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House of Leaves: The End of Postmodernism

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by

Joseph B. Noah

An Abstract of a Thesis
in English

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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Mark Z. Danielewski's debut 2000 novel *House of Leaves* is written in part as an essay titled *The Navidson Record* by Zampanò. Within this essay, Zampanò includes footnotes and citations to many works both real and fictional. Through investigating some of his footnotes and allusions in *The Navidson Record*, certain connections to the postmodern movement may be drawn. By interpreting Zampanò's allusions to Freud, Derrida, and Einstein, elements from Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late-Capitalism* change the reception of Danielewski's novel. Thorough investigation of a few allusions within the novel *House of Leaves* reveal many foundations for the dual-narratives of Zampanò and Johnny Truant; deconstructing these allusions may prove that without these allusions and the large group of texts they inform, there may be nothing left to the novel itself, as if the novel itself is completely deconstructed. Danielewski reacts to authors like Jameson and Lyotard in his novel *House of Leaves*, and instead of embracing postmodernism, he abandons it.

State University of New York
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Chapter One: An Introduction to Reading *House of Leaves*

"'Take a look for yourself,' he said, handing me a big brick of tattered paper. 'But be careful,' he added in a conspiratorial whisper. 'It'll change your life.'" (Danielewski 513).

The novel *House of Leaves* by Mark Z. Danielewski exhibits many characteristics that could place the novel neatly within the realm of the literary theory postmodernism. The publication history of the novel, its format, and the two narratives within it all contain elements which seem postmodern. This theory and its relation to *House of Leaves* might actually act like a new article of clothing that is bought and not tried on—perhaps it does not quite fit. At first glance, the book is contained within the parameters laid out by theorists such as Fredric Jameson—but, as most of the characters within the novel discover, first glances can be deceiving.

The act of reading *House of Leaves* is a dizzying experience because of the format of the text itself: the novel is made up of two narratives, and features such as font, color, page orientation, and footnotes all seem to work against the reader and add to the strange format. One narrative centers on Johnny Truant—a young tattoo shop employee who discovers an acquaintance of his dead and alone in his apartment with nail marks in the floorboards, and an essay he was writing locked away in a trunk. The second narrative is the essay itself concerning the film *The Navidson Record*, wherein the footnotes of the essay contain Truant's own story. The dual narratives of Johnny Truant and Zampanò are filled with allusions to other works (some of the cited works are real, or from real authors, but most turn out to be made-up), and these allusions create a convoluted intertextuality. These formatting features of the novel create a dizzying effect on readers, who are forced to refer to names or titles of essays within the large amount of footnotes, which distracts from the narrative. This format is foreign to many readers

because it is so different from the preconceptions of what a novel should look like. The novel also forces readers to change its orientation during certain sections, because the text is printed upside-down or sideways. All of these formatting features contribute to the novel's dizzying effect, and when considering the dual narratives and strange publication of the novel, the effect is strengthened.

These elements within *House of Leaves* fit into the world of the postmodern sublime described by Fredric Jameson. Jameson discusses the effects that both Sartre's derealization of reality and elements of Derrida's deconstruction have on postmodern culture. He writes, "The world thereby momentarily loses its depth and threatens to become a glossy skin, a stereoscopic illusion, a rush of filmic images without density," and then asks, "But is this now a terrifying or an exhilarating experience?" (Jameson 34). *House of Leaves* is made up of multiple layers of narrative; although each individual narrative threatens this "glossy skin," actually, the novel exhibits much depth when considering all the layers together (Navidson's documentary, for example, is simply a film of his family as they move into a new house). Danielewski's novel may be both a terrifying and an exhilarating experience at the same time, but for a possibly different aesthetic reason than Jameson sets out to describe.

Of course, the text does in fact fit into this sublime world Jameson is referring to in *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, but I will contend that the text actively seeks to fit into this world in order to satirize and criticize it. Jameson writes:

> Yet something else does tend to emerge in the most energetic post-modernist texts, and this is the sense that beyond all thematics or content the work seems somehow to tap the networks of the reproductive process and thereby to afford us some glimpse into a postmodern or technological sublime, whose power or authenticity is documented by the success of such works in evoking a whole new postmodern space in emergence around us (Jameson 37)

Content and context inform and comment on one another throughout *House of Leaves*, and this "postmodern sublime" seems to emerge from the text. My contention is that Danielewski may be creating this space to encourage the reader to examine that space with a skeptical eye, and focus instead on the act of reading itself—the relationship between reader and text, excluding the spaces surrounding the text.

Therefore, Danielewski's true goal in creating a complex postmodern web around and within his novel is to focus on this relationship between reader and text. In order to properly frame this space, it may be helpful to consider my own relationship to the text. I discovered the novel *House of Leaves* through hearing a song by the band Poe called "Hey Pretty (2001 Drive-By Remix)." The original song is on the album *Haunted* (Danielewski's sister is the lead singer of the band Poe, and the album is infused with references to *House of Leaves*), and I heard the remix as a single on the radio right around the time it was released. I enjoyed the song at the time, but never listened to it very closely. When I re-discovered the song recently, I researched the lyrics and history of the album, and that research led me to the novel *House of Leaves.*

In the remixed version of the song, Danielewski himself reads a section from the novel over the instrumental track of "Hey Pretty." The chorus remains the same, and his sister's voice seems to become the voice of Kyrie from the novel, driving him through the streets as if he himself were Johnny Truant. I noted the poetics of this passage and how darkly sexy the car ride to Mulholland seemed, and I soon became transfixed upon the origin of such a passage: "Kyrie… suggested we go for a drive in her new 2 door BMW Coupe. In the parking lot, we slipped into her bucket seats…Kyrie took over from there" (Danielewski 88). Johnny Truant rides with Kyrie up to Mulholland and describes a love making scene where the focus becomes language—the car's physical turning and acceleration, the words passed between the two lovers, and

descriptions of clothing. Truant offers only glimpses into his love-making scene, and offers a sort of behind-closed-doors comment, which concludes the scene without expanding on any particular details: “Too bad dark languages rarely survive” (Danielewski 89).

I realized that this was an incredibly well-crafted passage of writing, and if it came from a novel I knew that I had to read it. Soon after I purchased a library edition of *House of Leaves* and began reading, not knowing anything about the book other than that this passage lay somewhere inside. I ignored the warning which comes after the foreword and title page: “This is not for you.” As I began reading, I realized that the novel was really the essay Johnny Truant describes finding in the introduction. The essay acts as a satire of academic discourse; there are footnotes quoting authors who do not exist from fictitious academic journals, and quotations from things real authors never wrote. The essay also features an unreliable author who constantly places meaning into the film he analyzes (without being able to see the film in the first place, because he is blind). This experience of reading someone who is reading became a humorous commentary on my own reading of the novel, which began simply to find the passage from the song.

My focus eventually shifted from simply trying to find this one particular passage, and I began following the allusions that the other readers in the book reference. Zampanò quotes many different critics throughout his essay, and most of these critics seem to be as fictional as the film *The Navidson Record*. When I started to realize that some of Zampanò’s allusions behind the footnotes to so many different authors were real, I traced the allusions he made, and it brought me into the realm of the postmodern. These allusions became greater and greater in number and eventually as I traced all of their origins I came across a complex web of texts all related to what is labeled “postmodernism.” I discovered psychoanalytic film theories, scientific and mathematic

discoveries which influenced artistic movements, and classic linguistic theory all behind Zampanò's words. Following the allusions to more and more texts led me to believe that this novel was really made up entirely of other texts. Instead of claiming that this was a postmodern text, now I was inclined to say that this text didn't exist at all.

Through tracing my experience in reading this novel, I hope to better illustrate its foundations. This postmodern web of texts weaves itself throughout Zampanò's essay, but as Jameson might ask: what does this create—a frightening or exciting experience? I will argue that the experience, when deconstructed, proves frightening. Tracing some of the allusions found in Zampanò's writing may lead a reader to an essay by Sigmund Freud called "The Uncanny," where Freud discusses a short story by E.T.A. Hoffman. Also, the strange dimensions of the Navidson house are reminiscent of a short story by Robert Heinlein called "And He Built a Crooked House," a story which experiments with the possibilities of the fourth spatial dimension and the hypercube. These elements of *House of Leaves* point the reader in many directions, on top of the excessive number of texts cited to begin with.

So if the whole text of *House of Leaves* is grounded in other texts, real or otherwise, then what is really left to read? At first glance there is nothing left to read aside from Jameson's complex web of postmodern technology that exists "without density"; looking closer reveals that there is much left to be read. The reader becomes briefly transfixed on Johnny Truant's own narrative as he struggles through reading Zampanò's essay, but this experience is always interrupted—Johnny Truant's narrative only exists as footnotes to the essay. Martin Brick, in his essay "Reading the Book of Someone's Reading," summarizes this experience: "Though his plot is about a house that grows infinitely on the inside, his book is clearly about the reading process and a metaphor for interpretation of books themselves" (Brick 1). Besides describing the

commentary expressed on the act of reading, Brick is also interested in the implications of such a commentary; he later expands: “The compelling textual layout facilitates an unresolved competition of authority between the various narrative voices. But more obviously, on a visual level, this instability of page structure operates as a mirror of the novel’s plot, which involves a filmmaker’s journey inside his mysterious house” (Brick 5).

Expanding on page structure, consider the title of the novel; if “leaves” refers to one of the Oxford English Dictionary definitions, “One of the folds of a folded sheet of paper…which compose a book or manuscript, a folio; hence, the matter printed or written thereon,” then *House of Leaves* may refer to the novel itself, which is a house made up of leaves or pages. Perhaps the word “leaves” functions then as the history of the word listed in the OED, quoted from Spenser’s *Amoretti*: “Happy ye leaves when as those lilly hands…Shall handle you” (Spenser i) rather than in the poem included in the first appendix to *House of Leaves*: “Little solace comes/to those who grieve/when thoughts keep drifting/as walls keep shifting/and this great blue world of ours/seems a house of leaves/moments before the wind” (Danielewski 563). The house and this text are not built on symbols which can be solved and which will blow away with the wind, as the leaves in this poem included in Zampanò’s essay—they are rather built on leaves which eventually “handle” the reader:

> First, he reads a few lines by match light and then as the heat bites his fingertips he applies the flame to the page. Here then is one end: a final act of reading, a final act of consumption. And as the fire rapidly devours the paper, Navidson’s eyes frantically sweep down over the text, keeping just ahead of the necessary immolation, until as he reaches the last few words, flames lick around his hands, ash peels off into the surrounding emptiness, and then as the fire retreats, dimming, its light suddenly spent, the book is gone leaving nothing behind but invisible traces already dismantled in the dark. (Danielewski 467)

Chapter Two: Freud, Zampanò, and Psychoanalysis in *House of Leaves*

Discovering the Uncanny: Freud and Zampanò

A reader will stumble across many names throughout *House of Leaves*, including some famed critics and authors; even in just the short segment of interviews Karen Green filmed, "What Some Have Thought," a reader will come across the names of Anne Rice, Harold Bloom, Stephen King, Hunter S. Thompson, and Stanley Kubrick. Of course, these are fictional interviews created based on what these people *might* say about *The Navidson Record*. The interviews prove to be humorous asides, which end mostly with sexual advances towards Karen. More important than all these names listed in this short segment, though, is the name that is not mentioned overtly, Sigmund Freud.

Freud is rather mentioned through Zampanò while he discusses Karen building a bookshelf in his essay on *The Navidson Record*. Instead of listing an imaginary source by a fake author, Zampanò alludes to an essay written by Freud. Zampanò writes: "Karen's project is one mechanism against the uncanny or that which is 'un-home-like.' She remains watchful and willing to let the bizarre dimensions of her house gestate within her" (Danielewski 37). Any reader who is familiar with the Freud essay will immediately recall "The Uncanny," Freud's attempt to provide psychoanalytic insight into linguistic and literary theory using E.T.A. Hoffman's short story "The Sandman." The words 'un-home-like' broken apart with dashes are reminiscent of the German etymological discussion which begins Freud's essay: "The German word *unheimlich* is obviously the opposite of *heimlich, heimisch*, meaning 'familiar,' 'native,' 'belonging to the home'; and we are tempted to conclude that what is 'uncanny' is frightening precisely because it is *not* known and familiar" (Freud 419).

Zampanò allows Freud's words to cue the reader instead of his own as Karen completes a craft project with a friend, distracting herself from the completely bizarre, shifting dimensions of her home. As everyone else becomes transfixed with determination to resolve the strangeness they are experiencing within their house, Karen "challenges its irregularity by introducing normalcy" (Danielewski 37), and Zampanò points the reader in the direction of this Freud essay. But why simply allude to a real essay instead of quoting it and listing it in the footnotes? This relationship between Zampanò and Freud is an attempt by Danielewski to satirize postmodernism, and make an inter-textual joke within the format of his novel by alluding to "The Uncanny." This not only comments on the action of *The Navidson Record*, but also relates to film theory and Zampanò's nearly endless footnotes; Danielewski once again creates an interesting layer of "readers" while satirizing some elements of postmodernism.

Focusing first on Freud's essay reveals the basic similarities between Zampanò writing about *The Navidson Record* and Freud's writing a piece of literary theory about E.T.A. Hoffman's story "The Sandman." The essay is supposed to examine the effects of the unconscious which are surprising, which create strange effects of "uncanniness." Freud focuses on the childhood terror within "The Sandman" and the feeling it arouses in the older Nathaniel later in the story. Freud begins his essay with the quotation previously listed, pointing out that the German word "*unheimlich* is 'obviously' the opposite of *Heimlich,*" but strangely enough lists nearly three pages of dictionary excerpts explaining the etymology of the word—perhaps an excessive discussion for a word with an "obvious" meaning.

Thus, here within his word-investigation is the first commonality between Freud and Zampanò. Freud seems to be interested in the second definition he lists from the first dictionary entry for the word "*heimlich"* which is related as: "Concealed, kept from sight, so that others do

not get to know about it, withheld from others" (Freud 419). Freud then comments: "What interests us most in this long extract is to find that among its different shades of meaning the word *Heimlich* exhibits one which is identical with its opposite, *unheimlich*" (Freud 420). After illustrating the strangeness of this word, Freud then begins his attempt to illustrate its effects as applied to literature; he writes: "When we proceed to review the things, persons, impressions, events and situations which are able to arouse in us a feeling of the uncanny in a particularly forcible and definite form, the first requirement is obviously to select a suitable example to start on" (Freud 421). Freud then mentions Jentsch's reading of "The Sandman" and begins a tangential summary of the story for the next two pages.

Freud's listing of dictionary definitions and his summary of the story within his essay are formatting issues or scholarly writing taboos to which Zampanò also succumbs. Instead of simply referring a reader to the story being analyzed, these authors deem it necessary to review and summarize the narrative occurring within the story. From a scholarly writing standpoint, these tactics are unnecessary for a work strictly concerned with analysis and interpretation; for example, when teaching students writing we might be inclined to say "don't summarize." When an author focuses on summarizing instead of analyzing a narrative, they undermine a reader's previous knowledge of the narrative. This method forces a reader to experience the narrative again as they re-read an author's own summary of a narrative. Of course, because *The Navidson Record* is not a real film, Zampanò's summary is necessary for readers, but Danielewski uses these stylistic taboos to further the effect of satire.

Zampanò in fact mostly summarizes the events of *The Navidson Record* within his essay, and offers quotations from other sources as commentary. At the first mention of the word "uncanny," Zampanò offers a long quotation from Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* and fails to

translate the German. Johnny does offer the following translation within his footnotes: “In anxiety one feels uncanny. Here the peculiar indefiniteness of that which Dasein finds itself alongside in anxiety, comes proximally to expression: the ‘nothing and nowhere’. But here ‘uncanniness’ also means ‘not-being-at-home.’ [das-Nicht-zuhause-sein].” (Danielewski 25). Here, Zampanò quotes Martin Heidegger in order to illustrate the effect of “uncanniness” exactly as Freud did—by using the definition of the word. Strangely enough, in both cases, the word’s ambiguous definition is used to illustrate the greater meaning of the word in the context of psychoanalysis. Johnny Truant adds some commentary on Heidegger’s discussion of the uncanny: “[…]Which only goes to prove the existence of crack back in the early twentieth century” (Danielewski 25).

Truant is crudely commenting on the incomprehensiveness of Heidegger’s passage, but his comment does hint at the problems which arise from the deconstruction of this word, which creates a convoluted postmodern mess. As Heidegger and Freud use signification to point readers to the direction of the meaning or “sign” of “uncanny,” they both offer the slightly opposite meaning of the root word “heimlich.” The fact that “heimlich” may signify “unheimlich” is strange. The problem which both Freud and Heidegger encounter is that in over-analyzing the word’s meaning, they lose some of the other meaning that they are trying to achieve in using the word in the first place—hence Truant writing off Heidegger’s meaning, blaming his use of crack. His comment is relevant to *The Navidson Record*, though, because each word contains the other—“unhomely” and “homely,” one cannot exist without the other—a condition which will evolve with negative consequences for the Navidson family.

In an older essay, Robin Lydenberg addresses the effect that ignoring certain literary elements (Freud’s “scholarly writing taboos” previously discussed) has within his essay “The

Uncanny"; Lydenberg writes: "In fact several readers of 'The Uncanny' have pointed out that in reducing 'The Sandman' to its themes (or to his own themes), Freud ignores the complexity of the narrative framework and obscures the elements that constitute the story's literariness" (Lydenberg 1073). Lydenberg points out that Freud is using his "own themes" to discuss Hoffman's story, and not the universal literary themes which are understood by his audience. Freud does apply his psychoanalytic theory to the story within his essay, but really fails to address any of the narrative elements that make "The Sandman" a story. The effect of this stylistic taboo is that Freud loses some credibility as an author, because he is undermining his own analysis.

Lydenberg expands on this position of narration within Freud:

> By focusing on the themes of "The Sandman" to the exclusion of its narrative form, Freud overlooks the aspects of his role as a story-teller that connect him to the tale's principals: the struggle with the limitations of language to express intellectual and emotional conflict, the desire to sweep readers up in his own way of seeing (Lydenberg 1074)

Once again, Lydenberg explains that because Freud focuses on his "own terms," or sweeping readers up "in his own way of seeing," he detracts from his goal in interpreting the story in the first place. Freud was concerned with how the story "The Sandman" made him feel and how readers in general are affected by the words they read. Freud was trying to describe that reading certain stories creates in a reader the feeling of "The Uncanny," and used "The Sandman" as well as personal anecdotes from his life's travels to illustrate this feeling—but he is not successful in accomplishing this goal.

On the other side of things, because *The Navidson Record* is a documentary style film, the discussion by Zampanò tends to blur this narrative framework as well. The important difference between Zampanò and Freud though is that Danielewski has created Zampanò to

intentionally comment on Freud's approach in "The Uncanny," which creates a satire of academia. The space Danielewski explores through Zampanò's essay is in part made up of all the authors he quotes and interprets—an academic realm made up of "authority" and published facts. This space also is made up of authors and works which do not lie inside of the text; through his allusion to Freud, for example, Danielewski navigates the postmodern space which emerges around *House of Leaves.*

A further discussion of Zampanò's style of writing and the similarities between his "taboos" and Freud's will help to define the "space" which I am referring to. The complex theories that Zampanò often focuses on eventually detract from the summary of the film he provides. In fact, examining one of Johnny Truant's footnotes reveals a similarity to Lydenberg's discussion of "The Uncanny." Truant writes:

> Yesterday I managed to get Maus Fife-Harris on the phone. She's a UC Irvine PhD candidate in Comp Lit who apparently always objected to the large chunks of narrative Zampanò kept asking her to write down. "I told him all those passages were inappropriate for a critical work, and if he were in my class I'd mark him down for it. But he'd just chuckle and continue. It bothered me a little but the guy wasn't my student and he was blind and old, so why should I care?" (Danielewski 55)

Zampanò almost becomes the narrator of *The Navidson Record*, instead of simply acting as a commentator on the narrative of the film; as Fife-Harris points out to Johnny Truant, these passages of narrative are "inappropriate for a critical work." Fife-Harris tells Johnny Truant she didn't press the issue because Zampanò is blind and old, but this is problematic because being blind, he would never have been able to view the film in the first place. This is also a problem because the film may or may not exist (Johnny Truant mentions searching many video stores for a copy—although his quest to find the film won't haunt him as much as Zampanò's essay gradually does).

The expert that Truant finds here may be yet another reference to the realm of academia. Maus Fife-Harris is a PhD candidate in comparative literature, which is a realm where her name might reference another critic (just like Freud, "the critic," in his essay). The French academic Marcel Mauss might be the critic behind the allusion of providing Fife-Harris with the first name Maus. Mauss focused his works such as *The Gift* on elements of anthropology, human interactions and their social significance in terms of "gift giving." Traces of Mauss's work may be found in the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss, and some have even used Derrida to discuss the implications of Mauss's work. This group of critics represents a web of academia related to the allusion to "The Uncanny" in the first place.

This allusion to Mauss also echoes Jameson's discussion I previously mentioned in the introduction, the "authenticity" of works which tap into a postmodern space. Other authors use Mauss as an authority in their own works, much like authors would use Freud and his essay "The Uncanny." For example, in a sociological work by James Carrier, Carrier uses Mauss's theories on exchange to introduce his own ideas: "How does the transaction of objects reflect and recreate those people and their relationships? How does this transaction reflect and recreate the social understanding of the nature of objects? Because of its broad scope, Mauss's model can be used to address a number of sociological topics" (Carrier 121). Carrier evokes Mauss's model of gift exchange in order to relate to his own discussion of social relations, and in doing so becomes a critic of Mauss himself. This trend will continue throughout *House of Leaves* within Zampanò's footnotes and allusions to texts both real and made-up, and for a further examination of this space the focus will be shifted again to Freud's "The Uncanny."

The allusion to "The Uncanny" begins to point readers to the postmodern space Jameson refers to that "emerges around us." Danielewski (via Zampanò) is also pointing readers in the

direction of Freud's essay to help comment on how readers may exhibit emotional responses to texts. Because the text of *House of Leaves* is constructed in such a bizarre way which creates a dizzying effect on a reader, the reader will no doubt feel the effects of "uncanniness" as they thumb through the pages. Readers become lost in footnotes as Navidson himself becomes lost inside of his own home, while meanwhile Johnny Truant loses his job and changes his whole life because of his obsession with Zampanò's essay. Even some of the critics that Zampanò mentions throughout his essay exhibit traumatic physical, psychological, and emotional effects from studying the house. So by alluding to "The Uncanny," Danielewski is commenting on the "uncanniness" of *House of Leaves* itself.

Entering the Spaces of the House—"Expanding" on Psychoanalysis

After summarizing Hoffman's story, Freud writes: "This short summary leaves no doubt, I think, that the feeling of something uncanny is directly attached to the figure of the Sand-Man, that is, to the idea of being robbed of one's eyes, and that Jentsch's point of an intellectual uncertainty has nothing to do with the effect" (Freud 423). Freud does offer his idea of what about the story is uncanny, disagreeing with Ernst Jentsch's own thoughts in *On the Psychology of the Uncanny*. Freud claims the fear of losing one's eyes (through the symbol of the sandman) that permeates Hoffman's story creates the feeling of uncanniness in readers. Freud continues and discredits the inanimate doll Olympia that Nathaniel in the story becomes obsessed with, as well as Jentsch's thoughts on intellectual uncertainty. Rather than agree with the previous commentaries on the subject of the feeling of uncanniness, Freud claims that the feeling is directly related to losing the eyes, and he does not stop here.

Freud continues to expand on why losing one's eyes may create a feeling of the uncanny, and places this feeling into his own terms of psychoanalysis. Freud reflects: "A study of dreams, phantasies and myths has taught us that anxiety about one's eyes, the fear of going blind, is often enough a substitute for the dread of being castrated[…]all further doubts are removed when we learn the details of their 'castration complex' from the analysis of neurotic patients, and realize its immense importance in their mental life" (Freud 424). Because so many critics and psychologists responded to Freud's sentiments in his "The Uncanny," a powerful lineage was created concerning psychoanalysis and literary theory which stem in part from this essay. Using this psychiatric method may make sense from the stance of a literary theorist who is able to psychoanalyze characters and their actions. Studying dreams and the "mental life" of Will Navidson in Danielewski's novel is important for this Freudian connection.

An important element of Freud's psychoanalysis is his interpretation of dreams. Dreams are important within *House of Leaves* as well. It is within dreams that the subconscious is allowed to freely express its desires, and for Freud it is the location where the fear of castration may be discovered. He writes:

> But this view does not account adequately for the substitutive relation between the eye and the male organ which is seen to exist in dreams and myths and phantasies; nor can it dispel the impression that the threat of being castrated in especial excites a peculiarly violent and obscure emotion, and that this emotion is what first gives the idea of losing other organs its intense colouring [sic] (Freud 424)

Simple familial relationships, such as the male relationship illustrated here by Freud, are distorted through our dreams and our subconscious desires, so that the castration complex of the son creates a troubled relation to the father. Throughout these anxieties rest the feelings of "violent and obscure emotion" which may be referred to as uncanny.

Consider the relationship that Freud has to the text “The Sandman” within his essay “The Uncanny”; Freud acts as a reader. Just like Zampanò is a reader, Freud is using the theories and discussions he has found most interesting concerning Hoffman’s story, and he is applying them within his essay. Danielewski understands this relationship well, and is pointing readers towards it with his allusions through Zampanò to “The Uncanny.” Tracing the allusion to the end of the essay and Freud’s applications of psychoanalytics reveals Danielewski’s next point of satire. Zampanò applies psychoanalysis to Navidson in the same way Freud applies it to Nathaniel, and in one section of *The Navidson Record*, Navidson’s dreams reveal Danielewski’s satire of theory.

The way Freud places his discussion of dreams and the castration complex into the story of “The Sandman” is exactly the type of academic writing that Danielewski is setting out to satirize. Chapter XVII of *The Navidson Record* is devoted to answering a simple question concerning the film... “Why Did Navidson Go Back To The House?” (Danielewski 385). The entire chapter is centered on three specific theories concerning the answer to this question, and Zampanò discusses the photograph which originally won Navidson critical acclaim (The Delial photo[1]). He also discusses a post-exposure effects rating of who is most affected by the trauma experienced within the house, and a set of dreams that Navidson has. One “theorist,” Lance Slocum, discusses the second dream Navidson refers to in the film, where he is in the center of a town attending a feast where the town has eaten a giant snail. After the feast, the town travels to a remote location outside of the town on a hill where the snail’s shell is left. The snail’s shell is of course the snail’s home, and as Zampanò continues to summarize through this person Slocum,

[1]Various explanations for Navidson’s poor health and crumbling psyche point to the prize-winning photograph that originally made him famous. Navidson was a war photojournalist who won the Pulitzer Prize for a picture of a starving girl on the brink of death. Navidson takes a picture of the girl—now known as “Delial”—while a vulture is stalking her and waiting for her to die, instead of acting to save her. This picture of Delial represents the pinnacle of Navidson’s past—it is the photo that made him famous, and then allowed him to meet Karen in the first place.

he addresses the emptiness of the home with the last sentences: “He gives serious thought to staying. He wonders if the approaching dawn will fill the shell with light” (Danielewski 399).

Danielewski makes up this dream to create a landscape of Navidson’s subconscious related again to Freud. As Zampanò and other theorists ponder the meaning of this dream, the dream becomes a narrative itself like “The Sandman” which will be interpreted in the same manner as Freud by various critics. Danielewski invents the symbol of the snail and creates the dream of a feast around that symbol, and these critics will read the dream the same way Freud read “The Sandman.” Through these various critics’ discussions of the dream, readers discover more satire of Freud and the postmodern space which emerges from the novel. Consider the following passage Zampanò quotes from these “dream critics”:

> “Unlike the dread lying in wait at the bottom of the wishing well,” Slocum comments, “The snail provides nourishment. Its shell offers the redemption of beauty, and despite Navidson’s dying candle, its curves still hold out the promise of even greater illumination. All of which is in stark contrast to the house. There the walls are black, in the dream of the snail they are white; there you starve, in the dream the town is fed for a lifetime; there the maze is threatening, in the dream the spiral is pleasing; there you descend, in the dream you ascend and so on.” (Danielewski 402)

This commentator Slocum is a perfect representation of how Danielewski is satirizing this academic writing, and specifically the discussion of dreams and Freudian psychoanalysis. Slocum neatly places the symbols which occur in the dream into his answer to the question which surrounds this chapter—why did Navidson return to the house? He provides evidence based on the light within the dream as a symbol for hope. Through this hope found within the dream, Navidson will presumably find the courage to return to his house and explore the staircase and labyrinth further. The odd thing is that the commentator is quoted as saying “and so on” at the end of his discussion of the dream. The phrase “and so on” signals a reader that this

list of symbols and analysis could be endless, or possibly that the list of symbols is not that important and can be brushed off with a quick summary.

Danielewski's satire of academia is found through creating allusions to psychoanalysis and the interpretation of Navidson's dreams. He then proceeds through Zampanò and writes, "For the more troubling and by far most terrifying *Dream #3*, Mia Haven and Lance Slocum team up together to ply the curvatures of that strange stretch of imaginings. Unlike *#1 and #2*, this dream is particularly difficult to recount and requires that careful attention be paid to the various temporal and even tonal shifts" (Danielewski 402). Then, a simple note occurs which is a footnote from Johnny Truant, "[2 pages missing]." After explaining that the most terrifying dream is yet to come, readers are denied the chance to experience it because simply those pages are missing from the essay. Just like the "and so on" comment at the end of Slocum's discussion of the snail dream, this missing portion breaks the academic discourse for the reader, removing them from the essay. Truant takes his cue in the missing content to begin discussing one of his own dreams. This interruption by Truant leads to more allusions to psychoanalysis within *House of Leaves*, illustrated in Truant's obsessive relationship to the essay *The Navidson Record*, and his relationship with his mother.

In her essay "'What Has Made Me?' Locating Mother in the Textual Labyrinth of Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*," Katharine Cox challenges the critic Doug Nufer's claim that allowing Johnny Truant to present Zampanò's essay is "risky." She argues that "Truant is an essential narrative proponent and that both he and his mother are integral to the house/labyrinth detailed in the Navidson Record" (Cox 6). By focusing on how the relationship between Truant and his mother is presented throughout the footnotes, Cox does illustrate the importance of Truant's narrative. Then she continues, arguing that "The fragmentation and later reconciliation

within the family unit offered by the Navidsons act as an analogy for the tortured and mysterious story of Truant and Pelafina; they too mask a secret that is confronted and finally resolved in the space of the labyrinth" (Cox 6). Cox achieves her goal in setting up Truant as an important foil to Navidson and Karen, and does this by using psychoanalysis to locate the portions of the essay where Truant is "locating" his mother.

However, Cox is also illustrating another point concerning Truant. By using this psychoanalytic theory, she is playing into the same realm of the postmodern that Danielewski is trying to satirize. Through using the language of psychoanalysis itself, grounded in Freud's "The Uncanny," Cox's words become another in the line of readers already examined amongst Freud, Zampanò, and Truant. Cox concludes her essay by saying: "From a site of mythic contestation and architectural difficulty, Danielewski reveals a current labyrinth whose structural bonds denote the fatiguing impositions of familial ties. Yet these denigrating and traumatic alliances are softened by the walking of the labyrinth, directly through the transformative qualities of the structure" (Cox 14). Cox's tone seems familiar to the dream interpretation discussed previously in Zampanò's essay. Her "walking of the labyrinth" becomes the process of interpreting these realms of theory, Freud's psychoanalysis and postmodernism, and it is this process of "walking" which helps to "soften" the familial ties presented in the novel.

These familial ties are the foundation of the book's main narrative…the narrative, as told by Zampanò, of *The Navidson Record*. The entire film is based on the premise that Navidson is an obsessive photographer, setting out on a project to film his family's adjustment to a new home. Zampanò introduces the scope of Navidson's project when he writes: " [He] began his project by mounting a number of Hi 8s around the house and equipping them with motion detectors to turn them on and off whenever someone enters or leaves the room. With the

exception of the three bathrooms, there are cameras in every corner of the house. Navidson also keeps on hand two 16mm Arriflexs and his usual battery of 35mm cameras" (Danielewski 10). These cameras work on one level simply to film the documentary *The Navidson Record*, but on another level these cameras are another example of "reading," as Zampanò is supposedly writing his essay on his viewing of the film (which is problematic because he is blind, and both Johnny Truant and the unnamed "editors" throughout the footnotes dispute the film's existence). The cameras, and the film and narrative of the story in general, come to represent this relationship of a reader to a text. The interpretation of the film then through Zampanò's essay becomes a reader's own analysis through his personal relation to the narrative—just like Freud relating *his* reading of "The Sandman." The familial relationships between the Navidsons and Johnny Truant and Pelafina must be considered within this context of the original allusion to Freud's "Uncanny"; they exist within Jameson's web of postmodern texts.

Tracing Freud to Film

Karen's allusion to "The Uncanny" extends past this discussion of psychoanalysis and comments directly on the format and the presentation of the text of *The Navidson Record*. When tracing the allusion to Freud's essay, readers experience a deeper understanding of exactly what Zampanò's words mean. "Karen's guard against that which is uncanny" may signify to a reader that she is trying to craft a project with a friend to introduce normalcy into a situation she does not comprehend; her project at the same times signifies to a reader to recall another essay, which further signifies all the previously discussed elements of Freudian psychoanalysis. Through this allusion, readers are plunged into the world described by Jameson when he writes of the works which exist "in the postmodern space around us." The space signified by these allusions is made

up of many other works which all relate to *House of Leaves*—so much so that without this space, the "house" of leaves is seemingly an empty one.

Considering that the format of Zampanò's narrative is an academic essay about a film, this allusion to another academic essay by Freud is a clever commentary on the academic space that exists around the essays. Christopher Butler summarizes this space well in his *Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction*:

> The danger, but also the point, for many postmodernists, of embedding theoretical and philosophical arguments within a literary rhetoric is that the text is thereby left open to all sorts of interpretations. Books of a postmodernist persuasion are often advertised by their publishers, not for their challenging hypotheses or arguments, but for their '*use* of theory', their 'insights', their 'interventions', their 'addressing' (rather than answering) questions (Butler ii)

Butler describes postmodern rhetoric as "skeptical," and overly concerned with embedding theoretical arguments. Danielewski is also acting as a skeptic through Zampanò's and his commentaries, but he is most likely being skeptical of this academic space labeled here as "postmodern," rather than skeptical of the actual theorists and philosophers he mentions through Zampanò.

Examining this space even further through Zampanò's allusion to Freud may more clearly illustrate another way that Danielewski is satirizing this realm of academia and postmodern rhetoric. Exploring the uncanny is a good metaphor for Navidson exploring his own house (literally the most familiar thing "home," for him has become unfamiliar). Zampanò explores this metaphor in his essay:

> Some have suggested that the horrors Navidson encountered in that house were merely manifestations of his own troubled psyche. Dr. Iben Van Pollit in his book *The Incident* claims the entire house is a physical incarnation of Navidson's psychological pain: "I often wonder how things might have turned out if Will Navidson had, how shall we say, done a little bit of house cleaning" (Danielewski 21)

On one level while the reader explores the depths of the allusion to the uncanny, Navidson will also be exploring that which is uncanny to him—his house. On another level, the essay "The Uncanny" fits neatly into a line of essays which influenced postmodernist film theory, specifically the feminist theories of Laura Mulvey. Tracing this lineage of essays and influence not only outlines but creates an example of the "postmodern space" to which critics like Jameson and Butler refer. When readers eventually trace the line of essays which influence Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," a new realization of Will Navidson and his film project occurs.

Zampanò frames the project of filming the house again as he centers on Navidson: "For this reason, we should again revisit Navidson on his porch, his gaze fixed, his delicate fingers wrapped around a glass of lemonade. 'I just thought it would be nice to see how people move into a place and start to inhabit it,' he calmly announces" (Danielewski 23). Zampanò is exploring why Navidson decided to start this project, and one word in his commentary may stand out to readers familiar with film theory—the gaze. Navidson is a photographer, so his desire to film his own family in his home stems from certain concepts found within Mulvey's essay. To fully comprehend the scope of the space surrounding the essay, though, once again a reader needs to start with Freud.

One effect of Freud's "The Uncanny" was influencing other writings concerning psychoanalysis and the aesthetic; theorists began to either embrace or dispute Freud's writings, and new texts became tied into this emerging theory of psychoanalysis. One such theorist was a French psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, whose writings directly influenced post-structuralist authors often referred to by the postmodern critics. Jacques Lacan may be considered one of the

critics to be most directly influenced by Freud—his name is not often mentioned without also mentioning Freud's.

In one of Lacan's seminars, "The Psychoses," an important concept is introduced that will once again influence another essay. Lacan interjects a personal narrative just like Freud's narration of his traveling to another country within "The Uncanny," or the other features previously discussed where his own narrative voice penetrates the text of his essay. A discussion of the case of President Schreber illustrates in the first section of his third seminar how psychoanalysis explains a particular subject's unconscious. It is near the end of this discussion that a reader might recall certain elements of "The Uncanny." Lacan states:

> You think you are dealing with someone who is communicating with you because he speaks the same language as you. And then, what he is saying is so understandable that you get the feeling, particularly if you are a psychoanalyst, that here is someone who has penetrated, in a more profound way than is given to the common lot of mortals, into the very mechanism of the system of the unconscious. Somewhere in the second chapter Schreber expresses it in passing—*Enlightenment rarely given to the mortals has been given to me* (Lacan 31)

Lacan refers here to the feeling of "uncanniness" that may occur through reading certain authors' words, just as Freud set out to describe in "The Uncanny." Perhaps Lacan is situating this particular reading of Schreber's words here to substitute the "uncanny" for "enlightenment"; but more important than this possible misinterpretation is something that occurs later in his essay.

Lacan discusses how language and linguistics work within psychoanalysis in terms of analyzing a patient, and continues until he arrives at another "popular" term within psychoanalysis. From this terminology he will develop his own important contribution to the field of psychoanalysis—the concept of "other." He begins this discussion though with a term which will also be familiar to readers of *House of Leaves*: "Take a subject who is the object of a thought-echo…one of the two intracerebral messages, one of the two telegrams, as it were, is

impeded and arrives after the other, thus as its echo" (Lacan 36). Lacan is introducing the concept of "other" (which will become important for deconstruction later) by reviewing a particular psychology concept, the thought-echo. The word "echo" here may act just like the word "uncanny" as previously discussed, and an intricate web of theorists will use this word for their own purposes. Danielewski is certainly interested in this word, and includes a whole chapter from Zampanò's essay dedicated to "echo." The chapter begins: "It is impossible to appreciate the importance of space in *The Navidson Record* without first taking into account the significance of echoes" (Danielewski 41). Zampanò refers to "space" meaning the vastness of the caverns and hallways which appear in the Navidson house, but space also refers to this space of texts which surround *House of Leaves*. Zampanò also uses the phrase "significance of echoes," meaning the importance of various echoes, but the chapter is in fact an exploration of signification of the word echo itself.

Because Danielewski dedicates an entire chapter to a concept with such a complex history, he is engaging once again in satirizing the emerging postmodern texts around *House of Leaves*. Danielewski can tie into the lineage of linguistic and theoretical history that makes *The Navidson Record* important for Zampanò in the first place. By referring to Freud and Lacan, Danielewski places his novel into this web of complex texts, as Zampanò navigates through his own web of complex texts in his essay. These layers of textual space that appear mimic the space which appears in the Navidson household, and through this layering of various texts Danielewski achieves a successful commentary on the realm of postmodernism.

Through that successful commentary, Danielewski resembles the caption written about him on the back cover of the library's second edition of the novel by *Time Out New York*: "Danielewski has a songwriter's heart as attuned to heartache as he is to Derrida's theory on the

sign." Danielewski ties his understanding of complex linguistic theories into Zampanò's discussion of echo. Zampanò begins his chapter on "echoes" with a description of the word: "Generally speaking, echo has two coextensive histories: the mythological one and the scientific one. Each provides a slightly different perspective on the inherent meaning of recurrence, especially when that repetition is imperfect" (Danielewski 41). A footnote in the middle of this passage refers readers to a critic who argues for a third history of "echo," the epistemological history. This passage is entirely concerned with the limitations of knowledge surrounding the word, and the echo chapter fits nicely into the postmodern space created around this novel while at the same time enacting the concept of echo itself through repeating these various histories.

Zampanò discusses various elements of Greek mythology and the story of Echo throughout the chapter, summarizing the story and then re-interpreting the various meanings of it through critics and authors. He continues to discuss the importance of "echo" as related to religion, and also the recording of psalms by religious choirs—"Divinity seems defined by echo" (Danielewski 46). Zampanò then discusses the scientific definition of echo, and lists various physics equations for determining the lengths of sound waves. Johnny Truant is also concerned with sound in this chapter, and recalls hearing the ten words that his love interest Thumper finally offers him when she says "hello thank you what's your name nice to meet you" (Danielewski 53). Finally placing echo back into the context of *The Navidson Record*, Zampanò concludes his chapter by writing: "Myth makes echo the subject of longing and desire. Physics makes Echo the subject of distance and design. Where emotion and reason are concerned both claims are accurate. And where there is no Echo there is no description of space or love. There is only silence" (Danielewski 50).

Zampanò takes a lot of space in his essay to describe all the various meanings of the word "echo," just like Freud listing the definitions of the word "Heimlich" in "The Uncanny." Zampanò adds to the satire of academia and contributes more content to the emerging postmodern space around *House of Leaves* by labeling the separate schools of thought contributing to the meaning of "echo." Zampanò is attempting to describe echoes to cue the reader in on just how vast the Navidson house is, but he actually creates more space in and around his essay with his various allusions to religion, Greek mythology, and science within this one chapter. As the discussions of the word "echo" increase in number, Zampanò's essay itself becomes larger, mimicking the physical alterations to the Navidson house while at the same time demonstrating the action of an echo. By using the format of his novel to relate to and comment on the narrative occurring inside of it, Danielewski is masterfully constructing his own postmodern space both inside his text, and through allusions to other works outside of his text.

The very next chapter of the essay is the beginning of the journey into the house, and Navidson records his "Exploration A" into the cavernous hallway that appears in his living room, even against the warning of Karen that she will leave him if he enters. The narrative structure of *The Navidson Record* begins to take shape in this chapter, as family tensions between Will and Karen increase and the explorations into the house become more serious. The ending of this chapter, though, is important for this discussion of Lacan and "Echo" when Daisy requests that she and her father can play "always." Zampanò writes: "Despite the tremendous amount of material generated by Exploration A, no one has ever commented on the game Daisy wants to play with her father, perhaps because everyone assumes it is either a request 'to play always' or just a childish neologism. Then again, 'always' slightly mispronounces 'hallways.' It also echoes it" (Danielewski 73). Zampanò focuses on an event he claims no one else has ever commented

on, and places his own meaning of Daisy's words here in this passage when he suggests everyone assumes Daisy wants to "always play." By placing his own meaning into this event, Zampanò is again demonstrating a similarity to Freud in "The Uncanny," but the allusion is strengthened when he ends the chapter by saying "it also echoes it." The echo shows up once again and the space between Zampanò, Lacan, and Freud emerges.

Danielewski creates some horror filled effects through Zampanò's essay in these chapters, when the reader begins to realize that the discussion of "echo" actually "echoes" into different chapters. The next character to be introduced in Zampanò's essay is Holloway Roberts, whose name also "slightly mispronounces" or "echoes" the word hallway. This connection between Lacan's seminar and Zampanò's chapters ties into the discussion of "The Uncanny" very well, but as I have previously mentioned, this space constructed around *House of Leaves* does not end here. Influenced by Lacan's seminars and concepts of "echo" and "otherness," Laura Mulvey also shares some connections to Navidson and *House of Leaves*.

Building on psychoanalytic foundations, Mulvey discusses the concept of "scopophilia" in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Mulvey applies this concept of "visual pleasure," which is based upon Freud, Lacan, and others, to film when she writes: "The cinema satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking, but it also goes further, developing scopophilia in its narcissistic aspect" (Mulvey 31). This "pleasurable looking" becomes important when considering Will Navidson's position as a photojournalist, and the documentary style of the film *The Navidson Record*. She continues to discuss this concept of "gaze" in film, where one person looks at another on screen through filmic images and holds a position of power over the other person because they are objectified. Just like signification or Lacan's discussion of "otherness," the gaze works as a binary structure—one thing, and the other. Mulvey will use this

concept of “the gaze” to influence her discussions in this essay, which became the foundation for most modern feminist film theory. Mulvey analyzes various ways men look at women in film and the ways women are objectified or fetishized.

Instead of further analyzing Mulvey’s essay, applying this basic understanding of the essay to *House of Leaves* will suffice to complete the frame around the space Danielewski is creating. Obviously, Mulvey’s essay is important to *House of Leaves* because *The Navidson Record* is a film, so it would be appropriate to discuss film theory in context (in fact, Zampanò does this quite often). Also important is the fact that Navidson himself was a photographer, and as the discussion of the film’s narrative progresses, Zampanò often focuses on discussing the lens combinations or filming equipment that Navidson used. Instead of advancing the narrative along while Navidson explores his house, Zampanò may interject the gaze of Navidson himself, who is simply filming the whole proceeding.

Mulvey’s “gaze” becomes very important in the context of one photo Navidson took in particular, the Delial photo previously discussed (see footnote 1). The guilt he carries surrounding the photo haunts him nearly as much as his own house does throughout *The Navidson Record,* and the photo is referred to many times throughout the essay. One critic that Zampanò quotes claims that if *The Navidson Record* were to follow Hollywood conventions, the film would have ended with Delial discovered at the center of the house (interesting when considering the previous critic Van Politt’s claim that the house is a manifestation of Navidson’s psychological pain). It is through the discussion of another “critic” that a connection to the gaze is fully understood; Zampanò quotes Rouhollah W. Leffler and then writes: “Leffler’s point is simply that while Navidson does not physically appear in the frame he still occupies the right side of the photograph. The emptiness there is merely a gnomonic representation of both his

presence and influence, challenging the predator for a helpless prize epitomized by the flightless wings of a dying child's shoulder blades" (Danielewski 421). Through analyzing the space in the photograph, this critic Leffler has come to the conclusion that Navidson's presence is indicated by the emptiness in the right side of the frame. As Navidson photographs the girl, he is simultaneously contributing to her death by not helping her.

Through interpreting the gaze, we realize that Navidson holds a gaze over the little girl he is photographing. His position of power as the holder of the gaze is literally a position of power over her life, as she is about to die. This position relates to a stance where one can take action but may chose not to, a stance that is encapsulated in both Lacan's "other" and Freud's "Uncanny." Delial is only one symbol inside of the film, though, and many more exist which also relate to Mulvey's theories and this space created between Freud and Mulvey in general. The essays, critics, and authors which influence each other and occur between "The Uncanny" and "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" don't appear directly in the footnotes of *House of Leaves*—but this lineage of critical theory is alluded to often as I have previously demonstrated. By alluding to this history of literature and theory, Danielewski creates an emerging postmodern "space" of texts which comment on the action of *The Navidson Record*. Placing this *other* space on top of a web of already convoluted intertextuality creates an interesting commentary on this sort of academic discourse by critiquing it through allusions, while at the same time being made up of that same discourse.

Roll the Credits

I think if properly read in the context of *House of Leaves*, the postmodern space that Danielewski creates encourages the reader into a re-evaluation of the role of "reader." By writing

a novel built on a dual narrative structure which contains so many footnotes to other texts, the novel is actually very difficult to describe or summarize. In this sense, it evades criticism itself, and offers a very difficult-to-relate story to a reader. This novel is largely made up of other texts, some real and some simply made up. Exploring Zampanò's essay and the area "outside the text" (which is described through his allusions), reveals this world of intertextuality, or this postmodern space that Danielewski has created. A reader exploring Zampanò's essay and the novel *House of Leaves* at large, then, becomes just like Navidson who is exploring the dark depths of his house—or like Johnny Truant who explores his life through writing in the footnotes of this essay he has become obsessed with.

To better understand what Danielewski may be saying about "reading," consider the following: after the introduction of the novel by Johnny Truant, a question appears as the only text on an otherwise blank page: "*Muss es sein?*" This phrase is German, and translates to "Must it be?" or "Does it have to?" The phrase also sounds like a French phrase, "*mise-en-scene,*" which means "placing on stage" and is used to describe anything in the frame of a performance. Starting the novel with such a question frames this relationship of a reader and a text; the reader is cued to pay attention to everything in the frame, and to simultaneously question everything that appears within that scene while receiving it: "must it be?"

Even the title of the novel relates to this relationship of reader and text. If the word "leaves" refers to pages, then *House of Leaves* is a house which is made up of pages. Doesn't any book ever written fit this description? Zampanò's essay is an example of academic discourse, an interpretation of a text (or in this case a film—*The Navidson Record*). Unlike Zampanò's essay, Danielewski is trying to re-evaluate the relationship of reader and text. This relationship may be thought of as a binary relationship made up strictly of one reader and one text—and not made up,

like Zampanò's essay, of so many other allusions, authors, references, and texts—but this relationship may also be something entirely new, maybe even a web of relationships between readers and texts.

Chapter Three: Surfaces, Johnny Truant, and Signification

Postmodern Linguistics

The movement of postmodernism is sometimes concerned with structures of language, and in particular it is concerned with the linguistic branch of semiotics. Jameson dedicates an entire chapter of his book to sentences and language, and even Jean-Francois Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* refers to "language games." Danielewski is attuned to this relationship concerning the postmodern and semiotics, and beyond his allusions to Freud and "The Uncanny" previously discussed, he uses his character Johnny Truant to further demonstrate his balance between a "love story" and sign theory. Ideas brought to a novel by a reader concerning what a love story really is may warp an understanding of Johnny Truant's own sordid "love" life. For Truant, love becomes synonymous with strippers, parties, and sex. But for Navidson, love is challenged by the events surrounding his shifting house, and he and Karen struggle to save their relationship while trying to survive the horror-filled events their family encounters. So labeling *House of Leaves* "A love story by a semiotician" is appropriate given Danielewski's twisting of reader's expectations of what to encounter in a love story.

The concerns with language within postmodern theory may stem from the word itself. Like Freud's definition of "uncanny," the word seems to have no clear definition and is built on the definitions of other words. To comprehend the word postmodernism requires one to also comprehend the movement it stands against, modernism. Ihab Hassan explores these words in his essay "Toward a Concept of Postmodernism" when he writes: "But what better name have we to give this curious age? The Atomic, or Space, or Television Age? These technological tags lack theoretical definition… Like other categorical terms—say poststructuralism, or modernism,

or romanticism for that matter—postmodernism suffers from a certain *semantic* instability" (Hassan 38-9). Hassan hints at some of the technological relationships which exist with the theory, and then denies them, saying they lack "theoretical definition." As I am attempting to demonstrate through Danielewski's novel, perhaps the movement itself is crafted around this lack of "theoretical definition." The semantic instability Hassan refers to has less to do with the word "postmodernism" and more to do with the labyrinth of theories it is made up of.

Postmodernism has approached a theoretical definition, thanks in part to Hassan's essay and other works such as Lyotard's *Postmodern Condition,* or Jameson's collection of his work on the subject. Certain authors published works while the postmodern period was still being defined and reinterpreted which experiment with the forms of language and the format of the novel in general; using these tactics authors associated themselves with the postmodern movement, so much so that their works were inseparable from the theory itself. Ray Federman, for example, explored the format of narrative and language in his novel *Take It Or Leave It*. Throughout the novel, he uses language to challenge the traditional format of narrative. Federman writes:

> *Writing is not* [I INSIST] *the living repetition of life.*
>
> *The author is* [PERHAPS?] *that which gives the disquieting language of fiction its unities, its knots of coherence, its insertion into the real.*
>
> *All fiction is* [I THINK] *a digression. It always deviates from its true purpose.*
>
> *All reading is* [IN MY OPINION] *done haphazardly.*
>
> (Federman, "Recommendations")

Federman abandons the format of a traditional narrative to embark on his own digressions throughout his entire novel, and in this passage he even interjects further digressions in the form of parenthetical statements.

Besides his novel, Federman published some important theoretical work for the postmodern movement. In his *Critifiction: Postmodern Essays,* he explores the implications of using language for this purpose, and he even attempts to reinterpret the term "postmodernism" itself:

> And so, for me, the only fiction that still means something today is the kind of fiction that tries to explore the possibilities of fiction beyond its own limitations; the kind of fiction that challenges the tradition that governs it; the kind of fiction that constantly renews our faith in man's intelligence and imagination rather than man's distorted view of reality; the kind of fiction that reveals man's playful irrationality rather than his righteous rationality. This I call **SURFICTION.** However, not because it imitates reality, but because it exposes the fictionality of reality (Federman 67).

"Exposing the fictionality of reality" is a phrase reminiscent of Jameson's discussion of the postmodern society when he writes: "beyond all thematics or content the work seems somehow to tap the networks of the reproductive process and thereby to afford us some glimpse into a postmodern or technological sublime" (Jameson 35). Federman's passage as a whole relates well to *House of Leaves*—specifically, the term "playful irrationality" describes Danielewski's writing style well. Like Federman inserting digressions within his digressions, Danielewski crafts the narrative of Johnny Truant inside of another narrative—*The Navidson Record.* Writing style aside, Danielewski's novel clearly "explores the possibilities of fiction beyond its own limitations," but through his character Johnny Truant, the postmodern tradition is challenged and satirized rather than embraced.

Johnny Truant and Surfaces

Johnny Truant could possibly be considered the protagonist of *House of Leaves*—as if "Truant" were the matching answer for "protagonist" on the final examination for the novel. Or perhaps the answer is Navidson. "Truant" could even refer to the fact that Johnny Truant stands

in as the protagonist of the narrative instead of Navidson—who is simply filming the events and editing himself into the documentary Zampanò is discussing in *The Navidson Record*. But then again, maybe there are two questions to match, because there are two narratives in the novel. [2] But then, there's the question of who exactly Johnny Truant is, or whether or not *The Navidson Record* is a real film. Determining the authenticity of sources within *House of Leaves* may be just one of the many, many concerns a reader may exhibit whilst engaging with the text; for example, a reader may inspect which authors and essay titles are in fact real within the footnotes. The character of Johnny Truant does not escape this investigation either—information is readily available on Johnny Truant; readers learn about his job (a tattoo shop employee who prepares needles), his best friend and his love interest ("Lude," and a stripper named "Thumper"), and his drug and alcohol preferences (anything under the sun). But the source of this information is the unreliable narrator Johnny Truant himself. Considering this source, a reader comes again to the question of who exactly Johnny Truant is. Whoever he is, Johnny Truant is a hero—a champion who must struggle with overcoming a dangerous beast—in his case, the essay *The Navidson Record*. His role as "hero" is sort of a function of Danielewski's novel, because his purpose in writing is often to focus readers on the role of language and the linguistic elements which I have been discussing.

Johnny Truant is represented by various surfaces within *House of Leaves*; possibly for a linguistic reason, Danielewski is once again creating an allusion for readers to investigate. Truant may be considered an editor of Zampanò's essay, and this position as a reader of the essay is one of the "surfaces" he is associated with. Truant is the discoverer of Zampanò's essay; he finds it in

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[2]Consider again how a reader will first approach the text of *House of Leaves*; preconceptions of what a novel should be are present before ever reading this text. Readers must therefore take every preconception of "a novel" away from an approach to understanding *House of Leaves*—developing an idea for what this novel is may be as hard as passing a final examination on it

a chest while investigating the apartment after Zampanò's mysterious death. As he begins to read the essay, he becomes obsessed with it until he transforms his whole life because of what he is reading and the way the essay makes him feel. The introduction of the novel is Truant speaking to readers about how transformed he has become because of Zampanò's essay *The Navidson Record*. In one passage Truant refers to his experience by using a metaphor pertaining to light:

> …For some reason, you will no longer be the person you believe you once were. You'll detect slow and subtle shifts going on all around you, more importantly shifts in you. Worse, you'll realize it's always been shifting, like a shimmer of sorts, a vast shimmer, only dark like a room…You might try then, as I did, to find a sky so full of stars it will blind you again. Only no sky can blind you now. Even with all that iridescent magic up there, your eye will no longer linger on the light, it will no longer trace constellations. You'll care only about the darkness and you'll watch it for hours, for days, maybe even for years, trying in vain to believe you're some kind of indispensable, universe-appointed sentinel…it will get so bad you'll be afraid to look away, you'll be afraid to sleep (Danielewski xxiii)

Truant interprets the fear he has developed after discovering and reading Zampanò's essay about the film. Truant refers to the time before he began reading the essay, calling himself "blind" (an important word choice considering that Zampanò is himself blind). But he then discovers a light-filled "shimmer" of information within Zampanò's essay, and this knowledge transforms him. His fear has corrupted him so much by the time he is writing the introduction that he literally craves the darkness again, and relates his state of fear as being so severe that he is afraid to even sleep. His insomnia is personified by the presence of his footnotes in *The Navidson Record* even; the essay is interrupted by Truant as much as his own sleep and life is interrupted by the essay.

His fear throughout this introduction is manifested because of the nature of Zampanò's essay…the film *The Navidson Record* doesn't appear to be real, Zampanò was found dead and alone (an event Johnny Truant suspects to have something to do with the essay), and the events of the film are terrifying for Will Navidson and his family. But his fear represents something more for readers encountering the text *House of Leaves*; it represents the act of reading in

general. The symptoms that Truant suffers while engaging with *The Navidson Record* are not unlike the symptoms that readers of *House of Leaves* encounter because of the maze-like construction of the text itself. The experience of encountering the maze-like format of the novel, and the web of postmodern texts that Danielewski weaves around the novel, are challenging for a reader because they are forced to navigate through these distractions to experience the narrative which lies beneath. Through presenting his own narrative within the footnotes of Zampanò's essay, Truant exposes these challenges of reading—whether the reading is analytical like Zampanò's, or social and historical like Jameson's—while providing further allusions to linguistic theory.

Truant , Lude, and Animals

Johnny Truant discovers the death of Zampanò and the essay *The Navidson Record* through his friend, Lude. Lude previously lived in the same building as Zampanò, and Lude relates to Johnny Truant during the introduction to the novel that Zampanò told him he felt like he would be dying soon. Lude plays an important role in Johnny Truant's narrative, because Johnny rarely leaves his apartment unless he is with Lude or going to work (eventually he even stops leaving for both, sheltering himself and almost as closed-off as Zampanò was). Lude introduces Johnny to many different people in the episodes they encounter throughout Truant's narrative footnotes, including Kyrie.

Johnny Truant writes about meeting Lude's friend Kyrie: "Lude took heed when I told him I needed a German translation and introduced us. As it turned out, I'd met her before, about five or so months ago" (Danielewski 87). Then Truant describes this scene where he previously met her; he was out with Lude and was accused by a man of coming on to the girl he was with,

who turns out to be Kyrie. After making a scene and nearly getting assaulted, Truant writes: “Lude was yelling at me. ‘You got a death wish Truant?’ Which was the thing that scared me. ‘Cause maybe I did” (Danielewski 87). Lude here is cautioning Johnny Truant, although most times Lude represents the furthest thing from caution. Although this caution Lude is offering seems genuine, Lude gets Truant into the situations which require caution in the first place, so Lude represents the opposite of Truant’s “surface” experience—Lude is made up of things beneath the surface.

Lude represents the channel for Johnny Truant to experience the world outside his apartment and tattoo shop. Although Lude is the social link for Johnny Truant, the experiences they encounter are not very safe, and oftentimes not even legal. Lude is a link not only to other people and experiences outside Truant’s apartment, but also to drugs and alcohol and the trouble that comes along with being in close proximity to both. The name Lude even functions to comment on this channel, which leads to danger and experience for Johnny Truant—“Lude” could be a homonym for “lewd,” meaning crude or offensive in a sexual manner. “Lude” is also a word that refers to a drug: Quaaludes, most often appearing as Methaqualone, are a depressant sedative type drug. Also, one more important definition appears in the Oxford English Dictionary—“Lude” is from the Latin root “lūd-us” which means “play,” and the second definition of Lude is listed as “a game.”

So Lude’s name is signifying to readers the nature of Johnny Truant and Lude’s relationship—a relationship based on playing and games, most often playing with drugs and “lewd” behavior. As illustrated by Lude, names are important in Truant’s footnotes, which is one element of how Johnny Truant is always presented in the context of different “surfaces.” A name represents one of the simplest relationships of language, but as illustrated through Jameson and

various philosophers throughout history (like Kant and Hegel—who will be discussed later on), naming any object represents a linguistic binary that may never properly connect subject to object. No person ever occupies the content which comes with a name, because that person is also made up of an identity which is constantly in a state of flux.

This binary becomes important for Johnny Truant as he exists only in the footnotes contained within Zampanò's essay. His narrative is positioned as a sub-textual object to the primary narrative of *The Navidson Record,* and this position is further separated by its font. Truant's narrative is recorded in the "Courier new" font, which was the standard font for older academic works before it was replaced with the font that Zampanò is recorded in, "Times New Roman." This difference in font, along with other features of Truant's narrative, separates the two narratives and satirizes the relationship between subject and object through challenging forms of language. Truant and Lude's names, Truant's relation to surfaces, and the position of Truant's footnotes in *The Navidson Record* all mirror the discussions by authors like Jameson concerning subject and object. Katharine Hayles examines Truant's position to Zampanò's essay, and argues that *House of Leaves* allows Danielewski to recover "the lost subject." Early in her essay, Hayles refers to a postmodern element related to *House of Leaves*, the collection of various media which makes up the novel:

> To make matters worse (or better), this proliferation of words happens in the represented world on astonishingly diverse media that match in variety and strangeness the words' sources. The inscription technologies include film, video, photography, tattoos, typewriters, telegraphy, handwriting, and digital computers…Despite his uncertainty (or perhaps because of it), Johnny Truant adds to these "snarls" by more obsessive writing on diverse surfaces, annotation, correcting, recovering, blotting out and amending Zampanò's words, filling out a journal, penning letters and poems, even scribbling on the walls of his studio apartment until all available inscription surfaces are written and overwritten with words and images. (Hayles 780-1)

Hayles is connecting Truant to surfaces in a different way; she refers literally to the surfaces Truant writes on and the palimpsests he creates, offering to readers yet another image of the novel itself. Because writing and reading take over much of Truant's life, and the novel *House of Leaves* as a whole mimics the relationship Truant has with *The Navidson Record*, the surfaces referred to may all be covered ones. Hayles continues in her essay to discuss relationships within *The Navidson Record*, and the format of the novel *House of Leaves*, ultimately claiming that this novel represents a way to illustrate to readers how subjectivity is constructed both inside and outside of a text. I have been focusing on the space constructed outside of *House of Leaves* through Danielewski's allusions to Freud and others, and how these allusions force readers to re-interpret the text itself, but now I will focus on the space inside Johnny Truant's text and illustrate the satire Danielewski constructs in relationship to language.

Hayles refers to the various media that appears in *House of Leaves,* and also to Johnny Truant's obsessive need for writing that he develops while reviewing Zampanò's essay. But although Truant begins his footnotes influenced by sections of Zampanò's essay, Truant's footnotes end up almost always discussing his own life and constructing his own narrative for readers to interpret. Consider again Truant's friend Lude—the person who originally mentioned Zampanò and his death to Johnny; Lude's name reveals all of the elements upon which his adventures with Johnny will be based (playful lewd games). Tracing one of Truant's stories in particular will illustrate how Danielewski moves beyond Hayles' "reconstruction of the subject" and uses Truant and Lude to satirize the linguistic realm based on Kant, Hegel, and Jameson that Hayles engages with to construct her argument concerning "saving the subject."

To illustrate the tactics used by Danielewski to comment on linguistic theory, I will focus on one story in particular mentioned by Johnny Truant called "the Pekinese." Truant mentions

this story about a dog in the chapter concerning animals in Zampanò's essay. The "animals" chapter is just over a page long, and is a tangential story which occurs between Navidson's first exploration into the hallway and Holloway Robert's arrival into the house. The rising tension of the narrative is halted by the "animals" chapter, because it is so short and stands in direct contrast to these two crucial events in the early plot of *The Navidson Record.* Zampanò only even offers one critic's thoughts concerning animals in the Navidson house, as quoted from Mary Widmunt: "So what's the deal with the pets?" Then Zampanò adds in conclusion "Even Navidson himself, the consummate investigator, never revisits the subject. Who knows what might have been discovered if he had" (Danielewski 75).

In the eighty-second footnote of the essay, Johnny Truant adds his thoughts concerning Zampanò's chapter on animals; the footnote goes on for three pages and starts with the following:

> Strange how Zampanò also fails to comment on the inability of animals to wander those corridors. I believe there's a great deal of significance in this discovery. Unfortunately, Zampanò never returns to the matter and while I would like to offer you my own interpretation I am a little high and alot drunk, trying to determine what set me off in the first place on this private little home-bound binge (Danielewski 76)

Truant is unable to offer his commentary in his state of mind, so instead tries to investigate what led him to reach that state in the first place. Truant starts his foot note off criticizing something Zampanò did—failed to comment on how the animals can't occupy the corridors of the house (one chapter of *The Navidson Record* is labeled "Animals" and is only a page long; in it the Navidson's dog and cat chase one another into the labyrinth and end up in the back yard)—then he states that there is much significance to this, and ignores the issue himself. His discussion of syntax mirrors the impaired state of mind he is in, and his writing begins to become more and

more jumbled. He starts talking about Thumper entering the shop and how it made him feel, and as he begins to fear that Thumper will not call him he starts to focus on the pets from the "animals" chapter again—but here his language starts to become incomprehensible. Truant begins confusing the cats near Zampanò's apartment, the Navidsons' pets, and the sounds each makes, and his writing becomes more difficult to understand as he infuses sounds and actions and loses track of his own purpose of writing, which was to resolve how he feels about Thumper. Truant writes:

> sprinting out from under the shadows, paws!-patter-paws-paws!, pausing then to rub against our legs, zap! Senile sparks perhaps but ah yes still there, and I'm thinking, has another missing year resolved in song?—though let me not get too far from myself, they were after all only cats, quadruped mice-devouring mote-chasing shades, Felis catus (Danielewski 77)

His language mimics the thinking he mentions he is doing by asking a question about another missing year, and interrupting his discussion by writing animal sounds, both cases of grammar which don't appear to fit in with the rest of the passage. Truant's grammar then is a product of his impaired state of mind, and this passage turns into a drunken rant. Truant rambles on like this until he mentions dogs: "Well, there are no dogs except for the Pekinese but that's another story, one I won't, I cannot tell" (Danielewski 77).

No mention of the Pekinese appears again throughout the novel until much later on, when during Tom's manuscript Johnny Truant offers a footnote concerning the shadow puppets Tom is making inside his tent. Truant relates this event to the "animals" chapter, and then writes: "Which in an odd and round about way brings me to the Pekinese, the dog story I mentioned a ways back but didn't want to discuss. Well, I've changed my mind. The Pekinese belongs here. With Tom's Hand shadows" (Danielewski 262). Finally, almost 200 pages later, readers are cued that the Pekinese story is appropriate for the current timing, during the section of Zampanò's

essay where Tom is casting shadows with his hands. Tom is distracting himself from the fear he is experiencing listening to the growling occurring beyond the staircase—this situation mirrors Truant's own fear he mentions in his introduction, and reminds him of the animals Zampanò failed to discuss, and the importance of his Pekinese story. But, once again Johnny Truant distracts both readers and himself with his footnote, and begins to tell a story about the month of November when Lude offered him a "pass to paradise" (which turns out to be a large amount of Ecstasy). Truant and Lude are offered all-access passes to parties everywhere for their month-long binge, and Truant saves a list of girls that Lude sleeps with during the month.

Lude's list contains short descriptions of the over twenty sexual encounters he had, including the locations of the sexual encounters and certain specific details. When Johnny Truant attempts to list his sexual conquests, the story ends up to be very depressing, as his three encounters for the month all end on sad notes. At this, Truant is prompted to re-interpret Lude's list of girls and give the actual details surrounding the sexual encounters. Playful encounters such as "Caroline. 21. Swedish, on her Nordic Track" become reinterpreted by Johnny Truant as a "truer" version: "Caroline—Grew up in a commune. Had her first abortion when she was twelve" (Danielewski 262, 65). Truant re-writes Lude's list by providing the emotional and physical traumas that the girls have been through, which suggests either that Lude is preying on the weak by using the girls, or that he is ignoring their emotional needs—given Truant's attempts to investigate his own feelings, the latter is more likely. Also the fact that Truant and Lude are both writing lists here point readers to the type of communication Truant is cultivating in his footnotes throughout Zampanò's essay—layering levels of readers, and engaging with syntax throughout those levels, mimics the action of making a list itself. For example: Lude chooses to identify Caroline on his list with the fact that she was Swedish and had sex on her Nordic Track,

a playful rhetoric of humor connecting a Swedish girl to a piece of Swedish exercising equipment; Truant chooses to identify Caroline by her communal upbringing and her history of abortions and sexual abuse. In re-creating the list, Truant is mimicking the act of writing itself, but as he continuously gets distracted within his own footnotes, perhaps Truant himself could benefit from the use of a list.

So, instead of revealing the elusive Pekinese story that Truant promises readers, he offers only this dark tale of self-destruction he and Lude embark on for the month of November. But then soon enough, after re-interpreting Lude's list, Truant finally begins to reveal the story: "Which I guess finally brings me to the story I've been meaning to tell all along, one that still haunts me today, about the wounded and where I still fear they finally end up. The story of my Pekinese" (Danielewski 265). This introductory phrase by Truant frames the story well, and may explain what it means to him. Johnny Truant's fear and the emotional duress that he struggles with throughout the novel may be related to the outcome of the Pekinese—where he fears the wounded end up. Truant has delayed this story because of his fear of the grotesque death of the dog he relates to, and the entire experience is probably a traumatic reminder of finding Zampanò in the first place.

Truant then tells the tale of meeting a woman who is possibly a porn star named Johnnie, although her real name was actually Rachel. Johnnie offers Truant a ride home, and they stop to pick up a stray dog—a Pekinese. Johnny Truant doesn't invite the girl inside his apartment and as she drives away, he hears a loud thump and describes the ensuing scene:

> I looked down the street. Her truck was gone but behind it, in its wake, something dark rolled into the light of a street lamp. Something Johnnie had thrown out her window as she passed the parked cars. I jogged down the block, feeling more than a little uneasy, until as I approached that clump of something on the side of the road, I discovered much to my dismay all my uneasiness confirmed…lying next

> to a car with half its head caved in, an eye broken and oozing vitreous jelly, tongue caught (and partially served) in its snapped jaws (Danielewski 267)

Finally the hesitation to reveal this grotesque story is understood—Johnny Truant didn't want to share his story about his Pekinese because of the horrifying experience of seeing the dog die. Also, Truant seems to be relating to the dog while he tells the story, as if Truant sees himself as the dog because of the traumatic effects of Zampanò's essay. But I think there is more happening here than fear; that the Pekinese represents something else entirely.

Johnny Truant cues the reader that he will be relating a story of a Pekinese dog; but the story turns out to be about the death of that dog, and how Truant relates to it. As soon as Truant mentions the word Pekinese and that he has a story about "his" dog, readers may have preconceptions that the dog may be from his childhood and that the story could explain some facet of his relationship with his mother Pelafina. Or perhaps a reader assumes that the dog may relate to the "animals" chapter of Zampanò's essay. Danielewski is playing with a reader's notions of the word "Pekinese," offering a vague symbol which has many interpretations, and then revealing the dark story. Through this story of the Pekinese, another satire of postmodernism is discovered which pertains to signification and semiotics.

Jameson, Kant, and Hegel

So Johnny Truant brings up the story of the Pekinese in an appropriate place—the end of Zampanò's chapter on Animals—but then doesn't offer up the story for readers until much later. But why wait? The "Pekinese" story is one example of how Johnny Truant's footnotes work in relation to postmodern theory; Danielewski uses stories like the Pekinese to allow for Truant to

call attention to the postmodern interpretation of semiotics and linguistic theory. As in Zampanò's allusions to Freud, a level of satire is achieved in *House of Leaves* through Johnny Truant's footnotes. But this time, the satire is aimed at the meaning of words themselves.

Fredrich Jameson dedicates an entire chapter of *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* to reading and the interpretation of words. In his chapter on "sentences," Jameson discusses *Les Corps conducteurs,* a novel by Claude Simon, and examines the relationship of two important aesthetic philosophers—Immanuel Kant and Georg Hegel. Jameson's analysis of both Kant and Hegel is the postmodern realm that Danielewski seeks to satirize with Truant's narrative. Through Jameson and Johnny Truant, I will demonstrate how Kant and Hegel's dialectic, and the positions of subject and object, are re-imagined in Danielewski's novel.

Hegel and Kant struggled with creating a dialectic model of reason to reinterpret universal truths. For these philosophers, experience and reality contributed to an understanding of the unknown. For Kant, demonstrating the relationships between nature and the mind and the universe could be broken down by sensory experience. How a subject could be affected by objects or objective truths then became a very important foundation for Kant's dialectic. Likewise, for Jameson, language plays an important role in this relationship between subjects and objects; Jameson writes on the subject:

> Objects are, however, here still very much a function of language, whose local failure to describe or even to designate them takes us in a different direction and foregrounds the unexpected breakdown of a function of language we normally take for granted—some privileged relationship between words and things which here gives way to a yawning chasm between the generality of the words and the sensory particularity of the objects. In such passages language is being forced to do something we assumed to be virtually its primary function, but which it now—pressed to some absolute limit—proves to be incapable of doing (Jameson 137-8)

When Jameson mentions “sensory particularity,” he is referring to the difficulty of accurately capturing the sensory experience of objects. Jameson refers to the basic structure of language, the relationship between subject and object, and claims when “pressed to some absolute limit” this relationship malfunctions. Jameson asks: “…why are such impossible demands now made on language, whose other functions seemed to have performed well enough and given satisfaction in other modes of production?” (Jameson 152)

Jameson’s chapter focuses on repositioning this discussion of language outside of the realm of the aesthetic. Language becomes a critique of society within works from authors such as Adorno and Marx, and Jameson uses his discussion of Simon’s novel to further these critiques. Simon’s novel is important in the context of language investigation because his work is critiqued by Jameson as sharing modernist sentiments. When referring to *House of Leaves* and Johnny Truant, these societal concerns are not as important as what Jameson calls the “primary function” of language. Aesthetic philosophers struggle with the fact that objects exist and can be experienced through the senses without the aid of language to describe such an experience; the “primary function” of language then lies in this realm of the aesthetic, in creating a subjective relation to an object. Kant writes in his *Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgement*: “In order to find something good, I must always know what sort of thing the object is supposed to be, i.e., I must have a concept of it. I do not need that in order to find beauty in something” (Kant 93). Kant continues to define the process of judgment and explores the realm of criticism in this essay. Criticizing an object in relation to its aesthetic value becomes a function of language in this realm, but as for the “primary function” Jameson refers to, Hegel may share some more insight.

From his "Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art," G.W.F. Hegel arrives at a definition of the "ideal." This ideal for Hegel relates to the idea of the "beauty of art," as Kant discusses in his *Critique*, but draws closer to Jameson's "primary function" of language. Hegel writes: "For the *Idea as such* is indeed the absolute truth itself, but the truth only in its not yet objectified universality, while the idea as the *beauty of art* is the Idea with the nearer qualification of being both essentially individual reality and also an individual configuration of reality destined essentially to embody and reveal the idea" (Hegel 41). Hegel's ideal is this configuration of reality, which is destined to "reveal" the idea. Revealing an idea considering the "objectified universality" is the concept that Jameson's function is founded upon.

Jameson refers to this relationship Hegel examines when he writes: "In this situation of linguistic failure, the breakdown of the relationship between words and things is for Hegel a happy fall insofar as it redirects philosophical thought toward new forms of the universals themselves" (Jameson 139). Jameson relates Hegel's celebration of this "breakdown," because when this type of linguistic failure occurs, the ideal form of an object can be revealed. Jameson then demonstrates this revelation in terms of semiotics with a diagram pointed from the "signified" to two objects, the "not-signified" and the "non-signified."

Jameson claims that the "signified" object points readers of a text in two directions—towards the realm of "linguistic problematics," and towards "image society and media" (141). So in terms of the postmodern, these signified aesthetic objects don't reveal a Hegelian "Ideal," but rather point to the history of aesthetic philosophy and "image society." Jameson is employing tactics of signification taken from Derrida's definition of signification, which is made up of the signified and signifier. Derrida's sign theory evolves within postmodernism to become an even more complex relationship of language, where signs create misdirection. I think that Danielewski

is aware of this role of language, and is using his character Johnny Truant to encourage readers to re-focus on the "primary function" of language.

Using the example of Truant's story of the dog, if "Pekinese" is signifying this aesthetic concern of language and the "image society" for readers, then what exactly is the "Ideal" universal object behind the sign? Because Truant mentions this story during his "whimsical" footnote in Zampanò's chapter on animals, and then when revealed in a footnote which occurs much later it is in a new context, Danielewski is toying with the notion that there is no "Ideal" object. If "the Pekinese" is considered a signified object, then the signifying universals become the subjective experiences of Johnny Truant and Lude. So the sexual conquests expressed in Lude's list, Johnny Truant's emotional distress concerning Thumper, and Truant's own encounters with women such as Johnnie all make up an understanding of the Pekinese. In a larger context, this story of the Pekinese relates to Johnny Truant's fear as he writes in his introduction to Zampanò's essay. On one level, Truant relates the death of the dog to the death of Zampanò, and the "story" of his life surrounding the death of the dog is like Zampanò's "story" of *The Navidson Record*; on another level Truant relates to the dog's death himself illustrated by his rhetoric of fear throughout the footnotes which tell the narrative of Lude and Truant's games.

Danielewski's satire becomes apparent when considering that these "linguistic problematics" occur within Truant's footnotes. Truant is relating the story of "the Pekinese" and creating a realm of postmodern linguistic breakdown within the footnotes to Zampanò's essay. So, Truant's footnotes themselves have to be considered in relation to the essay. Because Danielewski chooses to place the two pieces of "the Pekinese" story first in a footnote contained in Zampanò's chapter on Animals, and then again in the part of Tom's manuscript where Tom is

making shadow animals because he is afraid of an unknown monster, then the "image society" or the media that lies behind the "Pekinese" sign is *The Navidson Record*.

So there are two levels to Johnny Truant's linguistic satire, just like the two levels of Jameson's signified objects. On one level, Danielewski is exposing to readers the aesthetic relationship of the object and the linguistic breakdown of describing it subjectively as related by Kant, Hegel, Derrida, and others. On another level, "the Pekinese" story needs to be considered by readers in the context of *The Navidson Record*. Katharine Hayles' discussion of "media" within *House of Leaves* then becomes important for an understanding of Danielewski's satire. Perhaps the "primary function" of language as Jameson discusses isn't defined by Danielewski; rather, its effects are exemplified within Johnny Truant. Truant often engages in this type of layered storytelling as illustrated by his re-interpretation of Lude's list, and I could have easily presented a different example from his footnotes to describe this linguistic relationship instead of the story of the Pekinese. What is important in Danielewski's satire is how Johnny Truant relates his feelings to readers, especially in the quotation from the introduction above. This "linguistic breakdown" can never be clearly understood, and because the "universal truths" behind objects will never be properly related with language, readers such as Johnny Truant are forced into the position which scares him the most —the position of "darkness."

Chapter Four: Postmodern Science, the Hypercube and Parallel Dimensions, and the Hypertext

Scientific vs. Narrative Knowledge in the Postmodern Condition

Danielewski experiments with language through the competing narrative voices of Zampanò and Johnny Truant, as I have explored, and these experiments prove to be for satirical reasons. Through alluding to authors such as Freud, Kant, and Hegel, Danielewski critiques certain elements which make up postmodern theory including aesthetic philosophy, linguistics, and critical theories such as Freud's psychoanalysis. Besides the satire discovered within the narrative voices of Zampanò and Johnny Truant, Danielewski also uses the format of his novel and the plot of *The Navidson Record* to comment on a different feature of postmodern theory.

Instead of adding an analysis of the labyrinth to the discussion in the previous chapters, I would instead like to simply examine the "labyrinth" as a plot event and formal structuring device for *The Navidson Record*. The Greek mythology that Zampanò uses in his essay and the attempts by Johnny Truant to delete the references to the labyrinth and the myth of the minotaur[3] could stand for further evidence of Danielewski satirizing linguistic theory or the realm of academia because Greek mythology is an example of the "classic" canon of works studied throughout various schools of academia. The labyrinth not only represents a plot event and structuring device for the novel, but it is also an explanation of why the house contains rooms of shifting dimensions and expanding areas.

[3]Any time "labyrinth" is mentioned in *House of Leaves* it appears in red font with a line striking through the text; as Johnny Truant disagreed with Zampanò's including this discussion, he attempted to delete the portions where Zampanò discusses the labyrinth. For more on the labyrinth see "The A-Mazing House: The Labyrinth as Theme and Form in Mark Z. Danielewski's House of Leaves" by Natalie Hamilton in *Critique* 50.1, Fall 2008.

Besides explaining the house through the discussion of labyrinth, Zampanò includes a chapter in *The Navidson Record* where Navidson attempts to discover a scientific explanation for why the house is acting "un-home-like." The term "scientific" is important for postmodernism, specifically the aesthetic philosophy that postmodern theory is grounded in. Authors such as Hegel and Kant struggle to resolve the difference between a stated "fact" and a statement that is not factual. By examining this difference, these authors are attempting to reconstruct the dialectic form of reasoning founded by classical Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle. Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition* also taps into this classical reasoning in his discussion of "the Pragmatics of Scientific Knowledge" when he writes:

> It is therefore impossible to judge the existence or validity of narrative knowledge on the basis of scientific knowledge and vice versa: the relevant criteria are different. All we can do is gaze in wonderment at the diversity of discursive species, just as we do at the diversity of plant or animal species. Lamenting the "loss of meaning" in postmodernity boils down to mourning the fact that knowledge is no longer principally narrative. (Lyotard 26)

The important difference here in Lyotard's discussion of scientific and narrative knowledge from previous authors such as Hegel or Kant is that he attempts to separate the two forms from one and other, claiming that "knowledge is no longer principally narrative." For a further examination of the "loss of meaning" which occurs in postmodernity, it may be beneficial to again examine Jameson and one of his critics.

Jameson uses the same term as Lyotard—mourning—to describe this shifting function of knowledge in the postmodern world. In his chapter on "space," Jameson writes:

> What is mourned for is the memory of deep memory; what is enacted is a nostalgia for nostalgia, for the grand older extinct questions of origin and telos, of deep time and the Freudian Unconscious (dispatched by Foucault at one blow in the *History of Sexuality*), for the dialectic also, as well as all the monumental forms left high and dry by the ebb tide of the modern movement, forms whose Absolutes are no longer audible to us, illegible hieroglyphs of the demiurgic within the technocratic world (Jameson 156)

Jameson's summary of knowledge within the postmodern period is related to Lyotard's "loss of meaning," where postmodern reasoning seeks to return to the questions raised in the modern period when knowledge was first challenged against classical forms. Jameson then expands his discussion to refer to spatial relations of knowledge and temporality. "Time" in this passage from Jameson refers to the entire history of the universe, as represented by Kant's dialectic view of history or Foucault's re-definitions of time in *The History of Sexuality.* He even refers to "the demiurgic," a force behind creation who in Platonic theory creates the world in response to eternal ideas. Jameson ties into Lyotard's discussion of "loss of meaning" then by reinterpreting all classical representations of time and knowledge through a postmodern lens. By placing space and time into a discussion of the now separate "scientific" knowledge, Jameson is connecting to the narrative forms of knowledge where temporality and spatial relationships are important to placing the "narrative" into its surrounding reality. Although "space" and "time" will become important again later to the discussion of the Navidson house, in terms of Jameson's mourning of knowledge, they may stand for something else entirely.

Jameson expands on time: "if *experience* and *expression* still seem largely apt in the cultural sphere of the modern, they are altogether out of place and anachronistic in a postmodern age, where, if temporality still has its place, it would seem better to speak of the *writing* of it than of any lived experience" (Jameson 154). Jameson claims that experience and expression are elements of knowledge which are out of time in the postmodern age, and the focus of knowledge should be on writing about that temporality. "Time" has a very specific purpose in explaining the abyss which appears in Navidson's house, but explaining Danielewski's purpose in writing it is related to this Jameson quote. To better understand how Danielewski is satirizing the theories of authors like Jameson and Lyotard, it may be beneficial to first examine one of Jameson's critics.

Although Jameson's discussion of representations of knowledge is relevant in the context of Lyotard, Hegel, and Kant, to some opponents of postmodern theory, it is not relevant at all. Walter Laqueur attacks Jameson and his contemporaries, referring to the academic end of the century ("fin de siècle") in his article "Postmodernism Lacks Lasting Relevance," when he writes:

> These students of English literature tend to refer to 'late capitalism,' but they are not experts in economic history, let alone physics, advanced mathematics, and molecular biology. Yet some of them have been writing on these topics confidently, distributing praise and blame and demanding revolutionary changes in these sciences. The earlier fin de siècle period also suggested a break with past traditions, but it had no scientific ambitions, and it was cosmopolitan rather than provincial in outlook. (Laqueur 160)

Laqueur is critiquing Jameson and his contemporaries with a ruthless assault on the ability of a student of "English literature" to be able to discuss other schools of "knowledge." Jameson's discussion of temporality justifies his position of authority, though, because narrative and scientific knowledge may not represent reality in the postmodern period. By separating the types of knowledge that make up the history of temporality Jameson discussed in the previous quotation, Jameson is referring to types of knowledge like "capitalism" and "physics" in a different way than Laqueur assumes. What Laqueur is commenting on though is the separation of knowledge itself as a representation of reality; what used to be considered scientific knowledge is through postmodern theory distorted and no longer in accordance with the scientific knowledge that Laqueur is familiar with.

The Navidson house may represent this same type of negative sentimentality that Laqueur is offering towards the postmodern period. Like the distortion of the rooms of the house, distorting knowledge which used to be considered "scientific" may lead to an abyss of new forms of "knowledge," hence Laqueur's hesitation at accepting the authority of authors such as

Jameson when discussing other schools of knowledge. Previous forms of discussing knowledge are now, in the postmodern period, blended together so much so that Laqueur's hesitation may be justified—like the house, the world of postmodern theory expands and morphs previous understandings of temporality and philosophical representations of knowledge such as understood by Plato or Kant. So to question the origins of such a different new expansion of knowledge is justified through Laqueur or even by Navidson who searches for answers about his house.

Explaining the House

By centering the plot of *The Navidson Record* on a house with shifting dimensions and a cavernous hallway which appears at the center of the house, Danielewski is once again setting up elements of satire for readers to discover concerning the postmodern theory. The satire is found through reasoning what exactly the cause of the house's expansions could be…a method of reasoning which is being examined by Lyotard and Jameson in their respective works on postmodernism. The sixteenth chapter of Zampanò's essay is simply labeled "science" in the list of possible chapter titles published in an appendix to *House of Leaves*. In this chapter on "science," Navidson takes some samples from material collected inside the house to a research laboratory at the Princeton geology department.

Chapter XVI starts with a list of "incontrovertible facts" concerning the house, various facts collected in a list by Zampanò concerning different features of the house, such as number 10: "The place will purge itself of all things, including any object left behind" (Danielewski 371). Zampanò begins to summarize petrologist Mel O'Geery's findings from all of the pieces of matter he has examined, from sample A to XXXX. As the explanation of what types of rock

make up the samples begins on the third page of the chapter, a note is included which informs readers that two pages are missing, followed by three pages that only contain X's and pieces of geological words such as "volcan" or "metamor" (374). Truant then explains in a footnote that the X's are his own fault, because he placed a bottle of German ink on a stack of the papers which leaked through to the text.

After seventeen more pages are listed as missing, Johnny Truant starts a long footnote discussing his mother and an explanation of a letter she sent to him, interrupting any further discussion of the "scientific" findings from the Princeton lab. At the end of Zampanò's chapter he quotes two critics that comment on the "science" sequence inside of the Princeton laboratory. Zampanò writes:

> Noda Vennard believes the key to this sequence does not exist in any of the test results or geological hypotheses but in the margin of a magazine which, as we can see for ourselves, Navidson idly fills with doodles while waiting for Dr. O'Geery to retrieve some additional documentation: 'Mr. Navidson has drawn a bomb going off. An Atom bomb. An inverted thermonuclear explosion which reveals in the black contours of its clouds, the far-reaching shock-wave, and of course the great pluming head, the internal dimensions of his own sorrow.' (Danielewski 381).

Vennard here places some meaning into Navidson drawing an atomic bomb going off, which Vennard reasons stands for his own internal sorrow. The other critic Zampanò quotes is named Virgil Q. Tomlinson, who writes: "That place is so alien to the kingdom of the imagination let alone the eye—so perfectly unholy, hungry, and inviolable—it easily makes a fourth of July sparkler out of an A-bomb, and reduces the aliens of *The X-Files* and *The Outer Limits* to Sunday morning funnies" (Danielewski 381-2). These critics that Zampanò quotes discuss the implications of the findings on Navidson's psyche, but they ignore the evidence presented from O'Geery that some of the rock samples are from meteoric rock which is not found on Earth. By ignoring the findings in the house and focusing on Navidson's psyche, the quotations from these

critics encourage readers to interpret the evidence presented for themselves, without the help of "the experts." If this chapter's facts are closely examined instead of passed over for their strangeness and their implications for Navidson's emotions, then some troubling results are discovered concerning the "scientific" knowledge previously discussed.

A few pages before the critical summary Zampanò offers about Navidson, O'Geery is quoted saying the following: "now I want to stress *possibly* here, but this deuterium *could* indicate matter older than even our solar system. Interstellar perhaps. So there you have it—a very nice little vein of history" (Danielewski 378). Because the samples from inside of the Navidson household contain matter found outside of this solar system, the evidence suggests that either the matter had to be transported into the house from a meteor, or that the house expanded (somehow) into the far reaches of space. Possibly it could also mean that the house itself originated in this outer-worldly realm, on a different planet, in another galaxy, or possibly in another dimension. On this line of reasoning, Zampanò adds the following to the discussion of science:

> Primarily thanks to O'Geery's conclusions, some fanatics of *The Navidson Record* assert that the presence of extremely old chondrites definitely proves extra-terrestrial forces constructed the house. Others, however, claim the samples only support the idea that the house on Ash Tree Lane is a self-created portal into some other dimension…Keener intellects, however, now regard scientific conjecture concerning the house as just another dead end. It would seem the language of objectivity can never adequately address the reality of that place on Ash Tree Lane (Danielewski 378-9)

By including the last phrase in this passage, Danielewski is engaging in the same discourse as Lyotard and Jameson concerning their discussions of representations of knowledge. Language works in an interesting way here, in the sense that it lacks the tools necessary to represent the reality of the house in an accurate way.

By embracing the same discourse as these authors, Danielewski is once again evoking an allusion to the lineage of aesthetic history I have discussed in chapters one and two, but beyond this allusion to postmodern authority lies an important connection to the House on Ash Tree Lane. The "others" Zampanò refers to who claim that the house is a self-created portal into another dimension are referring to a complex history of mathematics and physics that could explain the expansion of Navidson's house, thus disproving the geological findings that O'Geery offers, and possibly discrediting the discussions of marginal doodles that Navidson draws in the waiting room. By examining theories of hyperspace and parallel dimensions, and tracing the development of Einstein's theory of relativity, readers may discover a convincing connection to the "hypercube."

The Hypercube and the Crooked House

To approach the importance of a hypercube to *House of Leaves*, some founding theories need to be examined first. Like Kant and Hegel influencing some of Jameson's ideas concerning linguistics, Einstein and his contemporaries formulated complex mathematical theories which influenced modern theories concerning the fourth dimension and hyperspace. Einstein's theory of special relativity reasoned that spacetime curves around matter, surpassing Newton's laws of physics explaining motion in space, and from this theory Einstein derived his famous equation $E=mc^2$ which illustrates the equivalence of energy and mass. Einstein also developed a theory of general relativity which explained gravitation, specifically accelerated motion in a gravitational field. From this theory of general relativity, Einstein reasoned that the universe is expanding, and he began work on a unified field theory. Unified field theories are mathematical principles which attempt to describe all of the fundamental forces of nature, "unifying" the universe with

mathematics. From his work, developments in the field of differential geometry were possible, and further physics theories were eventually reasoned. Through these theories, the existence of alternate dimensions may be proved.

Michio Kaku in his book *Hyperspace: A Scientific Odyssey Through Parallel Universes, Time Warps, and the 10th Dimension* expands on this "development" of alternate dimensions:

> The world's leading physicists now believe that dimensions beyond the usual four of space and time might exist. This idea, in fact, has become the focal point of intense scientific investigation. Indeed, many theoretical physicists now believe that higher dimensions may be the decisive step in creating a comprehensive theory that unites the laws of nature—a theory of hyperspace." (Kaku 33).

Through this "intense scientific investigation," scientists have come up with theories concerning the fourth dimension. Einstein, in his theories on relativity, concluded that the 4th dimension (beyond our normal x, y, z spatial dimensions) was time. Through investigating what the 4th spatial dimension might be, mathematicians came up with the illustration of a hypercube.

The basis of understanding the hypercube is founded in simple geometry, from the relation of a cube to a square. A square is a two-dimensional object, that when a third dimension is added becomes a cube. A cube in four spatial dimensions is what mathematicians refer to as a "hypercube," and just like a cube built from a cut-out piece of paper, a hypercube can be "unfolded" in three dimensions. If someone traces the outline of a cross on a piece of paper, and draws an outline of eight squares within the cross, folding those eight squares together in the proper sequence will yield a cube. In the case of a hypercube, eight cubes need be arranged in a pattern to form a cross, but folding them into an actual hypercube would require four dimensions of space—the "unfolded" hypercube then is referred to as a tesseract. Kaku expands on the mathematician Charles Hinton's development of a visualization of the hypercube, and how its influence led to developments in the world of art: "So pervasive was Hinton's influence that

Savadore Dali used Hinton's tesseract in his famous painting *Christus Hypercubus*, on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, which depicts Christ being crucified on a four-dimensional cross" (Kaku 70). The development of this method of visualizing a hypercube by Hinton influenced artists because the concept of seeing into the fourth dimension to them was parallel to the creative process in general, or the fourth dimension held some religious implications for the artists. Dali's painting is often associated with the "surrealist" movement of art, which could be considered a subgenre of the grand postmodern movement, and by including the tesseract in the painting, Dali is bridging the realms of knowledge of math, science, and art—an action that the critic Walter Laqueur may not be fond of. In the case of Dali's painting then, perhaps Laqueur's work is flawed—if a person in the field of English Literature is not supposed to extend his or her knowledge base into the fields of physics or economics, then artists like Dali would also be forbidden from these separate schools of knowledge. By painting Christ crucified on a tesseract, Dali engages with themes of religion, science, mathematics, and philosophy all through one "surrealist" work of art.

So the history of mathematics and the development of the hypercube are related to this Dali painting, and to the movement of postmodernism, but how exactly does it relate to the Navidson house in *House of Leaves?* Exploring this question leads a reader to other stories and works of art which were influenced by the development of the fourth dimension. Kaku in his book *Hyperspace* discusses that the development of a fourth dimension of space spawned an interest in science and its mysteries in the general public. Kaku lists novels such as H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine*, which used the concept of the fourth dimension and Einstein's theories to explore the possibilities of time travel. One other author who was greatly influenced by the developments of mathematicians related to the fourth dimension was Robert Heinlein.

In one of Heinlein's stories "And He Built a Crooked House," an architect while drinking with a friend gets into a spirited argument over whether or not a house can be built in four dimensions. Heinlein writes: "Homer, I think you've really got something. After all, why not? Think of the infinite richness of articulation and relationship in four dimensions. What a house, what a house…" (Heinlein, "House"). The architect talks with his friend Bailey about the tesseract and how it relates to the fourth dimensional hypercube, and he eventually goes through with building the house for the Baileys. After the tesseract house is completed, the structure stands exactly as the cross Christ is crucified on in Dali's painting, with eight cubes laid out in a four-dimensional pattern. When the house is completed though and the Bailey couple arrive to view the tall standing tesseract structure, only one cube remains where there was once eight: "Bailey stared unbelievably, Mrs. Bailey in open dislike. They saw a simple cubical mass, possessing doors and windows, but no other architectural features, save that it was decorated in intricate mathematical designs…gone was the tower with its jutting second-story rooms. No trace remained of the seven rooms above ground level" (Heinlein "House"). As the three enter the home, they realize that all of the rooms still exist and they become disoriented in trying to navigate around the fourth dimensional home.

The process of exploring the home makes the Baileys sick during some points of the story, and the reader realizes eventually why the structure of the house from the outside appears so different—the house collapsed in on itself, and into the fourth dimension. Readers of Heinlein's short story who are familiar with *House of Leaves* would struggle not to draw similarities between the Baileys exploring their home and Navidson exploring the cavernous abyss which appears in his living room. Zampanò's comment about a portal into another dimension then is not as fantastical as it appears to be. Instead of the presence of extra-

terrestrials and matter from a different world inside of the Navidson house, through reading a text like “And He Built a Crooked House” or viewing a painting such as Dail’s *Christus Hypercubus*, I argue that the only thing present in Navidson’s home is Danielewski’s allusion to the history of mathematics and the hypercube.

By placing this allusion to the fourth dimension inside of *The Navidson Record*, Danielewski is engaging with the realm of criticism surrounding Jameson and Lyotard’s works, specifically concerning the representations of knowledge I have previously discussed. When investigating these realms of mathematics and science hinted at by Danielewski’s allusion to an alternate dimension, a complex history of knowledge is discovered based on Einstein’s theory and applications of geometry. The “fact” of the matter is that Laqueur’s hesitation concerning authors such as Jameson’s scientific ambitions is crumbled through Danielewski’s “house.”

The physical traits of the Navidson household as related by Zampanò support my theory that the Navidson household may simply be a hypercube. Firstly, the physical dimensions outside and inside the house are not congruent. As Navidson and Tom measure and re-measure walls inside of the house, the measurements of the walls outside remain exactly the same. Even as the staircase and giant cavern appear inside of the living room, the outside of the house does not grow larger. If the house is indeed a hypercube, like the house in Heinlein’s short story, it may explain why the house does not appear to change size on the outside as it grows larger on the inside. Also, the appearance of the abyss-like staircase inside the hallway in the living room is an event that may be labeled “science fiction.” Like Zampanò’s comment about alternate dimensions indicates to readers, this event of the labyrinth “appearing” inside of the house may be similar to a portal opening into another dimension in some sci-fi story; “science-fiction” to Danielewski may have a different meaning than readers are used to. Just like the act of reading

the story of the Pekinese, readers have certain expectations about an event they encounter. Discovering that there may be a scientific explanation for the house's shifting physical properties is probably an unexpected outcome for readers.

The text of *House of Leaves* itself supports the fourth-dimensional hypercube theory as well. Footnotes in the novel at one point appear mirrored inside a blue-outlined box in the middle of the text. On one side of the page, a list of building materials begins in the window, and on the opposite side of the page the list ends and is printed in a reversed orientation as the left side of the page—so the text in the windows mirrors itself and appears as if it is seen through a window. Some passages Zampanò writes while Navidson is inside of the house exploring for the last time are written upside-down or sideways as Navidson himself is shifting his orientation. Encountering passages such as these causes a reader to rotate the book itself and change its orientation in order to properly read the words printed on the page. Even the previous discussions I have made of the "complex web" of postmodern texts which are alluded to in *House of Leaves* may be considered an extra-dimension of space for the novel. Readers investigate works such as Freud's "The Uncanny," and are guided away from the novel itself, and as they discover and read the essay they are themselves transported into another dimension of *House of Leaves*. Even though a reader is reading "The Uncanny," if it is only to trace the allusion contained within Danielewski's text, then they are entering another dimension of reading in a way. Because the text of *House of Leaves* is similar to a hypercube in more ways than one, maybe it can even be labeled a "hypertext." The most common usage of the term hypertext refers to branches of related texts, typically in reference to groups of texts connect via the internet. In Danielewski's case though, the term hypermedia may be more appropriate because of his expansive collection

of references to many types of media, not just textual documents. When referring to *House of Leaves* as a hypertext then, readers may be encountering a text that is more of a hypercube itself.

The Navidson household is as expansive as the writings concerning postmodernism that I have discussed above, but as the house is explored and never quite understood, perhaps these issues surrounding postmodernism are equally undiscoverable. *House of Leaves* is made up of dual layers of narrative and Zampanò's essay *The Navidson Record* contains many citations and references to various works both real and fictional. The text of *House of Leaves* in this sense mimics the expansion of the Navidson house, because it contains so many allusions and "hallways" which may be explored. Through the constant allusions to postmodern theory and works such as Heinlein's short story, or Freud's essay, Danielewski has crafted a work that contains an alternate "dimension" of texts. Considering the plot similarities between *The Navidson Record* and "And He Build a Crooked House" (and the allusions to Freud and linguistic theory), the novel *House of Leaves* stands as the house in Heinlein's story when the Bailey couple and architect look at the collapsed hypercube from the outside—a structure which appears to be small but is in fact expansive in the fourth dimension. *House of Leaves* appears to be built upon so many other texts that perhaps there is nothing to the novel itself, as if *House of Leaves* did not exist. When investigating the proper dimensions of the novel, readers discover that this is actually not the case—the *House of Leaves* not only exists, but it may be as large in scope as Navidson's own house.

Chapter Five: Reading and a House Made of Leaves

The second edition of *House of Leaves* has three different appendices, which in turn have multiple lettered sections containing extra material. Truant labels this section saying: "Zampanò produced a great deal of material outside of The Navidson Record. Here's a selection of journal entries, poems and even a letter to the editor, all of which I think sheds a little more light on his work as well as his personality" (Danielewski 537). One of the largest sections of the appendices is section E; "The Three Attic Whalestoe Institute Letters," the collection of letters that Truant's mother Pelafina sent to him from an asylum. So when Truant claims the selections in the appendices shed more light on Zampanò, although this may be true, the selections shed more light on everything pertaining to *House of Leaves*—including Truant and the relationship to his mother that he struggles to mention throughout the text.

Section F of the first appendix is labeled "poems" and contains a collection of assorted poems with no credited author, so readers may assume that Zampanò is the author and this section could be what Truant is referring in his introduction. One poem in particular contained in this collection has further implications beyond shedding more light on Zampanò's work and his personality. One short poem, listed under the heading "(Untitled Fragment)," when analyzed sheds light on the title of the novel *House of Leaves*, and more facets of the experience of reading the novel (as discussed previously in the first chapter: "an introduction to reading *House of Leaves*"). The poem listed is as follows: "Little solace comes/to those who grieve/when thoughts keep drifting/as walls keep shifting/and this great blue world of ours/seems a house of leaves/moments before the wind" (Danielewski 563).

The first three lines of this poem are a response to the experience of grief; in the context of the novel they may be applied to a few characters. The grief could be felt by Johnny Truant,

who is coping with the experience of reading *The Navidson Record* and trying to discover the world behind Zampanò's essay; in contrast, the grief might be felt by Navidson while he tries to protect his family while discovering the mysteries of his house on Ash Tree Lane. On another level, the grief could be equally felt by Zampanò who is trapped in his blind solitude with nothing but *The Navidson Record* for his consolation. By starting the poem claiming that "little solace" comes to those who deal with the effects of grief, the drifting thoughts and the feeling that the walls around you are shifting (or literally shifting in Navidson's case), implies that no resolution or relief can be found while grieving. Besides the characters in the novel, readers of the novel may also experience this grief referred to in this poem. I've previously called reading *House of Leaves* a dizzying, frightening, and exciting experience, and I think this poem serves to further my sentiments about the novel.

The final lines of the poem, "and this great blue world of ours/seems a house of leaves/moments before the wind" (Danielewski 563) compare the world to a fragile house made up of leaves. The "world" could be considered our reality, or the events that happen throughout life, or in Navidson's case the world centered around his family and his home. By giving the house a delicate foundation, a house which is made up of leaves, the house then takes on properties not usually associated with a house. A house of leaves is not sturdy, and is easily blown away. To borrow a phrase again from Frued's essay "The Uncanny," the house in this poem then becomes "un-home-like," and is threatened by the wind in the final line. If the house is standing moments before the wind, then it is likely it will not be standing when the wind blows and the house will be destroyed.

Reflecting on this poem in regards to the title of the novel *House of Leaves* may "shed some light" on the novel and the experience of reading it. If the novel is like the house in the

poem, a house made up of leaves, then it is a brittle substance which is about to be broken by the act of reading the novel. Because the novel is made up of so many fragile allusions to the essays and critics I've mentioned, and the endless citations and references that Zampanò includes in his essay, the act of reading *House of Leaves* is almost like the blowing wind which threatens the house in the poem. By discovering an allusion to Freud, for example, a reader is compelled to investigate that allusion and try to relate the events of the novel to that essay. So as a reader of *House of Leaves* begins to navigate the labyrinth that lies within it, that reader is also forced to investigate various facets of the novel; a hyperlink, for example, listed as a footnote may compel a reader to find an internet browser and follow the link to see what webpage Zampanò chooses to cite as a source for his essay. In this act of reading, the reader becomes like the wind which is about to topple the *House of Leaves*.

The act of reading mirrors Navidson's own experience inside the house; recall his last moments trapped alone in the depths of his home—Navidson is crawling through a small space in the dark and as he scours through what little remains of his supplies he discovers a copy of *House of Leaves* and a match book, and as he begins to read by match light, he also begins to rip out pages of the book he has read and burn them for more light. To Navidson, these moments may have felt like his last. He escapes his fear of death while lost in his home by retreating into this book for a few moments of reading. Zampanò comments on Navidson's reading when he writes: "Here then is one end: a final act of reading, a final act of consumption" (Danielewski 467). Calling reading an act of consumption is not far off from the metaphor in the poem of the blowing wind threatening a house of leaves, and both descriptions of reading are very suitable for a novel which is as important as *House of Leaves*.

Because reading this novel is so tied into the postmodern sublime, and filled with allusions to works real and fictional, the novel becomes that object which its name represents—a house made of fragile leaves. One other element is important to thinking of the novel as a house of leaves, the amount of leaves which would go into building a whole house. If the bricks of a house are made from pressing leaves together, than each individual brick would contain many leaves, and the house would contain many bricks. Mark Z. Danielewski's novel not only is made up of many leaves or pages, but within those pages lie other worlds of text beyond what can be confined to a page. The allusions and dual narratives are crafted together in a similar way to a house of leaves.

To me then, the novel represents an end to postmodernism. If the novel is a house which is made up of leaves, through interpreting the novel and analyzing the allusions to Freud or the Heinlein short story, a reader can blow the leaves which make up the house away. When discovering that the story of Navidson's home may have been influenced by the Heinlein short story and the history of mathematics, or discovering the connections to Jameson's world as he described in his *Postmodernism*, there is almost nothing left to the novel. After uncovering all of the allusions, reading through all of the footnotes, and successfully navigating the labyrinth Danielewski has crafted, one is left with almost nothing but Johnny Truant's footnotes and a strange sensation of fear and confusion. How can a book create this sensation in a reader?

Danielewski tunes into the world of postmodernism as I have described in my previous chapters, and creates a novel that has the power to affect readers on a physical as well as a cerebral scale. By tapping into this sensation that comes with tearing down the "house of leaves," readers are encouraged to reinterpret their own experiences in reading the novel and the varying pathways through the labyrinth that is *House of Leaves*. I do not think that Danielewski points

readers in any direction in particular besides away from the world of postmodernism, by creating sensations of horror for readers inside such the complex web of his novel. If readers manage to successfully navigate the labyrinth of the novel, then they are rewarded with the freedom that comes with “surviving” the maze, or blowing down the house of leaves; readers are then just like Navidson who emerges from the depths of his house, or like Truant after reading Zampanò’s essay.

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