century video artist Alana Olsen, R. M. Berry reflects on Olsen's (1987) film *Scarred*: " . . . the world continuously writes upon us, reminds us where we've been, that that place is real" (Olsen *there's no place like time*, no pagination).[1] Alana Olsen's film—Berry suggests—contemplates how we experience reality by exploring the stories that people tell about, and that are symbolized by, the scars on their body. In turn, lived embodied experiences inform how people narrate real-world events and how they create imagined worlds.[2] This article explores the aesthetic texture of imagined worlds and their ontological relationships with felt reality.

Ontological instability is well known as the dominant *topos* of postmodernist fiction, frequently generated by metaleptic transgressions staged across recursive, semi-permeable world-structures; the effect is the artifice of the work being foregrounded and the supposed *real* becoming exactly that, *supposed*, exposed as another ontological level of construction (McHale; Ryan). However, contemporary fiction exhibits a renewed interest in connecting with the real; a propensity that Ameel and Caracciolo—in their introduction to this special issue—identify as "earnest ontologies." Such earnestness towards the real world, and our human place within it, resonates with Berry's description of Alana Olsen's film *Scarred*: motivated by the visceral imprint of a scar, "everyone tells some version of the same story: *I'm here. This is the proof against the feeling I sometimes have that I am nowhere*" (*there's no place like time*; original emphasis). In this article, I show how—in contemporary fiction—ontological distortions and metaleptic transgressions can work, not to override reality but rather, to reinvigorate our human sense of lived experience and

reaffirm the place of narratives within it.[3]

My case study is what might be considered a triptych of interrelated texts, all penned by Lance Olsen: *Theories of Forgetting* (2014)*, there's no place like time* (2016), and *[[there]]* (2014). Whilst these texts feature overlapping content, they appear dissimilar in their generic and ontological foundations, published as novel, exhibition catalogue, and journal, respectively. I use 'appear' deliberately because *Theories of Forgetting* and *there's no place like time* are actually both fictional and examples of what I have previously called "ontological hoax": works that "masquerade as something they are not, disguising their fictional status" ("Multimodal Literature" 432). There is, therefore, a paradox at play in this article's opening discussion: the artist Alana Olsen, whose career is charted in *there's no place like time* (and who features in *Theories of Forgetting*), is a fictional construct; R. M. Berry is a real person, but his words quoted above are entirely fictionalized (invented by Lance Olsen). Speaking back to Berry, then, fiction sometimes does not remind us which places, which people, or which worlds are real and which are not. Instead of reducing the real to a fictional construct though, the ontological blurrings of Olsen's fiction serve to enhance readers' phenomenological and emotional experiences in relation both to narrative and felt reality.

My methodology—introduced in the next section—utilizes Text World Theory and the metalanguage of the narrative interrelation framework to explore issues of ontology, fictionality, and narrative experience. The ensuing analysis demonstrates the dexterity of this cognitive approach to fictionality, including its agility in capturing readers' experiences of ontological distortion. Focusing primarily on *Theories of Forgetting*, my analysis considers the effects and affects of metaleptic ontological ruptures, caused by textual references to the author, visual depiction of the author, and the installation of the fictional narrative in a real-world setting as an art exhibition.

Fictionality, Ontology, and Cognition

The concept of fictionality designates a property of discourse which entails imaginary events and/or persons (cf. Cohn). An influential, prevailing approach to the study of fictionality takes the form of a rhetorical account, primarily associated with scholarship by James Phelan, Henrik Skov Nielsen, and Richard Walsh. Phelan defines fictionality as "any rhetorical act in which somebody on some occasion intentionally signals his or her use of a discursive invention to someone else for some purpose(s)" ("Fictionality" 235); a definition that construes narrative as a communicative act between discourse producer(s) and receiver(s). Intentionality and interpretation are therefore crucial issues, as demonstrated by the fifth thesis in Nielsen, Phelan, and Walsh's "Ten Theses about Fictionality": "fictionality is an interpretive assumption about a sender's communicative act" (66). If this is the case—and as I have argued elsewhere ("Using Life"; "'dissolving margins'"; "'Why'")—cognitively informed frameworks are best placed to identify readers' interpretations concerning fictionality, including the ontological status of the work and the protagonists therein. Although the rhetorical approach gestures towards acts of cognition and interpretation, it nevertheless considers the activities of reading and interpretive reception theoretically (the difference between rhetorical and cognitive approaches is discussed by Phelan, "Cognitive Narratology"). I adopt a cognitive approach to literary fictionality and ontology principally using Text World Theory which, developed based on insights from cognitive science, enables a rigorous, empirically grounded account of reader experience.[4]

Text World Theory explicates the way mental representations are generated during discourse processing and the experiential texture of those representations. An underpinning distinction is made between the discourse-world and text-worlds. The *discourse-world* designates the communicative context, modelled by and including *participants*, such as the real author and real readers. Paul Werth emphasizes that because it is "founded on interpretation, and is 'filled in' and edited, the discourse-world is a *construct* although one that we may suppose is founded on *'real'* external circumstances" (17; my emphasis). Interestingly, scientific theories such as "conscious realism" (Hoffman; Hoffman and Prakash), "veiled nonlocality" (Kak, Chopra, and Kafatos), and

"Qualia science" (Chopra and Kafatos) make similar claims about reality itself: that the objective world is structured by and experienced *as* reality through active perception and consciousness.[5]

Text-worlds are imagined representations constructed during discourse processing. The protagonists in text-worlds are *enactors*, a term that allows for the same character to exist in multiple but ontologically distinct versions (e.g., past-selves) as well as to be either invented or to represent a real individual. Thus, the text-worlds of an autobiography would include an imagined enactor representing the real author. Whilst text-worlds can be produced by various communicative modes (Gibbons, *Multimodality*), the framework prioritizes linguistic cues. Werth—who originally proposed Text World Theory—describes a text-world as "a deictic space, defined initially by the discourse itself, and specifically by the deictic and referential elements in it" (51). At the micro-level of lexico-grammatical analysis, text-worlds are constructed from deictic expressions (time, space/location, protagonists and objects). Changes in deictic world-building information cause *world-switches*, as do ontological fluctuations, for instance prompted by modality, hypotheticality, or shifts in perceptual deictic viewpoint. With regards to the latter, if different characters were to describe the same narrative event, each account would necessarily produce a text-world structure separate from the other(s): minds (whether fictional or otherwise)—including the perspectives, thoughts, and experiences they entail—are ontologically and cognitively distinct.

In my work, I employ the concept of text-worlds in this sense as well as extrapolate it to capture a reader's impression of the various ontological layers within a single narrative text or across a chain of related narratives or texts. After all, boundaries are also drawn between different narrative levels since these are, necessarily, different layers or planes in text-world architecture. It is nevertheless worth clarifying that text-worlds differ from the related (perhaps more well known, in narratology at least) concept of storyworlds which David Herman defines as "mental models of who did what to and with whom, when, where, why, and in what fashion in the world to which recipients relocate" (5). In a cognitively driven worlds-approach, then, we can distinguish between three levels of analysis: the storyworld as a mental model that encapsulates the sum of the textual

universe's locations, events, and characters; macro-level text-worlds as models of ontologically distinct narrative levels; and micro-level text-worlds generated by and derived from the particularities of textual composition.[6] Storyworlds and text-worlds (both macro- and micro-level) are mental representations; the difference is the degree of ontological granularity and scale. Text World Theory is necessarily founded on, and finely attuned to, "essential differences" in ontology (Gavins, *Text World Theory* 76). Consequently, the distinctions I suggest here enhance the framework's explanatory power with regards to fictionality, ontological instability, and experientiality as well as allow (and, indeed, generate) a more fine-grained narratological account of the ontological architecture within the totality of a work's storyworld.[7]

Although both text-worlds and the discourse-world are cognitive constructs, the distinction is vital for capturing participants' felt ontological differentiation between these separate realms of experience. Similarly, participants' affective engagements with fictional versus non-fictional text-worlds is, in part, determined by the ontological conditions attributed to these worlds. As Werth states, reality relations "are stipulated rather than built in" (17). Assessments of fictionality are therefore made by participants in the discourse-world. A participant's appraisal, according to Werth, "consists of calculating the truth or probability of the propositions in the text . . . together with background knowledge" and "modifying that calculation in terms of the reliability and claims of the speaker" (210). This is not altogether at odds with the rhetorical account, in which fictionality is seen as a "contextual assumption" (Walsh 30). The focus differs, though, because in a cognitive approach—whilst intentionality and textual cues are important—fictionality and ontology are deemed attributes that are cognitively assigned to text-worlds; this reception-oriented emphasis explains both misinterpretations of fictionality and the experience of ontological distortions (see Gibbons "'dissolving margins'"; "'Why'").

Whilst real, flesh-and-blood authors are discourse-world participants, readers' capture authors and authorial intentionality through cognitive processes of mind-modelling (see Stockwell, "The Texture" 153; Mason 96–98; Gibbons, "'dissolving margins'"; "Using Life"). Moreover, authors

sometimes appear as characters *in* their fictions and, thus, as enactors in imagined text-worlds. Enactor-authors can be introduced in a variety of more-or-less explicit ways; in this article, I borrow and adapt the metalanguage of Jessica Mason's narrative interrelation framework in order to describe the degree of ontological instability posed by the presence of enactor-authors. Designed to track the linguistic mechanics by which intertextual interrelations between narratives transpire, Mason's framework involves two classificatory axes: the specific/generic axis discerns whether one narrative in particular is being referenced (specific) or a more general category (generic); the marked/unmarked axis captures how explicitly the intertext is signalled. If we relate these terms to enactor-authors in reading, references to any individual author will necessarily be specific: a specific marked reference, then, indicates that a full name overtly signals the enactor-author interrelation; a specific unmarked reference indicates that, in place of an explicit name, the enactor-author interrelation is made implicitly, such as when readers notice that a character's biographical details match those of an author. The more specific and marked the author-character interrelation, the more apparent the metaleptic breach, and the more forceful the referential pull, for readers. This quintessentially postmodernist device—authors appearing in their fictions—necessarily produces ontological blurrings (McHale 29–30, 197–215) but—as my analysis argues—this does not inevitably reduce such markers of the real—e.g., the author figure—to fictional constructs.

Werth highlights that meaningful communication is a "joint effort on the part of its producer and its recipients to build up a 'world'" (20) but that because "there is no other secret channel of meaning between the speaker and the hearer or, *a fortiori*, between the writer and the reader, than the discourse itself, the retrieval and selection of knowledge relevant to a given discourse must be text-driven" (149). Accordingly, the creation of text-worlds is text-driven, but assigning ontological status is context-dependent. As the fictional ventriloquism of this article's opening demonstrates, there are no absolute "signposts" of fictionality (Cohn); rather—as Nielsen, Phelan, and Walsh argue—it "takes an interaction among authors, readers, and textual features in a historical context to establish something as a signpost" ("Fictionality" 106). In other words, readers' appraisals of

ontology and fictionality arise from a contextual triangulation of intentionality, textuality, and interpretation. Accessing and evidencing such knowledge can pose challenges for analysis. Consequently, my analysis begins by considering contextual factors in a literary experience, namely potential paratextual signposts.

Reading Authors

All readers bring pre-existing knowledge structures to reading experiences, including information and expectations about the author and the book. Gérard Genette has described book covers as "the first manifestation of the book offered to the reader's perception" (27), making it a sensible place to start in analyzing literary fictionality. *Theories of Forgetting* is rather unusual: the cover is designed with each side showing an identical back cover; on opening each side of the book, the reader finds duplicated titles, copyright pages, dedications. Resultantly, paratextual information is prioritized over the imagistic content usually dominant on front covers. The dual covers of *Theories of Forgetting* feature: price, genre indicator, synopsis, promotional endorsement, photo and bio statement of the author, photograph attribution, publisher information, cover design attribution, and bar code. Nielsen, Phelan, and Walsh highlight the role of paratextual indices in signaling fictionality, though they concede "such cues may be ambiguous and not all-decisive" ("Ten Theses" 67). *Theories of Forgetting*'s genre designation is given on the cover as "Literature/Fiction."

Studies in experimental psychology offer evidence that paratextual markers of fictionality influence how readers engage with texts: whilst both fiction and non-fiction elicit mental representations, these representations are not equivalent.[8] As Altmann et al. outline, "reading facts seems to elicit mental simulation processes basically regarding actions and their outcomes, reading fiction appears to initiate simulation processes especially concerning the motives behind an action and thereby the protagonist's mind" (27). For fiction, readers create more detailed text-worlds (Zwaan), including the extent to which they engage in "social and moral reasoning" (Altmann et al. 27). Over the course of *Theories of Forgetting*, one of the central characters—Alana Olsen—

becomes terminally ill and her husband struggles with grief. Moreover, this intensely human narrative is set against a larger backdrop of planetary global warming (for a discussion of these issues in the novel, see Gibbons, "Entropology").[9] Paradoxically, then, it is fictionality itself that encourages readers to emotionally engage with the novel's characters and depictions of climate change and therefore—*contra* an uncritical postmodernist celebration of unreality (McHale 219)—to examine the social and moral dimensions of the real-world circumstances which underwrite the narrative.

With paratextual indicators of the novel's fictionality, *Theories of Forgetting* exhibits a weak commitment to its ontological hoax. Nevertheless, the conceit is that, rather than a novel, it is a multimodal collection of documents. Experimental filmmaker Alana's first-person diary begins at one side of the book, presented in black Adobe Garamond Pro typeface, and including various images supposedly inserted by Alana relating to her life and current film project. On the other side of the book, in grey American Typewriter font and on the same pages as Alana's diary but with the text turned 180 degrees, is the third-person travelogue of Alana's husband Hugh who, overwhelmed by the passing of his wife, is haunted by his memories of their life together and her final days. Lastly, their daughter Aila's marginalia, in blue Georges typeface which resembles handwriting, is seemingly transposed over her parents' narratives.[10] Whilst all of these narratives belong to the same storyworld, the multimodal presentation of the book creates a layered macro-level text-world structure: whilst the page presents all three narrative layers simultaneously, these texts-worlds are ontologically separate (they are distinct in time/space and have different perceptual ontologies as the subjective narration of each enactor). Nevertheless, readers make "intratextual references" between them; that is, "connections between multiple narratives within a single text" (Mason 167). Crucially, the accumulative text-world structure generates felt degrees of ontological and phenomenological distance from a reader's discourse-world: Alana's narrative seems furthest from the reader whilst Aila's—containing frequent metatextual references to and about her writing, thus foregrounding the page-surface of the book—seems closest to the reader's discourse-world.[11]

Aila's correspondence echoes out to her brother, addressed only once by name as "Lance" (H.111).[12] In his explication of the "pacts" between autobiographer or novelist and their readers, Philippe Lejeune argues that conflating the author and protagonist in name "excludes the possibility of fiction" (17). He therefore identifies two kinds of "autobiographical pact." The first is autobiography proper: this is explicitly marked as such so—according to the metalanguage of narrative interrelation—this would feature a specific marked enactor-author. The second is a zero case: readers' deduce that the identity of a mentioned character is the same as the author based on textual details or references such as part of a name.[13] If a name is absent, this is a specific unmarked enactor-author but, if part of a name is used to prompt the interrelation, I suggest we consider this to be a specific *partially*-marked enactor-author.[14] Correspondingly, it is partially-marked reference that encourages readers of *Theories of Forgetting* to interpret the textually addressed "Lance" in relation to author Lance Olsen, whose name appears on the book's cover(s). However, the novel's paratextual "fiction" label means that *Theories of Forgetting* cannot be read as an instance of zero-case autobiography.

Later in the same essay, Lejeune questions: "Can the hero of a novel declared as such have the same name as the author? Nothing would prevent such a thing from existing and it is perhaps an internal contradiction from which some interesting effects could be drawn" (18). Lejeune's comment has been credited with inspiring autofiction, a literary genre blurring autobiography and fiction. In most critical accounts of autofiction—including my own mapping of its stylistic features (Gibbons, "Autonarration")—an onomastic correspondence between author and protagonist is pivotal. Even though the genre indicator of *Theories of Forgetting* marks it as neither autobiography nor autofiction, the specific partially-marked reference to "Lance" motivates what Lejeune eventually calls the "phantasmatic pact," an "indirect form of the autobiographical pact" containing "*phantasms* of the individual" (27; original emphasis). Identifying "Lance" as a specific partially-marked enactor-author reference captures the fact that whilst it gestures towards Lance Olsen, the elision of his surname—like an unmarked reference—also "problematises the consistent

identification" (Mason 79). For this reason and in the context of the paratextually signaled fictionality of *Theories of Forgetting*, readers are unlikely to indiscriminately conflate "Lance" with Lance Olsen. The interrelation is strongly encouraged though, not least because on the inside cover pages, Lance Olsen is listed not as author but as "Lance Olsen, editor" (A5.; H.3) and the acknowledgements maintain "The editor wishes to thank. . ." (A.9.; H.7).

In Text World terms, whilst stemming from the proximally textured macro-level text-world in which Aila writes to her brother, "Lance" also activates another text-world in which readers assign an enactor of the author Lance Olsen (in other words, Lejeune's phantasm). This text-world is sparse, but enables readers to create a trans-world mapping between the fictionalized enactor "Lance" and their mind-model of the authorial writer. Moreover, because of Lance Olsen's supposed editorship, this text-world sits atop the chain of text-world ontologies (shown in Figure 1) and is akin to what Joanna Gavins has called a "composition text-world" (*Reading the Absurd* 115) in which an enactor of the author and his writing, in this case editing, is conceptualized. According to McHale, when—in postmodernist texts—the author metaleptically appears in the fictional world as "a visible maker, its [the fictional world's] own status must inevitably change, too; it has become less the mirror of nature, more an *artifact*, visibly a *made* thing" (30; original emphasis). This is only partially true for *Theories of Forgetting* because, whilst the composition text-world forms another ontological level which foregrounds the storyworld's recursive construction, this is in keeping with the ontological hoax of the novel as an edited manuscript. Text World analysis thus accounts for the experiential effects of *Theories of Forgetting*'s ontological hoax, whereby readers develop a felt sense of the fiction's relationship to and grounding in reality.[15] The trans-world mapping between the fictionalized enactor of "Lance" *as editor* and the reader's mind-model of the discourse-world author endorses *Theories of Forgetting* as a documentary artefact, evidentially existent in the reader's discourse-world.
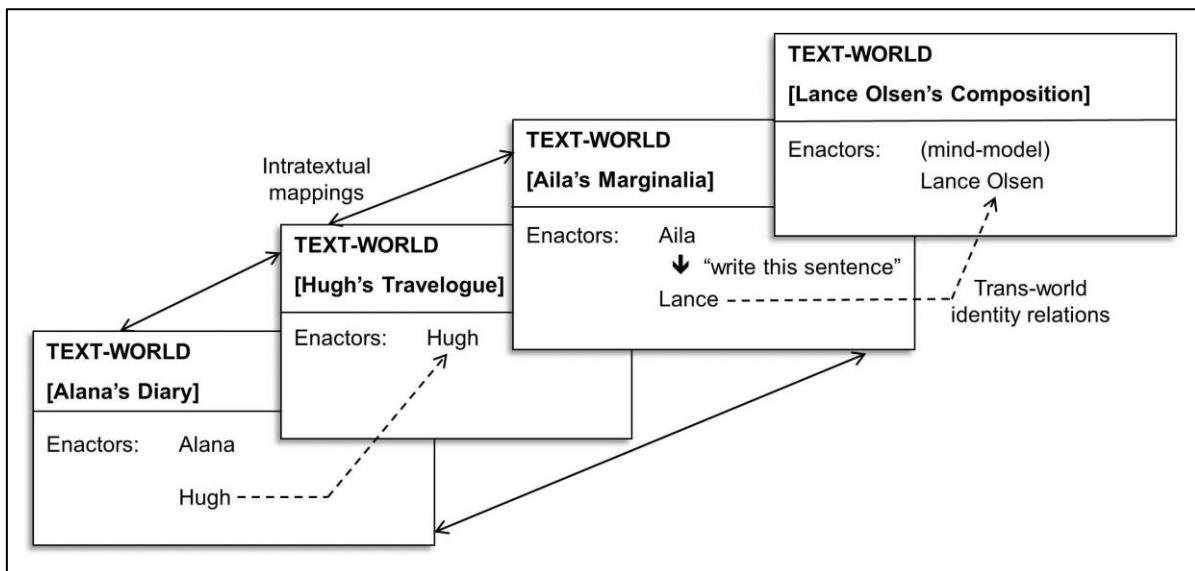
Figure 1: Macro-structure of text-world ontologies in *Theories of Forgetting*

Seeing Authors

Authorial intrusions can be more or less disruptive in terms of their impact on the ontological boundary between fiction and reality. Furthermore, the fictional or referential effects of enactor-authors is not equal across semiotic modes. Linda Haverty Rugg has argued that photographs seem to offer "physical evidence" and, as such, "re-anchor the subject to the physical world, insist on the verifiable presence of an embodied and solid individual" (2). Photos in *Theories of Forgetting* function at the intradiegetic level of Alana's diary. The majority relate to her current film project or her health concerns. One particular photo in *Theories of Forgetting* stands out (A.285; see Figure 2), not least because it is discussed in both Alana's and Hugh's narratives. The photo undoubtedly depicts real people and belongs to the genre of holiday or travel photography (it is not overly aestheticized and does not appear to have been professionally taken). It cues readers to build the depicted text-world—a man and a woman stand in front of a temple, presumably somewhere in Asia—which is assigned a referential status: the photographed event *really* happened. Actually, the photo produces a specific unmarked reference because it shows real author Lance Olsen and his wife Andi Olsen but without explicit indication. Since a bio photo of the author is included (twice) on *Theories of Forgetting*'s cover(s), readers should detect the correspondence with the man in this photo. For readers who do notice, their referential text-world for the photo will include an enactor
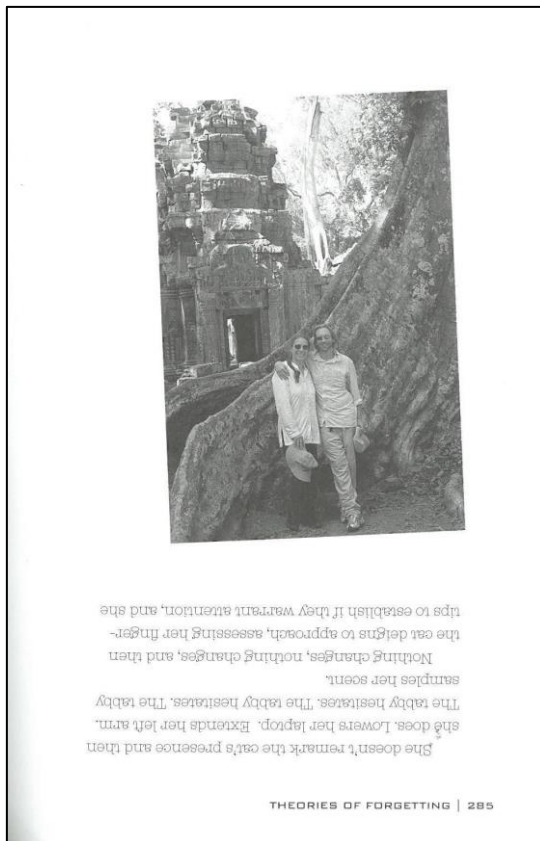
of Lance Olsen (and Andi Olsen).

Figure 2: *Theories of Forgetting* (A.285)

Alana's narrative account of the photo is given overleaf. She writes: "Let's say this is H., this is A., somewhere inside Angkor Wat. The Ta Prohm Temple, let's say, although it could be somewhere else" (A.286). Alana's account is already ontologically complex because of the way its hypothetical and epistemic modality questions the reality of her representation (generating a number of micro-level text-worlds). Moreover, the use of initials "A." and "H." as metonymic identities standing for Alana and Hugh delivers a third-person description that splits Alana's narrating self from the depicted self. Hugh's narrative also potentially alludes to this photograph (H.350):

Ready? Says the tourist they stopped and asked to snap their picture, a skinny pockmarked German in black leather pants and black t-shirt.

The couple processes a pair of traveler smiles.

This is a narrative fragment with no preceding contextualization and is located at the opposing side of the book to the photo and Alana's account. Consequently, some readers might not connect "the couple" in Hugh's narrative to the photo; others will though, particularly because Hugh's narrative often revisits episodes from Alana's. The connection is certainly encouraged since, on the facing page to Hugh's description, Aila's marginalia reads "Yes lets," an affirmation that appears to respond to Alana's hypothetical suggestions.

Text comprehension tasks have shown that readers detect discrepancies in ontological conditions (e.g., when a sentence depicts a real person meeting a fictional character). Yang and Xue suggest that this is because participants build a mental representation with a particular ontological status and then struggle to assimilate the ontological deviation: "Participants felt difficulty when they had to add a real human character into an unrealistic event, or add an unreal character that does not exist into a realistic event that can possibly happen in the real world" ("Distinguishing" 49). For this photo in *Theories of Forgetting*, two interpretations arise: it is a picture of the real Lance Olsen and Andi Olsen; it depicts the fictional characters Hugh and Alana. The latter, however, has been narrativized by both Alana and Hugh and therefore readers conceptualize two different macro-level text-worlds, representing each account and textually encoded point of view. There are therefore three macro-level text-world construals related to the photograph and these are not easily reconciled. This ontological instability is even harder to resolve for readers who recognize the location, in front of which real author Lance and wife Andi Olsen stand, as the Ta Prohm temple in Cambodia which matches Alana's hypothetical description in the fiction.

The photo therefore creates what Haverty Rugg in her discussion of autobiographical photos calls "double consciousness" (2), what Lejeune describes for the phantasmatic pact as a "[double] blow, or rather double vision—double writing" (27), and what Nielsen, Phelan, and Walsh refer to as fictionality's "double exposure" in which "[fictive] communication may invite the reader or listener to map an engagement with representations of *what is not* onto *what is*" ("Ten Theses" 68; original emphasis). Because of the already doubled intratextuality (the single event described twice,

in two characters' narratives), *Theories of Forgetting* evokes not only doubled but tripled imaginative construals. Accordingly (as shown in Figure 3), readers create macro-level text-world representations of the photo's referential origins and of both Alana's and Hugh's narratives. Because the photo was not explicitly mentioned in the text, connections between the photograph and narrative accounts are formed through specific unmarked intratextual mappings whilst correspondences between the figures in the photo and Alana and Hugh as fictional enactors occur as trans-world identity mappings. Furthermore, trans-world mappings between enactors in different text-worlds create ruptures in the ontological boundaries between them. Consequently, in order to process the ontological distortion stimulated by the photograph and its narrative engagements, readers must generate what Gavins identifies as a "blended-world" which is the "result of a conceptual merger of [at least] two independent text-worlds" (*Text World Theory* 149; my insertion).[16]
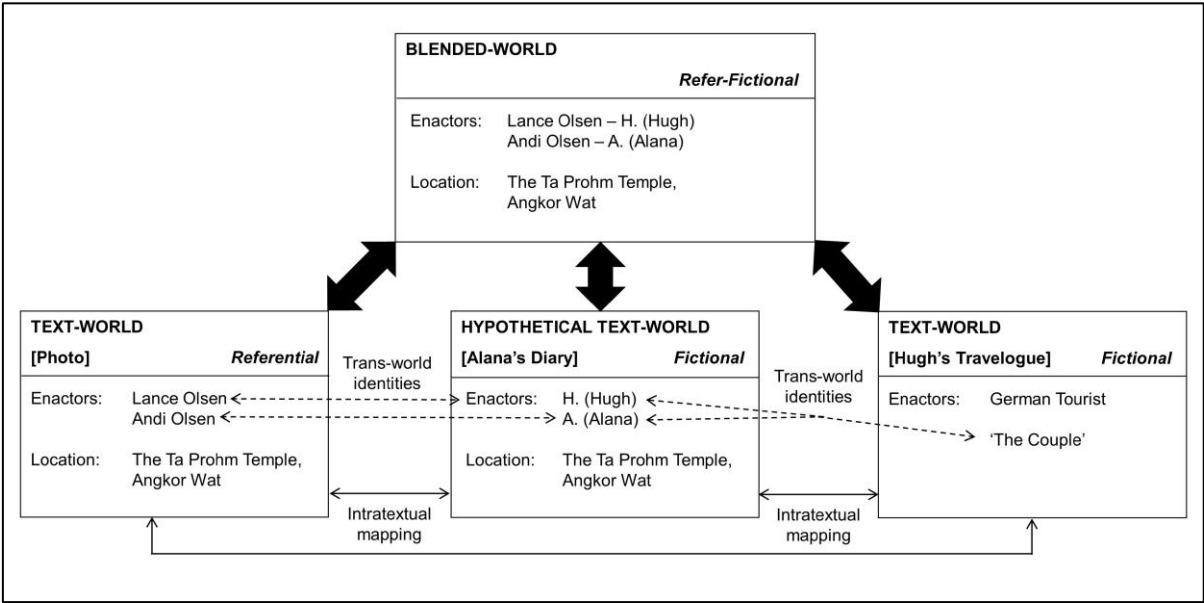

Figure 3: Macro structure of text-world ontologies in *Theories of Forgetting*, resulting from photo and narrative interrelations

Text World analysis not only reveals the cognitive architecture entailed in ontological clashes and blurs; it also elucidates fictive discourse's experiential resonance for readers in the discourse-world. Rather than resulting in fictional/referential indeterminacy or foregrounding the ontological

construction of the fiction and its layers, as postmodernist texts purportedly do, this ontological blurring creates multiple "exposures" and these can continue to interact with each other after the moment of blending (or doubling), resulting in an experiential and affective resonance (cf. Alice Bell's discussion of ontological resonance in her article in this special issue). For instance, take the dual dedications to *Theories of Forgetting* (on both sides of the book), which read: "for A, and all the days left" (A.7; H.5). Since, as Genette highlights, typically "the dedicator is always the author" (130), on first encounter readers interpret the dedication by reference to their mind-model of Lance Olsen; thus, if readers have knowledge about Olsen's life, "A" in the dedication is a partially-marked reference to Olsen's wife Andi. Adding strength to this claim, in *[[there]]*, Olsen writes (104):

> Because my books would never have been themselves, in other words, without Andi most of all, her artist's eye, her ability to teach me daily how to unlearn certain ways of seeing.
> Every sentence in every single one is dedicated to her.

Readers can create multiple text-world referents for the "A" in *Theories of Forgetting*'s dedication(s), not least because the same initial was used in Alana's description of the intradiegetic photo discussed above ("this is A.") and readers will possess this knowledge the second time they encounter the dedication. In relation to the fictive text-world(s) of *Theories of Forgetting*, then, "A" can also function as a dedication from "Lance" as editor to either his sister Aila or to their deceased mother Alana. The latter interpretation is an effect of readers' intratextual mappings and prior experience of the photograph's blended-world formation. As mentioned, over the course of *Theories of Forgetting*, Alana dies and Hugh is heartbroken by his loss. The novel's ontological blurrings between fictional beings (Alana) and referential beings (the real author's wife) result in an affective transfer: "for A, and all the days left" is endowed with greater intensity as readers' emotional experiences of the fictional narrative are brought to bear on their mind-model for Lance

Olsen—which includes his feelings for wife Andi—in the real, discourse-world context and related referential interpretation of the dedication.

Meeting Authors

Complicating ontological boundaries further, *there's no place like time* is a catalogue for the retrospective of Alana Olsen's films, with corresponding exhibitions installed in real-world galleries.[17] Andi Olsen is an artist-filmmaker and created the films exhibited as Alana Olsen's whilst Lance Olsen wrote the catalogue and exhibition text-plates. The catalogue credits Alana Olsen on the title page while the next page states "in collaboration with Aila Olsen," who is consequently implied to have written most of the book. The book is organized into the equivalent of chapters about each of Alana Olsen's films, before ending in the purported reprinting of an online interview with Alana.

The first chapter is attributed to Aila who contextualizes the retrospective in relation to her mother's death and father's disappearance and speaks of her brother Lance's editing of the manuscript he subsequently calls "*Theories of Forgetting*" (all events and details compatible with those presented in Olsen's novel). Other chapters are attributed to guest contributors whose ontological groundings vary (though all were, in fact, written by Lance Olsen). Of these contributors, whether readers recognize Lance Olsen will depend on prior knowledge. Similarly, readers possessing knowledge about experimental literature might identify real-world equivalents for R. M. Berry, Larry McCaffery, Christina Milletti, Davis Schneiderman. The identity of other contributors is ambiguous: whether Takumi Saito should be mapped to the real Japanese actor is unclear, and who Mike Christensen, Uljana Weber, and Paula Haig are cannot be ascertained through Google search, at least not mine during the period of writing this article (2018–20). Finally, the identity of some contributors seems mystifying: Chloé Lefebvre is credited with writing the chapter on "Self-Portraits" in 2001; I couldn't identify a real-world persona, though the first result in a Google search led to a Wikipedia page about a portrait called 'Chloé' by nineteenth century

painter Jules Joseph Lefebvre.[18] The difficulty in ascertaining the ontological status of these contributors shows up the shaky ground of fictionality, when suitable context is missing and readers do not have enough information in their mind-model of the author to identify the intended grounding.

I conducted a qualitative empirical questionnaire study, completed by 46 participants, to gauge visitors' assessments of the exhibition's fictionality when it displayed at the Snite Museum of Art at the University of Notre Dame, USA, in 2018 (for more information on this study, its methods and results, see: Gibbons, "'Why'"). Visitor-participants without prior knowledge of the exhibition's fictionality tended to interpret Alana Olsen as a real artist and this felt referentiality led, in some cases, to self-reports of heightened emotional involvement. It is nevertheless possible that readers of *Theories of Forgetting*, aware of the ontological hoax, will still find the exhibition emotionally impactful. Studies in cognitive neuroscience show that the brain registers differences between fictional characters and real people not based on ontological grounding but perceived personal relevance associated with knowledge in episodic memory (Abraham; Abraham, von Cramon, and Schubotz). This leads to the premise that "it may be possible that under certain circumstances a fictional entity of high personal relevance (e.g., a 'World of Warcraft' character to a chronic gamer) could yield greater activation than a real famous person of low personal relevance" (Abraham and von Cramon 6). Moreover, text comprehension studies which employ second-person address, and thus involve constructing personally relevant text-worlds, make clashes between reality and fiction harder to judge as "implausible" (Yang and Xue, "Reality/Fiction" 174). The personal relevance resulting from the exhibition's discourse-world setting and readers' past cognitive encounters with Alana Olsen could also result in ontological blurs. The exhibition may therefore *feel* real and personally affecting to both prior readers of *Theories of Forgetting* as well as visitors with no prior knowledge.

Conclusion

This article has explored literary fictionality and ontology blurrings in Lance Olsen's *Theories of Forgetting* and its companion texts *there's no place like time* and *[[there]]*. Text World Theory explicated the ontological relations between imagined representations or text-worlds and readers' felt reality in the discourse-world. The metalanguage of the narrative interrelation framework complemented this approach. It allowed a systematic description of ontological interrelations between the different narratives in *Theories of Forgetting* as well as of enactors, including enactor-authors. A cognitive approach to fictionality is—my analysis demonstrates and I maintain—unmatched as a method for tracking ontological distortions and readers' resultant experiences, particularly in relation to the kind of blurred fictionality found in autofiction or arising from enactor-author interrelations.

As multimodal hoax fictions, Lance Olsen's *Theories of Forgetting* and *there's no place like time,* as well as Andi and Lance Olsen's corresponding exhibition, present readers with ontological challenges. Whilst it might be tempting to class these ontological blurrings—in both technique and effect—as postmodernist, I have argued that instead they bring the fiction closer to the reader's discourse-world reality and transfer the affective intensities of the fictive narrative onto our lived experience of the real, including our emotional affiliations with others (characters we feel to be real or our perceptions of real authors). Because all text-worlds are built using the same conceptual apparatus, however real characters might seem or to whatever extent authors might become fictive, questions of fictionality and ontology are not actual but, rather, cognitive and experiential. There is no substitute for lived embodied empirical reality—that is, 'us' as participants in the discourse-world, the 'here' and 'now', the place that is real—or to quote from Aila's marginalia "we are living in a way they couldn't because we existed in the first place" (H.153).

Acknowledgements

Works Cited

Abraham, Anna. "The World According to Me: Personal Relevance and the Medial Prefrontal Cortex." *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 7, Article 341 (2013): 1–4.

Abraham, Anna and D. Yves von Cramon. "Reality = Relevance? Insights from Spontaneous Modulations of the Brain's Default Network When Telling Apart Reality from Fiction." *PLoS ONE* 4.3 (2009): 1–9.

Abraham, Anna, D. Yves von Cramon and Ricarda I. Schubotz. "Meeting George Bush versus Meeting Cinderella: The Neural Response When Telling Apart What Is Real from What Is Fictional in the Context of Our Reality." *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 20.6 (2008): 965–76.

Altmann, Ulrike, Isabel C. Borhn, Oliver Lubrich, Winfried Menninghaus, and Arthur M. Jacobs. "Fact vs Fiction—How Paratextual Information Shapes Our Reading Processes." *Scan* 9 (2014): 22–29.

Caracciolo, Marco. *The Experientiality of Narrative: An Enactivist Approach*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014.

Chopra, Deepak and Menas Kafatos. "From Quanta to Qualia: How a Paradigm Shift Turns in Science." *Philosophy Study* 4.4 (2014): 287–301.

Cohn, Dorrit. *The Distinction of Fiction*. Baltimore; London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1999.

Fludernik, Monika. *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology*. London: Routledge, 1996.

Gavins, Joanna. *Text World Theory: An Introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.

———*Reading the Absurd*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013.

Genette, Gerard. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Trans. Jane E. Lewin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997 [1987].

Gibbons, Alison. "Multimodal Literature and Experimentation." *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*. Ed. Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons, and Brian McHale. London; New York: Routledge, 2012. 420–34.

———*Multimodality, Cognition, and Experimental Literature*. London; New York: Routledge, 2012.

———"Reading *S* across Media: Transmedia Storyworlds, Multimodal Fiction, and Real Readers." *Narrative* 25.3 (2017): 320–40.

———"Autonarration, *I*, and Odd Address in Ben Lerner's Autofictional Novel *10:04*." *Pronouns in Literature: Positions and Perspectives in Language*. Ed. Alison Gibbons and Andrea Macrae. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. 75–96.

———"Entropology and the End of Nature in Lance Olsen's *Theories of Forgetting*." *Textual Practice* 33.2 (2019): 280–99.

———"*Using Life* and Abusing Life in the Trial of Ahmed Naji: Text World Theory, *Adab*, and the Ethics of Reading." *Journal of Language and Discrimination* 3.1 (2019): 4–31.

———"The 'Dissolving Margins' of Elena Ferrante and the Neapolitan Novels: A Cognitive Approach to Fictionality, Authorial Intentionality, and Autofictional Reading Strategies." *Narrative Inquiry* 29.2 (2019): 391–417.

———"'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." *Style and Reader Response: Minds, Media, Methods*. Eds. Alice Bell, Sam Browse, Alison Gibbons and David Peplow. Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2021.

Gibbons, Alison, Timotheus Vermeulen, and Robin van den Akker. "Reality Beckons: Metamodern Depthiness beyond Panfictionality." *European Journal of English Studies* 23.2(2019): 172–89.

Haverty Rugg, Linda. *Picturing Ourselves: Photography and Autobiography*. Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Herman, David. *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative*. Lincoln, NE; London: *University* of Nebraska Press, 2002.

———*Storytelling and the Sciences of the Mind*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2013.

Hoffman, Donald D. "Conscious Realism and the Mind-Body Problem." *Mind & Matter* 6.1 (2008): 87–121.

———and Chetan Prakesh. "Objects of Consciousness." *Frontiers in Psychology* 5.Article 577 (2014): 1–22.

Kak, Subhash, Deepak Chopra, and Menas Kafatos. "Perceived Reality, Quantum Mechanics, and Consciousness." *Cosmology* 18 (2014): 231–45.

Lejeune, Phillipe. "The Autobiographical Pact." *On Autobiography*. Trans. Katherine Leary. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989. 3–30.

Mason, Jessica. *Intertextuality in Practice*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2019.

McHale, B. *Postmodernist Fiction*. London; New York: Routledge, 1987.

Nielsen, Henrik Skov, James Phelan, and Richard Walsh. "Ten Theses about Fictionality." *Narrative* 23.1 (2015): 61–73.

———"Fictionality as Rhetoric: A Response to Paul Dawson." *Narrative* 23.1 (2015): 101–111.

Olsen, Lance. *[[there]]*. Fort Wayne, IN: Anti-Oedipus, 2014.

———*Theories of Forgetting*. Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2014.

———*there's no place like time*. Lake Forest, IL: &Now Books, 2016.

Phelan, James. "Cognitive Narratology, Rhetorical Narratology, and Interpretive Disagreement: A Response to Alan Palmer's Analysis of *Enduring Love*." *Style* 43.3 (2009): 309–21.

———"Fictionality." *A/B: Auto/Biography Studies* 32.2 (2017): 235–38.

Ryan, M-L. "Postmodernism and the Doctrine of Panfictionality." *Narrative* 5.2(1997): 165–87.

Scott, Jeremy. "Building a World from the Day's Remains: Showing, Telling, Re-presenting." *Stylistic Manipulation of the Reader in Contemporary Fiction*. Ed. Sandrine Sorlin. London: Bloomsbury, 2020. 92-114.

Stang, Nicholas F. "Kant's Transcendental Idealism." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2018 Edition). Ed. Edward N. Zalta. Online: https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/kant-transcendental-idealism/.

Stockwell, Peter. "The Texture of Authorial Invention." *World-Building: Discourse in the Mind*. Eds. Joanna Gavins and Ernestine Lahey. London, New York: Bloomsbury, 2016. 147–63.

Walsh, Richard. *The Rhetoric of Fictionality*. Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2007.

Werth, Paul. *Text Worlds: Representing Conceptual Space in Discourse*. Harlow: Longman, 1999.

Yang, Jie and Jin Xue. "Distinguishing Different Fictional Worlds during Sentence Comprehension: ERP evidence." *Psychophysiology* 51 (2014): 42–51.

———"Reality/Fiction Distinction and Fiction/Fiction Distinction during Sentence Comprehension." *Universal Journal of Psychology* 3.6 (2015): 165–75.

Zwaan, Rolf. A. "Effect of Genre Expectations on Text Comprehension." *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory and Cognition* 20 (1994): 920–33.

Notes

[1] The exhibition catalogue for *there's no place like time* is unpaginated.

[2] Indeed, a central tenant of cognitive stylistics and cognitive narratology is that mental representations rely, fundamentally, on embodied cognition. For instance, see arguments made by Joanna Gavins in *Text World Theory* and David Herman in *Storytelling and the Sciences of the Mind*. Emphasis on embodiment is also present in the articles by Marco Caracciolo and Merja Polvinen in this special issue.

[3] I have previously made a similar claim, with Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, arguing that what Marie-Laure Ryan calls panfictionality, associated with postmodernism, has transitioned to a contemporary, metamodern panreality: " . . . just as postmodernism has been replaced by a new cultural logic, so too has panfictionality been superseded. Metamodernist texts instead produce a 'reality effect'—a performance of, or insistence on, reality—and ironically they create this effect by using many of the same postmodernist devices Ryan identifies as panfictionalising techniques" (Gibbons, Vermeulen, and van den Akker 174).

[4] Text World Theory has specific linguistic conventions: reference to the framework as theory/approach, either in full or clipped (e.g., Text World analysis), uses title case; world terms (e.g., 'text-world') are presented in sentence case and hyphenated. Unless otherwise stated, all key terms from Text World Theory outlined here were proposed by Paul Werth or Joanna Gavins.

[5] The appearance of reality has, of course, been subject to philosophical debate for centuries, with similar insights advocated by Kant in his conception of "transcendental idealism" (for a summary of Kant's thinking here, see Stang).

[6] At the *20 Years of Text World Theory: A Celebration* symposium (University of Sheffield, September 2019), Joanna Gavins facilitated a discussion in which she highlighted the distinction between the storyworld and text-worlds (in the form of what I am here calling their micro-level form). The same distinction is also noted by Jeremy Scott (2020).

[7] Monika Fludernik defines experientiality as "the quasi-mimetic evocation of real-life experience" (12). The term, though, has been used in various ways: for instance, whilst Fludernik is primarily interested in the representation of character experience, Caracciolo considers the "tension between the textual design and the recipient's experiential background" (49). Whilst it differs, my use of the term is more aligned with Caracciolo's since my focus is on the reading experience itself.

[8] For a more detailed review of existing empirical research concerning fiction/reality distinctions, see Gibbons, "'Why.'"

[9] The relationships between narratives of anthropogenic climate change and ontological instability are taken up in greater detail by Lieven Ameel, Marco Caracciolo, and Pieter Vermeulen in their articles in this special issue.

[10] In *Theories of Forgetting*, Alana's and Hugh's narratives start at alternate sides of the book and both have their own page numbers. Consequently, I use 'A' for Alana's narrative or 'H' for Hugh's in my references. All of Aila's comments are referenced based on the page numbering for Hugh's narrative due to the temporal ordering/logic of the fiction.

[11] Such a layered ontological structure is typical of recursive narratives and a construction often made visible by multimodality in literature, as in Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, and J. J. Abrams' and Doug Dorst's *S* (see Gibbons, *Multimodality*; "Reading *S*").

[12] Aila's marginalia highlights the familial relationship by referencing her addressee as an "intimate sibling" (H.285) and as her brother: "dear bro" (H.59; H.153) "mole-brother" (H.76), 'imaginary brother' (H.251).

[13] Lejeune's example is Jean-Paul Sartre's *Les Mots* (*The Words*), where the narrating "me" is said to be the grandson of "Doctor Sartre". Lejeune then argues: "From the name, we grasp the identity of the protagonist, of the narrator, and of the author whose name is displayed above the title: Jean-Paul Sartre. And, that it indeed concerns the famous author, and not a homonym, is proved by the text itself' (17).

[14] Mason conceives of her categories of interrelation as offering degrees of granularity that exist along a cline (77–78) so this seems like a feasible solution.

[15] A comparable dynamic emerges as a result of the presence of the "Ruth" enactor-author in Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*: the novel's similarly recursive structure "ontologically embeds the 'Nao' chapters within the 'Ruth' chapters; then, through autofictional correspondence, embeds the 'Ruth' chapters in—or perhaps superimposes them on—the real-world of Ruth Ozeki. Rather than alienate readers from the fictional world, the effect is to make the fictional world feel more real" (Gibbons, Vermeulen, and van den Akker 178).

[16] In his article in this special issue, Lieven Ameel offers the concept of the 'fold' to account for ontological interactions, overlaps, and distortions. Because of its basis in cognitive science and Text World Theory, I use the concept of a blended-world to account for readers' cognitive operations here. Perhaps, however, the fold also captures—in literary critical terms—something of the co-existence of these macro-level text-worlds interanimating within the storyworld.

[17] The first exhibition was shown at the Green House in Berlin (November 2015). *there's no place like time* has since shown as full exhibitions: in Germany, at Momentum Worldwide in Berlin (May to June 2017); and in the United States, at Texas A&M University (September-October 2014), the New Hampshire Institute of Art Roger Williams Gallery in New Hampshire (February to April 2017), Lake Forest College's Sonnenschein Gallery and Albright Gallery in Illinois (April 2017), and the University of Notre Dame's Snite Museum of Art in Indiana (September to December 2018).

[18] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chloé_(artwork)